



HAL
open science

**” We were just testing what kind of man you are ” -
negotiating masculinities in a New Mexico prison**

Bettina van Hoven

► **To cite this version:**

Bettina van Hoven. ” We were just testing what kind of man you are ” - negotiating masculinities in a New Mexico prison. *Justice spatiale = Spatial justice*, 2011, Gender, sexual identities and spatial justice, 3, <http://www.jssj.org/article/on-voulait-juste-voir-le-genre-dhomme-que-tu-es-masculinites-dans-une-prison-du-nouveau-mexique/>. halshs-01525367

HAL Id: halshs-01525367

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01525367>

Submitted on 19 May 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

"We were just testing what kind of man you are" - negotiating masculinities in a New Mexico prison.

Bettina Van Hoven

Abstract

This article addresses the issue of spatial injustice/s at the level of the prison. The article begins by contextualizing prisons, introducing the spatial context of differences in implementing justice within the United States. It briefly explores the becoming and structuring of prisons and addresses prisoners' identity work to illustrate the ways in which different prisoners use different resources available inside and outside of the prison in order to negotiate the experience of punishment within the US legal system. In so doing, it draws on a wider study with 21 male prisoners of different ethnic backgrounds in a New Mexico prison. In particular, drawing on work by Wetherell and Edley (1999), the article explores different kinds of masculinities expressed by prisoners as a response to the prison system as well as a way of bridging prison lives and the outside world. The analysis shows that prison spaces cannot be viewed as homogeneous spaces in which ideas of justice are translated into the same means of control and punishment for all prisoners.

Key words: Spatial injustice, discursive practices, masculinities, New Mexico, prison.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) for financial support of the study and Inge Noback for her research assistance. In addition, David Sibley's intellectual input and friendship constitute an invaluable source of support.

Introduction

This article addresses the issue of spatial injustice/s at the level of the prison. As far as the (legal) justice system goes, prisons are perhaps the most obvious locations established in service of this system. At the same time, they are inherently contested spaces. Looking back, they were meant to 'cleanse' an enlightened-society-to-be of unwanted elements (e.g. the poor, the drunk, the sexually promiscuous) desirably at far away locations. Over time, notions of prisons and prisoners have changed reflecting the values of (dominant groups in) the societies in which they are placed. For instance, a justice system may place someone in the prison system for several years for the possession of soft-drugs in one nation but not another. As ideas of justice differ at the international scale, differences can be found at the national and regional scale (see below) as well as within the prison system itself. As a result, some persons are more likely to be imprisoned than others but some persons are also more likely to experience imprisonment as punishment than others. Although this article begins by introducing the spatial context of differences in implementing justice within the United States, the bulk of the article zooms in at the micro scale of the prison itself.

It has been argued that the US prison system is not merely a manifestation of ideas about justice, punishment and betterment but that it serves to maintain patriarchal society because, in sum, the (perception of) displays of 'excessive masculinities' by prisoners enable men outside of prison to feel empowered and secure in their own masculinities (Sabo et al., 2001 but see also Seymour, 2003). This supports Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: p. 832) who maintained that hegemonic masculinity¹ is achieved through "culture, *institutions* and persuasion" (my emphasis) but is changeable over time (and space). Institutions such as prisons can indeed be important locations for establishing (illusions of) normality, because they provide the certainty of unwanted Others that are spatially separated but nevertheless ever-present. This means, however, that the correctional system is imbued with values that are part and parcel of this patriarchal system. This is reflected in who is

¹ "the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue".

incarcerated, why, where, for how long and, as I will explore below, how their incarceration should be experienced.

In 2008, the US justice system had 'legal authority' over more than 1.6 million prisoners. The prison population consisted to 93 percent of males and, in the US, men were imprisoned at a rate 15 times higher than females. The male prison population consisted of 34% whites, 38% blacks and 20% Hispanics. The largest group of male prisoners (17.2%) fell in the category 25-29 years. Since 2000, the number of persons imprisoned has declined but this trend was unequally present in the different states, reflecting the level of conservatism, with New York leading a drop in the number of inmates (down 3.6% in 2008) and Pennsylvania leading a rise (up 9.1% in 2008). The overall decline was attributed to a decline in the number of imprisoned blacks since 2000. Nevertheless, black males are imprisoned at a rate 6.5 times higher than white males (Sabo et al., 2010).

It is important to note, that some authors have argued that prisons, as a means to spatially segregate men, are but a part of a wider landscape of incarceration (e.g. Davis, 2001; Wacquant, 2002; Mendieta, 2004; Shabazz, 2010) from which norms and values of hegemonic masculinity become apparent. Shabazz (2010) claimed many men have experienced spatial injustice prior to their imprisonment through their class, sexuality and most often, their race. Using the example of the Robert Taylor homes in Chicago (and South Africa's mining projects), he argues "that carceral forms organize the living and working space of many poor and working-class black men in the United States" (p.277), thus leading to "prisonized subjectivities" (p.277) and a preparedness for prison. Shabazz maintains "with no real or abstract power [...] these men learn to negotiate this world by performing prison masculinities" (2010: 285).

At the larger geographic scale then men are more likely to be spatially segregated (with some men more likely than others) than women. However, prison spaces cannot be viewed as homogeneous spaces in which ideas of justice are translated into the same means of control and punishment for all prisoners. The US prison system is structured using a levels system, ranging from level 1 through 6². Inmates at the lower levels generally have more privileges and freedom of movement than those at higher levels (see appendix 1 for overview of the levels system). It is possible for inmates to be credited by correctional officers for good behavior with 'Good Time' which might enable them to move to a lower security unit. Within the levels, too, there are ways of differentiation (see also Karp, 2010). Some inmates may maintain good relations with correctional officers, or know how to circumvent spaces of control and thus earn privileges more readily than others (van Hoven and Sibley, 2008). Phillips (2001) argued that "privileges emerge as powerful symbols of the reassertion of autonomy and status. Modes of social organization are built around these limited goods and services" (p.15). At the micro scale, among and between prisoners, spatial injustice is enacted and utilised to achieve and maintain power (see also Owen, 1985).

The introduction above suggests that the prison system involves different levels of spatial injustice. In addition to a spatial dimension, injustice has, amongst others, a gender, class and race dimension. Various authors have established an additional link with the (re)production of hegemonic masculinity and argue that the resources available for (white, middle-class, educated) men to achieve hegemonic masculinity are not equally available to all men. Messerschmidt (1993), for example, argued that crime (and imprisonment) can then become a resource for accomplishing masculinity, for 'doing gender' (Seymour, 2003). Yet, different social interactions, structures and practices (see Connell, 2000) produce different gendered identities. Exactly these interactions, structures and practices are the context for a discussion in this article of the production of masculinities at the micro scale. The article draws on data collected in the context of a broader study on everyday experiences of prisoners at Central New Mexico Correctional Facility (CNMCF),

² It must be noted that not all prisons contain all levels. In order to be categorized into one of these levels, prisoners receive points upon arrival according to a number of criteria, such as the type of crime committed, whether they are first-time offenders or repeat offenders, whether or not there is a record of behavioural problems- or gang membership.

level 2. Masculinity emerged as key theme volunteered and explored by prisoners. This article is structured in three parts. First, the article draws attention to structure by providing a brief background of (Foucauldian) representations of prisons as largely controlling and limiting spaces, but inserting more recent work that illustrates how prisons encompass material spaces and imaginary spaces, that are unseen and not susceptible to regulation by the regime and that are used by prisoners to exercise agency.

Next, it discusses prisons and masculinities, and last but not least, extracts from the interviews are explored in relation to they way in which men take different positions when talking about masculinity.

Prisons, structure and agency

Many prison studies draw on Foucault's work *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison* (1979) as a context for their analyses. In his historical account of prisons, Foucault described prisons, along with asylums and workhouses, as a means to create modern society. Enlightenment theorists instigated a concern for humanitarian aspects of punishment which ultimately led to the conceptions of institutions as places for punishment (increasingly replacing public, corporeal punishment) (Ignatieff, 1981). The organisation and use of space in exercising punishment plays an important role in early conceptions of prison as panopticon, such as Bentham's (and Foucault's readings of Bentham) where a prisoner is subject to the ever-present, all-seeing eye of the institution. Goffman's (1961) analysis of total institutions shows how space and time are regulated to achieve organisational goals. The organisation of space and time involves all aspects of life occurring in the same place and under the same authority, daily activities are conducted in the presence of others, and all activities are highly schematized and supervised. In the case of prisons, the daily schedule is centred on counts, meals, work and recreation, perhaps the distribution of medication, and lock up. Such means, or rituals, to structure prisoner's everyday lives also serve to highlight the subservient position of inmates and are meant to produce compliance (Leger and Stratton, 1977)³.

Foucauldian interpretations of prison, and to some extent Goffman's too, give priority to structure over agency by neglecting the subject of surveillance as a social being. However, later work on prisoner adaptation increasingly acknowledges prisoners' personal backgrounds and agency (Irwin and Cressey, 1962⁴; Toch, 1985; Cao, Zhao and Vandine, 1997; Paterline and Petersen, 1999)⁵. Although they do not use the term agency in their discussion, Paterline and Petersen (1999) propose an 'integrated model'. In this model, they include prisoners' inner world by taking into consideration non-criminal relationships outside the prison and a multitude of self-attitudes and identities, all of which can be weighed by inmates in different ways depending on particular situations and encounters. Paterline and Petersen also imply that inmates have a range of identities to 'choose from' in different contexts and encounters. This resonates with writings by other authors who claim that prisoners may also *feign* compliance. Vaz and Bruno (2003) argue that, prisoners' "docility would only be apparent, a mask that [they] carried as long as [they] thought [they] were being observed. [They] would internalize power's eye but [they] would not identify with its values" (p. 276) (see also Simon, 2005).

³ Additional means to achieve compliance are, for example, entry procedures or "stripping" processes that inmates undergo, e.g. the replacement of personal clothing and items with institutional ones, and the assignment of a number to each prisoner as well as a system of penalties and rewards.

⁴ But see also critique by Roebuck (1962)

⁵ The importation model (Cao, Zhao and Vandine, 1997), developed in response to the deprivation model, predominantly considers prisoners' criminal background outside of prison. The situational model is more dynamic and includes intra-prison relationships, i.e. inmates positioning in relation to the organisation and members of staff (and correctional officers).

In geography, too, some have drawn attention to spaces, social relations and exercising agency within the prison. Dirisuweit's (1999) account of a women's prison in South Africa highlighted resistance and subversion as evident in trading in drugs and food, looking for partners and prostitution, but also in attempts by inmates to establish a sense of home, using whatever materials at hand to designate space as personal and, to some extent, private. Baer's (2005) more recent study in young offender institutions in the United Kingdom discussed how inmates were able to use consumable items, such as shampoo bottles, to personalize the otherwise alienating spaces of the prison (see also Anita Wilson (e.g. 2004) who provides rich material on the personal transformation of prison spaces, and Baer and Ravneberg (2008)). Such accounts further question the efficacy of the prison in producing 'docile bodies'⁶.

Men in prison

To date, an impressive body of work on spaces of masculinities has developed, drawing on the relevance of place in negotiating masculinities and pointing to the significance of including the voices of marginalised men in theories of masculinities (see, for example, Barker, 2005; van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005; Aitken, 2006; Bandyopadhyay, 2006; Hopkins, 2006; Nayak, 2006; Leyshon and Brace, 2007). In the context of the above studies, it is notable that work on men in prisons has emerged significantly earlier, namely from the 1940s. With regards to work on men in prison, prominent studies were conducted by sociologists, such as Clemmer (1940), Jacobs (1977) and Sykes (1958). The often cited study *A society of captives* by Gresham Sykes (1958), for example, provides insights into the relationship between environment, behaviour and the construction of masculinity. Sykes explained prisoner behaviour, in particular violence, as a result of psychological trauma experienced through the prison environment itself and the loss of freedom⁷. He interprets the formation of a prisoner subculture as a way of dealing with deprivations and preserving the self. Even though more recent work on prisoners and masculinities has begun to see masculinity in a more relational way (which resonates with changes in writings on inmate adaptation), Gresham Sykes' work is still echoed by recent studies on prison and masculinities (see, for example, Phillips, 2001; Sabo et al., 2001; Hua-Fu, 2005; Karp, 2010). Sykes (as do others) emphasises the significance of the prison code in prisoners everyday life. The prison code emphasises the superiority of masculine toughness and insensitivity. A key concern for prisoners then is to find means to be, to become or to remain masculine. The presence of a variety of (subordinate) masculinities results in the establishment of an inmate hierarchy. From Sykes point of view in 1958, a key criterion of maleness in society was heterosexual intercourse. In the homosocial environment of the prison, the achievement of dominant masculinity relied on alternative means to "be a man". Unlike men "on the streets", men in prison relied on these alternative means exclusively and excessively which produced a context in which manhood was judged by 'accompaniments of sexuality rather than sexuality itself' (p. 98). Therefore, some behaviour was not accepted and regarded as weak and/ or lacking self-restraint, for example preying on the weak or providing sexual favours for personal gain. Since 1958 changes in the prison system have effected changes the inmate subculture. Paterline and Petersen (1999) referred to an increase of inmates within the following five groups: mentally ill inmates, drug and alcohol abusers, youth offenders, "lifers", and gang members. In many ways, prison life has lost some of its clear and ordering structures including a clear division between prisoners and the prison organisation. Hunt *et al.* (1993) ascribe these increasing uncertainties in

⁶ But, see also ethnographic research, such as Wahidin's work with older inmates (Wahidin, 2006), who demonstrates the explanatory power of 'Foucauldian theory'.

⁷ More recently, such arguments still find support through work such as by Carrabine and Longhurst (1998) who stated that militaristic management styles in prison contribute to the display of 'excessive masculinity'. The spatial constraints encountered and everyday 'survival' strategies produce "a kind of masculinity that perpetuates crime, violence and other destructive behaviours" (Fraleay, 2002: p.86).

prisoners' lives largely to the attempts of the prison system to control prison gangs, such as 'using "confidential informants", segregating gang members in different buildings and prisons, intercepting gang communications, setting up task forces to monitor and track gang members, locking up gang leaders in high security prisons and "locking down" entire institutions' (p.400). Even though inmate relationships evolve around group cohesion and the exploitation of inmates, solidarity among them has declined significantly (Cordelia, 1983). Now, a key problem for adjusting to life behind bars is prisoners' relations with other prisoners (see also van Hoven and Sibley, 2008; Sibley and van Hoven, 2009). The assignment of loyalties and behavioural codes has become more "messy". In this context, the 'cultural construction of manhood' to borrow Phillips' (2001) terminology, has become more differentiated, more flexible as well. It is important then to revisit prisoner identities and, as Wetherell and Edley (1999) state to "understand the nitty gritty of negotiating masculine identities and men's identity strategies" (p.74). Referring to 'the free world' rather than the context of prison, Wetherell and Edley suggest that "identification is a matter of the procedures in action through which men live/ talk/ do masculinity and [...] these procedures are intensely local (situationally realized) and global (dependent on broader conditions of intelligibility)" (p.353). Since their thinking about performing masculinity is relevant to the analysis of my own data, I will elaborate their study in some more detail.

Social psychologists Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1999) discuss how hegemonic masculinity is appropriated by men in their everyday lives⁸. More specifically, they address norms conveyed and enacted by men in different situations: when do men try to conform to their ideals of masculinity and when do they resist it? Their analysis falls into three general positions men appear to take in talking about masculinity -the heroic position, the ordinary position and the rebellious position. In contrast to the argot roles proposed by Sykes, the three general positions can be taken by the same men in different situations. The ordinary position describes situations in which men embrace conventional ideas and social practices of masculinity and their attempts to embody hegemonic masculinity. The rebellious position defines events in which men contrast themselves to this heroic masculine imaginary position by labelling it macho and by positioning themselves as average men instead. Respondents also recount rebellious events which are marked by activities they consider unusual for their gender but which they embrace as being one of the many sides of their being men. In the context of prisons, the heroic position has been recognized, for example by Whitehead (2005) who notes that the "Hero may be seen as setting a standard of masculinity that overarches social divisions between men [...] a man's claim to masculinity does not depend on his social, cultural or racial positioning, but rather on his ability to display transcendental courage."(p.413). In contexts where other aspects of identity are less relevant than one's identity as a man, the tension between the imagined ideal masculine self and lived reality causes anxiety at the relational and ontological level: a man "may both be afraid and afraid of being unable to transcend his fear, [of] showing nerve", or in the words respondents to my research of 'having a heart'. The remainder of this article discusses ways in which prisoners perform, interpret and reinterpret masculinity under the conditions of life in a minimum security prison in New Mexico.

Case study New Mexico

Data Collection

The respondents for the interviews were selected with the help of prison case workers. Respondents were chosen from a minimum security level for several reasons, the most important being their willingness and ability to cooperate and the absence of a security risk for the (female) researcher. The sample was comprised of 21 males of whom the youngest was 24 years and the oldest was 59

⁸ A recent 'update' by Connell (with Messerschmidt, 2005) acknowledges Wetherell and Edley's work as advancing the way in which hegemonic masculinity has been conceptualized thus far.

years. The majority of the respondents (11) were Hispanic, 5 were Anglo-white, 4 were African-Americans and 1 Native American. The majority of the respondents had been in and out of prison since they were teenagers, 6 respondents were first time offenders. Half of the respondents served a sentence of 5 to 10 years, 4 served a sentence over 10 years. Three respondents reported some form of gang affiliation.

During the in-depth interviews the following topics were explored: the prisoners' personal/ family/ criminal background (depending on which information the prisoner volunteered); first impressions of the prison; the prisoners' daily routines; their physical, mental and material well-being; the nature and quality of contacts with other prisoners, with prison staff and friends and family; rules and regulations in the prison and the prisoners' view of themselves at the time of the interview. It is important to note that the interview was strongly influenced by the topics prioritized by the prisoners *themselves*. 'Start up' questions on sexuality and gender identity were not asked, instead masculinity was explored in the context of the above themes. In addition to the research project taking an interest in everyday geographies in general, there were other reasons for this choice: the respondents were 'assigned' to the researcher by case workers rather than approached by the researcher following a longer presence in the prison (e.g. as observer). There was little opportunity to establish trust and rapport with prisoners prior to the interview and the researcher was not able to 'get a feel' for the personality of the respondent. The researcher therefore felt it was important to take cues from the content and 'emotional charge' of the interview. This concurs with perceptions of some other authors' work on prison masculinities. Davidson (2007), for example, noted: "to talk to different men about, say, their favourite music most likely would not create the same amount of anxiety, nervousness, pride, shame, anger, boasting, privilege, and pain that may accompany talk about masculinity" (p.379). And Sabo et al. (2001) claimed that "prison is an ultramasculine world where nobody talks about masculinity" (p.3). In spite of these reservations, the interviews revealed a wealth of statements on the ways in which men perceived and performed their masculinities.

Prison masculinity at a minimum security prison in New Mexico

It is not difficult to discern the heroic position (Wetherell and Edley, 1999) from the prisoner interviews. It transpires from the analysis of prisoner stories that these heroic positions are assigned to specific times (the past), situations (e.g. 'initiations') and locations (higher security levels or facilities).

Heroic Positions

The quotes below describe challenges encountered that helped the respondent establish his position as a strong male. Respondents describe themselves as being in control, meeting the challenge of a risky situation.

George B. (44 years, Anglo-white) explains:

"When you walked into Santa Fe Main, back then you had to mind your own business, do your own time ... You had to go in and you had to fight. Don't make no difference if you win or lose. If you had to stab them you'd stab them, if you had to kill them, you'd kill them, whatever it took ... In the system of the 70s and 80s it was predatory, you know, they preyed on all the weak people ... That was a very violent system [...] But if you didn't have a heart, or wouldn't fight, they would steal your kit, or rape you or whatever, beat the shit out of you and you would have to go to the protection unit ... for the rest of your days. A lot of people were scared, they were afraid to die. I was. I was afraid to die but I wasn't going to let anything happen to me, so I fought. Until I earned my respect."

George B. recalls his experiences as a young prisoner at a time when the system was different, before policy demanded the separation of gang leaders (see discussion above). He begins by saying that 'you had to fight' in order to be distinguished from the weak prisoners who would, by definition, be preyed upon. It was a system in which identities were formed through establishing opposites, along the lines of not-guard and not-weak using the resources available: violence, sexual

domination and accumulation of property. However, George also reveals that violence was taken on as a means of survival and did not constitute a 'natural feature' of the prisoner. He states that although he was successful in adopting the required features, he also experienced fear and uncertainty.

Raul (47 years, Hispanic) recalls similar experiences of being tested as a new prisoner but also reveals that these experiences belonged to a past time and regime. He says:

"At that time you have 160 people on 1 cell block, there was a lot of violence and not just anybody could walk the line, you were tested. [...] Me personally, I was in an A facility back in '99. [...] Within a short amount of time a person came up to me and said Hey are you this person? I said yeah. Well I heard these bad things about you. So get your shank [homemade knife] and I'll meet you in the yard after dinner. [...] Well I don't know this guy, he's tattooed from head to toe [...] I had no clue what he was talking about. But it did give me this feeling like wow, where am I, where did I get myself into. But I knew that no matter what it was I was going to have to handle it or lock it up. Lock it up, do my time and 5 year segregation which is not a choice to me. So I sleekeed a shank and waited for the dinner call. [...] When you get to the yard you pass one gate and once you pass that gate they lock that gate. No, you are in the yard and there is no way out. [...] The person I had to confront was standing there with some friends of his waiting for me. I approach them and asked what the problem was [...] because it better be worth dying for. [...] I listen to them and no matter what happened today I'm taking one of them with me. It were 5 or 6 of them so they were going to stick the shit out of me but I'm taking one with me. [...] After they had seen that I was willing to take it to the final step they came forward and said: We were just testing you, see what kind of man you are, if you have heart. And you have a lot of heart [...] you came by yourself. So that broke the ice and I was respected throughout my time."

Raul's recollections reveal a few more interesting aspects. He is being tested by a prisoner who is "tattooed from head to toe" but does not immediately appreciate the authority that comes with bodily markers; the actions required of him do not constitute a part of his self-ascribed identity. Instead of responding directly with (readiness for) violence, Raul contemplates what options he has and what results different actions will yield. He concludes that he needs to confront his challenger, largely in order to establish a sense of stability for his remaining time in prison. Although Raul's is illustrative of a heroic position, there are nuances in his account, too.

It is important to note that the respondents' use of examples from a past time and different place has certain implications for the way in which they may have perceived and now perceive their masculinity. It appears from the extracts that the respondents feel they had nothing to lose by displaying the described behaviour and, in fact, needed to display it in order to create and protect boundaries which meant protection from bodily harm in the future. The minimum security level they were at during the interview poses a rather different context in which to perform masculinity compared with the medium or maximum security levels. Last but not least, when seen in the context of the entire interview, the heroic positions resonate a rite of passage, a memory of youth and a knowledge of having matured since and possibly of not requiring said behaviour to protect boundaries and their body any longer. George A. (24 years, Black) explains:

"These days, it is alright to hang out with somebody of another race. In level 3, it is still somewhat segregated. Not in level 2 anymore. When you are here in level 2, you are getting ready to go home. Every inmate knows, you have a short time left. So you are not trying to get into real trouble."

Ordinary Positions

In their analysis, Wetherell and Edley described those instances as 'ordinary positions' where respondents describe themselves as 'normal', 'moderate' or 'average'. To identify an ordinary position using the same definition in the context of the prison is not, however, straightforward. Prisoners have already been labelled as abnormal, undesirable and abject persons by society. To reiterate, for society 'normal' prison behaviour would be excessive and destructive. What then, in the context of the prison and from the perspective of prisoners could be viewed as 'ordinary positions'?

As noted above, heroic positions were usually associated with past regimes or high security levels. Prisoners interviewed at CNMCF level 2 now position themselves in opposition to the excessive behaviour of young prisoners, which they almost caricatured, and which helps them view themselves as 'normal'. Anthony (45 years, Mexican) illustrates this:

"These younger kids they don't care [...]. The mentality they have, they're getting tattoos, always working out and getting strong, see who's the toughest... macho, you know what a macho is... showing off, "I'm the best", "I'm the baddest". I used to be like that. When I was a kid."

An important means of establishing normality for many prisoners is heterosexuality. However, the interviews do not reveal a universal, violent response to homosexuality. Gary (42 years, Irish), for example, talks about his (Mexican) homosexual bunk mate whom he tolerated as long as his sexual activities remained out of sight and outside of Gary's personal space.

Gary: "I told them, as long as you don't bring that over here I ain't got a problem. You do your thing and I'll do my thing and we'll be fine. But then they were at two in the morning - happened to be sitting next to my bed doing their thing."

Interviewer: "Too close?"

Gary: "Too damn close. I was getting the creeps."

Although Gary's strategy initially is avoidance, he does tell other prisoners which results in gossip and name-calling.

Gary: "[They were] calling them homo and anything else you can imagine they were called all kinds of stuff".

In this particular case, the bunkmates identity as Mexican afforded him a higher status than that of a gay person which implies unquestioned support from fellow Mexican prisoners. As a result, Gary was caught unawares and injured by hot saltwater thrown in his face, leaving him with severe burn marks.

Most prisoners in this research agreed, though, that their lives at present were characterised by just wanting to get by, lying low and doing their time without getting into trouble. This is not to say that they are model prisoners, instead they make careful choices about what kind of transgressive behaviour they adopt in what contexts and at what times. At times, doing something against the rules is necessary for them to be 'normal'. Raul (47 years, Hispanic), for example, uses contact with prisoners who have the means and connections that help him establish a quiet existence, mostly separate from other prisoners.

Raul: "You just ask: Who do you need to talk to, who makes everything happen? When I first got here, there was a gang guy here. He worked up here with the staff and everything, and he could make anything happen. [...] I went to him and told him I have money [...] so get me a job that I won't be bothered with anybody else, do my laundry for me, give me anything I need as far as for a bunk area [...] and let me do my time. [...] Let me think about the things that I need to do, talk to my family, and writing my letters, watching TV and doing my time. I did the crime and I am doing my time. Let me do that and I will be out of the way."

Raul's interview demonstrates that some men are able to position themselves as ordinary because they have the resources that allow them to avoid violence as a means to determine their self-identity. George B. (44 years, Anglo-white) gives another example of being 'normal' in terms of the outside world in relation to his work. He says:

"I work on the utility crew, I do the hardest labour they got, pluck weeds, chop logs, you know whatever needs to be done from here to over there across the street. Anywhere really, we gotta keep this place tidy [...] We're always doing something every day. Whatever has to be done. Even at night sometimes. [...] It's a good job, it's hard labour, it really is. It's a benefit to me, that's why I do it. [...] I've worked all my life, I've never been without a job. I like to work. So after all these years, when I do finally get out, I wanna be able to work. Not like these guys here who are not used to working. I'm gonna go work and I'm gonna have a job. It's a benefit to me."

Again in this example, certain resources are utilised. George uses resources similar to many men in the free world: hard labour. Moreover, he views his work as a link between his past and his future outside of prison, he implies that he needs to maintain the skill to be able to work in order to be

able to gain access to paid employment- which in turn implies being able to contribute to the household income of his family, buy consumer items that will afford status etc. The quotes suggest that prisoners continually shift between reinterpreting their behaviour as ordinary either in the context of and by the standards of the prison or those of the outside world.

Rebellious positions

In Wetherell and Edley's study, men taking on rebellious positions described occasions in which they were unconventional. Respondents emphasised that they felt being masculine just meant being themselves which implied a rejection of macho masculinities and could include "activities unusual for [their] gender such as knitting and cooking" (Wetherell and Edley, 1999: p.347), as well as being caring and being the main caretaker in the family. In the above discussion, I already pointed at the respondents' reinterpretation of their behaviour to fit the specific situation described in the interview. As a result, some quotes used in the above section could equally be discussed here. For example, George B. (44years, Anglo-white) emphasises that other prisoners have no interest in working, thus portraying them as 'normal' prisoners. He feels that work will help him be 'normal' by the standards of the outside world. But in the context of the prison, he may be seen as rebellious. In fact, George B. provides other examples of contested notions of 'normal'. He describes his relations with some correctional officers (COs) as amicable and notes that at present and at level 2 such relations are okay but in the past, they would have broken the prisoner code.

"There is COs in here that, if it came down to it, I would defend their life ... the one I work for, he retires this year, the end of this year. There is nothing I wouldn't do for that man. Because he has nothing but respect for us, he would help us in any way he could. There's, I mean that man, I don't see him as a CO, he's a boss, we work with him, I've worked with him for years and he's earned a lot of respect. If one of these guys tried to jump on him or hurt him, I would be there to help him. I wouldn't do that back in the day, but I would now."

The resources utilised by George here cross the 'them-us' boundary present in earlier work (see above). He highlights respect as a key characteristic of his relations with the officer, something that could, by definition, only be afforded to fellow prisoners in the past. It seems here that the boundaries between groups of people are blurring but perhaps also between the institution and the outside world.

There are other examples to be found in the interviews, though, that refer to an inclusion of more 'feminine traits' as a part of the masculine self. George B. describes doing crafts, i.e. drawing and making decorative items, but reinterprets these as a means to generate money to send home which in turn helps secure his position as a 'normal' father in the outside world. He says:

"It's hard because some of these guys they don't have the income or money to [cook]. They don't have money to do it. [...] I would make money every day. I hussle. I do a lot of different things, everything I see is money. I can get money off a dead weed if I want to. There's a lot of ways to make money if you know how to do it. [...] Well, right now it's... I got a bunch of dead weed right here haha. I'll find pieces of wood somewhere and make a little case. I'll take these weeds and spray em with wax and arrange them inside the little box and put Plexiglas over it or whatever. I'll get 20 dollars for it. [...] I'll sell it in here, one of the inmates will buy it for 20 dollars to give to his wife or whatever. Somebody. Things like that."

Anthony (45 years, Mexican), too gives a glimpse of an emotional, more 'feminine' side, although he describes that he hides this from other inmates. First, Anthony takes on feminine tasks of the banquets organisation (serving, cleaning), then Anthony talks about being overwhelmed by emotions when watching children play within the confines of the prison. Anthony notes:

"We have the banquets. We have Mexican food. [...] I served the food and I cleaned up. It was wonderful. [...] Families came, kids came. [...] They had a piñata, it was great I loved it. It was great to see the kids smiling, they had a blast. You know it made me cry. Made me miss my granddaughter [...] It was just good to other families, see their loved ones in prison and that they're okay and they'll be home soon. We had fun, we got together and had fun. We took

pictures. [...] What made my banquet was to see the kids having fun. It made me cry. I had to go to the bathroom so they wouldn't see me cry. Cause they were so happy."

Discussion

The material quoted from the New Mexico study first of all illustrates that men do not define their masculinities primarily through violence and unruly behaviour, as has been suggested elsewhere, even though there were some parallels to Sykes' work when prisoners have taken on quasi argot roles. Old divisions between prisoners and the organization are less strict and solidarity expressed among the group of prisoners has declined (Hunt *et al.* 1993). Inmates do their own time and seek alliances that serve their needs and personal goals. In so doing, they draw on different kinds of masculinities.

In many ways, the New Mexico case supports Wetherell and Edley's findings on men's talk about masculinity. However, Frosch *et al.* (2003) contended that Wetherell and Edley's research falls short of explaining *why* men can be 'macho' or 'new men'. Frosch *et al.* ask "What is it that produces the specific 'choice' of location a particular individual makes amongst the available identity positions?" (p.40). And in addition, which "needs are being met [...] by the position which is taken up" (p.52). In this research, available resources seemed to play an important role in picking an identity position during the interview. Violence and association with other prisoners were key factors in establishing a prisoner identity as capable, or even dominant men in the past (heroic position). But masculinities are continuously negotiated, continuously shifting and changing depending, for example, on the racial or age group they belong to. Dissociation from other prisoners and access to income to facilitate either this or a bridge to their lives outside of prison were important factors in establishing the present self-identity (ordinary position) of prisoners.

It needs to be reiterated that the organizational context in this study played an important role in determining the kind of masculinities found. The study was undertaken at a minimum security level which means that the prison organization views its inmates as suited for reintegration into mainstream society in the near future. George A. (24 years, Black) maintains that it is not a "real prison" and Anthony (45 years, Mexican) emphasizes that this prison is, relatively, "the best place to do time" because the prison organization relies more on normative power than coercive power, meaning fewer threats of physical sanctions by the organization (Etzioni, 1977). Prisoners at minimum security perhaps feel a smaller need to act out against the system and remain more in control in their response to aggravating situations concerning other inmates in order to avoid repercussions such as segregation or the extension of their prison time. Certainly, further in-depth research at different security levels would shed more light on this.

As noted above, prison spaces cannot be viewed as homogeneous spaces in which ideas of justice are translated into the same means of control and punishment for all prisoners. The data for this study has illustrated how institutional ideas of justice are experienced in different ways based on individual characteristics of prisoners. Those with years of experiences in the prison system, those that are older, those with more available income and those belonging to a dominant social group usually are able to find ways to alleviate the experience of punishment somewhat. Sometimes, this is done at the expense of other prisoners, for example when labor, prime locations in the prison, or other services are 'bought' or traded.

A number of prisoners have begun to actively shape their identities in ways they think will potentially be successful in the free world, for example, through hard work and nurturing relations outside. However, and unfortunately, it is likely that many prisoners will encounter resistance in their attempt to shake off their previous identity as prisoner, or they might return to unfavorable living conditions and socio-economic environments which put them at risk of recidivism or even suicide (see, for example, Farrell and Marsden, 2008; Petersilia, 2003; Rosenfeld *et al.*, 2005). For these prisoners then, having served their sentence, having 'done' justice by the standards of society, does not provide more equal access to resources needed to (re-)establish themselves as masculine. They

continue to lack real or abstract power and often remain a part of landscapes of incarceration (see also Shabazz, 2010 in the discussion above).

About the author: Bettina VAN HOVEN, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen

To quote this article : Bettina VAN HOVEN, « "On voulait juste voir le genre d'homme que tu es" : masculinités dans une prison du Nouveau-Mexique » [" 'We were just testing what kind of man you are': negotiating masculinities in a New Mexico prison", traduction : Muriel Froment-Meurice]

justice spatiale | spatial justice, n° 03 mars | march 2011, <http://www.jssj.org>

References

- AITKEN S.C.**, "Leading Men to Violence and Creating Spaces for their Emotions" *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, Vol. 13, n° 5, 491-507, 2006.
- BAER L.**, "Visual imprints on the prison landscape: a study of the decorations in prison cells", *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, Vol. 96, n° 2, 209-217, 2005.
- BAER L., RAVNEBERG Bodil**, "The outside and inside in Norwegian and English prisons", *Geografiska Annaler: Series B*, Vol. 90, n° 2, 205-216, 2005.
- BARKER G. T.**, *Dying to be men: Youth, masculinity and social exclusion*, London: Routledge, 2005.
- BANDYOPADHYAY M.**, "Competing masculinities in a prison", *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 9, 186-203, 2006.
- CAO L., ZHAO J., VANDINE S.**, "Prison disciplinary tickets: a test of the deprivation and importation models", *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 25, 103-113, 1997.
- CARRABINE E., LONGHURST B.**, "Gender and Prison Organisation: Some Comments on Masculinities and Prison Management", *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 37, 161-166, 1998.
- CLEMMER D.**, *The Prison Community*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1940.
- COLLIER R.**, *Masculinities, Crime and Criminology: Men, Corporeality and the Criminal(ised) Body*, London and New York: Sage Publications, 1998.
- CONNELL R. W.**, *The men and the boys*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- CONNELL R. W., MESSERSCHMIDT James W.**, "Hegemonic masculinity. Rethinking the concept", *Gender and Society*, Vol. 19, n° 6, 829-859, 2005.
- CORDELIA A.**, *The making of an inmate. Prison as a way of life*, Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, Inc, 1983.
- DAVIDSON K G.**, "Methodological instability and the disruption of masculinities", *Men and masculinities*, Vol. 9, 379- 391, 2007.
- DAVIS A Y.**, "Race, gender, and prison history: from the convict lease system to the supermax prison", in *Prison Masculinities*, Donald Sabo, Terry A. Kupers and Willie Londen, 35-45, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.
- DIRSUWEIT T.**, "Carceral spaces in South Africa: a case study of institutional power, sexuality and transgression in a women's prison", *Geoforum*, Vol. 30, 71-83, 1999.
- ETZIONIA.**, "Power, goals, and organisational compliance structures", in *The Sociology of Corrections*, Robert G. Leger and John R. Stratton, New York: Wiley and Sons, 7-19, 1977.
- FARRELL M, MARSDEN J**, "Acute risk of drug-related death among newly released prisoners in England and Wales", *Addiction*, Vol. 103, n° 2, 251-255, 2008.
- FOUCAULT M**, *Discipline and Punish. The birth of a prison*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979. (version originale : *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, 1975).
- FRALEY S.** "Book Review 'Sabo, D., Kupers, T.A. and London, W. (2001) Prison masculinities. Philadelphia: Temple University Press'", *Contemporary Justice Review*, Vol. 5, 85-88, 2002.
- FROSH S, PHOENIX A., PATTMAN R.**, "Taking a stand: Using psychoanalysis to explore the positioning of subjects in discourse", *British Journal of Social Psychology* Vol. 42, 39-53, 2003.
- GOFFMAN E.**, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*, Chicago, IL: Aldin, 1961. (traduction française : *Asiles. Etudes sur la condition sociale des malades mentaux et autres reclus*, éditions de Minuit, 1979).
- HOPKINS P. E.**, "Youthful Muslim masculinities: gender and generational relations", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 31, n° 3, 337-352, 2006.
- HUA-FU H.**, "The patterns of masculinity in prison sociology: a case study in one Taiwanese prison", *Critical Criminology*, Vol. 13, 1-16, 2005.
- HUNT G., RIEGEL S., MORALES T., WALDORF D.**, "Changes in prison culture: prison gangs and the case of the "Pepsi Generation"", *Social Problems*, Vol. 40, 398-409, 1993.
- IGNATIEFF M.**, "State, civil society and total institutions: a critique of recent social histories of punishment", *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 3, 153-192, 1981.
- IRWIN J., CRESSEY D. R.**, "Thieves, Convicts and the inmate culture", *Social Problems*, Vol. 10, n° 2, 142-155, 1962.
- JACOBS J B.**, *Stateville: The penitentiary in mass society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

- JEFFERSON T.**, "Subordinating hegemonic masculinity", *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 6, n° 1, 63-88, 2002.
- KARP D. R.**, "Unlocking men, unmasking masculinities: doing men's work in prison", *The Journal of Men's Studies*, Vol. 18, n° 1, 63-83, 2010.
- LEGER R. G., STRATTON J. R.**, "Correctional institutions as complex organizations", in *The Sociology of Corrections*, Robert G. Leger and John R. Stratton, 7-19, New York: Wiley and Sons, 1977.
- LEYSHON M., BRACE C.**, "Men and the Desert: Contested masculinities In Ice Cold in Alex", *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, Vol. 14, n° 2, 163-182, 2007.
- MENDEITA E.**, "Plantations, ghettos, prisons: US racial geographies", *Ethics, Place & Environment*, Vol. 7, n° 1, 43-59, 2004.
- MESSERSCHMIDT J.**, *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and reconceptualization of theory*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993.
- NAYAK A.**, "Displaced Masculinities: Chavs, Youth and Class in the Post-industrial City", *Sociology*, Vol. 40, n° 5, 813-831, 2006.
- OWEN B. A.**, "Race and gender relations among prison workers", *Crime & Delinquency*, Vol. 31, n° 1, 147-159, 1985.
- PATERLINE B. A., PETERSEN D. M.**, "Structural and social determinants of prisonization", *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 27, 427-441, 1999.
- PETERSILIA J.**, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- PHILLIPS J.**, "Cultural construction of manhood in prison", *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, Vol. 2, n° 1, 13-23, 2001.
- ROEBUCK J.**, "A critique of 'Thieves, convicts and the inmate culture'", *Social Problems*, Vol. 11, n° 2, 193-200, 1962.
- ROSENFELD R., WALLMAN J., FORNANGO R.**, "The contribution of ex-prisoners to crime rates", in *Prisoner reentry and crime in America*, Jeremy Travis, Christy Ann Visher, 80- 104, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005.
- SABO D., KUPERS T. A., LONDON Willie**, *Prison masculinities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.
- SABOL W J., WEST H C., COOPER M.**, "Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. *Prison in 2008*", Washington: US Department of Justice, 2010.
- SEYMOUR K.**, "Imprisoning masculinity", *Sexuality & Culture*, Vol. 7, n° 4, 27-55, 2003.
- SHABAZZ R.**, "So high you can't get over it, so low you can't get under it': carceral spatiality and black masculinities in the United States and South Africa", *Souls*, Vol. 11, n° 3, 276-294, 2010.
- SIBLEY D., VAN HOVEN B.**, "The contamination of personal space- boundary construction in a prison environment", *Area*, Vol. 41, n° 2, 198-206, 2009.
- SIMON B.**, "The return of panopticism: supervision, subjection and the new surveillance", *Surveillance and Society*, Vol. 3, n° 1, 1-20, 2005.
- SYKES G. M.**, *The society of captives. A study of a maximum security prison*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958.
- TOCH H.**, "The catalytic situation in the violence equation", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 15, 105-123, 1985.
- VAN HOVEN B., HÖRSCHELMANN K.**, *Spaces of Masculinities*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- VAN HOVEN B., SIBLEY D.**, "'Just duck': the role of vision in the production of prison spaces", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 26, n° 6, 1001-1017, 2008.
- VAZ P., BRUNO F.**, "Types of self-surveillance: from abnormality to individuals 'at risk'", *Surveillance and Society*, Vol. 1, n° 3, 272-291, 2003.
- WACQUANT L.**, "From slavery to mass incarceration: rethinking the 'race question' in the US", *New Left Review*, Vol. 13, 41-60, 2002.
- WAHIDIN A.**, "A Foucauldian analysis: experiences of elders in prison" in *Foucault and Aging*, WAHIDIN Azrini, POWELL Jason L., 115-128, New York: Nova Science, 2006.
- WETHERELL M., EDLEY N.**, "Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices", *Feminism and Psychology*, Vol. 9, n° 3, 335-356, 1999.
- WHITEHEAD A.**, "Man to man violence: how masculinity may work as a dynamic risk factor", *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 44, n° 4, 411-422, 2005.
- WILSON A.**, "Four days and a breakfast: time, space and literacy/ies in the prison community" in *Spatialising Literacy Research and Practice*, Leander Kevin, Sheehy Margaret, 67-90, New York, Peter Lang, 2004.