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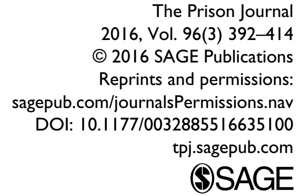
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A Critique of the Prison Reentry Discourse: Futurity, Presence, and Commonsense

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Abstract
This study raises basic questions about reentry programs in the United States and the discourses of reentry that currently frame policy, research, and programs. We compare Nordic discourses with those in the United States and illustrate how the latter curtail a more complex understanding of the presence of loved ones in the life of an incarcerated father. We found that U.S. reentry discourses in general are future-oriented and convey hopelessness about the capacity of loved ones separated by prison to be positively present—physically and imaginatively—to each other. We conclude the study with implications for a humanizing curriculum.

Keywords
reentry discourse, parenting, presence, futurity

Introduction

> "With imprisonment, we do not take the whole life away. But we take parts of life away."
>
> —Christie (2004, p. 103).

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This study raises basic questions about family-oriented, prison-based reentry programs in the United States. What exactly are prisoners reentering—job markets? families? societies? Why are reentry programs needed? What does the *discourse* of reentry "do to" prisoners and practitioners? Here, the term discourse refers to language in use (Gee, 1996); that is, *how language is used by some to "do" something to others*. We are particularly interested in discourses about incarcerated parents and their relationships with their families promulgated by those in positions of power vis-à-vis criminal justice systems. This, we might add, includes prisoners and their families, legislators and policy makers, and researchers and practitioners like ourselves. We are concerned about the adverse effects of family reentry discourses on all of us.

Logically, reentry programs might be needed most when the separation from family is most severe (in terms of length of sentence, distance from home, visiting policy, beliefs about the redemptive capacity of prisoners, programming opportunities, prison culture, etc.). The rise of reentry discourses in the United States is coincident with mass incarceration and harsh sentiments against those convicted of crime and "ex-offenders" as reflected in political rhetoric and popular culture. This parallel trend suggests that the most established reentry programs risk being the most attuned to the status quo and its complacency with rampant rates of recidivism.

In this article, we illustrate ways that reentry discourses about parents and their families perpetuate commonsense beliefs that legitimize certain approaches to reentry, maintain status quo, and curtail the aims of a humanist curriculum. We make our argument in three steps. First, we compare punitive and socially inclusive penal policy, illustrated in particular by reference to English-speaking and Nordic countries. This analysis will help us question the "commonsense" that underpins notions such as "removal from society" and "reentry." Second, we use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine policies and academic texts related to U.S. reentry. We show how these texts frame policy and shape attitudes by perpetuating a discourse about reentry as something that happens in the future, after prison, if at all. Third, we then reflect on the way future-oriented reentry discourses curtail the possibilities for effective family reentry by limiting what can be imagined and discussed seriously by policy makers, researchers, and practitioners, and offer some suggestions for a new reentry discourse and humanizing curriculum.

Punitive Versus Socially Inclusive Views of People in Prison

Dominant features of prison systems in the United States and other English-speaking countries—mass incarceration, longer sentences, fewer

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prisoner-centered activities and programs, and so on—began their ascendency in the 1970s (Garland, 2001; Warner, 1998). The term used by Pratt, Brown, Brown, Hallsworth, and Morrison (2005), *the new punitiveness*, captures these developments, which may be thought of in terms of three interrelated trends: (a) an enormous increase in the *scale* of imprisonment, (b) a significant worsening in the *depth* of imprisonment, and (c) *the representation or perception of the person* held in prison in one-dimensional and demonized terms (Warner, 2009).

In Garland's (2001) analysis, the epoch that preceded this current "culture of control" (p. 175) and that held sway in the Western world for most of the 20th century is depicted as "penal welfarism." It involved a more even balancing of "caring" and "controlling." The prison, in this perspective, has "detrimental effects" and should be used as "a last resort." This is a far cry from the "prison works" approach prevalent in the United States and elsewhere, where prisons are rhetorically positioned in policy as safe places where deficient prisoners go to become rehabilitated for society (see below). Furthermore, in the penal welfarist outlook, the loss of freedom is regarded as the punishment; thus, security should be the minimum necessary, and conditions in prison should be as "normal" as possible. Moreover, in penal welfare thinking, the prisoner is seen as "a disadvantaged, deserving subject of need" (p. 10), the aim being "to bring all individuals into full social citizenship with equal rights and equal opportunities" (p. 46). When we look at the third criteria for examining prison systems identified above—the perception of the person in prison—we find great differences between penal welfarism and the culture of control.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this shift was not an absolute change but rather a significant change in emphasis, and "that new practices and mentalities co-exist with the residues and continuations of older arrangements" (Garland, 2001, p. 167). Garland says that in particular, the "penal mode" of penal welfarism has become "more prominent . . . more punitive, more expressive, more security-minded . . . The welfare mode, as well as becoming more muted, has become more conditional, more offence-centred, more risk conscious" (p. 175). Those who commit crime are "less likely to be represented in official discourse as socially deprived citizens in need of support [but rather as] culpable, undeserving and somewhat dangerous" (Garland, 2001, p. 175).

The emergence of this new punitiveness, in the United States, Britain, and beyond, helps explain much of the thinking around reentry in general and the attitude toward prisoners as parents in particular. Seeing prisoners only as "offenders" removes from view other dimensions of their lives: personalities, experiences, relationships, awareness, history, culture, and so on. Features of

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the new punitiveness can be found in Britain, Ireland, and the United States. Yet "penal welfarism" remains the *current* dominant policy and practice in many places, notably in Nordic countries, and is promoted by international bodies such as the Council of Europe (CoE). A core policy document for European countries is the *European Prison Rules* (EPR), which serves as an agreed philosophy of imprisonment as well as a set of standards. The EPR state that

> no one shall be deprived of liberty save as a measure of last resort . . . restrictions placed on people deprived of their liberty shall be the minimum necessary and proportionate . . . life in prison shall approximate as closely as possible the positive aspects of life in the community. (CoE, 2006, Preamble and Rules 3 and 5)

The CoE (2003) stipulates that the enforcement of custodial sentences "requires striking a balance between the objectives of ensuring . . . discipline in penal institutions . . . and decent living conditions . . . and constructive preparation for release, on the other" (p. 3).

When such principles provide the framework for penal policy, people held in prison are far more likely to be treated humanely and as "normal" people. This socially inclusive approach tends to see men and women in prison as having parenting roles *in the here and now*, rather than after release. This is exemplified in descriptions of Swedish and Finnish arrangements.

In both Sweden and Finland, *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989) has had significant impact on the way parents in prison, and their children, are regarded and supported. Article 3 of that Convention states, *inter alia*, the following:

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
2. State parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being.

Swedish prison authorities see themselves as obliged to be mindful of the best interests of the child in making a range of decisions about the child's parent who is sent to prison (B. Persson, Senior Adviser, Swedish Prison and Probation Service, personal communication, August 22, 2013). Such decisions include the location of the prison to which the parent is sent, to ensure optimum accessibility for the child to the parent, although this objective is

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constrained somewhat by a requirement to assign the individual to a prison of an appropriate security class. The need to support parent–child relationship also comes into play in decisions about prison leave, visiting hours, telephone use, and electronic monitoring. For example, the need of a child to have his or her parent at home for a special event such as a birthday must be considered.

Due regard must be given to the rights of the child even in such matters as sentence planning. Visiting facilities must be appropriate for children. The Swedish prison service website has a special page designed for the child whose parent is in prison. Every prison has a specially trained "children's ombudsman," whose role is to advocate for the best interest of the prisoner's child and to ensure that this is high on the prison agenda.

In Finland, there is similar recognition of the needs of the children of prisoners and of prisoner parents (Sunimento, n.d.). New principles for child and family work were set out by the Criminal Sanctions Agency (CSA) in spring 2013, and these are also based on Article 3 of the U.N. Convention. A child is seen to have the right to regular contact with its parents, and the prison system is obliged to support the imprisoned parent in the performance of his or her childrearing responsibilities. Suitable facilities that enable unsupervised visits by children have been increased. A CSA document states, "The visiting facilities shall be as close to the entrance as possible. The child perspective shall be considered when meeting children who are coming to visit [and in] the furnishings of the visiting facilities" (Sunimento, n.d.).

In Finland, elaborate assessment takes place at the beginning of sentences, and individual sentence plans are developed in conjunction with prisoners. Sunimento (n.d.) states that

> Each assessment centre has a person who is responsible for family work and who has basic knowledge of child welfare and child development. The assessment centres ensure that the child and family work and the child's best interests are taken into account in the sentence plans . . . The prison supports the prisoner's parenthood. The prisons organise, for example, family camps and a variety of programmes and courses. The prison also takes into account the child's rights in the daily schedule (e.g. telephone call times, visits).

The degree to which humanist policies succeed in a penal system may be determined in part by how the prisoner is represented. These Swedish and Finnish policies view the person in prison as a parent and member of society, and not merely as an "offender." Criminality is part of the image of the man or woman held in prison, but many other aspects of his or her life and personality also help compose the picture. One CoE policy document states,

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"Education in prison shall aim to develop *the whole person* bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context" (CoE, 1990, p. 8, emphasis added).

On the contrary, the new punitiveness allows little recognition of a prisoner's life beyond being an "offender"—"the whole person" is not recognized. Such a limiting perspective precludes initiatives that make imprisonment less damaging and more constructive, including support for *present* relationships, such as those between a child and an imprisoned parent.

In Nordic countries, penal policy is often seen as an offshoot of an inclusive social policy; good social policy is best criminal policy. Prisoners in Nordic countries vote in elections. The predominant urge is to draw those in prison back more fully into society, not to treat them as "outcasts." Thus, social inclusive policies are grounded in the Nordic or "universal" welfare state (Lappi-Seppala, 2007). Humanist policies for incarcerated parents are understood in this larger context: In Nordic countries, the incarcerated continue to be seen as active members of society.

Such an approach to penal policy stands in stark contrast to Anglophone countries, but it is common in much of Europe and is expressed clearly via the CoE, whose policies represent men and women in prison in an inclusive way, as part of society, as "whole persons," and not just as "offenders." We end this section with illustrations of this outlook from Norway.

Are Hoidal, the governor of Norway's largest prison in Oslo, reflected a socially inclusive view of those in his care: "80 per cent of the inmates need help. They need a lot of help. I think that's the main focus in the Norwegian [prison] system" (Warner, 2009, p. 273). Not surprisingly, then, an important "white paper" on the future of the prison system, issued by the Norwegian government in 2008, states that

> The smaller the difference between life inside and outside prison, the easier the transition from prison to freedom. The normality principle is therefore a loadstar for penal implementation policy. It is also in accordance with the principle that deprivation of liberty is the actual penalty and that the stay in prison shall not be more onerous than security considerations demand . . . Strengthening the normality principle means organising a daily routine in prison that as far as possible reflects the society outside the walls. (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Police, 2008, Part 3)

In this section, we contrasted two approaches to penal policies—punitive and socially inclusive—and argued that the latter is supported in the Nordic countries by a larger humanist stance toward the welfare of their citizens. From this perspective, prisoners are represented in policy as whole human

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beings, whose membership in society is intact. With the socially inclusive model as a backdrop, we now turn to a more punitive (or what is sometimes referred to as retributive) model of reentry that currently reigns in U.S. penology.

U.S. Reentry Discourses: The Power of Words (and Images)

Reentry Policy—The Positioning of Prisoners as Objects

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) views discourse as the means by which power is exercised symbolically (Halliday, 1985; Janks, 2010; Thompson, 1990). All social discourses are ideological and aim to consolidate the power of regimes using them. CDA looks to disclose the ways discourses are produced and distributed (Halliday, 1985), as well as how they work symbolically to disguise power (Thompson, 1990) and control others through commonsense regulations, expectations, and procedures (Foucault, 1978). This use of language works best at the unconscious (commonsense) level, resisting criticism not through open debate but through implied dualisms that create rules of discourse and curtail the language needed for critical dialogue (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

We illustrate how discourses work ideologically both to disguise and to create truth regimes. First, to illustrate the way ideology is disguised, we examine the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons' (FBOP; 2011) mission statement that states, in part, "It is the mission of the FBOP to protect society by confining offenders in . . . facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure . . . ." The mission statement further states that the FBOP strives to preserve ". . . security through the elimination of violence, predatory behavior, gang activity, drug use, and inmate weapons" (p. 1). Security is framed in physical terms. Interior or psychological needs for security (Maslow, 1968), such as protection from embarrassment, support for guilt, or the need for reassurance, are unaddressed. This exterior/interior dualism is grounded in behaviorism; it works at an unconscious level to discursively "rule out," for example, the opportunity to address more psychologically interior security needs. Terms such as *safe, humane*, and *secure* disguise a dehumanized view of prisoners (i.e., a view that attributes no value to their interior lives) within a discourse of "caring for" prisoners. Nordic countries tend to approach caring very differently—a caring "about" rather than "for"—as evident, for example, in the remarks of K. J. Lang (1993), the former director general of the Finnish prison system, who said, "All our efforts

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when organizing correctional services should be analyzed as to their ability to support, uphold and redress the self-esteem of the prisoner" (p. 67).

Who benefits and who loses when prisoners are discursively identified in the "objective" language of behaviorism,[1] rather than as sensing, thinking subjects (Duguid, 2000)? According to the FBOP, the beneficiaries of prison programs are society and the economy: "It is the mission of the FBOP to protect society." "Inmates are well-prepared for a productive and crime-free return to society." This appeal to the public and the reference to prisoners in third person reinforce the notion that the FBOP is talking "about them" grammatically as indirect objects, rather than talking "with them" as fellow human beings.

The Virginia Department of Corrections (2010) presents two of the top three goals for its Virginia Adult Reentry Initiative (VARI) in a similarly objectifying grammar:

> Goal 1: To enhance public safety by shifting the organizational culture from a primary focus on risk control to include risk and recidivism reduction through offender change
> Goal 3: To employ a system of research-based practices and programs that reduce the criminal thinking and behaviors of offenders

A second way discourses consolidate power is through the establishment of truth regimes. The word "control" appears frequently in the mission statements of prison systems, unsurprisingly. And control is largely realized through the behavioral grammars of program discourses (Foucault, 1978). Skill deficits can be measured and correctives prescribed to improve behavior. Behaviors are exterior and measureable, allowing prisoners to be "monitored for progress." Reentry discourses that use behavioral grammars to position prisoners as objects to be studied and corrected by the system are, of course, pervasive. For example, the subtitle of Tolbert's (2012) reentry report, *Supporting Education and Career Advancement for Low-Skill Individuals in Corrections*, signals a "skills" or behavioral view. She notes, for example, "many offenders are ill equipped to break the cycle of catch-and-release because they lack the education and workforce skills . . ." (p. 1). The reentry discourse establishes a criminogenic truth—one that precisely measures the deficits of prisoners and prescribes treatment—whereby the treatment itself constitutes a system of control, as Foucault (1978) would say, by establishing a technology of self that manages behaviors at a micro, "cellular" (p. 149) level. This regime requires a decontextualized, behaviorist, one-dimensional view of prisoners that circumvents a "whole person" perspective. It aligns well with a retributive approach to prisoners that severs their ties with society until they are deemed rehabilitated and worthy of membership.

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Like other prison-based reentry programs, Tolbert's (2012) reentry model (p. 5) begins at prison intake, but the "reentry challenge" looms in the future: ". . . reentry into the community is a major concern . . . too many of these individuals do not reintegrate successfully into society [after release]" (p. 1). We surmise from the future orientation of her model that although reentry programs exist in prison, they reflect the commonsense notion that reentrance is something prisoners can look forward to, but not experience while incarcerated. Like the grammar of behaviorism, futurity also has a role to play in the reentry discourse. It perpetuates a retributive approach and profound contrast with socially inclusive approaches to incarceration described earlier, such as the CoE's determination that "life in prison shall approximate as closely as possible the positive aspects of life in the community" or the Norwegian stipulation that "the normality principle" be "the loadstar for penal implementation policy."

Reentry Industry—The Language of the Future

The U.S. Congress passed the Second Chance Act of 2007 to reduce recidivism and improve offender outcomes (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2013). Between 2009 and 2012, the federal government alone funded 145 demonstration grants (with awards of up to US$750,000 each), 144 mentoring grants (with awards of up to US$300,000 each), and 44 co-occurring disorder treatment grants (with awards of up to US$600,000 each; Council of State Governments, 2013). And since 2010, the NIJ (2013) has awarded research institutes with approximately US$15,000,000 to study the Act's effectiveness in supporting "individuals returning to the community from prison or jail" (p. 1).

Perhaps from a macroeconomic perspective, it is misleading to refer to the rise in spending on reentry services as a reentry *industry* (Wacquant, 2010). Nevertheless, others (Thompkins, Curtis, & Wendel, 2010) see an emerging reentry industry as the logical frontier for the "increasingly punitive and widespread sentencing policies of the last two or more decades that have accompanied the dramatic expansion of the prison industry" (p. 427). Leaving aside questions about political and financial profiteering associated with this critique, we are interested here in its discourse: "Reentry" refers to *postrelease systems*. Thompkins et al. define the prisoner reentry industry as

> . . . the systems charged with overseeing the release of prisoners—to post-prison supervision (dubbed "reentry")—and with policing the behaviors of the former prisoner during periods of quasi-incarceration, while supposedly at the same time helping to prepare them for reintegration back into the community. (p. 428)

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Although reentry programs (often called reintegration, prerelease, or release readiness) were historically managed and implemented from within prison, they remained future-oriented, preparing inmates for release. FBOP (2007) policy states, "The BOP recognizes that an inmate's preparation for release begins at initial commitment and continues throughout incarceration and until final release to the community" (p. 1). We find the same orientation in the State of Virginia's reentry mission:

> The mission of the VARI (Virginia Adult Reentry Initiative) is to promote public safety and reduce crime by preparing offenders for success . . . from the time of the offender's entry into prison through his or her transition and reintegration in the community. (Virginia Department of Corrections, 2010, p. 4)

We see, however, with its expansion into a separately funded industry, that reentry programs are no longer primarily managed inside prisons but rather after prison, during and after the transition period back to the community. The new reentry discourse amplifies its future orientation. Commonsense says you cannot reenter the community while you are still locked up.

Interestingly, Stageman (2010) challenges the assumptions underlying the futurity of this commonsense by arguing that, for many, reentry cannot happen in the future because "entry" never happened in the past: "How can the term *reentry* accurately describe the experiences of an individual in relation to a social world that he never effectively entered in the first place?" (p. 442). Although we sympathize with his objection, we flip Stageman's critique and argue that, for many fathers in prison, loved ones are reentering their life worlds in the present and have never stopped doing so. We ask, "Who gains and who loses by ignoring the existential and human dimensions of the lived-in-the-present experiences of prisoners?" Our ontological critique of the temporal assumptions of (future-oriented) reentry discourses are developed and illustrated below.

Discursive/ideological turns like the ones above (positioning prisoners as objects rather than subjects, establishing a behavioristic commonsense, locating reentry as off-limits in the present lives of prisoners) curtail the way practitioners and researchers think about the problem of reentry and the structures that might support families while a loved one is still in prison. What's more, this curtailment happens at a preconscious level—by delimiting the available words that give rise to thought. Furthermore, when researchers seek a Second Chance Act grant or practitioners design a reentry "intervention," they are discursively positioned by/oriented to this reigning discourse and paradigm (Ahmed, 2006; Costelloe, 2007). Thus, we may think we are taking a stance against an objectifying reentry discourse yet still be working within it,

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unaware. At least, when we strive to see prisoners as human beings with lived experiences and personal aspirations, we feel the outsideness of our stance, the prevailing discourse acting on us.

Reentry Research: Witnessing the Unlinking of Families

Two questions that helped us deconstruct the commonsense of reentry discourse are "*What* are prisoners reentering?" and "*When* are they reentering?" The questions are especially pressing because, for all the rhetoric about reentering society, there is very little policy related to *family reentry* (Dyer, 2005; C. Fennelly, personal communication, August 10, 2012). We hoped that studies of family reentry might help us answer the "*Reentering when*" question and also provide a stronger sense of how the futurity discourse shapes or does not shape the research agenda, as family reentry issues might present a greater need for support *in the present*, rather than the future (Bernstein, 2005). Thus, we searched two major databases (Education Resource Information Center [ERIC] and PsychInfo) for peer-reviewed articles from 2001 and later using combinations of search terms such as *reentry* + *family, parenting* + *prison, incarceration* + *family*. We identified 48 journal articles. We were interested in studies that provided insights about the authors' stances regarding (a) the *temporality* of reentry (i.e., as a present or future phenomenon) and (b) the primary programmatic orientation (specifically, behaviorist/exterior or humanist/interior). However, we soon found that the latter was too complex and nuanced to use as a meaningful category. Thus, focusing on temporality, we found 12 articles that pushed back against a view of family reentry that suspended meaningful family roles or contact until the prisoner was released from prison (even if the same article also endorsed its futurity elsewhere in the paper) and nine that more or less adopted the futurity view.

Authors wrote from within the futurity reentry discourse in a variety of ways. For example, Meek (2011) wrote of the way parenthood affects the identities of young fathers in prison and how being new fathers might shift the way they imagine themselves to be in the future (what Meek refers to as their "possible selves," p. 941). Although this identity shift seems to be happening in the present time, the focus of Meek's study was the future. This was evident in both the definition of possible selves as "imagined scenarios for the self in the future" (Meek, 2011, p. 942) and in the questionnaire used to study this phenomenon among the young fathers, which included stems such as "after release, I hope I will be . . ." (p. 943). We wonder how these fathers are experiencing being fathers in the *here and now*, what a study of these transcending aspects of present possibility might reveal about family reentry, and how it might be supported during incarceration. We also observe a trace

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of behavioral discourse in the study. Meek notes that the possible selves' framework might "be employed in interventions to improve father/child relations, to motivate young men . . ." (p. 943). The suggestion begins as a humanist insight about the capacity for human beings to interpret their own life experiences in self-enhancing ways but then turns to behaviorism: Prison staff takes back control to motivate, intervene, correct.

Clark et al. (2005, p. 222) provide another example of futurity discourse related to family reentry:

> Being in prison illustrates one extreme of fathers living apart from children, often for an indeterminate period out of their control . . . Our purposive sampling has deliberately selected those men who claim an intention "to contact and have some responsibility" for a child post release.

The effects of prisonization are profound, and Clark et al.'s (2005) study helps raise awareness of the violence of imprisonment to families. It also reveals how deeply fathers themselves internalize the futurity of the reentry discourse:

> Obviously because of the fact that I'm not available there have been some difficulties in the role that I would have played if I weren't in prison . . . Obviously I'm not able to be there for any crisis, any occasion; sometimes people would like you to be there, and you're not, for a number of reasons. (p. 229)

> I don't know—you can't do very much out there because I am stuck in here. There's nothing I can do really—I speak to her on the phone when she's upset; I speak to her on the phone when she's been naughty. I speak to her on the phone. There's nothing I can really do when she comes here. (p. 233)

Clarke et al. (2005) conclude that fathers who intend to *become* responsible fathers when they are released have "an unsettled and fragmented paternal identity . . ." (p. 239). Their work, like Meek's and others, disclose the destructive forces of prison as well as the resilience of prisoners. Yet we see the futurity discourse in both: the unquestionability of the "unlinking of lives" (Arditti & Parkman, 2011, p. 207; Elder, 1998), the "givenness" of the "fact" that fathers cannot reenter their families while they remain in prison. Whereas in Meek's study, the influence of futurity shows itself in his conceptual framework and data collection methods, with Clarke et al., it emerges in the sampling strategy that selects fathers who *intend to become* responsible fathers when they get out of prison. In these and other studies, reentry is conceived, at best, as a future aspiration. The *uncontested fact of unlinked lives*

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is witnessed to and voiced by female prisoners (Kellett & Willging, 2011), male prisoners (Visher & O'Connell, 2012), youthful prisoners (Arditti & Parkman, 2011), children of prisoners (Shlafer, Gerrity, Ruhland, & Wheeler, 2013; Yocum & Nath, 2011), at home mothers and caregivers (Yocum & Nath, 2011), and even former prisoners (Trimbur, 2009).

Absent from these testimonials of separation and loss is the *possibility of a meaningful presence of family members during the period of incarceration*, as we have seen in some Nordic policies. At least one set of researchers (Arditti & Parkman, 2011, p. 208) make their awareness of futurity transparent: ". . . our pre-understanding of young men's reentry experience . . . is characterized by social exclusion."

We did discover articles that pushed against the futurity discourse. Mendez (2000), for example, contends that "Incarcerated men have been overlooked with respect to their ability to assume a major role in the raising of their children" (p. 100) and that

> Programs that teach incarcerated men how to participate in the raising of their children should be required . . . The families of the men continue to maintain contact with them over the years. Therefore, human development programs should attempt to include the men's children and the children's mothers in the training the men receive. (p. 100)

Although their study involved men in a work release program serving shorter sentences, Roy and Dyson (2005) found that the relationships between the men and their "baby mamas" (p. 289) were dynamic and ambiguous throughout incarceration. They noted that the mothers of their children have enormous power to maintain father–child ties or sever them:

> Through regular contact or even through cutting off communication altogether, mothers can exacerbate the isolating effects of incarceration or provide an alternative set of role expectations for incarcerated fathers. Mothers of children can create new avenues for men to enact their father roles, reconfirming their identities as fathers during incarceration. (p. 291)

Roy and Dyson show how much fatherly work takes place during incarceration and distinguish between two kinds of presence—psychological and physical. We are reminded of how "sparse" (Day, Aycock, Bahr, & Arditti, 2005) the research on family reentry is and how little we know about the psychological presence of loved ones and its worthiness as a topic of study.

Related to psychological presence, Boswell (2002) found numerous ways for incarcerated fathers to remain "present" in the lives of their children through photographs, letters, cards, and videotapes. Similarly, Hallman,

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Dienhart, and Beaton (2007) found that fathers separated from their children by divorce, but not incarcerated, found ways to remain present in the lives of their children. The fathers "found ways to bridge different experiences of time, and expand their influence beyond the here and now" (p. 20).

If temporal givens—what it means to be present, when loved ones reenter our consciousness—can be challenged when studying divorced fathers, can they also be challenged as they manifest themselves (or hide themselves) in reentry discourses? For example, Muth and Walker (2013) described how a daughter remained intensely present in the day-to-day imaginary life of her incarcerated father. We noted how a prison-based family literacy project, phone calls, and visits deepened this sense of presence and, conversely, how this temporal phenomenon opened up richer dialogue, even in otherwise depersonalizing contexts, such as phone conversations. We also discovered that being present to loved ones from a distance can enhance a sense of hope and belonging, but not without risk and pain. We therefore agree with Dyer's (2005) call for a more sensitive conceptual framework:

> While intervention on the family level is thought to have great promise in reducing recidivism, in order to effectively guide research and intervention, current theory must be evaluated for its sensitivity to the context of incarceration and additional theoretical work is needed to conceptualize how incarceration affects paternal identity. (p. 201)

Dyer (2005) notes that it might be impossible for an incarcerated father to "enact roles meaningful to his identity as a father" (p. 214). As shall be seen, we challenge the limitations of a strictly behavioral view of fathering as *enacting* but support Dyer's call to help fathers *be* fathers in the day-to-day world of prison. Furthermore, his thesis—that father identities are confirmed through an ongoing process of reflecting on the appraisals of loved ones—provides a key to the very real ways fathers experience the arrivals of their children (and vice versa) in the phenomenal world despite being "beyond the here and now."

Discussion: What Reentry Discourses Do and What We Can Do About It

Whereas Thompson (1990) and other critical theorists view macro-level discourses as essentially *deceptive* (Janks, 2010), Foucault (1978), no less wary of the ideological hold that discourses have on us, takes an opposite approach, seeing discourses as *truth systems*. Gee (2005) notes the *reflexive* nature of language, that is, its "magical property," whereby language both reflects reality and constructs it:

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> We face a chicken and egg question: Which comes first? The situation or the language? . . . Language simultaneously reflects reality ("the way things are") and constructs (construes) it to be a certain way. . . . The term for this property is "reflexivity" (in the sense of language and reality being like two mirrors facing each other and constantly and endlessly reflecting their own images back and forth between each other). (p. 97)

Discourses not only influence the realities of our world but also construct them. Foucault (1978) is interested in how systems of truth reflexively create new realities. He illuminates the way regimes construct and order the daily reality of prison life, norms, and prisoners' bodies, through discourses of surveillance, interventions, and the micromanagement of time. "The disciplines which analyze space, break up and rearrange activities, must also be understood as machinery for adding up and capitalizing on time" (Foucault, 1978, p. 157). In most schools, inside and outside prison, commodification of time was achieved by breaking duration into micro segments, ordering them, and concluding each segment with an examination. Foucault further observes, "It is this disciplinary time that was gradually imposed on pedagogical practice" (p. 159).

Thus, the language of clock and calendar time becomes a form of control by creating a reality that is parsed into fixed segments. The segments are felt on our bodies in the present, they pile up in the future, they evaporate into the past. Daily life is a series of micro events, each discontinuous with the ones preceding and stretching out ahead. This reality is discursively constructed and reconstructed by prisoners and practitioners alike through the regimes of the reentry curriculum. It works on the corporeal level, making bodies behave in certain ways.

We see here a connection between temporality and the behaviorism that, we argue, underpins today's reentry discourse. Functioning at a commonsense (i.e., unexamined) level, they make claims for what we can say and think about prisoners (as constellations of criminogenic behaviors) and time (as a neoliberalized commodity; Adam, 2004). Both claims are essentially decontextual: They segment time into depersonalized units and reduce people in prison to isolable variables. Together, they create a powerful discourse that not only controls prison systems but also what we can think about time and humanity; it even curtails the way we can know about ourselves and the world.

In contrast to commodified/decontextualized experiences of time, Muth and Walker (2013) have reported on the way incarcerated fathers experience being "in time"—that is, unaware of the clock and fully in the present—with loved ones who are physically not present. This presence of loved ones in

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dreams and dream states, in long moments of unself-conscious (prereflective) being, and in rare moments of deep reflection was often emotionally intense and undeniably real. We argue that honoring the lived experiences of prisoners is honoring their humanity—not merely their useful skills but also themselves as human beings. Being attentive to the presences of loved ones in this way allows one to look beyond the behavioral view of parents physically and morally cut off from society. We make no utopian claims about this: imagining oneself as being home and playing with one's child is in no way the same as actually being there. Yet as Mendez (2000), Roy and Dyson (2005), and others have observed, parental identities are pliable and reflexive: How we perceive our relationships to others makes a difference in the world, and they make a *different world*. We further argue that this view interrupts the commonsense of the reentry discourse in profound ways and allows us to see more clearly into the psychological, social, spatial, corporeal, and temporal aspects of being a parent in prison. It provides new ways of seeing and being conscious of the effects of prison on prisoners, as well as the effects of prisoners on prison, their families, and each other.

The Presence of Reentry: Toward a Humanizing Curriculum

At this time, we do not know all that a presence-oriented understanding of reentry might entail. But we suggest the following features of a humanizing family reentry curriculum as a start.

1. Sensitivity.

We need an approach to family reentry that sees parents in the contingency of their lived experiences. At the very least, we will need to stay sensitively aware that in the phenomenal and imagined world, loved ones arrive and depart in the present and parents' modes of being shift. But honoring the humanity of prisoners requires tact (Van Manen, 1990), trust, and, at times, a capacity for letting go. That is, being attuned to "the fact" of the arrivals and departures of loved ones is important. But a presence-oriented reentry policy will need to work through the ethical and professional challenges necessary to ensure safe space, sufficient professionalism, and so on.

2. Support for doing.

Consistent with the reentry literature, we deplore the way prisons interrupt the essential need for families to *do things together*. Reentry programs need to find ways to help families do things routinely and predictably throughout

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the incarceration period. Here, again, we find some exemplars in the Nordic model. The doing of day-to-day fatherly things like recording books for, and corresponding with, children supports families in their being present from afar. Perhaps knowing that a new book recording will be happening in a month lessens the existential space (Gadamer, 1975/1989) that separates families and orients them more strongly toward each other.

3. Support for being.

The need for routines for families to do things together is critical, and programs that support routines that keep family members physically connected in their day-to-day lives are also supporting them in their being families. But given the discursive and ideological forces that have curtailed our understandings of time as decontextualized and reentry work as improving behaviors for the future, the need to focus on the present, as it is lived by the family members, has been largely overlooked. Perhaps this is because it is simply too painful or too intrusive to do this tactfully in prison. It is true that without sensitivity, the presence-oriented approach could become invasive and abusive. But avoiding this perpetuates a myth that families separated by prison must wait until some future date to be present to each other again. It risks the reflexive realization of that myth: The more the discourse works on and through us, the more we fall under its spell.

However, a thoughtful approach to the lived experiences of parents opens possibilities for practitioners: (a) to acknowledge the presence of loved ones and perhaps even encourage parents to share that presence with the loved ones and (b) to validate this not from a backdrop of absurdity and hopelessness—a temporality that only sees years of separation—but rather from a correct understanding (Heidegger, 1953/2010) of real presence that nourishes the human longing for biography, a unifying of pasts and futures that heals in the present phenomenal moment. We wonder, also, if this sensitivity might be encouraged among prisoners: (c) to consider new ways to envision family presence—a visioning that requires a continuous, rather than discontinuous, experience of the future and (d) to replace the hopelessness of clock time with the mindfulness of living in the present so that they (and their children) can reimagine more empowering temporalities (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

4. Support through family literacy programs.

Literacy activities, including book discussion groups and autobiographical writing, provide powerful ways to confront our histories and build healthier narratives about them (O'Connor, 2000; Rossiter, 2007). Biography

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empowers authors to extend into time rather than be oppressed by it. It unifies past and present in ways that open up new futures. When families collectively write biographies (Gutiérrez, 2008; Muth, 2011), the writing can result in testimonials of commitment and new family scripts, and provide a way for family members to perform (R. Wright, personal communication, October 18, 2013) new identities and ways of belonging. Through literacy, the lines between being and doing are blurred, as reflection becomes a form of praxis.

We offer detailed suggestions for ways to structure these programs elsewhere (Muth & Walker, 2014). The structures include (a) protocols that establish safe spaces; (b) the right balance of guidelines and freedom so that families are freed in time and space to direct their attention, thoughts, conversations, and work; (c) a recognition that with the proper supports, families generally work to "heal" themselves; and (d) the establishment of parent-centered communities inside and outside of prison that engender routines, traditions, stories, memories, and other unifying temporal features. We stress, however, that community building must proceed cautiously, especially inside prison.

Curriculum is never ideologically neutral. In a presence-oriented family reentry program, we aim to replace a grammar that curtails us all and objectifies prisoners with a discourse about human beings. In our efforts to humanize prisons, we have merely sketched the rudiments of a new reentry discourse.

Conclusion: A New Reentry Discourse

Warner (2009) demonstrated how the dehumanization of prisons in Europe can be empirically tracked through the language of policies that reveal the curtailment of humanist programs and views of prisoners. Our study aims to show how discourse works to curtail research and treatment programs and to offer some initial thoughts about a new reentry discourse. The grammar of U.S. reentry positions prisoners as objects. Prisoners are those to whom prison does things. Yet other possibilities—discursively excluded from U.S. reentry policy—exist. We are reminded of how incarcerated parents are represented as whole human beings in Nordic policy and how the rights of children to remain connected to their parents in prison, in the present, are protected in Nordic policy.

Encouraging a presence-awareness can interrupt a behaviorist- and future-oriented discourse. But taking this view of parents *being parents* in prison is not a panacea. Helping parents *do* more for and with their children while they are in prison is still paramount. However, the doing is neither the only meaningful way parents can be parents in prison nor is it an exclusive outcome of

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parenting programs (though it is likely the only way to measure them). Linking to families—by *doing* things together—is an end in itself, but it is also a means to an end—a means for families to understand the intentionality of loved ones and to perform and confirm their membership in families and their identities as fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons. Linking by doing in the physical world is a means for family members to help manage the presence of their loved ones in the phenomenal and imagined world, by mediating the lived experience of time and space separating them. It is a way to interrupt decontextualized, internalized discourses of time, and it replaces them with a sense of wholeness and biography connected in the present to pasts and futures.

We need a curricular framework that is sensitive to the existential modes of being a parent in prison. Support for being a parent is not a simple thing, and, as Dyer (2005) has urged, we need new ways to study these modes of being. To do so, researchers and practitioners need to become more aware of the way prisons dehumanize parents and how behavioral and future-oriented reentry discourses serve to maintain the myth of the unlinking of families.

A mandate to support incarcerated parents in their being parents in the present would reframe the discourse for prisoners, their families, practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. The new discourse is needed to expose the curtailment of reentry curricula in the United States and open all of our minds to the phenomenal possibilities lying just under the radar.

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Note

1. We are not critiquing behaviorism; rather, it is the discursive uses of behaviorism that concern us here.

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