



The Effects of Imprisonment

EDITED BY

**Alison Liebling
and Shadd Maruna**



The Effects of Imprisonment

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The Editors dedicate this book to Distinguished Professor Hans Toch,
the patron saint of prison effects research and our cherished friend.

A. Liebling
S. Maruna

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We are also grateful to all the participants at the conference for their lively contributions (see list in the Appendix), and especially to Andrew Coyle for so ably chairing the event. Robinson College staff were excellent hosts. We would also like to thank Helen Griffiths for her most efficient work in organising the conference and preparing papers, and Ann Phillips for her very valuable assistance with the preparation of the manuscript for publication.

Foreword

Andrew Coyle
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In their introduction to this book Liebling and Maruna ask whether the world really needs another book on the effects of prison. That is a question which deserves an answer.

During all the years that I worked in prisons I never ceased to ask myself why I did so. This was not because of obsessive uncertainty about my chosen career. Rather, it came from a desire never to lose sight of the reality of what I was doing. Shorn of all subtleties and rationalisations, my task was to deprive other human beings of their liberty. I tried to ensure that I did so in the most decent and humane way possible. I attempted to reduce the pain of imprisonment for those men who were under my care. I did my best to provide them with opportunities to make positive use of their enforced time in captivity. But in doing all of those things it was important always to remember that prison is by its very nature a debilitating experience. That is why in any decent and democratic society the imposition of imprisonment should always be an instrument of last resort, only to be used when there is no other option.

In a number of countries, especially in the Western world, that principle is no longer observed. The number of people in prison in the United States has gone from half a million to over two millions in just over 20 years. In England and Wales the prison population has risen in the last 15 years from 45,000 to 75,000. In neither case has there been anything like comparable rises in the crime rates or in detection rates. Put simply, courts now send more offenders to prison and impose longer sentences than they did before. One explanation for this is that society has become more punitive and courts are simply responding to the demands of the public and the media. This is partly true.

It seems to me that there is also another dangerous influence at work and that is the proposition advanced by some people who work in and around the prison system that good can come out of imprisonment; that it can be an important method of changing the behaviour and attitude of those who are sent there, so that they will come out better people and much less likely to commit crime as a result of their experiences

in prison. This is what Nils Christie has called 'the denial of existence strategy':

Study after study has shown how penal measures and long-term incarceration have been made more acceptable to society if they were disguised as treatment, training or pure help to suffering individuals in need of such measures. (Christie 1978: 181)

As a result, in England and Wales many prisoners are now required to undergo 'programmes' in an attempt to change their behaviour; the number of women in prison has increased four times within a very short period; in some parts of the country drug addicts can get better treatment in prison than in the community; and it is now claimed that some difficult children are better off in prison service custody than in a welfare environment. Duguid (2000: 230) has characterised this phenomenon, which of course is not new, as treating the prisoner as 'object rather than subject', someone whose only role is to co-operate with decisions made by others, rather than someone to be encouraged to take control of his or her own life.

In a similar context, one of the dangers when studying criminology is that one can come to view the prisoner as an object rather than a subject, engaging in dispassionate and supposedly neutral analyses of whether human beings suffer 'pain', or indeed are affected in any way, by the experience of imprisonment. In so far as this is the case, the answer to the editors' initial question is that the world does not need another book on the effects of imprisonment; certainly prisoners do not.

Fortunately, the contributors to this volume have not fallen into that trap. As they demonstrated during the two days they gathered in Cambridge in 2004, they care deeply about the humanity of prisoners and about the effects which imprisonment has on those who suffer it and on their families. As a consequence, this book is not an arid scholastic treatise. It has rigorous academic foundations but the conclusion which cries out from it is that prison should have a very limited role to play in a modern society. In that respect it is a fitting tribute to Hans Toch, to whom it is dedicated.

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Chapter I

Introduction: the effects of imprisonment revisited¹

Alison Liebling and Shadd Maruna

Offenders emerge from prison afraid to trust, fearful of the unknown, and with a vision of the world shaped by the meaning that behaviours had in the prison context. For a recently released prisoner, experiences like being jostled on the subway, having someone reach across him in the bathroom to take a paper towel, or making eye contact can be taken as a precursor to a physical attack. In relationships with loved ones, this warped kind of socialization means that problems will not easily be talked through. In a sense, the system we have designed to deal with offenders is among the most iatrogenic in history, nurturing those very qualities it claims to deter.

(Miller 2001: 3)

Florence Nightingale (1859) famously argued that the first principle of the hospital should be to do the sick no harm. A recent history of prison standards (Keve 1996: 1) begins by arguing that Nightingale 'undoubtedly would have expressed a similar principle for prisons'. It seems that she actually did – or at least argued that we should do more research into whether or not prisons caused harm. In a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* in 1890, Nightingale laments the fact that 'criminology is much less studied than insectology' and argues that: 'It would be of immense importance if the public had kept before them the statistics, well worked out, of the influence of punishment on crime or of reformatories and industrial schools on juvenile offenders.' Armed with such knowledge, she believed, no rational society would support a system of 'reformation' that made its subjects more likely to offend upon their release than they were prior to admittance.

Since Nightingale's time, the discipline of criminology has grown immensely (surely by now eclipsing entomology at least in terms of undergraduate interest levels) and recidivism statistics of the type she described have become one of the discipline's most essential products (see Baumer *et al* 2002; Beck 2000; Kershaw 1997). However, the prison has remained and indeed reliance on imprisonment as a means of social control has increased substantially over the last 20 years in the United Kingdom and especially in the United States. We rely on imprisonment by remaining blind to the falseness of our assumptions about its role and effectiveness. As Garland (1990) has argued, restricted to its technical functions, imprisonment does not work, and there are other institutions far better placed to deliver goods such as 'repair', 'inclusion' or 'correction'. Yet, presumably, the public consent to the increasing use of imprisonment based at least in large part on these narrow, technicist and unproven grounds (Useem *et al* 2003).

Where did Nightingale's remarkable prognostic abilities go wrong? Perhaps we human beings are not as rational as she gave us credit for being. Or else, more optimistically, perhaps criminology has simply failed to make the case that prisons do not 'work'. The study of the effects of prison has a distinguished history within criminology, yet the debate has gone stale in recent decades (partially indicated by how few investigations of this nature have been supported by criminal justice research councils in recent years). Haney and Zimbardo (1998: 721) have argued that although social scientists contributed significantly to the intellectual foundations on which the modern prison was developed, over the last 25 years, we have 'relinquished voice and authority in the debates that surround prison policy'. This absence has created 'an ethical and intellectual void that has undermined both the quality and the legitimacy of correctional practices', they argue.

In recent years, the reigning paradigm in the prison effects literature, voiced by Zamble and Porporino (1988) and others, is that incarceration is akin to a 'behavioral deep freeze' (see Oleson 2002 for an ingenious parody of this finding). In other words, the adaptational styles and capacities of offenders are basically invariant and largely impervious to effects of imprisonment. In this framework, incarceration simply acts to put a person's pre-existing propensities on hold until renewed opportunities are presented for these propensities to be freely exercised in the future. Essentially, Dostoevsky's tragic optimism that humans must be creatures who can 'withstand anything' – earned the hard way after he spent four years in a Siberian prison camp – has become the dangerously taken-for-granted assumption in contemporary thinking about prison effects.

The logical conclusion of this 'deep freeze' argument is not so much that 'nothing works', but essentially 'nothing much matters'. Prisons can become as harsh and inhumane as desired – and imprisonment does not get much more inhumane than the conditions in so-called 'supermax' confinement widespread in the United States (see Haney, this volume) – and no real damage will be done to their unfortunate inhabitants. Among the shortcomings of this argument is the narrowness by which it defines 'harm'. The contemporary effects literature lacks a sufficient affective dimension. Fear, anxiety, loneliness, trauma, depression, injustice, powerlessness, violence and uncertainty are all part of the experience of prison life. These 'hidden', but everywhere apparent, features of prison life have not been measured or taken seriously enough by those interested in the question of prison effects. Sociologists of prison life knew these things were significant, but have largely failed to convince others in a methodologically convincing way that such 'pain' constitutes a measurable 'harm' (see Liebling 1999). Yet, 'pains' have consequences, however indirect. The petty humiliations and daily injustices experienced in prison (as in our communities) may be suffered in silence, but as they accumulate and fester these hurts can return as hatred and 'inexplicable' violence (see Gilligan, 1999). After all, if the consequence of injustice and rejection is hatred (Storr 1991: 49; Parker 1970: 84–6) or resentment (Barbalet 1998) and the product of this pain is violence (de Zulueta 1993), we are surely obliged to avoid these unwanted and unintended effects.

Our dissatisfactions with the state of the existing literature, and our recognition that important work challenging the 'deep freeze' paradigm was beginning to emerge, provided the rationale for the conference out of which the following chapters emerged.² Our admittedly ambitious aim in assembling this collection of chapters from leading international scholars is to redirect the conversation among academics, policy-makers and professionals regarding the effects of imprisonment. We define this topic broadly to include the social, psychological, behavioural and emotional impacts of the incarceration experience on prisoners (during and after their captivity); as well as the impact of imprisonment on prisoners' families (see Murray, this volume); and on those working in the institutions themselves (see e.g. Arnold, this volume; Carlen, this volume); and, indeed, the impact that the institution of the prison has on a society (especially in the present times of mass incarceration in the US and elsewhere).

These are far from mere academic issues. For instance, there may be justice implications if apparently objective measures of punishment, calibrated in chunks of time, have radically different subjective effects on recipients (von Hirsch 1993; Liebling 2004). Understanding the true

effects of imprisonment is necessary if we are to appreciate what goes on in prisons as well. As Sykes argued, the deprivations of prison life provide the energy for the system of action that characterises the prison (Sykes 1958). There is even a relationship between the effects debate and prison design: reflecting on assumptions about the impact of prison over time helps us to make sense of the varied and apparently contradictory penal estate in England and Wales, for example.³ Finally, of course, an understanding of the intended and unintended effects of imprisonment has serious implications for the treatment of offenders and the reduction of recidivism. One reason for the null findings of so many of the best designed interventions may be that the positive impact of interventions such as education or job training may be systematically undermined by the negative effects of the incarceration process itself.

The account below presents a selective review of the debate over the effects of imprisonment over the last 50 years or so, and shows some of the limitations of the argument to date. We begin with the post-war consensus regarding the dangers of total institutions like prisons on the mental health and personality of the individuals they hold captive. Then, we review the shift in the 1980s to seeing imprisonment as a largely neutral experience with little lasting impact, good or bad. We conclude with some of the new issues that have emerged in recent years and which inform this collection.

The post-war consensus on prison effects

The first major critiques of imprisonment and its effects came from sociologists critical of institutions *per se* (e.g. Goffman's 1961 classic *Asylums*). In the UK, Barton (1966) brought together several studies showing detrimental effects of institutionalisation under the heading 'institutional neurosis'. This was:

... a disease characterised by apathy, lack of initiative, loss of interest more marked in things and events not immediately personal or present, submissiveness, and sometimes no expression of feelings of resentment at harsh or unfair orders. There is also a lack of interest in the future and an apparent inability to make practical plans for it, a deterioration in personal habits, toilet and standards generally, a loss of individuality, and a resigned acceptance that things will go on as they are – unchangingly, inevitably, and indefinitely.

(Barton 1966: 14)

There were several overlapping factors associated with its aetiology: loss of contact with the outside world; enforced idleness and loss of responsibility; the authoritarian attitudes of medical and nursing staff; the loss of personal possessions and friends; prescribed drugs; and loss of prospects outside the institution (p. 63).⁴

Around the same time, other, more specific reservations about the effects of imprisonment were being expressed from various sources in the UK, including a report of the Advisory Council on the Treatment of Offenders on Preventive Detention (Home Office 1963). It was clear from research (e.g. West 1963) that very long sentences were being inappropriately given to socially 'inadequate', repeat offenders and that such prison terms only reinforced the cycle of dependency, institutionalisation and crime (West 1963: 106–7; Home Office 1963). Tony Parker's *The Unknown Citizen* powerfully illustrated this critique:

Imprisonment neither reforms nor deters me. It confirms and completes the destruction of my personality, and has now so conditioned me that I am almost totally incapable of living outside. A prison has become the only place in which I can exist satisfactorily, and it has become a kindness on your part to return me to it since the strain of living outside is so painful and intense.

(Parker 1963: 156)

In a landmark study of prison environments,⁵ Gresham Sykes (1958) used the language of the 'pains of imprisonment'. In his sociological study of a maximum security prison in Trenton, Sykes identified five main pains of imprisonment. They were:

- the loss of liberty (confinement, removal from family and friends, rejection by the community, and loss of citizenship: a civil death, resulting in lost emotional relationships, loneliness and boredom)
- the deprivation of goods and services (choice, amenities and material possessions)
- the frustration of sexual desire (prisoners were figuratively castrated by involuntary celibacy)
- the deprivation of autonomy (regime routine, work, activities, trivial and apparently meaningless restrictions – for example, the delivery of letters, lack of explanations for decisions)

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- the deprivation of security (enforced association with other unpredictable prisoners, causing fear and anxiety; prisoners had to fight for the safety of their person and possessions) (Sykes 1958: 63–78).

According to Sykes, prisoners lost society's trust, the status of citizenship and material possessions, which constituted a large part of their self-perception. The minutiae of life were regulated with a bureaucratic indifference to individual need and worth:

Imprisonment, then, is painful. The pains of imprisonment, however, cannot be viewed as being limited to the loss of physical liberty. The significant hurts lie in the frustrations or deprivations which attend the withdrawal of freedom, such as the lack of heterosexual relationships, isolation from the free community, the withholding of goods and services, and so on. And however painful these frustrations or deprivations may be in the immediate terms of thwarted goals, discomfort, boredom, and loneliness, they carry a more profound hurt as a set of threats or attacks which are directed against the very foundations of the prisoner's being. The individual's picture of himself as a person of value ... begins to waver and grow dim. Society did not plan this onslaught, it is true, and society may even 'point with pride' to its humanity in the modern treatment of the criminal. But the pains of imprisonment remain and it is imperative that we recognise them, for they provide the energy for the society of captives as a system of action.

(Sykes 1958: 78–9)

These deprivations threatened the prisoner's sense of worth and self-concept. They provided the energy for the 'society of captives' to act collectively, in order to mitigate their effects. They caused prisoners to generate alternative methods of gaining self-esteem.

The post-war literature, then, has represented the power of institutions as dangerous and damaging, including the fear of breakdown (Cohen and Taylor 1972), and hopelessness about the future. This tradition might be best captured in a more recent study by Gallo and Ruggiero (1991). They describe prisons as 'factories for the manufacture of psychosocial handicaps': 'Even the most modern, comfortable and 'humane' regimes provide forms of destruction which are built into the normalcy of incarceration' (Gallo and Ruggiero 1991: 278). They argue that the two most common types of behaviour found in prison were aggression and depression. Prisoners in the research described the distress caused by trying to keep their own distress under control as one of the harshest

pains of imprisonment. Their survival techniques, adopted to survive imprisonment, damaged them. As one prisoner said:

I found myself giving precedence in a queue to 'respectable' prisoners; shaking hands with some and ignoring others; mocking one inmate and being respectful and subservient to another. Everybody complied with these unwritten rules. If you didn't, you were looked at with suspicion; you were regarded as someone to shun, sometimes to punish.

(ibid.)

Gallo and Ruggiero describe prisons as worlds of 'de-communication' (see Johnson, this volume), where prisoners either lived in a state of constant anxiety, or 'disengaged' in a form of psychological absenteeism encouraged by the availability of drugs. In prison, they argued, 'it is possible to speak using a hundred words' (ibid.: 285).

Two landmark psychological studies provided considerable support for this anti-institution consensus in sociology: Milgram's obedience study and Zimbardo's model prison experiment. Both studies remain important, despite significant and well-documented methodological shortcomings.⁶ With some exceptions (e.g. Shover 1996), contemporary penology neglects these studies and tends to consider them discredited. However, our view is that both studies (and the controversy they provoked) provide important theoretical and empirical insights which have considerable relevance to the contemporary prison experience.

Milgram and obedience to authority

Arendt's conception of the banality of evil comes closer to the truth than one might dare imagine. The ordinary person who shocked the victim did so out of a sense of obligation – a conception of his duties as a subject – and not from any peculiarly aggressive tendencies.

(Milgram 1974: 6)

How are personal morals overcome in the face of autocratic authority? How do individuals shake off their own responsibility for unacceptable actions? What is the psychology of 'ordinary cruelty'? Stanley Milgram conducted a series of experiments in the 1960s intended to investigate readiness to obey morally wrong and physically dangerous acts (Milgram 1974; see also Asch 1951 on conformity). Motivated by curiosity about the cooperation of thousands of Germans with the systematic destruction of

the Jews and others during the 1930s and 1940s, Milgram conducted his experiments at Yale University under the title, 'the effects of punishment on learning'.

In the now infamous tests, he persuaded duped volunteers to administer shocks of increasing severity to a 'student' who gave wrong answers to a series of learning tests. The experiment was conducted under the strict guidance of the experimenter, who encouraged the subjects to continue. Many participants showed signs of distress, and some eventually refused to go on. However, levels of conformity far exceeded expectations. Sixty-five per cent of the subjects administered shocks of what they thought were as high as 450 volts, apparently endangering the life of the actor who masqueraded as the student.

The level of blind obedience in such behaviour varied, of course. When the experiments were repeated at a less prestigious location, the number of subjects willing to deliver these levels fell to 50 per cent. When the subject was in the same room as the 'student' instead of being the other side of a glass partition, obedience levels dropped to 40 per cent. When other 'teachers' left the room during the experiment in protest (providing support for refusing to obey), obedience levels dropped to 10 per cent. If the experimenter left the room, obedience dropped to almost zero, and many participants administered lower levels than required (while assuring the experimenter that they were obeying his instructions). When subjects could enlist another person to actually deliver the shock for them, obedience levels rose to 95 per cent.

The participants expressed serious reservations about their own behaviour once the experiment was over. Milgram concluded in his Epilogue, drawing on other examples of real atrocities, that 'we find a set of people carrying out their jobs and dominated by an administrative, rather than a moral, outlook' (p. 186). Other related studies showed that ordinary citizens were more likely to obey an instruction if it was given by someone in uniform, even if the instructor subsequently left the scene. Nurses would deliver dangerous levels of drugs to patients if instructed to do so by an unknown doctor over the telephone. Behaviour was transformed under instruction from a legitimate authority.

Milgram concluded that his studies revealed 'the capacity for man to abandon his humanity ... as he merges his unique personality into larger institutional structures' (p. 188). He claimed that morally wrong behaviour can be viewed as a product of transactions with an environment that supports such behaviour, and that social institutions contain powerful forces (including authority structures) which can make good men engage in evil deeds. Individuals experience strain during these activities, but many resolve this strain through avoidance or denial,

and continue with their work (Milgram 1974: 156–64). As the world of prisons becomes increasingly managerial and bureaucratic, the threat of this sort of interpersonal masking of evil actions as legitimate ('just doing my job') takes on increased urgency. Likewise, the exposure of the extraordinary treatment of captives by British and American soldiers in Iraq in recent years is a grim reminder of the truth behind Milgram's basic findings of the human capacity for evil in the line of duty.

The Zimbardo experiment

The Zimbardo 'Simulated Prison' experiment was another, classic illustration of the dangers of institutional roles in influencing human behaviour. Haney, Banks and Zimbardo (1973) conducted an experiment in which subjects role-played prisoners and guards in a simulated prison. Subjects were selected after careful diagnostic testing of a large group of volunteer, male college students. Participants were randomly assigned to act as either prisoners or guards in an experiment designed to last two weeks.

The experiment was cut short, however, as the researchers became startled and concerned by what they were seeing. The authors reported that the 'prison' became a 'psychologically compelling environment', eliciting unexpectedly intense, realistic and often pathological reactions from the participants. The prisoners seemed to experience a loss of personal identity and reacted profoundly to the arbitrary control of their behaviour. This resulted in a syndrome of passivity, dependency, depression and helplessness. Alternatively, most of the guards experienced gains in social power, status and group identification, which made their role-playing rewarding. Half the prisoners developed an acute emotional disturbance. A third of the guards became more aggressive and dehumanising than predicted. Importantly, few of these reactions could be attributed to pre-existing personality traits. The authors concluded that imprisonment destroys the human spirit of both the imprisoned and their keepers. They argued that the brutality of prison stems not from the characteristics of individual guards and prisoners (the 'dispositional hypothesis'), but from the 'deep structure' of the prison as an institution.

They concluded that 'harmful structures do not require ill-intentioned persons to inflict psychological damage on those in their charge' (Haney and Zimbardo 1998: 721). Evil can arise out of powerful social forces, and situational variables shape even the most unethical social behaviours, overriding personality traits. Personality traits, by themselves, did not predict who survived, resisted and broke down under extreme stress, although they may have operated as moderator variables:

We feel there is abundant evidence that virtually all the subjects at one time or another experienced reactions which went well beyond the surface demands of role-playing and penetrated the deep structure of the psychology of imprisonment.

(Haney *et al* 1973: 91)

The authors suggested that power was self-aggrandising. The most hostile guards moved into leadership positions, making decisions which were rarely contradicted. Rights were redefined as privileges, to be earned by obedience. Everyone in the experiment came to despise lack of power in others and in themselves. The prisoners showed disbelief, followed by rebellion and self-interest. Some sided with the guards and tried to win approval. The model prisoner reaction was passivity, dependence (or learned helplessness) and flattened affect. The loss of personal identity, and the experience of arbitrary control, forced them to allow others to exercise power over them. The prisoners believed that guards had been selected on the basis of their larger size. In fact, there was no difference between the groups in average weight or height.

The conclusion was clear: 'Like all powerful situations, prisons transform the worldviews of those who inhabit them, on both sides of the bars' (Haney and Zimbardo 1998: 721). The risks of bureaucratic practices, and of barely visible uses of power, were higher than we commonly assume. Among the important implications of the research were clear lessons for the training of prison officers (see the interview with Zimbardo by Cheliotis; 2004: 48). Shortly after the study was completed, there was a spate of killings at San Quentin and Attica prisons. These incidents emphasised the urgency of reforms which recognised the dignity and humanity of both prisoners and guards (Pallas and Barber 1972).

The emergence of a new consensus

Beginning in the 1970s, however, these studies alleging the dangers of institutions were subjected to methodological criticism and accusations of ideological bias and selectivity (Sapsford 1978; Walker 1987). The 'pains' identified by these studies were largely unsubstantiated by more carefully designed psychological research, leading a number of psychologists to conclude that the effects of imprisonment were largely minimal (Banister *et al* 1973; Bolton *et al* 1976; Bukstel and Kilmann 1980; Walker 1983, 1987). Walker (1987) argues that 'research – chiefly by psychologists – has done much to deflate the sweeping

exaggerations – chiefly by sociologists – about the ill effects of normal incarceration’.

Research in the 1970s and 1980s suggested that prisoners coped surprisingly well (Richards 1978; Sapsford 1978, 1983),⁷ despite an initial period of disorientation, and anxieties about family and friends. Empirical studies concluded that ex-prisoners were able to resettle after an initial period of restlessness upon release (Coker and Martin 1983). This psychological research characterised the experience of imprisonment as little worse than a period of ‘deep freeze’ (Zamble and Porporino 1988; and see comments by officers in Crawley 2004: 97). Research such as the Durham study (e.g. Banister *et al* 1973) seemed to many to largely close the heated debate of the effects of imprisonment in favour of a conservative, new consensus (see e.g. Bukstel and Kilmann 1980).

How is it possible to reconcile these apparently ‘neutral’ findings of psychological research on the effects of long-term imprisonment with earlier, and alternative, accounts of the nature of the prison experience? During the late 1980s, psychological studies continued, but broadened, and began to include the concept of *coping*. This concept allowed for individual differences and environmental conditions to be considered in more detail, and led to a richer stage in the study of prison and its effects (see e.g. Toch *et al* 1989). For instance, prisoners who made suicide attempts were found to differ in significant ways from other prisoners, showing poorer coping strategies and suffering from a greater degree of background disadvantage. The prison experience was far more difficult for those prisoners who were not able to find their way into jobs, activities and social networks in prison (see Liebling 1992). Imprisonment seemed to be most distressing for vulnerable groups who were least able to cope with the demands made by an unresponsive and depriving environment (Liebling 1999).

In other words, the psychological resources and individual circumstances of prisoners had been insufficiently examined in the prison effects research. Prison can be extremely, and differentially, painful depending on one’s psychosocial background and particular experiences inside, and yet this apparently obvious fact was not being reflected in the research of the 1970s and 1980s. In the most comprehensive review of the prison effects literature to date, Gendreau *et al* (1999: 18)⁸ conclude that:

The sad reality that so little is known about what goes on inside the ‘black box’ of prisons and how this relates to recidivism ... Only a mere handful of studies have attempted to address this matter ... Analogously, could one imagine so ubiquitous and costly a

procedure in the medical or social services fields receiving such cursory research attention?

At the beginning of the 1990s, Hay and Sparks nicely characterised the 'effects debate' as 'sterile' (Hay and Sparks 1992: 302). The measurement of harm was poor, and the focus of most of the research was on long-term prisoners because of an assumption that any harmful effects – if they existed – would be curvilinear, increasing with length of time in custody. There are several flaws in this argument. The impact of custody is often most negative at the earliest stages. This is reflected in suicide rates, absconding figures and in several research studies (for example, Ericson 1975; Sapsford 1983; Gibbs 1987; Liebling 1999; and see Harvey, this volume). Prisoners who die by suicide do not appear in these 'long-term' samples, nor do those who leave prison by other means, for example, by transfer to psychiatric hospital. At the end of a long period of imprisonment, only the survivors appear in research samples.

Additionally, there are few substantial longitudinal or developmental studies of the effects of imprisonment (but see Jamieson and Grounds, this volume). Most studies rely on short follow-up periods (e.g. Zamble and Porporino 1988) or on cross-sectional samples, comparing groups of different prisoners who have served different lengths of time. Further, research has concentrated on prisoners during the period of custody, when important effects may manifest themselves after release from prison. The few studies that have examined long-term prisoners after release (e.g. Coker and Martin 1983) have focused on general measures of social adjustment, rather than more subtle, hidden kinds of psychological and emotional disability (Grounds 2004).

Prison is not a uniform experience. Studies have tended to take undifferentiated samples and to look for general patterns. These general studies neglect the experience of particular groups and individuals, such as women, the young, the old, prisoners segregated for their own protection, those spending long periods of time in segregation units for other reasons, and so on (see Kruttschnitt; Crawley and Sparks; and King, this volume). Moreover, assumptions about 'harm-as-deterioration' (e.g. in IQ) are seriously limited. Suicide does not require a permanent drop in measurable psychological constructs such as IQ. Pain is a harm which psychological scales have so far failed to reflect (see Haney 1997). Damage may be immediate, or cumulative, and independent of time spent in custody. Repeated short periods of custody may engender at least as much pain as one long sentence serving to 'exacerbate psychological vulnerabilities and emotional difficulties' (Porporino and Zamble 1984).

In short, the real effects of imprisonment, when understood in a broad context, appear to be anything but a 'deep freeze'. As the British Home Office wrote in the 1991 White Paper, *Custody, Care and Justice*, following the Woolf Report:

... [Prison] breaks up families. It is hard for prisoners to retain or subsequently to secure law-abiding jobs. Imprisonment can lessen people's sense of responsibility for their actions and reduce their self-respect, both of which are fundamental to law abiding citizenship. Some, often the young and less experienced, acquire in prisons a wider knowledge of criminal activity. Imprisonment is costly for the individual, for the prisoner's family and for the community.

(Home Office 1991: para 1.16)

New directions in the effects debate

The next generation of research on prison effects needs to focus on issues such as mental and physical health (including addiction issues), the possibility of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the developmental health and well-being of prisoner families, and the impact of imprisonment on the ability to successfully desist from crime. The failure of research to pursue these crucial other harms of imprisonment has resulted in the sterility to which Hay and Sparks (1992) refer.

Mental and physical health

Imprisonment can be detrimental both to the physical and mental health of prisoners, and this is a particularly urgent issue with regard to long-term and aged prisoners (see Jewkes; Crawley and Sparks, this volume). While many prisoners receive medical treatment in prison that would be unavailable to them outside (see Jones 1976), the health risks of imprisonment are high, uneven and specific to the conditions of confinement.

For instance, research by Gore *et al* in Scottish prisons has demonstrated the increasing risk of HIV transmission in prisons (Gore *et al* 1995; Taylor *et al* 1995; and Crofts *et al* 1995 on Australian prisoners) where the random sharing of injecting equipment is common. Rates of hepatitis B and C are increasing in prison, particularly among injecting drug users. Crofts and colleagues argue that:

... [s]everal risk behaviours for transmission of HIV and hepatitis B and C occur in prison, including the injection of illicit drugs and tattooing with inadequately disinfected equipment as well as unprotected sexual intercourse, including male to male anal intercourse. One Australian study estimated that 36 percent of prisoners had injected themselves intravenously, and twelve percent had participated in anal intercourse at least once whilst in prison.

(Crofts *et al* 1995: 285)

The authors also found that the high rate of continuing exposure to hepatitis B in male prisoners aged less than 30 years who inject drugs suggests that this is a group in whom 'spread of HIV must be considered to be simply a matter of time' (*ibid.*: 287).

The Crofts study found that injecting drug use was more common amongst women prisoners (*ibid.*: 286) and that exposure to hepatitis B and C was more frequent. Recent Inspectorate reports have condemned particular female establishments in the UK for turning 'shoplifters' into 'drug addicts', arguing that as many as 80 per cent of Styal Prison's female prisoners were injecting drugs (HMCIP 1995). In the above studies, risk of transmission of viruses relating to intravenous drug use was found to be high both during custody and immediately after release. Many prisoners begin their injecting habit while in custody, although those who inject daily outside prison do so less frequently whilst in custody (Taylor *et al* 1995: 290–91) and some regular drug users stop while in prison (*ibid.*: 292). The sharing of needles by injecting drug users is however, far more common in custody than outside, and the cleaning methods used by prisoners (rinsing with water, bleach or hairdressing liquid) are more ineffective than those typically used on the outside. Taylor and colleagues conclude that 'various studies of behaviour and prevalence of HIV in injecting drug users have shown that a period of imprisonment is an independent predictor of being positive for HIV' (*ibid.*: 291).

Their study of an outbreak of HIV infection in a Scottish prison, which was initiated following a cluster of cases of acute hepatitis B infection, demonstrates that transmission may occur during a period of custody as a result of high-risk behaviours practised by prisoners. All of the infected prisoners had shared injecting equipment within the prison.

A follow-up study of the prevalence of HIV infection and of drug-injecting behaviour in the same establishment one year later concluded that 'the arrival of a carrier of hepatitis B or HIV within any of the needle-sharing networks common within British prisons is all that is required

to start such an outbreak' (Gore *et al* 1995: 295). A quarter of known injecting drug users in the prison (18 of 72) had started injecting while in custody. Between a quarter and a third of the men who injected drugs between January and June 1993 became infected with HIV while in custody (Gore *et al* 1995: 296). Over a quarter of the prison's population were injecting drug users.

The authors note that:

The predilection of prison populations for blood-borne virus infections is not a new observation. Because of a more than 10 times higher prevalence of previous hepatitis B infection and carriage rates among prison inmates in the UK Blood Transfusion Services ceased donor sessions in prisons in the early 1980s.

(Gore *et al* 1995: 296)

Yet the policy climate in the UK supports the use of prison to reduce drug use. Detoxification programmes are proliferating, voluntary and mandatory drug testing programmes are widespread, and prisoners themselves sometimes rely on a short prison sentence to 'get themselves clean' (see Crewe, this volume).

Post-traumatic stress

Research on the psychological effects of trauma has been shown to apply to certain groups of prisoners who have been found to develop symptoms of PTSD in medico-legal assessments. Such symptoms can have debilitating effects and are associated with difficulties in restoring and maintaining relationships. High levels of anxiety, disturbed sleep, chronic depression, withdrawal from others and persistent feelings of being 'different' from others and from one's previous self are described by clinicians working with former prisoners. For instance, in a series of assessments of men who had served long prison terms after wrongful convictions, Grounds (2004) found strong evidence of severe and disabling psychological morbidity. Similar symptoms have been found by other prisoners released after long prison sentences, particularly, for example, where they have witnessed violence. Characteristic symptoms of PTSD include restlessness, irritability and severe difficulties in forming or restoring close relationships, fear and distress in response to reminders of the traumatic event, avoidance behaviour, diminished interest or participation in significant activities, feelings of detachment and estrangement from others, loss of motivation and a restricted range of affect (for example, an inability to feel warmth), and anxiety

and depression. There may also be physical symptoms: increased physiological arousal, outbursts of anger, difficulties in concentration and hyper-vigilance. Such symptoms can be associated with increased alcohol and drug use.

Adrian Grounds has argued that such symptoms can be regarded as an 'enduring personality change'. This is manifested as 'inflexible and maladaptive characteristics that impair interpersonal, social and occupational functioning' and which were not present before, such as 'a hostile or mistrustful attitude towards the world, social withdrawal, feelings of emptiness or hopelessness, a chronic feeling of threat, and estrangement' (Grounds 2004, forthcoming; and see Jamieson and Grounds, this volume). Prolonged trauma can lead to major problems of relatedness and identity which are only manifest in close relationships, attitudes to themselves and sense of purpose (Grounds, forthcoming). These shifts, in one's sense of time and identity, and in the capacity to build or sustain social connections, can make coping with the demands of everyday life extremely difficult. The psychosocial and psychiatric effects associated with imprisonment could be much more widely understood as a result of these analyses.

Research on prisoners' families

Finally, there is little research emphasis on the effects of imprisonment on prisoners' families (see Lanier 2003; and Murray, this volume). As Light (1993: 322) argued, a term of imprisonment affects not only the person remanded or sentenced. 'The inmate's family and dependants are all too often the ones who suffer most'. Shaw (1992) further points out:

It is a sobering thought that, in spite of the increasing attention being paid to the children of broken and bereaved families, no government in Europe, North America, or elsewhere appears to know how many children within its jurisdiction are affected by the imprisonment of a parent.

Despite considerable progress in understanding the immediate and long-term effects of separation trauma upon children (see especially, Hendriks *et al* 1993; and Rutter 1982), the impact of imprisonment upon the children of prisoners has been slow to appear in the literature on the effects of imprisonment. The effects of separation and loss on children include increased behaviour disturbance and later delinquency, depression and feelings of low self-esteem (Richards 1992). The apparent failure

to apply the findings of research on separation to our understanding of imprisonment is particularly surprising, given the inevitability of distress when one or both parents are imprisoned, in some cases for an offence against the other parent (see Hendriks *et al* 1993). Additionally, criminologists have amassed considerable evidence relating to the damaging effects of early loss on child development and later antisocial and destructive behaviour:

For children, imprisonment of adults may result in sudden separation from a parent. Young children who lose parents are likely to show separation anxiety, anger, behavioural disturbance and deterioration in school performance. In their later lives they may have more difficulties in forming satisfactory relationships, lower than expected occupational status and increased incidence of psychiatric illness.

(Grounds, forthcoming)

The links between research on the effects of divorce upon children and the effects of imprisonment upon children have barely been drawn. This link has been established by those concerned with the development of children or with prisoners' families rather than by commentators on prison life and its effects. The vulnerability engendered by trauma and loss in childhood, which is so common in the histories of the imprisoned, plays a crucial role in the pattern of anger, misery and mistrust which characterises violent offending (de Zulueta 1993). It may be exposed by the rejecting and isolating experience of imprisonment. Shaw referred to the pain and harm inflicted on children by the imprisonment of a parent as 'institutionalised child abuse' (Shaw 1987) and to the children themselves as 'the orphans of justice' (Shaw 1992).

These issues may be even more acute when the imprisoned parent is the mother (see Kruttschnitt, this volume). There is some evidence that keeping small babies in mother and baby units can have temporarily damaging effects on development (see Catan 1992), and that a variety of factors connected with their mother's imprisonment (such as poverty, unstable relationships and living arrangements, etc.) may have longer-term detrimental effects (see also Woodrow 1992).

Imprisonment and desistance from crime

The study of desistance from crime has received an increasing amount of attention in recent years (see Burnett 2004; Laub and Sampson 2003), yet little of this work has focused on the role of the correctional system in

this process. Indeed, something of a passive consensus has been reached among desistance scholars (like the 'deep freeze' school of prison effects) that the experience of imprisonment is somewhat irrelevant to the process. Farrall (1995: 56) writes, 'Most of the research suggests that desistance "occurs" away from the criminal justice system. That is to say that very few people actually desist as a result of intervention on the part of the criminal justice system or its representatives.' As a result, prison effects researchers have largely ignored the growing body of research on desistance from crime. This is more than a little ironic due to the fact that desistance and recidivism (the outcome variable favoured in prison effects research) are arguably two sides of the same coin.

Fortunately, a number of studies have sought to reverse this trend and marry prison-recidivism research with studies of desistance from crime (see Burnett and Maruna 2004; Bushway *et al* 2003; Hosser 2004; Petersilia 2003). In particular, much of this research draws on Robert Sampson and John Laub's influential theory of informal social control, which suggests that social bonds (in particular, employment and marriage) may inhibit offending. Their longitudinal research on crime over the life course suggests that the experience of imprisonment reduces opportunities to achieve relational and economic stability and, therefore, increase re-offending (see also Laub and Sampson 2003). Imprisonment weakens these (already vulnerable) bonds, and makes them difficult to re-establish, hence severing a significant source of legitimate or law-abiding behaviour. Imprisonment thereby becomes part of the cycle of delinquency and crime.

Although early offending behaviour precedes imprisonment, Sampson and Laub show that those offenders with the 'most to lose' by offending had the best chance of positive recovery or change. Imprisonment in youth and early adulthood had a negative effect on later job and relationship stability, which were 'negatively related to continued involvement in crime over the life course' (Sampson and Laub 1993: 248). This was related to length of incarceration and could not be explained by individual differences such as previous criminal history, excessive drinking, etc. These indirect but powerful criminogenic effects of imprisonment on life course transitions are significant as 'the effect of confinement may be indirect and operative in a developmental, cumulative process that reproduces itself over time' (*ibid.*: 168).

Imprisonment and prison staff

Research on the effects of prison work upon staff has also been sparse. The Zimbardo experiment found that power (especially its overuse) had

dehumanising effects (Haney *et al* 1973). Other studies have documented the destructive effects of power cultures (e.g. Gibbs 1991; Marquart 1986) and the culture of masculinity characteristic of prison staff on prison officers (Sim 1994). The features of prison life which may exacerbate such conditions are greatly under-researched.

A significant contribution has recently been made to this literature by Elaine Crawley, who has focused attention on the emotional dimensions of prison work and on the power of 'feeling rules' to keep emotions in check. She applies the notion of a 'spoiled identity' to prison staff, and suggests that this effect is extended to prison officers' families (Crawley 2004). Helen Arnold's work on 'identifying the high performing prison officer' is also taking this agenda further. Via a participant observation study of new entrant prison officers undergoing training, and a follow-up study, she finds that the process of becoming a prison officer brings with it a range of emotions, and new emotion-management techniques. Some of these techniques can lead to hardening, distancing and distrust. The process of adaptation could lead to enduring changes in their character and family life – to cynicism and a preparedness to respond to danger (Arnold, this volume).

The road ahead

We hope that the chapters in this book stimulate renewed reflection on the contemporary nature of imprisonment. In recent years, the management of prisons has been radically transformed (Carlen, this volume; Irwin and Owen, this volume), its operation reinvented (King, this volume), and claims about its effectiveness have increased. Additionally, there is a growing dissonance between an increasingly connected world and the particular capacity of prisons to 'cut off' (Johnson, this volume). As John Irwin and Barbara Owen argue, loss of agency and a sense of unfairness constitute two of the significant harms caused by the prison (see Irwin and Owen; Snacken, this volume). Other potential harms include social dislocation, drug addiction, loss of authenticity, threats to safety, mental illness and suicide (Liebling *et al*, this volume).

Despite these harms, and the apparent pains of prison life, one of the paradoxes of modern penal life is the apparent lack of organised protest among prisoners in newly configured, mega-institutions. Control is finely calibrated, new forms of power are in operation, and prisoners seem disconcertingly compliant in their behaviour, while expressing deep discomfort with their own predicament and the failure of the prison to show them a future (Irwin and Owen, this volume). As images of the

prison become increasingly benign, its use continues to grow rapidly, and its damaging effects seem to be of little interest to practitioners or criminal justice research agencies.

Craig Haney (this volume) suggests that we need to reconsider the problem that if criminal behaviour has roots in social/family background and current social contexts, then a system that targets individuals is by its very nature self-limiting. The current approach to crime control is, in this sense, irrational. If the goal is crime reduction, we should pay more attention to the contexts from which prisoners come, and into which they are released.

The aim of this volume, like the conference on which it was based, is to re-open the debate about prison effects in this new climate, and to stimulate renewed research effort and collaboration in this area. A second aim is to pay tribute to the work of Hans Toch, in recognition of his major contribution to this field, and of his rigorous and humanistic research approach (see e.g. Toch 1975, 1992, 1997, 2002). As Andrew Coyle suggested in his opening comments at the conference, we believe the best compliment we can pay to Hans Toch is to firmly restate the limitations of the prison in accomplishing either criminal or social justice.

Before proceeding, however, we need to ask whether the world really needs another book on the effects of prison. It seems obvious to us, like Nightingale before us, that if we want to reduce the harms (and the use) of imprisonment, we need strong, careful research evidence exploring different penal systems and practices, documenting not just 'what works', but 'what hurts', and uncovering means of alleviating these harms. Yet, conducting research of this kind does carry some risks, as we have discovered in past reactions to our own work. For instance, do we as prisons researchers not lend legitimacy to an institution thought by many to be broadly illegitimate? After all, why focus research efforts on making imprisonment less painful when we should be using our energy to tear prisons down altogether?

Over 20 years ago, writing in *The Pains of Imprisonment* (Johnson and Toch 1982), one of the most important predecessors to the present collection, Toch himself wrestled with these ethical tensions inherent in putting together a collection of this sort. Acknowledging that congested, undersupplied, 'warehouse' prisons are morally indefensible, Toch (1982: 41–2) asks, 'Then why do we stipulate them? Are we gilding the lily on the corpse of civilised society? Do we compromise with evil when we talk of "coping", "adaptation", "amelioration" in prisons?'

In response to these hypothetical criticisms, Toch argues eloquently that there are two, basic justifications for studying prison effects:

One is that as inmates must cope, society must cope. While prisons exist it does no good to cry without effect in the wilderness of unresponsive public opinion. Assertive responding means doing what we can with as much effect as possible ... Prisons are not an abstraction. They are a painful, tangible reality for ... inmates [and] their keepers ... These fellow humans are stressed now, and must be helped to survive.

(pp. 41–2)

Essentially, then, the first justification for researching prison effects is to lessen the pains suffered by prisoners. Toch writes, 'Given the obvious hurt of prison pains, the most plausible argument for this research ... is the potential it offers for amelioration through insight' (p. 41). Zamble and Porporino (1988: 2) go one step further than this, arguing: 'In order to be sound and reasonable, the design and operation of prisons should be based not on any particular theory or ideology, but on some fundamental understanding of how imprisonment affects individuals.' This ideal of designing prisons on the basis of empirical evidence on the effects of imprisonment is, of course, a long way from being realised. Yet, research on the effects of imprisonment is one of the few remaining defences against a complete 'race to the bottom' in corrections, and, in theory at least, should set limits on penal policies. If prisons are to exist (and they do not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon), criminology cannot simply stand back and wish them away. More research *is* needed, and, as Nightingale argued 100 years ago, we need to continue to push our findings under the noses of anyone who will read them. Quoting Stan Cohen (2001: 296) in a different context, the known harms of imprisonment 'should be regular and accessible' to the average citizen, 'rolling in front of our eyes like the news headlines on the screens in Times Square'.

Toch's second justification for studying prison effects is perhaps less immediately obvious. He writes:

The second issue is existential... Though prisons be adjudged evil, human survival must be good. There are those – Frankl (1959) and Bettelheim (1960) for example – who surmounted the unspeakable evil of Nazi death camps. Such victories are monuments to human resilience. They are worth studying and emulating. Inmates too can conquer evil (ours and theirs) and they must do so if the race – with its cruelty to itself – is to survive.

(p. 42)

Thus, the point of studying prison effects is not just the need to understand the potentially brutalising aspects of institutional living, but also to document and learn from examples in which prisoners, like Dostoevsky, have overcome these substantial social forces. Toch's dual reality of the pains of confinement and the enduring potential of human transcendence characterises our own work (see e.g. Liebling 1992; Maruna 2001) as well as the diverse contributions to this volume. Hence, it is most appropriate that we are dedicating this collection (as we did the conference that preceded it) to Professor Toch and his legacy of humanistic inquiry into the effects of imprisonment.

Notes

- 1 Some of the ideas developed in this chapter have appeared in an earlier form in Liebling 1999; Liebling and Price 2001; and Maruna and Toch, in press.
- 2 Like the previous books in Willan's *Cambridge Criminal Justice Series*, this volume has grown out of a two-day symposium at the University of Cambridge sponsored by the Cropwood Trust. This particular Cropwood Conference received additional funding from Cambridge's Prisons Research Centre.
- 3 An illustration of this general point is the use of stately homes or army camps as prisons after the Second World War in England and Wales. As a view that 'you can't train men for freedom in conditions of captivity' came to prominence, Victorian prisons began to be seen as unacceptable for the delivery of a 'treatment and training' ideology.
- 4 Suggested remedies included purposeful work, activities and events; participatory regimes; staff job satisfaction and positive staff attitudes (Barton 1966: 63).
- 5 Sykes' analysis provides the framework for several of the chapters to follow (see Crewe; Einat; and Jewkes, this volume).
- 6 Jones and Fowles (1994), for example, argued that the Zimbardo experiment was biased, and structured in a way that made the results inevitable.
- 7 On the other hand, specific concerns such as overcrowding were investigated in some detail, and high degrees of sustained overcrowding were indeed found to contribute to higher levels of disciplinary infractions, illness complaints, deaths in custody and recidivism (Farrington and Nuttall 1980; Cox *et al* 1984; Gaes 1985).
- 8 Synthesising the findings from 50 prison effects studies dating from 1958 involving over 300,000 prisoner subjects, Gendreau and colleagues argue that there is no evidence that longer prison sentences could reduce recidivism through specific deterrence, and substantial evidence that the relationship works the other way around. Indeed, they found the higher the quality of the study (including two randomised designs), the more likely it is to find

a strong positive correlation between time spent in prison and likelihood of recidivism (Gendreau *et al* 1999).

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Part I

The Harms of Imprisonment: Thawing Out the 'Deep Freeze' Paradigm