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INMATE SOCIETY IN THE ERA OF MASS INCARCERATION*

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Abstract

Inmate social organization was once a central area within criminology that stalled just as incarceration rates dramatically climbed. In this review, we return to seminal works on this topic before summarizing the changes that mass incarceration wrought in correctional contexts and the potential impacts of these changes for inmate society. We then review the few recent studies that document contemporary inmate social life and call for increased researcher-practitioner partnerships that embed criminologists within carceral settings. We suggest that network approaches are particularly useful for building on past qualitative and ethnographic insights to provide replicable results that are also easily conveyed to correctional authorities. As the era of mass incarceration peaks, we argue that the time is ripe for renewed interest in inmate society and its connections to prison stability, rehabilitation, and community reintegration.

Keywords

Incarceration; Social Organization; Networks; Prison

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-twentieth century, inmate social organization emerged as a significant object of criminological inquiry (Crewe 2007; Kreager, Schaefer, et al. 2016; Simon 2000; Wacquant 2002). Aside from its inherent exotic appeal, criminologists elevated prison research by connecting it with prominent concerns of the time, including totalitarianism and systems of total control (Goffman 1961; Sykes 1958) and tectonic shifts in race relations and urban deindustrialization (Jacobs 1977). Moreover, social scientists were then integral members of prison staff, providing researchers with direct and daily access to inmate experiences and placing sociological scholarship at the forefront of progressive prison reform (Simon 2000). In a relatively brief period, a multitude of prison case studies became seminal works in the field and continue to shape our understanding of prison society, its origins, and its consequences.

Although substantial, the ascendance of prison criminology was short-lived and ironically declined just as American incarceration rates steeply climbed (Simon 2000; Wacquant

2002). There were several interrelated causes for this fall. On a practical level, prison administrators reacted to the challenges of housing and controlling a rapidly expanding prison population by prioritizing managerial efficiency and the built prison environment over penologists' rehabilitative ideals. Simultaneously, large-scale evaluations of prison programming demonstrated weak or null effects, further eroding the perceived necessity of prison-embedded sociology. Institutional Review Boards' increased scrutiny of prison research widened the gap between researchers and prisons, necessitating the use of secondary data sources (e.g., ex-inmate accounts, institutional data, and aggregated statistics of prisons and prisoners) as principal means of understanding the contexts of contemporary confinement. Although rigorous studies of inmate society persist, they remain infrequent, limited in scope, or confined to international settings. As a result, inmate social organization within U.S. prisons remains opaque, a state that is particularly problematic because the transformations that accompanied mass incarceration substantially altered both prisons and the inmate population.

A burgeoning literature now documents the negative individual and collateral consequences of incarceration (Travis, Western, and Redburn 2014; Wakefield and Uggen 2010), yet research of inmates' lived experiences has stalled and often "...existing data do not provide even the most basic information regarding the conditions of confinement faced by prisoners" (Travis et al. 2014:431). The purpose of this review is to reinvigorate inmate society as a valuable object of knowledge and update classic studies with concepts relevant for the current correctional landscape. Specifically, we document what is known today about inmate life in light of increased prison overcrowding, the proliferation of prison gangs and other inmate subgroups, the aging of the inmate population, inmate-staff interactions, and prisoners' increasingly limited interactional opportunities with the wider society. Throughout this text, we acknowledge the tremendous heterogeneity in incarceration experiences across space, gender, custody level, and race. We also consider whether carceral developments are unique to our own political context by contrasting our findings with those of Dutch and English criminological counterparts. Finally, based on our findings (or lack thereof), we outline a set of recommendations for future research to enliven this relatively dormant, but highly promising, area of research.

FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

Thorough reviews of foundational work on inmate society exist elsewhere and remove the requirement to do so here (Crewe 2007b; Simon 2000; Wacquant 2002). Useful for our purposes, however, are how the assumptions of earlier theorists correspond with the changing carceral landscape over the past five decades. Specifically, seminal theories fundamentally differ in their propositions for the origins of prison culture, and these varying hypotheses have distinct implications for if and how shifting prison contexts correspond with changes in inmate social organization.

Sykes' (1958) *Society of Captives* provides the most well-known and illustrative example of what is now termed the deprivation model of inmate culture. For him and other functionalist scholars (e.g., Goffman 1961; Sykes and Messinger 1960), deprivations indigenous to prison (e.g., loss of security, heterosexual sex, liberty, autonomy, goods and services) promote

inmate responses that alleviate those pains. For the most part, such adaptations are self-serving and “alienative”, but there may also arise inmate leaders (i.e., “real men” or “right guys”) who suffer prison’s deprivations with dignity, resist exploiting peers, and provide community goods that encourage inmate solidarity and passive resistance to formal authority. Inmate hierarchy and cohesion are then intricately linked to the experience of incarceration and the actions of prison authorities that either exacerbate or ameliorate prison’s deprivations. Following the basic logic of the deprivation perspective, changes wrought by mass incarceration would impact inmate society to the extent that they alter the prison setting, particularly regarding inmates’ felt deprivations.

The primary competing explanation for inmate culture comes from the importation model, most associated with the work of Irwin (Irwin 1970; Irwin and Cressey 1962) and Jacobs (1977; see also Clemmer 1940). Arising at a time of immense social change and rising crime rates, importation arguments share the assumption that prison culture largely reflects the values and norms outside of prison, primarily from the communities and streets inmates call home. For example, the gangs present within prison are expected to reflect the geographically and racially-based gangs found outside of prison, and the characteristics associated with “street” status should be similarly valued in the prison setting. To the extent that an “inmate code” exists, then, the importation argument holds that it is a warped version of norms existing beyond the prison gate (Crewe 2007). At their base, importation arguments rest on the assumption that contexts external to prisons influence inmate society. Accordingly, trends in crime, criminals, and society are more relevant for changes in inmate informal organization than would be changing conditions within prisons.

A third theoretical strand emphasizes contextual heterogeneity and situational intersectionalities as more important than broad generalities for understanding inmate society. Research adopting this situational perspective challenges the deprivation-importation dichotomy with case studies that defy easy categorization (e.g., Mathiesen 1965; Ward and Kassebaum 1965) or large-scale multi-level analyses of inmate outcomes that demonstrate institutional or interactional effects between inmate characteristics and prison contexts (Camp et al. 2003; Steiner and Wooldredge 2009a). Work in this area reminds us that, even at similar points in historical time, heterogeneity exists in prisons and prisoners across space. Local correctional policies, social conditions, and inmate demographics vary widely and interact in complicated ways to potentially affect inmate society. While it is beyond the scope of this review to examine all possible factors, wherever possible we identify contextual heterogeneity – including inmate gender, race, offense, and policy differences – and how these may impact inmate social organization.

THE IMPACTS OF MASS INCARCERATION ON CORRECTIONAL SETTINGS

Beginning in the mid-1970s, the number of incarcerated persons in the United States rose precipitously, reaching a high-water mark in 2008 with over 2.3 million imprisoned or jailed inmates (Kaeble and Glaze 2016). During this historically unprecedented “era of mass incarceration,” the country’s incarceration rate surpassed that of all other nations, at its height reaching 760 inmates per 100,000 residents (Travis et al. 2014). Moreover, the rising risk of imprisonment disproportionately affected minorities and the socioeconomically

disadvantaged. The imprisonment rate among young black males, for example, reached over six times that of similarly-aged white males, while the young Hispanic male imprisonment rate approached two and a half times that of whites (Carson and Golinelli 2014). The resulting concentration of incarceration within disadvantaged and minority communities necessarily increased racial stratification and magnified pre-existing economic, geographic and social inequalities (Clear and Frost 2013; Travis et al. 2014; Wakefield and Uggen 2010).

Although incarceration rates rose across the U.S. during the era of mass incarceration, significant state-level variability remained and likely differentially affected prison conditions and inmate experiences. At one end of the spectrum, several states in the Northeast and Midwest (e.g., Maine, New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Nebraska) saw their incarceration rates less than double between 1970 and 2000. Alternatively, some Southern states (e.g., Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas) had incarceration rates that increased more than six-fold in the same period (Travis et al. 2014). These dramatic differences remind us that carceral contexts are often more a local than a national phenomena.

More generally, mass incarceration corresponded with six interrelated trends for prisons and prisoners, each with its own direct implication for inmate life and social organization. First, the rapid influx of prisoners quickly strained existing prison capacities and often led to overcrowded conditions in prisons across the United States. The last available publication on national-level facility size and prison capacity indicated that between 2000 and 2005, the number of prisoners in both state and federal facilities rose faster than facility capacity expanded; overall occupancy rates rose 11% above capacity in 2005 (Stephan 2008).¹ More recent data from The Federal Bureau of Prisons indicate that, between 2006 and 2011, the inmate population in federal facilities grew by 9.5% while their capacity for housing inmates grew less than 7%, increasing their crowding from 36% to 39% over this time (Bureau of Prisons 2012). Indeed, litigation (e.g., The Prison Litigation Reform Act [PLRA]) initiated to reduce prison overcrowding has had little impact while severely curtailing prisoners' abilities to redress adverse prison conditions and put restrictions on some methods of responding to crowding (e.g. release orders)(Belbot 2004).

Second, increasing racial disparities in prison admissions resulted in growing racial heterogeneity in American prisons throughout the era of mass incarceration. For example, in California, the ratio of minority to white inmates grew from .5-to-1 in 1951 to almost 3.5-to-1 in 2011 (Skarbek 2014). Nationally, the absolute disparity in prison admissions between blacks and whites grew by three fold between 1970 and 1986 (Langan 1991). A high black-white disparity in drug-related arrests during the 1980's put even greater numbers of black men into prison. Today, although non-Hispanic blacks make up approximately 12% of the country's population (Rastogi et al. 2011), black men account for over 35% of America's current male inmate population and are the largest prison racial category (Carson and

¹Occupancy rate is defined as the number of inmates divided by rated capacity multiplied by 100. It is also important to remember that state correctional departments can use different methods to determine their rated capacity and hence level of crowding. New York, for example subtracts the number of temporary beds from the number of beds in the general population and Wisconsin does not calculate rated but capacity but uses design capacity (the number of inmate planners intended for the facility) and operational capacity (the number of inmates that can be accommodated based on staff and services) (Bureau of Prisons 2012).

Anderson 2016). Although not as dramatic, Hispanic male incarceration rates have also increased over time and today are over twice that of non-Hispanic whites (Carson and Anderson 2016). In men's prisons, Hispanics now make up approximately 22% of the prison population.

Third, rising use of mandatory minimum and life sentences, "three strikes" laws, and severe penalties for drug violations has meant that inmates generally spend more of their lives in prison than in the past. This, along with broader age trends, has resulted in an increasingly older inmate population. According to a recent Bureau of Justice Statistics report, the number of prisoners aged 55 or older in state prisons increased 400% between 1993 and 2013. This older age group is now 10% of the state prison population (Carson and Sabol 2016).

Fourth, although far from universal, scholars point to ways that mass incarceration has coincided with changing correctional policies and prison infrastructure. Most notable has been an expansion in solitary confinement (i.e., administrative segregation, disciplinary segregation, and protective custody) and the development of "supermax" prisons for managing inmates who are perceived as extremely disruptive, a flight risk, or who are at or at heightened risk of victimization (Beck 2015; Frost and Monteiro 2016). Recent estimates suggest that nearly 20% of prison inmates spent some time in solitary confinement within the past 12 months of their incarceration, with approximately half of these spending 30 days or more in that status (Beck 2015). The influx of inmates also resulted in the hasty construction of new prisons, often with podular designs that house inmates in small groups that are constantly shuttled between daily work assignments, meals, programming, and exercise throughout the prison (Irwin 2005). This segmented and routinized existence is commonly termed "warehouse" imprisonment as it seeks to reduce violence through incessant movement and mundane tasks. Adding to this segmentation is the increased emphasis on risk assessment tools for inmate assignment and programming. Under the principles of matching inmate risks with needs through actuarial assessment, the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model has diffused widely through American prisons and has important, albeit understudied, implications for individual inmates' lives and system-level properties related to cell, unit and treatment program assignments (Andrews, Bonta, and Hoge 1990; Andrews, Bonta, and Wormith 2006).

Fifth, changes in arrest and sentencing policies have substantially affected the distribution of incarceration offenses over time. Nationally, the majority of incarcerated persons have been, and continue to be, classified as violent offenders. Indeed, the proportion of inmates whose most serious crime was "violent" rose substantially in the 1990's, and in 2015 accounted for over half of inmates in state correctional facilities (Carson and Anderson 2016; Clear and Frost 2013). At the same time, however, the War on Drugs greatly increased the proportion of prisoners convicted of drug-related offenses. In the 1970s, approximately 5 percent of prisoners in the United States were sentenced for drug-related crimes. By 2010, almost 20 percent of prisoners were convicted of such offenses and this percentage reached 50 percent at the federal level (Clear and Frost 2013). In recent years, state prison admissions and sentence lengths for drug-related offenses have dropped, as have the percentage of current state inmates serving drug-related sentences, but these statistics remain far above estimates

prior to the era of mass incarceration (Carson and Anderson 2016; Carson and Golinelli 2014).

Finally, America's punitive turn has also resulted in greater numbers of women placed behind bars. Since the early 1970s, women's incarceration rate has increased more rapidly than men's (Travis, Western and Redburn 2014: 64). Women's rate of imprisonment in state and federal institutions increased most dramatically between 1980 and 2000, moving from 11 per 100,000 to 59 per 100,000, (Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2003). It reached its high mark in 2008 (at 69 per 100,000), and has since fluctuated, but it remains eight times higher than it was in 1980 (Carson and Anderson 2016).

Like male offenders, these incarceration trends did not impact all racial groups equally. Incarceration rates for black women far outstripped those for white and Hispanic women and by 2000 black women were being incarcerated at a rate that was approximately five times that of whites and over twice the rate of Hispanics (Kruttschnitt 2011, Table 4). However this changed precipitously between 2000 and 2009 when the proportion of black women in prison decreased by 31% and the relative proportions of white and Hispanic women increased (47% and 23% respectively; see The Sentencing Project 2013).

RESEARCH OF CONTEMPORARY PRISON LIFE

Although often limited and exploratory, some penologists have connected the above trends to inmate outcomes and prison informal organization. In this section, we summarize recent research in these areas and note instances where gaps exist so that we may highlight these as ripe for future study.

Prison Crowding and Violence

The explosive growth in the incarcerated population over the past five decades was predicted to markedly increase prison violence and the pains of imprisonment (Hagan 1995; Wacquant 2001). Paradoxically, the most reliable measures of prison violence, rates of prison homicide and suicide, dropped dramatically just as the number of inmates grew exponentially. Prior to 1980, the homicide rate within the nation's state prisons approached 60 per 100,000 inmates, but by 2000 this rate dropped over 90 percent to 5 per 100,000 inmates, and recent statistics place the rate at 7 homicides per 100,000 inmates (Mumola 2005; Noonan and Ginder 2013; Sylvester, Reed, and Nelson 1977). Reports of prison riots similarly dropped over this time period (Useem and Piehl 2006). Although such statistics by no means capture the extent of inmate violence (as we have no reliable data on the non-lethal assaults) and prison overcrowding likely has other negative consequences (Gibbons 2006), the statistics at minimum suggest that the chaos expected to accompany prison overcrowding did not materialize (Travis et al. 2014).

Multi-level studies including both inmate-level and facility-level characteristics also produce equivocal findings for the association between overcrowding and inmate violence. Studies that have focused on a broad array of facility environmental (e.g., design capacity and facility overcrowding) and compositional characteristics (e.g., security levels, staff to inmate ratio, proportion of non-white staff, proportion of inmates held in punitive segregation) for a

large number of (male) state institutions generally find that compositional factors are more important than environmental factors in shaping inmate violence (Steiner 2009; Steiner and Wooldredge 2008; Wooldredge and Steiner 2015). However, there are some compositional factors that may be related to violence that are conditioned by crowding. For example, in prisons that housed a greater proportion of younger inmates (ages 18–25) or aggressive inmates, crowding increased levels of misconduct (Franklin, Franklin, and Pratt 2006; Lahm 2008). Other research, however, finds that facility size is more important than crowding and that higher assault levels occur in larger prisons that house higher custody inmates and a larger proportion of African Americans (Steiner 2009; Wooldredge and Steiner 2009).²

Wacquant (2001) is perhaps the first scholar to connect prison overcrowding to inmate society. He argues that overcrowding, along with other changes wrought by mass incarceration, undermine traditional prison social structure founded on the “convict code” and inmate solidarity. Moreover, he asserts that the explosive growth in the prison population, racial cleavages, and a “code of the street” (Anderson 1999) imported from the postindustrial “hyperghetto” make modern prisons increasingly brutish and unstable. However, as outlined above, Wacquant’s (2001) description of contemporary prisons appears inconsistent with official statistics of inmate violence, leaving open the question of how inmate society has responded to prison overcrowding.

Skarbek (2014) provides an alternate explanation that connects prison overcrowding with reductions in prison violence and changes in inmate social organization. Using descriptive data from California prisons, he argues that the overcrowded conditions that accompanied mass incarceration helped to destabilize existing inmate norms. In response, inmates turned to prison gangs as extralegal governing bodies that provided security through group allegiances and constant threats of retaliatory force, which in turn deterred inmate-on-inmate violence. This argument is reminiscent of Sykes’ (1958) functionalist account of inmate society in that it connects inmate social organization to prison deprivations (i.e., growing insecurity that accompanied overcrowding). Indeed, Skarbek (2014) turns importation theory on its head by contending that modern prison gangs export their structures and illegal markets outside of prison. His theory also provides an intriguing explanation for the mixed results of overcrowding-violence research, in that overcrowding may contribute to violence up to a point when inmates take matters into their own hands and establish gangs for self-protection.

Although Wacquant (2001) and Skarbek (2014) provide intriguing accounts of the links between overcrowding and inmate social organization, it should be noted that neither of these authors directly observed inmate experiences in overcrowded settings. The lack of embedded research in contemporary prisons leaves the connection between overcrowding and inmate society relatively unexplored.

²There is some evidence that crowding and maximum security increases assaults in women’s institutions (Steiner and Wooldredge 2009). More generally, however, the work on violence in women’s prisons has focused on the individual predictors of violence (Teasdale et al. 2016); the nature of violence, or the fact that it is more relational/verbal than men’s violence (Greer 2000; Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2003; Lahm 2015; Trammell 2009); and, the rate of violence relative to the rate in men’s prisons (Wolff et al. 2007; Wooldredge and Steiner 2016).

Race, Gangs, and Inmate Social Structure

Skarbek (2014) also discusses the impacts of increased prison racial heterogeneity on inmate social order. Specifically, he argues that greater black and Hispanic prison representation resulted in increased racial segregation and between-race antagonisms. This proposition parallels work in school networks, where more equal representation by race has been associated with heightened levels of intra-school racial segregation (Moody 2001). This fractionalization, Skarbek (2014) asserts, combined with the rise of prison gangs to create a balkanized social system made up of race-based gangs competing for shares in prison illicit activities, principally the drug trade.

Trammell's (2012) interviews with ex-convicts support Skarbek's (2014) description of the prison racial divide, at least within the Californian correctional system. The men in her study described California's prisons as being highly segregated by race where violent incidents commonly occurred along racial lines despite the fact that the majority of individual inmates also socialized daily with friends from other races. Inmates thus enforced norms of racial segregation and resisted official mandates, such as the Supreme Court decision, to desegregate prisons. Prison authorities, in turn, acquiesced to inmate racial norms in order to maintain system stability (Goodman, 2008).

In his ethnography, Irwin (2005) provides a markedly different picture of race relations in California's Solano prison. Irwin (2005) finds that, although inmates tended to segregate themselves by race and ethnicity, little racial tension existed and racial boundaries were commonly porous. He argues that this racial détente was the direct result of prison policy, specifically increased surveillance and the constant threat of reassignment to a higher security level "supermax" prison for any violence. For Irwin (2005), the characteristics of contemporary "warehouse" imprisonment successfully dismantled the authority of race-based prison gangs and weakened racial barriers within inmate society.

Irwin's (2005) focus on prison management to explain reductions in racial conflict is reminiscent of DiIulio's (1987:239) earlier description of the "bureaucratic" prison, where strict rules and a strong (militarized) custodial regime atomize inmate society to create "safe, lawful, smooth-running correctional institutions." Where Irwin (2005) and DiIulio (1987) diverge, however, is in the perceived consequences of such penal regimes for inmate rehabilitation and psychological health. For Irwin (2005), the loss of agency and assaults on self that accompany "warehouse" imprisonment are detrimental to inmate outcomes and outweigh any safety benefits. For DiIulio (1987), inmate rehabilitation cannot begin until safety is ensured. Moreover, he argued that inmates should not be trusted to police themselves or work in concert with institutional goals, so strict "bureaucratic" prison management is an optimal solution.

Trulson and Marquart (2009) also look to correctional policy and management to understand prison racial (de)segregation and inmate violence. They focused on the social, legal, and policy changes surrounding racial integration processes within the Texas Department of Corrections (TDC) in the latter twentieth century. Although operating within a highly-segregated Southern state, the TDC was forced to respond to incremental federal and state legislation requiring prison racial integration, ultimately resulting in random cell assignment

by race. Both prisoners and staff were reluctant to implement these changes, but Trulson and Marquart (2009) found that forced racial integration was not followed by increased interracial violence, system disorder, or feared race wars. Similarly, Steiner and Wooldredge (2009b) examined differences in inmate rule violations across 175 facilities across the U.S. and found that, net of other individual and contextual factors, racial heterogeneity was associated with significantly *fewer* drug/alcohol and nonviolent incidents. The authors concluded that increased interracial contact can increase prison social order without also increasing interracial violence.

Drugs and Inmate Society

The influx of drug offenders during the era of mass incarceration, sentenced either for drug possession or trafficking, may have substantially altered contemporary inmate social organization. Crewe (2005, 2009) suggests that the increasing presence of hard drugs (e.g., heroin) affected the informal social system within the medium-security English prison he observed. Specifically, he found that inmates dependent on heroin within prison became disruptive to system stability due to debt problems and unpredictable behaviors that often accompany addiction. Addicted inmates are held in low regard by other inmates and marginalized within inmate society. Simultaneously, Crewe (2005, 2009) asserts that the illicit market surrounding prison drugs increases the power and influence of prison drug dealers. Such dealers often exploit other inmates, both users and non-users, to maintain their power and profits, further destabilizing inmate social order. In the end, he argues that although heroin may (temporarily) alleviate individual users' pain, it also contributes to the collective pains of imprisonment.

Skarbek (2014) also points to prison drug markets as influential in shaping contemporary inmate society. For him, prison gangs operate as governance structures for prison drug sales and debt collection. This business, he argues, has not only supplanted the inmate code as the formal organization of inmate society but, given the profitability and power of the drug market, it has also allowed gangs to export their activities outside of the prison.

Age and Inmate Society

A growing body of research documents the incarceration experiences of older, long-term, and "lifer" inmates, groups that are increasing in size as the era of mass incarceration reaches its fifth decade (Carson and Sabol 2016). The broad consensus from this research is that, consistent with the age-crime curve, older and long-term inmates typically "age-out" of misconduct and adjust to prison in predominantly prosocial ways as their sentences unfold. Johnson (1987; Johnson and Dobrzanska 2005) refers to this adjustment process as "mature coping," defined as "...one who seeks autonomy without violating the rights of others, security without resort to deception or violence, and relatedness to others as the finest and fullest expression of human identity" (Johnson and Dobrzanska 2005:8).³ Consistent with this definition, Irwin (2010) found that the 17 "lifers" he interviewed, each of whom had already served 20 years in prison, progressed through phases of increased conscience, remorse, self-discovery, and redemption through service to others. Most recently, Crewe,

³It is also worth noting the similarity between Johnson's (1987) "mature coping" and Sykes' (1958) "real man" argot role.

Hulley, and Wright (2016) cover similar terrain in describing how English prisoners adapted to long-term sentences. The inmates they interviewed came to terms with their offenses and shifted from passive to active agency by making their prison-terms meaningful and productive through either redemptive or self-improvement projects.

Less is known about how long-term or older inmates fit into inmate society. Zamble (1992) surveyed 41 long-term Canadian inmates in the first 7 years of their sentences and found that, in general, over time the inmates spent more of their optional time in their cells with a few close friends instead of informally socializing with the broader inmate community. Similarly, Irwin (2005; 2010) and Honeywell (2015) suggest that “lifers” band together to form their own small fraternity or niche within the prison, thus avoiding the potential conflicts of “the mix.” In an interesting study that mixes social network and inmate narrative data, Kreager et al. (unpublished) examine the peer status of inmates in a Pennsylvania prison “good behavior” unit, finding that older long-term inmates were at the top of the status hierarchy and were perceived as providing valuable mentoring and inmate-staff brokerage to younger and shorter-term peers. Consistent with the situational perspective, this study highlights that local prison contexts have substantial consequences for inmate organization. Under the right conditions, the growing population of long-term inmates may be harnessed to promote system stability and even rehabilitative roles.

Inmate Society in Women’s Prisons

Early depictions of the inmate society in women’s prisons were shaped by the classic studies of men’s institutions. Researchers focused primarily on the question of whether women’s adaptations to prison were a function of the same hallmarks of deprivation and importation that shaped men’s adaptations to prison (Giallombardo 1966; Heffernan 1972; Ward and Kassebaum 1965). While support emerged for both perspectives, the role of gender role socialization in women’s adaptations remained a dominant focus of research even as the number of women being imprisoned began to dramatically climb and the nature of women’s prisons, and the discourse around women’s criminality, began to change (see Kruttschnitt, Gartner, and Miller 2000). It wasn’t until the late 1990s that scholars started documenting the ways in which the character and meaning of women’s carceral lives were changing, albeit in an uneven fashion.

One of the most noted changes in women’s conditions of confinement during the era of mass incarceration was crowding. While there is substantial state-by-state variation in this phenomenon, researchers studying prisons for women in diverse locations (California, Pennsylvania and Connecticut) note how crowding became a defining feature of women’s institutions, spurring the growth of new custodial models of imprisonment for women (Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005; Owen 1998; Rierden 1997; Silberman 2007). While crowding and violence are commonly studied in men’s prisons, it has rarely been examined in studies of women’s prisons perhaps because it is a relatively new phenomenon. A study by Steiner and Wooldredge (2009a) represents an important exception. Drawing on national state-level data at two points in time, that capture the significant growth in the rate of women’s imprisonment (1991 and 1997), they found that crowding (the ratio of the daily population to design capacity) resulted in more self-reported physical assaults. While

crowding may well have increased levels of physical aggression among women prisoners, it is important to note that this increase is likely grounded on a low base-rate. A wide range of research suggests that physical violence is rare in women's prisons but verbal and emotional aggression is quite common (Celinska and Sung 2014; Greer 2000; Harer and Langan 2001; Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2003; Kruttschnitt and Krmpotich 1990; Lahm 2015; Owen 1998; Trammell 2009).

The finding that there are relatively low levels of serious physical aggression in women's prisons is underscored by the general absence of gangs in female institutions and the role of race relations in their carceral lives. Two studies that encompassed three of the four prisons for women in California during the 1990s, and thereby a significant proportion of the women imprisoned in the U.S. at that time, found no evidence of gang activity and little evidence that race was a significant determinant of either the inmate social structure or women's adaptations to prison life (Carbone-Lopéz and Kruttschnitt 2003; Gartner and Kruttschnitt 2004; Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005; Owen 1998). As Owen (1998:152–154) aptly characterized, race operates as an interesting “subtext” in the prison, structuring who hangs around with whom on the yard and at meals. Race also had little influence on who was politically active,⁴ or who participated “in the mix.” or the hustles that revolved around the underground economy and drugs, but it could surface in the context over interpersonal relationships and competition over scarce resources.⁵ However, if we put aside the conventional (read “male”) approach to studying race in the context of the inmate society, there is evidence that it affects how women cope with their conditions of confinement. Bosworth's (1999) study of three women's prisons in England revealed that racial and ethnic alliances developed outside of prison were maintained inside and that they were important aspects of the women's identity (along with their age, religion, sexual orientation and offense of conviction). Kruttschnitt and Hussemann (2008) extended this perspective by examining how race and ethnicity affect women's abilities to cope with their conditions of confinement in two different contexts: California and England. They found that in California, where the conditions of confinement were more severe, racial identity surfaced as important only for white women who were unaccustomed to holding a minority status. By contrast, in England, white women rarely drew attention to their racial/ethnic identity and it was the women of color and the foreign national prisoners who drew attention to how their racial identities shaped their sense of themselves as the “other.” All of this suggests that race may be a necessary element in understanding how women do time but it far from a sufficient explanation for the structure of the social order of women's prison.

Age and aging are both important elements of understanding women's prison experiences. Younger inmates' experiences are more varied than older inmates, shaped in large part by whether they have done time in prison before. For young women, who are new to prison, the experience can be isolating and frightening but for others, with more prison time under their

⁴An important exception to this may be found in Diaz-Cotto's (1996) description of Latina prisoners' attempts to implement reforms in New York in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁵Few scholars have examined in whether, and if so how, the underground economy differs in men's and women's prisons. One notable exception, however, is Alarid's (2005) study of workplace deviance in the “sub-rosa” economy in Texas prisons. She found that the overall prevalence of selected deviant activities (i.e., passing contraband, stealing food) did not differ by gender; but, one prominent subcultural difference was that men were more likely than women to use some of their job activities to alter their prisons uniforms to signify their gang affiliations.

belts, it can be a chance to get back into “the mix” hustling drugs and other inmates (Kruttschnitt et al. 2000; Lempert 2016; Owen 1998). Older inmates, by contrast, have always been considered a stabilizing presence in the prison and they are garnering increasing attention as the age structure of the prison population has shifted. The number of female prisoners age 55 and older quadrupled between 1993 and 2013, accounting for 39% of the overall growth in the female prison population during this period (Carson and Sabol 2016). Most of the research on these aging prisoners focuses on health care needs and the attending inadequacies of the health care facilities in women’s prisons (see e.g., Aday and Farney 2014; Fisher and Hatton 2010; Harner and Riley 2013; Proctor 2009; Young and Revere 2001) rather than how this shift in the age structure may be altering the inmate society in women’s prisons. However, some attention has been given to “lifers” whose presence in the prison population has also increased. Between 2008 and 2012 there was a 14% increase in the number of life-sentenced women and, as of 2012, 5,361 of the life-sentenced inmates in U.S. prisons were women (Nellis and King 2009). Lempert’s (2016) study of 72 of the 176 life-sentenced women in Michigan represents one of the few dedicated studies of lifers. Her research encompassed women with a range of pre-carceral experiences, including their age at the time they received their “no-exit” sentence. Despite these variations, she found that these women employed four common coping strategies: (1) normalizing activities by using “as if” in the outside world analogies; (2) staying busy; (3) forming affective and instrumental relationships with peers; and (4) becoming spiritual. Her findings also underscore much of what is known about the place of “long-termers” in inmate society who serve as “model” inmates by avoiding “the mix” and by providing needed counseling to neophytes (Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005; Owen 1998; Silberman 2007).

Inmate Trust in Late Modernity

Within the sociology of punishment, a substantial body of work has documented and explained societal shifts toward coercive control accompanying mass incarceration. Garland’s (2001) *The Culture of Control* is perhaps the most well-known example in this area. Central to his thesis is that interrelated political, cultural, and criminological responses to social change created an overarching emphasis on exclusion and control to solve perceived issues of crime and insecurity. The late-modern prison then replaces the rehabilitative functioning of the penal-welfare era with a singular focus on controlling and excluding abstract, de-individuated, and stigmatized “offenders.” Several penologists have extended these themes to examine how societal-level foci on punitiveness have affected micro-level inmate-staff relationships. For example, Kruttschnitt and Gartner (2005) provide a detailed account of the changing contexts (i.e., 1960’s to 1990’s) of two California women’s prisons. One of their key findings is that macro-level “changes in penal ideologies, rationales, and practices described in recent prison scholarship translated into changes in the experiences of female prisoners” (Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005:158). Specifically, they argue that societal views emphasizing punishment and the “incorrigible offender” are mirrored by prison staff when dealing with rapidly expanding populations within the two prisons. Results include weakened inmate-staff trust, the dismantling of rehabilitation programming, and inmates retreating from the institution and one another. With regard to inmate organization, the authors assert that the political contexts of modern penal policy fractured and atomized inmate solidarity and cohesion.

Liebling and Arnold (2012) cover similar ground in their study of an English maximum security prison. Comparing qualitative data collected in the prison in 1998–99 to 2009–10, they found a deterioration in inmate-staff relationships and a more heterogeneous, balkanized, and distrustful inmate population. Similar to Kruttschnitt and Gartner (2005), the authors assert that the less hierarchical and cohesive inmate society they observed resulted from broader structural and cultural changes that penetrated the prison on multiple fronts, including inmate composition (e.g., age and faith), staff beliefs, and coercive correctional practices.

In another example, Crewe (2007a) collected 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork and hundreds of hours of interview material to document how inmates complied, resisted or adapted to increasingly coercive formal controls in an English medium-security prison. Similar to Liebling and Arnold (2012), Crewe (2007a) finds that the majority of inmates resigned themselves to the prison's absolute power and conformed to individualized routines. Although passive resistance and institutional manipulation were rewarded with increased status, such behaviors resulted in individual rather than collective goods, meaning that the solidary society proposed by Sykes (1958) was effectively dismantled by the late-modern prison regime.

Although the above literature paints a dour picture of inmate trust and social organization in modern prisons, alternative images exist. For example, Schaefer et al. (forthcoming) examine friendship networks in a Pennsylvania medium-security men's prison unit and find them to be very dense, composed of reciprocated ties, and with almost no social isolates. The proposed mechanism for this more cohesive structure is that the unit was comprised of inmates who had demonstrated good behavior and therefore were permitted by staff to socialize and were not confronted with a highly repressive prison regime. The examined prison unit thus had a more supportive and solidary social organization that inmates did not want to jeopardize with misbehavior that would result in their being returned to general population. Research in this vein can demonstrate that, even in an era that prioritizes punishment and control, conditions may exist for the establishment of inmate trust and the harnessing of this trust toward rehabilitation ideals.

Comparative Approaches

Up to this point, we have focused our discussion on prison conditions and inmate society within the contemporary United States and England. England adopted much of the neo-liberal approach to punishment that has characterized American penal policy over the past two decades (Garland 2000; Pratt 2000) which affected both who goes to prison (more violent and drug offenders and more women) and, presumably, life inside prison as sentences lengthened, crowding and violence increased, and the average age of inmate population increased (Allen and Dempsey 2016).⁶ Prisoner and staff interactions were also altered as risk assessment, classification and responsabilization became the order of the day (Crewe 2011a; Ministry of Justice 2013). Although strong similarities exist and we may assume similar processes across the two countries, it remains useful to directly compare the

⁶In 2014, England had the highest rate of prisoners per 100,000 (146) among all western European jurisdictions (Allen and Demsey 2016 p. 24)

two countries and extend these comparisons to other nations with alternative correctional regimes. Indeed, during the era of mass incarceration, penal research in non-U.S. contexts has outpaced its domestic counterpart, providing exemplars for how we might proceed.

On the broadest level, Ross and colleagues (2008) examined the prison climate in 10 Federal prisons in the U.S. and 3 English prisons. The characteristics of the inmates sampled differed significantly but there was no significant difference in the factor-score scales that measured personal well-being (i.e., psychological and somatic complaints) suggesting that the “pains of imprisonment” are largely the same across prison contexts. However, what distinguished the two prison systems were the measures of environmental quality (e.g., cleanliness, safety, noise, crowding) and safety and security. Perceived safety and security was higher in England than the U.S. While there were no national differences in inmates influence on one another or the frequency of assaults, staff were seen as having more influence on inmates in England than in the U.S. This may reflect the U.K. prison system implementing more environmental controls (e.g., extensive use of CCTV) and the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme after the prison disturbances of 1990. IEP gives prisoners the chance to earn various privileges (in-cell TV, additional visits and spending money) and is designed to get prisoners to take responsibility for their conditions of confinement. As Crewe (2007a, 2011a, 2011b) documented in a series of articles, this scheme profoundly shifted the inmate culture. He suggests that “compared to only two decades ago, prisoners in England and Wales are less likely to live in fear of their captors, to be systematically brutalized, to share triple-bunked cells with their own excrement and to be deprived for days on end of showers, fresh air and clean clothing” (2011a:524). Instead with the extensive use of responsibilization, prisoners now endure the pains of self-governance and engage in various forms of compliance (e.g., fatalistic, detached and strategic or manipulative) to get through their prison sentences.

Additional comparative research suggests that, while this new scheme may have altered the weight of imprisonment, the tenor of staff-inmate interactions in England remains extremely problematic. A recent replication of Downes (1988) comparative analysis of the penal systems in the Netherlands and England drew particular attention to the stark contrasts in prisoner-staff interactions in these two countries. Despite efforts to improve prison life in England, Dutch prisoners found the English correctional officers largely unresponsive to their needs, dehumanizing in their interactions and particularly hostile to non-white foreign national prisoners (Dirkzwager and Kruttschnitt 2012; Kruttschnitt and Dirkzwager 2011; Kruttschnitt, Dirkzwager, and Kennedy 2013). While this may seem like a somewhat lopsided comparison, given the penal standards upheld in the Netherlands, others have also found that front-line correctional officers in England are “punitive and disrespectful” in public sector prisons and that staff racism remains a problem (Cheliotis and Liebling 2006; Crewe, Liebling, and Hulley 2015).

Other attributes of the prison society — gang activity, drug trafficking and the adaptations of an aging inmate population — are largely consonant with the U.S. Empirical research on both prisoner and staff perceptions of gang activity in nine prisons suggests that it is a frequent occurrence in male prisons, among younger inmates and recidivists. Like gang activity in the U.S., their focus is primarily on drug possession and distribution (Wood 2006;

Wood and Adler 2001); in fact Crewe (2005:462) has suggested that drugs may be the “main motor of social dynamics” in English prisons today thereby eroding the culture of solidarity.⁷ But a fundamental difference between U.S. and English prison gangs is their locus of formation: in the U.S. it tends to be along racial lines where as in the UK it is formed along the regional lines of nationality, region of the country, or neighbourhood (Crewe 2009; Harvey 2007; Phillips 2012). Aging, and the mechanisms associated with coping with different stages of a prison career also have some consistency across borders. English prisoners serving life sentences of 15 years or more identified different sets of concerns in early and later stages of their prison careers which required different coping mechanisms. In the early stages they reported missing little luxuries, heterosexual relations, and specific individuals. But by the latter stages, individuals became more isolated and emotionally detached (Frank and Gill 2015; Hulley, Crewe, and Wright 2015). Further, inmates who have grown old in prison, by virtue of the length of their initial sentence or as a result of being sentenced to prison late in life, draw attention to the problems of both psychological and physical “self maintenance” (Sykes 1958). Physically they have to find ways to adapt to the structure and routines that have been designed for much younger prisoners; and, psychologically they confront their loss of contact with the outside world and their fear of death. (Crawley and Sparks 2005, 2006).

A somewhat different picture emerges when we examine inmate society in women’s prisons in England and the Netherlands. While women’s prisons have always been imbued with distinctive programs and setting, reflecting society’s changing views of women’s criminality, they have not been impervious to the larger shifts in penal policy and the changes in discourse that stress risk, classification and control. However, relative to the U.S., where one-third of the women held in prisons throughout the world are housed (Kruttschnitt 2011), the implications of new penal policies for women in England and the Netherlands may, in some respects, be more benign. Because California is often considered the bellwether state in penal policy, and we have empirical evidence about the character of women’s penal experiences during the era of mass incarceration (Kruttschnitt and Gartner 2005; Owen 1998, 2005), we consider how the experiences of women in California compare to those of women in England the Netherlands.

California demonstrates the most obvious movement away from the domestic rehabilitative models that has long characterized women’s prisons, despite the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) rhetoric of engaging in gender responsive approach to women prisoners (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2016a). Although the size of the female inmate population has dropped by 49% since 2007 (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2016b), all three of the women’s prisons are at, or well above their capacity and dealing with long sentences, inadequate health care and abusive interactions with staff appear to be significant problems for the inmates (Prison Law Office 2016).⁸ England also has embraced a gender responsive

⁷Trammell (2009) also suggests that the influx of gangs and the underground drug economy have reshaped the inmate code in California.

⁸The phenomenon of staff sexually and verbally abusing women inmates is not unique to California; it appears to be a more widespread problem in women’s prisons in the U.S. (Buchanan 2007).

approach to female inmates that puts consider emphasis on domestic comforts (see Corston 2007; HM Prison Service 2008); but, it is unclear how, if at all, this has changed the inmates' lives. The number of women incarcerated has been relatively stable over the past 15 years (hovering around 4,000) and most of the women are serving sentences of 6 months or less in 12 relatively smaller prisons; nevertheless, problems with health care and suicide are on-going concerns (Plugge, Douglas, and Fitzpatrick 2006; Short et al. 2009; Wolff et al. 2007). By contrast to California and England, the Netherlands has no specific gender response scheme. Their crime rate that has declined so much that they have closed, or are closing, 19 prisons including one for women. Sentences are short and in the last three months of their sentences, women can spend up to 60 outside of the prison looking for work and re-establishing family connections.

What do these distinctions mean for tenor of inmate interactions? Survey data collected in 2 women's prisons in California, 3 women's prisons in England and 4 women's prisons in the Netherlands provides an assessment of the effect of demographics, prior prison experiences, and relations with staff and other inmates on prisoners' well-being. These data revealed that staff-inmate interactions had the largest impact on inmates' wellbeing and they were significantly worse in California and England relative to the Netherlands (Kruttschnitt et al., 2013). More generally, despite the differences in scale and "nods to gendered approaches," the women in California and England voice similar concerns about their conditions of confinement and the characteristics of inmate societies: the problem of missing their families, the distrust of other prisoners, the conflicts that emerge over the underground economy, and the general lack of gangs and racial hostilities (Cheliotis and Liebling 2006; Kruttschnitt 2005; Owen 1998).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

When compiling a review such as this, one is immediately struck by how little recent research has been conducted *within* U.S. prisons, a prerequisite for understanding inmate society in the era of mass incarceration. Although IRB approval will remain a hurdle for future prison research, what can be improved are the institutional relationships between academics and correctional practitioners. Such partnerships become increasingly feasible as cracks in current criminal justice policies widen and stake holders across the political spectrum understand the need for reform. Social scientists would be instrumental in producing and evaluating the evidence-based policies undergirding criminal justice reform. For their part, prison scholars need to tailor, or at least acknowledge, the practical needs of prison administrators (Wacquant 2002). To only critique the status quo or focus solely on general science research questions will not foster researcher- practitioner partnerships or open the gates to prison research. We live in a time when the need for embedded prison research is recognized by all sides, but steps remain to break down pre-existing institutional barriers.

There are several paths for scholars to connect research of inmate society with practical programs, policies, and outcomes important for prison administrators. Much of the current sociological research of incarceration has, perhaps rightly so, focused on the impacts of incarceration for post-release individual, family, community, and societal outcomes (Travis

et al. 2014; Wakefield and Uggen 2010; Western et al. 2015). Missing from this research are connections between post-release outcomes and the *experience* of incarceration (Travis et al. 2014). What is then needed is longitudinal research that begins in prisons (including pre-prison data and records) and prospectively moves toward parole and community re-entry processes (Kreager, Schaefer, et al. 2016; Volker et al. 2016). Such research can answer long-dormant questions about inmate structure and culture while simultaneously connecting prison experiences to successful community reintegration and criminal desistance. The combination of pre-prison, in-prison, and post-prison data allows for the estimation and evaluation of individual health and behavioral trajectories that include the incarceration experience. Answers from such research are easily framed as contributions to sociological and life course perspectives, as well as correctional policy.

Relatedly, inmate treatment programming and interventions provide attractive avenues for connecting inmate relational experiences with prison policy. Interventions based on inmate peer interactions—such as therapeutic communities, group-based prevention programs, educational classrooms, and group work assignments—could benefit greatly from sociological and system-level approaches. There is now a substantial body of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that have evaluated the effectiveness of correctional programs, including boot camps, “scared straight” programs, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and therapeutic communities (MacKenzie 2006). The contributions of these RCTs often lie in discrediting the effectiveness of popular, but often costly, correctional programs. However, in cases where programs are evaluated as effective (e.g., therapeutic communities), the treatment effects are often modest and the RCT is unable to explain weak program impacts in terms of proposed theoretical mechanisms. In other words, RCTs are poor tools for understanding *why* a program works and thus have little to say for how effective programs can be improved. Combined with thorough program fidelity and integrity assessments (Duwe and Clark 2015), prison-embedded sociological research has tremendous potential for understanding the mechanisms of effective correctional treatment programming. In the tradition of Moreno’s (1932) early work on prison-based group therapy, the burgeoning area of network science offers a particularly useful approach for understanding and improving prison programs (Kreager, Davidson, and Whichard 2016). Specifically, such studies can identify optimal social structures and structural dynamics necessary for the diffusion of valued treatment outcomes. The lessons learned from such research can be returned to correctional practitioners to evaluate and refine prison programming.

Network science also offers a valuable tool for understanding incarceration’s impacts on social capital over time. There is a growing literature on the associations between visitation and inmate misconduct and ex-inmate recidivism (Cochran and Mears 2013; Mears et al. 2012). Missing from this research, however, are how visitation (1) relates to inmates’ positions within inmate society and (2) connects with pre- and post-incarceration family and community ties. Network surveys administered both inside and outside of prison can fill these gaps and describe incarceration’s effects on trajectories of social capital accumulation/erosion and how variations in these social ties impact criminal recidivism upon release.

There has also been little research of inmate social organization within local jails. In 2015, one third of the nation’s incarcerated population was housed in local jails (Kaeble and Glaze

2016), but research of jail inmates' experiences falls well behind the already limited research of state and federal prisoners. One can imagine that high turnover of jail populations undermines and atomizes inmate social organization, potentially resulting in greater disorder and violence. Indeed, in one of the few studies of inmate networks in temporary detainment facilities, Kreager, Palmen, et al. (2016) found that detainees in the Netherlands who *did not* create trusting peer ties had better mental health and behavioral outcomes than those who did. Contrary to much research on social integration and health (e.g. Berkman et al. 2000), this finding suggests that social isolation and "keeping one's head down" benefits short-term inmates. More research is needed to replicate this finding in the American context, compare it to inmate networks in prisons, and understand the connections between social integration and health and recidivism.

Finally, extant studies within American prisons have been confined to a narrow number of states connected with enterprising researchers and/or progressive correctional departments. We thus know far more about prison experiences in California and Pennsylvania than we do about similar experiences in Southern states, where correctional regimes, overcrowding, and inmate demographics may differ substantially. California has the largest correctional population in the United States, providing some justification for its central place in prison research, but Georgia is a close second and has an incarceration rate that is over five times that of California (Kaeble and Glaze 2016). Indeed, all of the "Deep South" states (i.e., Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi) have incarceration rates that surpass California's and are among the highest in the nation. Researching inmate life in these understudied states may identify processes, norms, and social structures that differ substantially from what is already known. Accessing such prisons may not only contribute to longstanding perspectives of inmate social organization, but also point to ways that the era of mass incarceration has differentially impacted inmate experiences across geographical and institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

The groundwork has been laid for a resurgence in embedded prison research and explorations of inmate society. With mass incarceration showing some signs of receding and criminal justice reform receiving increased bipartisan political support, correctional administrations may have room to search for alternative prison policies. There is also growing recognition that such reforms should have their basis in research rather than anecdotal evidence, "just desserts" punishment philosophies, or institutional immediacy. More than at any time within the past four decades, social scientists have a role to play in prisons, increasing the prospects for researcher-correctional practitioner partnerships. The challenge for penal scholars is then to directly engage the priorities of correctional staff to build trust and open the doors for further research.

The perceived irrelevance, and even suspicion, often placed on sociological research by prison managers (Jewkes and Wright 2016; Wacquant 2002) may be allayed with studies offering quantifiable and replicable products relevant for correctional policies and institutional concerns. As stated in the previous section, network science offers one promising avenue for future research of inmate society (Kreager, Schaefer, et al. 2016).

Network approaches provide intuitively appealing and tangible visualizations and statistics for complex concepts, such as unit hierarchy, groups/gangs, peer influence, and social integration. Results from prison-based network studies are not only capable of testing longstanding questions about the structure and culture of inmate society, but can be easily conveyed to prison administrators and policymakers. Moreover, the quantifiable metrics associated with network data allow for comparisons across contexts, increasing generalizability and permitting hypothesis tests of the association between inmate experiences and health and health-related behaviors.

We are not Pollyannaish in our perceptions of future prison research. We live in a time of tremendous uncertainty on multiple fronts, including crime trends, criminal justice policy, and state and federal politics. The atmosphere today, at least at the state level, appears opportune for research aimed at increasing the humanity, rehabilitation potential, and simply understanding of prison processes, but there is no guarantee that this situation will carry forward to the near future. The risks and uncertainties of prison research are even greater at the project level. Changes in prison administrative personnel or local prison circumstances (e.g., inmate lock downs) can easily delay or derail the best laid plans. Indeed, set-backs and uneven progress are normative for prison research. It takes persistence, patience, adaptation, and negotiation to conduct such research, particularly when it is geared toward the inmate experience. Ideally, the needs of scholars and correctional practitioners will further align to lessen barriers and illuminate the inmate social world. Potentially, such research can improve inmate safety and reduce incarcerations' direct and collateral consequences, while also answering general social science questions.

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