



**Greying Behind Bars:  
The Older Male Offender's Experience of  
Prison Life and Preparations for  
Resettlement**

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His John Sunley Prize winning masters dissertation

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28 March 1955 – 20 November 2009

In memory of David Patrick (Trinity Hall, 1991), Subject Master in History at Sydney Grammar School. He was a brilliant teacher, an inspiring mentor and a kind friend.



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## 1. Introducing the older male prisoner

When we think about older people, certain stereotypes might come to mind. It has been argued that in contemporary America, older people are largely stereotyped as incompetent but warm (Cuddy and Fiske, 2002). They are kind but out of touch with modern society and its advances, for example, in technology. Other researchers suggest that rather than being a homogenous group with a dominant stereotype, various stereotypes exist, reflecting different subgroups of older people (Schmidt and Boland, 1986; Hummert *et al.*, 1994). Stereotypical subgroups of older people include those who are despondent, reclusive, conservative or impaired (Blaine, 2013). These stereotypes, which depict older people as slow, vulnerable and relatively harmless, go some way towards explaining the lack of research in criminology on the relationship between older people and crime (Powell, 2014).

Probably as a result of these stereotypes, when the link between older people and crime is made, it is invariably of older people as the victims of crime. Media reports are often replete with stories of younger able-bodied people attacking and abusing vulnerable older people. In these reports, emotive words such as 'shocking', 'horrifying' and 'outrage' are used to describe the crimes (Fricker and Lightfoot, 2014; O'Neill, 2015). It is notable, however, that while elder abuse does occur and older people do generally experience a strong fear of crime, research has consistently found that 'older people are no more at risk of most forms of criminal victimisation than the wider population' (Powell and Wahidin, 2007:4; Burnett, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2006).

Very rarely do we think of older people as the *perpetrators* of crime. As Wahidin (2006:171) notes, '[w]e are unaccustomed to thinking about people in later life as criminal offenders'. Consequently, very limited literature exists on older people in prison. This is remarkable since the older prisoner aged 50 and over is the fastest growing prisoner demographic in England and Wales and in various jurisdictions around the world, including Australia, Canada and the US (Aday, 2003; House of Commons Justice Committee (HCJC), 2013; Trotter and Baidawi, 2015). Table 1 below presents data on the adult prison population in England and Wales over the last 12 years and highlights the growth in the prisoner population aged 50 and over in both absolute terms and as a proportion of the total adult prison population. Between 2003 and 2015, the older prisoner population aged 50 and over has more than doubled in size from over 5,000 to almost 12,000. While still a minority in the prison estate, prisoners aged 50 and over now account for 14% of the total adult prison population, up from 7% in 2003.

**Table 1: Total adult prison population, including both remand and sentenced prisoners in England and Wales, 2003-2015<sup>1</sup>**

Age Range	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015
<b>18-29</b>	35,529 (0.50)	35,516 (0.47)	38,299 (0.47)	37,023 (0.44)	33,263 (0.39)
<b>30-49</b>	30,864 (0.43)	33,841 (0.45)	35,521 (0.44)	38,016 (0.45)	39,982 (0.47)
<b>50 and over</b>	5,010 (0.07)	6,186 (0.08)	7,533 (0.09)	9,727 (0.11)	11,720 (0.14)
<b>Total Adult</b>	<b>71,403</b>	<b>75,543</b>	<b>81,353</b>	<b>84,766</b>	<b>84,965</b>

Source: Ministry of Justice (2013a and 2015)

### Explaining the growth of the older prisoner demographic

Most researchers agree that the rise in the number of older people in prison is not due to a 'geriatric crime wave' and a shifting of the age-crime curve towards an increased prevalence for offending in one's later years (Mann, 2012c). Rather, various explanations relating to demographic change and shifts in sentencing practices have been advanced. As a consequence of both increased life expectancy and the ageing of those born during the '1960s baby boom', many developed countries including the UK are experiencing an ageing population (Cracknell, 2010:45). A natural consequence of this is that more older people now fall within the reach of the criminal justice system, therefore increasing the probability that an older person will be arrested, convicted and incarcerated (Aday, 2003). Moreover, shifts towards harsher penal policies on both sides of the Atlantic have increased the imprisonment of older people. Liebling (2006) notes that in the absence of any substantial increase in crime, the rising prison population in England and Wales is attributable to a more punitive penal climate in which more adults meet the custody threshold and are incarcerated for longer periods of time. The lowering of the custody threshold means that older people are more likely to be imprisoned. Crawley and Sparks (2005a:348) note that while courts consider age when determining the appropriateness of a custodial sentence, this consideration is increasingly being side-lined by issues of 'retributive proportionality or risk'. A rise in harsher and longer prison sentences has also meant that more people, who may have entered prison at a young age, are greying behind bars. The abolition of parole board release in various American states and the introduction of tough 'three strikes' laws and 'truth-in-sentencing' legislation has significantly inflated the average length of a US prison term (Aday, 2003). Meanwhile, in England and Wales, prison terms have also increased in length, while the proportion of the sentenced prison population serving an indeterminate or life sentence has more than doubled between 1993 and 2012 (Ministry of Justice, 2013d).

In England and Wales, 'the pursuit of the sex offender' by the police and prosecutors, in a contemporary society where sex crimes stir strong public reactions, has also played a significant role in the greying of the male prison population (Mann, 2012a:345). In June 2013, 43% of all men aged 50 and over sentenced to imprisonment were serving time for a sexual offence. In other words, in mid-2013, sexual offenders constituted more than a third of all sentenced older male prisoners aged between 50-59 and more than half of those over 60 (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Figures from 2003-2012 reflect the total adult prison population as of 30 June of that year. The 2015 figure reflects the population as of 31 March 2015.

Crawley and Sparks (2005a) note that many of these men are imprisoned for 'historic' offences, that is, sex crimes committed up to several decades ago. A combination of greater willingness by the authorities to prosecute these 'historic' offenders and improvements in police investigative abilities, for example, in DNA technology, has resulted in the rising imprisonment of sex offenders who committed crimes many years ago and have aged by the time of their conviction (Crawley and Sparks, 2005c).

### **The dissertation**

It is striking that only limited research exists on the older prisoner aged 50 and over in England and Wales despite the group's extraordinary growth that shows no sign of reversing in the immediate future. This dissertation is therefore an attempt to fill this research gap. The older prisoner is worthy of greater academic attention because fundamentally, older people are *different* from younger people, yet at present, all adult prisoners in England and Wales are undifferentiated by age. No national strategy for older prisoners exists, despite repeated recommendations that one be created (HCJC, 2013). Therefore, older prisoners in England and Wales are subjected to a prison regime designed with the majority in mind – that is, young able-bodied men (Crawley, 2005).

Older people are different from their younger counterparts in many ways. At the most basic level, older people are physiologically different. As we age, our bodies change; we require different needs and become more susceptible to a range of age-related diseases. For example, muscle bulk and efficiency decline over time and the prevalence of dementia, osteoporosis and incontinence (among many other conditions) increases in frequency with age (Nicholl and Wilson, 2012). Moreover, being at a different stage of the life-course, older people may have different thoughts, desires and views about the present and future in comparison to their younger counterparts. Given the fundamental differences between older and younger people, it is important that the experiences of older prisoners in a regime primarily designed for younger men be researched.

This dissertation focuses in the older prisoner aged 50 and over. Debate exists as to the age at which a prisoner may be considered 'older' (Wahidin, 2006). Various studies have used different ages, ranging from 45 and above to 65 and above in defining an 'older prisoner', with the lack of consensus in the definition hampering comparative research (Trotter and Baidawi, 2015). In the UK, the key researchers in the field have all used different ages as the starting point for old age: 65 (Crawley and Sparks, 2005a); 55 (Mann, 2012c) and 50 (Wahidin, 2004). This dissertation adopts 50 and over as the definition of an 'older prisoner' for several reasons. Taking the lowest common age definition used by the key researchers of older prisoners in the UK allows for a better comparison between the findings of this dissertation and the existing research. Moreover, including prisoners in their 50s in the older prisoner definition acknowledges the phenomenon of 'accelerated biological ageing' (Wahidin and Aday, 2013:66). This refers to evidence that due to their 'chaotic and unhealthy lifestyles prior to entering prison, and the experience of imprisonment' itself, prisoners aged 50 and over commonly exhibit the physical and mental health characteristics of those in the community who may be at least 10 years older (HCJC, 2013:13; Williams *et al.*, 2006; Reimer, 2008). While it is recognised that ageing is ultimately an individual process, such that prisoners in their 70s may be 'active,

mobile and articulate', this dissertation's adoption of 50 as the base age in the definition of an 'older prisoner' ensures that prisoners in their early 50s who may suffer from age-related problems are not excluded from the study (HCJC, 2013:14).

Also, this study focuses on the older *male* prisoner. The decision to exclude women from this dissertation recognises that while the imprisonment of older women has increased over time, older women form a very small proportion of the older adult prison population (Crawley and Sparks, 2006). As of 31 March 2015, there are 478 older women in prison in England and Wales, representing 4% of the older prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2015). Excluding older women from this study also recognises, from the literature available on female prisoners, that they often experience incarceration very *differently* from men, such that their demographic requires separate consideration (Carlen, 2002; Wahidin, 2004; Corston, 2007; Wahidin and Aday, 2013).

This dissertation, *Greying Behind Bars*, reports the findings from a single-site qualitative study of older male prisoners at HMP and YO1 Hollesley Bay, a Category-D prison in Suffolk. After outlining the limited literature on older prisoners, this dissertation turns to address its three research questions:

- 1) what is the experience of prison life for the older man?
- 2) how do older male prisoners perceive the future and do they feel adequately prepared for resettlement; and
- 3) is there a case for a differentiated treatment of older male prisoners, for example, by accommodating them in separate older prisoner units?

In addressing these questions and providing a voice to the men who contributed to this study, it is hoped that *Greying Behind Bars* goes some way towards improving the understanding of older male prisoners, who, despite their remarkable growth over time, remain drastically under-studied.

## **2. What we know (and don't know) about older male prisoners**

When a study of older prisoners was published in 2003, it was noted that '[n]o literature review can avoid the large amount of North American research and comment' on older inmates (Howse, 2003: iv). One reason for the need to turn to the American literature was the distinct lack of contemporary research on older prisoners in the UK (Howse, 2003). On the other hand, in the US, scholarship on older prisoners had its origins in the 1970s, with researchers beginning to recognise the demographic as a 'forgotten minority' and one worthy of separate consideration (Ham, 1976; Kerbs and Jolley, 2014). However, in 2015, it is possible to conduct a literature review with a reduced reference to the American research. Since 2003, a small body of literature about older prisoners has emerged in England and Wales, comprising work in the form of a thematic review (HMCIP, 2004 and 2008) and scholarly studies (Wahidin, 2004; Crawley, 2004, 2005 and 2007; Crawley and Sparks, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c and 2006; Mann, 2012c). This chapter outlines this small but significant body of UK-specific research, drawing only on the American literature when necessary to supplement gaps. By doing so, this chapter celebrates the recent progress that has been made in understanding the older prisoner in the UK. Moreover, it recognises that there are differences between the US and UK penal systems such that research in one jurisdiction is not necessarily compatible in the other. For example, one trend in the US is the rapid growth in the number of prisoners serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole (Sentencing Project, 2013). Numbering approximately 50,000, this significant population means that a substantial part of the US literature on older prisoners considers issues including end-of-life care (Sentencing Project, 2013; Linder, 2014). While these issues are relevant here, it remains the case that most older prisoners in England and Wales are ultimately released, so that resettlement and reintegration dominate the discussion (HMCIP, 2004).

### **'The' older prisoner?**

The key reason given for the continued absence of a national strategy for older prisoners is that they form a diverse demographic, making it difficult to generalise their characteristics and needs (HCJC, 2013). While it is true that older prisoners are not a homogenous group, distinct 'subgroups' of older prisoners sharing similar characteristics are identifiable (Crawley, 2007). In England and Wales, these distinct groups exist on two dimensions. First, one may distinguish between older prisoners aged 50-59 and those over 60. While the older male prisoner aged 60 and over currently accounts for only a third of the total older male prison population in England and Wales, this cohort's growth rate has outstripped the younger 50-59 age group (Ministry of Justice, 2014 and 2015). Between June 2002 and March 2015, the number of male prisoners aged 60 and over grew by 160% while the 50-59 age cohort grew by 133%, demonstrating an ageing of the older male prison population over time (Ministry of Justice, 2014 and 2015). This has implications on research and policy direction given the differences between the two cohorts. For example, men over 60, who are closer to retirement age, may have different resettlement needs from men in their 50s, who are more likely to require employment following release. Also, given their more advanced age, prisoners over 60 are more likely to exhibit age-related illnesses that might impact upon their experience of incarceration.



The older prisoner demographic may also be characterised by sentencing history. While additional categories have been identified, older prisoners may be largely grouped within a three-category typology (Teller and Howell, 1981; Metzler, 1981; Goetting, 1984; Crawley and Sparks, 2005b):

- 1) those who have 'grown old in prison as a result of lengthy sentences' imposed when they were younger (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:346);
- 2) recidivists who have come in and out of incarceration over a long period of time; and
- 3) men sent to prison for the first time in their 50s.

The third category has been referred to as 'first-timers' and include the large number of older men sentenced for 'historic' crimes committed up to several decades ago (Crawley and Sparks, 2006). The identification of different prisoner subgroups on the basis of this typology is important since an older prisoner's sentencing history may impact upon their experience of imprisonment. As will be further described below, 'first-timers' may be considerably different from prisoners who have had a long association with the criminal justice system. Having never experienced the depriving prison environment, they may have fewer health problems. Moreover, they are more likely to have established a successful adult life prior to incarceration such that their experience of imprisonment is greatly affected by the loss of their former outside identities.

### **Experiencing imprisonment as an older man<sup>2</sup>**

The 2004 thematic review by HMCIP remains, in terms of scale, the most comprehensive study into the older male offender's experience of prison life in England and Wales (HMCIP, 2004). Following a survey of 442 men aged 60 and over in 15 prisons, the review found wide-ranging examples of prison regimes being unsuitable for older males. Most of the findings related to older prisoners being subjected to an undifferentiated regime designed for young able-bodied men. For example, it was found that older prisoners with mobility issues were being assigned to upper-tier bunk beds and in one instance, a visually-impaired prisoner was reported to have taken 'three showers in the previous six months' as the result of an inability to access shower facilities without assistance (HMCIP, 2004:6). Examples of inflexible regimes that applied the same rules to all prisoners, regardless of age, had the greatest impact on older men in closed as opposed to open conditions. It was noted that, in some cases, retired prisoners in closed conditions who chose not to work remained locked in their cells during the day, with limited structured activity available to relieve boredom.

This finding, that prison regimes are commonly unsuitable for older male prisoners, was reiterated by Crawley and Sparks in their study of inmates aged 65 and over in four prisons (Crawley, 2005). They argued that subjecting older prisoners to a regime designed for younger prisoners amounted to 'institutional thoughtlessness', a term coined to describe the regime's unconscious 'indifference' towards the needs of older

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of older women's experiences of imprisonment, including their gender-specific pains, see Wahidin (2004).

prisoners (Crawley, 2005:358). Rather than the prison regime being actively ageist (as has been argued by Wahidin (2000 and 2005) in relation to older female prisoners), the prison, its environment, policies and activities were simply 'outdated' and 'constructed in blithe unconsciousness of the needs and sensibilities of the old' (Mann, 2012c:111; Crawley and Sparks, 2005a:350). The impact of 'institutional thoughtlessness' was the infliction of 'hidden injuries' on older prisoners, exacerbating the negative impact of incarceration beyond the traditional 'pains of imprisonment' first described by Sykes (1958) (Crawley and Sparks, 2005a:351).

Crawley and Sparks (2005b:360) also found other ways in which older prisoners' 'pains of imprisonment' were 'magnified'. Focusing on the experience of 'first-timers', it was noted that their initial entry into prison was often accompanied by intense feelings of distress. For 'first-timers', incarceration represented 'nothing short of a disaster, a catastrophe' (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:347). These men were often leaving behind an established outside identity, career and family built up over many years. The stark contrast between their former lives and their present situation was a significant pain felt during the initial months of imprisonment – a period in which prisoners are already extremely vulnerable and at risk of self-harm and suicide (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b; Liebling, 1999b). Moreover, older prisoners, especially those with pre-existing illnesses, were found to have a strong fear of 'physical and mental deterioration' (Crawley, 2007:231). This included anxiety as to their ability to receive timely medical help in the event of an emergency, especially at night in closed conditions (Crawley, 2007). Finally, for elderly men with several years left to serve, a debilitating fear of dying in prison was another frustration identified to be beyond the ordinary 'pains of imprisonment' (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b).

Given the additional 'pains of imprisonment' experienced by older prisoners, Crawley and Sparks also examined the methods in which these men coped and survived their sentence. It was noted that while older age could exacerbate the frustrations of imprisonment, it could also provide the resources to endure it. Older prisoners were often able to draw upon 'previous depriving experiences' from their long lives in order to cope with their present situation (Crawley and Sparks, 2006:71). These included memories from their childhood spent in care homes and previous life in the army. Older prisoners were also observed busying themselves in a variety of 'time-consuming activities', ranging from seemingly trivial 'campaigning, letter-writing and list-making', to undertaking employment and education courses (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:350). These activities, which kept the men occupied and provided 'a sense of purpose', mitigated against the frustrations of imprisonment and, particularly for 'first-timers', helped to mirror their present existence with their former lives on the outside, in which they had worked and were productive (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:351). Indeed, it was found that in many cases, prisoners continued to seek prison work, even after reaching retirement age and despite the onset of age-related illnesses (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b).

Mann's (2012c) research on prisoners aged 55 and over in three prisons represents the most recent major publication on older prisoners in England and Wales. Her findings are consistent with much of the research outlined above. She argues that the older prisoner ultimately does 'harder time' as a result of the additional 'pains of imprisonment' inflicted upon them by virtue of the prison regime's failure to account for their age (2012c:62). The physical prison environment made few concessions for

ageing bodies, while there was a lack of 'appropriate prison activity' including meaningful work and education courses (Mann, 2012c:62). Mann's research also extended the literature on how older prisoners cope and survive their sentence, drawing on Stones' (2005) concept of internal and external structures. She found that older prisoners were generally resilient and coped 'under the most trying of circumstances' by drawing upon either structures internal or external to them (Mann, 2012c:63). Internal structures included experiences accumulated over an older prisoner's long life and encompassed more than simply depriving experiences as noted by Crawley and Sparks (2006). Experiences could also be *positive*, such as memories of past employment and the nostalgia derived from listening to old music that had the ability to transport the listener to another time beyond the prison walls (Mann, 2012c). External structures referred to a prisoner's family and friends, who were found to be an important source of support. However, the presence (or absence) of these external structures could be a significant additional pain for ageing prisoners. For example, family and friends on the outside could be a constant reminder of the losses prisoners were experiencing by being incarcerated. These losses were potentially compounded since family and friends on the outside were invariably older as well. Some could be too frail to visit and others may have died during an older prisoner's sentence (Aday, 1994).

Finally, two further findings from Mann's research are worth highlighting. First, in an earlier paper, Mann (2006) hypothesised that the frustrations of imprisonment were more severe for older prisoners since their age inhibited their ability to mitigate the losses of power and masculinity inherent in incarceration. It has been noted that prisoners often resort to bodybuilding and displays of physicality and violence in an effort to regain a degree of power and masculinity – something more difficult for an ageing body (Jewkes, 2002). Older prisoners are also further emasculated by an inability to derive masculinity through alternative means commonly undertaken by older men in the community, such as assuming a patriarchal role within the family (Mann, 2006). However, rather than being rendered powerless, 'inventive' methods of regaining masculinity were identified (Mann, 2012c:108). These included older prisoners adopting a father-type role with both female officers and younger prisoners, helping these men to regain some of their status lost through imprisonment. Second, Mann (2012a) found that the ageing child sex offenders she interviewed were often very different from the general older male prisoner. Using Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralisation theory, she found that despite being at the bottom of the prisoner hierarchy, they coped relatively well with their imprisonment. The older sex offenders were able to neutralise the seriousness of their crimes, often by denying personal responsibility for their actions or not recognising the harm they had caused (Mann, 2012a). Many of the older child sex offenders displayed a degree of 'arrogance', even considering themselves to be superior to those committing crimes such as drugs offences or armed robbery, who they readily classified as 'undesirable' (Mann, 2012a:350). These techniques of neutralising the seriousness of their offending and differentiating themselves from other prisoners helped many ageing sex offenders to survive in prison.

### **Release, resettlement and the future**

For the older prisoner serving a natural life sentence, the certainty of dying behind bars is overwhelmingly distressing, causing significant frustration and depression (Crawley and Sparks, 2006). However, in England and Wales, the vast majority of

older prisoners will ultimately be released, making research into issues of resettlement extremely relevant (HMCIP, 2004). While our understanding of the experience of imprisonment for an older man has developed considerably over the last decade, the same cannot be said about resettlement. Very little is known about older men's views and feelings about the future, their release and reintegration into the community. Limited domestic research has given direct consideration to these issues. In their work, Crawley and Sparks (2006) found that older male prisoners generally held pessimistic views about the future. As individuals age and become more aware of their mortality, a 'life review' often occurs whereby a person reflects on their life and evaluates its significance and achievements (Butler, 1963). For older men in prison, undertaking a 'life review' often results in a negative evaluation of their lives. This, compounded with a recognition that 'time is running out' and that there may be insufficient years 'left to try to remake (and rewrite) their life', makes both the experience of imprisonment and thoughts about the future extremely bleak (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:357). Moreover, Crawley and Sparks (2006) found a distinction between (the few) older prisoners who had families and social networks awaiting them upon release and those who did not. While the former were generally optimistic about release, for the latter, the prospect of release often created 'intense anxieties' given the uncertainty that the future brought (Crawley and Sparks, 2006:73). Among the worries that these older prisoners held included concern regarding 'where they were going to live, how they were going to get there ... and whom they will be living with' (Crawley and Sparks, 2006:73). The prisoners who felt these anxieties were often those at the end of long sentences and who, during their imprisonment, had lost their former accommodation, possessions, family and friends. Crawley (2004:33) noted how these anxieties, coupled with a realisation that the need to start 'from scratch' once released would be a formidable challenge for ageing bodies unable to work, meant that several older prisoners in her sample expressed no desire to be released and actually preferred imprisonment to the prospect of reintegration. Mann (2012c:75) similarly found a 'general lack of enthusiasm for the issue of release' among her sample. She also discovered older prisoners 'who did not want to be released at all' (Mann, 2012c:76). However, unlike Crawley (2004) who suggested that older prisoners lacking a desire for release often felt this way due to the uncertainty and inevitable isolation that a future outside prison would involve, Mann (2012c) found prisoners wanting to remain incarcerated for more *positive* reasons, including that they had found hope for the first time in their lives while imprisoned. There was recognition that with the security of food, sheltered accommodation and time to pursue personal interests such as religious study, prison provided an opportunity to exist without many of the stresses that accompany those living in the community.

Whether older prisoners feel *adequately prepared* to leave prison and return to the community is a related question that has also received limited research attention. For example, we do not know how older prisoners in their 50s, who are likely to seek employment upon release, feel about their prospects of finding meaningful work in the community. Also, in her research, Mann (2012c) found that a majority of her sample were frustrated by the quality of prison education courses and the activities on offer. Common criticisms included that the activities and courses available were inappropriate for older men: they were simplistic and patronising or were run only so that the Prison Service could meet certain performance targets, rather than a genuine attempt to equip older men with relevant skills. In the absence of any

specific research in this area, it would be interesting to note whether these criticisms are found in other establishments and whether prisoners feel as if the activities and courses available to them are beneficial in their preparations for resettlement. Moreover, another issue which has remained under-researched in England and Wales but has been noted in the US literature relates to the preparedness for release of older prisoners who have served such long sentences that they have 'lost almost all contact with the outside world' and become relatively dependent on the prison regime (Blevins and Blowers, 2014:212). American research has recognised that without proper preparation for release, these older prisoners may struggle to live in the community (Snyder *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, unable to cope and without the relevant life skills to survive in an outside world that has significantly changed during their incarceration, studies have suggested that former prisoners may resort to self-harm or the commission of further crime in an effort to be returned back to the familiarity of the prison (Binswanger *et al.*, 2007; Williams and Abraldes, 2007; Blevins and Blowers, 2014). Given these issues, this dissertation seeks to further the domestic literature regarding how older prisoners view the future and whether they feel *prepared*, in the sense of possessing the relevant skills and mind-set to survive and *flourish* in the community.

### **Segregation or integration**

In England and Wales, the lack of any 'significant central guidance' as to how older prisoners' specific needs should be met has not precluded individual prisons from taking their own initiative and from modifying their regimes to accommodate the distinct needs of their older population (Crawley and Sparks, 2005a:354). Crawley and Sparks (2005a:354) have noted that, in the absence of a national strategy on older prisoners, staff and senior management in individual prisons have frequently made (often successful) improvisations and 'innovations'. For example, HMP Whatton, a Category-C prison for sex offenders, is an institution that has made several adjustments to its regime to accommodate older prisoners (Saunders, 2013). These include modified exercise programmes that are suitable for older bodies and adjustments to the offending behaviour courses on offer, such as ensuring that printed material is of a larger, more readable font (Saunders, 2013). HMP Whatton also has an established pre-release group for older prisoners entitled 'Training and Information for Prisoners in their Senior Years'. This group allows older prisoners to meet and receive age-specific support and resettlement advice as they near release (Saunders, 2013). Across the prison estate, several institutions also have specific accommodation for older prisoners. These range from informal policies whereby older prisoners are accommodated together in certain parts of the prison, to more formal dedicated older prisoner units and wings. For example, HMP Norwich operates an older prisoner unit and an elder lifer unit, while HMP Wymott maintains a wing for older prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2013c and 2013e).

The existence of these older prisoner units has resulted in debate as to whether they should be maintained and expanded, or abolished. Those in favour of accommodating older prisoners in dedicated units are therefore proponents of age-based segregation, while those supporting their abolition or limited use prefer the integration or 'mainstreaming' of older prisoners within the general adult prison population (Blowers *et al.*, 2014:139). Various arguments have been advanced in support of either greater segregation or integration. Proponents of segregation typically argue that housing older prisoners together in a separate unit ensures that

age-specific services, activities and healthcare can be better provided to ageing prisoners and in a more cost-effective manner than would be possible if they were dispersed amongst the adult prison population (Blowers *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, there is a view that older prisoners should be 'protected from the hostility and aggression of prison life' (Mann, 2012c:6). Separate accommodation ensures that older prisoners will not be victimised or intimidated by the more violent behaviour often exhibited by younger counterparts (Howse, 2003). Also, separate accommodation may provide older prisoners with more peaceful and quiet surroundings. Indeed, researchers have long observed the high level of noise in prison and its negative impact on older inmates who desire greater privacy (Wilson and Vito, 1986). On the other hand, those in favour of integrating older prisoners within the general population raise opposing arguments, including the potential of segregation leading to 'ghettoisation' and the greater neglect of older prisoners as they become further removed from mainstream view (Howse, 2003:29). It has also been argued that older prisoners, who are generally well-behaved and compliant, provide a positive 'calming influence' on younger prisoners that would be lost with segregation (HCJC, 2013). Accepting these latter arguments, the House of Commons Justice Committee recently recommended that there should be no further expansion of older prisoner units (HCJC, 2013).

However, despite the existence of arguments in support of either greater segregation or integration, limited research in England and Wales has specifically addressed this debate and assessed the strengths of the opposing views. Also, we have a limited understanding as to whether older prisoners *themselves*, if given the choice, would prefer segregated or integrated prison accommodation. This issue has only been considered in passing by the Justice Committee, when they noted that the older prisoners they sampled generally preferred integration (HCJC, 2013). Moreover, it is unclear whether there are significant differences in the experience of imprisonment between older offenders who are segregated and those who are subject to 'mainstreaming'. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the limited research on best practices for the housing of older prisoners by addressing the segregation/integration debate. Unlike the UK, in North America, where differentiation between prisoners on the basis of age widely occurs, age-specific prison accommodation is common, and with it, a more robust literature on the segregation/integration debate (Aday, 2003). Researchers in support of integration commonly argue that segregation increases the possibility that older prisoners will be marginalised and excluded from the full spectrum of programmes and activities available (Curtin, 2007). Also, studies have consistently found that older prisoners are among the most well-behaved inmates and are unlikely to cause violence or break rules, giving weight to the view that older prisoners may provide a positive and calming influence on younger prisoners (Rubenstein, 1982; Goetting, 1984; Wilson and Vito, 1986; McShane and Williams, 1990). However, in their study of victimisation amongst older male prisoners, Kerbs and Jolley (2007) found high levels of harassment and intimidation against older prisoners, often by younger prisoners, helping to support the argument for age-segregation. These conflicting findings in the US literature highlight the significant debate that exists regarding the appropriateness of age-segregation and the need for these issues to be addressed in this jurisdiction. This will allow for a more evidence-based critique of the Justice Committee's recent recommendation against the further expansion of older prisoner units (HCJC, 2013).

### **3. Researching 'us old folks'**

#### **Research location**

HMP and YOI Hollesley Bay is a Category-D prison in Suffolk. During the fieldwork period, the prison's database showed that there were 346 adult prisoners. In January 2015, the prison had received an exceptionally positive HMCIP report on an unannounced inspection that occurred in late 2014 and it was evident that management had taken the results as a matter of great pride. The report was frequently mentioned in discussions I had with staff and on several noticeboards, the Chief Inspector's comments that Hollesley Bay was 'an impressive open prison, from which other similar establishments could learn' had been excerpted, together with other positive comments from the Ministry of Justice and the Governor in response to the report (HMCIP, 2015:5). Overall, the prison had high scores across the dimensions of safety, respect, the provision of purposeful activity and resettlement assistance (HMCIP, 2015).

While conducting research in a prison operating near the top of all key performance indicators presents the limitation that prisoner experiences there may be atypical, Hollesley Bay was ultimately selected as the research site given its strong fit with this dissertation's research questions. First, the prison has a relatively large older population. During the fieldwork period there were 65 prisoners over 50 years of age, representing one in five of all prisoners. This is higher than the proportion of older prisoners across the prison estate (14%, Chapter 1). Second, as an open prison, Hollesley Bay has an emphasis on preparing individuals for resettlement. Everyone was coming towards the end of their custodial sentence, making the prison ideal for research regarding prisoners' thoughts about the future and reintegration into the community. Finally, at the initiative of the Deputy Governor, one of the prison's seven residential units, Samforde, had been designated as an older prisoner unit for 15 inmates over the age of 60. Originally, this age threshold had been set at 50, such that several residents in Samforde were below 60. The presence of a dedicated older prisoner unit allowed for research on the segregation/integration debate to take place.

#### **Access, trust and sampling**

Researchers have often described access into prison as a 'precarious process' involving constant negotiation and renegotiation with various 'gate-keepers', ranging from the Ministry of Justice to prison staff (Wahidin, 2004:21; Jewkes, 2002). Fortunately, access was straightforward and was significantly aided by a Deputy Governor with a personal interest (and experience) in researching older prisoners. A preliminary visit was made on 31 January 2015. This allowed for familiarisation with the research site and enabled me to meet key staff members and older prisoners, several of whom would ultimately be interviewed. Formal NOMS access was granted on 31 March and fieldwork commenced on 20 April, lasting five days.

Scholars have discussed the importance of gaining trust and a level of acceptance with prisoners as a crucial stage in the research process once access has been granted (Crewe, 2009). Attempting to reduce the inevitable power distance that exists between the researcher and participant is challenging, not least because the

relationship is 'fundamentally structured by the essential difference between being captive and being free' (Crewe, 2009:479). Researchers have frequently considered issues ranging from the need to dress down in order to gain greater acceptance, to the impact of being a female researcher in a male prison (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1990; Jewkes, 2002; Mann, 2012c; Ugelvik, 2014). However, very little has been written on the impact of a researcher's age on their ability to gain trust and acceptance with much older participants. I was aware that my youthful appearance could impact upon my ability to be accepted by older prisoners, who might not have liked their lives being intruded into by a researcher more than half the age of the youngest possible participant. In the week prior to entering the field, the Governor authorised two official notices that were distributed to all prisoners and staff respectively. These identical notices informed all stakeholders of my arrival the following week and provided a brief outline of my research. In her fieldwork, Jewkes (2002:67) noted that the prison tour she received from the Governor and the allocation of keys gave her presence a 'sense of legitimacy...in the eyes of both staff and inmates'. Similarly, the official notices ensured that all prisoners and staff were aware of my presence and this greatly assisted, particularly as I did not have to repeatedly introduce myself or justify why I was alone in a certain place or speaking to a particular individual. To a degree, the notices also legitimised my presence. They reduced the impact of my youth and equalised my relationship with the older prisoners, making me appear less like a young student and more like a serious researcher.

Also, in the week preceding the fieldwork, a 'Letter of Introduction' was distributed to all older prisoners. The purpose of this letter was to further legitimise my presence and win greater acceptance from the prisoners. The letter also invited all older prisoners to a 'Meet and Greet' event to be held on the first day of fieldwork, immediately following lunch. Almost one-third (n=21) of the older prisoners attended this event, which was considerable since many others had to return to courses or work following lunch or were out on temporary licence, working in Ipswich and the surrounding area. During the meeting, I introduced myself and outlined my research. I also stressed my position as an independent researcher and provided an overview of my ethical obligations including the voluntary nature of participation and confidentiality. This introductory meeting greatly helped in establishing my presence in the prison and in gaining the trust of the older prisoners. The attendees were generally receptive and several were enthusiastic to hear my views on contemporary prison issues and the significance of my work, including whether it could affect policy. At all times I ensured that I did not 'mislead or promise too much' (Crewe, 2009:470). I simply reiterated the need for a greater understanding of older prisoners, a demographic long neglected by researchers. Nonetheless, on several occasions, my presence was somewhat challenged. One prisoner, a little aggressively, demanded to know why I was interested in 'us old folks'. I dealt with this by calmly restating my research aims and the limited existing literature. This prisoner would eventually be involved in one of my longest interviews and provided a four-page typed letter in which he addressed my research questions and provided views beyond those expressed during the interview. On numerous occasions, prisoners also challenged my credentials and demanded to know whether I had ever visited other prisons. These challenges were dissipated when I revealed that I had visited HMP Grendon and an Indonesian prison. Ultimately, I did not feel that my age impacted on the research. While at times participants commented on my age ('How old are you?');



'When I was your age...'; 'Jeez, you're younger than my grandson!'), the initial concerns I had about age becoming an obstacle did not eventuate.

At the conclusion of the introductory meeting, attendees were encouraged to take part in a discussion group, an interview, or both. Also, before my arrival, following receipt of both the official notice and the introductory letter, several prisoners had indicated to staff their willingness to participate. Therefore, relying on volunteers who expressed interest, the sampling strategy adopted was based on convenience, with the older prisoners who were 'most easily accessible' selected (Flick, 2015:106). While convenience sampling has been criticised for its lack of focus, relying on 'doing what's fast and convenient', I was conscious about the feasibility of adopting a more purposeful or strategic sampling strategy within the limited time at my disposal (Patton, 2002:241). Moreover, I wanted to ensure that all prisoners who wished to participate would be able to do so. However, provided with a list of names and room locations, I was able to supplement this sample by knocking on doors and seeking out other prisoners. I used this opportunity to seek individuals from different ethnicities and those who were unable to attend the introductory meeting, for example, because of mobility problems. The final sample included 23 prisoners, representing about one in three of the total older prisoner population. Of these, 16 participated in two discussion groups and 16 were interviewed one-on-one; nine prisoners participated in both. The sample had a mean age of 59 years and a median of 58 years. The mean and median ages of the total older prisoner population were 57 and 56 years, respectively. The oldest participant, who was also the oldest prisoner, was 77. 78% (n=18) of the sample identified as white British, compared to 72% of the older prisoner population (n=47). The five non-white British participants were all of different ethnicities: black African, mixed background (Turkish), Chinese, Pakistani and non-British white (Palestinian).<sup>3</sup> The obtained sample was thus broadly representative of the total older prisoner population.

Finally, as my research questions addressed the experience of imprisonment, I did not seek information regarding participants' index offences, however they were almost always volunteered, without my prompting. The 23 participants had committed a range of offences including murder, drug offences, fraud and corporate crime. There were no sex offenders since it was prison policy not to accept them (Ministry of Justice, 2013b). This study is therefore limited in that it does not examine the experiences of one of the largest groups of older prisoners. However, since much of the existing literature has considered, predominately, older sex offenders, the exclusion of this group from the present study provides an opportunity to consider *other* older prisoners whom the existing literature, given the greater numbers of older sex offenders, has inadvertently side-lined.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Qualitative research methods were used since the study's research questions necessitated strategies that result in the collection of rich experiential data not easily obtainable through quantitative means (Richards and Bartels, 2011). Data were primarily collected from two discussion groups and 16 interviews. The discussion groups took place on the first two evenings of fieldwork and interviews took place

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<sup>3</sup> Ethnicities refer to prisoners' NOMIS ethnicity label, which was kindly provided by the prison.

throughout the week. Using discussion groups increased the number of participants who could be involved. Discussion groups are also commonly used to allow for the collection of data that might not be as accessible in a one-on-one interview. The group setting allows for 'opinions to bounce back and forth and be modified by the group', permitting nuances and new interpretations to emerge (Frey and Fontana, 1991:178). Holding the discussion groups at the beginning of the fieldwork phase also allowed the one-on-one interviews to be more focused, directed towards issues that emerged in the group setting. Owing to participants' availabilities, the discussion groups were uneven in composition: 13 in the first and three in the second. Despite its size, the first group remained manageable. The discussion groups were directed by the same interview schedule used for the one-on-one interviews (Appendix 1). The questions within the schedule covered the three research questions and were guided by the existing literature. Since discussion groups are unsuitable for researching sensitive and personal topics, the schedule was slightly modified (Fontana and Frey, 1994). For example, questions did not consider family issues or specific details regarding participants' expected release date and future plans. Each discussion group lasted for an hour and a quarter.

An office in the resettlement department was provided for the duration of the fieldwork and this was the venue for nine one-on-one interviews. Given some participants' mobility problems, the closure of the resettlement department at 4pm, and my desire to move around the prison, the remaining seven interviews occurred in quiet (and empty) wing offices or in the communal garden behind Samforde unit. While the interview schedule guided discussion, I was able to 'follow up ideas, probe responses and ask for clarification or further elaboration' (Arksey and Knight, 1999:7). This semi-structured format was ideal, given the exploratory nature of the research questions. The average interview length was 58 minutes. The shortest interview lasted 25 minutes and the longest was 1 hour and 26 minutes. Appendix 2 provides information on the 16 interview participants.

All interviews and the discussion groups were voice recorded. Prior to commencing both interviews and discussion groups, all participants were provided with a detailed 'Participant Information Sheet'. I read through this document with all participants before they signed the 'Research Consent Form' (Appendix 3). The British Society of Criminology's Code of Ethics (2006) guided this research, which received Institute of Criminology ethics approval in February 2015. In particular, I was concerned that participants could become distressed during or following the interview, especially given the sensitive nature of the questions asked. In addition to a ten minute debrief at the end of each interview in which I asked how participants felt and engaged in light conversation, on the final days of fieldwork I was able to re-visit all participants for a brief follow-up. All participants seemed unaffected and no ethical complications have since emerged.

During interviews and discussion groups, participants were encouraged to consider not only their present experience of imprisonment, but to reflect on their entire sentence, which often involved incarceration in higher-category prisons. This ensured that the limitation of researching in an atypically successful open prison would be somewhat mitigated. While the interviews occurred without incident, on one occasion, a 69-year-old mobility-impaired prisoner who had initially volunteered for an interview withdrew at the last minute, claiming he was 'no longer in the mood'.

This was disappointing since this individual could have provided greater insight on resettlement issues. Staff had informed me that the prisoner, a lifer, had been recommended for release on licence but that actual release had been delayed given the inability to find suitable accommodation in the community.

Data were also gathered from innumerable informal conversations with staff ranging from unit officers to probation and education staff. I often had lunch in the staff mess and was invited to sit with senior managers, including the Governor. Moreover, each day I was driven to and from my accommodation in Ipswich by a roster of four prisoner drivers (two in their 30s, one each in their 40s and 50s respectively). These journeys involved many conversations, including exchanges directly relevant to this study. While these staff members and drivers did not sign consent forms, all were aware of my research and volunteered information and opinions, which were subsequently recorded in my fieldwork notes. Consequently, where appropriate, these notes will be explicitly referred to. Finally, rich observational data were collected from simply 'hanging around' (Crewe, 2009:469). I undertook 'reserved participation' on several occasions, for example, by joining prisoners during dinner when they ate communally (Liebling, 1999a). All prisoners were aware of my presence and the observations made were subsequently recorded in my fieldwork notes.

The recorded data were not transcribed. Transcribing the recordings would have been an inefficient use of the limited time I had for data analysis. Moreover, in circumstances when the interviewer and researcher is the same person and data analysis occurs immediately upon leaving the field, the desirability of using a transcript as the basis from which to analyse data has been questioned. When the spoken word is transcribed, meaning derived from sounds, pauses and tones is invariably lost (Thompson, 1988; Samuel, 1998). Also, transcriptions are never 'truly neutral' but are inevitably tainted by the transcriber and their 'set of hypotheses and assumptions' (Kendon, 1982:478). Therefore, an analysis based on a written transcript becomes one-step removed from the original data source – the recording. For this reason, Beckman (2004:83) advocates 'active listening', arguing that '[a]s opposed to *reading* the transcripts for data, a continuous *listening* may produce a description and explanation in closer proximity to its evidence as the integrity of the oral source is maintained and affirmed'.<sup>4</sup> Active listening was therefore adopted, with the recordings replayed several times and listening guides consulted to ensure that the process yielded maximum results (McGregor and White, 1986; Rost, 2011). Active listening was guided by framework analysis, 'a systematic process of sifting, charting and sorting material according to key issues and themes' (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994:177). As I listened, I made notes, indexing the recordings into themes based on my research questions and from the existing literature.<sup>5</sup> New themes also emerged inductively from the data. Notes on the same theme were then collated into what Ritchie and Spencer (1994:182) term 'charts' and the analysis that follows is based on an interpretation of these 'charts'.

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<sup>4</sup> Emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> Active listening was an intensely time-consuming process, resulting in over 200 pages of typed notes. These notes were mainly comprised of selective transcriptions.

## 4. The experience of prison life<sup>6</sup>

### Entering prison for the first time

*It is so stressful ... it's taken so much from me. ... I think it is the worst thing that has happened in my life.*  
(Louis, 55)

*It was hell ... it was absolute chaos. My life was ... just put in, ripped inside out, I've had to start from scratch, to build trust, to build up confidence to speak to officers without getting shouted at.*  
(Ahmet, 52)

Eight of the sixteen interviews conducted involved participants who had never been imprisoned before. For Louis and Ahmet, and consistent with the existing literature, receiving a first prison sentence in their 50s represented 'nothing short of a 'disaster', a 'catastrophe' (Crawley, 2007:228). Both men vividly described the trauma associated with having their lives 'ripped inside out' (Ahmet). Entry into prison was a major and unexpected intrusion into their otherwise crime-free existence, disrupting their working and family lives. Crawley (2007) likened the trauma that many first-timers experience upon entering prison to the 'relocation stress' that older people tend to feel when they move into institutional care for the first time (Siebers *et al.*, 1993:169). However, unlike the existing literature, when reflecting back on their experience of first entering prison, a majority of the first-timers interviewed did not consider it to be a deeply 'traumatic experience' (Crawley, 2007:228). William's reflection on his experience of first entering prison in his 60s was typical of several of the first-timers interviewed:

*It was a shock, but I'm going to say something very strange. It was not as bad as I thought it was going to be! [chuckles] I was 63; you build up this horror of prisons.*

Several of the first-timers spoke about the strong fear and anxiety they held immediately prior to entering prison, whether on remand or upon being sentenced. Compounding the stress of being separated from family and having their life-course dramatically altered were fears of the harshness and violence associated with everyday prison life. Having never experienced imprisonment before, many had turned to the popular media and to dramatisations of prison life in films and American television series. In a study of the media representation of imprisonment in the US, Yousman (2009:125) found that prisons are invariably brutally depicted, with prison life 'framed in such a way as to suggest that prison will either kill a person, or turn them into an animal'. Primed by such terrifying perceptions of imprisonment, many first-timers were pleasantly surprised when they found the reality of incarceration to be very different. This helped several of the participants to moderate the trauma

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<sup>6</sup> The following three chapters incorporate direct quotations from participants. An attempt has been made to remain as faithful as possible to the 'respondents' accent, dialectic idioms and lack of grammar' (Mann, 2012c:14). While this may impact on their comprehensibility, presenting the data in this way ensures that it is as close as possible to the original recording and gives the reader a greater insight into each participant and their idiosyncrasies.

associated with being incarcerated for the first time in their 50s. As Curtis, 57, explained:

*There was fear, a bit of trepidation ... But from the moment I arrived ... it was nowhere near as bad as I thought it would be. It's not the stigma attached with the brutality, a regime ... That was what I was expecting ... We're taught from a young age between right and wrong and if you're wrong you'll be punished ... and in religion if you do wrong, you'll be punished. It's instilled into you that you'll be punished. Prison, you're locked up, bars, punished! But you come in and you're politely addressed and people are quite amenable and people call you 'Mr Smith', and 'would you like a cup of tea, Mr Smith?' A cup of tea? I thought I was a prisoner! What, you're not going to beat me up?*

Therefore, while experiencing imprisonment for the first time in older age was a significant and deeply traumatic experience for a few participants, several others found prison life to be less stressful and brutal than what they had anticipated. These individuals had worked up such a negative impression of prison life that when they finally experienced it and found many of their initial fears of unrestrained violence unsubstantiated, this realisation provided some relief, making the initial 'entry shock' less severe and first time imprisonment more palatable (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:350).

### **Prison pain**

*This is a [pauses], I don't hasten to use the word 'holiday camp', but it's like a holiday camp.* (William, 68)

On the surface, life as an older prisoner in open conditions may appear tranquil and carefree, far removed from the monotonous and often brutal regimes depicted in classic prison studies such as Clemmer's (1940/1958) *The Prison Community*. Indeed, on several occasions, participants jokingly nicknamed Hollesley Bay 'Holiday Bay' – a reference to recent tabloid reports of absconding inmates, in which the prison is described as having weak security and a 'relaxed atmosphere' (Dolan, 2013). Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that despite the relaxed regime and greater material comforts on offer, including possessing the keys to one's own room, Hollesley Bay was ultimately a prison. As Jeffery, 65, lamented while being interviewed in a recreation room overlooking a garden behind Samforde unit, 'you still can't get out'. Therefore, while certain 'pains of imprisonment' such as the deprivation of autonomy were reduced in open as opposed to closed conditions (prisoners were largely able to move freely around the prison during the day and room doors were unlocked), others, such as the loss of liberty and being separated from family and friends remained as daily reminders of participants' status as prisoners (Sykes, 1958). Consistent with the literature, many of the older men who had spouses, children and grandchildren considered their separation from these family members to be 'the worst part of being in prison' (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:348). On the verge of tears, Louis, 55, described being separated from his wife and three adolescent children as the most painful part of his sentence. Louis felt 'dead and alive' and emasculated by not being able to financially support his wife or provide fatherly advice to his children during their teenage years when he believed they needed him most. Several participants firmly believed that their frustration from

being separated from loved ones was more intense than their younger counterparts. They argued that older prisoners were more likely to be in long-term marriages and to have children compared to younger prisoners. Dmitri, a 31-year-old prisoner driver married with two very young children agreed:

*I'm lucky. My kids won't remember this. But for the older prisoners, their kids will know that daddy's in prison. It's a bigger loss for them.*

In his study of a Norwegian open prison, Shammas (2014) found that the greater privileges, autonomy and material comforts associated with the prison brought about a new and distinct set of penal frustrations. Labelling them the 'pains of freedom', these included the confusion felt when navigating the dual identities of being a prisoner and an individual granted greater autonomy and responsibility, such as the right to work daily on licence in the community. Another frustration that Shammas (2014:111) identified was the 'anxiety and ... sense of boundlessness' that inmates feel as they 'transition from closed to open prison, from tight confinement to looser regulations'. Ahmet's description of his feelings when he first arrived at Hollesley Bay from a Category-B prison capture the initial disorientating effect of open conditions on an individual who had spent several years in higher-security establishments:

*I look around, there's trees and I'm thinking, where the hell am I? Are they testing me? You know ... are they testing me? Are they going, well look, you can't go past that, there's a little sign saying you can't cross it. So, first couple of weeks was hard ... cos you can so easily get yourself in trouble in a place like this. ... Although it's a D-Cat, open, there is still rules here ...*

For several older prisoners, incarceration in open conditions exacerbated the pain of being away from their family and friends. They mentioned that a prison without fences made them feel closer but simultaneously further away from home. Freedom was within grasp but was nonetheless unreachable and unobtainable at present. Henry, a prisoner in his 60s who declined a formal interview, informed me that the frustration he felt from being separated from his wife was worsened by living in open conditions. He felt that living in the relative comfort of an open prison, spending most of his time walking the grounds and doing light gardening was an undeserved privilege while his wife, who had cancer, struggled financially on the outside. These frustrations of being separated from loved ones remained ever-present, despite older prisoners in open conditions generally qualifying for periodic home leave on temporary licence. Indeed, if anything, these short home visits *increased* the trauma of being separated from family. Henry had recently returned from home leave and, as William observed, these prisoners were 'best left alone' to process the intense emotions associated with the bittersweet nature of going home on temporary licence only to be required to return back to prison. These intense emotions parallel the distress that Moran (2013) found in her study of female prisoners in Russia following long visits in which relatives are able to live with prisoners in specially designed visitors' units for a few days. Moran (2013:347) argued that these visitation units represented 'a space which can be repeatedly entered and left, but from which there is no immediate progression to another status' and found that this could cause intense trauma for both prisoners and their visitors. Similarly, in an open prison, the transitory nature of home visits could exacerbate the pains of imprisonment,

providing inmates with a privilege they could only briefly experience but never truly grasp and enjoy.

## Coping

*I think that's the main thing in prison today, you gotta keep yourself occupied.*

(Ned, 68)

Despite being over the retirement age and requiring the aid of a walking stick to move slowly around the prison, Ned remained relatively active, busying himself by volunteering in the kitchen, helping to keep accurate records of prisoners' diet sheets. When interviewed, Ned was particularly proud of the fact that he had just updated the sheets. He was keen to point out that he had updated them 'to next Tuesday week, *next* Tuesday, not Tuesday the following week!' Consistent with the existing literature, virtually all participants, regardless of whether they had reached retirement age, were involved in some form of educational course or work, either within the prison or in a charity shop (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b). Jeffery, 65, the only participant not involved in either work or a course, was nonetheless extremely busy, using his time to write a novel. At age 77, Carl, the oldest prisoner, tended the gardens in Samforde unit. Despite having a serious heart condition, Carl was observed mowing the small patch of grass at the entrance to the unit and watering the flower-beds. Carl was also actively involved in prison life. He was a member of several prisoner committees and volunteered with the Fire Department, checking the prison's fire equipment. For the participants interviewed, working, remaining busy and 'occupied' helped to pass the time and was a 'survival and coping strategy' (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b:351).

The older prisoners also drew upon 'internal structures' and their experiences over a long life in order to cope, consistent with the existing literature (Stones, 2005; Mann, 2012c). Several first-timers referred to the difficult jobs and long hours they had previously worked, or the businesses they had once owned and managed. Having endured challenges and a demanding working life in the past, these participants viewed prison as another difficult job that one needed to simply 'get on with'. Ned, who left school at 14 and had worked ever since, typified this mentality:

*I looked at it, well, I've done the crime ... and I've got to pay for it. ... I've always worked and all that. ... Get on with it mate, you gotta get on with it don't ya? If you don't get on with it, you sit here and let yourself go low and you start taking the spice and all that shit.<sup>7</sup> If those people dropped down in front of me, fuck, I wouldn't help them. ... I just walk over them.*

Jeffery, a first-timer, also drew on his past experiences in order to survive his sentence. He was able to cope with the frustrations he constantly felt from being separated from his wife and two adult children by drawing on his memories of being the owner of several successful nightclubs. Jeffery noted that he had never cried or allowed himself to have 'a bad day'. He explained:

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<sup>7</sup> 'Spice' is a synthetic drug common in prisons.

*I've never shown any weakness in life. The job I've done, you can't afford to show weakness.*

Moreover, Jeffery explained how he used popular psychology to internalise his negative feelings and turn his prison sentence into a personal challenge. Prison became another business obstacle or goal that needed to be overcome and conquered:

*I don't allow myself to have bad days ... I change it in my mind. ... [W]hen I first came in here I thought, I got 2 years of this ... get on with it. And me, I've always, I make it a challenge, a violent challenge, it's weird but it works ... I'm going to beat you. It's a thought I have, and I get myself worked up to beat the thought. It sounds stupid.*

When asked how they managed to survive their sentences in older age, several participants also pointed to religion. These participants stated that they had converted to a religion (usually Christianity) in prison or had rekindled their relationship with God. In the latter case, participants had often grown up in a religious household but had stopped going to Church when they became adults. Tom, 63, described how he had 'walked away' from the Church as a teenager but returned to religion when he received his sentence:

*[I]t came back when I was on the prison bus, on the day I was sentenced. ... I didn't expect to be coming to prison. ... I was absolutely devastated...but on that prison bus, I just prayed ... my prayer was basically God if you exist, reveal yourself to me. I prayed for about an hour, I had a vision ... I felt afterwards a calmness, almost as though I was on drugs. ... And it stayed and has grown stronger every day since.*

Considering himself a 'committed Christian', Tom now had plans to become ordained upon release. A small body of literature has dealt with the role that religion can play in helping older prisoners cope with their sentences. Goffman (1963:91) had long argued that 'strong religious convictions' had the ability 'to insulate the true believer against the assaults of the total institution', while a dated study of 96 older prisoners aged fifty and over in the US found that 'religion may be a resource which older inmates use to help adapt to prison life' (Koenig, 1995:229). More recently, Maruna *et al.* (2006:162) argued that the 'jailhouse conversion' provided a particularly powerful method for prisoners to survive and cope with their sentences. Based on 75 life-story interviews, it was found that converting to a religion while behind bars allowed prisoners to construct positive religious identities and gave prisoners a strong sense of hope for the future and purpose while incarcerated (Maruna *et al.*, 2006). For Tom and several others, religion was a clear coping tool. It helped the older prisoners structure their daily lives and focus on the positive, redemptive scripts that religion offered, taking their thoughts away from the pains of imprisonment and the guilt that several felt for having committed a crime.

### **An older corporate criminal**

Several participants had been convicted of corporate misconduct and fraud-related offences. Many possessed university qualifications and their offences were often high-profile. Among the participants included a former City currency trader, a banker, a former director of two well-known multinational corporations and a man who had been involved in a sophisticated tax evasion scheme. All but one of these



participants were first-timers. While greater scholarly attention has been devoted to issues including the tighter regulation of financial markets and corporate criminal liability for offences ranging from participation in a cartel to decisions by senior managers 'causing a financial institution to fail', especially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, relatively little is known about how the individuals ultimately convicted as a result of these regulations cope in prison (s36, Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act 2013; Black and Kershaw, 2013; Graham, 2013; Pinto and Evans, 2013). Despite the disparity between their former lives and current imprisonment, the older corporate offenders interviewed appeared to have adjusted reasonably well to prison life. William, 68, a former banker, drew upon his experiences from working in a high-pressure environment, in which he held a senior management role, in order to cope. Having thrived in the corporate world, William saw no reason why he could not survive in prison and noted he was unfazed to be surrounded by individuals convicted of violent offences and was not intimidated by staff or the regime:

*I'm not afraid ... I used to do public speaking when I was with the bank ... and it doesn't faze me to speak to anybody and ... I think, well I've been up there, so why should I be worried about speaking to anybody? ... At one point I was in charge of 60-odd people. ... There's no reason why I can't talk to you, anybody [else] ... I can talk to them, I am not inferior to any of them, probably more highly educated than quite a lot, and to be honest, I am probably more highly educated ... than most of the staff in here.*

As in Mann's (2012c) research, which found that older child sex offenders frequently used Sykes and Matza's (1957) 'techniques of neutralisation' in order to cope with their imprisonment, William had also found ways to minimise or even *justify* his criminal actions. For example, William believed that his sentence was illegitimate, and he neutralised the seriousness of his offence by questioning whether it was in fact criminal, denying that he had caused harm to an actual victim (Sykes and Matza, 1957):

*We don't deal drugs ... we never stole from grandmothers. The only people who lost, maybe, from our actions were large corporations, banks and ... very wealthy individuals. We didn't take the life savings of grandmothers or that. It was purely corporate crime. If it was a crime! [laughs] It was all a matter of perception, at the time.*

William also 'condemned the condemners', a neutralisation technique whereby an offender 'shifts the focus of attention from his own deviant acts to the motives and behaviour of those who disapprove of his violations' (Sykes and Matza, 1957:668). He was critical of the jury which had found him guilty and blamed his predicament on the former Labour government which, he believed, pursued bankers in an effort to appease the public following the financial crisis:

*To be honest, in the trial, we may as well walked out after 15 minutes, because we had a very, very nice lifestyle. That was brought up to a jury ... probably most of them unemployed, most of them social workers, and as soon as the prosecution started talking about banking, and bankers were of course, at that time, the lowest of the low ...*

*[T]here is a department within government called 'perception management' ... spin! And the bankers were blamed for everything. ... They had to find a scapegoat so they blamed bankers ... we became the worst of the worst. And then the government decided ... that perhaps we ought to arrest a few ... to show that we are being strong.*

Therefore, while several of the ageing corporate offenders interviewed displayed a slight arrogance and dismissive attitude towards their sentence and those around them, as typified by William, their ability to draw upon past experiences and neutralise the seriousness of their offending acted as a successful coping strategy. This enabled these offenders, many of whom had enjoyed very comfortable and successful former lives, to survive their present predicament.

## 5. The future, release and resettlement

### Thoughts about the future

Previous studies examining how older men talk about release have discussed the 'general lack of enthusiasm' and anxieties that many share when asked to consider the future (Mann, 2012c:75; Crawley and Sparks, 2006). These findings are compatible with theories on the psychology of the ageing process from the fields of psychiatry and gerontology. It is widely argued that as we age, individuals naturally undertake a 'life review', in which we reminisce and evaluate the course our lives have taken (Butler, 1963). Erikson (1963, 1975 and 1982) proposed that an individual's life-course consisted of eight developmental stages. In the final stage, which occurs in the post-retirement years, the individual reflects on their life and, either consciously or subconsciously, asks themselves questions such as 'What does my life mean, and how do I feel about that? What have I to grieve, to be proud of, to make up for, and what remains to be done about these things?' (Hearn *et al.*, 2012:2). Evaluating the answers to these questions, Erikson proposed that the individual ultimately achieved either 'ego-integrity' or 'despair'. While recent studies have suggested that the outcome of a life review may be more nuanced than the two categories Erikson proposed, in the former, the individual achieves 'a basic acceptance' of where their lives have taken them (Haber, 2006:157; Hearn *et al.*, 2012). However, a life evaluation that results in 'despair' leaves the individual unsatisfied, with feelings of 'resentment, guilt, and regret' (Haber, 2006:157). A positive life review resulting in 'ego-integrity' can help ageing individuals to make sense of their lives and accept their mortality. For this reason, reminiscence and the life review have long been advocated as a therapeutic intervention for older adults who generally suffer from higher levels of pessimism and depression vis-à-vis the general population (Haight, 1988; Cook, 1998; O'Leary and Barry, 1998; Bohlmeijer, 2003; Stinson, 2009; Kotter-Grühn and Smith, 2011). However, it has been theorised that older prisoners are more likely to conclude a life review in 'despair', with an acute awareness of their failings and a realisation that there is insufficient time to rewrite their life-script (Crawley and Sparks, 2005b). For this reason, older prisoners may hold extremely pessimistic thoughts about the future.

All participants were asked to provide three words that best described their thoughts about the future and release. A summary of all the words provided appears in Appendix 4. Contrary to what would have been expected, the words provided were generally positive. Four participants used the word 'optimistic' to describe their future outlook. Despite suffering from a serious heart condition, Carl, the oldest participant, longed for release from prison and firmly believed that his best years were still ahead. When asked to consider the future, Carl said:

*They will be, from the moment I get out, the best days of my life.*

A lifer, Carl noted that he had never received 'a negative remark' from any member of staff and so fully expected (and had received indications from probation) to be released on licence upon the completion of his tariff in twelve months' time. Carl's enthusiasm for release and the future were largely related to the prospect of being reunited with his wife, about whom he spoke very passionately, recounting at length

how he had first met her. In prison, Carl wrote her 'at least' a four-page letter every day. Carl's optimism is consistent with findings that older men with family and friends awaiting them tend to view the future more favourably (Crawley and Sparks, 2006). However, separation from relatives did not necessarily preclude participants from speaking positively about the future. Several participants looked forward to release and the *hope* of rekindling relations with estranged family members. Joe, 53, said that he was quietly optimistic about the future and had plans to try and rebuild his relationship with his 24-year-old son, Charlie, who had already served three custodial sentences. Their father-son relationship was, at present, extremely tense. The last time the two met, Charlie had physically assaulted him. However, as Joe noted:

*I am ... looking forward to [release] ... My boy will be my ultimate challenge ... I sit here and ... work out ways to get round it. ... [The police] all say to me ... you've got to sort yourself out ... if you can sort yourself out then [Charlie might stop offending] ... So, he's my primary concern ... my biggest driving force, because to see him continue going down exactly the same road [as me] ... I don't want to see him ... take someone's life or seriously hurt someone ... Obviously he's going to have to see me continue that path [of desistance] for quite a while before he comes around ... It might take a year for us to even start talking but as long as he sees me continue to progress and do right, hopefully he'll change.*

Therefore, despite estrangement from his family and adult son, Joe was positive about the future. A lifelong recidivist, he was looking forward to desisting from crime and turning himself into a role-model for his son, for whose criminal behaviour he felt deeply responsible.

Moreover, not all participants were stressed about the insufficient time they had to rewrite their life-scripts. For these participants, time was not a finite resource, but was fluid and something that could be extended. Tom, 63, whose three words were 'confident', 'optimistic' and 'joyful', explained how upon arriving in prison, he had embarked on a course of 'self-improvement', exercising regularly and making life-changes in an effort to extend the time he would have after release to enjoy his life and *regain* the years lost by imprisonment:

*I use the philosophy ... I've lost 3 years, but I am trying to gain 4 or 5 years back in my life. I have given up smoking. Obviously I am not drinking! [laughs] I exercise every day and I am determined to get a few years back in my life. I want to live longer. I've lost weight.*

However, while most participants were positive and hopeful about the future, a few were pessimistic. For example, James's three words were 'trepidation', 'anxiety' and 'longing'. Aged 52, and having served twelve and a half years of a life sentence with a 14-year tariff, James longed for release and to return to his partner but felt a great deal of frustration and uncertainty as to when this might occur. James had heard of other lifers who were still in prison several years after the end of their tariff and this troubled him. For James, every day was a challenge, as he attempted to navigate prison life, avoiding confrontations and ensuring that his reports were always positive, thereby improving his chances of being recommended for release. This constant tip-toeing and heightened sense of vigilance, as James attempted to remain

a model prisoner, knowing that any wrong step could delay his release, was stressful:

*[Y]ou cannot afford confrontation because you don't know what it's going to be met with. ... [I]f you have a negative entry [in your prisoner report] for confrontation or aggression, you can have a hundred entries, all positive, [but] one negative entry for something that is offence-related ... violence wipes all that out. That counts for nothing. ... [W]e're beaten. It crushes the life out of you, jail. It's not a life, it's an existence. You're dancing to somebody else's tune.*

When asked to describe, in more detail, how he felt about the future, James provided a distressing analogy of being within touching distance of release, only to find the uncertainty of being a lifer overwhelming and debilitating:

*[Y]ou see a light at the end of the tunnel, you get to D-Cat and you're on the home-straight, and you see this light ... only to find out it's an oncoming train. ... [Y]ou wish for two things while you're in jail, you wish you were a pigeon because ... they fly away and you wish your life away. ... You just wish time would disappear and to be at the end of it.*

Several scholars have addressed the unique 'pains of uncertainty' that lifers and those serving indeterminate sentences experience (Jewkes, 2005; Crewe, 2011). In an open prison, freedom was closer for James than at any other time during his sentence. But it was nonetheless ambiguous, near but far, within grasp but not. This made thoughts about the future extremely pessimistic.

## **Preparations for resettlement**

### ***Accommodation***

Most of the literature on the accommodation of ex-prisoners has tended to focus on the importance of securing adequate housing to encourage desistance from crime (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Wilson, 2014). While older prisoners are one of the least likely categories of prisoners to re-offend, ensuring that their housing needs are adequately met upon release remains important for other reasons (Brunton-Smith and Hopkins, 2013). As several participants explained, having a clean and quiet place of their own to call home was important for reasons of dignity. A home would also enable them to begin to rebuild their lives and, as Bruce, 59, explained, to attempt to regain their self-respect and respect from society that had been lost by the stigmatising impact of imprisonment.

The majority of participants knew where they would be living upon release. This was particularly true for the first-timers, many of whom would return to their family homes.

The lack of problems that this group generally faced regarding accommodation was probably, in part, due to the nature of the offences they had committed. There were no sex offenders in Hollesley Bay, and research has suggested that older first-timers convicted of sex offences might be unable to return to their family homes, given the shame associated with their offences and the fact that often, their crimes occurred within the family setting (Crawley and Sparks, 2006). Other participants, who were estranged from family, nonetheless had their own properties to return to and some

had savings and were confident of their ability to find and rent a flat. However, for those without family and with limited savings, finding adequate housing was difficult, making the future uncertain and a source of worry. Matthew, 56, had no family to return to, except a sister who, with her own large family, would be unable to accommodate him for the long term. A confiscation order also meant he had lost the majority of his assets. Also, volunteering in a charity shop while in prison meant that Matthew was unpaid for his work and unable to save money. Reliant on what probation could help him find, Matthew was frustrated by the slow resettlement process, which often meant that prisoners' accommodation would not be considered until just before their release:

*It's up in the air. It's uncertain. You can't do anything. I had a word with probation ... they can't do nothing ... until you've got 3 months left. Because the housing situation is so bad out there, they're more worried about the people who's going out of prison next week!*

A probation officer I spoke to confirmed the difficulties that prisoners in Matthew's position faced. He noted that low-risk, non-violent prisoners often fell within an uncertain middle ground. Without family or assets, they were unable to find private accommodation. Moreover, not classed as high-risk, they were unlikely to fall under a Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement that would require probation to actively supervise their release, including finding appropriate accommodation in an 'approved premises'. For Matthew, his greatest fear would be having to accept accommodation in a hostel as an alternative to homelessness:

*I could go to a hostel, but it's not ideal ... you've got ex-drug addicts, you've got needles about. They [offenders living in hostels] haven't learnt their lesson ... you wouldn't want to be in that environment. ... And they mix sex offenders up with normal guys!*

Matthew's reservations about being forced to live in a hostel echo the intense fears that many older prisoners in Crawley and Sparks' (2006) study held about hostel life. For older men like Matthew, traversing a 'middle ground' between having private accommodation and the legal requirement that housing be found for them by the authorities, their preparations for resettlement were patchy, uncertain and a source of great frustration.

### **Employment**

For the participants below the retirement age, release also meant needing to find a source of income. Aged 52, James was confined to a mobility scooter. He had arthritis in his neck, hands, shoulder and hips, had damaged nerves in his feet, and had long-term stomach and bowel problems. James noted that he would most likely be unable to work and would therefore be reliant on a disability pension and financial support from his partner. However, for the majority of participants in their 50s and early 60s, preparations for resettlement included taking steps to find employment. Curtis, 57, considered himself fortunate. He was serving a relatively short sentence (one and a half years in custody) for the first time, and his employer had kept his job vacant to be recommenced immediately upon release. However, this was atypical, with most participants needing to find new jobs. Several older prisoners were extremely pessimistic about their prospects of finding work. In a discussion group,

Louis, 55, summarised the view that several shared about feeling doubly discriminated against:

*The chance of you getting a job is ... very grim. As soon as you declare you have a criminal record, you've got no chance. And they [employers] rather take the 25-year-old, with no criminal record. You've got a criminal record. You've got age on you. You are competing with someone 30 years younger. They'll take someone like that and leave you.*

Louis' views on ageism reflect research findings that a large proportion of adults in the UK perceive the existence of age discrimination. Indeed, in a recent representative survey of 2,352 British respondents for the European Social Survey, 41% reported being afforded a lack of respect by virtue of their age (Abrams and Swift, 2012). Moreover, research has long found that ex-prisoners tend to be a highly stigmatised group, ultimately excluded from 'conventional economic and social activities', affecting their ability to find employment (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010:28; Metcalf *et al.*, 2001; Pager, 2003; Clear, 2007).

Several participants described how finding employment meant a career change and an attempt to source work in a completely different field to the jobs they had held prior to imprisonment. This only exacerbated the obstacles they faced. For the older corporate prisoners, this was invariably a result of court-imposed sanctions precluding them from future employment in the financial services industry. However, for others, their decision to find new work reflected a belief that their prolonged absence from employment would make returning to the same type of work so difficult that it would be easier to change occupation. This view is consistent with the economic argument that long-term unemployment results in such an 'atrophy of skills' and loss of 'human capital' that future employment prospects become significantly impaired (Blanchard and Summers, 1986:28).

Participants attempting to acquire skills in order to find work in new occupations were invariably critical of the vocational courses on offer. One criticism was that the courses, run by an external provider, were focused on improving employability for physically laborious jobs, not always suitable for older, slower bodies. As Stuart, 60, observed:

*... these courses – multi-skills, bricklaying, plastering – how many 60-year-olds, or 50-year-olds have got the physical capabilities? The plastering and bricklaying courses are very strenuous. ... So yeah ... if they [older prisoners] have the inclination, and do the course, do they have a line of employment when they leave? Do you think people are going to employ a 60-year-old bricklayer or plasterer?*

In this way, it seemed as though in offering vocational courses, the external provider had not actively considered the needs of older prisoners, less likely to have the stamina required to successfully complete many of the programmes on offer. This oversight amounted, in part, to the 'institutional thoughtlessness' that Crawley and Sparks found to be a common feature of prison regimes (Crawley, 2005:356). Nonetheless, a few courses that were less physically demanding were also available and they were well attended by older prisoners. For example, an 'IT for Business' course was running during the fieldwork period and I was able to observe a class. Its

curriculum included how to use Excel and PowerPoint. However, this course was being taught on software almost 10-years-old. The teacher later described the frustration he felt attempting to run the course using outdated equipment and without Internet access. While he understood the security concerns regarding Internet use, he explained that many older prisoners, especially those serving long sentences, did not know how to send emails or operate search engines – skills that are crucial for modern job-hunting. Surprisingly, another teacher who spoke to me displayed a sceptical attitude towards the 'IT for Business' course, noting that unless prisoners applied the skills learnt towards their *own* businesses, it was unlikely that they would gain private employment. She believed that when competing against younger job candidates with superior IT skills older prisoners would struggle to find IT-related work in a society where their criminal record would already make private employment extremely difficult to obtain.



## 6. Segregation or integration?

### 'Indirect bullying'

*What's a reason for older prisoner units?* (researcher)

*I'm nearly 70 and I don't like the noise. Is that good enough for you?*  
(Discussion Group 1)

As Chapter 2 described, limited research has been conducted in England and Wales on the segregation/integration debate. This is particularly worrying, given the House of Commons Justice Committee's recent recommendation against the further expansion of segregated older prisoner units (HCJC, 2013). In providing this recommendation, the Committee pointed not to empirical research but to anecdotal submissions in favour of integration from the Ministry of Justice and NOMS. These submissions both noted 'the calming influence older prisoners had on the younger prisoners' (HCJC, 2013:22). Even in the US, where the literature on the segregation/integration debate is more robust, only a limited and dated body of research exists to support the argument that age heterogeneity reduces prison violence levels (e.g. Mabli *et al.*, 1979). On the other hand, a large body of (mainly US) research has found that while inmate-on-inmate victimisation amongst older prisoners is rare, older inmates are commonly victimised by younger prisoners who generally view their older counterparts with limited respect and as 'easy prey' given their poorer health outcomes and tendency to be well-behaved and non-retaliatory when confronted (Bowker, 1980:159; Chaneles, 1987; DeLuca, 1998; Kerbs and Jolley, 2007).

More recently, in a study of 65 older American prisoners, Kerbs and Jolley (2007) found high levels of psychological and property victimisation amongst older prisoners, invariably perpetrated by younger prisoners. Concluding that their findings did not 'bode well for the current practice of mainstreaming older prisoners into the general prison population', Kerbs and Jolley (2007:213) also found that more than 90% of their sample agreed that older prisoners should be given the choice 'between placement in the general prison population' and placement in a specific older prisoner unit.

Almost all participants noted that they had never been physically bullied by a younger prisoner during any part of their custodial sentence. Of course this finding should be cautiously interpreted, since participants may have chosen not to self-report victimisation given the impact it could have on their masculine self-identity, as is commonly the case when researchers attempt to ascertain the levels of sexual assault in prison (Jenness *et al.*, 2010). However, this is consistent with US findings that the *physical* victimisation of older prisoners tends to be uncommon (Kerbs and Jolley, 2007). In Britain, Mann (2012b:100) has similarly written about 'childish pranks' played on older prisoners by their younger counterparts that may be more 'juvenile than vindictive', as opposed to outright physical confrontations and violence. Tom, 63, provided one of the few accounts of bullying by a younger prisoner, which had occurred at another prison:

*There was one incident ... when somebody vaguely threatened me. ... And I was quite impressed. About 8 adjacent cells heard the noise, all young people, [and] they all screamed at him, 'How would you like it if it was your grandfather being threatened?' They actually spoke out, really loudly and strongly! I never heard another word from this guy. ... [T]he younger guys all stood up in my defence!*

While not generalisable, Tom's account implies that younger prisoners may have a level of respect towards their older counterparts. This contrasts with US research, which although dated, suggests that younger prisoners do not respect older prisoners and target them in order to exploit their vulnerabilities (Hunt *et al.*, 1993; DeLuca, 1998).

In their study, Kerbs and Jolley (2007) found high levels of *psychological* victimisation against older prisoners by younger prisoners. They defined psychological victimisation to include 'threatening behaviour by younger prisoners ... used to control and dominate public spaces and resources', such as queue cutting, verbal taunting, dominating exercise facilities and excessive noise (Kerbs and Jolley, 2007:198). While instances of the *physical* bullying of older prisoners by younger prisoners were reportedly rare, most participants noted that they were often intimidated by their younger counterparts in this psychological sense. Almost all participants complained about the excessive noise in prison, invariably created by younger prisoners. I was able to observe this first-hand. Walking through unit corridors, I could constantly hear music with a very loud bass. Moreover, during a dinner service, when prisoners were out in the corridors, I observed younger prisoners yelling at each other across different levels or from different ends of the corridor. While most participants agreed that the loud noise being generated by younger prisoners was not intended to intimidate older prisoners, they felt intimidated nonetheless. As Jordan, 52, explained during a discussion group:

*When they turn on the music at full blast and leave the door open it's like them saying, 'Come and take something from me, if you dare!' It's like 'I pissed on this place'. It's challenging other people.*

Louis, 55, argued that while not deliberate and direct intimidation, the loud and inconsiderate behaviour displayed by many younger prisoners amounted to the 'indirect bullying' of their older counterparts:

*You can say 'indirect bullying' from the young generation. When you ask some of them to turn their music down, the language that comes out from them is very disappointing. They try to put you down ... The young generation seems to be overshadowing everything. They are in control. The officers are frightened of the young ones. It is intimidating.*

Most participants agreed that staff were either unable or unwilling to control the noise problem. These findings are consistent with previous findings that noise is a major complaint of older prisoners (e.g. HMCIP, 2004). Mann (2012c:42) argues that the inability or unwillingness of the regime to police the problem is, in part, due to the belief that noise represents 'an inevitable part of prison life ... a natural part of the punishment' to be received. However, given how frequently participants complained about the noise, including some who claimed that it affected their mental health and

ability to rest, it is questionable as to whether excessively loud noise represents an inherent feature of modern incarceration or the indirect intimidation of older prisoners and an *additional* (and unnecessary) 'pain of imprisonment'. This dissertation argues that the noise issue and the regime's general inability to control it across the prison estate represents the latter, giving support for the segregation of older prisoners, at least to quieter sections of the prison. This, as the following section explains, is also the view of most participants in the study.

### **The case for (optional) segregation**

All participants were in favour of older prisoner units and believed that there should be a choice, where possible, between being housed in a segregated unit or as part of the general prison population. The strong support amongst older prisoners for the provision of such units was also found by Kerbs and Jolley (2007). This finding contrasts with the Justice Committee's conclusion that the older prisoners they interviewed 'consistently ... wanted to be mixed with the rest of the prisoner population and did not want to be isolated' (HCJC, 2013:22). Two reasons may exist for this contrasting finding. First, as the Justice Committee noted, the older prisoners they sampled were classified as 'vulnerable prisoners' and were already partly segregated such that integration represented mixing with *other* vulnerable prisoners of different age groups, rather than integration with the general prison population *per se* (HCJC, 2013:22). As the Committee observed, '[i]ntegration may not be such an attractive prospect in a regime that is not already isolated' (HCJC, 2013:22). Second, participants in Hollesley Bay were asked about whether a *choice* between segregation/integration should be provided, rather than to provide a definitive preference for one over the other. Nonetheless, virtually all participants noted that they would *prefer* to reside in an older prisoner unit, consistent again with Kerbs and Jolley's (2007) findings, where three-quarters of their random sample stated that preference.

However, a few participants objected to being housed in an older prisoner unit. These individuals tended to be younger, healthier and were able to forge a certain connection with younger people. For example, Matthew, 56, noted that he shared an interest in football with the 'youngsters' and so was able to 'get on with' them. Without football, Matthew admitted that 'the relationship would be harder' to maintain. Curtis, 57, was vehemently opposed to living on Samforde unit, arguing:

*Put me on Samforde and I'd die. I'd hate to be on there. Fucking hate to be on there... Samforde is like God's waiting room. Just waiting to fucking die.*

However, even Curtis recognised that his strong opposition to being housed in an older prisoner unit stemmed from feeling 'quite young at heart'. Curtis noted that he used to sing and play the guitar and had grown up in a household where loud music was common. This allowed him to relate with the younger prisoners, whom he often spoke to about their music preferences.

Nonetheless, most participants noted that, apart from the noise and indirect intimidation, a key reason for wanting to reside on a separate unit was because they viewed themselves as *different* from younger prisoners in terms of maturity, mentality and friendship groups. While older and younger prisoners did mix, during dinner I

observed older prisoners tending to sit together, away from those who were younger. Gordon, a prison driver aged 50 explained:

*The young ones have a different mind-set. They're all into their drugs, music, doing things we would have done at their age but we have grown out of it.*

*Are you friends with the younger prisoners?* (researcher)

*Not really. Look, I was probably sleeping with his mum before he was even born!*

Another reason participants gave in favour of segregation was the belief that their surveillance by staff could be more centralised and efficient. Carl, 77, and Morgan, 63, who were very satisfied with the level of healthcare provided at Hollesley Bay, where prisoners were not locked in cells and allowed to freely visit the health centre, both provided examples of when they had a stroke in closed conditions. Both described ringing their in-cell buzzers only to find staff taking a considerable time to attend. Their common view was that in closed conditions, where younger prisoners constantly abused their in-cell buzzers, staff reacted slowly to emergencies, unsure of whether they were genuine. They believed that in an older prisoner unit, staff could keep a closer eye on older prisoners who, given their poorer health outcomes vis-à-vis the general prison population, were more likely to have a genuine medical emergency (Fazel *et al.*, 2001).

In a commentary, Kerbs and Jolley (2009) argue that it would be inappropriate if the authorities' view that integration may have a calming effect on younger prisoners informed policy at the *expense* of reasons against mainstreaming, such as the victimisation of older prisoners by their younger counterparts. In a similar vein, it would be inappropriate for the Justice Committee to recommend integration, as it has done, without also considering whether older prisoners *want* to be a calming influence on younger prisoners, assuming an empirical basis for that influence exists. Stuart's opinion suggests that older prisoners might not always want to be a role model for younger prisoners and would prefer to do their time without this extra task:

*[It's] deemed that the older prisoner would have a calming effect on the youngster. But no one considered that the older prisoner doesn't want to have a calming effect. ... He's brought his own children up. They've grown up and moved on. He doesn't want to be in a position of putting other people's problems right. He has his own issues doing his ... prison sentence. Being surrounded by youngsters is a big detriment to how he is going to serve that sentence.* (Stuart, 60)

However, even though the participants living on Samforde unit noted that they would not prefer to live anywhere else and appreciated the relative calm and quiet, living in an older prisoner unit, in close proximity with 14 others, was not free from problems. I found out from other Samforde residents that in the last year, four prisoners were removed from the unit for fighting and the possession of unauthorised items. Having four residents removed out of only 15 therefore made Samforde, proportionally, one of the most poorly-behaved units in the prison. Moreover, as Tom, 63, explained, living on Samforde came with its own unique set of frustrations:

*[Y]ou're expected to conform to their [other residents] hours and ways of thinking, which is ... hypocritical. I got to the stage ... and even now, when I go out of my room to get some water from the kitchen after 9pm, I find myself tip-toeing in slippers ... it plays on your mind! ... [P]eople [on Stamfordde are] set in their way[s]. Have you heard of the character Victor Meldrew? ... [He's] a grumpy old man, and it sort of typifies the older residents here and their lack of tolerance. I call them all Victor Meldrews! ... [I]t's certainly a very cliquey group who like to control things ...*

Nonetheless, when asked whether he would apply to live on Samforde, if given the chance to choose again, Tom replied:

*Yes. I'd put up with it for the peace and quiet ... the one thing I've craved ever since I've been sent to prison.*

Therefore, a strong case for segregation existed in Hollesley Bay, with near unanimous support for Samforde unit.

## 7. A few concluding reflections

This dissertation is an attempt to further our understanding of older male prisoners in England and Wales, and in particular, explore barely-researched areas within the literature, such as the segregation/integration debate and older prisoners' thoughts about the future. While it is hoped that *Greying Behind Bars* makes a positive contribution to our understanding, its weaknesses must be recognised. This study encountered limitations in both the fieldwork and data-analysis stages. These limitations were largely related to time constraints. Conducting two discussion groups and 16 interviews over five days was challenging, and opportunities to collect more nuanced and richer data, through probing and asking the right questions were lost. Qualitative researchers are often encouraged to self-evaluate their work throughout the fieldwork phase, setting time aside to 'take stock', considering issues that may have arisen from interviews already conducted and to plan how best to approach upcoming interviews (Arksey and Knight, 1999:107). This crucial research step could not be fully implemented over the short fieldwork period. Moreover, opportunities for greater unstructured observation and conversations with staff were missed. They would have added greater depth to the data and perhaps helped to assess the validity of participant contributions. It is one thing for a researcher to *hear* about issues and another to *experience* and *understand* them through observation and a deeper 'immersion' in the research environment (Maruna, 2011:127).

In the data-analysis stage, more time could have enabled a fuller and more complete analysis of the 18 hours of voice recording and fieldwork notes. Active listening to the recordings in *combination* with their transcription would have been ideal. Moreover, prison researchers leaving the field have regularly reflected on the 'draining' nature of their work and the intense emotions it can create (Crewe, 2009:485; Liebling, 1999a; Mann, 2012c). These feelings and emotions can themselves be 'a significant guide to or even source of valuable data' (Liebling, 1999a:149). Indeed, various scholars have written guides on how researchers' emotions can assist in developing new understandings of the data collected (Yuen, 2011; Drake and Harvey, 2014). After five long days in the field (most days began at 8am and ended at 8pm), I was tired and had experienced a range of emotions from shock to sadness, having developed relationships with most of the participants whom I knew on a first-name basis. Additional time would have allowed me to make sense of these emotions and this would have improved the analysis. Nonetheless, during the write-up, I started to notice myself working harder than usual, constantly trying to make sure that I had accurately transcribed quotations and described settings. I developed a strong sense of not wanting to let the participants down. So while I was unable to fully process my emotions in the month between leaving the field and writing this present chapter, my emotions did guide my work in the sense that I became hypervigilant, not wanting to misrepresent participants whom (I believed) I knew personally.

This dissertation presents findings from a single-site qualitative study of older male prisoners. These findings are not generalisable. However, as with other single-site studies, the intention is not generalisability but to provide a detailed description of life in a prison at a particular point in time (Crewe, 2009). In attempting to do this, *Greying Behind Bars* has made findings that have both been consistent with the

existing literature and that provide new themes for future consideration. Regarding the older men's experience of prison life, this study has made findings that confirm what we already know, such as the resilience of most older prisoners, who are able to draw upon a lifetime of past experiences, both positive and negative, in order to cope and survive. New research directions have also been uncovered. For example, this study has applied recent Norwegian research on the 'pains of freedom' associated with incarceration in open conditions on the domestic context, finding that life for an older prisoner in a Category-D establishment brings with it a unique set of frustrations and *additional* prison pains (Shammas, 2014). Moreover, this study has found that the older corporate criminal may experience and cope with imprisonment very differently from the general older offender. Given tighter financial market regulation in recent times, which may increase their numbers, a more detailed study of older corporate offenders would be an important area for future research focus.

This study has also found that the older prisoners in Hollesley Bay tended to have a positive view of the future, challenging our existing understanding of older prisoners as generally pessimistic. However, for these prisoners, significant challenges exist regarding their resettlement. For the low-risk older prisoner without family or financial security, the future may be uncertain. This is not helped by a Prison Service that, owing to resource limitations and security concerns, largely concentrates resettlement assistance upon higher-risk offenders. Moreover, for those older prisoners who intend to find jobs, frustrations exist regarding a belief that they are being doubly discriminated against by virtue of their age and criminal record. Also, prison courses were found to not always be appropriate for ageing bodies, suggesting the continued relevance of Crawley and Sparks' concept of 'institutional thoughtlessness'.

Finally, regarding the segregation/integration debate, it was found that almost all older prisoners *preferred* to live on quieter and calmer older prisoner units. Older prisoners tended to keep to themselves and while instances of physical bullying perpetrated by younger prisoners were rare, the older prisoners nonetheless viewed their younger counterparts as *indirectly* intimidating. This finding challenges recent government recommendations against the further expansion of older prisoner units and suggests that more research is necessary to assess the benefits of segregation, integration or a case-by-case approach.

Given the continued increase in the numbers of older people in prison, which shows no sign of reversal in the near future, further research on older prisoners is warranted. Future work should consider studying other establishments, such as closed prisons. This future research is extremely relevant since, fundamentally, older prisoners are different from their younger counterparts. They differ physically and in terms of their behaviour, aspirations and views. Yet until these differences are recognised and translated into age-specific policies, older prisoners will remain a marginalised demographic in prisons today.

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### **Legislation**

Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act 2013

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview schedule

1. Would you please tell me a little about yourself?

#### **Comparison between living in a dedicated older offender unit and living as an older prisoner as part of the general prison population**

2. Could you please tell me which wing you're living on?

3. What do you like most about being on Stamforde (or other) wing?

- What don't you like?
- What do you think can be improved on?

4. Would you prefer to be on (another/Stamforde) wing?

- Why or why not?

5. Do you feel safe here?

6. Should older prisoners live in a special older prisoner unit? Should there be a choice?

#### **Older prisoners' thoughts about the future, resettlement and preparedness for reintegration back into the community**

7. When do you expect to be released?

8. Do you think about the future and about release often?

- What are your thoughts about the future?
- What does the future look like?
- Do you have employment and accommodation for when you are released?
- If you are retiring, what are you planning on doing?
- Are you an ex-serviceman? If so, have you accessed charitable assistance or support?
- Are you looking forward to the future?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What are you not looking forward to?

9. What are your aspirations and desires after release?

- Do you have goals?
- What are the things that you'd most like to achieve or do when you get out?



**10.** What have you done to prepare yourself for release?

- Do you feel ready and prepared to leave and return to society?
- If not, why do you not feel prepared?
- What can be done to help you feel more prepared?
- Has the prison prepared you?
- Has anyone else, like a charity group, helped you?

**11.** Can you use three words to describe the future and release?

### **Experience of imprisonment as an older person**

**12.** Are there any changes that you've noticed in yourself in the past few years?

- Do you have any physical problems that you didn't have when you were younger?
- Has your personality and character changed over time?
- Are you a different person from when you were younger? In what ways?

**13.** Do you think your age affects how you live at Hollesley Bay?

- Access to health care
- Programmes and courses
- Prison activities
- Relations with others: other older prisoners, younger prisoners, prison staff.

**14.** What is it like to be one of the most senior men in this place?

- Can you provide me with 3 words to describe how it feels to be here?
- Can you describe your average day, beginning from when you wake up in the morning?
- What do you draw upon to help you cope if you're having a bad day? *Friends? Family? Activities? Good memories?*

**15.** When was the first time you went to prison?

- How does being one of the most senior men here compare with your past experiences in prison?
- Thinking about previous sentences as opposed to this one, what do you find painful now or frustrating about being in prison that is different to when you were a younger man in prison?
- In what ways is prison a different experience for older men compared to younger men?
- How do open prisons compare to closed prisons for older men?
- Thinking about prisons in general and your experiences in other prisons, do you think prisons do enough to accommodate for older prisoners?
- How can prisons be improved for older prisoners?
- What does this prison do well in?
- What could this prison improve on?

**16.** Do you have anything that you wish to add?

## Appendix 2 – Interview participant information

### Participant Information – Interviews

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Additional information
1. Carl	77	White	Samforde unit; murder; sentenced to life with 12 year tariff; 1 year to end of tariff; first-timer
2. Stuart	60	White	Fraud; sentenced to 11 years; 20 months left to serve; one previous sentence during his 20s
3. Louis	55	Black (African)	Offence unknown; sentenced to 14 years; 21 months left to serve; first-timer
4. James	52	White	Murder; sentenced to life with 14 year tariff; 18 months to end of tariff; served short sentences in the past lasting a few months in total
5. Michael	59	White	Drugs offence; sentenced to 15 years; 11 months left to serve; has served a sentence before for another drugs offence
6. Samuel	58	White	Murder; sentenced to life, served 31 years and currently on recall for 4 years
7. Ahmet	52	Mixed (Turkish)	Samforde unit; drugs offence; sentenced to 9 years 4 months; 12 months left to serve; first-timer
8. Joe	53	White	Drugs offence; sentenced for 31 months; 8 weeks left to serve; recidivist (numerous sentences, spent 18 years in prisons cumulatively)
9. Matthew	56	White	Fraud; sentenced to 11 years; 6 months left to serve; one previous sentence more than 20 years ago
10. William	68	White	Samforde unit; fraud; sentenced to 10 years; 7 months left to serve; first-timer
11. Adam	51	Chinese	Drugs offence; 1 year left to serve; has served a sentence before for another drugs offence
12. Curtis	57	White	Drugs offence; sentenced to 3 years; 2 months left to serve; first-timer
13. Jeffery	65	White	Samforde unit; drugs offence; sentenced to 4 years; 12 months left to serve; first-timer
14. Ned	68	White	Drugs offence; 3 months left to serve; first-timer
15. Tom	63	White	Samforde unit; fraud; sentenced to 5 years and 6 months; 10 months left to serve; first-timer
16. Morgan	63	White	Samforde unit; offence unknown; IPP since 2011; recidivist (22 prior sentences over 35 years)

### **A note about anonymisation**

The names of participants have been anonymised and reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that individuals are not identifiable. This is a core responsibility that researchers have towards their research participants (British Society of Criminology Code of Ethics, 2006).

It is acknowledged that the information provided in this dissertation regarding individual participants may make them more readily identifiable than would be the case if more stringent anonymisation procedures occurred. For example, identifying Carl, 77, as the 'oldest prisoner' at Hollesley Bay makes him more readily identifiable than would be the case if his age were also altered. However, since this dissertation is interested in *older* male prisoners, the age of all participants have been accurately recorded. Moreover, the additional information provided, for example, participants' offence, sentence length and prior offending history have all been accurately recorded since this information was, in consultation with my supervisor, deemed relevant. While anonymisation is extremely important and must be taken seriously by all researchers, it is argued that more stringent anonymisation than has occurred in this dissertation would have reduced the usefulness of its findings.

### Appendix 3 – Research consent form

**Research consent form**

**Research Title:** Greying Behind Bars: The Older Male Offender’s Experience of Prison Life and Preparations for Resettlement

**Researcher:** Victor Chu (Trinity Hall and Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge)

Please read the following carefully and initial in the appropriate box if you **agree**.

	<b>Initial</b>
I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me and I have understood it). I have had the chance to ask any questions to the researcher and they have been satisfactorily answered.	
I understand that participation in the research is entirely voluntary. I am not obliged to answer any question and I am able to withdraw from the interview or discussion group at any time, including after the research itself, until 1 May 2015. I do not have to provide reasons if I choose to withdraw from the research.	
I agree to take part in the research, which means being interviewed by the researcher, or participating in a discussion group with other participants, led by the researcher.	
I understand that the researcher will record the interview or discussion group by taking handwritten notes or through the use of audio recording equipment.	
I agree to allow the researcher to use direct quotations from the interviews or discussion groups. I understand that if the researcher uses direct quotations, it will always be done in a way such that I cannot be identified.	

Name of Participant:

Date of Birth:

Date:

Signature:

## Appendix 4 – Thoughts about the future

### Older prisoners' thoughts about the future

Very positive	Positive	Some negativity	Negative
Optimistic	Hopeful	Anxious	Afraid
Looking forward to it	I will take it on	Anticipation	Scary
Confident		Longing	
Excited		Trepidation	
Happy		Unknown	
Positive			
Achievement			
Constructive			
Family			
Fantastic			
Joyful			
No problems			
The best days of my life			

All interview participants were asked to provide three words to describe how they feel about the future and release. The words have subsequently been recorded and presented in the table above, which divides the words into four categories, ranging from words that are 'very positive' to those that are 'negative'. The words are listed in descending order of frequency. For example, 'optimistic' was a word used by four separate participants. Some participants provided a phrase rather than a word to describe their feelings: e.g. 'looking forward to it'; 'the best days of my life' and; 'I will take it on'.

## **Acknowledgements**

The numerous shortcomings and errors in this dissertation are entirely my own fault. Any positive aspects of this research however, are largely due to the support and assistance I received from a great number of people.

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And finally, I would like to acknowledge two sets of people. First, my friends. While the problem with naming individuals is that I will inevitably and unintentionally leave others out, I am particularly appreciative of the friendships I have with my fellow criminologists Joana, Sunwoo, Imtashal, Christiana, Allie, Samuel and Matthew. And to my non-criminology friends, Daniel J. Lewis and Seán Aherne. You both know what for.

And second, to the older prisoners who contributed to this dissertation, I am forever grateful. You gave me your time and allowed me to intrude into your lives. In a letter I received, one prisoner wrote: '[t]here is much to consider when you finally write up your paper. Please do not make it a glib one, just to achieve your own ends. You have a chance of making a difference, even a small one. Others may develop from the groundwork you can achieve, if you so choose'. I read and reread these sentences innumerable times during my write up. I hope that what appeared on the preceding pages represents more than simply 18,000 words towards a degree.

Victor Chu  
London  
5 February 2017

### **About the author**

An Australian, Victor was born and raised in Sydney. He attended Sydney Grammar School and won a scholarship to the University of Sydney, where he read economics and law. He continued his education at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he took a double first in law, a Distinction on the MPhil in Criminology and was elected both a Bateman and Wakefield Scholar. Victor's research interests are varied and cover penology, criminal justice reform, international criminal law and the use of force in international relations, among other topics. Currently based in London, Victor is a future trainee solicitor at Slaughter and May, an international law firm.

## **About the Howard League for Penal Reform**

The Howard League for Penal Reform is a national charity working for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison. It is the oldest penal reform charity in the world. It was established in 1866 and is named after John Howard, the first prison reformer.

We work with parliament and the media, with criminal justice professionals, students and members of the public, influencing debate and forcing through meaningful change to create safer communities.

We campaign on a wide range of issues including short term prison sentences, real work in prison, community sentences and youth justice.

Our legal team provides free, independent and confidential advice, assistance and representation on a wide range of issues to young people under 21 who are in prisons or secure children's homes and centres.

By becoming a member you will give us a bigger voice and give vital financial support to our work. We cannot achieve real and lasting change without your help. Please visit [www.howardleague.org](http://www.howardleague.org) and join today.

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The John Sunley Prize celebrates excellence and the impact of post graduate research into penal issues. Each year thousands of exceptional Masters dissertations are researched and written but few are even lodged in university libraries or shared with the wider penal affairs community. Many will be of publishable standard and would contribute to the pool of knowledge about penal issues. The John Sunley Prize has been established to ensure that the best of these dissertations now get the recognition they deserve.

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### **Please note**

Views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect Howard League for Penal Reform policy unless explicitly stated.