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**September 2020**

**250th Special Edition**

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*Drs. Ruth Armstrong<sup>1</sup> and Amy Ludlow* are Senior Research Associates in Criminology at the University of Cambridge, *Dr. Ingrid Obsuth* is a Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at University of Edinburgh and, at time of writing *Dr. Simon Larmour* was a Research Associate in Criminology at the University of Cambridge.

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# Editorial Comment

This specially commissioned edition is the 250th *Prison Service Journal*. *PSJ* was produced intermittently in 1960s, but was re-launched in 1971 with the first edition and has continued ever since. Throughout the intervening years, and 250 editions, it has always offered a space in which research and practice could connect. The Journal has, however, never been solely about trying to do imprisonment better. It has also been questioning, even provoking, seeking to ask sometimes uncomfortable questions about the role and function of imprisonment in contemporary society.

For the 200th edition of *PSJ* in 2012, a special edition was produced. This included re-publishing five articles from the first edition and commissioning distinguished practitioners and researchers to respond to those articles. This brought to light the many changes that had taken place in the intervening years but also the continuities. In many ways the problems and controversies of imprisonment are enduring.

For this special edition, a different approach was taken. A looser commission was offered to distinguished academics to take the past half century as a starting point for their own reflections, commentary and provocations. Each writer crafted their own distinctive contribution in their own unique voice.

The first article is on the topic of prisons and politics and is written by Richard Garside, Director of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, and a regular contributor to *PSJ*. His article traces the development of penal politics over the last half century. This has often been conventionally described as a period in which post-war liberalism waned, particularly in the 1980s, with a distinct punitive turn in the early 1990s and on to the current period of embedded punitiveness with historically high levels of imprisonment. Garside, however, offers a different account, noting the dramatic rise in the prison population from 1939 through to the 1960s, which then continued, albeit at a slower rate in the 1970s and 1980s, before intensifying in the 1990s. This account challenges any complacency about a 'golden age' and suggests a longer and more deeply entrenched history of penal punitiveness. Garside's account attempts to expose the ideologies at play in order to prompt a challenge. From this perspective, the current global crisis in both health (with the global coronavirus pandemic) and equality (with the killing of George Floyd and the rise of the

Black Lives Matter movement) offer an opportunity to rethink criminal justice institutions and their role in society.

In their article, Rod Earle and Bill Davies draw upon their own experiences of serving prison sentences and their subsequent careers in criminology. They sharply draw the reader into the reality of the experiences of imprisonment including the personal degradations. These experiences and their subsequent involvement in the 'convict criminology' movement has led them to a particular vantage point where they see the wider social role of imprisonment and see prison reform not solely as a matter of ameliorating poor conditions, but instead as an issue of social justice.

Professor Joe Sim, another regular contributor to *PSJ*, brings a critical and abolitionist perspective to the last half century. For Sim, the prison is a harmful institution that criminalises the marginalised and sustains the power structures of society. Sim continues to argue that liberal reform will not address the fundamental problems and that abolition is needed — a whole scale reconstruction of social relations and institutions including imprisonment. At the time he wrote the article, Sim saw grounds for optimism in the public agitation to release people from prison due to the threat from the coronavirus pandemic. Since then, the killing of George Floyd and revitalisation of the Black Lives Matter movement has given greater attention to radical ideas including abolishing and defunding the police. Sim has been a long-standing standard bearer for such arguments in relation to prisons.

The media representation of prisons is the topic of Sarah Moore's article. In particular, Moore uses representations on prison escapes to explore different and changing cultural ideas about prison and society. In the 1970s, Clint Eastwood in *Escape from Alcatraz* is the archetype of a prisoner escaping from a prison that is brutal and dehumanising. He is making a flight from the institution. In contrast, Red and Andy in *The Shawshank Redemption* are making a flight to their idealised fantasy of life on the Mexican coast. Moore goes on to discuss the more complicated depiction in the 2018 TV series *Escape at Dannemora* where the prison and the town it is situated in are monotonous, soulless and stuck in a rut. Dreams of escape are a fantasy for the inmates and workers. Through these representations, Moore outlines not only changes in

penal values and the growth of mass imprisonment, but also broader ideas of freedom and individuality in an increasingly homogenised world.

The fifth article is not a historical article, but instead reports research on the Learning Together initiative, which brings together students from universities and students from prisons. *Prison Service Journal* has always sought to integrate research, knowledge and practice, and therefore the Learning Together initiative is one that *PSJ* has an affinity and solidarity with. This important research shows how the programme has had a positive impact on those who have engaged and it is as much in the social connectedness as the academic content that personal transformation is achieved. This important work offers a new way of thinking about the relationships between prisons and communities and about learning and development in prisons. It is a contribution that has the potential to shape the next 50 years.

As well as the specially commissioned articles, this edition also has the first interview with the Chief Executive Officer of HMPPS, Dr. Jo Farrar. *PSJ* has regularly published interviews with senior figures including those who lead prisons. It is therefore fitting to have this important voice from inside the prison system included in this edition.

As well as marking the 250th edition of *Prison Service Journal*, this is also the first to be published following the passing of Dr. Ruth Mann. Ruth was a distinguished forensic psychologist and editorial board member of *PSJ*. Her work in prisons drew upon research to inform practice in progressive ways. In particular, she was at the forefront of developing innovative interventions for people who had committed sexually violent offences. She also made a major contribution to

promoting rehabilitative cultures in prisons. Her work for *Prison Service Journal* leaves an important legacy, including special editions on responses to sexual offending, published in 2008, and on reducing prison violence, in 2016. Her most recent contributions included two articles, published in 2018 and 2019 that outlined and promoted the practices of a rehabilitative culture. In these articles, Ruth argued that, 'Rehabilitative culture is focused on enabling change — not on creating or maintaining stability'. This could be a description of her own practice, restlessly and imaginatively seeking ways to make a change and have a positive influence. The 2019 article closes with another telling description:

*'...it is my observation that the most powerful understanding of, and efforts towards, rehabilitative culture in a prison occurs when it is personally driven by the prison's senior operational leadership, involving all levels and disciplines of staff, and when the men or women residing in that prison have a voice and role in culture change too. It is in these prisons where the most exciting transformational work is taking place.'*

Of course Ruth personally led the changes she wanted to see, she would bring people together and energise them. She would gently take people along with her, getting them to do things that were difficult or uncomfortable, but could be the catalyst for change. It was in these moments that she had a profound impact on those around her.

The 250th edition of *Prison Service Journal* is dedicated to the life and work of Dr. Ruth Mann.

# Prisons and politics

*Richard Garside is Director, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies*

**In October 1969 a short-lived stand-off between staff and prisoners in Parkhurst prison on the Isle of Wight — it lasted less an hour — left 12 prison officers and at least 35 prisoners injured. Reports of prison officer brutality were widespread. The wife of one prisoner told *The Times* that her husband ‘had eight stitches in wounds in his head and some of his fingers were broken and bandaged’.<sup>1</sup> Two witnesses saw a prison officer grab a prisoner saying ‘I have been waiting for this, you black bastard’.<sup>2</sup> At least one of the protesters, Richardson gang veteran Frankie Fraser ‘took a severe beating’, according to a prison medical officer,<sup>3</sup> leaving his eyesight and sense of balance permanently damaged.<sup>4</sup> During the subsequent trial of nine of the protesters, it emerged that prisoners returning to their cells were forced to run the gauntlet of prison officers lining the corridors, who beat them as they ran past.<sup>5</sup> In his account of life in Parkhurst in the period leading up to the 1969 disturbance, Brian Stratton detailed the many petty rules and regulations, and outright staff brutality, that contributed to the subsequent protest. Indeed, Stratton recounts his own warning to MPs, delivered earlier in 1969, that ‘there will be a riot unless you can get something done to stop the brutality’.<sup>6</sup>**

The events in Parkhurst were followed by a period of major prison disturbances. In August 1972 an estimated 10,000 prisoners across more than 30 prisons took part in a national prisoners strike, called by the newly-established prisoners’ union PROP.<sup>7</sup> Further demonstrations took place later in the decade. In 1976, for instance, there were over 30 demonstrations,

including a major disturbance at Hull prison. Many of these protests were put down with brutality. In the case of the Hull prison disturbance, for instance, the official Home Office inquiry noted the ‘excess of zeal’ of some prison officers, but otherwise exonerated the staff. Two years later, eight officers were found guilty of conspiracy to assault and beat prisoners.<sup>8</sup>

Prison officers too engaged in an increasingly militant campaign of disruption across the decade, ‘of a type, and on a scale, never previously witnessed’, according to an official report.<sup>9</sup> In 1973, for instance, the Prison Officers Association issued a work to rule instruction to its members. Unofficial action broke out across London prisons in 1975. In the same year, an editorial in *Prison Service Journal* argued that without urgent action, ‘the prison service in this country will be placed in a situation quite disgraceful by national and international standards’.<sup>10</sup> A series of local disputes affected prisons in 1976 and 1977, while in late 1978 the Prison Officers Association agreed on a campaign of industrial action, to commence from November 1978. The result was what Fitzgerald and Sim described as a ‘crisis of authority’ in prisons. ‘It has become increasingly clear that prison officers and governor grades compete for control of individual penal institutions’, they wrote.<sup>11</sup>

These strikes and disputes within prisons were but part of a wider set of social conflicts that roiled British society during the 1970s. ‘In the late 1960s the teenagers of the previous decade became militant campaigners in Britain’s factories’, writes Selina Todd. ‘They instigated the most radical wave of industrial unrest that the country had experienced since the 1920s’.<sup>12</sup> Between 1965 and 1969, nearly four million working days had been lost to strike action. This rose to

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1. The Times (1969) ‘Tension growing at Parkhurst’. *The Times*, 29 October.
  2. Borrell, C. (1970) ‘Parkhurst wives seek inquiry’. *The Times*, 11 November.
  3. The Times (1970), ‘Prisoner “got a beating”’. *The Times*, 20 February.
  4. Stratton, B. (1973), *Who Guards the Guards?* London: North London PROP, 142; Fitzgerald, M. (1977), *Prisoners in Revolt*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 134.
  5. Borrell, C. (1970) ‘Prisoners beaten as they “ran gauntlet”’. *The Times*, 30 May.
  6. Stratton, *Who Guards the Guards?*, 135.
  7. Fitzgerald, *Prisoners in Revolt*, 150-161.
  8. Fitzgerald, M. and J. Sim (1982) *British Prisons*. Second Edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 9.
  9. May Committee (1979) *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the United Kingdom Prison Services*. Cm 7673. London: HM Stationery Office, 233.
  10. Quoted in Fitzgerald and Sim, *British Prisons*, 4.
  11. Fitzgerald and Sim, *British Prisons*, 14.
  12. Todd, S. (2014) *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class 1910-2010*. London: John Murray, 275.

14 million between 1970 and 1974, and a further 11.6 million between 1975 and 1979.<sup>13</sup> The struggle between organised labour, in the form of the trade union movement, on one side, and the government, employers and capital on the other, spanned the decade, with no clear winner emerging. During his four years as Prime Minister between 1970 and 1974, for instance, Edward Heath declared five states of emergency: a sign, Todd notes, 'that strikers were not to be negotiated with, but should rather be treated as enemies of the state'.<sup>14</sup> In the first of two general elections in 1974, Heath's Conservatives lost to Labour, whose own turbulent period in office culminated in the 'winter of discontent' strikes of 1978-1979.

Against this background of intensifying class struggle, law and order themes became increasingly prominent in party political debates. They had begun featuring in manifestos in Britain with the 1959 general election, according to David Downes and Rod Morgan. However, the 1970 general election was, in their view, the 'real watershed' moment, with all three major parties devoting 'more space than ever before in their manifestos to these issues'.<sup>15</sup> From the early 1970s on, a new political consensus around the need for more authoritarian forms of government was in the process of being constructed, as Stuart Hall and colleagues described in their influential study of political and media representations of street violence.<sup>16</sup> As the decade progressed, law and order themes 'persisted and grew more insistent', Downes and Morgan argue, reaching 'their most polarized form in the 1979 election'.<sup>17</sup> Writing in late 1978, just a few months before that election, E.P. Thompson summarised the situation as he saw it:

*'The national crisis — the State of Emergency — the deployment of armed forces — the*

The struggle between organised labour, in the form of the trade union movement, on one side, and the government, employers and capital on the other, spanned the decade, with no clear winner emerging.

*attempt to induce panic on the national media — the identification of some out-group as a 'threat to security' — all these are becoming part of the normal repertoire of power'.<sup>18</sup>*

The 1979 general election came at a moment of what Alexander Gallas, following Gramsci, describes as a 'catastrophic equilibrium... a situation in which class actors engage in their "reciprocal destruction" because both sides are strong enough to launch attacks, but neither side is capable of defeating the other'.<sup>19</sup> As a solution to this 'catastrophic equilibrium', Gallas argues, the Conservative party under Margaret Thatcher 'advanced the authoritarian claim that Britain faced an all-encompassing social crisis, which could only be resolved by taking a hard-line approach to "law and order" issues'. He continues:

*'Along these lines, the 1979 Conservative election manifesto lamented the "growing disrespect for the rule of law", which was described as "THE MOST DISTURBING THREAT to our freedom and security". According to the manifesto, there was an ensemble of enemies of the law, who came from all sections of society. It included "Labour", "the criminal", "violent criminals and thugs",*

*"hooligans at junior and senior levels", "immigrants", "the young unemployed in the ethnic communities", "the government", "strike committees and pickets", "terrorism" and "convicted terrorists". All these people apparently had their part to play in creating a threat to the existence of British society'.<sup>20</sup>*

This presentation of a series of social and political conflicts as, at heart, law and order issues is striking;

13. Brown, W. (2004) 'Industrial relations and the economy'. In R. Floud and P. Johnson, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Volume III*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 403, Table 15.4.  
 14. Todd, *The People*, 301.  
 15. Downes, D. and R. Morgan (1997) 'Dumping the "Hostages to Fortune"? The Politics of Law and Order in Post-War Britain'. In M. Maguire, R. Morgan and R. Reiner (Eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 90.  
 16. Hall, S., C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke, B. Roberts (1978) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. Houndmills: Macmillan.  
 17. Downes and Morgan, 'Hostages to Fortune', 91, 93.  
 18. Thompson, E. P. (1978) 'Introduction'. In State Research, *Review of Security and the State 1978*. London: Julian Friedmann Books, ix.  
 19. Gallas, A. (2016) *The Thatcherite Offensive: A Neo-Poulantzian Analysis*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 75.  
 20. Gallas, *The Thatcherite Offensive*, 121.

the language, divisive. It plays to what Gallas, following Bob Jessop and colleagues, describes as the Thatcherite ‘two nations’ strategy: dividing ‘the population and, more specifically, the working class by pitting a ‘productive’ against a ‘parasitic’ section’.<sup>21</sup> As Jessop and colleagues expressed it, in an article originally published in 1984, rather than conceiving of social divisions in horizontal, class terms, the Thatcherites presented ‘an image of social divisions based on a *single, vertical* cleavage stretching from top to bottom of society which opposes the productive to the parasitic’. The division was presented as ‘inherently antagonistic’. The Keynesian welfare state — organised around the mixed economy, full employment, collective bargaining and demand management — was in structural crisis and incapable of resolving these antagonisms. Under Thatcherism, the productive — whose goods and services could be produced and marketed without state subsidies — were to be rewarded for their contribution. The parasitic — the poor and unemployed, but also those working in unprofitable public and private sector organisations — should expect to ‘suffer for their failure to contribute adequately (if at all)’.<sup>22</sup>

This world-view found concrete expression at various points during Thatcher’s period in office. During the 1984-85 miners’ strike, for example, the government worked closely with the police to disrupt strike activities. Although the government had recently-strengthened trade union laws at its disposal, it preferred to rely on the criminal law to target striking miners.<sup>23</sup> By doing so, the government sought to depoliticise the strike: portraying it as a matter of law and order, rather than a political dispute comparable to the ‘catastrophic equilibrium’ class struggles of the 1970s.

### Penal liberalism?

Despite its divisive and authoritarian political programme, the Thatcher governments of the 1980s

Despite its divisive and authoritarian political programme, the Thatcher governments of the 1980s are often thought of as having been relatively liberal in relation to prisons policy.

are often thought of as having been relatively liberal in relation to prisons policy. According to a number of accounts, the inflection point came in the early 1990s, after Thatcher had left office, when prisons policy took a punitive turn. This notion of an early 1990s punitive turn, following decades of relative liberalism, forms part of what might be considered the dominant view within liberal reform circles, as well as among representative figures in academia and policy-making.

In earlier times, the argument broadly goes, the formation and development of prisons policy took place among expert circles, behind closed doors. Such shielding helped to protect prisons policy from the potentially corrosive effects of politicisation. As one

anonymous contributor to *Prison Service Journal* 8 put it in the early 1970s, ‘crime and punishment must be kept out of the political arena. It is far too emotive and emotional an area to allow it to be used for political ends’.<sup>24</sup> Committees such as the Advisory Council on the Treatment of Offenders (established in 1944) and the Advisory Council on the Penal System (established in 1966) formed part of a network of civil servants, experts and practitioners that, in the words of one former civil servant, aided the development of ‘a kind of non-party political, good thinking consensus out of which good penal policy would grow’.<sup>25</sup>

Politicians and opinion formers were thought to operate with ‘a tacit, informal but nonetheless effective “gag rule”... treating crime and punishment as subjects so potentially explosive and emotionally charged that good governance and social cohesion require them to be kept out of the public realm’.<sup>26</sup>

In the early 1990s, according to this account, politics and politicians decisively breached these carefully constructed defences. These years marked the beginnings of an ongoing period of ‘extreme politicisation of criminal justice policy’, according to a 2010 report from the House of Commons Justice Committee.<sup>27</sup> The authors of a 2014 British Academy

21. Gallas, *The Thatcherite Offensive*, 19.

22. Jessop, B., K. Bonnett, S. Bromley and T. Ling (1988) *Thatcherism: A Tale of Two Nations*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 88, emphasis original.

23. See Gallas, *The Thatcherite Offensive*, 182.

24. Quoted in Ryan, M. (2003) *Penal Policy and Political Culture in England and Wales*. Winchester: Waterside, 59.

25. Quoted in Loader, I. (2006) ‘Fall of the “Platonic guardians”’: Liberalism, Criminology and Political Responses to Crime in England and Wales’. *British Journal of Criminology* 46: 561-586, 566.

26. Loader, ‘Platonic guardians’, 569.

27. House of Commons Justice Committee (2010) *Cutting crime: the case for justice reinvestment*. HC 94-I. London: The Stationery Office, 94.

report identify 1992 in particular as the point at which a negative spiral began, with party-political competition and mass media manipulation shifting the political consensus towards an embrace of tough sentencing and prison expansion, and away from a commitment to penal moderation.<sup>28</sup> 'We have experienced over 15 years of intense criminal justice hyperactivity', the report of the Commission on English Prisons Today stated in 2007. 'This intense and punitive political activity has had the effect of encouraging a more fearful and insecure population. It has raised unrealistic expectations about the role prison can play in securing a safer society'.<sup>29</sup> In a similar vein, Tim Newburn writes that until the late 1980s, 'there remained relatively powerful voices unwilling to endorse punitive penal policies fully'. From the early 1990s on, however, a new punitive consensus developed, which 'both the main political parties embraced... with gusto'.<sup>30</sup>

It is a compelling argument in some respects, one that appears to make sense of the growth in the prison population over recent decades. In the 22 years between 1970 and 1992, the prison population grew by some 15 per cent, from 39,000 to 44,700. In the subsequent 19 year period between 1993 and 2012, it nearly doubled, from 44,500 to 86,600.<sup>31</sup> In one single year, between 1996 and 1997, the population grew by nearly 6,000, an increase greater than the entire growth across the 22 year period between 1970 and 1992. Since 2012, prisoner numbers have stabilised at this higher level: up a bit now, down a bit then, never straying far from a central figure of some 85,000.

Underpinning the argument is a particular historical periodisation, telling a particular story, with particular political implications. There are different versions of this periodisation. In his highly influential account, for instance, David Garland dates the beginning of the end of penal liberalism to the early 1970s.<sup>32</sup> Most, though, including Garland, do accord a significance the supposed early 1990s pivot. It is the

story of an embedded penal liberalism (the 1950s/1960s/1970s to 1992), supplanted by a punitive turn (1993 to 2010), followed by a new era of embedded punitiveness (2010 to the present day). All in all, it presents a rather gloomy prospect, with little by way of potential for progressive, liberal change in the future.

But consider a different periodisation. In her history of the British working class, referred to earlier, Selina Todd divides the century into three periods: 1910 to 1939; 1939 to 1968, and, overlapping with the second period, 1966 to 2010. Viewing prison population changes through Todd's periodisation lens — which is to take something of a liberty as she did not develop it for this purpose — we might conclude that the most

liberal penal period was 1910 to 1939; the prison population halved across those years. Todd's third period, 1966 to 2010, was far more punitive by comparison, with prison population growth of 156 per cent. The most punitive period, however, was between 1939 and 1968, when the prison population grew by 214 per cent. We can also split Todd's final periodisation in two, to account for the post-1992 punitive turn of conventional accounts. The first mini-period — 1966 to 1992 — does then appear more liberal. The prison population grew by 35 per cent during that mini-period. During the second mini-period — 1993 to 2010 — the population

grew by 90 per cent. Punitive for sure, though still less so than the 1939 to 1968 period.

If prison population trends are a measure of punitiveness — and in some respects at least they surely are — the period of penal liberalism came to an end not in 1992, nor in the early 1970s, but more than 50 years earlier, on the eve of the Second World War. On this reading, the story of the past century is one of penal liberalism until the late 1930s, followed by an extended period of relentless prison growth. In some years the trend slowed, or went temporarily into reverse. In other years it quickened. The direction of travel was, though, remarkably consistent. Under this periodisation, the

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28. Allen, R., A. Ashworth, R. Cotterrell, A. Coyle, A. Duff, N. Lacey, A. Liebling, R. Morgan (2014) *A Presumption Against Imprisonment: Social Order and Social Values*. London: British Academy.
29. Commission on English Prisons Today (2009) *Do Better Do Less: The report of the Commission on English Prisons Today*. London: The Howard League for Penal Reform, 6.
30. Newburn, T. (2007) "'Tough on crime": Penal Policy in England and Wales'. *Crime and Justice* 36: 425-470, 455.
31. Calculated from House of Commons Library (2019), *UK Prison Population Statistics. Supporting documents*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04334/CBP-04334-PUBLIC.xlsx> [Accessed 17 May 2020].
32. Garland, D. (2001) *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

story of the past fifty years is not one of a fall from liberalism to punitiveness, but of ongoing, intensifying punitiveness, as Joe Sim has argued.<sup>33</sup>

From this standpoint, some developments during the Thatcher governments come more sharply into view. During this supposedly liberal decade, for instance, the prison population grew by 15 per cent; less, for sure, than the 44 per cent growth during the 1990s, but double the eight per cent growth in the 1970s. Meanwhile, prisons during the 1980s, in the words of Downes and Morgan, 'continued to fester, conditions deteriorating on virtually all fronts... locked in a logically endless drift borne of rising numbers and costs in a policy vacuum'.<sup>34</sup> One consequence was ongoing prison disturbances. Between 29 April and 2 May 1986, for instance, 46 prisons in England faced widespread disturbances in what the official inquiry described as 'the worst night of violence the English prison system has ever known'.<sup>35</sup> Further disturbances followed in 1988 and 1989. Then, in 1990, a number of prison disturbances broke out, including the longest and most destructive prison protest in British history: at Strangeways prison in Manchester. As the official report into the disturbances, published the following year, stated: 'prison riots cannot be dismissed as one-off events, or as local disasters, or a run of bad luck. They are symptomatic of a series of serious underlying difficulties in the prison system. They will only be brought to an end if these difficulties are addressed'.<sup>36</sup>

This disastrous end to the decade challenges the notion that the 1980s was a period of penal liberalism. Consider, too, another example, one that to many represents something of the high water mark of depoliticised penal liberalism: the 1991 Criminal Justice Act. Some four years in the making, the Act came about following extensive consultation. The development work included a Green Paper in 1988 and a White Paper in 1990, the latter published little more than a month before the Strangeways prison disturbance. It was the 1990 White Paper that famously declared, in a seemingly quintessential liberal turn of

They are symptomatic of a series of serious underlying difficulties in the prison system. They will only be brought to an end if these difficulties are addressed.

phrase, that imprisonment was 'an expensive way of making bad people worse'.<sup>37</sup> The White Paper rejected both rehabilitation and deterrence as rationales for imprisonment. 'Nobody now regards imprisonment, in itself, as an effective means of reform for most prisoners', it stated. Deterrence, too, did not work, despite its 'immediate appeal' for many.

Yet integral to this rejection of rehabilitation and deterrence as rationales for imprisonment was a rather more authoritarian and divisive argument. It was far better, the White Paper argued, that offenders 'should exercise self-control than have controls imposed upon them'. Yet this, the White Paper argued, was precisely what was in short supply among those who ended up in the courts. Indeed '[m]any offenders have little understanding of the effect of their actions on others'. The seemingly progressive notion of prisons as 'an expensive way of making bad people worse' carried a rather more regressive implication: offenders were bad people incapable of being made better. The thinking is captured well in the following passage from the White Paper, a passage redolent with the divisive 'two nations' rhetoric of the 1979 Conservative manifesto:

*'There are doubtless some criminals who carefully calculate the possible gains and risks. But much crime is committed on impulse, given the opportunity presented by an open window or unlocked door, and it is committed by offenders who live from moment to moment; their crimes are as impulsive as the rest of their feckless, sad or pathetic lives.'*

With potential criminals largely undeterrable, and convicted criminals largely unreformable, the White Paper placed 'public protection, denunciation and retribution' at the heart of the justification of imprisonment. These were the very themes that were to emerge, in sharpened form, a few years later when, in October 1993, the Conservative Home Secretary, Michael Howard, told his party conference that 'prison works'.

33. Sim, J. (2009) *Punishment and Prisons: Power and the Carceral State*. London: Sage.

34. Downes and Morgan, 'Hostages to Fortune', 123.

35. Quoted in Adams, R. (1994) *Prison Riots in Britain and the USA*. Second Edition. Houndmills: MacMillan, 161.

36. Lord Justice Woolf (1991) *Prison Disturbances April 1990: Report of an Inquiry*. Cm 1456. London: HM Stationery Office, 16.

37. Home Office (1990) *Crime, Justice and Protecting The Public*. Cm 965. London: HM Stationery Office. This and subsequent quotes are from page 6.

## The punitive turn?

On 31 March 1990, an estimated 200,000 people gathered in central London to protest against the poll tax, due to be introduced in England and Wales the following week. The protest ended in running battles between the police and some protesters. The organisers claimed the police attacked indiscriminately. 'I think we lost it a bit', one police officer reportedly remarked.<sup>38</sup> Hundreds were left injured. The following day, the 25-day Strangeways prison disturbance kicked off, the largest and longest of a number of prison disturbances to break out that month. The connection between the prison disturbances and the poll tax demonstration was remarked on at the time. A prison officer in Dartmoor, one of the other prisons where disturbances broke out, told the official inquiry that the prison disturbances should be put in 'the context of other riots... such as ... the London poll tax riot the night before the Strangeways riot... A large percentage of prisoners see themselves either unjustly imprisoned or overly oppressed while in prison'.<sup>39</sup> The Labour MP Joe Ashton alleged in parliament that the government 'was happy to allow the Strangeways disturbance to continue, knocking the poll tax riot off the front pages'.<sup>40</sup> The unpopularity of the poll tax hastened Margaret Thatcher's downfall. She was forced out of office in November that year, replaced as Prime Minister by John Major.

Major's Conservatives went on, unexpectedly, to win the 1992 General Election, but the party was badly divided. In September 1992 the UK crashed out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, dealing a huge blow to the Conservatives' claim to competence in economic matters, one from which they never recovered. At the same time, the government was engaged in a bruising, year-long battle with its own MPs over the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, intended to foster closer European integration. The legislation was only finally passed in the summer of 1993 with the support of opposition MPs, and after the government whipped some recalcitrant backbench MPs into line by tying the vote to a confidence motion. Two years later, the party still badly divided, Major forced a

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Conservative leadership election, which he won, in a failed attempt to face down critics in his party. The government during this whole period gave 'the impression of being in office but not in power', as the former Chancellor, Norman Lamont, memorably said in the House of Commons in June 1993.<sup>41</sup>

In the face of this turmoil and division, argues the former senior Home Office civil servant David Faulkner, the Conservative party needed 'a suitable populist issue' to unite around, 'and crime and law and order were a natural choice'.<sup>42</sup> But if it was an attempt to foster unity, it was one based on reaffirming old divisions: between the silent, angry majority and the dangerous, criminal minority, between the law-abiding and the lawless. As the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, expressed it in his October 1993 Conservative party conference speech: 'In the last thirty years, the

balance in the criminal justice system has been tilted too far in favour of the criminal and against the protection of the public. The time has come to put that right. I want to make sure that it is criminals that are frightened, not law-abiding members of the public'. And then this:

*'Let us be clear. Prison works. It ensures that we are protected from murderers, muggers and rapists, and it*

*makes many who are tempted to commit crime think twice'.*

Among the measures Howard announced that day, as part of a 27-point plan, was the building of six new prisons.<sup>43</sup>

Once inaugurated, Faulkner argues, the populism unleashed proved difficult to control, especially given the enthusiasm of the opposition Labour party — from 1994 under the leadership of Tony Blair — to go toe-to-toe with the Conservatives on law and order. It was an enthusiasm vindicated, in the view of many, when Labour won a landslide victory at the 1997 general election. These crucial years, in Faulkner's view, inaugurated a change in policy direction 'probably more fundamental than any which could be associated with a change of government, for example in 1979 or 1997'. But this surely overstates the degree of rupture, and

38. Carvel, J. And D. Sharrock (1990) 'MPs unite against poll tax rioters'. *The Guardian*, 2 April.

39. Woolf, *Prison Disturbances*, 505.

40. The Guardian (1990) 'The day in brief'. *The Guardian*, 28 June.

41. HC Deb, 9 June 1993, c281. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/199293/cmhansrd/1993-06-09/Debate-1.html> [Accessed 17 May 2020].

42. Faulkner, D. (2006) *Crime, State and Citizen: A Field Full of Folk*. Winchester: Waterside, 122.

43. Brown, C. (1993) 'Howard seeks to placate "angry majority"'. *The Independent*, 7 October.

understates the significance, at least, of the 1979 general election. Howard's predecessor but one, Kenneth Baker, had already mounted populist campaigns against 'bail bandits' and joyriders a few years earlier, while during the 1980s the government had introduced the 'short, sharp shock' in youth detention centres, among other hard-line measures. Moreover, Howard's speech itself played to the 'two nations' tropes that had been at the heart of Conservative ideology for close on two decades.

Noting these continuities, others have sought to portray the early 1990s punitive turn as a case of delayed-onset Thatcherism. According to Stephen Farrall and Colin Hay, only in the early 1990s did criminal justice policies start 'to become staunchly infused with new right thinking. When it came, the transition was sharp, with a clear departure from the pre-existing consensus within whose terms both parties had sought to limit the size of the prison population'.<sup>44</sup> In Farrall and Hay's telling, the Thatcher governments of the 1980s prioritised other policy areas — economic, housing and social security policy for instance — leaving criminal justice largely untouched. During the early 1990s, and with the Thatcherites now firmly in control of the party and government, rising crime rates — themselves driven by the spill-over effects from Thatcherite social and economic policies — combined with a growing electoral threat from Labour on law and order issues, creating the conditions for the emergence of a 'hard-line "Thatcherite" approach' to law and order.<sup>45</sup>

For Faulkner, then, the post-1992 developments had something of the cynical political gambit about them. Stoked by the Labour opposition, prisons policy descended into an ever intensifying punitive spiral, with an energy of its own. 'No party can easily oppose a populist law and order campaign once it gathers momentum', he writes.<sup>46</sup> The pivot to punitiveness was driven more by expediency than necessity. For Farrall and Hay, by contrast, these developments were always a likely consequence of the Thatcherite programme,

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right from the start. As they write in their conclusion: 'the social and economic changes they unleashed from 1979 onwards had the net result of demanding a more punitive response to crime'.<sup>47</sup> It was a question of when such policies would emerge, not if.

These two divergent explanations — one seeing the post-1992 developments as contingent and unnecessary, the other as over-determined, probably inevitable — agree on the essential problem: explaining the abrupt post-1992 change of direction in prisons policy. But as the earlier discussion of periodisation sought to show, the apparent abruptness of the change is itself an artefact of the explanatory framework. This is arguably a problem with periodisations in general,

given their tendency to conceive of periods of seeming homogeneity, 'bounded on either side by inexplicable chronological metamorphoses and punctuation marks', to use Fredric Jameson's striking phrase.<sup>48</sup> When sharp breaks are imposed on historical accounts, we create an explanatory mountain to climb, dramatic ruptures being difficult to explain convincingly or comprehensively. We also risk blinding ourselves to the presence and coexistence of perspectives and ideologies, policies and programmes, that cut across these breaks. The Conservative government did not dramatically switch from liberalism to punitiveness in

prison policy, some time around late 1992/early 1993. Nor did the Labour opposition discover punitive instincts it had previously disavowed in the name of liberalism. As the shadow Home Secretary, Jack Straw, told BBC Radio just a few months before the 1997 general election: 'We haven't opposed a criminal justice measure since 1988'.<sup>49</sup>

### The legacy of Thatcherism

Speaking in 2010, shortly after his appointment as Justice Secretary in the newly-formed Conservative — Liberal Democrat coalition government, Ken Clarke contrasted the prison system in 2010 with the system

44. Farrall, S. and C. Hay (2010) 'Not So Tough On Crime? Why Weren't the Thatcher Governments More Radical in Reforming the Criminal Justice System?'. *British Journal of Criminology* 50: 550-569, 552.

45. Farrall and Hay, 'Not So Tough On Crime?', 563.

46. Faulkner, *Crime, State and Citizen*, 122.

47. Farrall and Hay, 'Not So Tough On Crime?', 566.

48. Jameson, F (1991) *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 4.

49. Quoted in Anderson, P. and N. Mann (1997) *Safety First: The Making of New Labour*. London: Granta, 269.

he recalled from his time as Home Secretary in the early 1990s:

*'I said soon after I was appointed that I was amazed that the prison population has doubled since I was Home Secretary in the early 1990s, which is not so very long ago. It stands at more than 85,000 today. This is quite an astonishing number which I would have dismissed as an impossible and ridiculous prediction if it had been put to me as a forecast in 1992'.<sup>50</sup>*

The 'astonishing' prison system he referred to was the one constructed in good part by the Labour governments between 1997 and 2010, building on the work of the Major and Thatcher administrations. During Labour's years in office, the prison population grew by nearly 40 per cent, from 61,000 to 85,000. The growth was partly fuelled by factors internal to the criminal justice system: new laws and longer sentences, for instance, and the dramatic expansion of the police, which resulted in more arrests and increased criminalisation.

The Blairite political programme also fed this growth, with its tendency towards consolidating the free-market authoritarianism of the Thatcher/Major administrations, while also seeking to widen social inclusion, in particular by expanding education, training and work opportunities. But it was an inclusion with a hard edge. As Gallas notes in relation to one of the flagship Labour policies, the New Deal for Young People, it was more inclusive than Thatcherite approaches, 'insofar as it sought to address material factors behind poverty like education, and not just attitudinal factors such as the alleged unwillingness to work. Nevertheless, it preserved the focus on the individual and the authoritarian idea that people had to be forced into wage labour for their own good'.<sup>51</sup>

The tendency towards compulsion was complemented by an authoritarian approach to law and order. For instance, in 2004, David Coates notes, Blair condemned 'what he called "the 1960s liberal consensus on law and order" that had focused... too heavily on offenders' rights and on miscarriages of justice, and too little on the need for parental discipline and individual responsibility'. The main targets for Labour's law and order policies during this period, Coates adds, were, in a characterisation that would not have been out of place as a description of the Thatcherite programme, 'the hardened criminal class, the anti-social lout and the migrant'.<sup>52</sup>

While the Labour governments professed inclusion and opportunity, the material reality on the ground was somewhat different. The social and economic polarisation Labour inherited from the Thatcher and Major administrations increased further under Blair. As Danny Dorling notes:

While the Labour governments professed inclusion and opportunity, the material reality on the ground was somewhat different. The social and economic polarisation Labour inherited from the Thatcher and Major administrations increased further under Blair.

*'The proportion of children living in a family that could not afford to take a holiday away from home had risen; so too had the number of children whose parents could not afford to let them have friends round for tea. Likewise the number of children living in single-parent families without*

*access to a car had risen... New Labour's record was more like a continuation of Thatcherism rather than something new'.<sup>53</sup>*

The law and order policies, including its prisons policies, emerged from, and helped to reproduce, this social and economic polarisation.

Following Labour's defeat at the 2010 General Election, prison growth stabilised, in good part because austerity-driven reductions in police numbers meant fewer police chasing fewer people to criminalise. Meanwhile, conditions in prisons continued to be grim,

50. Clarke, K. (2010) 'The government's vision for criminal justice reform'. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/governments-vision-criminal-justice-reform> [Accessed 19 April 2020].

51. Gallas, *Thatcherite Offensive*, 282.

52. Coates, D. (2005) *Prolonged Labour: The Slow Birth of New Labour Britain*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 153, 154.

53. Dorling, D. (2014) 'Mapping the Thatcherite legacy: the human geography of social inequality in Britain since the 1970s'. In S. Farrall and C. Hay (Eds.) *The Legacy of Thatcherism: Assessing and exploring Thatcherite social and economic policies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 240-272, 264.

and in some respects deteriorated. The House of Commons Justice Committee referred to 'the ongoing and rapid deterioration in prison safety in England and Wales which began in 2012'.<sup>54</sup> Urgent notifications from the prisons inspectorate have become increasingly common. In 2018 the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Peter Clarke, referred to 'some of the most disturbing prison conditions we have ever seen — conditions which have no place in an advanced nation in the 21st century'.<sup>55</sup> A year later, he remarked on the 'deeply troubling' situation in many prisons. Far too many, he wrote, were 'plagued by drugs, violence, appalling living conditions and lack of access to meaningful rehabilitative activity'. Levels of self-harm, he added, were 'disturbingly high' while self-inflicted deaths had 'increased by nearly one-fifth on the previous year'. Far too many prisoners, he also noted, were enduring 'very poor and overcrowded living conditions'.<sup>56</sup>

### Resisting and rethinking penal policy

In 2016, once more out of government, Ken Clarke joined forces with the former Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, and another former Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, to call for a reduction in the prison population back 'to the levels it was under Margaret Thatcher. That would mean eventually reducing prison numbers to about 45,000'.<sup>57</sup> Presenting the Thatcher governments as the progressive solution to the punitive problems of the Major, Blair and Brown administrations was, to put it mildly, a counter-intuitive move. But the near doubling of the prison population between Thatcher's downfall and the defeat of Labour in 2010 does at least offer a challenge to any reflex dismissal of the proposition.

Clarke, Clegg and Smith's letter, though, had the appearance of a dispatch from a long-forgotten past. The cumulative, *quantitative* growth in the prison population over many years has delivered *qualitative* changes to the prison system, and that includes how we experience, think and feel about these institutions. Prisons occupy a far larger footprint in society than a generation ago, both in crude numerical terms, and in relation to their cumulative impact: on prisoners, prison staff, and their families, and in the ripples of

influence they exert on society more widely. With a longer view, it is possible to see the so-called punitive turn of the early-1990s as but a waymark on a much longer journey, during which the political significance of prisons in British society has only grown.

At the time of writing, prisons policy appears locked in inertia. The government estimates the cost of the backlog on estate maintenance and repairs at close to £1 billion; it has committed less than a fifth of this total to doing the work. 'I am not going to pretend that it is enough', the Justice Secretary, Robert Buckland, sheepishly told the House of Commons in 2019.<sup>58</sup> The Commons Justice Committee argued a few months earlier that 'ploughing funding into building prisons to accommodate prison projects is not a sustainable approach in the medium or long-term' and called for the government to explore alternatives.<sup>59</sup> The government has since reaffirmed its commitment to expanding the prison estate by more than 13,000 additional places.<sup>60</sup> Various campaigners and advocates, parliamentarians and inspectors, staff bodies and practitioner groups make regular representations: to improve conditions, to reduce unnecessary imprisonment, to close dilapidated prisons, to develop alternatives. Ministers smile and express sympathy, and the caravan moves on. The COVID-19 crisis, which continues to unfold at the time of writing, has the potential to shake-up this inertia, to prompt a rethink of some basic assumptions about prisons: their purpose, size and scale, their present operations and future development. There are, though, few signs currently of this happening.

Fredric Jameson once wrote that the 'ideological dimension is intrinsically embedded within the reality, which secretes it as a necessary feature of its own structure'.<sup>61</sup> Prisons create the conditions of their own existence, just as the societies that build prisons secrete the ideologies that sustain them. Untangling the web of politics and ideology, social antagonisms and division, that gives rise to and sustains the prison system; charting a path beyond the confines prisons impose our beliefs and practises, so that we might do something genuinely new and innovative; these are worthy and necessary tasks for the coming years.

54. House of Commons Justice Committee (2016) *Prison safety*. HC 625. London: The Stationery Office, 3.

55. Clarke, P. (2018) *HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report 2017-18*. HC 1245. London: House of Commons, 7.

56. Clarke, P. (2019) *HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report 2018-19*. HC 2469. London: House of Commons, 7, 11.

57. Clegg, N., K. Clarke, J. Smith (2016) 'Call to halve the prison population'. *The Times*, 22 December.

58. House of Commons Justice Committee (2019) 'Oral evidence: The work of the Lord Chancellor'. HC 41. 16 October. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/justice-committee/inquiries/parliament-2019/copy-this-page-inquiry-name-17-19/publications/> [Accessed 17 May 2020].

59. House of Commons Justice Committee (2019) *Prison population 2022: planning for the future*. HC 483. London: House of Commons, 20.

60. Garside, R., R. Grimshaw, M. Ford, N. Hickey, H. Mills (2020) *UK Justice Policy Review: Volume 9*. London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 28.

61. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 262.

# Glimpses across 50 years of prison life from members of British Convict Criminology

*Dr. Rod Earle is a Senior Lecturer at The Open University and Dr. Bill Davies is a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University*

**When the editor of the Prison Service Journal approached us with his proposal to include the views of ex-prisoners in this Special Issue on the last 50 years, we were keen to oblige. Our first ambition was to secure five short first hand accounts, one from each decade, that is the 70s, the 80s the 90s and so on. Quite quickly it became apparent that this would not be possible. Anyone serving a sentence in the 1970s, most probably in their mid-20s, would now be in their late 70s and we just couldn't track anyone down. As the oldest among the authors, I offer my own recollections of a short sentence served at the beginning of the 1980s when in my early 20s. Bill Davies, somewhat younger but less handsome, offers his of the time he served in the 1990s. We both served short (3 month) sentences but both of us feared, and could easily have received, much harsher punishment.**

One of the dilemmas of pursuing convict criminology is how to qualify the implication that these brief and personal experiences can be aggregated into some distinctive criminological contribution. How do we avoid appearing to valorise our experience as if they were something paradigmatic or typical? How can the implied authenticity of our experience be made to count for something without reverting to a sense of timeless, unchanging penalty? The answers are elusive but tend to involve elements of 'strategic exoticism' and 'strategic essentialism' in which we discuss our experiences in prison as if they were beyond the usual reach of criminologists by virtue of the fact of being direct 'from-the-convict' experience. To an extent they are, but they are much less than a comprehensive or fully authentic account, even if we wanted them to be. They are particular and personal and it is by sharing some of the particulars in the vignettes that follow that we seek to

offer methodological shape to the potentials of convict criminology.

Notwithstanding the brevity of the prison experiences referred to above, thinking about the last fifty years of prison is likely to have very different connotations, depending on whether you are an academic or were once (or twice or more) a prisoner. As one of the BCC group, Dr Dave Honeywell ruefully remarks, it can seem like the you never become free of the prison: 'What I'm teaching is what I'm part of...It's there with me 24/7. Sometimes I think 'is this dominating myself, am I sort of imprisoning myself here to be always this ex-convict talking about the same thing over and over again'.<sup>i</sup> Dr Honeywell has felt the insidious pull of institutionalisation from two of society's factories of character — the university and the prison — and lives with the unsettling liminality it imposes on his identity: '... the only way I would be able to transform my life through being accepted and fully integrated would be through the university culture... the academy has become the institution in which I am now defined'.<sup>ii</sup>

There is also a side-story to the limited range of this assemblage of voices for the 250th issue of the journal. It is one that reflects some of the successes, and difficulties, of the British Convict Criminology group. Established in 2011, both of us as active members of the group are pleased that it offers a conduit into an academic journal on prisons and that this review of the last 50 years will include perspectives from formerly incarcerated people. Criminologists associated with British Convict Criminology have been regular contributors to the journal over the last few years.<sup>iii</sup> There are several other potential contributors within Convict Criminology and the wider community of formerly incarcerated British criminologists who might have been able to offer their own accounts of imprisonment in this period, but one of the downsides of

- 
- i. Earle, R. (2018) 'Convict Criminology in Britain: Development and Dilemmas', *British Journal of Criminology* 58(6) 1499-516
  - ii. Honeywell, D (2020) 'Ex-prisoners and the transformative power of higher education, in Earle, R. and Mehigan, J. (eds) *Degrees of Freedom, Prison Education at The Open University*, Bristol, Policy Press
  - iii. Aresti, A. and Darke, S. (2015) 'Open prisons: An ex-prisoner perspective' *Prison Service Journal*. 217, pp. 14-16.; Aresti, A., Darke, S. and Manlow, D. (2016) 'Bridging the gap: giving public voice to prisoners and former prisoners through research activism.' *Prison Service Journal*. 224, pp. 3-13.; Davies, W. and Nichols, H. (2016) (Eds) 'PRisoN: Unlocking prison Research', Special Edition. *Prison Service Journal* 223; Honeywell, D. (2016) 'Returning to HMP Durham 30 years on: An ex-prisoner's perspective', *Prison Service Journal*. 224 pp 14-20

the growth in university criminology is that academics joining the discipline, with or without prior experience of imprisonment, find themselves having to take on increasingly punishing work routines that preclude and prevent their relatively impromptu contribution to collections like this. University teaching loads, marking and student support, research income targets and demands for 'impactful outputs' are ever-increasing and accelerating. We sometimes find ourselves referring with wincing irony to treadmills. Bentham's vision of prison as a machine for 'grinding rogues honest' has travelled far indeed. Universities, for all their elitist ambitions and function, were intended to be places to think and places where time and thoughts could move at a pace determined by the thinker. That's a rare or unknown pleasure now.

The two vignettes below seek to capture and present something of life inside a prison in two of the five decades covered in this retrospective. The vignettes demonstrate how some of the conventional landmarks of penal policy, law-making (and breaking) and criminological inquiry are lodged in the personal lives of convict criminologists. They are followed by some critical reflections prompted by our onward journeys through criminology.

**Scene 1: Bill Davies, HMP  
Cardiff, November —  
December 1997**

*(subsequently University of Essex, 2003-2007, BA (Hons) Criminology and Sociology; University of Cambridge, M.Phil. Criminological Research, 2007-2008; University of Hull, PhD Criminology, 2009-2014.)*

*November 1997 will probably not be memorable to anyone old enough to remember it. So that the reader can locate it in their cultural memory I offer the following; the movie Titanic got released; The British nanny, Louise Woodward, jailed in America for murdering a child in her care, had her sentence reduced to manslaughter; Brazil refused to extradite the (now late) Great Train Robber Ronnie Biggs; The Queen celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary and Barbie Girl by Aqua was number 1 in the charts. It was also the month that I was sent to prison; 10.30am on the 10th of November to be precise, with two sentences of 3 months imprisonment, to be served concurrently. My barrister came to see me in the cells under the court and told me that I was very lucky, and seeing as I could have been*

*sentenced to upwards of 18 months, I felt very lucky.*

*As it turns out, I was rather unlucky. Had I been up in court 12 months earlier, I might have received a suspended sentence, but this was 1997 and not 1996. In 1996, when John Major was in power, England and Wales had approximately 50,000 people in prison. In 1997 Tony Blair was in power and was finally putting his 1995 leader's speech on getting tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime to use, leading to approximately 60,000 prisoners, of which I was now one. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was still 7 years away, and the first Secretary of State for Justice, Charlie Falconer, was 10 years away from appointment. It would take me another 10 years, an undergraduate degree and master's degree to realise that I was simply a pawn in the politicisation of crime.*

*I had no idea about this when I was sat in the prison van watching the world go by on the short two-mile drive to the prison; the prison that I had walked past any time that I went to Cardiff city centre. Even at a conservative estimate of four times a week heading to work, I must have passed that prison thousands of times, never knowing I would one day*

*live there.*

*It was past 3pm before I got to the prison, and past 5pm before I got through reception and the stores where you picked up your prison issue clothes. There was a lad behind the window asking peoples' sizes and sifting through piles of clothes looking for the cleanest he could find. While he was doing this he would try and guess the offence of the mannequin before him in a fairground-style 'guess your weight' side show; that said, his guess was in the right ballpark.*

*The first week consisted of 23-hour a day lock up with my cell mate, a nice enough chap in his mid-20s, and a recidivist (a word I would have to wait several years to learn the meaning of) factory burglar who liked to spend the colder months at Her Majesty's pleasure. It was a dull week listening to my cell mate give a running commentary on the trains arriving and departing Cardiff Queen Street station that you can hear from the window. If you*

University teaching loads, marking and student support, research income targets and demands for 'impactful outputs' are ever-increasing and accelerating.

stood on the pipes and looked through the letterbox of a window at the top of the Victorian cell wall, you could just make out the roof of the trains that were being identified.

There were a number of firsts that week; the first time that I slept in bunk beds with a stranger; the first time I sat on my bed eating lunch while a stranger sat just two feet away defecating on a toilet; the first time I ever read a book in one sitting; the first time I ever felt real boredom. A few years later as I sat in HMP Hull interviewing short term prisoners on their experiences of prison, the topic of 'a lack of meaningful activity' within prisons came up, and in an instant, I was whisked back to that cold Victorian cell, listening to 17:48 Caerphilly train being announced to the waiting commuters that were blissfully unaware of my self-pity.

After a fortnight of bunk-bed sleep-overs I was moved to one of the newly built wings. It was constructed a year earlier, in time for the boom in occupancy that has always reminded me of Kevin Costner's 'build it and they will come' remark in the film *Field of Dreams*. This was a single cell (en-suite, of course), with a curtain-less window that afforded a clear view of the top of the multi-story car park where, on Friday and Saturday nights, local women would go so that they could flash their breasts to the 'zoo animals'. Fast forward eight years to when I first read Gresham Sykes' (1958) *Society of Captives*, and I couldn't help but think of the lack of curtains when I learned of the deprivation of goods and services involved in serving a prison sentence; and the serial flashing of breasts at the top of the car park when I read about the deprivation of heterosexual relationships.

I was offered a job on the garden crew, a job that came with a red band and the opportunity to spend most of the day out of my cell, not to mention the £13.50 weekly wage. In addition to the newfound daily freedom to wander around the inside of the perimeter wall at HMP Cardiff, came daily requests to 'bring in' items that I might find near said walls. For example, a tennis ball, or dead pigeon that had contraband within them; each request was

returned with a polite RSVP declining the offer. Thankfully, those who made the requests were always able to find couriers within the wider red band community, so my refusal didn't have a negative impact on me or my health. Sykes (1958) would have been proud of me for not being a snitch, and for getting on with my own time, even if he wasn't there to tell me at the time.

To prepare me for my release the prison sent me on extensive training courses to address my offending behaviour. These courses of re-education consisted of a single one-hour session with a prison officer, a flip chart, a marker pen, and a cautionary tale

about drug addiction. Drugs had not played any role in my offending, yet this was the only educational programme that was offered to me — because it was there. Had Dame Sally Coates written her 2016 Review into Prison Education some years earlier, then maybe that would have been different. I am now lucky enough in my job at Leeds Beckett university to teach men serving their sentence in a category-A prison and find it the most rewarding thing that I have ever done.

My last week of prison was also a countdown to Christmas. I left prison at 7.30 am on the 24th December 1997, with a small amount of money in my

pocket and the advice of my 'personal officer' ringing in my ear; 'don't worry about work, everyone needs their bins emptied and their windows washed'. The mandatory period of probation that followed my release was less helpful in my gaining employment, with the only advice given relating to which benefits I should apply for. Three probation meetings over the following six weeks, and my sentence was officially served. Unofficially, at times, it still feels as though I have to explain myself and my actions some 20+ years since.

...with a small amount of money in my pocket and the advice of my 'personal officer' ringing in my ear; 'don't worry about work, everyone needs their bins emptied and their windows washed'.

## Scene 2: Rod Earle, HMP Norwich, June-August 1982

(subsequently, Birkbeck College 1993-95, HE Certificate, Sociology of Crime and Deviance; Middlesex University 1995-97 Master's Degree, Criminology; The Open University, 2014. PhD-by-publications)

*In June 1982 when I went for trial, after almost exactly a year remanded on bail, I didn't expect to get sent down. I hadn't packed for a prison sentence so when I was taken from the dock down to the cells below the courtroom, I felt a bit numb. Stunned rather than panicked, I didn't know what to think. My patently inept barrister was little comfort. He had been drafted in on the day of the trial due to the unavailability of my more fully briefed 'brief' being unexpectedly occupied on another trial. His local replacement asked if I'd considered changing my plea so 'we' could go for a stronger mitigation, telling me I risked a sentence of up to 5 years or more if things went badly. They did, but the judge obviously did not agree with him on the potential sentence and, having been found guilty by a jury, he gave me three months, pronouncing that my actions in printing a fanzine that appeared to incite illegal behaviour (arson) suggested I was probably more of a 'knave than a rogue'.*

*I had a packet of cigarettes and a bit of loose change in my suit pockets as I was put in a van and taken from the court to HMP Norwich, a prison I barely knew existed on the edge of the city I'd lived in for the last 5 years. I was the only one in the van. I can't say my mind was reeling as it seemed to have stopped working almost completely. At the prison I remember having to strip and hand my clothes over to an officer who said they'd be returned on my release as he handed me a pile of folded grey garments and indicated the door-less shower cubicle. 'Of course', I thought 'a cold shower, it's a prison isn't it.'. The showers weren't cold, or hot.*

*After emerging from that first ordeal in my shabby grey prison garb, I remember the noises as we entered the main prison wing. There was the metallic clanging of gates and doors, an ambient echoey clatter. Hard surfaces for hard men. I faintly recall the officer explaining how I would be put in a reception cell which would be temporary, just one or two nights, before going to another where I would spend the sentence.*

*HMP Norwich is an old prison, built in 1886-7 and it is classic prison architecture. Clutching my loose pile of prison issue clothing, I recall looking at the prison landings, three levels up and wire-fenced along*

*each side, metal stairs up the middle and thinking how it looked so typically prison-like, even though my mental image of prison interiors was probably based only on the occasional episode of the tv sitcom, Porridge.*

*Shown into my cell I was alone for a while. Just me, the metal bunk and the sparse furniture. And a bucket. With a lid. In the early evening I was joined by another reception prisoner. I dreaded this moment. The space of the cell to be shared. He was a white man considerably older than me, perhaps in his late 40s, chubby, bald and sweating. He and the officer letting him in seemed acquainted. 'How long are you doing' he asked. 'Three months' I said. 'Fuck me, I've done more than that in a panda car' he exclaimed with genuine derision. Having established I wasn't worth talking to much he proceeded to tuck himself into the lower bunk and seemed to spend several parts of the night wanking noisily while I wept silently.*

*In 1982 the prison population in England and Wales was, at about 40,000, twice as large as the official capacity. HMP Norwich was an over-crowded prison. Already nearly a hundred years old, most of the cells designed for a single person were doubling up. Some*

*were tripled. It is just about possible to squeeze another single bed into a cell with a bunk bed, but no one was happy with the arrangement. When I was moved from the reception cell I joined two young-ish white men in such a cell. They were clearly not pleased to see me, complaining to the officer that they had been promised when the guy that preceded me was released, they would be assured a two-person share. They made a point of including me in the discussion with a 'don't get me wrong, mate, this isn't about you'. It was a welcome gesture and they proved to be friendly cell-mates who quickly demonstrated they were reconciled to sharing with me. They were from the north and had robbed their way south down the motorways, fully expecting to wind up somewhere like HMP Norwich. They were cheerfully serving out what they assured me was their last time inside.*

*Not much imagination is needed to understand the indignities of no in-cell sanitation, but considerably more to fathom the intricacies of 'less eligibility'.*

I remember the noises as we entered the main prison wing. There was the metallic clanging of gates and doors, an ambient echoey clatter.

With three to a cell even the most strenuous efforts to minimise the use of the bucket break down. An unwritten compact, a mutual understanding was that no one would use it unless absolutely necessary. And if they did, it was their job to empty it in the morning. The smell of the latrine area on the wing where buckets were emptied is not easily forgotten. It was only after the prolonged protest and riot at Strangeways prison in 1990, and the subsequent Woolf Report, that this most basic of prison humiliations was reformed. The penultimate day of my sentence I learned just how bad that humiliation could get.

At the usual slopping out in the morning, the smell was so much worse than usual — the acrid stench of urine was overpowered by something worse, something more 'organic'. The talk was of food poisoning. Several people had been taken ill in the night and there was plentiful evidence of their much-loosened bowels in the buckets. Just as I was thanking my lucky stars I was unafflicted I felt the tell-tale signs of an irresistible lurching in my guts. I pounced on an opening toilet door and pushed my way in to claim my place on a throne. It was my luckiest moment in HMP Norwich as the unstoppable download struck at the one place where I had the best chance of avoiding the ultimate indignity.

There was much about the prison that was bearable. My cell mates helped me to apply for a better job, encouraging me to join them in the bookbinding workshop (see Earle 2020). The husband of one of my best friends in Norwich was serving a long sentence for various offences and sought me out. Gary was a small wiry Scot with a fairly fearsome reputation. He fixed up a cell move so I could join him when his cell-mate was moved on. He knew the ropes and helped me through them. In the short time I was inside I couldn't help but learn a lot about prison. The food is poor, but just about adequate. The drugs are there, but best avoided, like the debts. Gary was an ex-heroin

addict from Aberdeen, a survivor of Scotland's first heroin epidemic that coincided with the oil money and rig work. His truths on that subject, shared with me in the inevitable, unavoidable hours, have lasted me a lifetime. Boredom, work, exercise, lock up, radio. Repetition, routines, sleep and the drowsy slowing of life's rhythms into the dull demands of prison emptied time are strangely insistent memories, even though my sentence can be counted in weeks rather than months, far less years.

In the decade that followed my incarceration, the 1990s, the introduction of in-cell sanitation changed something of the squalor of prison life, but talking to prisoners during my research in prisons in 2006/7<sup>iv</sup>

it wasn't seen as a very great privilege to be sitting eating your meals next to your own flush toilet. The prison governor of that prison told me his proudest achievement was that despite the pressures of overcrowding he hadn't had to impose cell-sharing in single cells in his prison. It was evidence of progress and his resistance to the warehousing features of modern imprisonment.

The squalid dereliction of old French prisons was a startling contrast to the relatively clean, modern, machine-like caging-in-groups type of prison he found at Attica.

#### Unending reform, unbearable conditions

There are certain features of a prison sentence that are almost universal and placeless: poor food, drugs, boredom, work, exercise, lock-up. Austerity. Hierarchical authority. Ruth First, imprisoned in South Africa in 1965 for opposing apartheid, reports a prison officer saying, 'I am the regulations'.<sup>v</sup> A prison officer in HMP Norwich said something very similar to me in 1982 and I expect that comparable sentiments have been heard by prisoners or reported to every prison researcher every year of the last 50 years.

Prisons are always different and yet always the same. Michel Foucault, visiting Attica prison in the USA in 1972 after the bloody suppression of the prisoner's rising/riots, was astonished at the differences to the French prisons he had recently become interested in. The squalid dereliction of old French prisons was a startling contrast to the relatively clean, modern, machine-like caging-in-groups

iv. Earle, R. (2014). 'Insider and out: reflections on a prison experience and research experience. *Qualitative Inquiry*', 20(5) pp. 429–438.; Earle, R. and Phillips, C. (2013). "Muslim is the new black" - new ethnicities and new essentialisms in the prison'. *Race and Justice*, 3(2) pp. 114–129

v. First, R. (1965) *One hundred and seventeen days: an account of confinement and interrogation under S. African ninety-day law*. London Penguin.

type of prison he found at Attica. He attributed the difference to the more overt political dimension of US carcerality, located specifically in the political repression of its racial dynamics.

By way of contrast, in the France of the early 1970s, Foucault identifies the explicit disavowal of prison's broader political dimensions, the limited perception of its politically repressive function. He draws on an anecdote told to him by the formerly incarcerated French writer, Jean Genet, who recalled an episode in which an imprisoned communist agitator had once refused to be cuffed to him as he (Genet) 'was a common thief, a criminal' whereas the agitator wasn't — he was better than that. Genet says that after sensing the contempt with which this communist agitator regarded him, he could never again fully trust anyone with self-professed political affiliations. For Foucault it demonstrated the need to ask questions and involve prisoners more closely in the process of understanding and critically analysing imprisonment — hence the establishment of Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP).

As hundreds of French political activists and industrial militants were imprisoned following the collapse of the 1968 insurgency in France, Foucault insisted it was important to understand how prison was able to forge and reinforce divisions between what was acceptably political, what was resistant to the prevailing social order and what was merely criminal. What was it that connected the subjectivities of those driving ever more people into prison with the subjectivities the prison sought to develop through its regimes? What is society consenting to when it consents to the manufacture and deployment of these regimes? What tastes, appetites and preferences are satisfied by the production of such large numbers of prisoners? As Bourdieu<sup>vi</sup> (1984:56) was to notice some years later 'tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance of the tastes of others'. The prison somehow gives shape and form to these negative preferences.

In his response to visiting Attica in 1972, Foucault insisted proponents of social change and revolution

needed to be more wary of how radical politics was drawn ineluctably into the 'game of negation and rejection' when it accepted the underpinning 'bourgeois morality' of the prison, rather than scrutinising its wider and ideological 'role in the class struggle'.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2020, some fifty years later, the term 'bourgeois morality' is heard more as if it were a tired political cliché than something real, something shaping how we live. It is, perhaps, more easily recognised as something that used to exist in the past or in Victorian fiction, in the novels of Charles Dickens or Victor Hugo. Thankfully, you don't have to read any old novels to see a bit of bourgeois morality. You can go to the cinema or stream *Parasite*, the Oscar winning film by Bong Joon-ho, into your home screen. In *Parasite*, as in *Les Misérables*, as in *Hard Times*, the class struggle is writ large against the backdrop of the lives of the bourgeoisie and their toxic morality. In *Parasite*, there are crimes aplenty, but the film's energy and narrative brilliance derives from the transgression of the boundaries that separate the rich from the poor, its tensions from the contemptuous disdain of one family for another. Bourgeois morality is located in the visceral indifference that insulates the rich from the poor, normalises their coexistence and exceptionalises actions that disrupt it.

Bourgeois morality makes a fetish of self-discipline, industriousness, punctuality and thrift. It sees the poor as a breed apart, pathologically indolent, inevitably different, even smelling disgusting in one of the film's pivotal moments. The boundaries of indifference are breached and the hate behind them spills out<sup>viii</sup>. In the violent climax of the film, the refusal of the status quo is criminal and cathartic, literally a bloody coup d'état from below that cancels the illusions of 'levelling up' or 'carrying on' that were woven through the social fabric to defer discontent in the UK, at least until the corona crisis offered a new lens on the present, the past and the future. And therein lies an argument about crime, imprisonment and class struggles within racial capitalism<sup>ix</sup> that seems to have got lost in the last 50 years, as prisons have grown and multiplied so dramatically.

Bourgeois morality makes a fetish of self-discipline, industriousness, punctuality and thrift. It sees the poor as a breed apart, pathologically indolent, inevitably different, even smelling disgusting in one of the film's pivotal moments.

vi. Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London. Routledge

vii. Foucault, M. (1972) Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview, (John K. Simon) *Social Justice*

viii. Ahmed, S. (2004) 'Collective Feelings, or The Impressions Left by Others', *Theory, Culture & Society* 21(2): 25-42

ix. Robinson, C. (2019) *On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism and Cultures of Resistance*, London. Pluto Press.

In 1968, two years before the Prison Service Journal was launched, there were 168 people in prison serving a sentence of 10 or more years. In 1974, four years after the launch of the journal, the number of people in prison who had been detained for more than 15 years had risen to 19. In 2019, the number of people serving sentences of 10 years or more exceeded 18,500 and such sentences are regarded as 'normal'<sup>x</sup> and insufficient by some. We urgently need more critical analysis that can weave a story between the politics of crime, the miseries of incarceration, the limits of what is tolerable and the hostile environments that are becoming the speciality of modern statecraft.

After his tour, one of the few times that he actually visited a prison, Foucault imagined what it must be like to be a prison guard in Attica, guiding the visitor around its cages. Bizarrely, he imagines the guards 'giggling inside' as they conduct visitors around the prison, all the while thinking:

*'You have handed over to us robbers and murderers because you thought of them as wild beasts; you asked us to make domesticated sheep of them on the other side of the bars that protect you; but there is no reason why we, the guards, the representatives of 'law and order', we, the instruments of your morality and your prejudices, would not think of them as wild animals, just the same as you. We are identical with you; we are you; and, consequently, in this cage where you have put us with them, we build cages that re-establish between them and us the relationship of exclusion and power that the large prison establishes between them and you. You signalled to us that they are wild beasts; we signal in turn to them. And when they will have learned it well behind their bars, we will send them back to you.'*<sup>xi</sup>

If, some 50 years later, this account were unrecognisable we might have more to celebrate and less to worry about. It would not be necessary to remind ourselves of Foucault's other, less well remembered prescription: 'The only way for prisoners to escape from this system of training is by collective action, political

organisation, rebellion'.<sup>xii</sup> In the summer of 1972, even without recourse to Foucault's insights, there were more than a hundred strikes and rooftop protests in British prisons.<sup>xiii</sup> A decade of penal reform and radical analysis was opened, but then narrowed again toward the end of the 1980s. The 1980s closed with the events at Strangeways prison in Manchester on 1 April 1990. As Joe Sim<sup>xiv</sup> reports on the very first day of the protest one of the prisoners involved in the protest declared 'We are having no more. We are not animals, we are human beings'. Twenty-five days of rebellion, roof top protests and riot resulted in one prisoner being killed and 47 being injured, as well as nearly 150 prison officers. It sparked other riots and disturbances in 20 prisons across England, Scotland and Wales, prompting the Conservative government into announcing a public inquiry, headed by Lord Woolf. Woolf reported what prisoners up and down the country knew: prison conditions had become intolerable, prison life unbearable.<sup>xv</sup>

As prisoners took the roof off HMP Strangeways in 1990, David Garland's *Punishment and Modern Society* was published to much acclaim. In its concluding discussion of the symbolism of imprisonment Garland<sup>xvi</sup>, following Foucault, points to prisoners perspectives on punishment: '...whatever meanings the judge, or the public, or the penitentiary reformers meant to convey by sending offenders to prison, it is the day-to-day actualities of the internal regime which do most to fix the meaning of imprisonment for those inside.' Criminologists have work to do if they want to avoid being implicated in Alvin Gouldner's famous analogy about the zookeepers of deviance who 'like the zookeeper...does not want spectators to throw rocks at the animals behind bars. But neither is he (sic) eager to tear down the bars and let the animals go.'<sup>xvii</sup> To avoid developing 'zoo-eyes' criminologists need to listen carefully for those meanings and not just look into prisoners' souls like secular priests but into the wider struggles, the class struggles that initially propelled Foucault to look inside prisons. Prisoners need partisans as much as they need criminological chaplains. Convict criminology is not necessarily either of these but seeks to make new alliances that might prompt new thinking rather than new prisons.

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x. Prison Reform Trust (2019) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, Winter 2019. London PRT  
 xi. Foucault, M. (1972) Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview, (John K. Simon) *Social Justice*  
 xii. Foucault, M. (1972) Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview, (John K. Simon) *Social Justice*  
 xiii. For a full account see Mike Fitzgerald's (1977) *Prisoners in Revolt*, Harmondsworth Pelican/Penguin  
 xiv. Sim, J. (2020) 'We are having no more...' Centre for Crime and Justice Studies Blog <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/we-are-having-no-more-we-are-not-animals-we-are-human-beings> (accessed 17/03/20)  
 xv. Jameson, N and Allison, E. (1995) *Strangeways 1990: A Serious Disturbance*, London. Larkin Publications.  
 xvi. Garland, D. (1990) *Punishment and Modern Society*. Oxford. Clarendon  
 xvii. Gouldner, A. (1968) The Sociologist as Partisan: sociology and the welfare state', *The American Sociologist* 3(2) 103-16

# The Modern Prison in a 'Fear-Haunted World'<sup>1</sup>

Joe Sim is Professor of Criminology at Liverpool John Moores University

## Introduction

**...history... can help to pierce through the rhetoric that ceaselessly presents the further consolidation of carceral power as a 'reform'. As much as anything else, it is this suffocating vision of the past that legitimizes the abuses of the present and seeks to adjust us to the cruelties of the future.<sup>2</sup>**

The first edition of the 'new' *Prison Service Journal* was published in January 1971. This was the year of the Attica prison revolt. Forty three people, mainly prisoners, were shot dead when America's National Guard stormed the prison. As a result of the state's brutal intervention, many others were 'left maimed, tortured and scarred....[a] list too long to recount here'.<sup>3</sup> The devastating events at Attica had a profound, radicalising impact on the emerging prisoners' rights movement in the UK and on the first, and so far, only strike by prisoners in August 1972.<sup>4</sup> In this tumultuous period, two other key events transpired.

First, within academia, criminology moved in a new, radical direction. The emergence of critical criminology meant that the discipline was no longer seen as a neutral, value-free subject which objectively analysed crime trends, and the allegedly benevolent response by the state to these trends. Rather, it was understood as part of an interlocking network of power, which, despite the contradictions, contingencies and contestations within this network, legitimated and reinforced the reproduction of a deeply divided social order. Critical criminologists conceptualised the state as a contradictory but coercive set of institutions based on the threat and use of violence when common sense discourses, and the wider consensus, began to disintegrate.

This development was important because central to the reform discourse was the emphasis on the neutrality of the value-free expert who had no political or ideological axe to grind. Critical criminologists highlighted the fallacy of this argument and demonstrated the role of experts in reinforcing power relationships within and without the criminal justice system. Criminological experts, like the rest of the human sciences, operating, according to Michel Foucault, as 'judges of normality'<sup>5</sup>, were integral to this exercise of power. In the case of the prison medical service, this had devastating consequences for prisoners over the previous 150 years.<sup>6</sup> In other institutions, expert interventions had equally devastating consequences for individuals who had not broken any laws but who were, nonetheless, punished for their aberrant behaviour.

The coruscating punishment of 'deviant' women provided a poignant example of this point. In asylums, the systemic rape of women labelled as spinsters to 'normalise' them sexually, and the electro convulsive 'therapy', and the lobotomies enforced on depressed women detained in hospitals, brutally exposed the bogus claims made by allegedly neutral experts that they, and the knowledge they generated, were benevolently independent of the exercise of state power, in these cases, the exercise of misogynistic, patriarchal power.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the emergence of radical prisoners' rights organisations — the National Prisoners Movement (PROP), Radical Alternatives to Prison (RAP) and Women in Prison (WIP) — supported by critical criminologists, followed a similar critical trajectory.<sup>8</sup> Again Foucault was crucial here. He pointed to the critiques of the prison that had been made since the early nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Over a century later, the same critiques were being

1. This is a term used by H.G. Wells in his book *The Dream* cited in Lynskey, D. (2019) *The Ministry of Truth: A Biography of George Orwell's 1984* London: Picador p.73.
2. Ignatieff, M. (1978) *A Just Measure of Pain* Basingstoke: Macmillan p. 220.
3. Thompson, H. A. (2016) *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy* New York: Pantheon Books (Front piece).
4. Fitzgerald, M. (1977) *Prisoners in Revolt* Penguin: Harmondsworth.
5. Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Peregrine: Harmondsworth p. 304.
6. Sim, J. (1990) *Medical Power in Prisons* Stony Stratford: Open University Press.
7. Showalter, E. (1987) *The Female Malady* London: Virago; Ussher, J. (1991) *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
8. Sim, J; Scraton, P. and Gordon, P. (1987) 'Introduction, Crime, the State and Critical Analysis' in Scraton, P. (ed) *Law, Order and the Authoritarian State: Readings in Critical Criminology* Stony Stratford: Open University Press.
9. Foucault, M. (1977). see n. 5.

made in the 1970s — and indeed beyond. And yet reforms were largely unsuccessful, they were incorporated into the prison's subjugating apparatus of power, prisons persisted, and their number expanded, as liberals strove to find the golden fleece of reform which would 'solve' the problem of recidivism and construct a prison system that 'worked.' Why, Foucault asked, did the prison remain central to the criminal justice system when, on its own terms, it had palpably failed for nearly two centuries? The answer was clear; the prison did work. It reproduced a narrowly defined, identifiable criminal class which generated an expanding, self-justifying and self-referential industry of state agents, private interests, professional groups and institutions designed to categorise, control and contain this class.<sup>10</sup> For PROP, RAP and WIP, state agents, despite some honourable exceptions, and the institutions within which they worked, were concerned not with rehabilitation, whatever the official discourse maintained, but with the conscious and unconscious, intended and unintended reproduction of a criminal class and the punishment of that class both as a group and as individuals.

These organisations, operating from an abolitionist theoretical, political and strategic position, were scathing about the capacity of liberal reformers to magically develop the 'perfect' prison. Instead, the system required radical transformation. The politics of the prison, operating as a state institution in a grossly unequal society, needed to be exposed, recognised and ultimately abolished. The institution operated at the sharp end of the needle of state power which, in combination with the criminalisation of the behaviour and activities of the poor, supported by equally regressive, formal and informal policing strategies outside of the institution, meant that it was those on the political and economic margins of the society who were incarcerated.

The powerful, on the other hand, who engaged in activities which, in many ways, were more destructive and harmful to the wider society, were rarely, if ever, policed, prosecuted and punished for their crimes and misdemeanours. This covered behaviour from domestic

violence to state assassinations. Prisons were warehouses for the poor and the powerless while a culture of immunity and impunity protected the powerful. In other words, 'the rich get richer, and the poor get prison.'<sup>11</sup> Breaking the Gordian knot which bogusly linked the prison to a rise or fall in the crime rate was an 'illusion of the epoch.'<sup>12</sup> As Brett Story has noted, 'reform efforts that treat the prison as merely a place, narrowly indexed to the metrics of punishment, offer little insight into or promise for a truly decarcerated future.'<sup>13</sup>

This history of the prison will be familiar to, and perhaps rejected by, many. However, prison familiarity should not breed political contempt. In fact, quite the reverse. It is a history that is worth repeating, indeed *needs* repeating. This story, over the last 50 years, has been effectively ignored by politicians of *whatever*

political party and persuasion and by liberal academics. Their hypocritical and egregious failure to recognise the prison's abject failure to live up to its own rhetoric, never mind the condescending and patronising attitude that often accompanies this failure, is a powerful example of what Henri Giroux has called the 'disimagination machine'<sup>14</sup> operating through the education system (and to which could be added traditional and social media outlets) to restrict and close down informed debate

The politics of the prison, operating as a state institution in a grossly unequal society, needed to be exposed, recognised and ultimately abolished.

about social issues.

### Criminality and Social Harm

Making the point that it is overwhelmingly the poor, the unemployed, the sexually abused, the poorly educated and those with drug and alcohol problems who have been criminalised since the birth of the prison should *not* be seen as defending, condoning or idealising conventional criminality. However, what *has* become clear over the last fifty years is that politicians, having no answers to the complexities surrounding conventional crime in terms of the relationship between individual agency and social structure, and the lamentable failure of their law and order policies to deal with these crimes, have responded to *any* criticisms of

10. *ibid*

11. Reiman, J. (2006) *The Rich Get Richer, The Poor Get Prison* London: Pearson.

12. This phrase was coined by the sociologist Erik Olin Wright about America's claim that it had overcome the major issues confronting the world in the 1970s. It also seems highly applicable to the claims being made about prisons. See Burawoy, M. (2020) 'A Tale of Two Marxisms: Remembering Erik Olin Wright (1947-2019)' in *New Left Review*, 121, Jan/Feb 2020 p 67.

13. Story, B. (2019) *Prison Land: Mapping Carceral Power Across Neoliberal America* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press p. 22.

14. Giroux, H.A. (2013) *The Politics of Disimagination and the Pathologies of Power* <https://truthout.org/articles/the-politics-of-disimagination-and-the-pathologies-of-power/> Accessed 25 March 2020.

their policies through mobilising an insidious and perfidious discourse namely that their critics are pro-crime and anti-victim.

This offensive caricature is based on morally vacuous sloganeering. It is underpinned by breath-taking hypocrisy which legitimates this caricature. Together, these discourses have mystified a key issue. In practice, it has been different governments over the last five decades which have been pro-crime in terms of their lackadaisical attitudes towards, and lack of response to, white collar, corporate and state crime. And it is *they* who have been anti-victim, in terms of their deplorable response to domestic and sexual violence.<sup>15</sup> What is required is moving from a fixation on conventional crime (without underestimating its impact) to considering the impact of socially harmful activities including:

*income tax avoidance and evasion, which even on the Government's own 'laughable' estimate now stands at a record £35 billion per annum,,,the 36,000 deaths each year which the Government links to air pollution in the UK in its recently revised downwards estimate...the 50,000 work related deaths which occur year in, year out in one of the wealthiest economies in the world. The cultures of immunity and impunity which allows the rich and powerful to engage in routine criminal activity will continue to be encouraged [after the General Election]: programmes of deregulation and non-enforcement of law against businesses have been institutionalised since 2010 to the point where, for example, there are no officers to enforce law in some local authority areas, where some regulation has been privatised, and where prosecution in some areas are now non-existent.*<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the state's response to crime in the world of the public has been narrowly focussed. It is indisputable that deaths from knife crime have a

In the year ending June 2019, over one-third of offences involving violence against the person were domestic-abuse related.

devastating and traumatic impact on families, friends and communities. However, there are other crimes in the public which do not receive the same attention. Hate crimes increased to 103,379 in 2018/19 from 42,255 in 2012/13. There is still little concern, about the impact of these crimes on the families, friends and communities of *these* victims. Additionally, in the year up to June 2019, the police recorded nearly 59,000 rapes and over 163,000 sexual offences, the highest volume since the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in 2002.<sup>17</sup> Then there is the question of crimes in the world of the private. In the year ending June 2019, over one-third of offences involving violence against the person were domestic-abuse related. According to Women's Aid, in the year up to March 2018, 1.3 million women experienced some form of domestic abuse while nearly 5 million aged between 16 and 59 had experienced similar abuse since the age of 16.<sup>18</sup>

Academically, it could be argued that critical criminologists have won the debate about crime over the last five decades. The idea that criminality is the prerogative of a small group living on the margins of the society is clearly indefensible given the arguments above and the surveys which have revealed the pervasiveness of law-breaking

in this and other countries. Allied to this, the social harms generated by those in power — from state crime and white collar criminality through to environmental destruction all of which directly and indirectly cause death, mayhem and destruction — raise profound questions about how danger is defined, who are the dangerous and how it is not necessary for the narrowly defined, legalistic notion of intent to be present for death to occur. Systemic indifference also kills.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the narrow, legal parameters around which intent is framed, and crime is prosecuted, needs to be radically reconceptualised and changed.<sup>20</sup>

Any yet, in the world of politics, and in popular culture, the stench of hypocrisy endures in that it is still those who are often-ignominiously processed through the criminal justice system each year, in increasingly

15. This was first published in a blog. See Sim, J. (2019) 'Bad Moon Rising': *Criminal Justice after the Election* <https://ccseljmu.wordpress.com/2019/12/19/bad-moon-rising-criminal-justice-after-the-election/>

16. Sim, J. and Tombs, S. (2019) *The Johnson Government: Working for the Brexit Clampdown* <https://ccseljmu.wordpress.com/2019/08/19/the-johnson-government-working-for-the-brexite-clampdown/>

17. See n. 15.

18. Women's Aid (no date) *How common is domestic abuse?* <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/how-common-is-domestic-abuse/> Accessed 2nd March 2020.

19. Reiman (2006) see n. 11.

20. Tombs, S. and Whyte, D. (2015) *The Corporate Criminal* London: Routledge pp. 87-9.

racialized numbers, who are regarded as the 'real' criminals. As Thomas Mathiesen maintained nearly 50 years ago, the prison not only distracts attention away from crimes of the powerful but it constructs a symbolic divide between us on the outside — the good — and those in the inside — the bad.<sup>21</sup> Ideologically, in 2020, that binary divide still resonates and remains deeply embedded in political and popular consciousness despite the evidence to the contrary in relation to the nature and extent of crime, and the harms caused by the powerful.

Therefore, before thinking about transforming prisons, the nature and extent of crime, and the devastating impact of socially harmful activities instituted and carried out by the powerful, should be the starting point if serious progress is to be made. To do otherwise means simply reproducing the narrow, ideological, common-sense understanding of crime on which the prison, like Mount Everest, has stood, implacable to the storm of critique it has faced.

### The Present Moment

This article was written in the run-up to the thirtieth anniversary of the Strangeways disturbance. Although the demonstration was seen as a seismic wake-up call for the state and successive governments in 1990, thirty years on what are we to make of the current penal moment? There are three issues I want to briefly highlight here.

First, there is the ongoing issue of prison conditions. Throughout 2018 and 2019, reports by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons — hardly a fully paid-up member of the nest of Marxist vipers which politicians use to slur their critics — painted a damning picture of male, local prisons in particular which could easily have been describing Strangeways three decades ago: appalling conditions, the normalisation of systemic indifference, the unofficial and often undocumented use of punishment and force, the desperate lack of safety, the dismissal of prisoners' concerns and feelings, the differentially negative experiences of black and minority ethnic groups, the

failure to rehabilitate and the lack of democratic accountability. The Chief Inspector's description of the brutal conditions in Birmingham prison crystalized the nature of the current crisis inside:

*Communal areas in most wings were filthy. Rubbish had accumulated and had not been removed. There were widespread problems with insects, including cockroaches, as well as rats and other vermin. We saw evidence of bodily fluids left unattended, including blood and vomit. I saw a shower area where there was bloodstained clothing and a pool of blood that apparently had been there for two days next to numerous rat droppings. Many cells were cramped, poorly equipped and had damaged flooring or plasterwork. Most toilets were poorly screened, many were leaking and we saw cells with exposed electrics.<sup>22</sup>*

...the desperate lack of safety, the dismissal of prisoners' concerns and feelings, the differentially negative experiences of black and minority ethnic groups.

Second, there is the question of prison safety. Many prisons often fail to live up to their duty of care towards prisoners given the acute and indefensible levels of self-harm and deaths inside. The Chief Inspector has pointed to the 'staggering' decline in safety in youth prisons which was so bad no institution for young offenders or secure training inspected in early 2017 was safe.<sup>23</sup> Central to the concern around the lack of safety has been, and continues to be, the state of prison health care. Recent accounts from inside the

state,<sup>24</sup> as well as from ex-prisoners,<sup>25</sup> have described, in withering detail, the lack of medical care, the systemic indifference towards prisoners and the lack of managerial coordination in Wormwood Scrubs and Wandsworth which, together, were, and are, deadly for the psychological and physical health of prisoners. Even getting a hospital appointment was problematic: 'I knew as *always*, that I would have a battle on my hands to arrange for his admission to hospital'.<sup>26</sup> For Chris Atkins, who served part of this sentence in Wandsworth, '[p]rison health care is straight out of the

21. Mathiesen, T. (1974) *The Politics of Abolition* London: Martin Robertson.

22. Sim, J. (2018) *Beyond Redemption: The Barbarism of Birmingham Prison* <https://ccseljmu.wordpress.com/2018/09/18/beyond-redemption-the-barbarism-of-birmingham-prison/>

23. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/18/youth-jails-staggering-decline-standards-england-wales-peter-clarke-prisons-inspector-report> Accessed 29th February 2020.

24. Brown, A. (2019) *The Prison Doctor* London: HQ.

25. Atkins, C. (2020) *A Bit of a Stretch: The Diaries of a Prisoner* London: Atlantic Books.

26. Brown (2019). see n. 24 p. 182.

Middle Ages. It wouldn't have been out of place if they had started dispensing leeches'.<sup>27</sup>

In February, 2018, the preventable death of Osvaldas Pagirys crystalized the issue of safety even further, this time in relation to deaths in custody. Deborah Coles, the Director of the charity INQUEST, said that Osvaldas had been regarded as a:

*discipline and control problem not only by the prison itself, but by the systems which needlessly sent him there. It is simply not good enough for the prison and ministers to repeat the empty phrase that lessons will or have been learned. This death is a matter of national shame.... [t]he response must be one which ensures there is accountability for those responsible, and lasting systemic change.*<sup>28</sup>

Safety was compromised in other institutions. In March 2020, the inquest into the death of Prince Kwabena Fosu at Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre found that the the 'medical cause was sudden death following hypothermia, dehydration and malnourishment in someone with a psychotic illness'. Even though he was purportedly checked four times an hour, these checks:

*showed no positive evidence that Prince had eaten, drunk or slept and that he was naked. Both detention and medical staff recorded this, and that Prince was often lying on the cold concrete floor, in unsanitary conditions, behaving 'bizarrely', not communicating with anyone and with no bedding or mattress. His bedding had been removed on the first day leaving him with nothing soft to sit or lie on and there was nothing else in his room save for it being smeared with his own faeces, urine and food debris. Even so, four GPs, two nurses, two Home Office contract monitors, three members of the Independent*

*Monitoring Board and countless Detention Custody Officers and managers who visited him failed to take any meaningful steps.*<sup>29</sup>

The Ministry of Justice's data on the levels of self-harm inside further illustrates the problems around ensuring safety. In the year up to September 2019, there were 61,461 incidents of self-harm — approximately 168 each day, a record number, and an increase of 12 per cent from the previous year. This harm was also highly gendered. The rate for male prisoners was 633 incidents per 1000 men, a rise of 15 per cent over the year. In women's prisons, there were an astonishing 3007 incidents per 1000 women, 18 per cent up on the previous year.<sup>30</sup>

Over the last five decades, the dominant discourse around prison safety has focussed on the safety of prison officers, particularly in relation to assaults against them.

Over the last five decades, the dominant discourse around prison safety has focussed on the safety of prison officers, particularly in relation to assaults against them. However, the health and safety of prison staff is more likely to be compromised by a range of other issues. Musculoskeletal problems, sickness, stress, bullying by managers, anxiety and depression have also been found to contribute to days lost at work.

In 1999, the National Audit Office (NAO) noted that sickness stemming from accidents at 5 per cent, and assaults at 2 per cent, 'represented a small proportion' of absences from work among staff. In 2004, the NAO also pointed out that between 1999 and 2003 the number of days lost at work as a result of depression, anxiety, stress and nervous debility rose from 116,744 to 178,625. The number of days lost as a result of accidents rose from 824 to 1201 while the number of days lost as a result of assaults increased from 397 to 693.<sup>31</sup> To be clear, this is not an argument for saying assaults on staff are unimportant, which again is contrary to the offensive caricature that critics of the prison system condone assaults. However, it is to say that there is a broader context for assaults on staff which concerns the prison *itself*. It is the prison environment — demoralising and dehumanising — which presents the greatest threat to

27. Atkins (2020). see n.25 p. 296.

28. Coles cited in <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prison-suicides-teenage-home-office-deaths-osvaldas-pagirys-mental-health-support-care-a8221656.html> Accessed 2nd March 2020.

29. INQUEST (2020) *Jury concludes neglect and gross failures contributed to the death of Prince Fosu in immigration detention* London: INQUEST Press Release.

30. *Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to December 2019 Assaults and Self-harm to September 2020* /1 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/861732/safety-in-custody-q3-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/861732/safety-in-custody-q3-2019.pdf) Accessed 3 March 2020.

31. Scott, D. and Sim, J. (2018) *Prisons Dangerous for Whom?* <https://ccseljmu.wordpress.com/2018/09/20/prisons-dangerous-for-whom/>

the psychological, emotional and physical well-being of staff.<sup>32</sup>

Third, there is the issue of how the current crisis is being explained. Again, this is an issue that cuts across the last five decades. Here, the dominant discourse has focussed on the cuts to the prison service (and the wider criminal justice system). If the cuts were restored, so the argument goes, then the prison will be back to its 'normal' operational best. However, this argument again ignores history. The pre-cuts prison was not an institution based on rehabilitation or reform but was also a crisis-ridden site which delivered punishment and pain.<sup>33</sup> Otherwise, how can the crises that erupted throughout the 1970s, which culminated in the winter of 1978/9, or the Strangeways disturbance in 1990, be explained? These eruptions occurred in a system which was not experiencing cuts and which had a full complement of staff. The cuts, built on 'the violence of austerity',<sup>34</sup> have only intensified the problems which were already deeply embedded in the system. They have not caused them. To argue otherwise is to occupy a terrain which reinforces the model that has persisted for the last two centuries, and certainly since the 1970s, namely crisis/reform/crisis/reform. This model has gone nowhere politically or strategically in terms of offering sustainable solutions to the social problem that the prison has become. The depth of the crisis in 2020 is a terrible testimony to decades of failure to move beyond the crisis/reform/crisis/reform model.

### **Eroding the Prison: The Question of Abolitionism**

So far this article has critiqued the role of the prison reform movement in reproducing a failing system while remaining trapped within the dominant discourses around crime. In contrast, the argument in this paper supports abolishing prisons, and the criminal justice system, in their present form. Since its emergence, also in the 1970s, abolitionism has provided a clear and unambiguous critique of the politics of reform and the role of the prison reform

lobby in reproducing, rather than challenging, the dominant discourses around the prison, and crime more generally.<sup>35</sup> However, there are also a number of issues for abolitionists, and critical penologists, to consider in the twenty first century.

First, there is the question of historical periodisation. Abolitionists, and critical penologists, have analysed the prison as integral to the authoritarian shift that took place in the 1970s, propelled forward and legitimated by the rise of the new right. This, in turn, led to the point where countries like America and the UK reached unprecedented levels of imprisonment.<sup>36</sup> And while there is much merit in this argument, the ideal typical binary which underpins this position — pre-1970s and post-1970s — misses a key

The pre-cuts prison was not an institution based on rehabilitation or reform but was also a crisis-ridden site which delivered punishment and pain.

point. Since their inception two hundred years ago, prisons have *always* been sites for punishing the poor and therefore what has transpired since the 1970s has been an intensification in punishment rather than a shift from an idealised moment of rehabilitation to a new moment of punishment.<sup>37</sup> This is important because having a longer historical perspective suggests some very different strategy interventions and policy conclusions compared with an analysis which focusses on relatively short-term historical trends.

Furthermore, in the UK, abolitionists have underestimated the contradictions and contingencies within the state. There have been a number of visionary initiatives which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s which have challenged the idea that prisoners are there simply to be punished. Rather, when committed staff recognise their dignity, treat them with empathy and support and when they are not subjected to the 'ethical loneliness'<sup>38</sup> that the prison engenders, then they can be fundamentally changed, even those who have been imprisoned for serious crimes. These examples — the Barlinnie Special Unit, Parkhurst C Wing and Grendon Underwood — have provided a very different vision to traditional law and order discourses and policies and directly challenge these discourses and policies. The key questions are: why have these initiatives either been

32. Ibid.

33. Sim, J. (2017) 'Austerity, Violence and Prisons' in Cooper, V. and Whyte, D. (eds) *The Violence of Austerity* London: Pluto

34. Cooper, V. and Whyte, D. (eds) (2017) *The Violence of Austerity* London: Pluto

35. Ryan, M. (1978) *The Acceptable Pressure Group* Farnborough: Saxon House

36. Garland, D. (2001) *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social order in Contemporary Society* Oxford: Oxford University Press; Wacquant, L. (2009) *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* Durham: Duke University Press.

37. Sim, J. (2009) *Punishment and Prisons: Power and the Carceral State* London: Sage.

38. Stauffer, J. (2015) *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard* New York: Columbia University Press.

closed down or not expanded and what have abolitionists had to say about them in terms of defending them? The answer is not very much. Therefore, abolitionists in the early 21st century should also be thinking about the contradictions within the state — it is not homogenous, speaking with one, instrumental voice. These examples provide a critical, alternative vision of confinement and stand in marked contrast to the baleful system that currently exists.<sup>39</sup>

The basis of abolitionist thought around health and safety also needs to be expanded. How should abolitionists (as well as liberal reformers and state agents) think about safety and protection in the twenty-first century? Prison safety tends to be analysed in isolation from debates about health, safety and protection across the social landscape. Therefore, what is required is a broader definition of health and safety built around a straightforward question:

*[h]ow can we organize our communities to be safe? What should we do when various kinds of harm, with different kinds of needs, occur? What are the collective ways and forums in which we can pursue this work?*<sup>40</sup>

Thinking about health, safety and protection in prison in this way would connect deaths in custody with deaths in a range of social areas: due to gender-based, racist and homophobic violence; through austerity; in the workplace; through pollution; amongst the homeless; in NHS Foundation Trusts; and in infant mortality rates as a result of poverty:

*Establishing these links, raises profound questions about the relationship between death, security and social harm [and] the state's abject failure to protect those who are often most in need.... These deaths should not be treated as forms of individualised*

*abnormality but as a normal outcome of the state's failure to offer even a modicum of protection to those at the bottom of the ladder of inequality. It would also mean rejecting piecemeal reforms based on the abnormal characteristics of individual state servants.*<sup>41</sup>

Finally, there is the question of democratic accountability. This is particularly relevant to prisons. The Chief Inspector of Prisons has consistently noted that many of the recommendations the Inspectorate has made have been systematically ignored by individual prisons, and by the state more generally. Therefore the question is: what would workable and effective structures of accountability look like, how can mechanisms of democratic control be implemented and how can the cultures of immunity and impunity referred to earlier, not just in prisons but again across the social landscape, be challenged, removed and replaced, so that *all* human beings, including prisoners, are protected and kept safe? This key issue has remained outside of abolitionist thought for fear of being seen as too reformist. However, according to Karl Marx, who is a key reference point for critical criminological and abolitionist thought, democratic accountability is a key building block towards radical social transformation.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these issues, the crux of the abolitionist position remains as clear as it was fifty years ago. In 2020, prisons, and the wider criminal justice system, continue to be corrosive sites for the 'churning'<sup>43</sup> of vast, increasingly racialised, numbers of the dispossessed, pauperised and destitute. The pliers of punishment, and the laser of criminalisation, reach deeply into their lives and have become normalised through an intertwined network of criminal justice and state welfare power, the intensification in punitive and degrading welfare state practices and the withdrawal

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39. Sim (2009). see n. 37.

40. Brown and Schept cited in Sim, J. (forthcoming) "'Help Me Please": Death and Self-Harm in Male Prisons in England and Wales' in Coyle, M. and Scott, D. (eds) *The International Handbook of Penal Abolition* London: Routledge.

41. *ibid*, emphasis in the original.

42. Sim, J. (2020) 'Challenging the desecration of the human spirit: An alternative criminological perspective on safety and self-inflicted deaths in prison' in Carlen, P. and Franca, L. A. (eds) *Justice Alternatives* London: Routledge.

43. Sawyer, W. and Wagner, P. (2019) *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie* <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html> Accessed 8 April 2019

of the state from a range of protective welfare interventions. Together, they reinforce a vicious, lacerating circle of coercion and surveillance.<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion

This paper has discussed some key themes and issues that have been central to the debate about crime and prisons since the *Prison Service Journal* was first published. The ongoing tension around, and the intrinsic limitations of, liberal reform which have emerged over the last five decades, and indeed over the last two centuries, have been central to the analysis presented here.

What of the immediate future? Until the time of writing, it looked as bleak as ever for prisoners and for those committed prison staff trying to do a humane job in often intolerable physical and psychological conditions. The endless mantra of crisis/reform/crisis/reform, referred to above, remained central to political and state discourses. Even the new reforms that are being suggested should be treated with caution. Brett Story's warning from America is instructive:

*.....under the pretext of bipartisan prison reform, the capacities of the carceral state may be retrofitted for the current conjuncture, producing new spatial fixes for managing surplus life. Such findings are in keeping with the history of prison reform. Scholars have offered examples....of reform efforts that have failed to stem either the growth of or the increased racialization of U.S. prisons, in some cases having even engendered more austere and punitive conditions.....recent scholarship shows that reformist appeals to a more 'rehabilitative' approach to incarceration have actually helped to facilitate the building of more carceral spaces in the guise of 'justice campuses'...and 'gender responsive prisons'....<sup>45</sup>*

However, as in other social arenas, the desperate, unfinished impact of the coronavirus may have opened a window for developing alternatives to the neoliberal responses which have dominated the state's response to social issues since the 1970s. In prisons, this would include thinking about radical decarceration. At the time of writing, liberal and radical prisoners' rights organisations have called for the early release of different groups of prisoners in order to avoid a

potential catastrophe inside.<sup>46</sup> This never happened. Even in the middle of a pandemic, which provided the perfect opportunity for a programme of decarceration, the prison remained, and remains, an impregnable force, deeply embedded in the politics of law and order, despite the institution's well-documented failures over the last two centuries. Even if it did happen, decarceration, etc.

a) **An immediate release of all those held in immigration detention centres**, in line with recommendations made in the British Medical Journal by key health professionals in the field.

b) **Relieving the pressures within [the] prison system** by closing child prisons Secure Training Centres and other facilities holding children) as soon as practicable.

c) **Prompt release into the community and relevant support services for women in prison**, alongside increased funding for women's centres and other specialist support services as a priority.

d) **Dramatic reduction of the population across the rest of the prison estate**, with consideration of options to release all those who safely and reasonably can be. This should be done with input from (and funding provided to) community and voluntary sector services providing support for people on release. Nobody should be released into destitution or poverty or faced with a lack of health and welfare support.<sup>47</sup>

As a start, implementing these proposals has the potential to overturn decades of failure and institute something radically different to what has gone before. Whether those in power have the desire, wisdom and imagination to recognise the failures of the past, and transcend them, remains extremely problematic. Turning possibilities into radical probabilities continues to be a difficult task given how power is distributed and exercised in the UK. However, not to seize this moment, and to simply continue down the iron road of punishment, is likely to mean that the 500th edition of the *Prison Service Journal* will be discussing the same issues and lamenting the same failures. To paraphrase Karl Marx, the history of the prison has repeated itself first as tragedy and second as more tragedy. Now is the time to bring the curtain down on this tragedy.

44. Shammas, V. (2018) 'Superfluity and insecurity: Disciplining surplus populations in the Global North' in *Capital and Class* 42, 3 pp 411-418; Vegh Weis, V. (2017) *Marxism and Criminology: A History of Criminal Selectivity* Chicago: Haymarket Books.

45. Story (2019) see n. 13 p. 175, emphasis in the original.

46. Scott, D. and Sim, J. (2020) *Coronavirus and Prisons: the need for Radical Alternatives* <https://newsocialist.org.uk/coronavirus-and-prisons-need-radical-alternatives/>

47. INQUEST (2020) INQUEST BRIEFING ON COVID-19 Protecting people in places of custody and detention London: INQUEST p. 6, emphasis in the original.

# From Alcatraz to Dannemora: 'flights from' and 'flights to' in prison escape stories

*Dr. Sarah Moore is a Senior Lecturer at University of Bath*

**'In the newspapers, on television, in the whole range of media, the prison is simply not recognised as a fiasco, but as a necessary if not always fully successful method of reaching its purported goals. The prison solution is often taken as paradigmatic'**

Mathiesen's complaint has been echoed by many criminologists and prison campaigners. If, they argue, there has been an evident swing during the last thirty years towards a more punitive, emotive political rhetoric in discussions about prison — sometimes called penal populism — it is at least partly to do with a parallel trend in the mass media towards more sensational depictions of crime and prison.<sup>2</sup> We know from studies of crime news and fictional representations of crime that there has been a gradual shift in the last fifty years towards greater coverage of serious, violent crime.<sup>3</sup> Pratt, in reviewing the role of the mass media in the rise of penal populism, highlights too the tendency for contemporary crime news to over-simplify complex social problems, over-rely on anecdote and testimonial account, and focus on high-profile, exceptional crime-related incidents.<sup>4</sup> The compound effect of all this is that the mass media depiction of crime and criminal justice has come to diverge markedly from empirical reality (however problematic this 'reality' may be).

This is an especially pertinent problem when it comes to media stories about prison and incarceration because, as Fiddler points out, the relative public inaccessibility of the modern prison means that

representation is especially likely to come to stand in for reality.<sup>5</sup> The small body of writing about media depictions of the prison tends to trace similar patterns to those noted above. Discussing films of prison release, Bennett observes that '[t]he representation of release from prison in popular cinema can be described in general terms as a movement from a mainstream concern with humanity and social justice to a default position where those released from prison are dangerous, violent and unreformed'.<sup>6</sup> Marsh notes the tendency in contemporary media accounts for the prison to be depicted as variously a 'too soft' holiday camp or a place of unrelenting violence.<sup>7</sup> And for others, the dominant cultural representation of the prison in the twenty-first century has become the Hell-hole. Deploying Dante's *Inferno* as an analytical framework, Jewkes convincingly argues that media depictions of prison draw upon culturally-entrenched ideas about Hell and its inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> Her broader point is that this cultural representation of prison works to confirm that certain people — the poor, ethnic minorities, the socially-marginalised — belong there, and that this in turn lends legitimation to the political project of mass incarceration in the late twentieth, early twenty-first century.

So, too, do these depictions work to confirm that other sorts of people *don't* belong in prison — that some people, by dint of social background and personal attributes, have a particular and undeniable desire for freedom. This article is interested in this idea.

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1. Mathiesen, T. (2000) *Prisons on Trial*. London: Waterside. P. 144.
  2. See, for example, Mason, P. (2006) 'Prison Decayed: Cinematic Penal Discourse and Popularism 1995-2005', *Social Semiotics*, 16(4): 607-26 and O'Sullivan, S. (2001) 'Representations of Prison in Nineties Hollywood Cinema: From *Con Air* to *The Shawshank Redemption*', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(4): 317-34, 321.
  3. See, amongst others, Reiner, R., Livingstone, S. and Allen, J. (2003) 'From Law and Order to Lynch Mobs: Crime News Since the Second World War' in P. Mason (Ed.) *Criminal Visions: Media Representations of Crime and Justice*. Collumpton: Willan. Pp. 13-32.
  4. Pratt, J. (2006) *Penal Populism*. London: Routledge.
  5. Fiddler, M. (2007) 'Projecting the Prison: The depiction of the uncanny in *The Shawshank Redemption*', *Crime, Media Culture*, 3(2): 192-206. 193.
  6. Bennett, J. (2008) 'Reel life after prison: Repression and reform in films about release from prison', *Probation Journal: The Journal of Community and Criminal Justice*, 55(4): 353-68, 358.
  7. Marsh, I. (2009) 'Representations of prisons in the British media — or are we being fair to holiday camps?' *Criminal Justice Studies: A Critical Journal of Crime, Law, and Society*, 22(3): 367-74.
  8. Jewkes, Y. (2014) 'Punishment in Black and White: Penal "Hell-Holes", Popular Media, and Mass Incarceration', *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 22(1): 42-60.

I have two key aims: to identify key features of the prison escape narrative in fiction film and television and, by way of a focussed discussion of three such narratives, to tentatively consider some of the ways that these representations have changed over the last fifty years.

My point of departure is that prison escape narratives are often about something 'more' than the daring feat of a prison-break — even as they might be about this too. Clover makes a similar point about trial movies when she argues that they tend to have a 'double trial structure'.<sup>9</sup> That is, they follow a specific court case and, at the same time, put certain values or cherished beliefs 'on trial'. The classic trial movie *12 Angry Men*<sup>10</sup> is a case in point: the film is just as interested in a specific instance of jury deliberation as it is the deeper problems with the jury-system.

I want to suggest that we also see the prison escape narrative as having deeper, or broader concerns — we might call it, after Clover, a 'double escape structure'. Below, I suggest that prison escapes might be thought of in terms of two distinct narrative structures: as 'flights from' institutional structures and 'flights to' imagined-futures. As such, prison escape stories give shape and content to an otherwise abstract belief that freedom is a fundamental human good. They ask us to think variously about what we need freedom from, and what we need freedom for — and, I'm going to argue below, in such a way as to reflect (and in some rare cases take aim at) deeply held fantasies about escape. This article explores this idea through a focussed and comparative discussion of three popular prison escape stories from across this time-frame — the films *Escape from Alcatraz*<sup>11</sup> and *The Shawshank Redemption*<sup>12</sup>, and the seven-part television series *Escape at Dannemora*.<sup>13</sup> Before that, though, some more thoughts on how we might conceptualise prison escape stories.

### Conceptualising the Prison Escape Story

The prison-break is an enduring feature of Hollywood prison movies. Take, by way of example, *The*

*Big House*<sup>14</sup>, released in 1930. The central protagonist, Morgan, is serving a long and entirely unproductive sentence in an over-crowded prison characterised by the constant jostling of inmates for privileges, power, and safety. He escapes, falls in love, and when he is recaptured he returns to prison more civilised by the promise of intimacy he has found in the outside world. When a prison riot and mass escape is planned, he refuses to take part and instead protects the prison guards from the ensuing violence. Morgan gets his freedom eventually, and the film asks us to think of this as the *right kind* of freedom, one that is appropriately directed towards building normative relationships in the outside world. Here, an original 'flight from' becomes a more meaningful — and enduring — 'flight to'.

*Big House* alerts us to the fact that some escape-routes are more culturally-permissible than others. In turn, cultural treatments of escape can tell us something about how our culture thinks about incarceration, and particularly who we incarcerate, and why. What they suggest, time and again, is that some people — quite beyond any crime of which they've been convicted — have a predisposition for freedom, whilst others simply can't be free, or wouldn't know what to do with freedom if they had it. In many instances, these are pernicious ideas — even more so, given that

we are living in an era of mass incarceration.

This is my point of departure for examining prison escape narratives in the post-1970s era. This is a period marked by the renewed popularity of fictional accounts of prisons and incarceration meant for a mass market. Within this, there is a marked interest in the prison escape narrative — and here we find great variety, from the brutal escape-quests of *Cool Hand Luke* and *Papillon*, to the dystopian vision of a prison state in *Escape from New York*, and thriller-prison escape hybrids, such as the hit television series *Prison Break*.

It's worth pausing here to reflect upon the possibility that the prison escape narrative is one that in some senses belongs to the period under review. Certainly, whilst prison films of the 1930s included prison-break as a plot device, the films and television

My point of departure is that prison escape narratives are often about something 'more' than the daring feat of a prison-break — even as they might be about this too.

9. Clover, C. (1998) 'God Bless Juries!', In N. Browne (ed.), *Refiguring Film Genres*. USA: University of California Press. Pp. 255-77.  
10. Lumet, S. (dir.) (1957) *12 Angry Men*. USA: MGM, United Artists  
11. Siegel, D.(dir.) (1979) *Escape from Alcatraz*. USA: Paramount Pictures.  
12. Darabont, F. (dir.) (1994) *The Shawshank Redemption*. USA: Columbia Pictures.  
13. Stiller, D. (dir.) (2018) *Escape at Dannemora*. USA: Michael de Luca Productions and Red Hour Productions.  
14. Hill, G. (dir.) (1930) *The Big House*. USA: MGM.

series discussed below are ones — in common with other prison escape stories of this period — where there is a sustained focus on the planning, process, and/or experience of escape. Where the protagonist of *The Big House* makes opportunistic escapes in a matter of minutes, today's escapees spend impossibly long periods of time plotting and digging. To some degree this reflects changing ideas about what the prison is — more specifically, that, as a matter of course, the prison is an institution with almost total control over its inhabitants' lives, so that escape, when it happens, is a monumental feat. It reflects, too, the degree to which films and television series about prison intersect with cultural forms that have become especially dominant in the post-1970s period, most notably the Action Film genre, with its emphasis on the lone male protagonist's demonstration of extreme physical robustness against all odds.<sup>15</sup> This is to think in very general terms about prison escape stories in the post-1970s period, and their relationship to broader socio-cultural currents. The article turns now to offer a focussed account of three prison escape narratives, each of them in some sense way-markers in the cultural treatment of the prison.

### Free as a bird in *Escape From Alcatraz* (1979)

Released in 1979 and directed by Don Siegel, *Escape from Alcatraz* is an adaptation of a 1963 novel about a real-life prison escape. The film's opening scene is set in the plush, wood-panelled office of the Prison Warden. A newly admitted prisoner, Frank (played by Clint Eastwood) is being lectured by the Prison Warden (played by Patrick McGoohan). Unlike Frank, inscrutable and unflinching (the casting of Eastwood is crucial here), the Warden is a man of considerable affectation. He delivers his monologue whilst variously cutting his nails, sitting back to fill his handsome leather chair, and pacing round his office. A large table-model of Alcatraz Penitentiary dominates the office-space. The camera cuts at various points to a long-shot of the office, providing an over-head view of the model prison. It serves to reinforce the Warden's key message: Alcatraz is the USA's top maximum security prison, a perfect, unbreachable fortress, 'built to keep all the rotten eggs

in one basket' he explains, whilst playing meaningfully with his caged bird. Frank, by implication, must accept a similar fate.

By the late 1970s, the inescapable-prison and the indefatigable escapee had become such established conventions of the prison escape narrative — set up by films of the 1960s, such as *The Great Escape* and *Cool Hand Luke* — that the audience fully expects Frank to confound the Warden's expectations. We all know that birds aren't meant to be caged. In this respect the opening scene of *Escape from Alcatraz* sets up the terms of Frank's escape: this prison, so conceited in its pretence at sophistication, is no match for a man like Frank, with his natural will for freedom. As if to dispel any doubts we might have on this matter, as the scene closes the camera pans down sharply (as the Warden takes-up his nail clippers once more) to show the words 'I.Q. SUPERIOR' on Frank's official record. The stage is set for a 'flight from', or what Bennett calls 'escape as a form of resistance'.<sup>16</sup>

We follow Frank as he befriends inmates and makes enemies of others, including the prison guards. It's soon clear that Frank won't accommodate himself to prison-life and, more than that, is willing to be openly critical of the mistreatment of vulnerable prisoners. When the ageing Doc has his painting equipment permanently confiscated due to a minor infraction and has a break-down, Frank marks his absence from the meal-table by placing one of his much-loved chrysanthemums in his place. The on-duty prison guard takes considerable satisfaction in meanly squashing the flowers.

All of this lends considerable justification to Frank's desire to escape. In a set of scenes that have become typical of prison escape movies, we see Frank and his associates refashioning prison spoons and working out that the dilapidated prison walls could aid an escape. In one sense it is obvious that the prison's resources should become the means of escape — the very condition of imprisonment means that little else can be used to achieve this end. All the same, it is notable how frequently the prison as an institution is turned back upon itself to facilitate escape in prison escape stories. The forced routines of prison-life make planning an

## This is to think in very general terms about prison escape stories in the post-1970s period, and their relationship to broader socio-cultural currents.

15. For some, the hybridity of the prison movie means that it is not quite a genre in its own right. This debate is beyond the remit of this article, but for readers interested please see Mason, P. (2006) 'Relocating Hollywood's Prison Movie Discourse' In (ed.) P. Mason (2006) *Captured by the Media: Prison Discourse in Popular Culture*. London: Willan. 191-209.  
 16. Bennett, J. (2018) 'Representations of Prison Escapes in Film', In. (Eds) T.M.Martin and G. Chantraine. *Prison Breaks: Towards a Sociology of Escape*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp 265-290. P. 274.

escape possible (as inmates and guards are reliably to be found in certain places, at certain times). Skills taught simply for the sake of keeping prisoners occupied — in the case of *Escape from Alcatraz*, it's metalwork — become purposeful when directed towards escape. And unloved facilities and spaces, as well as guards who are inattentive to the needs and idiosyncracies of inmates, provide the means for escape.

These narrative conventions in prison escape narratives tend to direct us to see prison itself as implicated in not just the means, but the motive for escape. In most cases, though, this turns out to be a soft critique. More often than not, it is the specific prison — rather than imprisonment per se — that comes into critical focus. This is the case in *Escape from Alcatraz*. If Alcatraz is an uncaring and uncared-for environment, that's because it's Alcatraz. The final scene of the film is telling in this respect. In the aftermath of Frank and his associates' audacious escape, the Prison Warden discovers a chrysanthemum planted on the edge of the island, beyond the prison walls. It's a 'kiss off' moment — another convention of the prison escape movie — that takes aim at Alcatraz specifically.

It is also in keeping with one of the film's central themes: the idea that freedom is a natural condition — for certain people, at least. The idea that you can't stop flowers from blooming, irrespective of the experience of terror and pain, might put viewers in mind of the use of the poppy to commemorate those killed during war. In *Escape from Alcatraz*, the flower serves a similar symbolic function, providing a final push-back against an oppressive prison regime that has failed to recognise that human freedom lies in everyday, seemingly small acts of personal choice and expression (in this case, the chrysanthemum draws a connection to the decision to deny Doc access to his painting materials).

All the same, Doc remains in Alcatraz. It is Frank who is free in a material sense. Overall, the film works to confirm that some people in particular have an unquenchable — and unrefusable — instinct for

freedom. You just can't keep a good man down, as the saying goes. Frank — white, attractive, only violent when provoked, highly intelligent, a man of deed — is an embodiment of the 'good man', and it's this set of qualities, just as much as the institution's excessive attempts to control, that render his 'flight from' permissible (in the context of the film, at least). The character of 'Wolf' offers a key point of difference in this respect. Convicted of rape, Wolf is seemingly unable to control his animal-like violence (as his name not-so-subtly indicates), and as a result is recurrently made to spend time in solitary confinement. Wolf represents something very important in *Escape from Alcatraz*: the sort of prisoner who *should* be locked up, who is absolutely beyond rehabilitation, and violent beyond repair. This sort of animal belongs in a cage. Both characterisations — of Wolf and Frank — are, I want to suggest, deeply problematic. If the character of Wolf serves to demonstrate that we need prisons like Alcatraz, the character of Frank asks that we see other, more culturally-vaunted forms of masculinity as inviolable.

These narrative conventions in prison escape narratives tend to direct us to see prison itself as implicated in not just the means, but the motive for escape.

#### Hope springs eternal in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)

Hollywood prison movies of the 1990s — such as *The Green Mile*, *Con Air*, *The Shawshank Redemption* — were amongst the most widely watched films of the decade.<sup>17</sup> For many criminologists, the prison movies of this era reflect — and to some degree licence — the changing political climate of the late twentieth century, and more specifically, the rise of penal populism in late liberal democracies.<sup>18</sup> Mason makes this point in an article reviewing prison movies from the mid-1990s through to the mid-2000s. He notes two key features to Hollywood prison films of this period: 'the graphic exploitation of violence and sexual assault' and 'the representation of prisoners as dehumanised other and deserving of harsh treatment'.<sup>19</sup> The overall implication, he argues, is that prison is mainly inhabited by people with insatiable appetites for violence — that is, people

17. *Con Air* and *The Green Mile* were both blockbuster films. O'Sullivan notes that *The Shawshank Redemption* had limited success on cinema release, but went on to have very high yields as a video rental. O'Sullivan, S. (2001) 'Representations of Prison in Nineties Hollywood Cinema: From *Con Air* to *The Shawshank Redemption*', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(4): 317-34.

18. See, for example, O'Sullivan, S. (2001) 'Representations of Prison in Nineties Hollywood Cinema: From *Con Air* to *The Shawshank Redemption*', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40(4): 317-34 and Mason, P. (2006) 'Prison Decayed: Cinematic Penal Discourse and Populism 1995-2005', *Social Semiotics*, 16(4): 607-26.

19. Mason, P. (2006) 'Prison Decayed: Cinematic Penal Discourse and Populism 1995-2005', *Social Semiotics*, 16(4): 607-26. 611.

who seem like they *should* be there. The central source of drama in these films is the struggle of those who, for various reasons, *shouldn't* be there.

O'Sullivan makes a similar set of observations in his analysis of four prison movies from the 1990s, and here he takes *The Shawshank Redemption* (directed by Frank Darabont, released in 1994) to be an outlier. He points out that the film presents inmates as capable of rehabilitation, is nostalgic in tone (the film is set largely in the 1940s and 1950s) and as such, he argues, might be seen to be 'doing good by stealth'.<sup>20</sup> I want to suggest that we look at the film differently — as a quintessential 'flight to' narrative with, I will argue below, just as much of an exclusionary impulse as other prison movies of the 1990s.

Certainly, the film's opening scenes clearly signal that this is a 1990s prison movie. We follow Red (played by Morgan Freeman) as he walks through a busy prison yard. In his voice-over — he narrates throughout — he gently brags about his abilities to smuggle into the prison anything a prisoner wants. A loud siren starts, and it calls Red and others to something — we're not sure what yet. The camera pulls out, up, and sweeps over the prison, taking us outside its walls to show the approach of a prison van. Inside, at the back, sits Andy Dufresne (played by Tim Robbins), looking nervous, smart but dishevelled, and thoroughly out-of-place. As the camera pulls outside of the van and back up

and over the prison, we realise that the siren marks the arrival of this new intake of prisoners. In a panning aerial shot, we watch the inmates — huge in number — slowly making their way to a prison entrance-point.

As with *Escape from Alcatraz*, then, the opening scene of *The Shawshank Redemption* offers us a bird's eye view of the prison building. In the earlier film, it's as a table-model in the Warden's office. Here, in *The Shawshank Redemption*, it's aerial shots of the building itself. The point, in both cases, is to emphasise the fortress-like qualities of the prison. In another, important respect, our early bird's eye view of Shawshank Penitentiary is different: this prison is peopled. In fact, the prison population is integral to

what makes this prison deeply threatening and overwhelming. As the van enters a holding bay area, cordoned off from the prison yard, the inmates crowd and rattle the wire mesh fence, jeering at the newcomers as they file out of the van. As O'Sullivan points out, this vision of the prison population has become part of the *mise en scène* of prison movies — and, it might be added, the cacophony of barely decipherable shouted taunts has become part of its distinctive soundscape — and it works to homogenise this population and make them seem like a built-in feature of the prison.

Wilson notes that the hero-protagonists of 1990s prison movies are often placed in stark contrast to the primordial prison population; they are the 'exceptional individual', wrongly-convicted or serving an overly-harsh sentence.<sup>21</sup> We already know from the opening scenes of *The Shawshank Redemption* that Andy is a fish out of water. As the film progresses we learn that he has been wrongly convicted of the double-homicide of his wife and lover. His first years in prison are absolutely gruelling. He's raped, he's beaten, he's (almost) friendless.

What comes to save Andy — in the first instance, at least — is his middle-class education. In return for protection, the head guard (Captain Hadley, played by Clancy Brown) recruits Andy to do his personal accounts, money laundering and all. Andy is duly moved to the prison library, both

a safer and more suitably cultured environment. The other key source of support in Andy's life is Red, an old-timer who is variously incredulous at Andy's naivety about prison life and impressed by his refusal to put up and shut up. Early in the film, we see Red source a small pickaxe and a poster of Rita Hayworth for Andy. We only learn of their significance much later in the film — 19 years later, in narrative terms — when Andy is discovered to have escaped his cell. A guard furiously throws a rock at the poster (we've seen it be replaced with posters of other glamorous women over the years), only for it to pass right through, revealing an exit-route that Andy has been painstakingly creating over the years.

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20. O'Sullivan, S. (2001) 'Representations of Prison in Nineties Hollywood Cinema: From Con Air to The Shawshank Redemption', *The Howard Journal*, 40(4): 317-34. 326.

21. Wilson, D. (1993) 'Inside observations', *Screen*, 34(1), 76-9. 79.

Fiddler convincingly argues that Andy's escape is framed as a re-birth in the film, and that Shawshank Penitentiary constitutes a space akin to purgatory.<sup>22</sup> By implication, Andy's escape requires an extraordinary leap of faith. What makes Andy's escape possible is his highly-developed understanding of freedom as something that requires a deep personal responsibility to ceaseless, existential hope. The means of Andy's escape is a neat demonstration of this. Through all the mundane, daily drama of the prison — the narrative focus for the film — Andy has been quietly burrowing away for 19 years. The fact that the process of escape is hidden from the audience's view reinforces the sense that this is a feat of great *inner* strength. This is the 'redemption' that the film's title refers to, and by implication the connection between hope and freedom is spiritual in character. That is, the film suggests that to be free — really free — is first a state of mind, and then a material state.

Throughout the film, we are asked to see hope and freedom as aesthetic experiences. In one of the film's most famous scenes, Andy barricades himself into the Warden's office and plays Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* over the prison tannoy system. Leaning back in the chair, eyes gently closed, Andy enjoys this short-lived moment of bliss. In the prison yard, the men stand still and silent, faces turned up to the tannoy, seemingly entranced by the operatic score. Still, the effect on them is short-lived. Returning from a stretch of solitary confinement in the 'hole', his punishment for taking over the airwaves of the prison, Andy — pale-faced and bleary-eyed — joins his fellow inmates at lunch. They tease him about whether it was worth it. A non-diegetic string score starts up as he explains to the men the importance of music in reminding him that 'there are places in the world that aren't made out of stone...that there's something inside that they can't get to...hope'. Red finds Andy's idealism irritating. The other men are nonchalant. The film's position on all of this is clear: hope, personally cultivated, is the only route to true freedom. This is what sets Andy apart from his fellow prisoners. This is what makes (real) escape possible.

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This message is especially clear in the film's closing scenes. Red is now out on parole and staying in a halfway house. We watch him packing in his bedroom. We've been in this room before — earlier in the film, when the elderly prisoner Brooks was released after serving a 50 year sentence, and, unable to cope with the outside world, committed suicide in this very bedroom. Red's voice-over draws this connection too: 'Get busy dyin', or get busy livin'....That's damn right', he says decisively. The camera travels upwards and settles on some graffiti carved into the wooden beam in the ceiling — 'Brooks was here', it reads, and next to it, 'so was Red'. Red won't fail at freedom like Brooks did, is the implication, and as the film closes, we see him join Andy on the postcard-perfect shores of a far-flung Mexican beach, by the pure blue of the Pacific Ocean. It is a deeply familiar cultural fantasy of the idealised 'flight to' — the stuff of dreams.

#### Fantasies of Escape in *Escape at Dannemora* (2018)

Rapping points to the steady proliferation of television dramas about the prison from the 1990s onwards.<sup>23</sup> Her focus is *Oz*, the hugely successful US television drama series set inside a fictional

maximum security prison, and Rapping suggests that the show contributed to a powerful cultural mythology that prison is a necessary storing-house for the unredeemable. Central to this, Youssman argues, is *Oz's* depiction of its inhabitants — particularly its African American inmates — as superpredators engaged in 'constant, bizarre, spectacular, and sadistic violence'.<sup>24</sup>

Looked at from this perspective, 1990s television series about prison seem to be doing much the same thing that prison movies of the same era do — that is, revive a retributive instinct and direct it in such a way as to entrench ideas about criminality and a carceral class. All the same, it's worth thinking about how television might be distinct in its effects as a medium. One thing that's important is the serial format of television programmes.<sup>25</sup> They're not unique in offering us stories in episodic form. Early novels tended to be serialised. Radio shows and podcasts, too, often have this feature.

22. Fiddler, M. (2007) 'Projecting the Prison: The depiction of the uncanny in *The Shawshank Redemption*', *Crime, Media Culture*, 3(2): 192-206.  
 23. Rapping, E. (2003) *Law and Justice as seen on TV*. New York: New York University Press. Chapter Three.  
 24. Youssman, B. (2009) 'Inside *Oz*: Hyperviolence, Race and Class Nightmares, and the Engrossing Spectacle of Terror', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 6(3): 265-84. 273  
 25. I'm indebted to Alex Clayton for this set of observations — see, for example, Clayton, A (2013) 'why Comedy is At Home on Television'. in: J Jacobs and S Peacock (eds) *Television Aesthetics and Style*. Bloomsbury Academic, New York & London. 79-92

Serialisation offers up certain narrative or dramatic possibilities, particularly when it comes to repetition, the routine and the everyday. Sometime this works to show us what's comforting, peculiar, or amusing about the familiar — sit-coms work in this way — and sometimes serialisation can show us that routines can be oppressive, that cycles repeat, and that particular behaviours are horribly predictable and unchanging. To take *Oz* as a case in point: each episode, the same character types act out on the same base instincts and with the same brutal outcomes. The effect is to make violence seem inevitable — and, by implication, so too the maximum security prison.

Serialisation can achieve other effects, of course. In *Escape at Dannemora*, a seven-part television series broadcast in 2018<sup>26</sup>, seriality instead works to depict prison-life as boringly repetitious and lacking in purpose. The story revolves around the relationship between prison sewing workshop supervisor Joyce 'Tilly' Walters (played by Patricia Arquette) and two inmates with whom Tilly is sexually (she thinks romantically) involved, convicted murderers David Sweat (played by Paul Dano) and Richard Matt (played by Benicio del Toro). Right from the start, we know things are going to end badly — that this is going to be in some measure a failed escape. The first episode opens with Tilly, cuffed and wearing prison uniform, being brought in for an interview with the Inspector General. Through this exchange we learn that there's been a prison-break, two men are on the loose and, it seems, Tilly is implicated. She asserts her innocence in all of this, but her petulance gives cause for wonder. She seems childish, naive and prone to self-delusion. As the story unfolds, it soon becomes clear that Tilly is a fantasist — that *Escape at Dannemora* more broadly, is centrally concerned with the fantasies of escape that emerge under conditions of social stasis.

We move from the present day back in time to watch Tilly travelling into work with her put-upon husband Lyle (played by Eric Lange). Like many of the locals, they work in the town's maximum security prison, Clinton Correctional Facility. There's something decidedly half-hearted about life at the prison. Guards buddy up with inmates. Staff bicker. Routines are followed, but not with much commitment. Tilly supervises the prison's sewing workshop. It's boring work — the same old routine, day in, day out — for

Tilly as well as the inmates. We watch them, too, trudge from 'home' to work (and this spatial association of prison with 'home' is reinforced by the vertical shots of the prison cells arranged like high-rise flats). Tilly barks out some orders and switches on the radio — she has a fondness for old-fashioned pop and rock — and all fall in with the familiar routine of the working day. When Tilly asks for inmate Sweat to join her in the storeroom, eyebrows raise. Everyone seems to know what's going on here. Furtive sex in the backroom is only part of it, though. Tilly imagines herself to be having a love affair with baby-faced Sweat — the sort of love affair that pop singers croon about. One moment she's petulantly scolding him, the next she's dotting on him and ragging about her inferior husband. When Sweat is moved out of the sewing workshop, his

mate Matt steps in to take his place as Tilly's favourite. He's more long in the tooth than Sweat — and more menacing and plainly manipulative, too. He easily co-opts Tilly to help him and Sweat escape so that the three of them can disappear to Mexico and set up home together.

It's the same 'flight to' fantasy that Andy dreams of in *The Shawshank Redemption* — the ocean-side get-away, and a new life without material constraint. In *Escape at Dannemora*, though, these escape-fantasies are quickly

punctured by reality. Like Andy, Sweat and Matt's moment of freedom, when it eventually comes, involves scrambling through a pipe into the outside world. Andy emerges from the sewer on the far side of Shawshank's walls to stand triumphantly, arms outstretched to the sheeting rain. Sweat and Matt instead emerge unspectacularly from a manhole into a quiet street in Dannemora. They've been stood up by Tilly — the plan was for her to be the get-away driver — and almost immediately panic sets-in. They roam around aimlessly, bickering quietly about where to go. As the final episode unfolds, it's clear that neither has the skills needed for escape, or indeed, life beyond the prison. Matt quickly unravels, starts drinking excessively, and is eventually gunned down and killed. Sweat, younger and fitter, more ready to try, makes it as far as the Canadian border before being shot and recaptured.

The problem is that Sweat and Matt haven't thought too seriously about what lies on the 'other side' of escape. Life on the run is exhausting, squalid,

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26. Stiller, D. (dir.) (2018) *Escape at Dannemora*. USA: Michael de Luca Productions and Red Hour Productions.

and dangerous. Matt ends up holed-up in an abandoned caravan-trailer. It's a decidedly unfree life of freedom. In other ways besides, *Escape at Dannemora* wants to draw a connection between life on the outside and life inside the prison, and in such a way as to suggest that there's something fundamentally inescapable about life in Dannemora (this is, after all, *Escape at Dannemora*, rather than *Escape from Dannemora*). Tilly is stuck in here. No amount of daydreaming can change that. The whole town — economically dependent on the local prison — feels like it's stuck in a rut or, at least, in an odd symbiotic relationship with the prison and its inmates.

In other ways besides, *Escape at Dannemora* suggests that the heart of the problem lies in late capitalism. Take, for example, the scenes set in the prison sewing workshop, where inmate labour is used to mass-produce clothes. It's monotonous work, driven by strict deadlines to meet orders rather than any strategy to rehabilitate. It says as much about the nature of work in post-industrial societies characterised by a decline in meaningful employment, as it does about the failure of the prison. Or, at least, we're urged to see the latter as inextricably linked to the former.

Take, too, the series' persistent suggestion that popular culture peddles sentiment — clichéd, over-done, unoriginal, incoherent, and devoid of any real meaning. Escapist pop music — so beloved of Tilly — is a case in point, and so too are Matt's paintings. Like Doc in *Escape from Alcatraz*, Matt seems to find some solace in painting. Unlike Doc, Matt finds a way to trade on his creative talents, and these art-works — made for transaction, rather than pleasure — are exact copies of photographs of people and pets (ordered through a prison guard in return for privileges and favours). It's painstaking work, but totally inexpressive, and the finished goods have a mawkish, uncanny quality (they are, after all, copies of a copy of real-life).

It's tempting to conclude from all this that there's a fundamental fakeness to life at Dannemora, despite — or maybe it should be 'because of' — the soundtrack's persistent suggestions about finding 'real' love, Matt's attempts to faithfully replicate, and the characters' desire to escape the prison for a better life. On closer inspection, the deeper problem is the impossibility of progress, or simply moving on. To copy a photograph,

follow the same old sewing pattern, recite the words of a pop song, rehearse dreams of escape — all, crucially, practices promoted by late capitalism — is to rehash. The long-term economic stagnation of Dannemora and the institutional inertia that besets the prison contribute, too, to a troubling sense of stasis. *Escape at Dannemora* wants to suggest that all of this is interconnected. If, here, the prison is a failed institution, and if Matt, Sweat and Tilly are deluded by fantasies of escape, that's largely because they are products of a culture that has become denuded of purpose and meaning.

## Conclusion

It has always been the case that freedom has to be earned in the prison escape story. That is as true of *The Big House* in 1930 as it is of *Escape at Dannemora* in 2018. There is, across all of these cultural treatments, a persistent suggestion that some people, by virtue of outlook, personality, and attributes, have a stronger claim to freedom than others. There are deep cultural structures at work here. It is, for example, no accident that escapees are almost always white men. There are also more historically-specific patterns evident in prison escape stories. Above, I described the prison escape stories explored in this article as way-markers in the cultural representation of the

prison and incarceration. It might be more productive to think of them not as distinct cultural 'moments', but rather as indicative of different strands of culturally-dominant thinking about incarceration in the late twentieth, early twenty first century.

Take, for example, the idea that Frank in *Escape from Alcatraz* is 'born to be free'. This owes much to the cultural motif of the indefatigable, freedom-loving 'good guy' and a historically-specific conception that individual autonomy is a good in and of itself. It's a distinctly modern idea, and it achieves particular cultural purchase in the mid-twentieth to early twenty-first century, finding expression in such varied cultural forms as the Hollywood Western and the Action Film genre. In many 'flight from' prison escape stories of the post-1970s period too, the implicit idea is that external, institutional constraints place too great a burden on certain forms of privileged masculinity and, in turn, that those who belong in this category have a natural and irrefutable desire for freedom.

There is, across all of these cultural treatments, a persistent suggestion that some people, by virtue of outlook, personality, and attributes, have a stronger claim to freedom than others

This is one culturally-dominant idea about prison escape — and, beyond that, about who we think prison is for — but it's by no means the only one. Andy, in *The Shawshank Redemption* is, too, a product of his time, and his escape-route points to other cultural currents at work in prison escape stories of the post-1970s period. This 'flight to' story is concerned with freedom as an internal, emotional state of mind. The implication here is that it is up to the individual to cultivate the right emotional disposition for freedom. People have to *really* want to be free and work tirelessly towards this end. It's a convenient idea in the era of mass incarceration, implying, as it does, that prisoners in some sense choose to be unfree.

In this way, and others besides, the film chimes with the distinct brand of penal populism that had by the mid-1990s become a key feature of political debate. If, as others have pointed out, penal populism is characteristically emotive and punitive in tone and calls for more visceral, spectacular forms of justice, fantastical stories of personal redemption are surely its corollary. Both rely upon a manichean worldview, where (very) good people are perceived to be under attack by (very) bad people. When it comes to cultural treatments of the prison, the effect is to confirm that prison simply isn't for some people — men like Andy, in *The Shawshank Redemption*. It's for *other* men (and, like many other post-1990s prison movies, we get plenty of indications of what these 'other' men are like in *The Shawshank Redemption* — they're

members of the deeply violent carceral class, depicted as the prison-horde).

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, popular treatments of the prison reflect a situation where high-security mass incarceration has come to seem like a normal, self-evident criminal justice response to crime. So it is that the super-maximum security prison is presented as a highly unusual carceral arrangement in *Escape from Alcatraz*, appears unremarkable in *The Shawshank Redemption*, and in *Escape at Dannemora* seems like a matter of tired routine. In this 2018 television series the prison is akin to a residential complex — vast and somehow, too, a 'way of life'. *Escape at Dannemora* provides a critical perspective on this. In focussing on the symbiotic — and deeply toxic — relationship between the prison and local town, the series wants to suggest that the prison is part of a broader political economy that hinders social mobility and meaningful change. The fantasies of escape that grow up in this context are variously distracting and self-destructive, and they are part of the problem in *Escape at Dannemora*. No one gets to be free here, and the institutional inertia of the prison — far from being an exceptional response to a specific problem of crime — is taken here to be an epiphenomenon, linked to a broader problem of economic stagnation and cultural stasis. It asks of us a critical question — and it's the one I want to end on: why do we spend so much time imagining the condition of freedom and so little time scrutinising its material reality?

# 'The learning happens in the interaction': exploring the 'magic' of the interpersonal in Learning Together

*Drs. Ruth Armstrong<sup>1</sup> and Amy Ludlow are Senior Research Associates in Criminology at the University of Cambridge, Dr. Ingrid Obsuth is a Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at University of Edinburgh and, at time of writing Dr. Simon Larmour was a Research Associate in Criminology at the University of Cambridge.*

**'I think it [Learning Together] gives you the tools to do it if you want to do something, and it gives you the words to use when you try to understand how you're feeling. I think what makes me want to act is not the learning as much as the interaction. The learning happens in the interaction.'** (Elinor, Learning Together university-based student)

**'While a traumatic past may increase our risk of bad things happening [in the future], we are not destined to crash and burn. Adversity doesn't mean that we're destroyed. [...] [Research] tells us that we can rescue one another. It is in our relationships with one another that we can all find healing and a better path forward.'** (Vivek Murthy, *Together*)<sup>2</sup>

Prisons and universities are public institutions seeking to support individual learning and change for broader social good. This article explores qualitative and quantitative data collected in the first two phases of a five-year evaluation of Learning Together at the University of Cambridge, describing one of the key findings from that research, namely that the transformative potential of Learning Together resides in the magic of interpersonal. Building from existing literature, and drawing on data from the first phase of the evaluation (2014-16), we explain the development of measures employed in the second phase of the evaluation (2017-19). These measures were designed to capture the changes students described as they learned together: changes in perspective-taking, self-esteem, self-efficacy and interpersonal-efficacy. Our findings show the central role of interpersonal-efficacy in predicting increases in self-efficacy, and how increasing perspective-taking and self-esteem can enhance the magic of the interpersonal. We argue that increasing self-efficacy should be an important goal for prisons and universities to enable students to reach

their potential. We conclude by considering what these findings might mean for the work of these important social institutions.

Learning Together builds communities of learning in which students who are currently under criminal justice supervision, often resident in prisons, and students who are currently resident in universities study higher education courses together. The practices and pedagogy of Learning Together are grounded in research about positive transformations through learning, including the role of education in supporting movements away from crime (desistance).<sup>3</sup> Learning Together has been evaluated from its outset, striving to understand not just 'what' happens as we learn, but how it happens, and the long term significance of these happenings.

We begin by describing the intellectual and pragmatic background of Learning Together, sharing the story of how qualitative learning from the first phase of our evaluation led to a theoretical and methodological 'undoing' and the development of new, broadened research instruments in the second

1. Corresponding author: Ruth Armstrong, ra299@cam.ac.uk. We are grateful to the many people and organisations that have supported Learning Together, especially the University of Cambridge, the British Academy, our anonymous philanthropic donor, Schroder Foundation, Cairns Trust, HEFCE, Rank Foundation, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, Bromley Trust, Simon Davies and the Fishmongers Charitable Trust. The research underpinning this paper was funded by the British Academy (grant RG79627) with ethical clearance from the National Research Committee (NRC2015-130, NRC2016-355 and NRC2018-142) and the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge. This article has been made possible thanks to our brilliant students who have engaged wholeheartedly in our evaluation, and to a hard-working and passionate team of people, including especially members of the Learning Together team beyond the authors above during the period of this study – Julia Arnade-Colwill, Claire Bonner, Elizabeth Champion, Gareth Evans, Jenny Fogarty, Lisa Ghiggini, Jack Merritt, Victoria Pereyra-Iraola and Izzie Rowbotham – and all of our colleagues in the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford who contributed to making the Learning Together courses on which this study is based so excellent for our students. We are also very grateful to Professor Stephen Farrall for his encouragement of our work and his care and insight in reviewing an earlier draft of this paper and providing very helpful comments. Finally, we acknowledge with gratitude all of our colleagues and students in the Learning Together Network. We are proud to be part of this vibrant and courageous community.
2. Murthy, V. (2020) *Together*, Profile Books: London, p 177.
3. Armstrong, R. and Ludlow, A. (2016) 'Educational partnerships between universities and prisons: how Learning Together can be individually, socially and institutionally transformative', *Prison Service Journal*, 225: 9-17.

phase of research, which included quantitative measurement. We continue by describing the methods of data collection and analysis underpinning this paper<sup>4</sup>. A description of our findings follow, and in the final section of the paper we conclude by discussing how these findings might advance understandings of the role and significance of interpersonal relationships, we argue, as does Murthy does in the quote introducing this article, that the interpersonal elements of learning may be key to individuals forging 'a better path forwards'. In closing, we reflect on some of the structures, policies and practices that might enable or frustrate the unleashing of the 'magic' of the interpersonal through education in our prisons and universities.

### **Learning Together: pragmatic and intellectual foundations**

Learning Together was founded at the University of Cambridge in 2014 with a master's level introductory course in criminology convened by the first two authors of this paper, together with Dr Rebecca Docherty, an educational psychologist.<sup>5</sup> It was delivered in partnership with HMP Grendon, with the enthusiastic participation of many colleagues from the Cambridge Institute of Criminology. Since then, Learning Together has grown substantially at Cambridge. By 2019/20, Cambridge had partnered with three prisons (of varying size, function and performance), providing a syllabus of learning opportunities across a wide range of disciplines, including creative writing, criminology, law,

literary criticism, maths, philosophy and ethics, theology and sociology. Beyond Cambridge, Learning Together has grown to become a national and international network of partnerships — the Learning Together Network — comprised of over 50 higher education and criminal justice institutions, working together towards a common vision, mission and values statement and toolkit of shared practices.<sup>6</sup>

The roots of Learning Together lie in intersecting pragmatic and intellectual interests. Pragmatically, our work is animated by interest in the potential of experiential, participatory and critical learning communities, that cross 'borders', with a view to widening participation within our higher education institutions.<sup>7</sup> Also central to our work, is an effort to broaden the nature of existing educational provision within prisons beyond functional skills and distance learning, to include higher education and learning with others, and to broaden learning within universities beyond depoliticised and disembodied 'ivory tower' experiences (recognising that some universities, and some prisons, are better at this than others).<sup>8</sup> We have written elsewhere about the wealth of existing evidence that describes the promises of higher education for personal and social development, noting however that prisons and universities can sometimes be both exclusive and excluding in their approaches to

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learners and learning, in ways that cause them to fall short of their ambitions. In thinking about how prisons and universities might better achieve their goals, we

4. Our participatory methods are explained in greater depth in Armstrong, R. and Ludlow, A. (2020) 'What's so good about participation? Politics, ethics and love in Learning Together', *Methodological Innovations*, May-Aug: 1-10.
5. See [www.psychologyfoundations.co.uk](http://www.psychologyfoundations.co.uk).
6. See further [www.learningtogethernetwork.co.uk](http://www.learningtogethernetwork.co.uk).
7. There is underrepresentation of certain groups at higher education levels, and also differing experiences and outcomes of higher education for those from underrepresented groups. On admissions see Jerrim, J. & Parker, P. (2015) 'Socioeconomic inequality in access to high-status colleges: A cross-country comparison' *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 4: 20-32; Office for Fair Access (2015) *OFFA Topic Briefing: BME Students*, London: OFFA. On experiences and outcomes see Stevenson, J. (2012) *Black and Minority Ethnic Student Degree Retention and Attainment*, London: The Higher Education Academy; Social Mobility Advisory Group (2016) *Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education*, London: Universities UK; and Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Sanders, J., Jones, S., & Higham, L. (2015). *Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes*, London: Higher Education Funding Council for England.
8. For example, the contested Teaching Excellence Framework implemented by the Department for Education assesses teaching provision in universities, and includes the ability to engage and support students from diverse backgrounds to achieve their aspirations in this assessment, illustrating different levels of provision: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/tef-outcomes/#/tefoutcomes/>. In prisons, while the Coates Review highlighted a dearth of higher education provision across the estate, the report acknowledged exceptions and variation in provision, see Coates, S. (2016) *Unlocking Potential: A Review of Education in Prison*, London: Ministry of Justice.

position them as uncomfortable, but productive, collaborators — institutions that could increase their positive impact by working more closely together.<sup>9</sup>

Intellectually, Learning Together has been catalysed by theoretical intersections between processes of 'going straight' following conviction for a criminal offence (desistance) and processes of transformative learning. Literature on both processes emphasises the importance of agency in context and the development of skills and attitudes that enable autonomous decision-making.<sup>10</sup> Broader research explores how personhood and potential interact with social context to be mutually constituted,<sup>11</sup> and these same threads run through educational and criminological understandings of individual, institutional and broader social transformations.<sup>12</sup> In education literature, research on the interactions between individual agency and complex social environments has been identified as one of the most important developments over the recent decades,<sup>13</sup> exploring both pragmatic<sup>14</sup> and socio-political<sup>15</sup> implications. In criminological literature, a different kind of learning — learning to live a crime free life — is similarly recognised as a psycho-social process

in which individuals construct their identities and seek to make meaning within social contexts.<sup>16</sup> Desistance is described as a process that does not happen in a vacuum, but rather in 'community' — contexts in which people can begin to feel they have a 'stake in conformity'.<sup>17</sup> 'Transformation' can often sound, and be recounted, as a positive movement from down to up, worse to better, bad to good, excluded to included. But research shows that processes of change and growth, especially movements away from crime, are often fragile and painful.<sup>18</sup> While most people move away from offending over the life course, the process varies in length and in speed<sup>19</sup> and, as with transformative learning, desistance is more likely to be sustained with the benefit of others who can provide connections, possibilities and encouragement.<sup>20</sup>

Within this broad theoretical terrain, Learning Together is particularly interested in themes of difference, stigma and inclusivity — how the 'edges' of our learning communities, as reflected in our practices of inclusion, exclusion, and coming together, shape experiences and possibilities for individual and social development. We know, for example, that perceived or

9. Ludlow, A., Armstrong, R. and Bartels, L. (2019) 'Learning Together: localism, collaboration and reflexivity in the development of prison and university learning communities' *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, 6(1): 25-45.
10. See, for example in desistance literature, the foundational work of Maruna, S. (2001) *Making Good*, Washington, DC: APA Press, and more recent developments arguing for a more central role for agency and identity in desistance theory; Paternoster, R., Bachman, R., Bushway, S. et al. (2015) 'Human agency and explanations of criminal desistance: arguments for a rational choice theory' *Journal of Development of Life Course Criminology*, 1: 209-235; and in educational literature, see the foundational work of Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, and more recently, Stetsenko, A. (2019), 'Radical transformative agency: continuities and contrasts with relational agency and implications for education', *Frontiers in Education: Hypothesis and Theory*, doi:10.3389/educ.2019.00148.
11. See, for example, the work of Smith, C. (2010) *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K. and Paloniemi, P.H.S. (2013) 'What is agency?' *Educational Research Review* 10: 45-65.
12. See for example Dweck, C. (2007) *Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfil Your Potential*, New York City: Random House Publishing Group; Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Akers, R. (2001) 'Social Learning Theory' in Paternoster, R. and Bachman, R. (eds) *Explaining Criminals and Crime: Essays in Contemporary Criminological Theory*, Los Angeles: Roxbury, pp.192-210.
13. Sawyer, K. (2007) 'Introduction: the new science of learning,' in K. Sawyer (ed) *The Cambridge Handbook of the Learning Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.1-18.
14. Sannino, A., Engestrom, Y., and Lemos, M. (2016) 'Formative interventions for expansive learning and transformative agency' *Journal of Learning Science* 25: 599-633.
15. See Stetsenko, n.10.
16. For a case study exploration of this theme in men's narratives see Gadd, D. and Farrall, S. (2004), 'Criminal careers, desistance and subjectivity: interpreting men's narratives of change' *Theoretical Criminology* 8(2): 123-156. For exploration of women's narratives of desistance see Wright, S. (2017) 'Narratives of punishment and desistance among repeatedly criminalised women' in Hart, E. and Van Ginneken, E. (eds) *New Perspectives on Desistance: Theoretical and Empirical Developments*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.
17. Historically this term comes from the work of Toby, J. (1957) 'Social disorganization and stake in conformity: complementary factors in the predatory behaviour of hoodlums' *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 48(1): 12-17. The role of 'community' and a 'stake in conformity' in the desistance process runs through more recent scholarship with different language and emphasis, including Sampson, R. and J. Laub (1990) 'Crime and desistance over the life course: the salience of adult social bonds' *American Sociological Review* 55(5); Farrall, S. and Calverley, A. (2006) *Understanding Desistance from Crime*, London: Open University Press; and Weaver, B. (2015) *Offending and Desistance: The importance of Social Relations*, London: Routledge.
18. Halsey, M., Armstrong, R. and Wright, S. (2017) 'F\*ck It!': Matza and the mood of fatalism in the desistance process' *The British Journal of Criminology* 57(5): 1041-1060; Nugent, B., & Schinkel, M. (2016) 'The pains of desistance' *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 16(5): 568-584.
19. Walters, G. (2017) *Modelling the Criminal Lifestyle: Theorising at the edge of Chaos*, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, especially at p.235.
20. For evidence from criminological research see Giordano, P.C., Cernkovich, S.A. and Rudolph, J.A. (2002) 'Gender, crime, and desistance: toward a theory of cognitive transformation' *American Journal of Sociology* 107(4): 990-1064; Farrall, S. (2005) 'On the existential aspects of desistance from crime' *Symbolic interaction* 28(3): 367-386; Maruna, S. and Farrall, S. (2004) 'Desistance from crime: a theoretical reformulation', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 43: 171-94, and in education literature see especially Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Sawyer, K. (2007), *The Cambridge Handbook of the Learning Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

experienced prejudice or stigma among people who leave prison can frustrate movements away from crime<sup>21</sup> and students' hopes of completing a degree at university.<sup>22</sup> But we know, too, that bringing people together across differences and under the right conditions, which enable 'meaningful encounters',<sup>23</sup> can reduce perceived or experienced prejudice or stigma<sup>24</sup> and can also improve learning.<sup>25</sup>

From its inception, then, Learning Together has been conceived as an action research initiative<sup>26</sup> — an attempt to put key existing theoretical and empirical knowledge into practice in the hope of contributing pragmatically to improved educational experiences in higher education and criminal justice institutions, while contributing intellectually, through the evaluation of our action, to enrich underpinning knowledge. Delivering on these hopes has been challenging. Bringing together individuals and institutions aiming for some similar things, but unaccustomed to working together to achieve them, requires creativity and persistence. Learning Together has opened us up to previously unknown heights of joy and hope as well as deepest depths of frustration and despair, the latter manifesting most devastatingly in the tragedy of 29 November 2019 at a Learning Together alumni event, in which a former student attacked and killed fellow Learning Together community members Saskia

Jones and Jack Merritt, and injured many others. It feels impossible to put into words the grief and trauma felt across our community, particularly for the loss of Jack and Saskia, two extraordinary, determined and treasured people. Through this event, we have felt ever more keenly the pains of crime — the actions of people who are part of our community but hurt and deeply

damage others who are also in that community. Social and criminal injustice hurt, deeply. We are determined to continue to play our part in striving for better. We hope the findings described below will contribute to this by enriching the development of the kinds of education that help out prisons and universities deliver on their missions.

## Theoretical and methodological development

### Phase 1 — beginnings

The first Learning Together class was held in January 2015, in B wing's community room at HMP Grendon. Over six weeks, 10 MPhil students from the Cambridge Institute of Criminology studied alongside 11 students from HMP Grendon, exploring topics that included legitimacy and desistance theory, social justice and imprisonment and processes of getting into and out of prison. Students prepared by reading and thinking about weekly readings and study sheets. They listened to a short lecture from a leading academic and broke off into small, facilitated discussion groups made up of students from the prison and university. To complete the course, students submitted a 1500 word essay.<sup>27</sup>

Evaluation of Learning Together began with this first course.<sup>28</sup> All students were given the option to participate in the evaluation; everyone chose to do so. Evaluation was framed fairly narrowly theoretically and methodologically. While we always aimed to include all students equally in the evaluation, our understanding of change had a strong criminological focus, especially in relation to outcomes. Our working hypothesis was

It feels impossible to put into words the grief and trauma felt across our community, particularly for the loss of Jack and Saskia, two extraordinary, determined and treasured people.

21. LeBel, T., Burnett, R., Maruna, S., & Bushway, S. (2008) 'The "chicken and egg" of subjective and social factors in desistance from crime' *European Journal of Criminology* 5: 130-158.
22. See for example Quinn, J. (2004) 'Understanding working-class 'drop-out' from higher education through a sociocultural lens: cultural narratives and local contexts' *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 14(1): 57-74 and Benuto, L.T. (2020) *Prejudice, Stigma, Privilege, and Oppression*, Switzerland: Springer.
23. Valentine, G. (2008) 'Living with difference: reflections on geographies of encounter' *Progress in Human Geography* 32(3): 323-337.
24. See, for example, Hirschfield, P. and Piquero, A. (2010) 'Normalization and legitimation: modelling stigmatising attitudes towards ex-offenders' *Criminology* 48(1): 27-55, and Pettigrew, T. F., and Tropp, L. R. (2006), 'A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90(5): 751-783.
25. Shaw, G. (2005) *Tertiary Teaching and learning: Dealing with Diversity*, Darwin: CDU Press.
26. For a critical and political perspective on action research see the work of Michelle Fine, especially Fine, M. (2016) 'Just methods in revolting times' *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 13(4): 347-365 and Fine, M., & Torre, M.E. (2019) 'Critical participatory action research: a feminist project for validity and solidarity' *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 43(4): 433-444.
27. Results from the pilot study are reported in our earlier publication, see n. 3 above.
28. Funded by the British Academy, grant Pf150089.

that bringing students from university and prison to learn together would increase social bonds, develop civic virtues, and reduce perceptions of stigma and social distance and we expected the presence of these factors to increase the likelihood of desistance from crime. Methodologically, we conceived of our work as mixed methods. We adapted and piloted narrowly desistance and intergroup contact focused scales<sup>29</sup> to capture change as a result of participating in Learning Together and students completed these before and after the course, alongside in depth post-course interviews.

### Learning from phase 1 — ‘undoing’

In the first phase of evaluation, students described how Learning Together had led to positive changes in ‘being, belonging and becoming’ — they reported positive developments in their self-identities, perceived connectedness with others, and their ideas and aspirations about their futures. Learning Together gave students an ‘expanded sense of belonging’, ‘reshap[ing] their understandings of self and open[ing] up new routes of personal growth and a sense of becoming with newly broadened horizons’.<sup>30</sup> In many cases, the experience of Learning Together also prompted the revision of existing ideas about similarity and difference between people both in the classroom, and beyond. New ‘improbable friendships’ emerged between students who started to think they may have previously over-stated their differences and under-stated their similarities. But students rarely talked about moving away from crime — whether based in the prison or the university (brushes with the law were not unique to prison-based students). We found that the fuller nature of the growth that students described was not captured by our narrowly theoretically informed quantitative

measures. Beyond irrelevance, students told us that our questions, (and the criminological frame of reference they imported) felt stigmatising, and that our methods were out of step with our co-produced approach to teaching and learning. Our students felt included and enlivened in the classroom, but somewhat ignored and objectified in our research. We listened.<sup>31</sup>

### Transitioning to phase 2 — broadening and reforming

Throughout our 2016 course at HMP Grendon,<sup>32</sup> we built on this feedback alongside analysis of first year data, broadening our theoretical framework and redesigning our methods to take a more participatory, inductive and creative approach.<sup>33</sup> While leading us down rabbit holes sometimes, our more inductive and open approaches began to help us to see new things, which led us to new, broader literatures, particularly from education, human geography and sociology.<sup>34</sup>

Working with our students and broadening our frames of reference led us to identify four recurrent themes in students’ descriptions of their growth through Learning Together: (i) students’ abilities to make friends, relate to others and seek support from them; (ii) students’ abilities to consider others’ points of view; (iii) students’ sense of self-worth; and (iv) students’ self-confidence in their ability to achieve the things they set out to do. We wanted to understand more. Our students had started to tell us ‘what’ was going on for them. We wanted to develop measures that would enable us to explore how different aspects of growth interacted. Eventually, through longitudinal research, we hoped to explore changes over time and the role they play in long-term outcomes, including through interaction with different social contexts.<sup>35</sup>

29. Drawing particularly on Bottoms, A. and Shapland, J. (2011), ‘Steps towards desistance among male young adult recidivists’ in Farrall, S., Hough, M., Maruna, S., et al. (eds) *Escape Routes: Contemporary Perspectives on Life After Punishment*, London: Routledge, pp.43–80; Farrall, S., Bottoms, A. and Shapland, J. (2010) ‘Social structures and desistance from crime’ *European Journal of Criminology* 7(6): 546-570; Farrall, S., Hunter, B., Sharp, G. and Calverley, A. (2014) *Criminal Careers in Transition: The Social Context of Desistance from Crime*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; LeBel et al in n.21; and Hirschfield, P. and Piquero, A. (2010) ‘Normalization and legitimation: modelling stigmatising attitudes towards ex-offenders’ *Criminology* 48(1): 27-55.

30. Armstrong and Ludlow in n.3 at p.14.

31. Described in greater detail in Armstrong and Ludlow, n.4, above.

32. HMP Grendon is a therapeutic community (TC) prison. While many prisons in England and Wales now have TCs or PIPEs (psychologically informed prison environments), HMP Grendon is the only prison to operate wholly as a TC. When we began this work people often said to us it was only possible because we were working in a TC. We can see aspects of the work that were influenced by this environment. However, our experience as we have grown the Learning Together Network across the prison estate has been that the TC elements of HMP Grendon have some benefits and drawbacks. At the end of the paper we acknowledge that the data from prison-based students in this paper is taken from three very different prisons, and that until we have greater numbers in our quantitative data set we cannot explore the data by prison/university.

33. As above, see n.4.

34. See especially by Sennett, R. (2012) *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Weare, K. (2000) *Promoting Mental, Emotional and Social Health: a Whole School Approach*, London and New York: Routledge; and Valentine, G. (2008) ‘Living with difference: Reflections on geographies of encounter’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(3), 323-337.

35. The longitudinal research is now underway, funded by the Cambridge Humanities Research Grant Scheme with two phases of data collection complete and a forthcoming paper in draft looking at interactions between students’ experiences of social cohesion and their self-assessments of individual change over time through repeat administration of the measures underpinning the data in this paper.

## Phase 2 — broadened frameworks for action and sense-making

As we moved towards broader measures and frames of reference, we found that the things students highlighted as important in their learning were well recognised in existing literatures. The four themes listed above mapped onto four well-established constructs — interpersonal-efficacy, perspective-taking, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Education research establishes that a sense of self-efficacy, or an individual's belief in their own agency and ability to achieve specific goals, predicts an individual's motivation to learn,<sup>36</sup> their ability to set and achieve academic goals,<sup>37</sup> cope with stress,<sup>38</sup> and pursue prosocial goals.<sup>39</sup> However, self-efficacy doesn't increase in a vacuum. At an individual level, a positive relationship between self-esteem (self-worth) and self-efficacy is well established.<sup>40</sup> When investigating the link between self-esteem and self-efficacy in relation to educational performance, Di Giunta and colleagues confirmed that self-esteem predicted self-efficacy beliefs and this influenced academic performance in young adults.<sup>41</sup> If an individual has a positive image of themselves, or feels confident about themselves, it will be easier for them to believe in their abilities and to set and achieve their goals. Looking more broadly at the relationship between individuals, research suggests a positive and direct relationship between a person's

ability to understand others' perspective and their self-efficacy.<sup>42</sup> Many studies suggest that interpersonal skills,<sup>43</sup> high or positive self-esteem,<sup>44</sup> and the ability to consider other's perspectives,<sup>45</sup> are all related to increased self-efficacy. Beyond the individual and interpersonal, recent sociological understandings of transformative learning situate agency (for our purposes, akin to self-efficacy) as a reciprocal part of social contexts within and beyond the classroom. As Stetsenko argues, 'human beings cannot be considered as existing separately and autonomously not only from other people but also from reality.'<sup>46</sup> This argument is supported by research which shows how broader learning environments can play a mutually reciprocal role, shaping and being shaped by self-efficacy.<sup>47</sup>

Criminological research about movements away from crime (desistance) is not dissimilar — it also shows that self-efficacy plays as an important role in positive transformations. In early work on desistance Maruna compared people convicted of offences who persist in offending with those who desist, and found that desisters needed what he called a 'tragic optimism' in order to forge crime free lives in social circumstances that made this extraordinarily difficult.<sup>48</sup> Self-efficacy is understood as an element of agency,<sup>49</sup> related to choices made on a range of alternatives in different social circumstances in the aim of securing a desired outcome.<sup>50</sup> But, as Stetsenko argues in relation to

36. See Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: W. H. Freeman) and Zimmerman, B. J. (2000) 'Self-efficacy: an essential motive to learn' *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25(1): 82-91.
37. Weiser, D. A., & Riggio, H. R. (2010) 'Family background and academic achievement: does self-efficacy mediate outcomes?' *Social Psychology of Education* 13(3): 367-383.
38. Kalkan, M., Odaci, H., & Koç, H. E. (2011) 'Self-efficacy, coping with stress and goal-orientation in nurse managers' *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences* 6(3): 118-125.
39. Carlo, G., Basilio, C. D., & Knight, G. P. (2016) 'The associations of biculturalism to prosocial tendencies and positive self-evaluations' *Journal of Latina/o Psychology* 4(4): 189-201, which found that positive self-evaluations (increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy) mediates pro-social tendencies.
40. Kohn, A. (1994) 'The truth about self-esteem' *Phi Delta Kappan* 76: 272-283.
41. Di Giunta, L., Alessandri, G., Gerbino, M. Luengo Karacri, P., Zuffiano, A. and Vittorio Caprara, G. (2013) 'The determinants of scholastic achievement: the contribution of personality traits, self-esteem, and academic self-efficacy' *Learning and Individual Differences* 27: 102-108.
42. See, for example, Pérez-Fuentes M.D.C., Molero Jurado M.D.M., Del Pino R.M., Gázquez Linares J.J. (2019) 'Emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and empathy as predictors of overall self-esteem in nursing by years of experience' *Frontiers in Psychology* 10: 2035.
43. Bumann, M., & Younkin, S. (2012) 'Applying self-efficacy theory to increase interpersonal effectiveness in teamwork' *Journal of Invitational Theory & Practice* 18: 11-18.
44. Di Giunta, et al, n.41.
45. Pérez-Fuentes et al, n. 42.
46. See Stetsenko, n.10.
47. Schunk, D. H. (2012) *Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective*, Cambridge: Pearson Publishing, sixth edition. Pearson and Schunk, D. H., & Dibeneditto, M. K. (2016) 'Self-efficacy theory in education' *Handbook of Motivation at School 2*: 34-54.
48. Maruna, n.10. Many other authors have confirmed and developed these findings on the role of agency in desistance, including, Laub, J.H. and R.J. Sampson (2001) 'Understanding desistance from crime', in M. Tonry (ed) *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research*, 26: 1-69, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago; Bottoms, A., Shapland, J., and Costello, A., Holmes, D. and Muir, G. (2004) 'Towards desistance: theoretical underpinnings for an empirical study' *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 43(4): 368-389; Sampson, R. and Laub, J. (2005) 'A life-course view of the development of crime' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 602: 12-45; Vaughan, B. (2007) 'The internal narrative of desistance' *The British Journal of Criminology* 47: 390-404; Weaver, B. and McNeill, F. (2010) 'Travelling hopefully: desistance research and probation practice' in: J. Brayford, F. Cowe and J. Deering (eds) *What Else Works?: Creative Work with Offenders*, Cullompton: Willan, pp. 36-60; and Lloyd, C. D., and Serin, R. C. (2012) 'Agency and outcome expectancies for crime desistance: measuring offenders' personal beliefs about change' *Psychology, Crime & Law* 18(6): 543-565.
49. Bandura, A. (1989) 'Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy' *Developmental Psychology* 25(5): 729-740.
50. See Wikström, P.O., and Treiber, K. (2007) 'The role of self-control in crime causation: beyond Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime' *European Journal of Criminology* 4(2): 37-264 and (2009) 'Violence as situational action' *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 3(1): 75-96.

education, criminological scholarship also acknowledges that agency doesn't exist in a vacuum. The reciprocal roles of agency and social structure (circumstances and networks) have been long recognised in literature on desistance.<sup>51</sup> Building from this in a recent paper, Johnston et al<sup>52</sup> found that self-efficacy — defined here as a person's confidence in their ability to desist — was related to reduced re-offending. This research also considered several factors expected to enable or constrain self-efficacy: perceived opportunities, self-control and resistance to peer influence were associated with increases in a person's self-efficacy to desist, while delinquent peer association and substance use dependency were associated with decreases in desistance self-efficacy. Significantly, for the purposes of this paper, Johnson and colleagues' research specifically examined the role of social ties on desistance self-efficacy, which they measured in terms of participation in employment,<sup>53</sup> post-secondary education<sup>54</sup> and unstructured socialising.<sup>55</sup> Surprisingly, in light of the body of research linking both education and employment to reduced reoffending,<sup>56</sup> their research found that the education and employment aspects did not mediate the effect of desistance self-efficacy through exerting significant effects on offending.<sup>57</sup> The authors acknowledge it is quite possible their measures of employment and education are poor measures of social ties because they fail to measure the quality of these relationships or the degree of commitment to them. Their study highlights that the role of self-efficacy is well established in relation to the kinds of outcomes our criminal justice institutions care about, and is mediated by environmental and relational contexts, and argues that further research is needed into the relationship between self-efficacy and social ties that may support or undermine its operation.<sup>58</sup>

Building from this existing research, and with qualitative data from the first two years of Learning Together courses at HMP Grendon, we worked with our students to adapt existing measures of the four identified constructs — interpersonal-efficacy, perspective-taking, self-esteem and self-efficacy.<sup>59</sup> In order to quantitatively assess the individual and interpersonal changes students had described in phase one. Based on the findings reported in previous literature and findings from phase one evaluation, we hypothesised that data from these measures would show:

- 1) significant self-reported increases for all students across all four measures — perspective-taking, self-esteem, interpersonal-efficacy and self-efficacy — following participation in a Learning Together course;
- 2) increases in perspective-taking predict increases in self-efficacy;
- 3) increases in self-esteem predict increases in self-efficacy;
- 4) increases in interpersonal-efficacy predict increases in self-efficacy, and;
  - a) greater increases in perspective-taking in combination with greater increases in interpersonal-efficacy are related to greater increases in self-efficacy;
  - b) greater increases in self-esteem in combination with greater increases in interpersonal-efficacy are related to greater increases in self-efficacy.

We were also interested to explore whether, and how, these changes and associations across the four measures varied depending upon whether students resided in prison or at university.

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51. See for example, Farrall, S. and Bowling, B. (1999) 'Structuration, human development and desistance from crime' *The British Journal of Criminology* 39(2): 253-268; Sampson, R. and Laub, J. (2005) 'A life-course view of the development of crime' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 602: 12-45; LeBel et al, n.21; Farrall, S., Bottoms, A. and Shapland, J. (2010) 'Social structures and desistance from crime' *European Journal of Criminology* 7(6): 546-570; Weaver, B., & McNeill, F. (2015). Lifelines: desistance, social relations, and reciprocity *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 42(1): 95-107; and Weaver, B. (2016) *Offending and Desistance: The importance of Social Relations*, Oxford: Routledge.
52. Johnston, T.M., Brezina, T. and Crank, B.R. (2019) 'Agency, self-efficacy, and desistance from crime: an application of social cognitive theory' *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology* 5: 60-85.
53. Measured by number of weeks employed.
54. Measured by enrolments in post-secondary education.
55. Measured by amount of time spent in unstructured activities with e.g. staying out late, going to parties.
56. For a review of the evidence on this see Ford, J.A. and Schroeder, R.D. (2010) 'Higher education and criminal offending over the life course' *Sociological Spectrum* 31: 32-58, and Nguyen, H., and Loughran, T.A. (2018) 'On the measurement and identification of turning points in criminology' *Annual Review of Criminology* 1: 20.1-20.24.
57. They did find that decreasing unstructured socialising increased desistance self-efficacy and was associated with decreases in offending. This confirms findings in other research, see for example Farrall, S., Hunter, B., Sharpe, G. and Calverley, A. (2014) *Criminal Careers in Transition: The Social Context of Desistance from Crime*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Segev, D. (2020) *Desistance and Societies in Comparative Perspective*, London: Routledge.
58. See, for example, Brezina, T. (2019) 'Freedom of action, freedom of choice, and desistance from crime: pitfalls and opportunities in the study of human agency' *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology* (published online 26 April 2019: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40865-019-00111-w>).
59. For exploration of participatory approaches to survey design see Parrado, E., McQuiston, C. and Flippen, C.A., 'Participatory survey research: integrating community collaboration and quantitative methods for the study of gender and HIV risks among hispanic migrants' *Sociological Methods and Research* 34(2): 204-239 and for different approaches to survey question adaptation with research participants through cognitive interviewing see Priede, C. and Farrall, S. (2011) 'Comparing results from different styles of cognitive interviewing: 'verbal probing' vs. 'thinking aloud' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 14(4): 271-287.

## Methods

### Participants

A total of 230 students completed a Learning Together course during phase two of our research (January 2017 to May 2019). Of those 230 students, 182 elected to complete questionnaires before they began their Learning Together course and 152 completed these questionnaires again following completion of their course. Overall, 132 of these students (57.4 per cent of the 230 students that completed a course and were eligible to participate) provided quantitative pre and post-course data. This data is included in the analysis below.

Our qualitative data set includes a total of 252 post-course qualitative interviews, 129 of which took place in phase two (97.7 per cent of the 132 students who completed pre-post measures also completed a post-course interview). The remaining 123 interviews were conducted in phase one of the study (academic years 2014-15 and 2015-16). All research participants

were invited to choose a first name by which they could not be identified for use in research publications.<sup>60</sup>

Courses took place in the context of Learning Together partnerships led by the University of Cambridge in partnership with HMPs Grendon, Whitemoor and Warren Hill. Table 1 displays the breakdown of students by course. At the time of participation 57 of the 132 total students in this data set were enrolled in degree courses at the University of Cambridge (42 females, 15 males, mean age 20.09)<sup>61</sup> and 75 were prison residents (all males, mean age = 26.30).<sup>62-63</sup> In the combined student sample, 14.4 per cent of all students self-identified as black<sup>64</sup> (n=19), 65.2 per cent as white (n=86), 11.4 per cent as Asian<sup>65</sup> (n=15), 5.3 per cent as mixed heritage (n=7) and 3.8 per cent as other (n=5).<sup>66</sup> As Table 1 also shows, the length of each course varied from 7 to 14 contact sessions (mean=10) with an 80 per cent attendance requirement.<sup>67</sup> The total completion rate across all courses was 90.4 per cent.<sup>68</sup>

**Table 1: Participant breakdown by Learning Together course**

Course	Total students enrolled (n)	Completion rate (per cent) evaluation (per cent)	Students completing pre and post	Number of sessions
Criminology 2016/17	23	23 (100.0)	23 (100.0)	10
Criminology 2017/18	23	20 (87.0)	19 (82.6)	10
English Literature 2016/17	21	19 (90.5)	11 (52.4)	10
Good life and Good Society 2016/17	26	26 (100.0)	11 (42.3)	10
Good life and Good Society 2017/18	20	19 (95.0)	12 (60.0)	10
Good life and Good Society 2018/19	21	19 (90.5)	18 (85.7)	10
Butler Law Course 2017/18	20	15 (75.0)	12 (60.0)	9
Butler Law Course 2018/19	26	22 (84.6)	6 (23.1)	10
French Film and Literature 2018/19	24	23 (95.8)	15 (62.5)	7
Law Justice and Society 2018/19	26	22 (84.6)	5 (19.2)	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>208 (90.4)</b>	<b>132 (57.4)</b>	<b>Mean=10 SD=1.61</b>

60. See Armstrong and Ludlow, n.4

61. University-based student participant mean age = 20.09, SD = 5.61. The university-based students were slightly older and included more females than the overall student population at the University of Cambridge, probably due to the overrepresentation of women within the particular subjects available as Learning Together courses, and the fact most Learning Together university-based students are second or third year undergraduates or post-graduates. For demographics of University of Cambridge students see <https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/13884>.

62. Learning Together prison-based student participant mean age = 26.30, SD = 9.28, slightly younger than the median age of the male prison population which is between 30-39. All of our prison-based students were male. Over 95% of the prison population in England and Wales is male, and even higher levels considering that all of our prison-based students were men serving sentences of four years and above. Prison population data is taken from House of Commons Briefing Paper, Number CBP-04334, 23 July 2019, UK Prison Population Statistics.

63. Independent samples t-tests comparing the scores of prison-based and university-based students revealed no significant differences on any of the assessed variables prior to Learning Together (at baseline).

64. This category includes black, African, Caribbean, black British.

65. This category includes Asian, Asian British.

66. Broken down by institutional affiliation, within the prison 22.7% of students self-identified as black (n=17), 54.7% as white (n=41), 10.7% as Asian (n=8), 8% as mixed heritage (n=6) and 4% as other (n=3); within the university 3.5% of students self-identified as black (n=2), 45% as white (n=78.9), 12.3% as Asian (n=7), 1.8% as mixed heritage (n=1) and 3.5% as other (n=2).

67. Contact session mean = 10, SD = 1.61. The number of contact sessions = induction + # taught sessions + end of course celebration.

68. Preliminary analyses suggested no significant differences on any of the measured pre and post-course variables between the students who were included in the analyses compared to those who were not included because they only completed pre- or post-measures.

## Data collection

As described above, an iterative mixed-methods approach was taken to evaluation, in which data from phase one informed the development of questionnaires that accompanied further qualitative data collection in phase two. All students taking part in Learning Together and electing to participate in the evaluation completed end of course interviews. The interview schedule was structured by way of 10 broad semi-structured questions, which focused on students' experiences of Learning Together (including high points and low points/challenges, learning environment and pedagogy), motivations for taking part, feelings about themselves and others, and plans for the future. Interviews were conducted by two researchers, often involving a course convenor and one of the research team talking with a student together. Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. With consent, interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymised using agreed pseudonyms, and inductively coded. Interviews took place in private, either on a prison wing or in a university office. Occasionally, two students elected to be interviewed together.

All students were also offered the opportunity to complete questionnaires to self-assess their attitudes to learning at the start and end of each course. Completed questionnaires belong to students and are available through Learning Together's digital learning platform. This gives students the opportunity to see what is being measured and how they have assessed themselves. On completing post-course measures, students can also see any changes in their self-assessments. At this stage, students can elect to keep their individual findings private, solely to support their own personal and learning development, or they can choose to submit them anonymously to the overall Learning Together evaluation. Students electing to submit their data to the research, and students

All students were also offered the opportunity to complete questionnaires to self-assess their attitudes to learning at the start and end of each course.

taking part in an interview, sign a form to indicate their informed consent and choose a name by which they cannot readily be associated and would like to be known in any publications. This can be their own first name or any other first name.

As introduced above, the questionnaire we developed with our students for use in phase two of this research includes measures of the four identified themes of perspective-taking, self-esteem, interpersonal-efficacy and self-efficacy. The questionnaire was developed by adapting validated measures used in previous research. Our measure of perspective-taking comprised three items ( $=.82$  and  $.72$ , pre and post, respectively) adapted from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index.<sup>69</sup> Self-esteem comprised four items ( $=.75$  and  $.64$ ) from the Rosenberg Self-

Esteem scale.<sup>70</sup> Our measures of self-efficacy and interpersonal-efficacy were adapted from a similar measure by Sherer, et al.<sup>71</sup> Following Bandura's recommendation that self-efficacy scales should be specifically tailored to the area of functioning being assessed,<sup>72</sup> we incorporated references to the learning context, using familiar language taken from phase one qualitative data and we re-phrased some of the items of the original scale from negative to positive. Our resulting measure of self-efficacy in a learning context comprises 13 items, such as 'I can

try doing a task even if it seems complicated at first glance' and 'I can face difficulties in learning' ( $=.94$  and  $.93$ ). Our measure of interpersonal-efficacy in a learning context comprises seven items, such as 'I can build relationships that help me to work with people who seem different to me' and 'I can share my ideas confidently with other people' ( $=.90$  and  $.91$ ). All items for each measure are rated on a 10-point scale from 0 ('cannot do at all') to 10 ('highly certain can do'). The internal consistency of all scales was high to acceptable based on Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's (as above) both at baseline (pre) and at the follow-up (post) assessment, suggesting reliability of the measured constructs.<sup>73</sup>

69. Davis, M. H. (1980) 'Interpersonal reactivity index (IRI). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy' *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology* 10: 85-95.
70. Rosenberg, M. (1965) 'Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSE): Acceptance and commitment therapy.' *Measures Package* 61(52): 18-29.
71. Sherer, M., Maddux, J. E., Mercandante, B., Prentice-Dunn, S., Jacobs, B., and Rogers, R. W. (1982) 'The self-efficacy scale: construction and validation' *Psychological Reports* 51(2): 663-671.
72. Bandura, A. (2006) 'Guide for constructing self-efficacy scales' in F. Pajares and T. Urdan (eds.), *Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents*, Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
73. Our study sample did not allow us to carry out a factor analysis. However, we are currently working on a validation paper of our study measures based on a much larger university sample. This will include a factor analysis to demonstrate the distinctiveness and consistency of each of the constructs.

## Data analysis

Analysis of qualitative data collected across both phases of the research (n=252) was conducted using Atlas-ti software. Following inductive analysis of phase one interviews (n=123), a coding framework was established. All phase one and phase two interviews were included in the analysis.

For quantitative analysis of the pre and post-course questionnaires preliminary and descriptive analyses, as well as paired samples t-tests (utilised to test changes between baseline and post course scores on all of the key study variables) were carried out in SPSS statistical analysis software.<sup>74</sup> Linear regression analyses were carried out to assess whether changes in perspective-taking, self-esteem and interpersonal-efficacy predict changes in self-efficacy. Calculation was carried out utilising G\* Power 3 software<sup>75</sup> to determine the required sample size.<sup>76</sup> Moderation analyses were carried out with the PROCESS macro for SPSS using the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates.<sup>77</sup> The 95 per cent confidence interval of the indirect effect was obtained with 5000 bootstrap resamples. All analyses were carried out on the change scores (post-course score — pre-course score) to explore how the changes in the studied variables following course participation related to each other. Analyses were also carried out with the post-course scores, while controlling for pre-course scores and these yielded similar findings.

## Findings

In this section we draw on the findings from our qualitative and quantitative analysis to explore each of our hypothesis in turn. Within each section we comment on any differences observed between prison and university-based students.

## Do students report significantly higher levels of perspective-taking, self-esteem, interpersonal-efficacy and self-efficacy following participation in a Learning Together course?

During post-course interviews themes of growth through changes in perspective-taking, self-esteem, self-efficacy and interpersonal-efficacy were common. Students told us they began to think and feel differently about things in general, about themselves, about what they wanted and thought they could achieve in life and about who they were connected with on this journey and why that mattered.

Comments on perspective-taking often related to ideas of similarity and difference between the two groups of students, and how Learning Together had challenged simplistic notions of similarity and difference. For example, when asked 'What do you think that you learned on the course?' Lewey, a prison-based student, responded:

*I learned that I used to think my situation was unique, and it's not that. Everyone's got — even though you come from different areas and different experiences, there's certain things that are shared.*

While Ben, a university-based student, identified the most important thing about the course for him as:

*[T]he coming together of people from different backgrounds, because if you do that, that's going to bring up differences between people and it's going to make you realise that actually a lot of those differences are flatter and smaller than you think. That said, there's no point pretending that everybody is on a completely level equal footing when some of us get in a coach and go home at the end of*

During post-course interviews themes of growth through changes in perspective, self-esteem, self-efficacy and interpersonal-efficacy were common.

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74. Difference scores were calculated and zero-order correlations utilised to assess the relations between the change scores; and whether changes in any of the variables are related to changes in the other variables. All the correlations were significant at  $p < .001$ , with the exception of one, which was  $p < .05$ .
75. Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A. G., and Buchner, A. (2007) 'G\* Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences' *Behavior Research Methods* 39(2): 175-191.
76. The calculation suggested that a single moderator model would require a minimum sample of 73 participants to detect small effects ( $f^2 = .15$ ) and 55 participants to detect medium effects ( $f^2 = .20$ ); both with a standard power level of .95, and alpha of .05. Thus, the sample sizes were sufficient to detect moderation effects on combined sample as well as separately for the sub-samples of university-based (n=57) and prison-based (n=75) students.
77. Hayes, A. F., & Rockwood, N. J. (2017) 'Regression-based statistical mediation and moderation analysis in clinical research: observations, recommendations, and implementation' *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 98: 39-57.

*the day and some of us are going to be in prison for another 30 years or whatever it might be. But what is special and what's good about the space for me comes primarily from compressing people who normally don't come into contact with one another and making them think about where the differences really are.*

Students explained how the Learning Together classroom presented opportunities for social and academic stretch, and how these opportunities appeared to relate to growth in other areas. Speaking about his experiences of giving a speech at the end of course celebration, Gareth, a prison-based student, explained how it boosted his self-esteem:

*[F]or a lot of my life, I had this, sort of, like, guilt complex, when I was little, and that manifested itself in sort of, like, self-esteem was basically nothing, you know, and I'd cover that up with sarcastic arrogance and stuff like that, just to try and keep people away [...] I actually felt really proud of myself up there [...] people were sharing the fact that actually I was, you know, standing up. I knew when I was writing [my speech], [I thought] as long as I can deliver this, I'll be alright. These people are really going to understand what I'm saying, and that's exactly the comments I got back. I was, like, you know, I told myself, this is what I want to do, and I did it. It was the most pure version of validation I think I could have from what I've done.*

Students from the university also talked about changes in their self-esteem, but in slightly different ways to the prison-based students. University students explained how the Learning Together class was distinct from their University of Cambridge experiences in its diversity (socio-economic, gender, ethnicity, educational history and other life experiences), as well as its pedagogy which prioritised personal engagement with academic content. Qualitative data for all students suggested a growing self-confidence, but whereas for prison-based students that self-confidence often related to realising they could 'hold their own' (and feel part) in a 'Cambridge' classroom, for university-based

students self-confidence often manifested in a realisation they were 'good enough' just as they were; that they had some skills and knowledge with real world currency, and didn't have to be perfect.

Elinor (a university-based student) described herself as struggling with perfectionism and saw her growth as coming to realise 'I'm OK' and 'it's OK that I'm not 'the best''. Claudia (a university-based student) discussed the social paralysis she often feels when interacting with people she doesn't know, but described how 'while I was getting to know people, the confidence was coming back,' as a result of which she said, 'I felt better' and found herself 'interacting more and being less self-conscious of whether 'am I doing this right or am I doing this wrong?'. Claudia specifically attributed this growth in self-confidence to the interactions she had in her small group within the Learning Together classroom:

*I felt that my group had grown around me, actually, and this is something that happened quite soon [early in the course] and it gave me a lot of confidence, and I feel that these bonds have grown more throughout the course.*

William describes something similar in relating his own growth in confidence to his experience of a different learning environment and a sense of his place, utility and purpose within the group:

*No one was very sort of 'humble' and they were all very willing to listen to each other. No one was intimidating or anything like that, so that was good, and there was no one desperately trying to prove themselves or anything like that. So maybe some of the negative things you'd get in the learning environment in Cambridge weren't there at Whitemoor. I think I became more confident, definitely, because — it was great to actually be sharing ideas with other people and talking about them and it actually working, people responding and registering what they are saying and surprising you and saying interesting things in response. That was definitely a confidence boost, because you feel like you are doing something that's making a difference for the people there.*

## Students from the university also talked about changes in their self-esteem, but in slightly different ways to the prison-based students.

This growth in self-esteem seemed, in turn, to boost self-efficacy. For many prison-based students, like Rosca, Learning Together was their first positive experience of an educational environment. Rosca linked this to a growing sense of self-efficacy — feeling different about himself and his future:

*R: To be honest with you, my experiences of learning even when I was in school and things like that has always been shit. I've always been picked on because I was different and I didn't speak the language well and I came from here and I came from there, so everyone used to try their best to pick on me. So me going into [Learning Together], I think it was massive for me because I haven't been in that environment learning with people in a classroom or doing anything. Even in prison I've always stayed away from education, just because of my experiences in the past.*

I: So who is Rosca now?

*R: Confident. I would like to say confident. Although I still have doubts every now and then in my mind, but I think everyone has doubts, it's just knowing that, actually, yes, I can do this. If I want to learn I can learn. If I want to do rapping, I can rap. Anything I want to do, I can actually do it. So I'm more confident.*

*I think Learning Together has played a massive part in that.*

For others, such as James, another prison-based student, increased self-esteem through Learning Together didn't just influence what he thought he could do in life, but also with whom he thought he could do it:

*I came to prison when I was 18. I've been in for nearly 14 years now, and I'm not going to lie, there's been periods where I've thought, do you know what, it's over, I've fucking, I've disseminated my life, it's done, I've ruined it as well as ruining other people's. [...] And then, things like this can, like I say, reignite that fire in my belly and give me a desire to get out — it's a self-esteem booster and it's kind of, I'm*

*going to get stuff out of it for me, you know? It's about realising my life is not over and I can still make something of myself. I can still get out, find love, have a family, have a good job, have good friends, not fucking criminals. Yes, it's about that.*

University-based students narrated similar changes in self-efficacy but, once again, these often related more to translating academic competence into 'real world' currency or capacity. Zoe, for example, attributed her increased certainty about what she wanted to do, and the sense she could do it, to a less pressured learning environment, encouragement from fellow students and the confidence boost and broadened career options that had come from being around other people who didn't feel they had to have an entire life plan sorted:

*I think I'm a bit surer of my plans for the future. I think meeting all the different people in Grendon and then having a conversation with them about the stuff that I want to do and all those sorts of things, and they are actually all very encouraging — and meeting people sort of outside of your realm of being in uni, where everyone has got a plan, and getting encouragement from people that are completely different or that are inside is quite validating,*

*I would say. But also, my focus has shifted more to prisons and police law, away from broadly criminal stuff.*

For others, changes in self-efficacy related more to learning real-life transferrable skills which could be put to use in a chosen career. Jane was training to be a curate in the Church of England. She talked about how she would now 'feel more confident' about building a diverse congregation. The interviewer then asked her 'What if you had a whole bunch of parishioners that said 'That person can't be in our church?', to which she replied:

*Well, I'd feel much more like, part of me will want to say, 'That's a load of rubbish, and you need to change what you think!', but also, having been through this process, and*

I haven't been in that environment learning with people in a classroom or doing anything. Even in prison I've always stayed away from education, just because of my experiences in the past.

*understood more about mentoring in the community and the process of learning in prison, realising more that you can't just say that. You've got to take them through that process as well. I think I'd feel more confident being able to do that.*

Running through all of this data about the more individual aspects of perspective-taking, self-esteem and self-efficacy, is the role of the interpersonal — the group. As Elinor, a university-student put it, 'the learning happens in the interaction.' Learning, and learning gain, can sometimes be viewed quite individualistically — what did one student learn or gain — but in interview our students seemed to describe a movement beyond individual gain, towards a mutuality inherent in achieving shared goals. The African philosophy of 'Ubuntu' — literally, 'I am, because we are' — seems to sum this up well.

Students recognised their individual contributions were important not in and of themselves, but as a part of a larger whole. One university-based student, Laura, a keen rugby player, related her experiences of Learning Together to being part of a team, where it's not about you as an individual, but your contribution is nevertheless vital:

*For me [...] it's something that's not about you, because it happens without you there, but part of it is also you, you have to be there for it to happen too, so it's kind of not all about you, but you are also part of it. There's a lot of parallels with [the rugby team name] environment and Learning Together. You're giving everything because the best thing is for everybody to have a good experience and for you to win the match. [...] I don't want to win rugby matches because I want to win them, I want to win them because I want to play the best I can for my friends. So, it's about your goal not being about self-gain, I think, so you're not trying to gain anything for yourself.*

This sense of mutuality and interdependence was often narrated in future oriented terms. Earlier in this

article we quoted Lewey, a prison-based student who explained how his perspective shifted over the course from thinking his situation was unique, to realising many things were shared. In his interview he went on to explain:

*I must admit at first, when I first joined the course, I was thinking, 'You're only here to pick our brains, to use us as guinea pigs to see what you can gain from us. It's an opportunity for you to just come into a prison and meet prisoners.' But after a while, that went away. You could see that they were genuine good people [...] you could see that it's not like that. We both were sharing our experiences. It wasn't one-sided. It was both sided. It was good.*

When asked about the most important thing he'd learned on the course, he said:

*That [other people] are compassionate. They don't just see us as criminals, the lowest of the low, and that they want us — to see us do well in the future.*

Lewey's learning was not just about how he saw others, but also about how others saw him and, confirming prior research findings about the impact of perceived stigma,<sup>78</sup> he

links this to a more positive imagined future, not just the one he imagines for himself, but the one he thinks others might also imagine for him. He indicates a sense of shared ownership of future hopes and dreams — from 'I am because we are' to 'I can be, because we are.'

When we examined these patterns through our quantitative data, we found that students' narratives of change were supported statistically. We began by running paired sample t-tests to assess differences between the scores of all students at baseline (pre-course) compared to their scores following completion of a Learning Together course (post-course). These analyses suggested significant increases across all four aspects for the combined sample (see Figure 1)<sup>79</sup> as well as for the university-based and prison-based students separately (see Figure 2). In other words, all students reported significantly more perspective-taking, self-

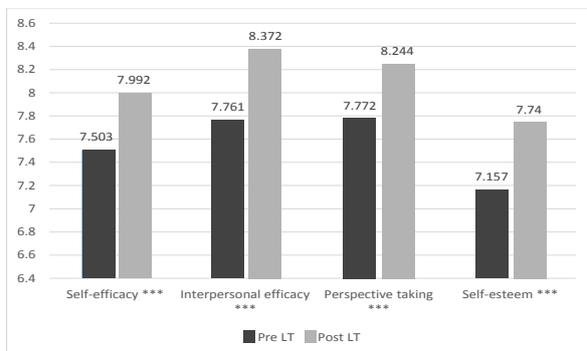
## Running through all of this data about the more individual aspects of perspective-taking, self-esteem and self-efficacy, is the role of the interpersonal - the group.

78. See LeBel et al, n.21

79. Self-efficacy [t(131) = -4.899, p < .001], interpersonal-efficacy [t(131) = -6.350, p < .001], perspective-taking [t(131) = -4.540, p < .001], and self-esteem [t(131) = -5.287, p < .001].

esteem, interpersonal-efficacy and self-efficacy following completion of a Learning Together course as compared to their self-assessment at baseline (pre-course).

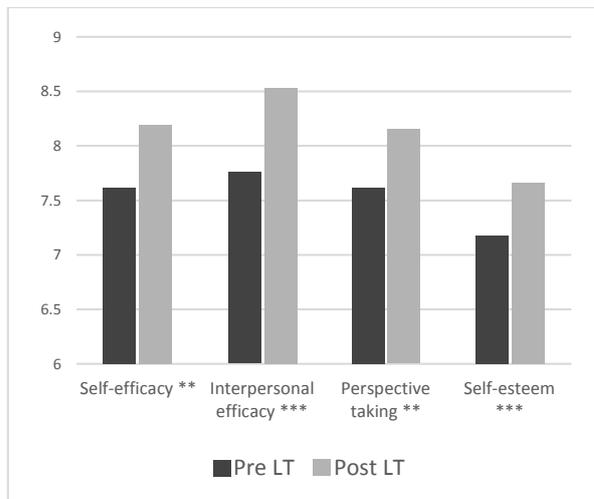
**Figure 1: Pre-post Learning Together course differences on all key variables (n = 132).**



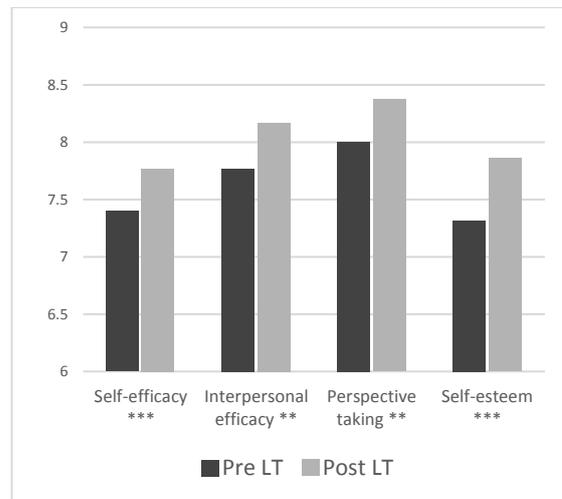
Note: \*\*\* p < .001

**Figure 2: Pre-post Learning Together differences on all key variables by institution.**

a) Prison-based students (n = 75)



b) University-based students (n = 57)



Note: \*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01

We used independent sample t-tests to compare pre-post-course change scores between prison-based and university-based students. This revealed that all students reported statistically significant increases from pre to post course, and that the rate of these increases were similar between the two groups. The one exception to this was the pre to post-course increase in interpersonal-efficacy, where prison-based students reported significantly higher increases than their university-based counterparts.<sup>80</sup>

80. [t(130) = -1.964; p = .052].

Our quantitative analysis thus corroborated findings from qualitative data analysis, indicating growth across all four measures as students learned together. However, in the qualitative data, students were not simply describing increases across these four aspects of change; they also seemed to describe directional links between them. For example, in the quote below Adam, a prison-based student, relates his increasing self-esteem to the kinds of vulnerabilities it is possible to risk in a supportive group learning situation (interpersonal-efficacy). He connects this, in turn, with how he thinks about his future and what he can achieve (self-efficacy):

*I: What would you say you learnt from Learning Together?*

*A: I learned a fair bit about criminology, but I'd say that was quite a distant second to [wells up with tears] [...] What's the matter with me? I think you kind of put in front of us a range of challenges that were much broader than I'd expected, and I kind of learned that I was able to step up and meet those*

*challenges. So, I learned that I'm a lot more capable than I thought I was.*

*I: What did that feel like?*

*A: It feels really good, yes. It's just really changed the way I see the future. I wouldn't rule myself out of anything really now. For a long time, I was dogged by these confidence issues, I've ruled myself out of so much, but [now] there's nothing literally that I would*

*limit myself in doing, which is really different. To you guys [speaking in public] probably seems like something that's just a completely matter of course, but that's the kind of thing that frightens me, but I did it, and I did it fine. From then on, all the little challenges that come along, especially the group project, I had to do some work in my group with that because I was worried about it. It was one of those things where the potential for feeling silly or exposure felt quite high, but I was really, really amazed at how it went. You put the pressure on us, you said, 'You've got 90 minutes or so in this new group, to come up with something meaningful and come up with a presentation,' and it's scary but we came up with something that I was proud of. Doing it on the day of the graduation as well, it meant a lot to me. It did.*

On the basis of our qualitative findings, as encapsulated in the way Adam narrates his change above, coupled with the previous empirical studies we described in the literature at the beginning of this paper, we expected that increases in perspective-taking, self-esteem and interpersonal-efficacy would all predict increases in self-efficacy. We were also interested in self-efficacy as an outcome variable because, as the literature we described above shows, it is empirically related to the kinds of outcomes prisons and universities care about. Below we report our findings from exploring these associations.

### **Do increases in perspective-taking predict increases in self-efficacy?**

In order to explore this association quantitatively, we carried out a linear regression analysis on the full sample and the two sub-samples (of prison and university-based students) independently. On the combined prison and university sample the findings suggested that perspective-taking was an independent and significant predictor of self-efficacy.<sup>81</sup> This remained the case when we ran the analyses on the two sub-samples of prison based and university-based students separately.<sup>82</sup> In our qualitative data, students like Lewey had told us that their perspectives were changing, that this made a difference to the kinds of things they wanted to do with their lives and their sense they could achieve them. This was confirmed in our quantitative findings. Above, we drew on Zoe's interview to describe the ways in which many university-based students found themselves developing broader and different

ideas of what they might want to do in the future and how they might do it. This was often linked with new confidence in the skills they now recognised which could help them to achieve their goals. Zoe explicitly linked changing her perspective on people who are in prison to a broadened sense of where and how she might use her skills to affect change:

*I had a change of heart over the year about what I want to do. I kind of went into it [the MPhil in criminology] very police oriented. [Now] I wouldn't rule it out [joining the police], but I would like something where I'm doing more to promote social justice. But I'm not quite sure yet.*

*I: What does 'more social justice oriented' mean?*

*Z: Sort of helping vulnerable people in some way. Maybe directly, maybe indirectly, but having a career where I have an impact on that.*

*I: And do you think your experiences of Learning Together played into that?*

*Z: Definitely.*

*I: Why or how?*

*Z: I think because I went into it with the whole policing idea, I'd already branded people criminals. Does that make sense?*

*I: Mmm*

*Z: Of course, we need policing, but it was just kind of a revelation to see it from another, coming at it from another angle, which is hard, like prevention, and thinking about how to help people who are vulnerable from maybe entering a criminal lifestyle.*

*I: Pre-policing?*

*Z: Pre-policing, something like that. I'm not saying for definite, but it's something I'm more open to now. The only thing I would say is that I used to think I definitely couldn't work in prisons, [but now I think] why not, basically? But then I just think that maybe Learning Together is like the best of the best*

81.  $F(1,131) = 24.896; p < .001$ .

82. Prison-based students  $F(1,74) = 13.634; p < 0.001$ ; University-based students  $F(1, 56) = 10.382; p = 0.002$ .

*of prisons and I don't want to be naïve about it and think that it would always be like that. But that's still a possibility.*

Learning Together had expanded Zoe's understanding of the social justice issues entwined with criminality, and she had grown to view people in prison differently as they learned together.<sup>83</sup> As a result, she also began to think of her own skills differently and to realise that while she might well be a good police officer, and because prisons were not just full of 'criminals' but broader social problems, she might also be able to work in prisons. So, our quantitative findings confirmed the directionality apparent in our qualitative data — that as students learned together their perspective-taking skills increased, and this drove an increase in their perceived self-efficacy — what they wanted to achieve and the sense they could achieve it.

### **Do increases in self-esteem predict increases in self-efficacy?**

We ran the same tests as described above for perspective-taking to examine whether increases in self-esteem also predicted increases in self-efficacy. In the combined sample, the quantitative data analysis confirmed that changes in self-esteem predict changes in self-efficacy.<sup>84</sup> When we ran the analyses on the two sub-samples of prison and university-based separately, we found support for this link in both.<sup>85</sup> As with perspective-taking, these quantitative findings were also consistent with what students such as James, Rosca, Claudia and William told us in interview, namely that as they learned together they began to feel more positive about themselves, which led to increased self-confidence in their abilities to achieve their goals. George put the link most clearly when he explained what seemed different for him since taking part in Learning Together:

*[What is different now is] my outlook on education. Because just before — I only literally started doing education last year. I left school with a spelling age at 16 of a 7 year old, and I came to prison when I was 18, and*

As they learned together they began to feel more positive about themselves, which led to increased self-confidence in their ability to achieve their goals.

*I never did anything in prison. I did two and a half years before I was 21, no qualifications or anything. Got out — I was only out five weeks. Got lifted off when I was 21, and even up until coming here [current prison], I still never did no education, and it was Nick [prior Learning Together student], remember him? He sort of strong armed me into education, forced me on this big meeting in here [What is Learning Together? information session on the wing], and I never thought I had the ability or capability to do it because the rest of my life, when I was a kid and that, I got told I wouldn't be able to do nothing. I've got dyslexia and that, so — but doing Criminology — even the level ones and level twos [entry level maths and English available in the prison] are good but they're not really — you know what I mean? They're just basic aren't they, but doing this — I got a merit, you know what I mean, on my essay! And I thought if I got a merit — this is putting none of the Cambridge lot down, yeah? — [but] those people on there [the Learning Together course] only got passes, and I thought, 'Wow, I can do this.' You know what I mean? I'm on par with these people.*

*I: And how does that make you feel?*

*G: It feels good. I've got drive now to think I've got a little path in life I can go down.*

In George's explanation, his self-esteem is raised as he realises he has some skills 'on a par' with students from Cambridge and he directly links this to increased 'drive' and a belief that he has 'a little path in life he can go down'. Three years on since this interview, George is on his way to completing his undergraduate degree.

### **What is the role of interpersonal-efficacy?**

Throughout the qualitative data, the role of the interpersonal appeared to be a central force

83. Zoe's understanding of her own shift in perspectives about people with criminal convictions and her underpinning assumptions about social justice and police/prison work are interesting reflections on different public perceptions of police and prisons work and perhaps on how and by whom they are taught, but are beyond the scope of this paper.

84.  $F(1, 131) = 40.323$ ;  $p < .001$ .

85. Prison-based students  $F(1, 74) = 22.924$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; University-based students  $F(1, 56) = 16.703$ ;  $p < 0.001$ .

encouraging the gains students described. As the quotes above show, students often spoke about the importance of interactions with each other as they learned, but sometimes, as with Jason (a prison-based student) it was an interaction with a lecturer that really made him think about himself and his future differently:

*When Nicky Padfield [Professor of Law and retired Judge] came in, I remember she'd come in before we spoke. She came in and sat down and I was asking her questions and she was asking me questions and it was the first time I thought to myself, 'Hang on, I'm sitting down with a judge here!' She was so down to earth, and I probably have made loads of judgments — and then I remember after she finished [lecturing] she came back and found me and we sat down and we spoke again and she asked me what I thought after what she had said, and it was just nice to be able to put my side across, and I could see she was interested in how I thought about things. I think that was one of the most enjoyable days on the course for me. [...] So I suppose that's what's given me, the confidence to, like I said before, to write to the Longford Trust and ask for help [to fund further education]. [Before Learning Together] I would have thought, 'They've got no time for me. I'm not their kind of person.' But I suppose that's what Learning Together has taught me. It kind of stands for what it says. It's about learning together regardless of your background, colour, your religion.*

In this quote we can see how Jason links the impact of an interaction with 'a judge' who was 'interested in how I thought about things' made him reconsider his own judgements [perspective-taking] and it boosted his self-esteem to the extent that he began to think of himself as the 'kind of person' [self-confidence] who could successfully apply for help with funding for further education [self-efficacy].

Similarly, Josh, a university-based student, described how the interactions involved in taking part in Learning Together had 'empowered' him to work in a refugee camp in Greece over the Easter break, and influenced the charitable work he took up immediately after completing his degree in Cambridge. He described

how his experiences on the course 'really helped me develop my own capacity for empathy' which he was careful to distinguish as not 'kind of patronising, like I have empathy for them because they're here [in prison] and I'm there [free], but [...] empathy [...] that means really seeing the goodness and the complexity in people who are in very difficult circumstances and to not use that as a constraint or as a constraining factor but to use that as something that kind of compels me to do meaningful things in the world and to work towards social justice'. Josh went on:

*I think empathy is tough because I think in many ways, it draws divisions too, [...] but it's acknowledging those divisions and working towards a more just and equitable world as a result of it. So a couple of weeks ago I was in Greece, I was volunteering at a refugee camp for a couple of weeks, and it was on the back of this course and it was in light of it too, but I found a very similar kind of experience as with Learning Together. I think it was maybe in part because of the course that I felt capable of having really meaningful interactions with people, not shying away from interacting with people for fear of being patronising, and being able to put myself out there even with people who are in very, very difficult and very different circumstances than I am, and use that as personally empowering.*

But I suppose that's what Learning Together has taught me. It kind of stands for what it says. It's about learning together regardless of your background, colour, your religion.

For Josh, his interactions with others on the Learning Together course had taught him a more complex version of empathy (perspective-taking), which he experienced as underpinning both his belief that he was capable of working in challenging circumstances (self-esteem), his decision to do that work, and sense that he did it well (self-efficacy).

To explore whether this directional relationship was also reflected in our quantitative data we tested the effect of interpersonal-efficacy on self-efficacy. We also examined the role of interpersonal-efficacy as a moderator of the link between changes in perspective-taking and changes in self-efficacy, as well as between changes in self-esteem and self-efficacy. In other words, we tested our hypothesis suggesting that the effects of the increases in self-esteem and perspective-taking on increases in self-efficacy will be exacerbated by

**Table 3: Moderation effects of interpersonal-efficacy on the link between perspective-taking and self-efficacy; and self-esteem and self-efficacy.**

Sample	Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	Estimate	SE	t-value	p	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Combined	Perspective-taking	.459	.164	.068	2.415	.017	.0298	.300
	Interpersonal-efficacy		.5194	.0765	6.787	<.001	.368	.670
	Perspective-taking x interpersonal-efficacy		.153	.050	3.015	.003	.052	.353
Prison	Perspective-taking	.466	.179	.091	1.960	.053 <sup>86</sup>	-.003	.362
	Interpersonal-efficacy		.574	.116	4.892	<.001	.338	.802
	Perspective-taking x interpersonal-efficacy		.153	.065	2.329	.022	.022	.285
University	Perspective-taking	.432	.166	.110	1.511	.136	-.054	.387
	Interpersonal-efficacy		.449	.089	5.016	<.001	.269	.629
	Perspective-taking x interpersonal-efficacy		.080	.130	.613	.542	-.182	.342
Combined	Self-esteem	.480	.242	.064	3.790	.002	.116	.369
	Interpersonal-efficacy		.534	.073	7.275	<.001	.389	.679
	Self-esteem x interpersonal-efficacy		.144	.055	2.625	.009	.035	.254
Prison	Self-esteem	.491	.286	.089	3.185	.002	.107	.465
	Interpersonal-efficacy		.574	.109	5.238	<.001	.355	.792
	Self-esteem x interpersonal-efficacy		.158	.077	2.047	.044	.004	.312
University	Self-esteem	.453	.173	.093	1.848	.070	-.014	.361
	Interpersonal-efficacy		.446	.099	4.497	<.001	.247	.644
	Self-esteem x interpersonal-efficacy		.065	.085	.7641	.448	-.106	.237

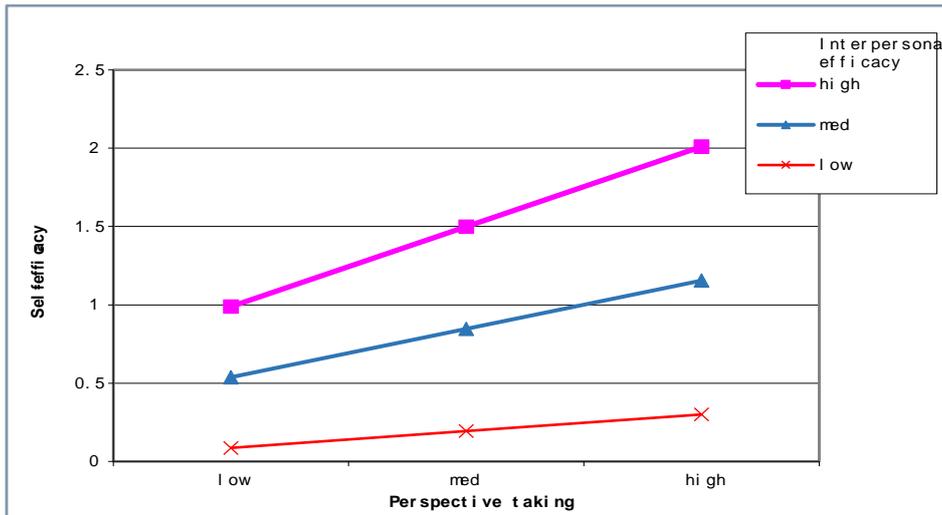
increases in interpersonal-efficacy. That is, increases in both will evidence a greater effect on increases in self-efficacy (see Table 3).

Our findings on the combined sample suggested that both perspective-taking and interpersonal-efficacy

were independent and significant predictors of self-efficacy. However, the interaction effect in this model was also significant. This suggests that students with higher reported changes in either perspective-taking or interpersonal-efficacy also reported higher changes in

86. This finding is taken as statistically significant but is to be interpreted with some caution as it is only less than .05 after rounding down.

**Figure 3. Moderation — perspective-taking predicting self-efficacy when moderated by interpersonal-efficacy in the combined sample.**

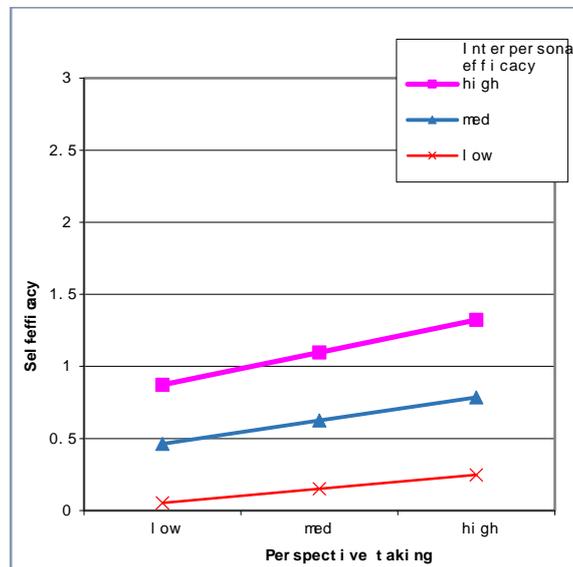
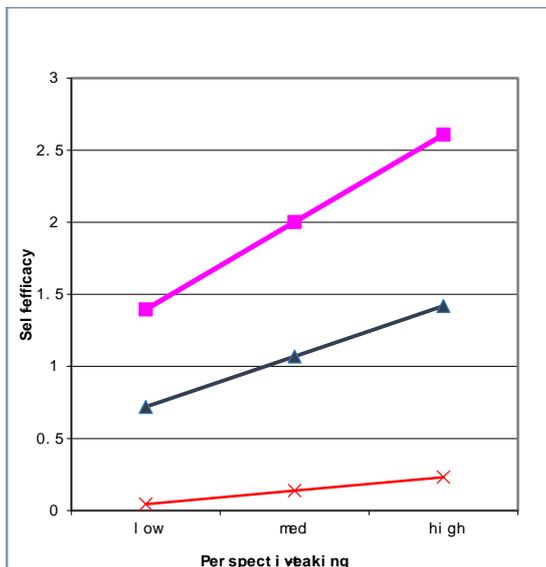


their self-efficacy. In addition, those who were scoring highest on both perspective-taking and interpersonal-efficacy scored highest on self-efficacy (see Figure 3).

When we separated out the moderation analysis to look at the interaction effects within the sample by institution (prison/university), for prison-based students we found the same pattern of findings as for the overall sample. Increases in perspective-taking predicted increases in self-efficacy, and importantly, changes in interpersonal-efficacy were even more effective in predicting changes in self-efficacy where changes in perspective-taking were also high (see Figure 4(a)). In contrast, when looking at university-based students alone (see Figure 4b), only changes in interpersonal-efficacy predicted changes in self-efficacy.

Prison-based students

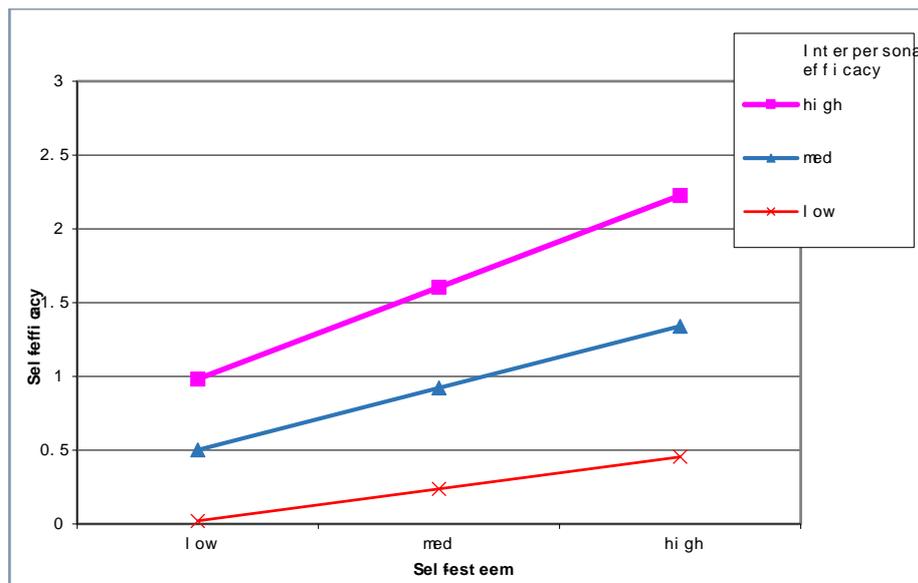
University-based students



**Figure 4. Moderation — perspective-taking predicting self-efficacy moderated by interpersonal-efficacy in the sample separated by institution (prison/university).**

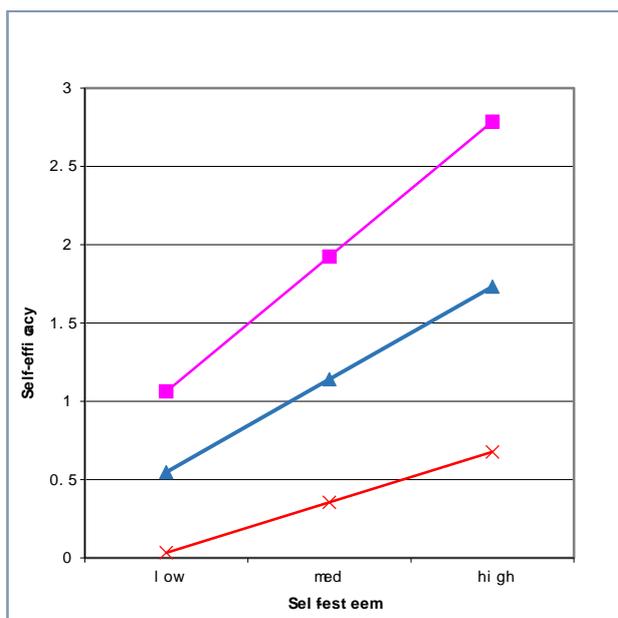
We next tested whether the link between changes in self-esteem related to changes in self-efficacy differed at different levels of interpersonal-efficacy. For the combined sample, findings were similar to those for perspective-taking, (see Table 3; Figure 5) — both changes in self-esteem and changes in interpersonal-efficacy predicted changes in self-efficacy. Similar to the findings above, the interaction effect was also significant

**Figure 5. Moderation — self-esteem predicting self-efficacy moderated by interpersonal-efficacy in the combined sample.**

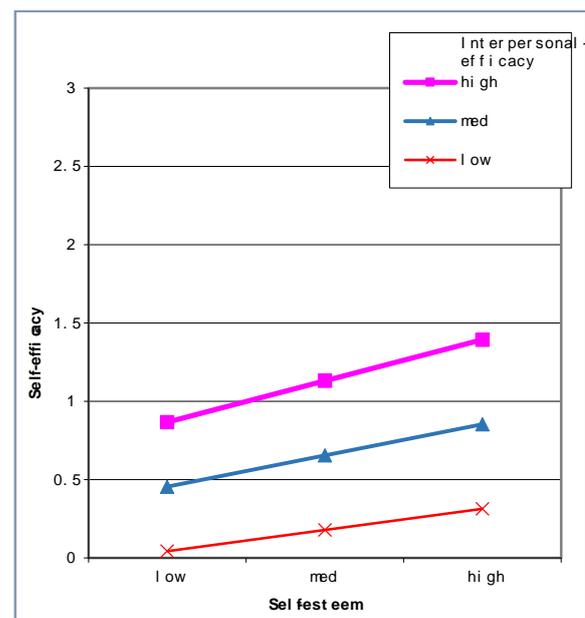


**Figure 6. Moderation — self-esteem predicting self-efficacy moderated by interpersonal-efficacy in the sample separated by institution (prison/university).**

Prison-based students



University-based students



suggesting that students reporting the greatest changes in self-esteem and interpersonal-efficacy also reported the greatest increases in their self-efficacy. The same pattern of findings was found when looking at the prison-based students only (see Figure 6a). When looking at university-based students only (see Figure 6b), once again, only changes in interpersonal-efficacy predicted changes in self-efficacy.

### So what?

We will never forget those early meetings in 2014 with students at the University of Cambridge and students at HMP Grendon where we explained to them our hope to build and evaluate a community of learners, and asked them if they might be interested to work with us. Over the five years since then they, and the many students who have followed, have taught us so much. In their book *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Miles

Horton and Paulo Freire argue, 'What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.'<sup>87</sup> The findings presented in this article support the broader research that suggests we become ourselves in relationship with others who provide connections, possibilities and encouragement.<sup>88</sup> The hypotheses we outlined above were designed to help us understand if, and how, individual and social factors of growth changed through learning together and how they interacted in this process of 'becoming'. Specifically, because of previous research suggesting that perceptions of self-efficacy are important to the outcomes prisons and universities care about, we wanted to understand how changes in perspective-taking, self-esteem and interpersonal-efficacy interacted with our students' sense of changes in self-efficacy. We have done so, and our findings suggest that to 'become ourselves' most fully — to experience ourselves as effective — we need one other.

Looking first at the main findings for all of our students together, we see that their sense of self-esteem, perspective-taking, interpersonal-efficacy and self-efficacy all increase from before to after taking part in Learning Together. Learning Together is not a neutral experience and is not simply a higher education qualification. Students say the process of completing a course together changes how they feel about themselves and their futures. Based on prior research findings, we expected that across all of our participants increasing self-esteem, perspective-taking and interpersonal-efficacy would predict increases in self-efficacy. Looking at all of the qualitative and quantitative data together, this seems to be the case — students' perceptions of their own abilities to achieve their goals (self-efficacy) were strengthened as a result of self-reported increases in perspective-taking, self-esteem and interpersonal-efficacy. But because our interviews highlighted the particular importance of interpersonal engagement in bringing about these changes, we also explored what happens if interpersonal-efficacy was added into the statistical 'mix'. We wanted to understand the joint influence of

increases in self-esteem and interpersonal-efficacy, and the joint influence of increases in perspective-taking and interpersonal-efficacy in terms of raising self-efficacy. What we found, is that increases in interpersonal-efficacy are at the heart of the ways in which all of these factors interact to predict increases in self-efficacy. Because previous literature notes positive relations between increases in self-esteem and self-efficacy,<sup>89</sup> and perspective-taking and self-efficacy<sup>90</sup> increasing these elements in isolation can often be a goal of education. Our findings suggest these gains will be maximised by putting the interpersonal at the heart of learning. We discussed earlier how previous research in education and criminological literature highlight psycho-social processes of identity construction and meaning-making.<sup>91</sup> While Horton and Freire put the role of 'the educator' at the heart of students 'becoming

themselves', our findings broaden this out to include everyone in the classroom — the transformative 'magic' is found in us all learning together, with and from each other.

Because our qualitative data suggested some potential differences between prison and university based students in relation to how different aspects interacted with self-efficacy, we also separated our quantitative data by group to explore our hypotheses. When looking at the university students alone, while changes were significant across

self-esteem, perspective-taking, interpersonal-efficacy and self-efficacy, when we looked at what predicted changes in self-efficacy, we found that interpersonal-efficacy was not just the most important predictor, it was the only significant predictor. For university-based students alone, only increases in interpersonal-efficacy predicted increases in self-efficacy. In light of previous research,<sup>92</sup> we expected that increases in self-esteem and increases in perspective-taking to also predict increases in self-efficacy, and it may be that with higher numbers of university-based students data included in future analysis these links become significant.<sup>93</sup> At present, our data for university students suggests that broadening participation in higher education could be important not only for those individuals who might not

Our findings suggest that to 'become ourselves' most fully - to experience ourselves as effective - we need one another.

87. 1990, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, p.181.

88. See above, n.20.

89. See Kohn, n.40.

90. See Perez Fuentes, n.42.

91. See notes 13, 14, 14, 15, and 16.

92. See above n. 40 - 45.

93. Due to the relatively small sample size, our findings for university-based students should be interpreted with some caution.

otherwise attend university, but because a diverse classroom broadens the potential for the development of interpersonal-efficacy in all students, and this relates to the transformative effect of learning. We all learn more when we learn together.

When we looked at the data from prison-based students alone we found two differences that we think are pertinent in light of the research we reviewed above. First, just like the university-based students, the data on prison-based students alone showed statistically significant increases pre to post-course across all four of our measures. There were no significant differences between the baseline measures between groups, but when we compared the increases across the separate groups, we found that prison-based students reported increases in interpersonal-efficacy that were significantly greater than those reported by the university-based students. We think this finding is especially interesting because we know from research on the process of desistance that building a new non-offending life after being involved in a criminal lifestyle is incredibly difficult. In his review of the literature, Anthony Bottoms begins by stating the fact that 'most offenders [sic], even persistent offenders [sic], eventually desist from crime, and to a significant extent they do this on their own initiative'.<sup>94</sup> And in his study exploring differences between those who fall back into crime and those who manage to move away, Shadd Maruna found that this process involved what he called 'tragic optimism' — a sense of self-efficacy that was not dampened by the extreme difficulties encountered in trying to rebuild one's life.<sup>95</sup> This could be interpreted very individually — those who make it are those who can make it on their own. But our findings suggest that crucial to developing and increasing one's 'own initiative' — the sense you can achieve what you intend to — is the interpersonal — a belief in one's ability to form meaningful relationships and work with a wide range of others. Perhaps our prison-based students' more pronounced increases in interpersonal-efficacy reflect their perceptions of how much they will need these relational connections to secure the success they desire and, perhaps more

We know from research on the process of desistance that building a new non-offending life after being involved in a criminal lifestyle is incredibly difficult.

importantly, their increasing recognition that they are able to build such connections and relationships. In future research it will be important to follow up with these students to see if they have managed to maintain this increased sense of interpersonal-efficacy, to act on it by building relationships and working effectively with others as they move through the prison estate and into life post-release, or as they move on from university, and to explore how their experiences in different social contexts support or diminish these gains.

The second difference between prison and university-based students strengthens this argument. While for university-based students, interpersonal-efficacy was the only predictor of increasing self-efficacy, for prison-based students increases in perspective-taking and self-esteem also predicted increases in self-efficacy, and when we included increases in interpersonal-efficacy into the mix, it enhanced their positive impact on self-efficacy. In the literature review above we highlighted the important role of self-efficacy in desistance from crime and noted especially recent work by Johnson and colleagues which included exploration of interactions between social ties and 'desistance self-efficacy'. Looking at enrolments in post-secondary education courses, they found this 'social-tie' did not increase self-efficacy, and highlighted the need for further research in this area.<sup>96</sup> Our findings in this area question whether enrolments in education really capture what is important about these activities for their relationship with self-efficacy. Of course, getting into 'college' might boost one's self-esteem, and experiences of learning might broaden perspectives. But enrolling in higher education might also be a disappointment, and might not boost self-efficacy in expected ways, especially if experiences do not in fact provide social ties that enhance students' beliefs in their ability to form relationships and rely on others to achieve their goals (interpersonal-efficacy). More nuanced measures of the nature of the social ties developed through educational participation, and how these interact with other areas of individual self-belief might tell a different story about the kinds of education through which we are formed and in turn form others

94. Bottoms, A., (2014) 'Desistance from crime' in Ashmore, Z. and Shuker, R. (eds.) *Forensic Practice in the Community*, London and New York: Routledge, p.251.

95. See Maruna, n.10.

96. See Johnson, n.52

and the world around us — or to use Freire's words, what kinds of education might be either 'the practice of freedom' or a 'pedagogy of the oppressed'.<sup>97</sup>

Interesting as these differences are, they should not obscure the main message of the findings in this article, which is that for both prison and university-based students interpersonal-efficacy was doing the work, albeit through slightly different paths. For all of our students, Learning Together enabled them, to believe that they can form positive relationships and engage relationally in their learning, through networks, and this was the most important predictor of increased self-efficacy. Perspective-taking and self-esteem were also important for increasing self-efficacy (especially for our prison-based students) and their power was also enhanced through students' beliefs in their interpersonal abilities. As Elinor suspected in the quote with which we introduced this paper, 'The learning [really does] happen[s] in the interaction.'

These findings pose interesting questions and challenges for some of the policies and practices that currently define the delivery of education in our criminal justice and higher education institutions in England and Wales. The delivery of education in our prisons has, for many years, been individual learner centric — focused on quantifiable certificated achievement, with a 'tick box' approach to educational attainment to reduce individual criminogenic risk. This has often come at the cost of a broader, and more nuanced, focus on what might be learned and experienced through education, including learning that happens outside formal educational settings or accredited qualifications.<sup>98</sup> Skills-based 'training' is often conflated with education.<sup>99</sup>

## Higher education opportunities in prison are scarce and are delivered exclusively at a distance, without a strong sense of community through which students can learn and feel part.

Higher education opportunities in prisons are scarce and are delivered exclusively at a distance, without a strong sense of community through which students can learn and feel part.<sup>100</sup> A longstanding lack of technological provision in prisons means that opportunities for creating learning communities virtually have not yet been exploited,<sup>101</sup> though we welcome the emergence of some new urgency and possibility in this direction as a result of Covid-19. As we have argued elsewhere,<sup>102</sup> somewhat similar criticisms have been levied at how some of our universities conceive and deliver higher education, including highly individualised pedagogical approaches and narrow focuses on quantifiable outcomes at the expense of broader philosophies and measures of learning gain.<sup>103</sup>

In their recent book on the purposes and practices of universities, Ed Byrne and Charles Clarke argue that universities should be 'engines of change and social justice' but are, in many ways, failing to live up to those ambitions.<sup>104</sup>

Our findings, with their emphasis on the social, do not easily align with predominant atomistic and individualistic ways of thinking that shape public policy generally,<sup>105</sup> and that shape higher education and prison education in some of the ways we have described above.<sup>106</sup> If the 'magic' of education really is unlocked by enabling students to form and mobilise social relationships and networks, then serious consideration might need to be given to how we 're-socialise' learning. This should include consideration of what is offered as much as how (including with whom) it is offered, and the ways in which we measure and understand indicators of 'success' in our prisons and universities. This prompts further critical reflections

97. Freire, P. (1973) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd: London.

98. See, for example, Coates, n.8 and Ludlow, Armstrong and Bartels, n.9.

99. G. Czerniawski (2020) 'Prison education: a Northern European wicked policy problem?' in Albertson, Corcoran and Phillips (eds) *Marketisation and Privatisation in Criminal Justice*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp.273-291 at 275.

100. Though see also E. Hughes (2012) *Education in Prison: Studying through Distance Learning*, London: Routledge, and R. Earle and J. Mehigan (eds) (2020) *Degrees of Freedom*, Bristol: Policy Press.

101. See Coates, n.8.

102. Ludlow, Armstrong and Bartels, n.9.

103. See especially Vermunt, J.D., Ilie, S. & Vignoles, A. (2018) 'Building the foundations for measuring learning gain in higher education: a conceptual framework and measurement instrument', *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 3:1, 266-301, and references above n. 8.

104. E. Byrne and C. Clarke (2020) *The University Challenge: Changing Universities in a Changing World*, Pearson Education Limited: Harlow.

105. See e.g. R. Sennett (2006) *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

106. See generally Garland, D. (2002) *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. On the impact of these ideologies on prison education, see especially G. Czerniawski (2016) 'A race to the bottom: prison education and the English and Welsh policy context' *Journal of Education Policy*, 31(2): 198-212.

about the current capacities and resources of our institutions to support this relational work and equip people to do it well. Building interpersonal-efficacy, developing students' beliefs that they can build relationships and work in meaningful ways with a range of others, requires significant skill and a carefully considered pedagogy, with social justice at its heart. This is especially true when navigating relationality across 'difference', of which combined prison-university classrooms are just one example, where there are risks of entrenching and compounding prejudice and stigma, and ignoring (rather than reducing) underpinning inequalities.<sup>107</sup> Learning how to form and nurture social ties within diverse communities is 'messier' work than the 'banking model' of education, which Freire described as a system that deposits 'facts' into students who passively receive and regurgitate them in individual assessments.<sup>108</sup> Our data, combined with a growing wealth of research from a range of different fields from mental health to employment, suggest that these skills are potent and essential for wellbeing and human flourishing.<sup>109</sup> With that in mind, it feels essential that prisons and universities lean into those challenges. Of course, prisons and universities do not work in a policy vacuum, and political decisions can make it easier or more difficult to make these institutions more or less inclusive or excluding. We have noted elsewhere the international variation in policy approaches to welcoming people with criminal convictions to universities,<sup>110</sup> and argued that if prisons are to be agents of positive individual and social change it could be more sensible to locate them at the heart of communities rather than making them as geographically and politically isolated as possible.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, our findings also underscore the importance of understanding the qualitative value and personal development taken from learning experiences.

Of course, prisons and universities do not work in a policy vacuum, and political decisions can make it easier or more difficult to make these institutions more or less inclusive or excluding.

They remind us of the need to advance and measure the mechanisms that support positive personal change. Such insights might well be transferrable and measurable across different institutional 'interventions', beyond education.<sup>112</sup> They might point us in new directions, encouraging us to resist the temptation to assume that all education or all employment is inherently positive, or positive in the same ways, for all people. Education can transform a person's sense of self, and their hopes and prospects for what they want and are able to achieve in the world. But education that is poorly conceived or executed, including without the benefit of research to guide its aims and practices, or evaluation to understand its mechanisms as well as its outcomes, might miss important opportunities to do good through, for example, failing to consider the social dimensions of learning. Less optimistically, education of this kind might cause harm, by creating systems and practices that narrow ambitions, close off opportunities and fracture fragile hopes. Implicit then in our findings about the power of the interpersonal, is a broader cultural challenge for criminal justice and higher education about how we remain empirically curious and creatively open to a more critical re-politicisation of how we are thinking about, delivering, and evaluating education and the sorts of outcomes we are — and should be — caring about.

Having said all of this, like all studies this study has its strengths and limitations. With respect to limitations, first, throughout our paper we attributed changes we assessed following Learning Together to this programme. Depending on methodological epistemology (what kinds of evidence people think is needed to be able to make a claim that is defensible), it could be argued that without a control group, these conclusions need to be taken with some caution.<sup>113</sup> The

107. These considerations are just as relevant for broadening participation in universities more broadly. On the potential negative impacts of perceived stigma and prejudice see especially Valentine, G. n.23 and for processes of desistance see LeBel et al. n. 21.

108. See n. 96.

109. See for example, Hari, J. (2018) *Lost Connections: uncovering the real causes of depression – and the unexpected solutions*, London: Bloomsbury; and also Murthy, V. n.2.

110. See Ludlow, Armstrong and Bartels, n.9.

111. Armstrong, R. and Maruna, S. (2016) 'Examining imprisonment through a social justice lens' in S. Farrall, B. Goldson, I. Loader and A. Dockley, *Justice and Penal Reform: reshaping the penal landscape*, Oxford: Routledge.

112. See also, for example, offender behaviour programmes in prisons which focus on perspective-taking. Might a focus on building interpersonal connections magnify their potential contribution for positive transformation?

113. Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1994) 'What works in evaluation research?' *The British Journal of Criminology*, 34(3): 291–306.

extent of qualitative data underpinning and corroborating the quantitative analysis presented in this paper goes some way towards mitigating this limitation. Having said that, our aim for the next steps of the evaluation is to include a quasi-experimental design that will allow us to isolate the causal impact of Learning Together. It will allow a direct comparison of those who took part in Learning Together with those who did not on key outcomes while controlling for important confounding variables. Future studies may also include multi-information assessments, including direct observations, third party reports and official records. We were also not able to examine any gender/sex differences in our findings due to the unequal distribution of males and females among our prison-based (all male) and university-based (majority female) students, so these findings apply only to men in prison and should not be taken to hold for the 5 per cent of the prison population who are women. This gender imbalance may be remedied in future studies by including data from Learning Together partnerships with prisons holding women,<sup>114</sup> and through including courses delivered by university departments with a higher proportion of male students. Over time, continued data collection will expand our sample size to enable us to detect even small effects and also to disaggregate the data to look at experiences by individual prison/university and by gender, comparing, for example, the experiences of male university-based students with male-prison based students. Ideally, evaluation would also have more time points to enable greater understanding of the temporal sequence of change. We are currently in the process of completing a longitudinal evaluation which introduces subsequent assessment points that will allow us to explore the relationship between individual changes, social (and institutional) contexts, and longer-term outcomes.

While it is important to acknowledge these limitations and the paths for future research they indicate, one of the key strengths of this study is that it is the first attempt to not only understand, but also measure, the experiences of all of the students taking part in a prison and university educational partnership.

It builds on previous qualitative, theoretical and opinion pieces<sup>115</sup> through adopting a mixed methods iterative design whereby initial research questions and measures were generated by reference to existing research evidence, but then 'undone' and more expansively reframed by close collaborative working with our participants. A mixed methods design maximises the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative research and allows for more reliable conclusions particularly when consistency of findings, such as in our case, is reached. While self-report questionnaire data provides important quantifiable information, the risk of answering questions in a socially desirable way is relatively high. It is therefore important that we were able to support these findings with interview data to provide a consistent and coherent picture.

At the start of this paper we cited a quote from Vivek Murthy's book, *Together*, which describes the importance of the interpersonal for building more positive futures, based on the author's work and experiences as former Surgeon General of the United States. In closing this paper, we return to that work, drawing on Murthy's words that '[i]t is in our relationships that we find the emotional sustenance and power we need in order to thrive.'<sup>116</sup> This perfectly sums up the key message we hope is taken from this paper — that the interpersonal and social dimensions of learning are critical for maximising the transformative potential of education. Writing, as we are, in the wake of our community's tragedy on 29 November 2019 at Fishmongers Hall on London Bridge, the personal truth of Murthy's words is striking. In the face of utter devastation only by holding tightly to each other have we been able to find the hope, courage and love to keep putting one foot in front of the other. With broken hearts, we remain determined to play our part in honouring the goals that Jack and Saskia cared so deeply about and lived out bravely and brilliantly in their all too short lives — maximising the potential for good and reducing the potential for harm in a world where we are equally afforded opportunities to thrive, rather than merely survive.

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114. The University of Surrey with HMP Send and Royal Holloway, University of London and Leicester De Montfort University partnerships with HMP Bronzefield.

115. See for example Weil Davis, S. and Roswell, B. (2013) *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A pedagogy of transformation for community-based education*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Karpowitz, D., (2017) *College in Prison: Reading in an age of mass incarceration*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; and the articles in the Special Issue of the *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* (2019) 6:(1) 'Critical reflections on Higher Education in Prison'.

116. See n. 2 at p 51.

# Interview with Dr. Jo Farrar

*Dr. Jo Farrar is Chief Executive Officer of HM Prison and Probation Service and is interviewed by Dr. Jamie Bennett who is a Deputy Director in HMPPS and editor of Prison Service Journal*

**Dr. Jo Farrar was appointed Chief Executive Officer of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) in April 2019. She was appointed after a long and distinguished career in public service, including as Chief executive of Bridgend Borough Council, and Bath and North-East Somerset Council. Immediately prior to her appointment, she was Director General for local government and public services in the Department for Communities and Local Government.**

HMPPS is an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Justice, which commissions, provides and regulates services including prison, probation and youth custody. The organisation has running costs of around £4 billion a year, directly employing around 49,000 people<sup>1</sup>, providing services for some 83,000 people in prison and almost 250,000 on probation<sup>2</sup>. Jo Farrar took on the role following what Richard Heaton, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice described as ‘several challenging years’<sup>3</sup>. The preceding years were described by the Chief Inspector of Prisons as ‘deeply troubling’ with ‘...far too many of our jails...plagued by drugs, violence, appalling living conditions and a lack of access to meaningful rehabilitative activity’<sup>4</sup>. This immense leadership challenge was only intensified by the coronavirus pandemic, which swept around the globe in 2020.

This interview took place in June 2020 and offers an opportunity for Dr. Farrar to reflect on her first year in the role and the enormous challenges of leading HMPPS.

**JB: Could you tell us about your personal background?**

**JF:** Of course, thank you for having me, I’m delighted to share my reflections with you. I started as CEO of HMPPS just over a year ago and it is a role I feel incredibly proud to be in.

A little about me — I have two children (and have recently become a Grandmother!) and I live in Bath with my youngest child and my husband Jeff.

I have spent most of my career in the public sector. I remember making a decision early on — when I was working with young offenders in the prison service — that I wanted to have a career in public service. It gives us the opportunity to make a difference to people’s lives and that

is so important, particularly when people are vulnerable or who have suffered from not having a good start in life.

**JB: What were your early career experiences before entering local government?**

**JF:** I spent most of my early career in the Home Office, where I always felt I was doing something important — whether that was working in the centre — in the Home Secretary’s private office, training staff, being part of the Inspectorate of Constabulary or taking a bill through parliament. All of these experiences helped shape me as a person and made me totally committed to giving back.

However, it was in the Cabinet Office, when I was working on Civil Service reform, where I came across some amazing people from lots of different sectors who encouraged me to reach out and widen my experience beyond the Civil Service. I applied for, and was surprised and delighted to be offered, an Assistant CEO role in Camden Council, a job which gave me a passion for local government as I realised the significance of the hundreds of essential services which councils provide to local communities.

This experience led me to becoming CEO of two local authorities, Bridgend in South Wales, and Bath and North East Somerset.

This second part of my career shaped me as a leader. It allowed me to bring about culture change, lead major programmes and respond to events and crises where — I firmly believe — we were able to save lives, bring families together and deliver lasting change.

I spent over ten years as CEO in local government, then, one day, saw an advert for a DG in Department for Communities and Local Government (now Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) and spoke to the Permanent Secretary, Melanie Dawes, who helped me to see the value I could bring to local government in a national role. It was great to return to the Civil Service and to bring something different, as well as learning a huge amount.

**JB: What drew you to be interested in leading HM Prison and Probation Service?**

**JF:** In 2019, I was drawn to the role of CEO of HMPPS as I could see that it would allow me to bring together the

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1. HM Prison and Probation Service (2019) *Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19* available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818788/HMPPS\\_Annual\\_Report\\_and\\_Accounts\\_2018-19\\_web\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818788/HMPPS_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2018-19_web_.pdf) accessed on 28 July 2020
  2. HM Prison and Probation Service (2020) *Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2019 and annual 2019* available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2019/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2019-and-annual-2019> accessed on 28 July 2020
  3. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chief-executive-of-hm-prison-and-probation-service-next-appointment> accessed on 28 July 2020
  4. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2019) *Annual Report 2018-19* available at [https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/07/6.5563\\_HMI-Prisons-AR\\_2018-19\\_WEB\\_FINAL\\_040719.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/07/6.5563_HMI-Prisons-AR_2018-19_WEB_FINAL_040719.pdf) accessed on 28 July 2020

operational experience I gained as a CEO in local government, together with the policy experience and knowledge gained in central government, in an area — going back to my early career — that I am passionate about. I felt that I could bring a fresh perspective and new ways of doing things to HMPPS. A year in, it is a job I love and feel privileged to have.

**JB: What do you consider to be the most important attributes of a leader?**

**JF:** As I reflect on my first year, there are some attributes that I believe are really important to my leadership. Over the last few weeks, we have seen people react to the death of George Floyd in America, and I have heard some important and difficult truths from my staff about the way they are feeling and have been treated. It has reminded me of the importance of listening and of hearing people's lived experiences. I want HMPPS to be an organisation where people are treated well and fairly and are able to reach their potential. While I am CEO, I will do everything I can to make sure this happens.

Another vital leadership attribute is the ability to empower and inspire the people who work for you. As a leader, it is important that you are clear about the vision and set parameters, so people know where they are heading and the space they have to operate. Then you should practice letting go. People will deliver much more if they are motivated and have freedom to innovate.

However, if you were to push me, I would say the leadership quality I hold dearest is authenticity. I could not be a leader if I was not true to myself. People need to see who you are and what you stand for. I always try to be the best version of myself and to have the courage to stand up for what I believe in.

**JB: What, for you, is the purpose of imprisonment?**

**JF:** Prison is the sharp end of our justice system. Whilst of course, this sanction is to protect the public, as well as being a place for those to serve the sentence handed to them by the court for committing a crime, it should be considered a place for rehabilitation. It offers a place to reflect and take responsibility for their actions and prepare them for a law-abiding life when they are released. We should take every opportunity we can to help people turn their lives around.

**JB: What have you found most distressing and most rewarding about what you have experienced during your first year in HMPPS?**

**JF:** I find it distressing every time I hear a personal story from someone in prison, youth custody or on probation about the difficulties they have faced which have led them to criminal behaviour and I find it incredibly rewarding when I hear the same people talking about how someone

in HMPPS has inspired them and helped them to choose a different path. This is why the work we do is so important. Sometimes the difference our staff make goes unnoticed — and yet it has been so significant for an individual person. Our staff really are hidden heroes.

**JB: Over recent years there has been a deterioration in safety in prisons. In 2019, there were 63,328 incidents of self-harm, 80 people took their own lives and 32,669 assaults<sup>5</sup>. What is your approach to reducing these harms?**

**JF:** I know that far too many prisoners are self-harming or taking their own lives. When I joined HMPPS I made it one of my key priorities to lower this number and I continue to pursue this with huge determination. We are doing everything we can to support those who are struggling and it's one of the reasons we introduced the key worker scheme in 2018, supported by the recruitment of extra prison officers, so that everyone in custody can have the dedicated support they need and someone to talk to.

We've given over 25,000 staff better training to spot and prevent self-harm and are investing an extra £2.75 billion to modernise prisons, combat drug use and improve the environment in which prisoners live. We have also refreshed our partnership with the Samaritans, awarding a grant of £500k each year for the next three years. This supports the excellent Listeners scheme, through which selected prisoners are trained to provide emotional support to their fellow prisoners.

Whilst we also know that assaults remain unacceptably high, we are seeing positive improvements across the estate. We have been working really hard to reduce the levels of violence in prisons and have in place a wide-ranging Safety Programme to improve safety in prisons. The latest Safety in Custody statistics published on 30 April 2020 show some encouraging reductions in assaults and show how our efforts to improve safety in prisons were working at a time before the current impact of COVID-19. The figures do still highlight there is more work we need to do to reduce these levels further. We have seen a welcome 4 per cent decrease in assaults in the 12 months to December 2019 and assaults coming down by 7 per cent from the previous quarter. The number of serious assaults is also down 9 per cent in comparison to the previous quarter. This demonstrates real progress and improving safety in prisons is a real priority for me.

**JB: The Lammy Review highlighted the racial disproportionality in the criminal justice system, including prisons<sup>6</sup>. Despite making up just 14 per cent of the population, BAME men and women make up 25 per cent of prisoners, while over 40 per cent of young people in custody are from BAME backgrounds. There are also problems of quality,**

5. HMPPS (2020) *Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to March 2020. Assaults and Self-harm to December 2019* available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/881990/safety-in-custody-q4-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/881990/safety-in-custody-q4-2019.pdf) Accessed on 28 June 2020

6. Lammy, D. (2017) *The Lammy review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system*. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf). Accessed on 30 May 2020

**including: in many prisons relationships between staff and BAME prisoners are poor; many problems are identified and unmet including mental health, learning disabilities and family issues; the under-representation of BAME people among prison staff contributes an 'us and them' culture, and; the system fails to address reoffending and so entrenches disproportionality. Are these isolated problems or is there a more significant institutional, structural and cultural problem in relation to equalities? What is being done to address this?**

**JF:** I made it clear when I joined HMPPS that having an inclusive organisation is non-negotiable. I recognise that we have a long way to go but I am determined that, under my leadership, we will be more diverse, and we will nurture talent and encourage people to reach their potential. We are tackling this in a number of ways.

First of all, through recruitment. We are committed to increasing the diversity of our workforce, not just frontline staff but also in positions in policy and senior decision-making roles. We have set recruitment targets and are developing and supporting local areas to reach out to their communities and encourage people to join our service; trialling pilot initiatives to improve the application process; including targeted advertising in our large campaigns; and keeping our processes under review for adverse impacts and working with our Occupational Psychologists to consider how these can be mitigated.

Secondly, we know that we need to build the trust of the people in our care and are revising our complaints process to increase prisoners' understanding and confidence in the fairness of the process; introducing a new incentives policy, which reinforces positive behaviour and reflects the findings of the Lammy Review and introducing an Incentives Forum in each prison, to bring together a diverse group of staff and people in custody to discuss the fairness of the Incentives system.

Thirdly, we are committed to ensuring our staff are skilled in cultural competence and we are developing training packages to provide the most impact. This varies from bite sized face to face briefings to a larger suite of online training and resources available to all staff, as well as introducing training to reduce bias in decision making and mandatory diversity and inclusion training.

**JB: Modern prison buildings, such as Berwyn, have comparatively good conditions including cells with separate toilets and showers, and access to in-cell IT and telephones. The Inspectorate of prisons have, however, described that 'far too many prisoners still endure very poor and overcrowded living conditions...[including] some of the most**

**squalid conditions...broken windows, unscreened lavatories in shared cells, vermin and filth should not feature in 21st century jails'.<sup>7</sup> In your view can such conditions be tolerated? Is there sufficient investment in replacing older prison buildings?**

**JF:** When I started in April, I spoke to some Governors and I mentioned that I was under no illusion about the enormity of the task to solve the large backlog of maintenance work. It is not a case of some quick fixes overnight, but I'm delighted with the progress we have made and are continuing to make.

We are investing an additional £156m of maintenance funding for the financial year 2020/21. This investment will update critical infrastructure such as fire systems and boilers, refurbish cells and showers and improve conditions for those living and working in prisons requiring the most urgent attention.

I have been pleased to have been given feedback from Governors about the difference this is starting to make.

**JB: The National Crime Agency have identified that Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) use prisons to network and recruit, and target staff for corruption so as to smuggle illicit items such as drugs and phones into prisons.<sup>8</sup> What is being done to tackle this threat?**

**JF:** I have found the overwhelming majority of our prison staff are honest and hardworking, and I am so impressed by their dedication to protect the public and commitment to our common cause, despite it being an enormously challenging role.

For the small number who are not, however, we won't hesitate to take action. Last year we announced a new Counter Corruption Unit (CCU) to close the net on those who drive crime. The CCU has received investment that will allow us to design a new prevent strategy and introduce a new team within the Counter Corruption Unit to support prisons and probation teams.

As well as this, the training package for new prison officers has been redesigned and we have recently published information for all establishments to brief all new staff about understanding, managing and reporting the risk of corruption in their daily work.

**JB: Recent terrorist attacks at Fishmonger's Hall, Streatham and Whitemoor have highlighted the significant risk that continues from violent extremism. In response the government announced 'Tougher sentencing and monitoring'.<sup>9</sup> Is enough being done in prisons to address this risk? Is being tough the right approach?**

**JF:** As CEO, I've been really impressed with the staff who have responded to these incidents, both operationally

7. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2019) *Annual Report 2018–19* p.11 available at [https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/07/6.5563\\_HMI-Prisons-AR\\_2018-19\\_WEB\\_FINAL\\_040719.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/07/6.5563_HMI-Prisons-AR_2018-19_WEB_FINAL_040719.pdf) accessed on 30 May 2020

8. National Crime Agency (2020) *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime* available at <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications/437-national-strategic-assessment-of-serious-and-organised-crime-2020/file> accessed on 30 May 2020

9. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tougher-sentencing-and-monitoring-in-government-overhaul-of-terrorism-response> accessed on 30 May 2020

and in HQ. Violent extremism poses a great risk to our society and way of life. We take the threat posed by terrorist offenders very seriously and are playing a key part in improving safety in our prisons and in the community for those under probation supervision. We have strict measures to stop extremists spreading their ideology and our new legislation means they will now face much tougher sentences

In January, we announced a significant investment of Counter-Terrorism capability and capacity in HMPPS. This will double the number of counter-terrorism probation officers, and provide a new assessment and rehabilitations centre and a multi-agency intelligence hub.

Highest risk offenders are managed through Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements which begin months before release. Terrorist offenders released on probation are subject to very restrictive licence conditions, with failure to adhere to conditions potentially resulting in being returned to prison.

More needs to be done and we expect the threat to continue to evolve as it has done in recent years. We will continually assess the effectiveness of our actions and will be flexible in adapting our approach accordingly to keep the public safe.

**JB: Can prisons offer the opportunity for people to rehabilitate? How would you like to see this strengthened in prisons?**

JF: Yes, I believe they can and do. I have pushed for strong and open relationships between staff and the people in our care, which is so important. A good example of this is our Key Worker scheme that allows prison officers to support and encourage people in prison to address their offending behaviour, and help them lead productive lives while they are with us, and when they are released.

This is then supplemented by good education and employment training in custody to make use of the time that people spend in prison and also allow them a smooth resettlement back into the community. We know there is more work to be done. I hope a combination of the above, alongside accommodation on release and our through the gate support will allow us to rehabilitate those in our care and ultimately reduce reoffending.

**JB: How do you see prisons connecting with the wider community, whether that is public service, voluntary services, educational institutions, employers and the general public?**

JF: I have been so impressed with the work prisons have done to a part of their communities. Obviously, there will be differences in approaches across prisons as they tailor these to meet the needs of the local population. It is not an easy task — the walls make it harder for communities to really understand the work that we do.

However, we have strong links with the voluntary sector, who provide a range of services to support prisoners — and also their families — and the links which are so important to help someone reintegrate into society. Relationships with employers are also strong, and often the relationship with prisoners starts before release. There are

many good employers who engage proactively with us (Timpsons, Halfords, Greggs). The New Futures Network — the specialist part of the prison service responsible for engaging employers — is constantly seeking to grow and nurture new relationships.

We know that there are many who live in communities who support the rehabilitation of prisoners and want to see them make a real contribution in society. But we also acknowledge that this is not a view shared by everyone and that this can impact on the opportunities prisoners have to make positive changes in their lives. We will be seeking to do more in HMPPS to work with communities to support the work we do to reduce reoffending and prevent victims.

**JB: What role do you see for research and evidence in the future of HM Prison and Probation Services?**

JF: I believe that using evidence to inform how we deliver and develop our service is a fundamental principle. We are ambitious about creating a strong, open, learning culture. Every day our staff use their professional experience and judgement to make tough decisions — and we want them to make the best decisions; decisions which are fair, legitimate and effective. We plan and develop our system using insight and data and understanding the consequences of our choices. This is about bridging the gap between evidence and practice, helping our people turn insight into new and better ways of working.

Coronavirus has created enormous challenges for us, necessitating change and innovation at a pace we would never normally consider. We have already stood up a programme of learning, helping us identify what we have done well, and not so well, as we bring back our services for the better.

In the future, I see a clear role for research and evidence — we will use it to: improve performance and deliver our services as efficiently and as effectively as possible; increase our understanding of what works, learn from our successes and to identify and build on best practice.

To name a few ways in which we are doing this: Insights20 (a vibrant programme of over 400 events and opportunities sharing learning and practice across the justice system) has gone online and across social media bringing evidence to life. Skilled researchers and practitioners are translating evidence into bespoke practice summaries, five-minute briefings, videos and guidance designed specifically for front line staff.

**JB: The Prison Service Pay Review Body described that prison staff 'are responsible for delivering a service in increasingly demanding and violent conditions. We consider that all staff should receive financial recognition for the difficult job they are doing in protecting prisoners in their care and the public'<sup>10</sup>. What has been your experience of prison staff? How would you like to see their role recognised?**

**JF:** I fully appreciate the dedication and hard work our staff undertake in difficult circumstances to ensure the safety of the public, HMPPS colleagues and the people in our care. The Independent Prison Service Pay Review Body is an important part in helping us to determine the financial reward and remuneration our staff receive. I would also like to move to a position where we are able to recognise all of our staff through a number of routes, including offering a greater degree of choice. Pay remains an important element, but offering our staff a range of flexible benefits will allow us to continue to recruit and retain a high calibre of staff.

**JB: We had two questions submitted by readers. The first is linked to the previous question: what would you like to have as an entry level qualification for prison service staff?**

**JF:** I have found entry level qualifications can be very restrictive when looking for diversity in role holders. Even introducing minimums of GCSE level qualifications may restrict those who didn't perform well at school, but who have gained valuable knowledge and skills later in life.

Where we are able to, it would always be a preference to design assessments which measure the specific requirements needed for a job role. With prison officers, we know that they require basic levels of numeracy skills. Instead of asking for a GCSE in mathematics, which is over and above the level of knowledge needed, we instead design selection tests that measure the exact numeracy skills/level needed in the role. Similarly for English — we know prison officers need a certain level of both spoken and written ability. Instead of asking for a qualification however, we measure this through our assessments. For example, we have multiple opportunities to measure someone's spoken English during role plays and an interview.

In this way, we are ensuring we are measuring the important areas required to be successful in the job role, without restricting the numbers of people who can apply.

**JB: The second is: do believe the new Incentives Policy Framework, which came into force in January 2020 in all establishments in England and Wales, which now places the onus on each individual Governor/Director to create their own scheme of incentives and privileges, is a good thing?**

**JF:** We found that the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) PSI — which the Incentives Policy Framework replaced — wasn't being used effectively to help change behaviour, or experienced fairly, particularly by people from a BAME background. It was also very prescriptive, leaving little room for governors to respond to the needs and challenges of their particular population.

HMIP reported that IEP schemes were often focussed on sanctions for bad behaviour, rather than incentives for good behaviour, while the Lammy Review described men from BAME backgrounds as more likely to report being victimised and unfairly treated by the IEP scheme.

Clearly, we needed to address these findings. There is also good evidence of a link between poorer perceptions of procedural justice and bad behaviour — people are more likely to have a better experience of prison and abide by rules when they perceive them to be fair. Research also shows that the most effective way to shape others' behaviour is to notice and reward the behaviour we want to encourage.

The new policy is informed by this research, focussing on reinforcing positive behaviour and ensuring procedures are fair. Consistency is provided through a common framework whilst there is greater freedom and responsibility for governors to design schemes to meet the local needs and challenges of their population and to make best use of the facilities they have available. This approach will better incentivise people to make the right choices, prepare them to lead crime-free lives when released and help make prisons safer.

**JB: We are talking in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Prisons are at the stage of transitioning from the restrictive 'lockdown' regime to a medium term plan that manages the health risks but starts to restore a fuller service. What are your reflections on the immediate crisis response? What lessons have you learned during this time? What are your aspirations for the future?**

**JF:** I have been really impressed and grateful to staff — both in HQ and on the frontline — for their immediate crisis response. We have had to work in ways that last year would have been unimaginable. They have risen to the challenge with extreme patience, compassion, professionalism and resilience. As the UK begins to ease restrictions put in place to protect the country, we are focussing on what changes we can make safely to begin our recovery.

Moving into the next phase, we have a real opportunity to shape HMPPS into a safe and inclusive environment, standing in solidarity together. My personal commitment is to continue the hard work that is underway in the MoJ, recognising that there is still a lot of work to do to ensure every single person — as a member of staff or in our care — is supported to be the best version of themselves. I will continue to do this with dogged determination and I look to everyone in HMPPS to get involved and do what we do best — working together to make lasting change.

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10. Prison Service Pay Review Body (2019) Eighteenth Report on England and Wales 2019 p.xv. Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/819442/PSPRB\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2019\\_Accessible\\_\\_1\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819442/PSPRB_Annual_Report_2019_Accessible__1_.pdf) accessed on 30 May 2020



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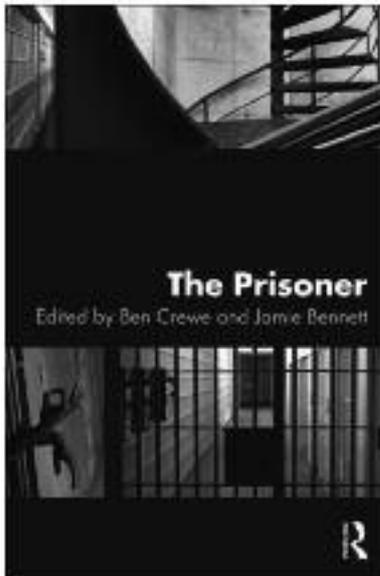
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