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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Regina White Benedict entitled "Giving Back Not Giving Up: Generativity Among Older Female Inmates." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Sociology.

Lois Presser, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Allison Anders, Damayanti Banerjee, Ben Feldmeyer

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Giving Back Not Giving Up: Generativity Among Older Female Inmates

A Dissertation Presented for
the Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Regina White Benedict
December 2009

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ABSTRACT

Extensive research has been conducted to understand the experience of incarceration, with the focus on hardships inflicted on inmates via incarceration. In addition, the current graying of America's prisons has gained some attention from both policymakers and the general public. However, despite the recent upsurge in concern and interest in matters pertaining to prison inmates, the focus by and large remains on young males. Meanwhile, studies addressing the experience of incarceration for older females are virtually non-existent. Generativity, defined as the desire to give back and execution of that desire, is regarded as a universal life stage first occurring sometime during middle age. Yet, generativity among older female inmates has not been specifically researched. This research project explores the experience of incarceration as well as the presence and practice of generativity among older female inmates.

Participants in this study were 29 female inmates housed at the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women in Pewee Valley, Kentucky. Data were collected through low-structure interviews, which allowed the participants to discuss issues that were important to them.

The findings suggest that older women experience motherhood and incarceration in unique ways. Generativity was indicated to exist among older women inmates. Furthermore, the participants reported engaging in generative behaviors in prison and expressed desires to continue to be generative upon their release. A number of policy implications are suggested, as are a number of areas that may be of interest to researchers in future.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies of older inmates focus on negative aspects of incarceration. For example, studies have revealed links between aging and diminishing health, and between aging and behavioral problems of inmates (Flint 1994; Eliopoulos 1997; Ebersole and Hess 1998; Hooyman and Kiyak). Compared to younger inmates, older inmates are more susceptible to both minor and chronic physical illnesses and are more prone to be diagnosed with a mental illness. Older inmates are at a higher risk of contracting urinary tract infections, gastrointestinal infections, hepatitis, and pneumonia (Falter 1999; Hooyman and Kiyak 1999; Aday 2003). While gerontological research generally regards age as gender neutral; that is, with no differentiation between males and females, Lindquist and Lindquist (1999) found both *gender* and *age* to be the most consistent demographic predictors of health status and medical utilization among inmates. They discovered that female and older inmates report higher morbidity and higher numbers of medical services (Lindquist and Lindquist 1999). Genders and Player (1990) found that female lifers reported an overwhelming fear of deterioration in their physical health and psychological well-being. Poor physical and mental health among women inmates stems from poor health habits prior to incarceration (Brewer and Baldwin 2000), exposure to traumatic events, such as abuse (Jordan, Schlenger, Fairbank, and Caddell 1996), previous impoverishment, and history of substance abuse (Reviere and Young 2004). As a result, health wise, women in prison are seven to ten years “older” than their chronological counterparts in free society (Reviere and Young 2004).

Notwithstanding these gloomy findings concerning aging in prison, the aging process in general also brings about positive outcomes, such as wisdom based on life experience and generative thoughts and desires. *Generativity* is defined as a commitment to the larger society and its continuation and/or improvement through the next generation (Erikson 1950). This dissertation reports on generativity among older women behind bars. I conducted qualitative, one-on-one interviews with twenty-nine (29) older female inmates (age 40 and older) and younger female inmates (under age 40) in the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women, located in Pewee Valley, Kentucky. My main research objective is to reveal female inmates' expressions of generative desires and how they fulfill these desires behind bars. An additional objective is simply to learn how older female inmates experience incarceration. Given the paucity of research in either area – generativity among inmates and the experience of incarceration for older female inmates – this work is necessarily *exploratory*.

The "graying of America" has become a popular term in reference to the vast growth of our nation's aging population (Gustavson and Lee 2004). Yet, the term "graying of America's prisons" is not common; nor do aging prison inmates share in much of the recent upsurge in attention and concern that has been devoted to the general aging population. In 2000, there were an estimated 35 million people age 65 and older in the United States, which is a 12 percent increase from 1990 (United States Bureau of the Census 2000). While prisons arguably house a "forgotten" portion of society, they are nonetheless a reflection of society. In 2001, 113,358 federal and state inmates were aged 50 and older, which represents more than a 172 percent increase from 41,586 in 1992 (Camp and Camp 2001). The proportion of older *women* who are in prison has risen in recent years (Reviere and Young 2004). In 1990, females aged 55 years and older were incarcerated at a rate of 3 per 100,000. By 1996, the rate had increased to 5 per

100,000 and by 2001, it had increased to 6 per 100,000 (Harrison and Beck 2002; Reviere and Young 2004). These increases are due, in part, to overall demographic trends as well as increased rates of incarceration of older offenders due to sentencing laws enacted in the past 25 years, particularly statutes requiring long-term determinate sentencing for violent offenders and other specially targeted offenders, such as substance abusers (Glaser et al. 1990).

I conducted interviews with twenty-nine (29) women, twenty-six (26) of whom were 40 and older and three (3) of whom were younger[1] (ages 27-39). I chose qualitative interviews in order to give a voice to a small, but unique inmate population. I took an exploratory approach and invited the women to discuss issues that were important to them. I approached the interviews from a feminist perspective, both conceptually and methodologically. Conceptually, I focused on women and their experiences. Methodologically, I established rapport with my participants and encouraged them to discuss issues important to them. The interview process substantiated my feminist approach as I witnessed a type of self empowerment among my research participants. The vast majority of them had resolved not just to "do their time," but to "do their time" their own way. That is, to use their time for self-improvement and to plan to give back to society by one day sharing their experiences with others. The study of generativity among female inmates is a distinctly feminist project as it explores how certain women resist insofar as the subjugation, via the incarceration experiences that might have depressed their spirits. Thus, there is an element of female resistance.

Studies concerning female resistance have posited that women are often socialized to be cautious of strangers, even though women are more likely to be victimized by someone they know (Belknap 2001). A woman in any public place may feel vulnerable to unpredictable

[1] Hereafter I will refer to the former group as "the older women" and the latter group as "the younger women."

invasions of her physical self ranging from objectification to violent crime (Gardner 1995). A woman entering prison may also have feelings of vulnerability and fear, but may truly feel justified in having them because of the forced interaction with strangers that is imposed by incarceration. Several of my research participants reported being scared when they first entered prison and admitted to acting tough and unapproachable to protect themselves from the possibility of victimization. In their study of women's feelings of vulnerability in public parks, Wesely and Gaarder (2004) found that women coped with their fears most frequently by engaging in basic strategies of companionship, that is, making sure they were never alone. Yet, in so much as the focus on gender differences in the prison subculture has predominantly been about how incarcerated women are far more likely than incarcerated men to form close emotional bonds with each other, my research participants also reported spending a great deal of time alone. Therefore, female resistance and resiliency in prison is complex and pertinent to feminist concerns because of the particular challenges women inmates face in navigating their environment.

Feminist researchers support the practice of researcher self-disclosure in order to establish rapport with the participants. According to Girshick (1999), "a researcher's disclosure of herself may minimize power imbalances, increase solidarity between researcher and participant, enhance information gathering, and transform an interview into a dialog." (p. 8). In many ways I am, and appeared to be quite different from the women I was interviewing. I am earning a Ph.D.; I am middle-class; I am white; and I live in a house in the "free world" – that is, I am not incarcerated. I have never experienced abuse or drug addiction. I am younger than my chosen sample – 33 years-old. But during most of the interviews, I shared with inmates that I am a mother of two young girls. Motherhood provided a basis for relating, in order to encourage dialogue. My

research participants were eager to talk about their children or grandchildren. One woman stated "I plan to spoil them (grandchildren) when I get out." I shared that my children were spoiled by their grandparents. The woman smiled and expressed her desire to be with her family and to cook for them on holidays. Yet, by in large, my sample was vastly different than me, bearing hardships and experiences that I had not encountered. In effect, the majority of these women were disenfranchised even before they came to prison.

My sample in particular "lives" at the intersection of oppressive systems. The majority of them are considered older (aged 40 or more), all of them are prison inmates, and all of them are women. Sontag (1975) suggests that while the prestige of youth affects women and men in similar ways, getting old is more profoundly troublesome for women. Once past menopause, women are more likely to be degraded and discounted than their male counterparts (Markson 1992). The adverse impact of aging for women stems, in part, from the perception that aged people are not physically attractive. Society defines physical attractiveness for women in terms of particularly youthful looks more so than it does for men (Vinton 1999). The social worth of women has been more closely linked with their physical appearance compared to men (Hatch 2005). It would seem that women lose their social value simply by growing old, whereas older men are more likely to be valued and rewarded for what they do, no matter their age (Hatch 2005). In general, my research participants did not discuss difficulties in relation to their age unless with a direct prompt to do so, such as "What is it like to age in prison?" The typical response was that aging in prison was not good. They mentioned health problems and required medications, but to most for them to be incarcerated at their age was an embarrassment. Peggy, a 58 year-old white woman serving 12 years for trafficking a controlled substance, said "I didn't realize how old I was until I was in prison. I'm upset being here. This is not where you want to

be when you're older." Another woman commented that she never thought she would retire to Pewee Valley; thus, there is some disconnect between how the women once thought themselves to be in middle to old age and how they now are.

While both male and female inmates are expected to be submissive, this is likely to be more rigorously enforced in women's prisons (Belknap 2001). Indeed, the intent of women's prisons has been described as to discipline, infantalize, feminize, and demoralize (Carlen and Tchaikovsky 1985). In a study of Texas prisons, McClellan (1994) found that minor occurrences, such as talking in line and failing to eat all of the food on their plates, resulted in citations or punishment for women inmates, but never in men's prisons. In effect, women's prison policies have been found to treat women like children. Furthermore, prisons routinely demoralize women inmates who already have a high prevalence of histories of sexual abuse. Women inmates are given little control over their bodies from strip searches in the presence of male guards to reported instances of forced abortions (Holt 1982; Leonard 1983) or coerced adoptions (Baunach 1992; Mann 1984). Even women returning from permitted locales, such as court or visitation, are frequently subjected to vaginal searches for contraband. These searches are humiliating and demeaning, but can also be painful and dangerous- sometimes resulting in bleeding and infection (Holt 1982; Mann 1984). In addition, access to everyday items like toilet paper and sanitary pads is often highly restricted in women's prisons (Belknap 2001). Thus, women inmates are dependent on staff for even the most basic necessities (Pollock 2002) which strengthens the oppressive component of the total institution. The older women I interviewed frequently commented on prison rules and regulations, but all of them recognized why the rules were in place and complied. Misty, a 50 year-old white woman who has been incarcerated for 23 years, stated: "When I first came here there were only eighty (80) inmates and only one

building. You could have anything you wanted. Good food like steaks and pork chops. The rules have gotten more petty because of inmates. 'We create our own madness.' You can't smoke in here since last year. Good. I needed to quit, anyway." In general, my research participants did not like the rules, but accepted them.

Feminist standpoint epistemology posits that experience should be the starting point for any knowledge production, and insists on the need to view the social world from the perspective of women. According to Millen (1997), this approach draws on Marxist ideas about the role of the proletariat and suggests that women are an oppressed class with the unique ability to not only understand their own experiences of oppression but to see their oppressors more clearly than can others. That is, the experience of subjugation provides a valid basis for knowledge because it gives access to a closer assessment of the oppressor. Yet, women do not have one universal experience of oppression. They have encountered various degrees of discrimination and abuse, but often share a bond of victimization.

While my research participants did not use the term oppression, many of them were victims of abuse. Many of the women I interviewed saw themselves as survivors. They had survived multiple instances of abuse- some nearly fatal- and now feel like they are healing and ready to move on. Dalia, a 45 year-old African American woman serving 17 ½ years for trafficking of a controlled substance, reported that "I think it is important to talk to them [other women] about sexual abuse. I was overprotective as a mom, because of what happened to me." For many of my research participants, prison gave them an opportunity to confront issues related to past abuse for the first time. Many lamented the abusive relationships that were a catalyst to their own criminal activity.

The recognition of male dominance is merely a starting point for feminist thought. Today's feminist scholars emphasize the importance of women's differences, the power that some women have over others, and the interests that women sometimes share with men. Female oppression varies in both nature and degree; it is folly to assume that women identify with each other on the basis of gender alone. Letherby (2003) notes that women are invested in different systems of power. Gender is just one source of power and may or may not be an individual's primary concern. Age is another source of power; confinement status is clearly another. It is the intent of this study to give voice to the intersection of three such systems of power, namely age, gender, and inmate status, via older female inmates – women who have lived through many life experiences and who all have stories to tell.

Women in wheelchairs, women stooped over while walking with a cane, and white haired ladies wearing prison uniforms are not the "typical" images associated with female inmates. However, such is the growing reality in many U.S. prisons today. These women have children who are grown and on their own. Typically, this stage in life brings retirement, vacations, and grandchildren. However, older women in prison experience life quite differently from their counterparts in free society. Their position in the prison social order is significant and their experience of incarceration is unique, but older female inmates are generally considered a small and trivial part of the prison population. Therefore, very little is known about their prison adjustment, hardships, and achievements. It should not be assumed that older women inmates share in the same experiences of younger mothers. Older inmates are mothers of older children and grandmothers, perhaps even great-grandmothers, to children that they may never have met.

While previous research has explored the complications caused by incarceration for motherhood (Baubach 1985; Enos 1997; Watterson 1996; Marcus-Mendoza 2001;

Belknap 2007), scholars have not specifically focused on the effects of incarceration on older women and their relationships to adult children and grandchildren. While even short periods of separation severely compromise the daily functioning of families with young children, older inmates often have adult children who live independently of their mothers, perhaps with children of their own. Thus, separation is arguably not as detrimental to the well-being of the family unit as with younger women with younger children. My research participants recognized their own children's independence, but expressed concerns for the well-being of their grandchildren and lamented the lack of ability to properly bond or, quite often, to even see their grandchildren due to incarceration. They considered the job of *raising* their children as finished, so their grandchildren were the new "little ones" in their lives- regardless of the nature of their relationship with their adult children. While some of my research participants reported their relationships with adult children to be strong, others viewed their relationships to be severely strained or estranged due to their incarceration. Although it is true that older adults in free society often relocate to be nearer to family (Clark and Wolf 1992), most inmates realize that maintaining relationships over a long period of time is difficult. Older inmates recognize that relatives will join their family through birth and marriage and that some will also die during their incarceration (Aday 2003). Furthermore, these events will occur without the prisoner's participation or, occasionally, knowledge (Santos 1995).

Previous studies regarding aging in prison mainly focus on issues of physical and mental health (Genders and Player 1990; Koenig, Johnson, Bellard, Denker, and Fenlon 1995; Aday and Nation 2001; Aday 2001) or family visitation (Wikberg and Foster 1989; Aday 1995; Aday

2003). Little to no attention has been given to prison adjustment, relationships with other inmates, and inmate perceptions of aging in prison.

Indeed, all inmates go through a similar prisonization or adaptation process, but not all of them experience every aspect of it (Girshick 1999). It can be assumed that older inmates have different needs than younger inmates; therefore, they are likely to experience prison differently. The pivotal difference between the lives of older inmates and the accounts of younger inmates provided by the literature is age. Larson and Nelson (1984) found that length of sentence and time already served had a significant impact on adaptation to prison. Inmates who had served more time were better adjusted to the prison environment. For many long-termers, incarceration has been a journey of self-discovery. Older short-termers enter prison as mature adults who often seek the quiet escape of their rooms to avoid the noise and drama caused by the younger inmates.

Furthermore, while prison is a somber environment, older inmates endure many years of incarceration full of pains and pleasures. Prior research primarily concentrates on negative aspects of incarceration, such as family separation, mental illness, and inmate victimization. The positives, while arguably fewer in number, are largely ignored. Generativity, or giving back to others, offers benefits for both the inmate and society, but opportunities to be generative are limited in prison.

The concept of generativity encompasses both desires and behaviors intended to improve the next generation. Generative adults ponder the legacy they will leave behind. Yet, it would seem likely that, due to incarceration, inmates would not express generativity in the same manner or to the same degree as adults outside of prison. Therefore, it is important to assess if older inmates have generative desires and, if so, how they are able to act on them.

The current study explores the experience of incarceration and, most importantly, the presence and execution of generativity among older female inmates. In Erik Erikson's (1950) theory of human development, generativity is a universal stage of life. Thus, adults should experience it whether incarcerated or not. Likewise, aging and all that it encompasses is inevitable for all adults as well. Yet, it is not clear how older *inmates* negotiate the prison environment on a daily basis to engage in generative behavior during their incarceration. In other words, the impact of incarceration on aging and generativity and vice versa is relatively ambiguous.

I have organized the dissertation as follows. Chapter 2 investigates theory and research on the prison experience for men and women, with a particular focus on the concerns of women inmates and how they cope with them. Chapter 3 reviews research on the process of aging – both in "free" society and behind bars. In Chapter 4, I explore the concept of generativity more closely. I also discuss generative outlets for inmates and ways that prisons either impede or allow generativity to occur. In Chapter 5, I describe the methodology of this study and provide descriptive data pertaining to the prison facility and the women inmates who face the daily challenges of incarceration. Chapters 6 through 8 reveal my findings from inmate interviews in regards to parenting and grandparenting, getting along in prison as an older person, and generativity, respectively. Chapter 9 is a discussion of the findings in general and the contribution of the study.

CHAPTER 2

THE PRISON EXPERIENCE AND COPING

This chapter examines the prison experience for women inmates and their ways of coping with prison life. I begin this chapter with a review of early studies on adjustment to prison life for both men and women. Then, I review existing research on women's experience of incarceration, moving from early studies of the prison experience to classic studies of women's survival in prison to recent work from a feminist perspective. I then describe a wider array of research on prominent issues that women inmates face. Finally, I consider ways of coping with these issues.

The female prison experience is compounded by gender discrimination in contemporary American society and its inability to deal with women whose behavior is outside the traditional definitions and expectations of society (Owen 1998). In other words, women inmates have, for all practical purposes, failed at being a woman as they are unable, due to incarceration, to fulfill their expected roles of wife and mother. Furthermore, they have failed at being a productive member of society; ergo, they are incarcerated and segregated from the morally upstanding members of society. At the same time, research about incarceration has devalued the smaller population of women inmates even more by not only failing to readily appreciate their uniqueness and importance, but also by needlessly and incessantly comparing them to male inmates, a group that shares very few of the same overall experiences of incarceration. Even now, the literature predominantly focuses on negative effects of incarceration, namely separation of the mother from her children, and remains male-centered as women inmates are still frequently compared to male inmates rather than studied on their own merit.

Early Research on the Prison Experience: Prisonization and Pains of Imprisonment

The dominant theoretical framework for understanding the prison experience stresses prison deprivations and comes primarily from Clemmer and Sykes. Clemmer (1940) defined prisonization as "the process of assimilation of the prison culture by inmates as they become acquainted with the prison world" (p. 299). The effect of the process of prisonization on the inmate is to make him or her conform to the norms and expectations of the prison culture. When an inmate first enters the prison, he or she is stripped of all bases for identity and becomes faceless and anonymous in the new prison environment. The process of prisonization is quicker for some inmates than for others; still others may never fully assimilate to prison culture.

Clemmer conducted a study of 2,300 male inmates at an undisclosed prison that is reportedly "typical in respect to discipline, labor, and the various practices found in most other adult correctional institutions" (Clemmer 1940, p. xv). He utilized multiple methodological resources including interviews with inmates and prison staff, inmate questionnaires, inmate files, essays written by the inmates, and standardized tests (e.g. the Alpha Army intelligence measure – see Memoirs of the National Academy of Science, Vol. XV). Clemmer identified several conditions – lengthy sentence, unstable personality among free society with a capacity for strong convictions and a particular kind of loyalty, a readiness to integrate into the prison subculture, lack of positive relations with people outside of prison, ready acceptance of the norms of the general penal population, chance placement with other people of a similar orientation, and a readiness to participate in gambling and abnormal sex behavior – which he found increase the effects of prisonization.

While Clemmer (1940) focused on variables influencing the degree of assimilation to the prison setting, Gresham Sykes (1958) studied the characteristics of the prison culture to which the inmates assimilate. Sykes (1958) reported on his study of the New Jersey State Maximum Security in Trenton. In *Society of Captives*, Sykes utilized a variety of methods including official publications and reports of the Department of Institutions and Agencies for the State of New Jersey (the state Department of Human Services), inmate files, formal interviews, surveys given to 200 male inmates, participant observation, and informal interviews with inmates and staff. Order within the prison is described by Sykes as emerging from the set of relationships that one develops to cope with life in captivity, and what he refers to as "the pains of imprisonment" (Sykes 1958). The shared sense of suffering and deprivation unifies inmate populations to some extent, creating an inmate subculture.

Sykes traced the discomforts of the prison experience to five particular "pains": deprivation of liberty, absence of goods and services, deprivation of heterosexual relations, loss of autonomy, and loss of security. The deprivation of liberty is inherent in the experience of incarceration. The absence of goods and services is painful, whereby the prisoner's basic material needs are met – he does not go hungry, cold, or wet- the inmate wants not only the necessities of life, but also the amenities such as cigarettes, nice clothing, furnishings for their living quarters, and privacy. Sykes referred to the deprivation of heterosexual relations as "involuntary celibacy" and stated that through imprisonment, the inmate is "figuratively castrated" (p. 70). Sykes observed that a male inmate's gendered self, his masculinity, is thrown into question as a result. The loss of autonomy is evident in that the inmate is subjected to a vast body of rules and commands that are designed to control his every behavior. Sykes quotes one inmate on the loss of security: "the worst thing about prison is you have to live with other

prisoners" (Sykes 1958, p. 77). Inmates lose the sense of security that they enjoyed in free society, because they feel threatened by other inmates and often fear victimization.

The remainder of Sykes' book investigates adaptation through assuming various "argot" roles[2]. These are distinctive social roles played by inmates in response to the particular problems of incarceration. These "argot roles" include *rats* (who betray the inmate code of solidarity); *center men* (who adopt the attitudes and beliefs of prison staff); *gorillas* (who take goods from other inmates); *merchants* (who sell goods to other inmates); *wolves* (who are aggressive sexual partners); *punks* and *fags* (who are submissive sexual partners); *ball busters* (inmates who give prison staff a hard time); *real men* (who endure prison life with dignity); *toughs* (who are quick to quarrel with all of the other inmates); and *hipsters* (who quarrel only with the weaker inmates).

In 1962, John Irwin and Donald Cressey departed from Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958) by including pre-prison socialization experiences as an important factor in the development of what they determined to be several inmate subcultures. They did not consider prison subcultures to simply be adjustments to the deprivations of incarceration, but rather aggregates of various criminal and conventional identities with origins outside prison walls. That is, the inmate subcultures are derived from offender characteristics and experiences prior to incarceration that are imported into the prison institution upon incarceration.

Irwin and Cressey (1962) distinguished inmates in terms of three subcultures. *Thieves* are oriented toward the outside criminal world and abide by their own code, not the inmate code. *Convicts* have been raised in the prison system and strictly adhere to the inmate code. *Straights* are not part of the thief or convict subcultures before prison and also reject both of these

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[2] Prison slang that is used to refer to different types of inmates who perform stable roles within the prison subculture

subcultures while in prison. These broad categories provide a way of examining the influence of latent culture, such as that of thieves and convicts, on prison experiences. In 1970, Irwin, who was once incarcerated himself, presented data supporting this argument

Irwin (1970) identified three modes of prison adaptation reiterating the subcultures outlined by Irwin and Cressey (1962) and the effect each mode has on both incarceration and post incarceration experiences. Irwin undertook his research at the California Department of Corrections where he interviewed parolees (116 men in all) and parole agents, studied inmate files, and attended all parole hearings. Irwin (1970) used the term “prison career” to describe the process of moving through the stages of imprisonment. In moving through these stages, Irwin identified three adaptive modes. The first mode of adaptation is called “doing time” and is most common among inmates who try to maximize their comfort and minimize their discomfort. Inmates who are “doing time” are usually involved in a number of pro-social activities in prison and often form friendships with other inmates. The second adaptive mode is “jailing” and is characteristic of the inmate who cuts himself off from the outside world and strives to establish some level of power within the prison. This type of inmate uses friendships and cliques as a means of survival. Finally, “gleaning” is an adaptation to prison made by those individuals who are looking to better themselves in order to change their lives once released from prison. These inmates take advantage of educational, vocational training and treatment programs within the prison in an effort to improve themselves (Irwin 1970). Irwin found that “the convict identity,” characterized by strict adherence to the inmate code and orientation to the convicts within the prison, influences the future career of the inmate both in prison and after release. That is, they know how to behave in prison prior to incarceration. He found that most convicts are influenced

by the convict code and adhere to the major dictum of this code – “do your own time” – that is, mind your own business.

Recently, convict criminologists have forcefully emphasized the pains of imprisonment, insisting that only convicts know the full horrors of prison life. For example, Ross and Richards (2002) share insights about the corrupt behavior of correctional officers and random unannounced transfers of inmates from one institution to another. Convict criminologists conduct research that illustrates the experiences of prisoners and ex-cons, attempts to combat the misrepresentations of scholars, the media, and government. Like Clemmer, Irwin, and Sykes, most self-identified convict criminologists are men. However, some belated attention is given to the specificity of women’s experience. Jean Harris (1988), the notorious former headmistress of The Madeira School for girls in Virginia who made national news in 1980 for the murder of her ex-lover Dr. Herman Tarnower. After an argument, Harris shot Tarnower four times at close range. She was arrested and convicted of second-degree murder. Harris offers a woman’s perspective on prison life in her book, *They Always Call Us Ladies*. Harris states: “It’s a fairly normal day here, the usual tragedy all around, some people caring, some people totally unconcerned” (p. 25). Her depiction of prison life includes tales of misconduct by correctional officers and firsthand accounts of the emotional anguish suffered by inmates who lost their children during incarceration. She states: “one of the many things for which I am grateful is that prison has not extinguished my sense of curiosity. The pleasure of searching, learning, fitting pieces together saves me from many of the horrors that the tedium of prison could reduce me to” (p. 19).

In 1969, Charles Tittle identified gender differences in inmate organization and the influence of the criminal subculture. He interviewed 115 male and female narcotic addicts at a

correctional federal hospital. He found that women inmates favor intimate primary groups, while men inmates exhibit more loyalty to the inmate subculture. However, Tittle (1969) found that each gender actually engages in both as a means of inmate organization. He argued that gender differences in inmate organization were small given similar incarceration conditions. Subsequent scholars would apply the concepts of prisonization and pains of imprisonment to female inmates, deconstructing the "horrors," "tedium," and adaptations thereto, for women as they have been deconstructed for men.

Classic Studies of Women's Survival in Prison

Ward and Kassebaum (1965), Giallombardo (1966), and Heffernan (1972) were forerunners in the study of women inmates. The general pattern had been that of ignoring women inmates or studying them only for comparison to men, yet these scholars broke new ground as they explored female prisons exclusively. All three sets of scholars conducted qualitative research and produced book length works based on their findings. All three entered women's prisons with the ideas of Clemmer and Sykes in mind, but arrived at rather different conclusions.

Ward and Kassebaum (1965) executed their study at the California Institution for Women (CIW) in Frontera, where they conducted surveys of 400 inmates and 65 prison staff members, interviewed 45 inmates, and studied inmate files. Ward and Kassebaum found that the development of identity and prison role adaptation for female inmates are related to the phase of incarceration and their involvement in homosexual relationships. They observed that the process of prisonization causes status degradation and feelings of self disorientation, apprehension, and a loss of autonomy for female inmates. The prisoner social system emphasizes female role expectations which mimic those of free society and homosexual relations in the absence of male

partners. Ward and Kassebaum found that identity and loyalty exist in small, intimate pseudo-family groups which often, but do not always, involve homosexual relationships.

Ward and Kassebaum (1965) found that women prisoners suffer from “affectional starvation,” the need for emotional and reciprocal relationships, and that they also possess “psycho-sexual” needs for interaction with men. They found that a culture had developed at the CIW to meet these needs through emotional and sexual dyads composed of female and male roles. Ward and Kassebaum estimated that approximately fifty percent of the women in CIW had engaged in some form of homosexual activity during their incarceration. They conceptualized homosexuality as a functional adaptation to the deprivations of imprisonment as experienced by the women inmates. In the absence of biological men the incarcerated women created socially defined men, and substituted homosexual relations for heterosexual ones. In addition, Ward and Kassebaum (1965) stated that the phase of a woman’s criminal career and prior incarceration experience contribute to her mode of adaptation to prison life. For example, a woman who has an extensive record and previous prison experience enters prison with some level of familiarity and understanding of the prison structure, thereby avoiding the fear and anxiety that are experienced by first-timers.

Giallombardo (1966) interviewed and observed over 100 inmates at the West Virginia Women’s Federal Reformatory. Her findings replicated those of Ward and Kassebaum regarding homosexual relationships among women inmates. Giallombardo observed, like Ward and Kassebaum, that the informal social order of the prison is based on identities and roles imported from free society. But Giallombardo also observed the adoption of family roles among the women. For example, the traditional feminine roles, such as wife, mother, daughter, or sister, were often paired with the male role of stud or butch.

Like Ward and Kassebaum and Giallombardo, Heffernan (1972) examined the assimilation of gender roles from fee society into prison life. She utilized surveys, qualitative interviews, inmate records, and participant observation at the Women's Reformatory at Occoquan in Virginia. She expanded on the works of Ward and Kassebaum and Giallombardo by examining the relationship between gender roles from free society and inmate behavior. She found no clear evidence for Sykes's "argot roles," such as the *right guy* or *merchant*, but she did describe some argot labels which implied a variety of adjustments to prison life for women. Three such roles among female inmates were the *Square*, the *Cool*, and the *Life*.

According to Heffernan, a woman's initial orientation to prison is typically based on pre-prison experience and identities. She describes three basic reactions. The *Square* is a noncriminal who strives to earn the respect of her fellow inmates and officers by focusing on being a "good Christian woman." The *Cool* is the sophisticated professional offender from the underground world of organized crime. She passively manipulates her environment, but does not fully commit to prison life because she is only there for a short period of time. She has prestige, power, and wealth in prison. Finally, the *Life* refers to the recidivist prostitute, shoplifter, and/or drug users and dealers. This group represents over half of the female inmate population. Prison life becomes very important to them as they adapt to the traditional inmate code of maintaining loyalty to the inmate society and standing up to prison authorities. Heffernan (1972) stated that "there is no single inmate adaptive system, but rather that it is composed of multiple subsystems with goals, codes of acceptable behavior, and means of mutual support that reflect their members' reactions to imprisonment and perceptions of what 'the good life' might possibly be in prison." (p. 25). Heffernan found that the prison family was a crucial element of the social order of women in prison as it helped them deal with the "pains" of

imprisonment. Women who are involved in pseudo family groups are, according to Heffernan (1972), the happiest in the prison because they are *living* in the prison and thinking little about the outside world.

All three of these studies found some variation among women inmates, in social life and adaptation behind bars. Homosexual relationships and pseudo-families allow women in prison to fulfill traditional gender roles. Fulfilling psychosocial “needs”, such as doing appropriate gender or being a good mother, can present a challenge to women behind bars. However, these studies identified several creative ways that enable women to satisfy their need to mother (e.g. nurture, care, and protect).

Contemporary Ethnographies From a Feminist Perspective

In the early work of Clemmer and Sykes and even in the studies of women inmates, the gender-specific hardships of prison life for women received little attention. That is, studies explored modes of adaptation, but did not include details about the prison environment to which women inmates had to adapt. In two recent books Owen (1998) and Girshick (1999) expose issues that confront female inmates specifically. Feminist theory informs the work of Owen and Girshick. Owen (1998) states that she “undertook feminist research methods as a way to collect and consider evidence or proof for analytical assertions” (p. 23). She sought to document the lives and activities of women inmates and to understand the experiences of incarceration through their own points of view. Girshick (1999) notes that her research “was undertaken with the explicit objective of examining the gendered nature of women’s lives, their options, their crimes, and their time in prison” (p. 3). She states that “a viewpoint grounded in feminism will refuse to

accept the male standard as the basis for all of human experience, motivation, or values" (p.25). Feminism also acknowledges patriarchy as a defining force in society.

Barbara Owen (1998) conducted interviews and daily observations in the Central California Women's Facility (CCWF). She interviewed and observed well over one hundred inmates over a three year period. She asked women inmates to share their own experiences in prison, and learned that family separation, sentence length, and degree of allegiance to "the mix" all have profound effects on how a woman will survive in prison. Throughout interviews and participant-observation, almost all of the women in her study voiced the extreme importance of children in their lives. The significance of their relationships with their children has an impact on the values shaping prison culture in several ways, such as making conversations about children sacred, acknowledging the intensity and grief attached to these relationships, sanctioning those with histories of hurting children, and other child-specific cultural beliefs or behaviors. Owen also found that family relationships form the foundation for the pseudo-family because they reflect significant roles present in family dynamics in the outside world. She found pseudo-families to be a primary social unit in the organization of the prison culture.

Owen found that sentence length is critical to adjustment and partially determines the ways women organize their time and their commitment to the inmate subculture. Women serving sentences of ten years or more appear to have a common pattern of early difficulties with adjustment (e.g. fighting and rebelling against staff), but most women come to accept their sentence and learn to adjust to prison life. Short-termers complain more and may never settle in to doing "clean time" that is, staying out of trouble. Participants in both studies, Owen (1998) and Girshick (1999), talked about the "convict" or "inmate code." Owen found that women do not strictly adhere to the convict code. Long-termers reported diminishing loyalty to the code

over the years; claiming the younger inmates no longer have any respect. Long-termers held a stronger allegiance to the code than younger inmates. While there is no uniform interpretation of the "code," respect toward other inmates seems to be central. A respected prisoner does not cause trouble for other inmates. Owen also identifies the "amorphous concept of 'the mix'." (p. 179). The mix, as defined by the women in Owen's study, is continuing the behavior that resulted in the incarceration, such as using or dealing drugs or engaging in prostitution. The majority of the women that Owen interviewed felt that the mix was something to be avoided. Few stated that they were currently in the mix, but many admitted being involved at the beginning of their sentence.

Lori Girshick (1999) conducted interviews with forty women inmates at a minimum security prison in North Carolina. She asked them about their lives before and during incarceration. She also interviewed family members, friends, and social service providers in an attempt to clarify the importance of social networks and how they can function or fall apart during incarceration. Separation from family was a major cause of depression, which was the most common mental health problem. Common physical health issues included back problems, headaches, asthma, menstrual problems, arthritis, and ulcers. Girshick reported that the women in her sample felt "overwhelmingly that the health care at the prison was adequate" (p. 99). Girshick reported that inmate participation in pseudo prison families, initially thought to be extremely prevalent in earlier studies, was low among her sample. Many women viewed prison as a positive experience because it got them off drugs, assisted them in obtaining a GED or job training, or separated them from an abusive partner. She also found that "for some inmates who are serving very long sentences, these realizations come and go; years of introspection, taking every program available, and fading family contact all have the potential to create frustration" (p. 101). After a

period of time, the inmates she interviewed all felt that they have served their debt to society and are just waiting to be released.

Owen and Girshick identify various and unique difficulties that women face while incarcerated. I return to their findings, and to the findings of other scholars, in reviewing research on: separation from children, drug use, histories of abuse, mental health problems, and physical health. Whereas I review these as distinct concerns, they are anything but. Rather, they intersect in lived reality and have compounding effects on the inmates who experience them.

Separation From Children

According to the Bureau of Justice and Statistics (2000), in 1999, approximately 66 percent of women inmates were mothers of children under the age of 18, and over 64 percent were living with their children prior to their incarceration. Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza (2001) found that one in every five incarcerated women in the United States has three or more children. Furthermore, almost all incarcerated women inmates had custody of their children prior to incarceration, while fewer than half of male inmates did (Church 1990, Johnston 1995). Male inmates are less likely than women inmates to even know where their children are living (Sharp et al. 1999).

Most of the women Owen (1998) spoke with, stressed the paramount importance of children in their lives.[3] She observes that for most women inmates, motherhood is "a basis for attachment to the outside world not always found among male prisoners" (p. 101). Separation from children is often mentally devastating and emotionally agonizing, as women in various studies report that

[3] There is a lack of data on guardianship of grandchildren among women inmates.

the most punishing aspect of their incarceration is being separated from their children (Baunach 1985, Clark 1995, Koban 1983, Van Wormer 1981).

The emotional strain results in a number of serious consequences regarding the mental health of incarcerated mothers (Sharp and Muraskin 2003). Women in prison also experience feelings of guilt because of not being there for their children and worry that the temporary guardians of their children may not adequately supervise them (Baunach 1992). According to the Bureau of Justice and Statistics (2000), in 1999, more than half of the mothers in state prisons reported that their children were living with a grandparent, while another one-fourth reported that their children were living with other relatives. An additional 10 percent were in foster homes or group homes. Some women may deal with the loss by not allowing themselves to think about their family "outside." Some inmates do not want visits from their children because they do not want them to see their mother in prison. They also fear their own emotional distress of seeing their families but not being able to leave with them (Owen 1998). As one inmate stated in Owen's (1998) study: "You cannot do your time in here and out on the streets at the same time. That makes you do hard time. You just have to block that out of your mind. You can't think about what is going on out there and try to do your five, ten [or] whatever in here. You will just drive yourself crazy" (p. 129). An inmate's detachment often undermines the already tenuous relationships with her children (Owen 1998), which, in turn, affects her mental health even more (Sharp 2003). Detachment exacerbates a mother's feelings of guilt and grief over the loss of contact with her children.

Most incarcerated women report that the constant worrying about their dependent children is the most stressful aspect of imprisonment (Bloom and Steinhart 1993, Farrell 1998, Owen 1998). Relatedly, the loss of a relationship with their children is the greatest fear for most incarcerated

mothers (Enos 2001, Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2001). Therefore, most women inmates want to take an active role in determining who will take care of their children during their incarceration (Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2001).

Many mothers in prison are committed to staying involved or becoming involved with their children (Owen 1998). Likewise, in Watterson's study (1996) of the experience of incarceration for inmates at the California Institute for Women, most incarcerated mothers said that they planned to regain custody upon release. Yet, many mothers in prison have little or no contact with their children (Bloom 1997, Henriques 1996). Whereas almost 40 percent of inmate mothers reported telephone contact at least weekly (Sharp 2003), the most intimate type of contact, visitation, is generally the most infrequent and logistically problematic. Ekstrand, Burton, and Erdman (1999) found, based on two national surveys conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (see Ekstrand et al. 1999), that over half of the women in state prisons reported never receiving visits from their children (Ekstrand, Burton, and Erdman 1999). Owen (1998) found that geographical distance and caregivers' reluctance to bring children to the prison were most often cited as reasons why their children never visited them. The physical location of women's prisons is a major inhibitor of visitation. Compared with male prisons, there are fewer correctional facilities for female prisoners; thus, inmates are commonly housed at a considerable distance, of 100 miles or more, from their families (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2001). Hence, taking children to visit their mothers is usually costly and time-consuming. Since women inmates and their family members often live in impoverished conditions, the problem of distance can easily translate into no visitation.

Women who are incarcerated, particularly for long periods of time, face the risk of losing their children, both legally and emotionally (Watterson 1996). The 1997 Adoption of Safe

Families Act allows the automatic termination of custody for incarcerated parents whose children were placed in foster care for 15 or more months (Raeder 2003). Therefore, inmates' fear of permanent loss of custody would seem justified (Sharp 2003). Remarkably, incarcerated women are more likely than incarcerated men to have their parental rights terminated (Fletcher and Moon 1993). Children are a huge part in the lives of women inmates who must navigate through life behind bars while constantly worrying about their children on the outside.

Drug Use

A significant number of women in prison report substance abuse and dependency as overwhelming issues (Belknap 2007, Gilbert 1999, Pollock 2002). In one nationwide survey of women inmates, Crawford (1988) found that about a third of the women had used heroin and about half had used cocaine. According to Chesney-Lind (1997), the War on Drugs has become a war on women: stringent drug laws have greatly contributed to the explosion in women's prison populations. At the time of arrest, women offenders are more likely to test positive for drugs in general and more likely to test positive for cocaine or heroin in particular than are their male counterparts (Moon, Thompson, and Bennett 1993).

Women have a different path to addiction than men, requiring smaller quantities, but frequent drug use results in more health problems among women than men (Grella 1996). Women who abuse drugs also report a higher incidence of anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric disorders than men do (Benishek et al. 1992). Rape and other sexual assault characterize the histories of more substance-abusing women than their male counterparts (Hanke and Faupel 1993). Women also report feelings of guilt and shame related to their drug abuse and the impact of their addiction on their families and children (Rosenbaum 1979). Miller (1990) offers a unique

gendered perspective whereby she suggests that female drug abuse is an attempt to control the perceived invasion of physical or psychological boundaries. She states that a woman's physical and psychological spaces are often invaded without her permission, and in an attempt to dull the pain of these invasions, she self-medicates. Miller (1990) says that these invasions range from actual physical episodes, such as rape, battering, and incest, to intrusions of family members who insist that the woman give up her own needs to accommodate theirs. Substance abuse and self-medication allow the user to distance herself from painful situations. Similarly, Reed (1985) observed that women more often report using drugs to cope with life, while men say they use drugs most often for pleasure or as a social outlet.

For drug users, entry to prison generally means that their intake is abruptly discontinued or drastically reduced. Malloch's (2000) study of women inmates who used drugs at five prisons in Scotland and England, revealed that prisons will often provide medication as a short-term detoxification regime or in order to provide symptomatic relief of withdrawal symptoms. However, the medications provided by prison administrators are minimal compared to the quantities used by the women outside. Consequently, most women inmates experience the pain of withdrawal symptoms. The extent and nature of these symptoms depends on the drugs and quantity used, length of time the drugs had been used for and individual tolerance levels. Malloch (2000) found that the medication provided by the prisons would sometimes alleviate the most severe aspects of withdrawal, but that the physical and psychological aspects of imprisonment clearly contributes to the distress experienced by many women with drug addictions. For many women, one of the most difficult symptoms of withdrawal is the inability to sleep. Being locked up, usually alone, and experiencing withdrawals with nothing to do but lie awake only worsens the experience. Several women stated that the combination of lack of

sleep, feeling sick, uncomfortable physical conditions and little or no organized activity, left them overwhelmed by their problems. Not surprisingly, incarcerated women in the United States rate drug treatment among the top three types of services to which they would like to have access (Ferraro and Moe 2003). Since the early 1980's, nearly all U.S. state prisons for women offer some form of drug and alcohol treatment programs (Weisheit 1985). However, studies suggest that there is far more demand for than supply of these treatment programs (Kelley 2003).

Relational Abuse

Scholars have established disproportionately high rates of child sexual abuse and intimate-partner abuse in the histories of female inmates (Browne, Miller, and Maguin 1999). According to Human Rights Watch (1996), between 40 to 88 percent of incarcerated women have been victims of domestic violence and sexual or physical abuse either as children or adults. Baro (1997) studied custodial sexual abuse in a women's prison in Hawaii that housed between 45 to 50 inmates. She found that between 1982 and 1994, Hawaii had 38 officially acknowledged cases of sexual abuse by prison staff. Abuse that persists in prison undermines further women's ability to cope with incarceration because of the constant fear of victimization.

Women prisoners are far more likely than their male counterparts to be subjected to physical and sexual abuse by prison staff (Amnesty International 1999). In 1998, male guards outnumber female guards by almost three to one in women's facilities (Pollock 1998). Some states have made any form of sexual interaction between staff and inmates, whether consensual or not, a felony, but staff/inmate relations continue. A Human Rights Watch study (1996) found that women who reported abuse by prison staff were frequently subject to retaliation by the perpetrator, other guards, or administrators. According to the Department of Justice Office of

the Inspector General (OIG) case statistics, the majority of sexual abuse cases for which an investigation is initiated do not result in prosecution (OIG 2005). The perpetrators are often transferred to other, usually male, prisons. Between 2000 and 2004, the OIG filed 163 sexual abuse cases for prosecution. Of these cases, 73 (45 percent) were accepted for prosecution. Sixty-five of these cases (40 percent) resulted in convictions and 6 of these cases (4 percent) are still pending prosecution. Eighty-eight cases (54 percent) were declined for prosecution. Even when prosecuted, the punishments for sexual abuse of inmates are not very severe. Of the 65 people who were convicted of sexually abusing inmates between 2000 and 2004, 48 (73 percent) received a sentence of probation. Ten of them (15 percent) were sentenced to less than one year incarceration (OIG 2005).

Girshick (2003) examines the re-traumatizing effects of prison authority and policies. Women inmates are confronted daily with situations that trigger feelings and memories of previous abuse from childhood and/or adulthood (Girshick 2003). The frequent occurrence of routine pat searches, strip searches, room searches, and surveillance in shower and toilet areas can prompt inmate to protest, which may then result in disciplinary action or further harassment (Girshick 2003).

Mental Health

Prisons are not able to provide the intensive mental health services that some inmates require. For example drug treatment programs often focus on the addiction rather than the underlying mental health issues that motivate the drug use. The abusive and traumatic backgrounds of most incarcerated women typically result in serious depression and even posttraumatic stress disorder (Farley and Kelly 2000, Marcus-Mendoza and Wright 2003). Incarceration exacerbates existing

mental illness (Suh 2000). Incarcerated women had depression scores more than twice those for general population samples of women (Ross and Lawrence 1998). The common mental disorders are anxiety, neurosis, and depression.

Some speculate that incarcerated women's disproportionately high suicide attempts (Maeve 1999, Miller 1994) is a result of women's tendency to internalize anger, while incarcerated men tend to externalize anger by assaulting other prisoners or staff (Fox 1975). In one study of incarcerated women, more than one in five reported attempting suicide in the past (Holley and Brewster 1996). Morris (1987) observed that self-mutilation while in prison, such as cutting, is a way for incarcerated females to feel something, particularly those who, in an attempt to survive traumatic and abusive pasts, have trained themselves to cut off all emotions. Self-mutilation is one way in which women inmates can lay claim to their own bodies and deal with self-esteem issues (Morris 1987). Women inmates with mental illnesses have problems adjusting to life in prison and are often heavily medicated, which also affects their prison experience by altering their ability to think clearly and perform daily functions- such as work detail or appropriately responding to prison staff. Medications often also make inmates very drowsy causing them to sleep for a large portion of their day (Watterson 1996).

Health Care

Ross and Lawrence (1998) identified certain common medical problems of women prisoners, including asthma, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, turberculosis, hypertension, herpes simplex II infection, and chronic pelvic inflammatory disease. Incarcerated women have more serious health problems than women outside of prison because of their increased likelihood of living in

poverty, limited access to preventive medical care, chemical dependency, poor nutrition, and limited education on health matters (Maeve 1999; Ross and Fabiano 1986; Pollock 1998, 2002).

Prisons are not designed to provide health care specific to women. While most prisons provide very basic health care services, services such as gynecological and obstetric care are frequently unavailable or inadequate (Ross 1998). Annual gynecological exams are not routinely performed at admission or at any other time during incarceration (Anderson 2003). One of the major problems in women's prisons is the lack of skilled and available health care (Fletcher and Moon 1993, Pollock 2002). Staff often patronize and minimize the inmates' requests for medical care (Compton-Wallace 2003).

These problems are even greater for pregnant inmates. Mann (1984) found that prenatal care is often lacking in women's institutions and women have difficulty meeting the nutritional requirements of pregnancy. Furthermore, prisons do a very poor job of providing care for inmates in medical emergencies (Ferraro and Moe 2003). Yet, Moe and Ferraro (2003) report that women inmates often offer conflicted evaluations of their health care as both poor and inadequate, yet better than could be obtained in the free world. However limited access to health care on the outside, the medical care in women's prisons is also poor in quantity and quality (Pollock 1998, 2002, Zaitzow and West 2003). The current situation is only expected to get worse as incarceration rates for women continue to increase and as the inmate population ages. Chapter 3 considers health challenges for the aging in prison.

The discussion now turns from problems facing women inmates, to means of coping with such problems. Women inmates must learn to cope with the realities and hardships of incarceration on a daily basis.

Coping Among Female Inmates

Female inmates share common experiences of abuse, substance use, and motherhood; thus, coping with prison life involves commiserating with others. Males are more likely to adapt to incarceration by isolating themselves, while females, seem more likely to adjust by forming close relationships with other prisoners (Fox 1975, Maeve 1999). Women inmates are kinder to each other than are their male counterparts (Belknap 2007). Their friendships with each other are not usually sexual, but rather are based on companionship. Bosworth (2003) viewed homosexual relations in prison as a strategy of resistance to the pains of imprisonment. Furthermore, some research suggests that females' socialization to be caring and to value family relationships has resulted in the structuring of pseudo-families in women's prisons (Carter 1981, Giallombardo 1966). Hart (1995) found that female inmates at a high-medium-security prison report higher levels of social support than do male inmates. Nonetheless, coping may be challenged when fellow inmates with whom women are close are transferred, paroled or die behind bars. Adaptation is an ongoing project.

Prison families provide a supportive network of mothers and fathers, children, sisters, and brothers. Previous researchers referred to these intimate groups as an extended "family system" or "kinship system" (Watterson 1996). In prison families, some women play the parts of men, fathers, husbands, boyfriends, sons, and grandfathers.

Williams & Fish (1974) found that the family unit is an economic unit. Inmates frequently need commissary products that they have no money to buy and goods and services that cannot be manufactured or stolen without the help of several inmates. The prison family provides the cooperative spirit and organization needed to obtain certain goods and services. Each family member feels a responsibility to help provide economic benefits for the other members of the

family. If an inmate who is being punished is deprived of almost all economic goods, other inmates in the family group are expected to give her extra food, clothing, or information about prison life (Williams and Fish 1974).

In Watterson's (1996) study of female inmates in California, prison families give older inmates the opportunity to "mother" younger inmates, which helps to fill the void of separation from children and grandchildren. They often give advice and encourage young inmates to straighten up. Older inmates offer the benefits of experience and perspective.

Belknap (2007) reports that some research suggests that pseudo-families were either exaggerated in earlier studies or have become less common in women's prisons that they once were (cf. Bowker 1981, Mahan 1984). Fox (1984) found that inmate participation in pseudofamilies declined between the 1970s and 1980s. By late 1978, only 27 percent of women in Beford Hills, a New York institution for women, reported active membership in a kinship unit; all families had fewer than four members; and involvement in close personal relationships had also declined (Fox 1984). In the 1980s, even fewer women reported belonging to such a family system. If they did, their reported loyalty was not as strong as in the past. Indeed, Girshick (1999) found that older inmates reported younger inmates to be much less respectful of the "inmate code," citing instances of "snitching" and other disloyalties; thus, the prospect of steadfast pseudofamilies has diminished.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the most prominent issues faced by women inmates according to research. A process of "prisonization" occurs for both male and female inmates. Earlier studies regarding female prisons focused on inmate relationships as a method of

adaptation while ignoring other important issues, such as the exact nuances of the prison environment to which female inmates adapt. In other words, researchers focused on the *how* and did not explore the *what*- initially assuming that the pains of imprisonment were the same for men and women. One of the overwhelming differences between male and female inmates is the importance of children to the latter. Visitation is difficult logistically, so that many women rarely see their own children during their incarceration. In addition, women inmates import the hardships of life on the outside into the prison. In other words, they are often drug users and victims of abuse. Women inmates also commonly suffer from depression and other mental health issues, as well as suffer from poor physical health. However, women somehow learn how to successfully negotiate the difficult prison environment. In turn, most inmates manage to find support among other inmates. Inmates adapt to their environment by importing many elements of their lives in the free world, such as family roles. Older inmates often feel pride in the guidance that they are able to give to younger inmates. While gender offers a unique perspective through which women inmates experience incarceration, the next chapter will add yet another social dimension: age.

CHAPTER 3

AGING IN PRISON

The stereotypical image of a prison inmate is a young, healthy young man, not an older woman with grandchildren who requires a walker to navigate the prison grounds. This chapter canvasses the research literature relevant to aging in prison. For the first time in American history, we are faced with the predicament of a steadily increasing aging prison population. Politicians and correctional systems are confronted with a number of serious issues regarding this unique prison population. In this chapter, I discuss general issues of aging; particularly for women. I briefly summarize typical physical and mental health problems. The subject of the geriatric inmate does not enjoy the popularity of other correctional research endeavors, such as inmate subculture and educational and vocational programming opportunities. However, the needs of elderly inmates are a growing concern for prison administrators and researchers as this population continues to grow.

Aging in General

It is only within the past few decades that researchers have begun to systematically study the physical health of older people (Markides 1992) and only within the past decade that researchers have focused on older women. Age is now recognized as having a major impact on health with current research spanning various age groups, including the middle aged and the elderly (Markides 1992). In addition to physical health, the process of aging is also associated with changes in mental health.

Aging can be defined as the "sum total of changes occurring in an individual from the time of birth throughout the course of a life time." (Mummah and Smith 1981, p. 21). Gerontologists do not agree on a specific chronological baseline for the beginnings of what is commonly called old age (Morton 1992). Rather, gerontologists tend to group people into categories. Such categories include "older" for 55 and older, "elderly" for 65 and older, and "aged" for 85 and older (Holzman et al. 1987); or the "young-old" as 60 to 74, the "middle-old" as 75 to 84, and the "old-old" as 85 and over (Yurick et al. 1984).

Aging is shaped by the interaction of a number of factors including heredity, lifestyle, socioeconomic conditions, and access to medical services (Yurick et al. 1984, Feldman 1989). As people age, physiological changes occur and although changes may vary from one older adult to another, they are referred to as the normal aging process (Aday 2003). The senses dull, and information is processed more slowly and less accurately (Young and Reviere 2006). Bones are likely to become brittle due to decreased mineral content (Zoller 1987). Muscle strength weakens and the probability of suffering a debilitating injury from a fall increases (AMA 1990). The skin becomes dry and wrinkles begin to appear. The decreased functioning of sweat glands and other changes leave the body less able to regulate temperature. Thus, older people are more susceptible to heat and cold (Mummah and Smith 1981). Chronic conditions, such as arthritis and diabetes, have also been linked to normal aging. Such diseases may require long-term treatment or management and may result in permanent disabilities.

Aging is gendered. There are documented gender differences regarding physical and mental well-being among older adults (Markides 1992). Gender differences in life expectancy and in the prevalence of chronic conditions and other health issues have been known for some time (Markides 1992). Women live longer than men, but they also suffer more from nonfatal

disabling conditions, namely arthritis (Markides 1992). Degenerative arthritic and rheumatic disorders are the most common of the chronic illnesses affecting mobility in old age (Ebersole and Hess 1998). Degenerative disorders of joints and connective tissue affect the entire body. These disorders cause pain, depression, immobility, and disruptions to daily activities (Ebersole and Hess 1998). Older women experience more physical symptoms, report greater levels of physical disability, and suffer more from chronic health conditions than men (Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields 2002).

Chronic conditions range from relatively mild, such as partial hearing loss, to disruptive and disabling, such as arthritis and asthma, to severe and life-threatening, such as diabetes and cancer (Young and Reveire 2006). One of the most troublesome aspects of many chronic diseases is pain, and pain is one of the most common complaints of elderly adults (Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields 2002). Women also appear to suffer more from minor illnesses and more from limitations in activities of daily living, than do men (Verbrugge 1989). Incontinence troubles some older women, but the embarrassing condition can often be alleviated with proper diet, certain exercises, and medication (Morton, 1992). Overall, women suffer from a greater incidence of minor physical illness (Popay, Bartley, and Owen 1993), suffer from more chronic diseases, perceive their health to be poorer, and have a greater prevalence of disability than men (Huyck 1990, Lorber 1997). Poor physical health has been linked to poor mental well-being. Gannon (1999) regards physical health as the strongest predictor of psychological well-being in older women.

While impaired cognitive function is a common complaint among older women, overall gender differences in the prevalence of cognitive dysfunction are relatively minimal (Badgio and Worden 2007). However, women suffer disproportionately from dementias and chronic fatigue

(Badgio and Worden 2007). Depression is also significantly more prevalent among older women than older men (O'Boyle, Amadeo, and Self 1990), but this is also true earlier in the life course as well. Finally, women experience health issues related to menopause, including osteoporosis and coronary heart disease.

Certain health problems may be compounded for women in prison because they lack the information and resources to cope with or treat their ailments and/or conditions and the prison experience may itself cause health problems. I turn to aging in prison next.

Research Specific to Aging in Prison

Correctional agencies generally adopt age 50 as the initial age defining older inmates (Morton 1992). Indeed, inmates appear "older", that is they present problems associated with adults chronologically older than they are, because of a number of factors such as socioeconomic status, access to medical care prior to and during incarceration, and the typical lifestyle of most offenders (Morton 1992). Some studies have defined inmates as young as 40 as "old" (Aday 1994). The American Correctional Association (1990) defines older inmates as those over 55. In a national survey of several state correctional departments, Aday (1999) found that correctional officials generally agree that the typical inmate in his 50s has the physical appearance and common health problems of someone at least ten years older on the outside. However, while many inmates do exemplify the phrase "old before their time" other inmates remain in reasonably good health well into their 60s or 70s (Aday 2003).

The term "successful aging" refers to the phenomenon of adapting and even thriving in one's later years, maintaining high quality of life (Baltes and Mayer 1999; Rowe and Kahn 1998; Crosnoe and Elder 2002). It is not generally treated as a gendered issue. Older women are still

largely either ignored in regards to the idea of aging well or they are considered only in comparison to older men (Crosnoe and Elder 2002). Some of the indicators for a good quality of life are health, absence of cognitive/psychological distress, and availability of supportive family and friends (Haug and Folmar 1986).

What follows is a review of previous research on aging in prison regarding three main areas: physical health, mental well-being, and family support. As the area of older female inmates is fairly new, research on this particular subpopulation is limited. Thus, my review includes both the more numerous studies regarding male inmates as well as the handful of studies focusing only on older women inmates.

Physical Health

Health problems are common among older inmates as they often have weakened immune systems and increased susceptibility to disease caused by the compounding effects of multiple health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Chronic medical illness and/or a history of drug and/or alcohol use also play an important role in the prevalence of infectious diseases in this inmate age group (Glaser, Warchol, D'Angelo, and Guterman 1990). The elderly are particularly susceptible to a variety of diseases that spread within institutions. Airborne viruses such as influenza and respiratory viruses are common among older inmates. Falter (1999) found gastrointestinal infections to be common as well. Older inmates are more susceptible to urinary tract infections (Hooyman and Kiyak 1999). Hepatitis and pneumonia can also quickly affect elderly inmates (Aday 2003). Consequently, many older inmates require various daily medications. Douglass (1991) conducted in-depth interviews with 79 male inmates aged 60 and older housed in 13 correctional facilities in Michigan. He found that out of the 79

inmates, 31.6 percent were taking over-the-counter pain medications, 36.7 percent were taking prescription medications for pain, 37.9 percent were taking high-blood pressure medications, and 24.1 percent were taking nitro tablets for chest pain.

Studies of older inmates have mostly sampled male inmates. These studies suggest the health challenges of aging behind bars. Douglass (1991) found that only 5 percent of his sample of 79 inmates rated their health as excellent, 78 percent rated their health as fair or good, with the rest rating their health as poor. When they compared their physical health conditions to what they were two years prior, 24 percent indicated their health was worse, 58 percent said it was the same, and 18 percent said it was better. Similarly, Colsher, Wallace, Loeffelholz, and Sales (1992) studied the health 119 male inmates aged 50 and older in seven Iowa state correctional facilities. Most (65%) rated their health as excellent or good, but almost half reported that their health had worsened since incarceration. The men reported a high incidence of chronic illness and some limitations in physical functional ability. The illness reported by the inmates included arthritis (45%), hypertension (39%), ulcers (21%), prostate problems (20%), myocardial infarction (19%), emphysema (18%), and diabetes (11%). Age was also significantly correlated with chronic illness. Inmates 60 years and older, in Colsher et al.'s study, reported higher rates of chronic illnesses than inmates between 50 and 59 years of age (Colsher, Wallace, Loeffelholz, and Sales 1992).

Aday (1995) surveyed 102 older male inmates aged 50 and over in Mississippi. Most of his sample (75%) were able to perform routine self-care activities and engage in some prison activities. Hypertension, arthritis, and heart problems were the most common conditions reported by inmates over the age of 50. Twenty-seven (27) percent of Aday's (1995) respondents felt that their health was excellent or good, 28 percent reported that their health was

only fair, while 45 percent reported their health as poor compared with their perception of the health status of their inmate peers. In comparison to their own health of two years ago, only 8 percent of the inmates surveyed felt it was better, 57 percent reported that it was about the same, and 32 percent felt that it was worse. Furthermore, only 11 percent expected their overall health to improve over the next two years, 28 percent expected no change, and 61 percent expected that their health would worsen over the next two years.

Most prisons are dealing with an aging prison population; thus, the health problems of older inmates is a phenomenon that is shared across all states. In 2001, Aday (2001), with the help of personnel from the Tennessee Health Department, conducted a survey of 318 inmates, 302 males and 16 females- 60 years of age and over in correctional facilities in Tennessee. This study was intended to provide a comprehensive health assessment for inmates in this age group. Hypertension was the most frequently reported health condition, followed by arthritis, heart disease, pulmonary disease, diabetes, and emphysema. Although most of the sample was functionally independent, 20 percent of them required a cane, walker, crutches, or wheelchair for mobility.

Research on female inmates yields similar findings. Women in prison are roughly seven to ten years “older” than their chronological counterparts in the free community and they often feel that way (Reviere and Young 2004). Kratcoski and Babb (1990) sampled both male and female prisoners over the age of 50 from 8 federal prisons and 7 state prisons in Pennsylvania, Florida, and Ohio. They found that 47 percent of the older female inmates claimed that their health was poor or terrible compared with 25 percent of the men, a difference that was statistically significant. Chronic health problems were both physical and psychological. Substance abuse,

overeating, worry, depression, heart, respiratory, and degenerative illnesses were common (Kratcoski and Babb 1990).

Genders and Player (1990) provide an in-depth account of the experience of aging in prison in their study of 25 women lifers in a British prison. They found that female lifers experience an overwhelming fear of deterioration in their physical health and psychological well-being. The women commonly suffered from skin and weight problems that were attributed to a lack of fresh air and a poor diet. Indeed, poor diet is reflected in the finding that women offenders serving sentences in excess of eighteen months typically reported gaining an average of 20 pounds over a three-year period (Genders and Player 1990).

Aday and Nation (2001) interviewed twenty-nine older females aged 50 or older at the Tennessee's Prison for Women. They found that 20 percent of these women considered their health to be poor and another 51 percent reported their health as only fair. The women reported chronic health problems such as hypertension, arthritis, and some type of heart condition. Depression was also very prevalent. One-third of the sample felt that their health would worsen over the next year. Over half said that they currently smoked and about 25 percent reported having had a previous drug or alcohol problem in the past that was exacerbating their current health status (Aday and Nation 2001). They also found that poor health caused mobility problems as older inmates may not be able to walk long distances or stand for long periods of time.

Older people require more health care than younger people and women require more health care than men. Therefore, older female inmates will likely need more medical services than any other inmate (Caldwell, Jarvis, and Rosefield 2001). Diabetes, hypertension, menopause, arthritis, and cancers of all types, especially lung, breast, and cervical, are of concern to older

female inmates (Caldwll, Jarvis, and Rosefield 2001). Furthermore, hysterectomies can cause dramatic physical and mental problems with which women inmates must cope. Young (1998) assessed the health of 129 women inmates at a Washington state prison. She found that 53.5 percent of the women were on medication when they entered prison and about 73 percent of them smoked, which is almost three times more than women do in free society. A little over 60 percent of the sample reported at least one major medical problem. The inmates also received a number of services outside the prison, such as chemotherapy, radiation, or dialysis.

Mental Well-Being

Mental health also affects an inmate's ability to function successfully in the prison environment. Approximately 300,000 inmates in state and federal prison facilities either have been found to suffer from a current mental condition or have stayed overnight in a mental hospital, medical unit, or treatment facility (Ditton 1999). Vitucci (1999) further estimated that about 210,000 of those 300,000 inmates have severe mental illnesses. Therefore, approximately 15 percent of state and federal prisoners are mentally ill. While dementia becomes more prevalent during old age (Cockerham 2000), the prevalence of substance abuse problems, anxiety disorders, and schizophrenia also significantly increase during middle age.

In a national survey of male and female inmates and probationers, Ditton (1999) found that offenders between the ages of 45 and 54 were the most likely age group to be classified as mentally ill. Approximately 20 percent of state inmates, 10 percent of federal inmates, and 23 percent of jail inmates in this age range reported at least one mental illness. Inmates age 55 and older also reported symptoms of mental illness. Approximately 15 percent of state inmates, 9

percent of federal inmates, and 20 percent of jail inmates in the 55 and above age group were identified as mentally ill.

Koenig, Johnson, Bellard, Denker, and Fenlon (1995) found that depression, anxiety, and psychiatric disorders were much more common in a group of 95 inmates over the age of 50 than among men in a matched sample in free society. Overall, 54 percent of these older inmates fit the criteria for having an active psychiatric disorder. Inmates with a previous history of alcohol or drug abuse were particularly at high risk of having a current psychiatric disorder (Koenig, Johnson, Bellard, Denker, and Fenlon 1995). Booth (1989) contends that older inmates have more stressors to contend with than do younger inmates who have not experienced poor health or major changes in vitality and endurance. The noisy, physically strenuous prison environment also creates a stressful situation (Aday 2003).

The prison environment naturally causes stress for inmates, but particularly for older inmates. Prisons are typically designed for young, physically active inmates. They often consist of campus-style housing with living units and support services located in various buildings spread out over wide areas. This design often requires inmates to walk long distances to obtain meals, medical services, and other necessities. Stairs, weather conditions, and structural difficulties, such as long distances between buildings, cause additional problems for older inmates with physical and mental disabilities (Newman, Newman, Gewirtz 1984). Aday and Nation (2001) found that very few of the older female inmates they interviewed at Tennessee's Prison for Women were satisfied with their living conditions. Older, frail inmates found stale air from smokers, top bunking, and being housed too far away from the dining room and bathrooms to be significant environmental problems. While they found that 96 percent of the twenty-nine inmates could walk independently, well over half reported difficulty walking long distances or

standing in line for longer than fifteen minutes, both of which they are sometimes required to do (Aday and Nation 2001). Older female inmates housed in the general prison population expressed a need for greater privacy. Aday and Nation (2001) found that three-fourths of their sample found the current housing situation to be crowded, unpleasant, and very noisy. The older inmates found younger inmates to be noisy and most inconsiderate. Similar studies have found that inmates of both genders prefer to live with people of their own age (Walsh 1989).

Walsh (1990) introduced the importance of structure for older inmates. Older people prefer stability and predictability more than younger individuals do. Prisons provided structure with guidelines for action, penalties for noncompliance, and rewards for compliance. Older inmates also prefer stability. According to Walsh (1990), older inmates are willing to accept some boredom in return for dependency and consistency. As time passes, the older inmate's need for structure increases. As older inmates serve their time, they become more attached to the defined prison environment. They become increasingly obsessed with the desire to maintain predictable prison routines. As aging brings personal losses, such as decline of personal health and death of loved ones, control over the immediate prison environment becomes more important (Walsh 1990, Aday 2003).

Bachand (1984) found the health of elderly inmates to be compounded by excessive mental worry. McCarthy (1983) classified approximately half of a sample of 248 older inmates, as "worriers." The inmates were worried about their health, family members, and their safety. Genders and Player (1990) found female lifers also expressed fears of physiological deterioration that were linked to their low sense of self-esteem, dread of institutionalization, loss of self-concept, and inability to conceive of a future (Greco 1996). The fears associated with being reduced to a passive mental state is a significant stressor for many female inmates serving life

sentences (Genders and Player 1990). However, the most common source of worry and difficulty in adjustment stems from separation from family members.

Relationship with Family and Friends

Studies have linked social support with positive health outcomes for seniors in free society (Thoits 1995, House, Umberson, and Landis 1988). Social support refers to assistance provided to individuals (including emotional or tangible), the frequency of contact with others, and the perceived adequacy of that support (Hooyman and Kiyak 2002). In free society, older adults often relocate to be nearer to family (Clark and Wolf 1992). Research consistently shows that living near children facilitates the existence of support services (Silverstein and Litwak 1993). On the other hand, prisons, particularly women's prisons, are frequently built in rural areas while most of the inmates' families live in urban areas, which results in isolation from family. In many states, there is only one facility for women and travel may be too expensive and inconvenient to allow for frequent visitation from friends and family.

The loss of contact with family and friends on the outside is a major concern for any prisoner. The length of incarceration coupled with growing older may serve to decrease the number of family and friends on the outside (Aday 2003). Most inmates recognize that the prospects for maintaining relationships over a long time are slim and they are often forced to construct a new sense of their social reality so that life can proceed. Santos (1995) observed that changes in families, such as marriages, births, and deaths, will occur with out the prisoner's participation and, sometimes, knowledge. The desertion of family and friends is hard for inmates to accept (Aday 2003).

Wikberg and Foster (1989) interviewed 31 long-term male inmates at Angola Prison in Louisiana. They found that most have had few visitors over the years. Their parents had died, their brothers and sisters are older and have stopped visiting, and if they were married their wives have divorced them. A survey done by Sabath and Cowles (1988) determined that family contacts, education, and health had the greatest effects on positive institutional adjustment. Older male inmates who were able to maintain regular family contacts were better adjusted than those who could not. However, women enjoy greater longevity than men, and they are also more likely to live alone and to outlive social support systems (Morton 1992). Older inmates often lose touch with the outside world and outlive many relatives and friends (Aday and Rosefield 1992). The lack of a supportive social network can be devastating as social support from family and friends is one of the main buffers against the effects of stress during incarceration (Aday 2003).

In Aday's (1995) study of male inmates in Mississippi an estimated one-third of the sample was married. Seventy percent reported that their parents were deceased, over two-thirds had living siblings, 72 percent had living children, and 53 percent had living grandchildren. Twenty-four percent of the sample reported "often" or "fairly often" receiving visits from their family, but 38 percent stated that they had contact with family members through telephone calls and letters sent and received (Aday 1995). Forty-one percent of the sample claimed to "never" have been visited by family. Visits from friends were less likely overall. Imprisonment disrupts family relationships, family roles, and life in general. The longer the normal roles of parent, child, or grandparent are disrupted, the more difficult it is to reestablish those roles.

In Kratcoski and Babb's (1990) study of male and female prisoners, they found more than 50 percent of the older women in their sample reported never having visitors, compared with 25

percent of the older men. One explanation they offer is the lesser proportion of married female inmates compared to married male inmates. However, in their study at the Tennessee's Prison for Women, Aday and Nation (2001) found that some older female inmates prefer not to have frequent visits and prefer to rely more on letters and phone calls to stay in touch with family. In their study, 27 percent reported that they had living parents, 86 percent had children, and 65 percent had grandchildren. Nearly all (93%) said that they remained in contact with their family (Aday and Nation 2001). Only 10 percent of them receive weekly visits, but 70 percent reported that they talk to family members each week on the phone. Almost all of them reported that they had family and friends on the outside whom they could depend on for support (Aday and Nation 2001). Aday (2003) notes that for some older inmates serving longer sentences, visits from family on the outside can be painful and can cause a grief reaction. The inability to fulfill the role of parent or grandparent every day can be frustrating. Therefore, it becomes easier for inmates to do their time by maintaining a degree of social distance from their families and free society (Aday 2003). Aday and Nation (2001) posit that seeking comfort among an inner circle of inmate friends for social support is one way some older females cope with long-term incarceration and family separation.

Conclusion

Aging is an inevitable process. Prison does not shield older inmates from the realities or complications associated with old age. If anything, incarceration along with previous lifestyle hastens poor health and mental illness. Mental health is also a concern among older inmates because they suffer from more mental illnesses than younger inmates, including dementias and/or depression. It is important to explore the consequences of incarceration during middle to

late adulthood. While policymakers are well aware of the aging inmate population, little systematic planning has been conducted to identify and manage the various needs of older inmates. Like older male inmates, older women in prison may be in prison for the first time late in life or may be growing old in prison as a result of long sentences. Women inmates are still underrepresented in current research literature; studies focusing on older women inmates are even rarer. Women inmates have more chronic conditions and seek more medical attention than men in prison. Further research is necessary to understand the needs of older female inmates, which also may include the need to be generative. Thus, very little is known about the negative and positive experiences of older women behind bars. The next chapter pertains to aspects of generativity.

CHAPTER 4

GENERATIVITY

This chapter explores the notion of generativity, or a desire to give back to the community and a concern for the next generation. Generativity has been conceptualized in different ways by various scholars, but with the general consensus that it is a stage of life first experienced during middle adulthood. Therefore, middle aged inmates should also experience this stage, but face institutional barriers to being generative. That is, inmates are separated from free society and the authoritative nature of the prison institution limits their ability to "give back."

I will present the original definition and principles of generativity as stated by Erik Erikson in 1950. I will then present a model of generativity as formulated by Dan McAdams and Ed de St. Aubin (1992). They expanded Erikson's concept of generativity by identifying seven features, or motives for, generativity. Finally, I will relate the idea of generativity to the situation of incarceration. Based on prior research, I will explore the generative thoughts and desires of the inmates. I will also identify the ways in which they attempt to engage in generative acts as well as the ways in which prisons impede or allow generativity to occur.

Generativity is the "concern in establishing and guiding the next generation." (Erikson 1950, p. 267). Through generativity, adults seek to care for and contribute in positive ways to the world and the people they leave behind. People hope the lives of their children and the children of others will be good and will have meaning and value (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim 2004). Erikson (1950) regarded generativity as the psychological focus of the seventh stage in his eight-stage model of human development (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim 2004).

According to de St. Aubin and his colleagues (2004), generative adults hope to pass on the most valued traditions of a culture, to teach the most valued skills and outlooks, to impart wisdom, and to foster the realization of human potential in future generations. Whereas Erik Erikson first coined the term "generativity" and explored its implications and influence on adult development in his 1950 work Childhood and Society, it was his concept of identity that caught immediate attention and made Erikson famous. As McAdams and Logan (2004) observe, it was not until the 1980's that generativity finally emerged as a topic for empirical research among life span developmental psychologists, personality psychologists, and sociologists (Kotre 1999, McAdams & de St. Aubin 1998, Rossi 2001).

Erik Erikson's Eight Life Stages

Whereas Freud stated that personality was developed and permanently defined during childhood, Erikson (1950) believed that personality continued to develop during adulthood in a series of eight stages that extend from birth to death. All of the stages in Erikson's theory are present at birth, but the resolution of each stage is determined by the interaction of the body, mind, and cultural influences at various points throughout the life course. More specifically, each stage is characterized by a psychosocial crisis, which is based on both physiological development and the demands put upon the individual by parents and other social actors and forces. Erikson (1950) presents "a system of stages dependent on each other" (p. 272). Each of these stages builds on the preceding stages while paving the way for subsequent stages.

Erikson divided his eight life stages into the experiences of children, young adults, middle aged adults, and older adults. Corresponding to these stages is a set of ego qualities that emerge

from critical periods of development (Erikson 1950). Middle adulthood, which is the focus of the current study, is marked by the seventh stage of generativity versus stagnation.

Erikson referred to the successful outcome of each stage as “the virtue.” Each of the life stages is associated with a specific “virtue” that signifies a healthy ego and the existence of personal strength. Erikson defined virtue as that which reflects the inner quality and eventually the integration of one’s complete character (Erikson 1950). The virtue of the generativity stage is care.

Erikson believed that once the adult has gained a sense of self in stage 5 and established long-term bonds of intimacy through marriage or friendships in stage 6, then she or he is psychosocially ready to make a commitment to the larger society and its continuation and/or improvement through the next generation.

Erikson presented the bearing and raising of children as key tasks in becoming a generative adult. Parents are actively involved in providing for the next generation as embodied in their own offspring. However, Erikson was careful to point out that the mere fact of having and raising children does not lead one to achieve generativity (Erikson 1950). Further, any adult, even those who do not rear children, is capable of contributing to the next generation. Erikson would later state even more explicitly that generativity is not limited to parenthood (Erikson 1963). In *Gandhi’s Truth* (1969) he found in the life of the Gandhi a generativity extended to the care of an entire nation (de St. Aubin, McAdams, and Kim 2004). Nevertheless, Erikson believed that the parent is the essential agent for ensuring physical certainty for continuity of the species and for the mental health of the young generation (Hoare 2002). Parenthood challenges the adult to believe in the future of the species and to foster this belief in their own children.

Erikson's life stage model and subsequent works that utilized his model have been criticized for reflecting male experience and a male perspective on development. Rosalind Barnett and Grace Baruch (1978) argued that women's varying roles do not correlate with chronological age the same as those of men. Patterns of timing and commitment are unique; thus, creating numerous combinations of career, marriage, and children. Carol Gilligan (1979) posited that as a result of early object relations, women place greater importance on attachments, intimacy, and relationships, while men place greater importance on separation, individualism, and autonomy. Carol Ryff and Susan Migdal (1984) observed that, for the most part, these criticisms have been raised primarily on the conceptual or theoretical level and there have been few empirical studies to test whether Erikson's model actually is or is not relevant for women.

Ryff and Migdal (1984) surveyed one hundred (100) women, fifty (50) women ages eighteen (18) to thirty (30) and fifty (50) women aged forty (40) to fifty-five (55), on issues of intimacy and generativity. They found that middle-aged emphasis on generativity was supported for middle-aged women who perceived themselves to be more generative than they were as younger adults. Young women, on the other hand, rated themselves as more generative than they anticipated themselves to be in middle age. Thus, Ryff and Migdal (1984) demonstrates that certain theoretical issues can be translated into research questions, but provides conflicting results regarding the increasing importance of generativity among women. Thus, Ryff and Migdal question the relevance of Erikson's model for women's development as women younger than age forty (40) reported thoughts of generativity – a stage Erikson posited as coinciding with middle age. Nonetheless, generativity continues to be regarded as a universal life stage of adulthood.

Expanding On Generativity

Erikson introduced the concept of generativity over fifty years ago. Since that time, research and theorizing on generativity has slowly gained in popularity. Several researchers have made theoretical statements about generativity that appear to expand on and depart from certain Eriksonian ideas (Browning 1975, Kotre 1984, McAdams 1985), several of which will be discussed more thoroughly under appropriate subheadings later in this chapter. For the purposes of this project, I believe it is important to dissect the concept of generativity. Female inmates face many challenges, survival arguably being the most fundamental, but it is important that their means of generativity are not lost in translation or otherwise overlooked due to the potential perception of them as trivial by comparison to generative adults in free society. It has already been established that generativity is an issue for adults, not for children (Erikson 1950). Furthermore, generativity is likely to occur around middle age for most adults (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992). While Erikson emphasized the importance of parenthood, generativity is arguably achievable with or without bearing children. Generativity is about the next generation, both one's own children and those of others. Indeed, Erikson (1950) stated that not all parents are generative and that generativity is not limited to parenthood. It is about being a responsible citizen, a contributing member of a community, and a leader (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). Generativity involves the creation of a product or legacy in one's own image (McAdams 1985). It involves behavior that includes the conservation, restoration, preservation, nurturance, and/or maintenance of that which is deemed worthy of such behavior, such as nurturing children, preserving good traditions, protecting the environment and participating in rituals (in school, church, or home) that connect generations and ensure continuity over a period of time

(McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998). Since generativity is about so many things, one can seemingly be very creative in achieving it.

A Model of Generativity

McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) recognized that, notwithstanding various research efforts on the concept of generativity (Erikson 1950; Ryff and Migdal 1984), there had yet to be any systematic theory of generativity. For example, Erikson (1950) did not theorize about generativity as an evolving process, as he only regarded it as an anticipated stage in the adult life course. In other words, Erikson did not provide a comprehensive theory of generativity that included specific thoughts of motivations and development. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) identified seven features of generativity. These features centered around both the individual's and society's goal of providing for the next generation. The first two features, *cultural demand* and *inner desire*, are viewed as the ultimate motivational sources for generativity as they combine to promote the third feature, *conscious concern*. When conscious concern is supported by the fourth feature of *belief* in the goodness of the human species, it may stimulate the fifth stage of *generative commitment*. The final two features are *generative action* and a person's *narrative story*. I will not explore each feature in greater detail.

McAdams and his colleagues (1998) state that generativity stimulates inner desires that feel natural because caring for the next generation has been a consistent part of human evolution (McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998). Generativity that goes beyond bearing and raising one's own children may simply be an expansion or generalization of instinctive patterns associated with reproduction and care of offspring. In other words, there is an instinctive desire to be generative. However, according to McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) there is also external

cultural demand. Culture strongly influences the form and the timing of generative expression (McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998). Indeed, all societies require, to some extent, that adults care and provide for the next generation. The very continuity of a society's traditions, values, and practices depends on adults' transmitting those cultural elements to future generations. McAdams, Hart, and Maruna (1998) maintain that without some kind of cultural setting, there can be no generativity. The generative adult must work within the economic and ideological frameworks of a society if she or he is to assume a generative role like teacher, mentor, advocate, leader, activist, and citizen. The generative adult who rejects the dominant values and norms of a society or experiences challenging or restrictive conditions will find an alternative framework within which to express generativity (McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998).

Concern for the next generation refers to an overall attitude regarding generativiity in one's life and social world (McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998). It is anticipated that that level of concern varies among individuals. Some adults may have an intense concern for and interest in promoting the next generation, while other adults may express little to no concern and interest. McAdams and Azarow (1996) found that generative concern was significantly associated with self-reports of life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, goal stability, and sense of coherence in life and was negatively associated with depression.

McAdams, Hart, and Maruna (1998) agree with Erikson that generative commitment and generative action are supported by what he called a belief in the human species. Generativity requires a fundamental faith in humankind and hope for the future (McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998). The life stories of highly generative adults suggest a deep and constant faith in the fundamentally goodness of the human enterprise. Despite human depravity, humans can redeem themselves or be redeemed. Adults who focus on generativity in their life narratives build

identities on the foundation of their faith in humankind. They affirm their hope for the future and support their convictions that their own lives have ultimate meaning and significance by way of their connection to the next generation (McAdams and Logan 2004).

McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) consider generativity to be a storytelling project. He states that beginning in late adolescence and young adulthood, men and women attempt to construct more or less integrative narratives of the self to provide their lives with some unity and purpose. Furthermore, he observes that it is not uncommon for adults to leave considerable space in their life stories for generativity as it is an important theme in life stories of midlife adults (McAdams 1985). Generative narration refers to the characteristic way in which an individual makes sense of his or her generative efforts: he/she puts these efforts in the context of a life story (McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998). However, adults show significant individual differences with respect to generative narration (McAdams, Hart, and Maruna 1998). A common version of the theme is expressed as a realization that because others have provided me with care in the past it is my turn “to give something back” to my family, my people, or my society (Kotre 1999; McAdams 1985).

Generativity and Imprisonment

The model of generativity assumes that an individual lives in free society and is exposed to the pressures and expectations associated with it. It also assumes that individuals want to care for future generations because they were cared for by others (McAdams 1985). The model emphasizes hope for the future and faith in the basic good in humanity. However, inmates are removed from free society and living under very unique and restricted circumstances. Female inmates, in particular, commonly suffered abuse at the hands of those who were supposed to

care for them. Women in prison are often a "forgotten" population which leaves little room for hope or belief in human goodness. The problems of generativity among prisoners and ex-convicts have not gone unexamined. In fact, several studies have explored the nature of and opportunities for generative behavior during and after incarceration.

Maruna (2001) found that generativity is a central theme in the narrative accounts provided by men and women who have "gone straight" after a life of crime. Maruna (2001) analyzed 20 published autobiographies written by successfully and unsuccessfully reformed ex-convicts in terms of theme, plot structure, and character. He found a prototypical reform story, among the successful ex-convicts, featuring generativity. He found that the self-narratives of ex-convicts who were successful were significantly more care-oriented, other-centered, and focused on promoting the next generation. He also found a common life plan for the future which was intended to "give something back" and help out others in similar circumstances. One participant described this as a desire to "give people my life- you know, experiences- what I been through." (Maruna 2001 p. 103). Another participant said "Hopefully, I'll be something to other people" (Maruna 2001 p. 105). In fact, many of the ex-offenders suggested that they were publishing their stories so that younger generations could learn to avoid making the same mistakes that they did (Maruna 2001). Maruna (2001) argues that the sense of higher moral purpose that accompanies generative commitments might be necessary for resisting criminal activities. Criminal behaviors provide individuals with at least momentary escapes into excitement, power, and notoriety (Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier 2003). If going straight means accepting docility and stigma, there is little reason to resist criminality. Maruna (2001) found that the intrinsic rewards and social respectability of generative roles provides an appealing alternative to both these subjugated outcomes and criminal behavior. White (2000) found that ex-convicts based their

self-conceptions on identities as "wounded healers." That is, they have tried to find some meaning in their shame-filled life by turning their experiences into warnings or hopeful stories of redemption for younger offenders in similar situations (White 2000).

Given such findings, it seems reasonable that the correctional system would seek out every opportunity to support and even hasten the development of these desires among inmates (Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier 2003). Erikson (1950) stated that the opposite of generativity is stagnation, and Maruna and his colleagues (2003) observe that there is no better word for describing contemporary prison life where almost everything about the process seems designed to prevent natural maturational processes among inmates.

The structure and rules of prisons create barriers to those trying to lend support to their families or to achieve other personal goals. Inmates working for a dollar a day are not able to make financial contributions to their families. In fact, these inmates often become financial burdens to their family members (Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier 2004). Inmates often require money in order to buy necessities from the commissary. Parenting behind bars is difficult and generally emotionally painful. Prisoners frequently develop a sense of being doomed to a life of addiction, criminality, and prison that is similar to the pessimism with which society seems to view their potential to reform (Maruna 2001). Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier (2004) observe that the current correctional system mainly lacks opportunities for the promotion of generative ideals and behaviors, but a few potentially generative projects and activities can be found. What follows are three areas of generative potential within the prison system as identified by Maruna and his colleagues (2004).

Community Service

Some programs promoting generative opportunities can be found in prisons. Community service is one. Yet, despite its origins as a rehabilitative endeavor, community service is no longer used as a strengths building exercise, but is generally manual, menial, and arduous (Caddick 1994). Community service opportunities in prison are rare, particularly for women. According to a strengths-based framework, community service work would be voluntarily agreed upon and would involve challenging tasks that utilize the talents of the inmates in useful roles in the community (Dickey and Smith 1998). For example, in a partnership program with Habitat for Humanity, inmates from 75 prisons, along with community volunteers, built over 250 homes for low-income families in 1999 in Illinois, Michigan, Texas, and Wisconsin (Ta 2000). Furthermore, teams of prisoners have voluntarily helped in fighting the forest fires ravaging national parks in the Western region of the United States. In the year 2000, one in six of the crewmembers fighting fires was an inmate (Jehl 2000). Jehl (2000) interviewed participants in this program and found that such participation made them proud and promoted a positive self-image. One participant stated "Being in this program makes all the difference…Now I can tell my 4-year-old son that his dad isn't in prison, he's out fighting fires." (Jehl 2000 p. A1). Another inmate firefighter stated, "most of my life, I took things from people, and now it's time to give something back." (Jehl 2000 p. A1). The community effort gave the inmates a sense of confidence and contribution that they would normally not receive behind bars.

Prisoners in many states are involved in providing respite care to fellow prisoners dying of AIDS and other illnesses in the prison facility. There are often long waiting lists of prisoners seeking to volunteer to be caregivers (Stolberg 2001). A warden at one prison with a hospice hypothesized that its nurturing climate helps the patients first, then the volunteers, and finally the

whole prison. These hospices have been found to have unforeseen effects such as decreases in prison violence (Kolker 2000).

“Professional Ex”

Generative activities have long been the focus of programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). These programs allow for the transformation of identity from victim to survivor to helper. Members who stay connected to the program, deemed as “wounded healers” (White 2000), eventually take on the role of sponsors and mentors to the next generation of recovering addicts (Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier 2004). Brown (1991) uses the term “professional ex” to refer to a person who desists from a deviant career by replacing it with an occupation as a paraprofessional, lay therapist, drug counselor, or training officer. He estimated that approximately three quarters of the counselors working in the over 10,000 substance abuse treatment centers in the United States are former substance abusers themselves (Brown 1991). This type of role modeling occurs in prisons as well. Inmates frequently form informal mentoring systems in which older inmates become parent-figures to newer, younger prisoners. Based on his own experience in prison, Irwin (1980) emphasizes that self-help groups “open doors…..to a variety of conventional endeavors.” (p. 94). Hamm (1997) observed that more prisoners belong to self-help groups than to any other form of prison program. Members of these groups try to see themselves as kind and capable individuals, who are able to lead fulfilling lives despite their current condition of incarceration (Hamm 1997).

In a recent trend referred to as the “New Recovery Movement” (White 2001), wounded healers are asked to become recovery activists. That is, to take a proactive role in mentoring others and encouraging them to change. These and other efforts offer individuals the opportunity

to share their experiences and to help others. They willingly give their time in the service of helping others who are not as far along in the rehabilitation process, in a sense, the next generation of wounded healers.

Parenting From Prison

Parenting from prison is very difficult due to the associated emotional and psychological issues involved with bringing children to prisons for visitation, the high cost of making telephone calls, and the distances most families have to travel to maintain physical contact (Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier 2004). While research has found that the children of incarcerated parents often become confused, unhappy, and socially labeled (Petersilia 2000), less is known about the impact of prison on a person's identity as a parent and her or his ability to maintain parental bonds (Maruna, LeBel, and Lanier 2004). Toch (1975) did observe that incarceration and the consequent impairment of the inmate's ability to contribute as a parent can result in feelings of guilt and shame.

Research suggests that active engagement in parenting while in prison may provide stability for inmates which can reduce the psychological impact of imprisonment (Toch 1975). Parenthood offers a useful way to engage inmates on a number of issues, such as substance abuse, steady employment, education, and even criminal behavior in general because they do not want their children to engage in the same behaviors that resulted in their incarceration. Inmates begin to see themselves as behavioral models for their children and decide to change their lifestyle in order to set a positive example. By making the parental role the focus, the individual is seen as having an important role to play in the lives of others (Lanier 2003).

Conclusion

The concept of generativity encompasses many things. At some point many adults recognize that they are what they leave behind. Therefore, they may be personally motivated to guide and teach the next generation. They may be motivated by social expectations of preparing younger generations for the future. Once an individual develops a concern for the next generation, she or he will also develop a belief in human kind. The individual will then be able to commit themselves to fulfilling a generative role and engage in generative action. Finally, the individual will narrate their experiences promoting their generativity, thus providing coherence to their life story. This model of generativity outlines the ideal transformation to a generative adult. However, individuals of various circumstances arrive at Erikson's seventh stage of development. Arguably, ex-convicts and prison inmates do not enjoy the freedom to naturally "grow" across their life span. Indeed, incarceration offers barriers to the development of identity, intimacy, and generativity. Prisons encourage generative behaviors very little, which may lead inmates to experience feelings of stagnation rather than the positive feelings associated with "giving back." The research reviewed in this chapter refers almost exclusively to male inmates. As seen in chapter 2, the experiences and needs of women inmates are much different than those of their male counterparts. The development and execution of generativity may follow suit. The next chapter reveals the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODS

According to Cook and Fonow (1990), acknowledging the pervasive influence of gender is the first stage of feminist work. Therefore, feminist methodology begins with research devoted to description, analysis, explanation, and interpretation of the female experience. This project utilizes the qualitative interview to explore the experiences of older female inmates, and especially to understand generativity in this population – that is, inclinations toward, and outlets for, giving back. Females have traditionally been secondary to men in academic research. Likewise, research on prison inmates has tended to neglect older inmates. Generally, prison inmates, while enjoying a lot of attention in criminological research, are not of much concern to free society. Taking all these considerations together, older female inmates are least likely to receive attention. They have unique needs that have hardly been examined. The current study was designed to enable older female inmates to identify the issues that are important to them.

Sample

I conducted interviews with 29 female inmates at the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women (KCIW) in Pewee Valley, a unit of Kentucky Department of Corrections (KDOC).[4] I generated this sample using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling, which accesses research participants based on their availability, is widely used in qualitative research, especially when dealing with a rare or hard-to-reach population. Sample demographics and criminal history are shown in Appendix A.

[4] The unit is commonly known as Pewee Valley.

Due to my geographic location in Knoxville, the Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC) was most convenient for me, and certainly more convenient than was its Kentucky counterpart. However, TDOC was on a research freeze when I first embarked on data collection, in January, 2008. The TDOC was not allowing any outside research within any of their prison facilities and did not foresee an end to this ban in the near future. I then approached the KDOC for research consideration. Upon contacting the KDOC, I felt encouraged by their gracious acceptance and assistance in seeking approval for the project. Pewee Valley was also close enough – four (4) hours from my home – to allow for relative convenience in planning the interviews. Furthermore, Pewee Valley houses minimum to maximum security female inmates, including one death row inmate.

After KDOC e-mailed me with their approval of the research within the facility, I received an e-mail from Shannon Butrum, Procedures Officer at the KCIW. She was assigned to recruit participants for me. Ms. Butrum posted my research synopsis (see Appendix B) that I had provided, in the housing unit. When volunteers approached her concerning their interest, she scheduled interviews during the weeks that I would be visiting. The inmates were individually responsible for showing up to the appointment with me.

Interviews

My exploratory investigation extended to the question of whether or not the women would even express generative desires. Similarly, I wanted to know about what experiences in prison the women would mention as significant. As such, some sort of ethnography, which delves into experience and perspective, was indicated. Because my study mainly concerned individual

experience and not social interaction, I did not opt to include a participant-observation component to the study. Hence, low-structure interviews were my method of choice.
After gaining KDOC's approval, I filed the necessary forms to receive human subjects, or Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at the University of Tennessee. Having never been through this process before, I was struck by their concern for my safety in interviewing the inmates. I had to assure the IRB committee that I would not be endangered. Sight supervision by correctional officers provided the necessary assurance, and IRB approval was gained. My informed consent form is included as Appendix C.

I conducted one interview with each individual. Each interview lasted approximately two (2) hours. Audio-recording devices were not allowed in the facility, so interviews were documented through careful note-taking – as much as possible, I wrote down direct quotes and especially statements that were particularly poignant. My interview notes averaged approximately 12 hand-written pages per participant. Following each interview I would expand on my notes and try to add as much detail as I could recall.

The visitation room where I conducted all interviews was located in the administration building. This building was separate from the housing units and recreation building; thus it provided a private milieu away from the general population. While I never feared for my personal safety, the interview room was under video (not audio) – hence limited sight – surveillance, it was adequately secluded from staff interruptions and no guards were visible from where we were.

I initiated each interview with a greeting; whereby, I stood and shook the participant's hand, followed by a review of the informed consent form. Upon reading highlights from the form, I allowed the participant time to read and sign the paper before proceeding with the interview. All

of my participants readily signed the consent form with no concerns regarding the method of the study itself. I did have three (3) participants specifically ask me the goal of the study as they were interested in informing the public about women in prison.

Qualitative interviews are similar to conversations, if somewhat one-sided ones (Kvale 1996). I used several prompts and questions to generate dialogue with the participant. These are shown in no particular order in Table 1.

Table 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/PROMPTS

Tell me about your life.
How is your relationship with other inmates?
Would you tell me about your children?
What is it like for you here?
How do you feel about aging in prison?
What is your biggest regret?
What is your greatest contribution?
How do you see yourself when you get out?
What made you happy outside of prison?

Would you talk to me about older and younger inmates?
Do you consider yourself a victim, survivor, or criminal?
Do you think about how you will be remembered?
Do you think about what, if any, legacy you will leave behind?

However, to a very large extent I allowed my research participants to talk freely. I offered prompts when appropriate, but I did not redirect them to stay on point. As Seidman (1991) writes: "The questions most used in an in-depth interview follow from what the participant has said" (p. 69), and this was certainly true of my interviews. Even when the discussion reached far beyond my scope of research, I allowed the participant to continue talking – often discontinuing my note-taking to maintain more eye contact during especially intimate dialogue. For example, Katherine, a 50 year-old serving ten (10) years for arson and insurance fraud, described the day her teenage daughter died in a golf cart accident. She told me that she had never really talked about it before and later thanked me for listening. My reasoning for essentially relinquishing control of the interview was three-fold.

First, feminist scholars cite control over subjugated persons as problematic in research. The feminist ideal is to minimize power differentials, and I saw interrupting the women's talk as running counter to that goal. Second, due to the sensitive and personal nature of some of the stories my participants shared with me, I did not want to interrupt them and dismiss their stories as unimportant or bothersome. Third, because they were sharing intimate memories and emotions, I felt that allowing the women to take the discussion where they wished it to go,

helped to establish rapport. I believed and believe that their willingness to share these stories with me indicated a certain amount of trust that I did not want to betray or belittle by discounting what they were telling me as straying from the focus of the interview.

Researchers acknowledge that even when both the interviewer and the respondent are women, differences persist that may affect the interviewing process. Power differentials between the interviewer and the participant affect the outcome of the interview (Giallombardo 1966). I particularly enjoyed listening to several of the women. I found their strength, in the face of circumstances that I doubt I could overcome, to be remarkable. I also smiled and laughed with several jovial women who are clearly able to just take one day at a time. During the course of some of the interviews, my awareness of their incarceration faded until they adjusted their state-issued jacket or an announcement for cell count was made over the prison loudspeaker. I did not perceive any power differentials due in part, I believe, to the relatively unstructured format of the interview and my willingness to allow the women to discuss issues they felt were important.

Nonetheless, interviewing within a prison setting challenges the feminist vision of equality in research. Even before the interview, there is an inherent power differential as the interviewer is free and the inmate is not. In one sense the researcher defines his or her own role in the field, but in another sense, it is defined for him or her by the situation and the perspective of the respondents (Giallombardo 1966). I did not perceive any adverse affects on the interview data from my status as a free citizen and the women's status as inmates. As mentioned before, I shook hands with each participant while introducing myself and then offered them a seat in a chair next to (and not opposite to) mine. As the majority of the participants were my seniors, I referred to them as "ma'am" and showed them the same respect as I would for any one else. I

believe that my sincere show of respect helped to negate the power differential, even as my research cannot eliminate its structural basis.

Finally, interviewing older women *potentially* introduces a set of difficulties associated with the generation gap, such as a difference in familiarity with terminology. I was not aware of a generation gap during any of my interviews with older female inmates and found them to be very easy to engage in conversation.

Limitations

My study has at least two major limitations. First, interviews were constrained by time, both in the sense that I had only two hours per inmate and in the sense that I could only interview each woman once. While Pewee Valley was close enough to allow for easy access to the institution – 230 miles from my home – this distance, work, and family obligations at home required me to conduct multiple interviews in one day, and to limit the interviewing period to two weeks. My two very young children, my very altruistic mother, and I "holed up" in a motel near to the facility for the duration – an arrangement that given my mother's and my subsequent schedule could not have easily been repeated. Therefore, within any one interview, I had to count on establishing rapport quickly in order to obtain the most information. I found that I did forge a connection with the majority of the participants. Several of the shorter interviews were with participants whom I observed to be sleepy and somewhat unresponsive to some of my prompts.

Second, by order of the KDOC, I was not permitted to use an audio recorder that would have allowed me to maintain more consistent eye contact with the participant and thus better facilitate the flow of conversation. Although I encouraged participants to talk as they "normally" would and assured them that I would be able to keep up with my notes, several of them felt the need to

stop mid-story to allow my frantic note-taking a chance to catch up. An audio recorder would also have allowed me to get a word-for-word transcript of each interview. As it was, I was able to write down some direct quotes, but I was often forced to use short-hand and make more detailed notes following the end of the interview.

In general, inmates are viewed as untrustworthy. In telling their stories, participants continually manage the impressions they make. In a sense, they perform by choosing to keep some secrets while disclosing others. Everyone, including prison inmates, have some interest in "saving face." Therefore, participants are confronted with the dilemma of to tell or not to tell, to lie or not to lie during the interview (Goffman 1963). For women in prison, their criminality is known to their families, other inmates, guards, service providers, outside peers, and even strangers who have seen them on the news. While inmates are viewed as being those with an unfavorable identity, it is important to note that all individuals use impression management. Inmates are not the only ones who tell narratives from their own perspective (Girshick 1999).

I felt that these women were honest with me. They were certainly forthcoming about their part in perpetrating harm, and as I explore in Chapter 7 they tended to take responsibility for their crimes. I felt gratified by the encounters, on both a personal level and from the perspective of the feminist goal of giving something back to our research participants. Some commented that the interview was therapeutic for them and that they came to some realizations about their past *through* the interview. Several participants cried during the interview while recounting particularly personal details, generally regarding their children. Stella, 52, referred to the interview as "the closest thing we have to therapy."

A number of the participants expressed interest in my research and requested a copy of the finished work. Informing the general public about the plight of incarceration for women and, in

particular older women, was very important to them. Sue, who has served 21½ years of a life sentence, stated "I hope this study helps somebody. This is the first one [study] I've ever signed up for in 21½ years. I thought it could help."

Method of Analysis

Upon initially reviewing my data of analysis, I was at a loss. It seemed that everything my participants had said was fascinating and worthy of mention. I was not sure how to begin to organize the material into themes that would be informative or make sense. Thus began my complete immersion into the somewhat tedious task of data analysis. I gained a deep familiarity with the interview material through numerous readings and careful comparison. After a time, I was able to identify multiple themes stemming from the narratives of my participants.

Namely, as somewhat expected, my participants talked about their children a good deal. Therefore, I began to look at patterns of mother/child relationships first. After focusing on the stories regarding motherhood and struggles with their children, certain types of prison mothers became apparent. I then sought to name these patterns of experiencing older motherhood behind bars. I created as many pattern categories as ultimately described all of the mothers in the sample, or 27 of the 29.

Next, I was interested in how age, which by now I knew to be an important factor in the experience of motherhood behind bars, would affect the other aspects of prison life. This search through the data brought me to the notion of acceptance – of incarceration, of responsibility and of themselves.

Finally, I studied evidence of generativity, my initial interest and focus. While I had expected to hear some interest in giving back to society, such as future plans to lecture youth on

the dangers of drugs, I had not expected the zealousness with which my participants discussed their plans for future acts of generativity. I also did not expect the number of generative opportunities within the prison institution.

I now turn to these research findings. In the three chapters to follow, I report on the realities, emotions, hardships, and joys as shared by the women of Pewee Valley.

CHAPTER 6

PARENTING IN PRISON

In 1999, approximately 66 percent of women inmates were mothers of children under the age of 18, and over 64 percent were living with their children prior to their incarceration (Bureau of Justice and Statistics 2000). Therefore, any researcher that seeks to understand the "typical" woman inmate must presume that she is a mother and, more specifically, a mother to young children. In one respect, my study accords with such an assumption; that is, twenty-seven (27) of the twenty-nine (29) women – including 25 of the older women – in my sample were mothers. However, my targeted sample deviates from the alleged norm as twenty-five (25) of the twenty-seven (27) were mothers of adult children living on their own.

It was very common for the women I interviewed to speak about their children. While several of my prompts directly pertained to issues of motherhood and one's children (e.g., Would you tell me about your children?), 26 of the women initiated discussions about their children voluntarily or in response to the generativity-related prompts (e.g., Do you think about how you will be remembered?). The frequency with which the women in my sample talked about their children is not surprising given that incarcerated mothers have, in earlier studies, stressed the importance of their children (Owen 1998) and the pain caused by separation (Morash and Schram 2002). Inmate advocates and, more recently, researchers in academia have become concerned about the challenges posed for inmates, children, and families by parental incarceration (Lord 1995). A considerable portion of the research on incarcerated parents, primarily mothers, focuses on their children (Baunach 1985; Bloom and Steinhart 1993) – generally either their placement during or their ability to cope with their mother's incarceration.

The most common arrangement for children of incarcerated mothers is to live with a grandparent (Mumola 2000). In 1998, parental substance abuse, imprisonment, and abuse and neglect of their children (Kelley 1993; Dressel and Barnhill 1994; Joslin and Brouard 1995) contributed to grandparents becoming adoptive parents to more than 1.4 million children in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1999); thus, forcing both mothers and children to adjust to the separation. Extensive research has linked maternal incarceration with depression in both mothers and children under the age of eighteen (Koban, 1983, Henriques, 1996; Siegal, 1997; Sharp & Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). Family systems, whereby children live with their mother, are severely stressed by even short periods of separation (Carlson & Cervera, 1992). Thus, research primarily illuminates the emotional and behavioral problems of younger children as a result of their mother's incarceration, but it rarely addresses such things as pertain to having *adult* children on the outside (Fuller 1993; Belknap 1998).

While all of the 27 research participants who were mothers reported that separation from their children was difficult, the nature and severity of the difficulty they described varied. In order to better understand this diversity, I considered the nuances of the mother/child bond as reported by my research participants. I took into account not only their responses to the question concerning what it is like to be a mother in prison, but also the *manner* in which the women discussed their relationships with their children. Over the course of each interview, the women tended to recount the evolution of their relationship with their children over time. They generally followed a narrative pattern of discussing how things were, how things are, and how they want things to be in regards to their children.

I identified four types of older mother in prison. The *remorseful mother* regrets her past mistakes as a young mother and hopes now to reconcile with her children. The *contented mother*

enjoys a strong relationship with her children and reports being relatively content with her incarceration. The *uneasy mother* worries about the well-being of her children during the separation. Finally, the *abandoned mother* is surprised and saddened by her children's thoughtlessness during her incarceration. Clearly, the experience of parenting older children from behind bars is variable. The nature of the relationship with their children prior to incarceration has a significant influence on the nature of their relationship during incarceration.

In this chapter I examine the women's perspectives on mothering from behind bars. In so doing, I attempt to piece together their accounts of their parenting and their future plans for the same. Most of my participants voiced concern over the impact of their incarceration on family members, particularly their children. The women discussed their appreciation for family and described the nature of and hope for their relationships with their grandchildren.

The Remorseful Mother

For my older research participants – those 40 years of age and older - raising children was an activity described in the past tense. That is, their children had already been raised: either they or others had done so. As they talked during the interview, they were likely to recall not only their past behaviors, such as drug use or solicitation, but also to comment on the effects that such habits had clearly had on their children. The ability to identify instances of long term effects of their behavior on their children is not an ability afforded to younger inmates with younger children. So while younger inmates may indeed recognize 'how bad' incarceration and separation are for their young children, their perspective is largely limited to the present. Yet, many of my older participants recalled their deficiencies as younger mothers without prompting.

Ten (10) of the older women said that their biggest regret was not having been able or willing to raise their children in the past. While their incarceration provoked remorse and regret in specific regards to their children, for many, the damage had been done. Seventeen (17) of the older women I interviewed related their own past behaviors to the struggles and emotional distress *currently* experienced by their adult children. Eight (8) out of the seventeen (17) reported strained or estranged relationships with their adult children and desired to reconcile with them. They criticized their shortcomings and attributed their now-'objective' insight to time, which is abundantly afforded in prison, and to simply getting older. Because recollections of the past were laden with regret, I refer to this category of inmate as the *remorseful mother*. As a mother of adult children, the remorseful mother is able to witness the consequences of her behaviors on her children and typically desires to re-establish the relationships with them that were either damaged or lost.

Frances, a 53 year-old white woman, offers a good example of recognition of consequences as she considered her children's struggles in adulthood and her strained relationships with them to be a reflection of her failure to guide and nurture them as children. Indeed, Frances initiated discussion about her sons five times during the interview. Each time Frances either lamented not providing enough love and care for them as children or voiced concern for not being with them at present.

Gina: What is your biggest regret?

Frances: Not being a better mother to my boys. Not showing enough love. My youngest son said, 'The TV became my mommy.' I didn't see that. I was getting high. I was selfish. I blame myself. That's why they [my children] are struggling like they are.

Gina: Struggling how?

Frances: My oldest is getting a divorce and my youngest is in jail.

Frances mentioned her oldest son and his perception of her not showing him enough love three separate times. She considered her mistakes as a mother as a contributor in his divorce. Although Frances was incarcerated after her children were grown, she said that she spent most of their childhood addicted to drugs and associating with the "wrong crowd" – that is, other people who used drugs. Her children were not her priority then, but she stated that they are her priority now.

Gina: How do you see yourself when you get out?

Frances: Scared, but excited. I want to enjoy the rest of my life. I want to be with my husband (she married while incarcerated). I want to spend time with my boys. I want to sit down with the oldest and let him know how much he is loved. I didn't realize how much I hurt him. I want a big family – to be surrounded by family. That comes with aging for me.

Frances, like sixteen (16) other older women I spoke with, was no longer the mother of young children, but believed she was witnessing the consequences of her poor parenting in the past. Therefore, Frances exemplifies two fairly common tendencies among the older participants in my sample – that of being cognizant of the effect one's lifestyle had on one's children and having the desire to make amends for one's past mistakes.

Sue, a 54 year-old white woman, provided a similar account of recognition and remorse. Sue has served 21½ years of a life sentence, so her children were young when she first entered prison. She talked about her children multiple times during the interview, but she depicted her relationships with them as strained.

Gina: Would you tell me about your children?

Sue: My middle child, my son, is in prison for 10 years. We are in touch. He was young when I was arrested. So getting someone to bring them here was hard. I developed some emotional detachment to avoid the pain. My daughter visited three years ago. I

don't know where she is now. I think she's had a nervous breakdown. Her husband left her. I think she doesn't want to deal with me. I know my children love me. I've hurt them. I was very self-centered at one time.

Gina: Do you want things to change?

Sue: Of course. My children are very important to me. I hope to re-establish bonds.

At the time of the interview, Sue described herself as personable, caring, compassionate, and goal-oriented. Recalling the time of her arrest, Sue said "I was beaten down – all the domestic violence and now a human being was dead." Sue's abusive partner kidnapped, raped, and murdered a woman he "picked up" off the street. Sue was in the car at the time and did not try to stop it. She said she feared her partner would have killed her too. For Sue, her experience with domestic violence and drug addiction affected the way she treated her children, but she claimed responsibility for her parenting as in the following exchanges:

Gina: What is your biggest regret?

Sue: The way I raised my kids – not setting a better example for them by raising them right.

Later in the interview, Sue acknowledged her pride in her children.

Gina: What is your greatest contribution?

Sue: Nothing…no wait..., having my kids.

Sue discussed her children, unprompted, two more times during the interview. She stated that her family was the biggest victim of her incarceration: she said "I can't do anything about that, but we can move forward." Sue did indeed look forward. When I asked her what she thinks about, she reported most often thinking about her grandchildren, children, and freedom.

Sue's personality and demeanor struck me as consistent with how movies portray prison "old-timers." That is, she seemed laid back, but she also conveyed a wisdom that seemed to

come from years of self-evaluation and contemplation, perhaps nurtured by seven years of counseling with the prison chaplain – someone she described as instrumental in helping her "turn her life around." Sue demonstrates a dichotomy shared with seven (7) of the women I interviewed. That is, her greatest contribution and her biggest regret both pertained to her children.

Guilt was a recurring theme for Clara, a 65 year-old white woman serving 530 years for sodomy, first-degree incest and other related charges. In order to better understand Clara's relationships with her children, it is important to understand her complex story of false accusations and family disruption. According to Clara, after her mother died she became depressed. Her house was dirty and her sons were placed in foster care. At the time, the foster parents wanted to adopt both of her sons, and she believed the foster parents manipulated the situation by telling her oldest son what to say. Her son's accusations of sodomy and incest resulted in more than 79 charges against her and her husband. Clara claimed there was no physical evidence, but that she and her husband were convicted based on the word of her son, not facts. The oldest son now feels guilty and wants to "make things right." Clara is currently jointly appealing her conviction along with her husband, who is serving the same sentence. Clara said she never blamed her son and stated that part of her determination to "fix things" was that she was getting older and she did not want her son to carry the guilt of making false allegations for the rest of his life.

Clara further reported that her daughter harbored some resentment towards her for the dissolution of the family and, consequently, has not contacted her in eighteen years (since Clara first entered prison). She lamented:

> I wish I had told my oldest daughter I loved her more….I would be kinder, if I could do it over, again. You don't realize you're hurting anything.

Clara recognized her shortcomings as a mother when her children were younger and hoped that by overturning her and her husband's convictions, they would be able to forge new relationships with their children. Likewise, Frances lamented her mistakes when she was a young mother, but was also particularly aware of the effect her mistakes had on her children as adults. Thus, she felt most guilty about not being with them now. "I should be out there with my boys. They both need me now." Sue's children were young when she was first incarcerated. By her own admission, her renewed appreciation for family and desire for forgiveness took time. She said she now wanted to tell her children, "Please let me back in your life, even though I don't deserve it." The regret, the guilt, and the desire to repair the damage caused by their deficiencies as young mothers, epitomizes the remorseful mother.

The Contented Mother

The positive appraisals of one's ongoing relationship with grown children were mainly voiced by women who were not incarcerated until later in life or from women who were fortunate to be able to maintain consistent contact with their children over the years. Approximately 16 of the 27 women with children were incarcerated for the first time after the age of 40 and after their children were grown. All 16 reported close relationships with their adult children. Also, four (4) women were incarcerated when their children were still young or for various other reasons were not able to effectively raise their young children, but were able to maintain contact and establish close relationships with their children as adults.

Overall, about 17 of the 27 women who had children reported having good relationships with them. Therefore, maintaining adequate, while perhaps not ideal, contact with one's adult children was not unusual for the women in this study. Few of the women I interviewed complained about the (low) frequency of contact with their children. I speculate that since adult children are able to take care of themselves, the women would, arguably, not enjoy daily or perhaps even monthly contact with their children if they were in free society, so that incarceration was less an obstruction to maintaining close bonds with their children than it was for younger mothers. Good relationships between adult children and parents do not require frequent face-to-face contact – something that research regarding incarcerated mothers with young children considers vital to maintaining a strong relationship.

Continuing contact with their children may be the most significant predictor of inmates' chances of reuniting their families upon release (Girshick 1999). Of course, this presumption stands to reason because mothers of younger children are often the sole caregiver to their children prior to incarceration (Belknap 1996). Therefore, the abrupt termination of family routine can be most devastating to both parties. Mothers generally worry about loosing their children's love (Baunach 1985). Concerning the plight of the younger mother I can only offer two examples from my sample: from the three younger inmates I interviewed, only two had children under the age of eighteen[5]. Both of my participants with younger children reported fairly frequent visits. Sarah, a 27 year-old African American woman, had two children currently living with her parents that she reported to see every week. Christy, a 34 year-old white woman, also said she receives regular visits from her two children. While both Sarah and Christy reported having close relationships with their children, they also mentioned a general sense of

[5] My third inmate under the age of forty (40) had one daughter who was eighteen (18) and living on her own.

having to relinquish parental control to those who were currently caring for their children. Thus, for them, frequent visits were an important way for them to remain in their children's lives, but such was not the case for women with adult children.

Five (5) of the older women in my sample reported that while they continued to miss being with their families and looked forward to reuniting with them upon their release, they were *content* with their current situation. For me, these women typified what I call the *contented mother*. The contented mother is able to maintain contact with her children throughout their childhood and to continue positive relations with their children as adults. Women in this category were generally either serving long sentences or getting ready to be released; thus, the contented mother either reconciles herself to the reality of a long separation or takes comfort in an upcoming release date. Either way, the existence of a supportive family unit gives the inmate a sense of security and allows her to better deal with her incarceration.

Rose, a 60 year-old African American woman, affectionately called "Granny" by the other inmates, offers a good example of positive family relations. I found Rose to be infectious as she smiled, laughed, and called me "baby girl." Rose is serving a 13 year sentence for manslaughter. She told me that her abusive husband was accidentally shot in the head while they were wrestling over a gun. She has served a year and a half of her sentence and claimed "now that I know God is with me, I'm doing fine."

Gina: What made you happy outside of prison?

Rose: Being with my daughter, son, and family. (My 2 kids and 4 grandsons – my little family) I enjoyed going shopping for them and going to ballgames. I did all that with them – played video games with them.

[Pause]

> Rose: I appreciate being with family more now than when I was younger. When I was younger, I was doing other things. I'm more happy now with family – since I'm older. Now I just want to sew and crochet and play with grandsons. My daughter wants me to live with her. I think she doesn't want me to live by myself. My grandsons will want me to go go go. I probably will live with her.

Rose reported that she was close to her two children and four grandsons, and that "it has killed them since I've been here, but I tell them that I will be home again." Rose said she raised her children "old-timey," which I interpreted to mean family-oriented. Rose reported she was content because prison forced her to examine herself and her path of self destruction. She declared "I would have gotten AIDS if this hadn't happened. God knew what He was doing. I wanted to kill myself – now I've got peace of mind." She credited prison with her "recovery" by helping her to recognize her abuse and to overcome her sadness. According to Rose, "when you have peace of mind, it's as sweet as blackberry juice." Women, like Rose, who were assured of their children's well-being seemed to be the most tolerant of their own incarceration. Rose exemplified something that younger inmates often don't understand, but admire; that is, the ability to do "easy time" - defined by my participants as not stressing about the outside world while in prison.

Rose's easy time seemed to follow from the comfort she took in knowing she had a place to live with her daughter upon release. While aftercare was mentioned by less than a third of my participants, I found it to be indicative of an interesting role-reversal –one which has recently gained attention from both members of academia and the general public. Yet, one made even more intriguing because other members of my sample were caregivers to their own elderly parents – a phenomena I will discuss later in the chapter.

Nevertheless, several of the women I spoke with talked about where they would live after they were released. The women who were incarcerated for the first time after their children were

grown and were assured of their children's well-being, took some comfort in knowing they had someone to take care of them upon their release. Like Rose, a few reported that their children wanted them to live with them. Mable, a prison first-timer stated:

> Mable: My sons are arguing over me to stay with them, but I told them that they have families of their own.
>
> Gina: So where will you go when you get out?
>
> Mable: I'll probably go back to Indiana to be closer to my sons and grandson, but I want to get back on my own feet.

Very different was May, a 50 year-old African American woman serving 12 years for trafficking cocaine. She expressed anger with her children for "leaving her for dead" during her incarceration. She seemed to feel particularly betrayed by one daughter with whom she had lived before. She stated:

> I'll need a place to stay when I get out. My daughter's boyfriend is staying with her. What about me? I have no place to go. There's nobody else in my family. That's bad. I have no place to go.

With their time of raising their children behind them, many of the older participants I interviewed now anticipated that their children would care for them. Thus, the role reversal of care-giver and receiver that takes place in free society is not negated, but perhaps is amplified, through incarceration and the mother's difficulties in starting over or with being alone. Three (3) of the women I interviewed specifically stated that starting over scared them. For example, I asked Eve, a long-termer, what she will do when she gets out. She replied: "The world will be so changed. I do not know my children (whom she gave up for adoption). My family will be dead – nobody left. That scares me. This is my home. I don't want it to be, but it is." Dependable relationships with their children gave the women I spoke with a sense of security and eased some

fears of starting over upon their release, a luxury that is not afforded to incarcerated women who have no children.

Family was a major theme for Sally, a 46 year-old white woman, who admitted that she was very dependent on her family for support. She reported that she calls home every other day. While Sally was very proud of her family, she said boredom in the free world and after her children were grown, led her to "partying" with the wrong crowd and using drugs. Yet, she wanted to go back to the comfort of being a housewife – the lifestyle she had known prior to using drugs. Sally claimed "My kids are my life." She stated that she took great comfort in having a family that supported her. "My husband takes care of me. My son bought me a TV and my daughter writes to me."

Gina: How do you see yourself when you get out?

Sally: I have a new grandbaby. I'll spend time with her and my family. I want to help my daughter – set up a business with her. I don't want to do drugs anymore. My husband lined up aftercare [drug counseling]. He has moved out of the old area now.

Gina: How do you feel?

Sally: I feel older now, stronger-minded now. But I feel like a grandmother. I feel content. I don't want to hurt [emotionally] my husband anymore.

Sally admitted to counting the days until her parole hearing which was scheduled later in the month of the interview. She said prison made her stop and realize what she was doing to herself and her family. She learned to focus on positives instead of negatives. For Sally, her family was a positive source for her. Sally was content because she was a mother and a grandmother who anticipated a happy future of family love and support.

Misty, a 50 year-old white woman serving a life sentence for first-degree murder, also enjoyed strong family support and provided a good example of maintaining family contact

during lengthy incarceration. She reported that she receives weekly visits from and makes daily phone calls to family members because they live close to the prison. She described herself as having a "charming personality," and being spiritual and very family oriented.

Gina: What is the most difficult thing about being in prison?

Misty: Still being away from family after 23 years.

Gina: How do you see yourself when you get out?

Misty: I want to be with family, just be with my family.

Misty admitted that what she referred to as her "spiritual" transition took time. She stated: "A lot goes on in prison. I've changed, gotten older, and gotten more spiritual. I wanted to change. I wanted something different for my family." Misty initiated discussions about her family seven (7) times during the interview. She reported her biggest regret was "not being woman enough" to raise her children, recalling that during many years of drug addiction, her mother raised them. While she stated that she was not happy being in prison, she reported that she was "content."

Gina: What is prison like for you?

Misty: Coming here has made me the individual I am today. If I was still out there, I would have been dead. I like who I am today. I told my mom this the other day.

Misty used the term "content" several times. She stated "God brought me peace to deal with what was going on." Misty may never be released from prison, but she is content because as she stated, "my family believes in me." Misty is one of five (5) women I interviewed serving life sentences. Of these women, she has served the most years and reported the most frequent contact her family. For me, Misty was not typical in her circumstances, but she demonstrated patience, endurance, and determination – which were common characteristics of the women in

my sample. Similarly, Rose and Sally gained strength from the support they received from their families; thus, they seemed better able to contend with their current incarceration.

The Uneasy Mother

Some of the research participants who reported having close relationships with their children also regarded incarceration as an obstacle which both mother and child must endure. Many of the women I interviewed mentioned particular hardships suffered by or complaints, in excess of simply missing them, made by their children due to separation. Twelve (12) of the women I spoke with reported close relationships with their children, but initiated some tale revealing that their children were having a particularly difficult time with their absence. Generally, these women had more or less accepted their incarceration, but their children had not.

For many of the women, their children's inability to cope with the separation was a main concern and source of worry during their incarceration; thus, preventing them from feeling content. In general, they had had frequent interaction with their children prior to their incarceration. Thus, the routine was, for lack of a better word, interrupted. I refer to the women in this category as the *uneasy mother*. The uneasy mother is able to maintain contact with her children throughout their childhood and to continue positive relations with their children as adults. However, while the mothers may have adjusted to their incarceration, their children seemingly had not; thus, the interrupted mother is anxious to resume her role in free society – generally as caregiver either to adult children who have remained emotionally or financially dependent and/or to elderly parents who require assistance. Thus, women who were charged with caring for older parents prior to their incarceration are also included in this category. It is also in this category that I classify my three (3) younger participants.

Two (2) of the younger women had minor children who were being raised by close family members. Their adjustment and the adjustment of their children supported previous research in that they were anxious to return to their children and resume parental responsibility. Christy, 34, reported that her teenage daughter now seeks advice and guidance from her (Christy's) sister. While Christy said she was close to her sister, she lamented not being readily available to her daughter. Thus, like several of the older women, my younger participants were worried and concerned about their children which prevented them from feeling contentment during their incarceration.

Separation from her daughter, whom she refers to as her "best friend," was a prominent theme for Polly, 44; so too were the pains of being a mother from behind bars.

Gina: What is it like being a mother in prison?

Polly: Pure plain and simple: it is horrible. Can you imagine losing contact with your mother?

Polly is serving a fifteen year sentence for assault. She had been drinking when she fell with her infant step-grandchild getting him out of the crib. She told me she already had back problems and nerve damage at the time of the incident. The baby stopped breathing and she shook him to revive him. According to Polly, the baby suffered no permanent damage.

Gina: Have you forgiven yourself?

Polly: That's a hard one. I'm struggling with it. I'm trying to forgive myself. I loved that child like he was my own. I'll never drink, again. I know that.

For Polly, prison "stopped her from making excuses." She stated "I wouldn't accept I was an alcoholic. Now, I can." Polly was most concerned about the well-being of her daughter. She

reported that her daughter visits with her two grandchildren, but she knows her daughter is suffering with her incarceration.

> My daughter is my best friend – always has been. It may be worse for her, That's the worst part. I almost wish they [my family] could forget me until I get out. My daughter is having a rough time right now. We would always shop and bake together.

While incarceration disrupts the normal routine for all of the inmates and their families, Polly and eleven (11) other women I spoke with showed considerable concern for their children's ability to cope with their absence. In Polly's case, her normal routine of frequently being with her daughter and sharing in daily experiences was interrupted; thus, Polly reported being more concerned for her daughter than herself.

Similarly, Evelyn lamented not being able to physically be there to help her children, of whom she was quite proud, during hard times. One day her daughter told her "Mom, you just don't understand. You're not here anymore." Evelyn is 44 years old and has currently served 12 years of a 70-year sentence for murder and attempted murder. Evelyn said "My first alcohol blackout was at 7 – my mother hit me and I couldn't feel it. I knew I would be an alcoholic before I knew what it was."

> Gina: Do you have any contact with your mother now?
>
> Evelyn: My mother quit drinking. We have the best relationship ever now. We've worked on a lot of stuff

While under the influence of alcohol, Evelyn killed one person and attempted to kill another person who had recently beaten her mother. She said she remembered coming out of a bar and then waking up in jail.

Evelyn was sexually abused multiple times as a child and physically abused by boyfriends- one of whom broke several bones in her face. Yet, Evelyn declared "I've survived everything. I have scars all over from abuse and now I'm a recovering alcoholic and drug addict." Evelyn struck me as strong-willed and a true survivor. In turn, she praised her children for their own determination and successes. Her son is an engineer and her daughter is a nurse. I asked her how she feels about being a mother in prison:

> Evelyn: I'm not out there so how can I tell them what they can or can't do. So, I'm more like sharing what I feel. You lose your authority as a mother- makes it hard to swallow. [Prison] strips you of all your power when you come here… You're limited, but can still keep some power with little children… Not when they are older. My daughter had an abortion, when she came here I couldn't hold her. My daughter said if you don't make parole, I'll stop believing in God. I said God has a bigger plan. Maybe I need to be here for somebody in here. I try to make things positive not negative.

Evelyn reported that she was recently given a twenty year deferment[6] by the Parole Board. She was not as concerned with how she would handle twenty more years as she was worried about her children. Evelyn demonstrated the struggles with motherhood behind bars, but whereas she has accepted the terms of her incarceration, her children continue to suffer; thus, she does too.

For Jane, family well-being was a daily source of stress and worry. Jane is serving 15 years in prison for second-degree manslaughter. According to Jane, her abusive husband was drunk, said he was going to shoot somebody, and threatened Jane's family. The two fought over the gun and Jane's husband was shot in the shoulder. He did not want to press charges, but he later died due to complications from the injury. His sister pressed charges and Jane was arrested. Jane said "My kids and mother were furious. I had taken a plea. Mom said I should have gone

[6] A deferment is a stay of parole. It would be 20 years before Evelyn's next parole hearing

to trial and told them about my husband's abuse, but I didn't want to do that to my kids." Jane had served almost two years of her sentence at the time of the interview.

Gina: What do you think about the most?

Jane: I try to look toward the future. Getting out. I'm not sure my Mom will be there or my handicapped daughter. My daughter has grand mal seizures. She is on baby food now. I think about not being there. When I call and get no answer, it scares me. If something happens to my mom, my daughter will die, too. She has only ever been with my mom since my incarceration.

While 25 of the 29 women in my sample were mothers of adult children, Jane was different. Prior to her incarceration, she was the caregiver to her handicapped adult daughter. Currently, her daughter is living with Jane's 84 year-old mother.

Gina: How do you see your life when you get out?

Jane: I hope Mom and my daughter are still here. I'll take care of them. I want to let mom have some rest. My grandson was 10 years old when I was locked up. He'll be 19 when I get out. I miss them, but I hate seeing them. When they leave, it's more depressing. I'm not there to be involved in everything. I miss that. Whether good or bad, I want to be with them. I've always had a close knit family. I pray God keeps them all healthy. Mom still cares for my handicapped daughter. People from church come and help her. She has support, and Mom is a strong woman.

Jane mentioned her concern for the well-being of her daughter and her mother three times during the interview. She told me she was recently denied parole:

Gina: How do you feel about the denial?

Jane: I thought I was going to get out. I didn't want to call my family. They are the ones being punished. I wanted to get out and give my mom some golden years.

Jane's family lives in Texas which makes visitation virtually impossible for her disabled daughter and elderly mother. Instead, she calls, writes, and hopes they will both be there upon her release.

In 2001, an AARP survey revealed that more than one-fifth (22 percent) of people age 45 to 55 provide supportive services to their parents or other older relations. Primary caregivers are most commonly middle-aged women who provide hands-on care, emotional support, and share their homes with their older parents (Dellmann-Jenkins, Blankemeyer, and Pinkard 2000). As the number of adults over age 65 is expected to double in the next 40 years, with the most rapidly growing segment being those aged 85 and older (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1996), the importance of the function that family caregivers provide in caring for an increasing portion of the population that would otherwise be dependent on society becomes clear. Eleven (11) of the women I interviewed mentioned their parents. Eve, a long-termer, did not anticipate leaving prison while her father was still alive. She reported: "I do everything to say life is great in here. I don't want him to worry." Sue was concerned about her mother's health. She said: "My mom had a heart attack. She is in a nursing home. I hope she lives until I get out." In general, the women reported close relationships with their parents and were generally interested in "giving them a break" from having to care for them or their children during their incarceration.

The Abandoned Mother

By its very nature, incarceration challenges the parental role and threatens the mother-child bond. Six (4) of the women I interviewed were preoccupied with strained relationships or worrying about the whereabouts and well-being of their grown children. These women appeared most troubled and ill at ease about being incarcerated and unable to be with their children. I also spoke with women who may have been incarcerated when their children were still young or for various other reasons were not able to effectively raise their children. Two (2) of these women had never had close relationships with their children so contact was nonexistent or very sporadic.

Two (2) of the women I spoke with believed they were close with their children, but felt betrayed or alarmed by the lack of contact during their incarceration. I call the women in this group the *abandoned mother*. The abandoned mother is often overtly worried about the well-being of her children or harbors some resentment for the lack of support. While the mothers may have adjusted to incarceration, they reported some concern and anxiety about their children.

Doris has served two months of a one-year sentence for prescription forgery and her worry and concern for her daughter was a major theme during her interview. She talked frequently about her daughter who she had not seen since her incarceration. This was her first time in prison and her first time in any kind of trouble with the law. Doris was in a wheelchair and dependent on other inmates to move her around on campus. Her daughter and grandchildren were living in her house, but she was not able to call (due to a block on her daughter's phone) or assure herself of their well-being.

Gina: Do you have any contact with your daughter?

Doris: No, I don't know why she doesn't even write.

Gina: Were you close before you came here?

Doris: I thought so. I haven't seen her since my arrest. I know she loved me. It is just not like her to let me come in somewhere and not even write.

Doris described herself as friendly and helpful. Doris was aware of the way others may perceive her after her release because her friends do not understand why she committed her crime or sympathy with her addiction to prescription drugs. While Doris said she had always had a lot of friends, she stated: "I won't have that many when I go home. All of them are very righteous and judgmental. I didn't think about that until I came here."

For Doris, prison life was “pretty much okay,” but she confessed she was concerned with her daughter’s behavior and anxious to be released so she can assure herself of her daughter’s well-being.

Doris expected to be paroled a month after the interview. She was quite concerned about her daughter, but also seemed sad for herself. Doris’ situation was unique in that she assumed she and her daughter were close and expected some support, but, surprisingly, received none. She demonstrates the isolation, albeit sometimes unexpected, experienced by some women during their incarceration.

Likewise May, a 50 year old African American woman anticipated financial and emotional support from her three daughters. Yet, she said that her children had not contacted her or supported her in any way during her incarceration. She felt hurt and betrayed by her loved ones on the outside.

Gina: Would you tell me about your children?

May: My oldest wrote me one time. My baby girl didn’t write at all. My middle child (with whom Mary lived with during last parole leave) sent me my Social Security checks. As far as I’m concerned, they sent me nothing. They don’t write me. I cried about that. I always provided for them. I’m not writing them no more. They never write me back. I’m leaving them. They won’t have to worry about me. They’ll miss me. I babysat, cleaned house- but they left me for dead. I still bought them a lot.

Gina: Will you call them?

May: I shouldn’t have to. I’m their mother. I still love them, but won’t buy them nothing. I mean it. I’m saying it from my heart. I’ve prayed about it. I won’t give them nothing. I can make it another year in here.

May was angry at her daughters, but she was anxious to reunite with her grandchildren. It was not uncommon for the women I spoke with to desire to return to the way things were prior to their incarceration, but to want to be even more involved than before. May stated: “I’m learning

in here. I can help my grandkids with homework. That makes me proud. I couldn't do that before."

Gina: How do you see yourself when you get out?

May: My priority will be my grandkids…. I'm changing. I'm a better person than I was. I'm learning with my schooling to help them. I was a good grandmother then and am now. They knew I was selling drugs… They knew I lied about not being able to play with them. I feel bad about lying to this day. No more drugs for me. I will take them on vacations that I've never been. I want to take them myself.

In general, all the older research participants shared that it was difficult not to be able to spend more time with their grandchildren, but talking about being a grandmother and being with them upon release made them happy.

Gina: What made you feel good before incarceration?

May: Drugs. No pain. I just wanted fast money. I dealt Monday through Friday and on weekends, I used.

Gina: What will replace that feeling for you when you get out?

May: My grandkids. I will be there and more. Bring on the fun. When before I told them to wait. I won't do that any more. I will take them places and be there for them. But I won't give my daughters nothing.

May looked forward to her future despite epitomizing the abandoned mother because of the joys and optimism associated with being a grandmother.

For Mary, suspicion and uncertainty were recurring themes. She was serving five years for possession of a controlled substance. She was classified by prison staff as "SLU." That is, she lived in the mental health support living unit. She seemed very excited and was quite talkative throughout the interview. It appeared to me that Mary had yet to face her demons. I asked her if she would use drugs again upon her release. The following was her reply:

> I can't do drugs – something tragic would have to happen. I'll be in the same environment, but can't go back to same people. All of the town knows me. All of the drug dealers know me. They'll follow me. You get to thinking about it. If you think about doing wrong, you might as well do it.

Mary was very worried about her daughter and she repeatedly discussed her fears and concerns about her. Mary discussed being a mother from prison.

> I think she [my daughter] might be into something. She's smart, but dating a no-good guy. I wrote her a 3 page letter. I don't want her to move too fast. I told her, "He'll use you." My daughter is not looking right. I'm worried. I'm being a mom from here as best I can. My daughter has Power of Attorney. She spent my money. I don't know where it went. I'm scared. She's never been away from me. We've always been together. I don't want her to suffer. I'll tell her not to go wrong, but I'm not there to see her.

While worried about her daughter, Mary also expressed some tough love and impatience:

> I want her to do something – get a good job. I need to take care of myself. I'm tired of supporting her. My daughter is old enough to take care of herself, but I am concerned about my grandkids. I don't want her to do to them what I did to her. I feel like my daughter has been taking advantage of me.

Mary declared that she was "going to try to spend more time with my family. Go places with them. Before, I was just getting high." I grouped Mary in the category of abandoned mother because of her suspicions about her daughter. While they have a reasonably close relationship, the nature of that relationship changed with Mary's incarceration and she no longer seemed to trust her daughter. Mary demonstrates a level of vulnerability; that is, financial dependence, that comes with incarceration, but one which is only problematic if exploited by someone on the outside.

Then there is Stella, a 52 year-old white woman serving three years for robbery, who appeared very sad and visibly depressed. Stella reported that she has been in and out of mental hospitals many times. She was diagnosed as bipolar schizophrenic and has always been on multiple medications. She was emotionally unable to raise her children and gave them up for

adoption long before her incarceration. She remarked that she has always "pushed people who loved me away. I've never been married. I gave kids up to other people because I wanted them to have a good home- I never had one." Stella has attempted suicide multiple times outside of prison. She has recently been in touch with her two oldest children, but the relationship is strained at best. She stated:

> I'm hoping, during clean times, my kids will come around. It won't be strong relationship, but it will be a start. I am older now and so are they- they should be able to understand it better. They are in their thirties now and know more about life than they did in their twenties.

She continued: "the closest I'll be to them is an associate, not even a close friend." Stella believed that her troubles, such as drugs and depression, came with giving up her children. Thus, in a way, she was a self-inflicted abandoned mother as she admitted to always alienating people. Stella declared that she is now tired of being alone.

For Stella, life was lonely, prison life was lonely, but she hoped that somehow she would not be lonely upon release. While abandoned, Stella had not anticipated that her children would visit or support her during her incarceration as she reported to only recently have begun to initiate contact. On the other hand, Doris, May, and Mary expected their children to care about them and show some financial and emotional support during their incarceration, but were saddened and, for some, angry when their children disregarded them.

Conclusion

Previous research has established the strain on young motherhood caused by incarceration, but the experiences of incarcerated mothers of *adult* children and the effects of incarceration on grandparenting have received little attention. While most of my participants lamented the

impacts of their earlier criminal behaviors on their children, their experience of incarceration varied depending on the nature of their *current* mother/child relationship. The nature of the relationship with their children prior to incarceration had a significant influence on the nature of their relationship during incarceration.

I classified my participants in four categories of older mother in prison. The *remorseful mother* was either incarcerated while her children were young or in some other way engaged in deviant behavior while they were growing up. Regardless, the mother felt she had failed to effectively raise her children. Therefore, she now seeks to reconcile with her children as adults. The *contented mother* was generally incarcerated for the first time after her children were grown and had forged a close relationship with them when they were younger. As such, their relationship had endured and she now enjoys financial and/or emotional support from her children during her incarceration. Overall, the contented mother reported being content with her current circumstances because she was assured that her family would be there for her upon her release. The *uneasy* mother worries about the well-being of her children during her incarceration. The mother had typically adjusted to the separation, but her adult children, often still relatively dependent on her, had not. Thus, the uneasy mother became distracted and concerned about her children's well-being during her incarceration. Finally, the *abandoned mother* is surprised and saddened by her children's disregard during her incarceration. The abandoned mother does not have the comfort of knowing her children are waiting for her when she is released, so incarceration generally becomes a lonely and, perhaps scary, experience. Clearly, the experience of parenting older children from behind bars is variable. Incarcerated mothers of adult children do not "do their time" in the same manner as mothers of young children, nor is there a universal experience among the older mothers.

The grandmothers, while sad about not being with their grandchildren, typically discussed grandparenting as something to look forward to upon their release. May, one of the abandoned mothers, had turned her attention to her grandchildren over her children: the role of grandmother still held excitement for her. Research has found that women are more invested in their roles as grandparent than are men (Troll 1983; Brubaker 1990; Aldous 1995). Family appears to gain importance for adults starting at middle age, so grandparents might derive a sense of their life's accomplishment, for the first time, from their grandchildren (Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick 1986).

A word is also in order about the two childless women in my sample. Peggy, a 58 year-old white woman, said she felt alone. "I don't have anybody. I have no children. No one takes care of me." Peggy admitted she was tired of starting over. She stated "I feel like my life is over. I feel so old. I don't want to get old by myself." Very different from Peggy was Elle, a 51 year old African American woman. Elle said she receives financial support from her boyfriend and has an abundance of emotional support from her friends from church. In their individual uniqueness, and in the obvious need for human connection, the experiences of incarceration for women without children may mimic the experiences of women with children. Generally speaking, the women I interviewed remained optimistic about family life on future release.

CHAPTER 7

AGING AND ACCEPTANCE

Whereas Chapter 6 focused on parenting experiences, an ancillary finding emerged from that discussion – that most of the older research participants expressed a critical stance on their behaviors and the effects thereof. That is, they were witness to the effects that their past behaviors had on themselves and their children. This chapter focuses on aging and the influence it seemed to have on various forms of acceptance. The older women I interviewed initiated very little discussion about aging in prison. Many of the women mentioned their age or talked about getting older only when asked a direct question. Several of my prompts directed older participants to consider the influence, if any, age had on their incarceration experience (e.g. Would you talk to me about older and younger inmates?). However, only a few of the women *voluntarily* discussed their age as a causal factor in any change in behavior or perspective. They would more often attribute their reform to adoption or strengthening of religious belief. Fourteen (14) of the women I interviewed mentioned religiosity or spirituality. Anna, who was 53 and in prison for the third time, referred to God twenty-two times. Concerning her regret of previous transgressions involving drug dealing and addiction, Anna remarked "God had purpose." While the majority of my participants, like Anna, were older and had transcended the indiscretions of their youth, some of them hesitated to acknowledge the traditional adage of "the older, the wiser."

After the women had responded to my prompt regarding aging in prison (Would you tell me about getting older in prison?), I inquired of several[7] of them whether they indeed credited their wisdom to getting older. Kay, serving time for a parole violation, stated "the older, the wiser? I don't know. I'm back at 51." Yet, other women I spoke with, particularly long-termers, reported they did consider themselves to be wiser than in their youth. Whereas older participants did not necessarily talk about wisdom, I was nonetheless struck by their methods of coping and surviving behind bars, and the sources of hope they identified to keep going. The women's statements about surviving create a more nuanced and gendered picture of Clemmer's (1940) "prisonization" and related studies.

Difficulties Associated with Physical Health

The older women in this study reported a multitude of ailments such as high blood pressure, diabetes, lupus, and rheumatoid arthritis, to name only a few. For example, Jane, aged 55, stated that she suffered from lupus, deteriorating disks, rheumatoid arthritis, and a knee that 'gives out on her'. She reported "I don't sleep as well. I need more pillows and the mattress is bad." Dalia, is 45 and uses a walker. She listed her medical conditions as rheumatoid arthritis, degenerative disk disease in her back, heel spurs on both feet, heart disease, nerve damage, borderline diabetes and hypertension. She has had multiple hip and back surgeries, and knee replacements. She told me that she is taking medicine for all of these conditions. I asked Dalia how she fares behind prison walls, and she replied:

> I have good days and bad days. Even on bad days I try to get up and do what I can. I have a job here. It makes me feel good about myself. I work in the supply closet. I try to stay busy

[7] I only specifically inquired about this point with five of the women in my sample, as it was an afterthought spurred by their previous responses to other prompts.

> to make time pass. Sometimes, my difficulty depends on the temperature or how long I sit or stand. I have a note[8] for early food and medicine.

Betty, a 43 year-old white woman, said she took "chemo" medications for rheumatoid arthritis and required other medications for an autoimmune disease in order to keep walking. Betty is a long-termer and stated "I have good days and bad." Twelve (12) of the women I interviewed had rheumatoid arthritis. All twelve (12) of these women reported rheumatoid arthritis as a debilitating disease that affected their daily functioning. The physical limitations caused by even minor health conditions or natural deterioration of muscle and organ functioning can affect daily functioning. Several inmates complained that their joints hurt more in colder weather.

Inmates requiring wheelchairs often rely on other inmates to push them around on campus. The help may or may not be forthcoming. Jane, 55, observed: "When the women in wheelchairs want to be pushed to medical, the younger inmates just keep walking." On the other hand, Doris, 62, who used a wheelchair, reported that the younger inmates in her dorm were quick to help her get around campus. Mable, 53, who also required a wheelchair, told me that her disability is her greatest difficulty, saying: "The doctor does not want me to push myself, but I don't want to ask for help. My hand swells when I push myself." All three women in my sample who required the use of a wheelchair reported some difficulty in navigating the prison campus, whether it was related to building access, location of their dorm on a steep hill, or difficulty in securing assistance from other inmates. Physical handicaps and routine daily activities can be a challenge in a setting that has little sympathy for inmates' ailments.

[8] Permission to receive food and medicine early prevents the inmate from having to wait in line.

Lack of Compassion

Inmate perceptions of treatment by staff bears mentioning because in a society which preaches respecting one's elders, my participants were particularly cognizant of being viewed first and foremost as inmates. Eleven (11) of my research participants discussed the notion of respect – what they gave and what they received in regards to prison staff. While I did not ask about prison staff or treatment, my participants commented on the over all lack of compassion for the inmates, particularly for the older women. Clara, 65, said that she refers to guards and prison administrators much younger than she is as "sir" or "ma'am" out of respect for their position of authority. Yet, Clara later mentioned the lack of respect from the officers for the inmates. She said despite her failing health, she was still expected to work and that she knew of one inmate with muscular sclerosis who was fired from her janitorial job because she could not stand up to clean. In another example, Anna, 53, reported a discussion she had overheard between a guard and another inmate, "A guard told one woman, who was 69, that her bunk was on top. She said, 'I can't get up there.' The guard said, 'You should have thought of that when you got charged.' The two most prevalent areas of mistreatment for my research participants were the distribution of medicines and available medical services.

At Pewee Valley, the inmates are required to stand in line to receive their medicines, thus, referred to as the "Medline." Six (6) of my participants complained, unprompted, about the Medline being located outside. Frances, 53, stated,

> It is cold. They give us thin coats. We have to buy toboggans and gloves. The Medline is out in the weather, but the officers have a canopy. They don't care because we're prisoners.

A few of the women reported "doing without" some medications in order to avoid having to stand in line to get them. Mary, 54, does not take pain reliever because her joints hurt more

when it is cold outside, so standing in line does her more harm than good. In general, my participants did not understand why they were not allowed shelter from the elements. Anna said, "You have to stand out in the rain. They write you up if you don't get your medicine. There is room for us inside. Why can't we get inside?" The women often described their experiences of Medline as somewhat degrading. Betty referred to it as "cruel and unusual punishment." Similarly, several of my research participants volunteered discussion about the prison medical services.

Generally, they cited long waits for services and insufficient diagnosis and treatment. In one extreme case, more of a commentary on prison staff rather than medical staff per se, Joy reported a pregnant inmate actually giving birth before receiving any attention from staff. Many of my participants credited what they perceived as inadequate services to a lack of compassion on the part of prison staff. Yet, not all of my participants shared the same disdain and resentment for the available medical services. A few (3) of the inmates were generally pleased with the medical doctor and staff. Doris, in particular, praised them. She said "They have a great medical staff. They take care of all my needs. I have to wait to see them, but good once I get in." I cannot speak with certainty of the two extreme dichotomous opinions regarding prison health care, but during my interviews I gleaned from some of my participants that their health services prior to incarceration were poor or non-existent. Thus, I assume, for them, prison offered services they would not normally receive; they had no real basis for comparison. Overall, my participants required fairly regular medical visits and services – generally familiarizing them with the health care system more than younger inmates as my three (3) younger participants made no specific mention of their experiences with the medical staff. The experience of incarceration not only takes a physical toll on older inmates, but has a psychological effect as well.

Shame of Aging in Prison

Previous research has established that the abusive and traumatic backgrounds of most incarcerated women generally result in serious depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (Farley and Kelly 2000; Marcus-Mendoza and Wright 2003). Suh (2000) found that incarceration exacerbates existing mental illness. In fact, nearly two-thirds of my participants had some mental diagnosis ranging from mild depression to schizophrenia. Yet, I also found there to be what I considered a more profound emotional response among my older participants. As previously mentioned, my participants did not readily initiate any discussion regarding their age, but they would respond to direct questions regarding the same. Thus, I began to realize that their age was actually a source of shame. Frances, 53, who has served 4 years of a 12 year sentence, admitted "I used to be very vain. I'm going through menopause. I've changed physically and mentally. Sometimes I try to pretend I'm not in prison. I never thought I would ever be in prison. I'm sad that I'm doing my old age in here."

At least five (5) of my research participants specifically referred to aging in prison as *embarrassing*.

Gina: Talk to me about aging in prison.

Margaret: I'm ashamed of being here at my age.

Gina: Why?

Margaret: I don't know why I feel that way, but I do…I'll carry the shame for a while.

Feelings of embarrassment and shame are social: they involve the perception of evaluation by external observers. Thus, I assume the women I spoke with perceived themselves to have failed to meet social expectations associated with older adults, including those of the senior being virtuous, wise, and at leisure. Mary, who was in prison for the second time, admitted "Growing

old in jail is demeaning….Old lady in jail. I should know better than to be here." For the most part, the older women I interviewed indicated they had accepted aging as they had accepted their incarceration.

It bears mentioning that my older participants were generally respected by younger inmates *because* of their age. Generally regarded as "old-timers," older inmates are often admired for their ability to "do their time." Misty, a 50 year-old long-termer, was one of several of the older women I spoke with who talked about her respected status among the other inmates. She said: "They call me Miss Misty. That makes me feel good." In this way, age is a source of shame in the eyes of free society, but becomes a source of pride within the prison. Nevertheless, most of my older participants were cognizant that they were not "living up" to social expectations by being an "old-timer" rather than a productive member of society. Thus, as older inmates, they admitted to lamenting wasted years and regretting their past behaviors.

Many of my participants stated they felt ashamed of past actions, generally in the context of their children as discussed in the previous chapter, but several of them also discussed behaviors that they are now embarrassed to recall. Sue, a long-termer, shared: "I'm upset about why I acted like I did when I first got here." Sue admitted she was reckless and engaged in deviant activity upon first entering prison years ago. Other participants recalled their criminal behaviors prior to their incarceration with a fair amount of disdain and embarrassment. Mary, a short-termer, recalled:

> I would ride around in my car and ask for money. I would tell them I needed gas. I made money for 2-3 years. I would get mad, if I didn't get anything. They didn't owe me anything. It's embarrassing to me now.

Mary, in particular, spoke at length about her indiscretions as a professional panhandler to support her drug addiction. On more than one occasion she laughed as she recalled what she

referred to as her “ridiculous behavior.” Mary, like several of my other older participants, had acceptance, but lingering embarrassment regarding her past.

Three Types of Acceptance

For every inmate entering prison, there is a period of adjustment, or what can be referred to as *adaptation* to the new environment. While all inmates go through a similar adaptation, or prisonization, process, not all of them will experience every aspect of it. Rose Giallombardo (1966) and David Ward and Gene Kassebaum (1964) argue in two early studies of homosexuality among female inmates that such behavior was the major mode of adaptation to the prison environment. Other studies reveal pseudo-families as a means of adaptation (Mahan 1984). Adaptation is thought to happen rather quickly as the inmate must immediately “learn the ropes” in order to survive. Acceptance, on the other hand, proved to be a much more difficult hurdle for many of my research participants. Acceptance, like life itself, is a journey which takes time, presumably years, to achieve. For the older women in my sample, acceptance occurred on three levels: acceptance of incarceration, acceptance of responsibility, and acceptance of self. Many of the women I interviewed indicated that while they may not like being in prison, they have *accepted* it. Acceptance should not be considered the same as complacency, contentment, of even a sense of comfort. I define acceptance as the act of resolving oneself to the inability to change one’s current circumstances and the decision to make the most of it. In this section, I explore the nature of acceptance as expressed by my participants.

Acceptance of Incarceration

Most of the women I spoke with had accepted their stay in prison, but the manner or degree of acceptance varied based on sentence length and time served. For the women I spoke with, the key difference was that short-termers have a release date; that is, they know when they are leaving. Polly, 44, must serve at least 3 years of her 15-year sentence for assault (shaking) of her infant step-grandchild before her first parole hearing. She stated: "The hardest thing to have in here is hope of getting out, unless you have an out date." The long-termers had to accept their incarceration and the possibility that they might never be released. The short-termers, on the other hand, accepted prison as a temporary circumstance – presumably a much easier reality to accept. While my younger participants also had accepted their incarceration, the youngest of my participants was 27 years-old. According to the women I spoke with, the inmates who tend to have a more difficult time in dealing with their incarceration are younger still. Thus, I cannot offer more than the accounts given to me by my participants for a comparison between acceptance among older and younger inmates.

Acceptance of incarceration for older short-termers, who entered prison middle aged or older, happened relatively quickly compared to long-termers. All of the long-termers had "grown up" behind bars and mentioned some type of behavioral and emotional transformation from when they first entered prison. Generally, the transformation took many years, in some cases more than 15, to complete, but, in the end, all of the older long-termers had accepted their incarceration. Betty, 43, has served 12 years of a life sentence.

Gina: Is there any difference between you then and now?

Betty: When I came to prison, I was a bitch. I would fight over everything. I just wanted people will respect me. I had to learn to change my attitude. You took everything away from me. I'm not here to be happy about that. But, I have to accept it. That's reality. I thought if I accept it, they win. I changed that (thought).

Eve, 51, has served 7 years of a life sentence. She described her initial period of denial upon first entering prison. "I was real depressed. I went to Medline and took so much medicine that I slept til the next day- I was very withdrawn- I didn't want to have to deal with nothing. I did that for about a year." Eve reported that she "grew up" after four years.

Gina: What do you mean "grew up?"

Eve: I realized if I could do it again, I would do it different. I've been high my whole life. This is the first time I've been clean. After four years, I grew up – see things in a grown up way.

In fact, like Betty and Eve, all of the long-termers I interviewed reported some initial stage of rebellion and denial followed by their current stage of acceptance. Sue, who has served 21 ½ years, said "I'm okay. I'm pretty happy." Generally the moment of acceptance came when the women, long-termers in this instance, experienced a change of mindset, what might even be called an epiphany. At some point they had made a choice: they *chose* to use their "time" in order to improve themselves. A common mantra among the women was "Don't let prison do *you*, you do prison." And so, for whatever reason, the women reported a decision to make the most out of the time they had, such as furthering their education or enrolling in self-help classes. Rose, serving 13 years for manslaughter, commented several times on the opportunities afforded to inmates in prison.

Gina: What is it like here?

Rose: They've got a lot of activity here. It is like a college. Either you learn or you don't learn. I consider myself as learned. I'm further in my mind than I was. You can get a GED and college degree in here.

Nearly all of my older research participants reported participating in prison programs and educational opportunities. Kay, a 52 year old short-termer, has served 15 months. She stated:

"You can better yourself here. I'm working on my GED. There is lots to do here. You either have to apply yourself, or you can do dead time." All eight of the long-termers in my sample had participated in self-help and educational classes. Evelyn, who has served 12 years of a life sentence, offered the best example of taking advantage of prison time for self-improvement.

Gina: Is there any difference between you then and now?

Evelyn: Everyone knew me as "she-devil," now I'm learned. I wanted to have a chance to get back out so people could see me in a different light.

Gina: Why?

Evelyn: The older you get, you begin to face the reality that you are going to die. You get a whole new perspective. Some women sit home for years and do nothing. I'm amazed at myself and what I've done.

Gina: Like what?

Evelyn: I have gotten over 400 certificates, diplomas, and degrees. I did everything you could in here.

Evelyn, like other inmates in my sample and especially long-termers, discussed her quest to stay busy as an essential part of her "new perspective" and reform.

Betty, a long-termer who had recently received a 10 year deferment, stated: "I've taken every self-help class here. I have 10 more years now. What am I going to do with it? Time gets very boring. Health goes down and start mentally losing it. I've seen it." For long-termers, inactivity equaled "dead time" – a scary prospect for women facing long sentences.

Acceptance of Responsibility

Generally, the women I interviewed also reported they had accepted responsibility for their own incarceration. Jane observed "Some inmates get $100 a week. If they don't, they call

someone and chew them out. I say be thankful for what you got. They [your family] didn't put you here." The older inmates judged themselves and others. May said: "I regret selling drugs again- should have left it alone. If I had I wouldn't be here today." Frances observed: "The person on outside no longer exists. I take my responsibility. I hurt a lot of people." Sue, a long-termer, said that accepting blame took time. "Taken all this for me to get in touch with myself. I didn't set out to do it, but I was a part of that crime." A sense of responsibility brought some feelings of shame and guilt. The majority of the older women I spoke with reported that they had accepted responsibility, dealt with their shame and guilt, and eventually learned to like themselves. I note that two (2) of my participants, in effect, denied responsibility for their incarceration. Clara stated that all of the allegations were fictitious and that no crimes were committed. For Clara, the court system had failed to deliver justice. Betty denied any wrongdoing; thus, for her, she has no crime to take responsibility for committing.

Nevertheless, my older participants, while they openly disclosed histories of child abuse, domestic abuse, alcohol and drug addiction, and other external factors that were prevalent at the time their crimes were committed, they still admitted that they did it. Acceptance of responsibility, for most of my participants, was the first step in initiating their reform or change of mindset. Is acceptance of responsibility necessary for reform? Clara and Betty have both been incarceration for over ten (10) years. During that time, Clara has accumulated two Associate degrees, a paralegal diploma, and nine (9) credits towards a Bachelor's degree. Betty has taken various self-help classes and "strengthened her relationship with God." Therefore, I do not view acceptance of responsibility as a necessary predecessor to reform. However, my participants' acceptance of responsibility was remarkable to me because the majority of them would have reason to disavow themselves of responsibility for their crimes due to issues of abuse

and/or drug addiction. Yet, none of my participants claimed to be a victim. For them, everything they had experienced, in some way, made them stronger. Thus, they were able to admit that they committed the crime, had accepted responsibility for their incarceration, and; furthermore, most of them reported they had forgiven themselves.

Acceptance of Self

Older inmates talked about two selves: the self then and the self now. Long-termers frequently talked about their behaviors as young inmates first entering prison. Misty, who has served 23 years of a life sentence, recalled: "When I first came in, I was still involved in drugs….I was bitter, because of everyone I hurt… Anything illegal, I was involved in – right there in the middle of it." But Misty continued: "A lot goes on in prison. I've changed, gotten older, getting more spiritual. I want change; I want something different for my family." Elle, a 51 year old long-termer, recalled:

> I used to be so angry. Look at me wrong, I'd take your head off. The bastard I was with made me an evil person. If you go after me, I'm going to get you back. If God intended for any of us to be abused, man would be born with a club and you born as punching bag. No one should be in that kind of situation. After all that abuse, he made me become an abuser. I became over-defensive. I regretted that.

Today, Elle said she smiles at everybody and cooks for the "girls" in her dorm. Long-termers said that age and maturity have transformed them from who they were "then" to who they are now.

Almost all of the older inmates reported that they liked themselves and, for many, it was for the first time. Kay said: "I've worked on myself more this time than I ever have. I love myself today and who I can be. I've never done that before. I always thought I wasn't worth it." Self-discovery is a process through which the inmates learned to accept themselves. In other words,

age was important because it was sometimes necessary to survive the bad and come out on the other side in order to truly appreciate your own strength and sense of self. June, a short-termer who almost died from the horrific abuse by her ex-husband, recalled what her mother, who had survived breast cancer, had once told her: “We are survivors. We are made of strong stuff and you never forget that.” She added “I will survive.” Mable, another short-termer, found her self confidence during her incarceration. She stated “I’m a lot stronger. I discovered strength I didn’t know I had – I feel like I can go back out in society and make decisions I never could before. I’ve learned things here… I like myself now. I didn’t always.” While all of my older participants reported liking themselves, none of my younger participants declared the same. At the same time, they did not confess to not liking themselves, but it was my impression that it was something they were still working on at the time. Older inmates are privy to hindsight, foresight, and experience; thus, they are capable of achieving acceptance on several levels.

The Young According to the Old

Incarceration is forced interaction. Consequently, one’s prison experience is affected, in one way or another, by other inmates. For the older women in this study, the prison experience was affected by their relationship with younger inmates. Two behavioral habits were consistent among all of the older inmates in the study. First, older inmates avoided the dayroom because of the noise, drama, and fighting of the rebellious younger inmates, preferring the comparative quiet and solitude of their own rooms. Second, they reported not associating or “hanging out” with the immature and troublesome young inmates, opting instead to be alone or seek company with other inmates their age or, on occasion, with the sensible younger inmates who may ask them for advice.

Some younger inmates were recognized for showing respect to the older inmates and even voluntarily assisting the women in wheelchairs. Doris was a 62 year-old short-termer who suffered from several physical ailments. She stated: "Where I'm living those girls are great. I didn't feel good yesterday- all of them asked if I needed anything." Mary, a repeat offender, observed "Girls here respect you for being older. Call me Miss Mary. That makes me feel good." On the other hand, Clara, a long-termer, considered younger inmates to be "crooked as hell and getting worse." Perspective, whether one is in prison or in free society, comes with age, even to the extent of seeing a little of yourself in the behavior of others. Similar to an elderly lady shaking her fist and saying "those darn kids," older inmates are in a position, albeit involuntary, to observe the repeated mistakes and rare triumphs of the younger generation. What follows are the accounts of what they see.

According to my older research participants, younger inmates who are commonly serving short sentences do not take incarceration seriously and typically receive more than adequate financial support from their family during their term. Carol stated: "They don't take it seriously. It is like a vacation – let them out and 6 months or 6 weeks later they're back." The problem, according to Christy, is that "young girls are getting $100 per month and spending it all while others are making state pay – $8 per month." She mused: "The young aren't learning hardships."

Many of my participants were angered by observing the younger inmates choose drugs over their children because they are aware of the consequences over time. Evelyn, a long-termer observed: "The young ones want to make contraband headbands, but what about a blanket for your baby or mother?" Dalia stated: "The young have a hard life, but we all do. They would rather write male inmates than family. I don't understand that. It makes me angry, as a matter of

fact." Older inmates admitted that they would relish the chance at freedom, and see younger inmates throwing that chance away again and again. Stella reported:

> In here ain't nothing to them. They think it is a joke. Get out and do the same shit all over again. I got a chance to get out – that's it- I'm not looking to come back.

Stella continued:

> [They] act like it's nothing. I don't understand it. They act like their shit don't stink. They say they'll do the same stuff again. You'd never see me again.

The younger inmates are generally regarded as the children of the inmate population. They are "babies having babies." Older inmates, especially long-termers, are particularly sensitive to and often irritated by their presence. My participants believed that younger inmates did not care or, perhaps, they were too young to care. Frances observed:

> Older inmates show respect to other inmates and staff. They follow rules. Just try to do their time. Young girls don't wear uniforms correctly. No respect for officers or elders. They just don't care. "I'm just here for this time. You're a lifer. You can go to hell." Officers know young ones are out of line when they say things like this.

Dalia remarked:

> They think this is a game….You shouldn't do that. They want you to be productive in here. Young ones don't want to be. They are very disrespectful, rude, and angry.

Whereas the older research participants said that younger inmates frequently ask family members for money and also write to men on the outside – "tricks" – and ask for money, these older women said that they were generally less concerned about money. They had learned to stretch their state pay from their prison job and accepted state-issued shoes and other paid-for amenities. Jane reported, "Young ones want name brand names. A lot of them have not grown up. I had to take care of my kids. They think everyone should take care of them." Kay observed: "A lot of younger ones have to have name brand shoes -- $60/$70 shoes – have to have best of the best. But in prison, who's going to see your shoes?" With reportedly few exceptions, older inmates

described their younger counterparts as materialistic and self-centered. They reported that younger inmates formed close relationships with other inmates in order to gain material items, such as food and clothing. Dalia reported that she had to learn to not be as trusting, particularly with younger inmates. "I'm family-oriented. Sometimes I get hurt here. I believe in friendship. Inmates are very manipulative. My roommate – saw her as my child. She stole my clothes when she left (to go to another prison). It hurt. I cried." Jane said "Young inmates only think about themselves and taking care of their woman or latch on to someone who will take care of them." Thus, lesbian relationships were said to be a playground for many of the younger inmates. Margaret, who reported being a lesbian for a long time, stated "To most of the girls it's a game. Some kind of emotional game they play." Younger inmates were accused of using other inmates for financial support and simply as a way to pass the time. Dalia, 45, observed:

> They want attention and love. It is not real love. They do it to get what they want - might have 2 percent gay on the street - rest have never been with a woman before, but do in here.

In spite of these negative evaluations of the young inmates, with the exception of one older long-termer, the older inmates in this study reported that they had had no major altercations with younger inmates. For the most part, older inmates reported ignoring the behaviors of the younger inmates. They would only get involved if the behaviors became overtly disrespectful. Jane recalled an incident when two younger inmates were "flaunting" their relationship. "I've been called a rat before – two women in the bathroom where everyone could see and I told – I found it disrespectful to me."

Thus, on a day-to-day basis, younger and older inmates are able to live together in reasonable harmony. According to my research participants, age and maturity provide older inmates with some level of implicit hierarchal authority. While not all of the younger inmates acknowledge or

respect this authority, the older inmates generally keep the peace. All of the older women I interviewed reported that older inmates support each other and act as a cohesive group. Betty, a long-termer, stated "Long-timers won't put up with the young inmates…Young ones think they can throw us over, but they learn fast." Clara, another long-termer who had served 18 years of a life sentence, declared:

> Before, if an officer said something to the girls, they would stop what they were doing. Now, they rebel. Why rebel? That's a big question… We're getting a crosscut of society. Much more crooked and rebellious. More self-centered. They don't care. We don't have law and order. Too much turnover. [They all] treat me the same. They know I won't take it. I tell on them in front of someone else. I tell them if I'm reporting it, don't like it, but I'm not sneaky.

Older inmates reportedly spend much of their time alone. When they do socialize, older inmates generally reported seeking companions close to their own age or length of sentence.

Relationships Among Older Inmates

While the older inmates frequently reported spending time in their rooms and keeping to themselves, it was not unusual for them to also mention significant relationships with other inmates their own age. While some of my participants were homosexual, the women who discussed their relationships with other women reportedly sought a deep emotional connection with another inmate. Several of the older inmates who reported engaging in these relationships were gay or bisexual prior to their incarceration. Therefore, their behaviors were generally a continuation of their lives in free society. Older inmates who did not report participating in lesbian relationships were by and large very understanding and accepting of those who did. Furthermore, all of my older participants mentioned relationships involving prison moms and prison daughters, whether or not they ever participated in these relationships themselves. Due to the caring and nurturing nature of these relationships, I will explore them in greater detail in the

next chapter dealing with generativity. While not all older inmates engaged in these relationships, they were very important to those who did. Therefore, this section will briefly explore the nature of those relationships among older inmates.

I return to the previous discussion regarding younger inmates because my participants appeared particularly bothered or angered by the carelessness with which younger inmates treated other women's emotions. All of the older lesbian inmates harbored some disdain for younger inmates whom they referred to as "gay for the stay." Margaret stated "I'm a lesbian- have been for a long time. If I do get with somebody- I keep it respectful- not for sex. I tell them (younger inmates) that they make us 'fucking faggots' look bad." In fact, all of the older women who took part in lesbian relationships specified that their relationships were based on companionship and not sex. In part, the older inmates were deterred from more intimate contact by current prison regulations. Many of the older inmates, particularly long-termers, had "honors," which entitled them to a private room and access to a stove for cooking. In order to keep their honors they had to maintain "good behavior": sexual contact with another inmate would result in the loss of their honor privileges. Other inmates reported that all they desired was to have someone with whom they could talk and share a close bond. It was not uncommon for older inmates to seek a close companion.

Betty, serving a life sentence, said:

> I have a girlfriend. Everybody thinks it's all about sex. We need affection, companionship. A lonely woman is like a scorned woman. We're made to be loved. I love men, but in here, it's another world – whole new world. Gotta do what I gotta do for me. They should let us do what we want. Lots of people hold their girlfriend's hand. There's nothing nasty about it. It's not hurting nobody. What is the sense in hiding it?

Eve, another long-termer, stated:

> As much time as I have- I seek a companion, but not sexually. I haven't found that companion.

While older inmates estimated homosexual activity to be quite high (80 percent or higher), their estimates of "true" lesbian relationships were very low (mostly 2 to 5 percent). The majority of the lesbian relationships were viewed as manipulative, either for attention or material gain, and simply as a way to pass the time for many younger inmates. Several long-termers admitted to "hustlin'," or engaging in relationships for material gain, within prison, when they were younger, but reported that they did not do it anymore. Again, like other wild behaviors of their youth, older women had aged out of what they now consider to be wrongful behavior. They often cited that they were tired of "the game," which is primarily played by the younger women, and are now more content with being by themselves. Misty, a long-termer, admitted:

> My relationships were mostly based on companionship… I used to write pen pals or get girlfriends – Oriental, Black – whatever I wanted, I got it, but everything was for a game. It made me feel good about myself. I thought it made me look good. People said, "Misty takes care of her women." Then, I woke up and thought, "This game is all wrong." I've been more content ever since.

Misty reported that she realized her relationships were for show and not about any real emotions. She no longer participates in homosexual relationships and claimed to much be happier. Whereas I detected no homophobia, older women framed sexual relationships in prison as sites of manipulation and duplicity.

The women also sought out platonic relationships with fellow inmates. While earlier research outlined complex interrelations of moms, dads, daughters, cousins, aunts, and more (Giallambardo 1966), the older women at Pewee Valley referred only to prison moms, daughters, and sisters; all of these were terms for individuals sharing closeness and loyalty. The term "friend" was used by some of my participants to describe another inmate, but close friends were

also called “sisters.” Evelyn, a long-termer said “I have two true friends - long-termers - two lifers.”

Older inmates, particularly long-termers, reported supporting each other as a family unit. Kay observed “All older inmates respect each other.” Betty said: “Long-timers stick together. This is all we have. You become a family in here. My prison “sister” is about to leave and I cry every day about it. We take care of each other.”

The majority of the older inmates found comfort in talking to other inmates. Indeed, some women simply found comfort in talking to anyone, as they spoke of the interview as therapeutic.

Older Inmates Cope with Incarceration

Long-termers, in particular, reported periods of ups and downs. Several of the long-termers doubted they would ever leave prison. The older women I interviewed reported that they had to occasionally take their minds off of the unknown, such as if and when they would leave, in order to survive day to day. The difference between older inmates and their younger counterparts is clearly evident in the way the two groups handle the ‘downs’. Frances said “I have 6 years to go, but I see I’m fortunate that that is all I have. I have a date I’m leaving. Lifers are going to die in here.” Elle stated: “I’ve learned someone is a little worse off than I am. Some people say I’m mean, (younger inmates) will be bellyaching about 4 months. I’ll say ‘suck it up – look at these doing 20 years’.”

Polly described a long-termer who recently received a twenty year deferment, time that must be served before the inmate is eligible for another parole hearing, from the Parole Board:

> [She] has gone through every program offered, but she had a violent crime, and she really thought she might have a chance. [After deferment] she was really down for a few days, but accepted it. She could handle it, but it was harder on her family.

The prison literature led me to wonder about coping among this unique population. Scholars before me have generally focused on younger inmates and their responses to the loneliness and the deprivations of prison life – namely the formation of pseudo-families and the engagement in homosexual relationships (Mahan 1984; Morris 1987). While my participants reported relating to other inmates either as associates, friends, sisters, or intimate companions; these relationships were not a constant. The two most prevalent and dependable coping mechanisms were religion and their self.

Having Faith

Over half of my participants attributed their ability to cope with incarceration to God and their faith. Religion is not typically mentioned as a way of coping in studies focusing on younger inmates (Owen 1998; Girshick 1999). Likewise, my three younger participants did not mention ideologies of faith or comfort obtained from religious beliefs. Evelyn, who was recently given a 20-year deferment by the parole board, said of getting older in prison:

> (It's) just one of them things. I will be 60 years old before I can be paroled. I'm getting old- going to die- that goes through my mind, but God is with me. I have to have faith. I stay positive and say I'm going to get out even if I'm in a wheelchair or on oxygen.

The women also typically credited God with their reform. Elle stated:

> Over the years, I have asked God to change me. He brought me change. When I rewind my life, I look at all the stupid things. It is only by grace of God that I didn't die or kill someone else. When a lot of people don't like you because of who you became, you have to humble yourself.

In many ways, my participants reported finding the most comfort in their faith. They regarded religion as something that was constant in their lives, thus God would be with them during the duration of their incarceration.

Time for Self

Another obvious constant for my participants was themselves. The day to day routine for any given participant was centered around *her* work assignment and *her* free time; thus, asserting *her* independence – as much as is allowed in a total institution. The women I spoke with commonly reported trying to stay busy, in order to deal with their incarceration. For many of my older participants, exercising was a common way to fill their free time. Rose, or "Granny," stated "If you keep exercising and eating proper and doing what they tell you, you won't age as fast. But, if you sit around and worry a lot about being in prison, you will age faster." Pewee Valley offers a recreation program specifically for women at least 42 years of age – generally designed with the needs and limitations of this age group in mind. While two of the women in my sample mentioned participating in that particular program, at least half reported getting regular exercise on their own. Sue stated: "I exercise a lot. I encourage other older women to exercise. I want to live to walk out of here." Stella is a 52 year old short-termer who takes care of herself in this way:

Gina: Tell me about life for you here.

Stella: At 52, I'm having a hard time anyway. Now just passing days until I get out of here. I exercise: stair stepping, treadmill, weights- try to keep sugar down."

Stella's attempts to manage diabetes with exercise raised a point about the prison diet. I wondered if prison fare was a problem. A few of the women I interviewed mentioned specific dietary needs that were hard to accommodate in prison. For example, Jane, 55, had an iron deficiency, but she was able to buy beans from the commissary to supplement meals in the

cafeteria. The women did not typically complain about the food that was available and seemed to be able to adapt their diet accordingly.

All of the older women reported trying to stay busy in order to help pass the time. Elle, a 51 year-old serving time for manslaughter, stated:

> I use time constructively. I take my mind out of this place. My mind is in the street. I'm in my own zone. I made a book – what I wanted my life to be. What I wanted surrounding me. It had a house and other things. I'm in the middle of it. On my bulletin board, I have a collage with a variety of things. Picture of bedroom suite, sexy, fine men, cans of food. Nice things in life. I always want to be surrounded by people.

Frances, a 53 year-old first-timer, reported "Sometimes I try to pretend I'm not in prison." My participants also reported spending a significant amount of time by themselves[9]. Clara, who has served 18 years of a life sentence, said "I sit at a cold table in the lunchroom, so no one will sit with me." Sally said "I don't go out in dayroom. I stay hibernated in my room. People try to get me out of there. They laugh. I can't understand why they are so happy." Indeed, for many of my participants, being alone was preferable to the noise of other inmates and often gave them time to do things which they enjoyed, such as reading or crocheting.

Conclusion

For my participants, the experience of incarceration was heavily influenced by health issues that coincided with getting older, as well as their ability to accept aspects of their lives that they might have denied when they were younger. The women in my sample reported numerous physical ailments often affecting their daily routine and entailing special needs – which they

[9] As previous mentioned, several of my participants had private rooms. The rest of the women reported having good "roommates" meaning they were able to find solitude in their room.

accepted as part of the natural process of aging. The psychological effect of being an older prison inmate included, for some, shame and embarrassment.

Yet, all of my older research participants reported what I term three levels of acceptance. They learned to accept: (1) their incarceration, (2) responsibility for their crime, and (3) themselves. Acceptance seemed to be a journey aided by age and maturity. Acceptance of incarceration eased the passing of time and often led to peace of mind. Acceptance of responsibility, perhaps the first step to achieving generativity, was fairly universal, remarkable due to the fact that many of their lives were characterized by victimization more than by offending behavior. Finally, acceptance of self, which may be the most difficult kind of acceptance, allowed many of the women to feel good about themselves for the first time.

Acceptance of self was the only type of acceptance not shared by my younger participants. Whereas, my older participants admitted to liking themselves – many for the first time in their lives – such was not the case for the three (3) participants under age forty (40). Generally, acceptance of self comes with being able to forgive oneself for past mistakes, as such, my younger participants had not yet been able to do so. Acceptance on any or all levels influences the ability to navigate the prison environment and deal with the realities of incarceration.

CHAPTER 8

GENERATIVITY IN PRISON

Generative adults hope that the lives of their children and the children of others will be good and will have some meaning and value.[10] They seek to care for and positively contribute to society and the people they leave behind. The model of generativity presented by Erik Erikson (1950) and elaborated upon by Dan McAdams and Ed de St. Aubin (1992) assumes an individual wants to care for future generations because they were cared for by others. I contend that the theory of generativity assumes that an individual lives in free society. By general definition, an inmate has been convicted of a crime against society; inmates are furthermore thought of as moral transgressors. The notion of generative desires and behaviors among a population of transgressors who have been ostracized by free society would seem an anomaly. However, all 27 of the older women in my study expressed generative thoughts, desires, or reported engaging in generative behaviors. The three (3) younger participants did not initiate discussion of generative thoughts and behaviors. Furthermore, when I prompted them with more generative questions, they responded with not to think about their legacy or what they will leave behind. While one (1) stated that she talked to younger inmates, she also admitted that she generally tried to avoid it. In this chapter I reveal what the older women said that pertained to generativity. First, I expound upon the concept of generativity.

Erikson introduced the concept of generativity over fifty years ago. Since that time, researchers have expanded on and departed from certain of his ideas (e.g., Browning 1975, Kotre 1984, McAdams 1985, McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992). Generativity has evolved to

[10] Value is a multifaceted term whose meaning is always socially determined. I define it as having either intrinsic worth or achieving some cultural ideal – depending on the context in which it is used.

encompass a number of principles and behaviors, such as teaching, mentoring, and encouraging the next generation. Due to the nature of incarceration and the "typical" characteristics of the women who are housed there, it would seem likely that inmates do not express generativity in the same manner or to the same degree as adults outside of prison. For the purpose of this study, I strip the definition of generativity down to the most basic elements first outlined by Erikson (1950). Erikson defined generativity as a commitment to the larger society and its continuation and/or improvement through the next generation (1950). Erikson considered teaching, writing, invention, the arts and sciences, social activism, and generally contributing to the welfare of future generations, all to comprise generativity. Generative adults want to feel needed and ponder the legacy they will leave behind. While Erikson believed the bearing and raising children show concern for the type of legacy that one will leave behind. While Erikson believed the bearing and raising of children were keys to becoming a generative adult – in part due to easy access to the next generation through one's own children - he later conceded that generativity was possible even for those who do not rear children. With these ideas in mind, I identified some elements of generativity in virtually all of my participants.

A word on methods is in order. The study was exploratory and inductive, and as such my interviewing method did not follow Erikson's or any other theoretical model. The topic of generativity was of great, early interest to me, yet I allowed the research participants to initiate mention of desires and behaviors related to generativity. Only later in each interview, if necessary, I provided prompts to encourage them to elaborate on generativity. Twenty-one (21) of my older participants initiated some aspect of generativity; yet, I prompted all of them (29) with more specific questions related to generativity, such as regarding their legacy, how they will be remember, and feelings of responsibility. I prompted them with questions about their legacy

and how they will be remembered. Below is an example taken from my interview with Doris, a 62 year-old long-termer.

> Gina: How do you see yourself when you get out?
>
> Doris: I'd like to be able to talk to younger girls about going down the road I've gone. I want to talk about life experiences and prison.
>
> Gina: Do you feel a responsibility to help others?
>
> Doris: Yes. I didn't go through this for nothing.

There, in response to a rather general question, Doris mentioned her desire to lecture younger girls about the consequences of foolish behavior – a desire I regard as generative. I followed the general prompt with a more generativity-oriented question regarding responsibility, in an attempt to probe her about why she felt the way she did. As in my two previous findings chapters, the words and emotions gleaned from my participants helped me to finalize the organization of this chapter. The sections reflect topics deemed important by the women in my sample.

One research question in particular seemed to stimulate talk of generativity. Early on I asked my participants whether they considered themselves to be victims or offenders. But after one woman asserted that she was a "survivor," I changed the question to whether they considered themselves to be victims, survivors, or offenders. The majority of the women I spoke with quite zealously declared they were survivors. My research participants had survived relational abuse, alcohol and drug addiction, and other hardships. The attributes they reportedly tried to instill in younger inmates were influenced by their life experiences and stories of survival.

The virtues of the generative inmate are, then, likely to be skills and tools necessary for survival – both of prison life and life hardships. Frances, a short-termer, declared "I feel like I should pass on what I know. I survived my abusive relationship. I learned a lot. I survived

this." The women I spoke with most commonly emphasized the virtuous qualities of patience, hope, and love.

Within the confines of prison, opportunities to directly give back to free society were (and generally are) extremely limited, but opportunities to do give to other inmates are comparatively abundant. The women in my sample desired to help others and many of them reported doing so on a daily basis. Sharing food and advising younger inmates were the two most common examples for helping others. Women shared food and other supplies with inmates who had less. They also reported advising, tutoring, and sharing their wisdom with the younger inmates – often giving the older women a sense of being needed. All of the older participants reported encouraging younger inmates to make better choices. Sometimes the women were "prison moms" to several younger inmates, taking on an explicit and steady maternal role by supporting and looking after their prison daughters. Moreover, upon their release, the women expressed desires to continue to help others, particularly youth, and to "repay" society for what they had done. While prison regulations and programming may either encourage or inhibit generativity, the women seemed steadfast in their efforts of benevolence. Inmates also talked about how they thought they will be remembered and what, if any, legacy they would leave behind. This chapter is about generative behaviors among a group of people whom we generally least expect to care for others.

Younger Inmates as the Future Generation

All of the older women in my sample reported talking to, listening to, and advising younger inmates to varying degrees. Of course, such interaction does not make all of the women generative. In fact, sporadic or frequent conversations may simply be the product of forced

interaction or boredom and may not contain any generative substance at all. However, when generativity does occur, both participants and general society stand to benefit.

The wish to help younger inmates was generally expressed in terms of giving to others what they had not had. This pattern leads me to revisit the assumption that an individual wants to care for future generations because they were cared for by others. Amid the many stories of abuse, neglect, and abandonment, I could not reconcile this assumption with the experiences of the older women in my sample. I suggest that generative *inmates* want to care for others, namely younger inmates – their most readily accessible members of future generations – because they themselves were *not* cared for by others. The attitude and reckless behaviors of the younger inmates reminded the older women I spoke with of themselves as young adults. For example, Mary, 54, short-termer, recalled her lack of guidance as an adolescent:

> When my mom died, my dad didn't tell me nothing – no advice. My sister didn't tell me nothing. I haven't been around anybody to teach me about stuff – to give me direction. I think he (my father) knew about me using drugs, but never said anything.

Similarly, Elle, a (age) long-termer, lamented never having what she referred to as a "strong family." She stated: "I never had strong family support to tell me I could do things." Like several other research participants, Elle reported a lack of encouragement as a youth. Since the younger inmates act in ways that my older participants associate with their own youth, the older women surmise that the younger inmates have also lacked care and encouragement.

By caring for others, generative adults in free society continue a pattern set by example by those who cared for them. The women I spoke with, on the other hand, lacked examples of generativity, but recognized their importance. Anna, 53, observed: "A lot of these girls don't have mothers or family. Growing older is hard. They need someone to say 'I want you to be somebody'." Betty, a 43-year old long-termer, had a similar feeling:

> My God provides for me and tells me what to tell these kids. I've gotten kids in church and turning their life around and in college. I've pushed them, because nobody pushed me.

For my research participants, the desire to care for and encourage younger inmates does not continue a positive pattern, but is an attempt to correct a negative one. In other words, the older women I spoke with recognized the consequences of their not receiving care and encouragement from others and sought to provide both of these things to younger inmates in an attempt to prevent them from continuing down the same path. Thus, motivations for generativity among the older women in my sample was notably different than that which is assumed for generative adults in free society. Next, I explore the behavioral expression of generative desires among the older women inmates and their ways of fulfilling such desires, in relative order of the frequency with which my research participants reported these.

Listening, Advising and Mentoring

While my research participants complained about the attitudes and behaviors of their younger prison mates, none of them reported denying the latter of an attentive audience when they wanted to talk. In fact, listening to the troubles of and offering advice to the more youthful offenders appeared to be one of the greatest services older women provided. Mary was a short-termer serving time for a drug offense.

> Gina: What is your greatest contribution?
>
> Mary: Talking to girls in here. I ask them, "What are you going to do?" One girl is trying to be different. I asked her, "What are you going to do? Going to go back to drug using again? Why don't you think about doing something different? She said she don't want to do drugs, so maybe she will go in a different direction.

The women I interviewed commonly reported, without prompting, that they regularly advised younger inmates, particularly in regards to taking care of children. The older women had either raised their children or lost the opportunity to do so due to drugs or incarceration. Several women reported being disheartened at the sight of so many young mothers in prison. While they were admittedly frustrated by the misplaced priorities and the all too familiar behaviors of the younger inmates – whom several called "babies raising babies" - they also felt a high level of compassion for them as well. Stella, who had given her three (3) children up for adoption, declared: "I want them to wake up and see what they have and how they keep screwing their lives up."

The women I spoke with were able to advise younger inmates with some degree of learned authority because they had behaved in similar ways when they were younger. Sue, a long-termer said "I know how I was, so I understand. I let them know that I truly understand." For many of my participants, the younger inmates triggered an experience of déjà vu. Thwarting younger inmates from the same fate was an important goal for Kay, a 52 year-old with a 14 year sentence for manufacturing meth:

> You see yourself in them and I say, "You know what – do you want to be 52 in prison for 14 years? 'Cause if you keep going, you will be." They say, "I'm not." I say, "Yeah you will, if you don't change." That's what I tell younger girls.

The exchange between older and younger inmates was viewed as mutually beneficial. The women I interviewed reported sharing their experiences with others helped them to learn about themselves and to forgive their own past mistakes. Margaret was thankful for the opportunities to share her experiences:

> Gina: Would you talk to me about your relationship with younger inmates?
>
> Margaret: How I see it – when they come to me. They are a different generation, but

> I understand because I was in a rebellious generation. I give advice about what I've done, what I wish I'd done. I don't sugar coat it. I don't act like it (prison) is a big party. But when I was younger, I thought it. They come to me because I don't sugar coat it…Just talking in here, I uncover things about me, too. We both benefit.

Mable reported that her primary goal was to convince younger inmates to take care of their children before it was too late:

> I talk to them about their children as a priority. Nothing is more precious than children. Yet, drugs took over and now they must face the consequences. I see so many who say they'll get children back, but then they're back here. They leave on parole and come back for a dirty urine test, so they're still putting drugs before kids. It is hard to tell them now that they'll regret it.

Older inmates seemed to have a difficult task in warning younger inmates about future consequences: the younger women were apt to ignore the warnings. Yet, the women I interviewed reported they continued to try. Stella was a short-termer, but also a repeat offender.

> All of us try to listen. A lot of us in here – we weren't bad people. For a lot of the older ones, this is their first time being in trouble, but we can still relate to the younger ones. They are younger and starting to get in trouble. The older ones, a lot of us raised kids, some of us didn't. We know how it was for us. Some younger ones listen. Some are hard assed and not going to listen. They are going nowhere, except in and out these doors. I've seen them leave and come back within 6 months to serve time out or with new charges.

Certainly, generative adults on the outside must contend with experience-based cautionary tales and advice falling on deaf ears. Yet, generative inmates have considerably more trouble due to their audience of rebels and misbehaviors. According to Misty, a long-termer: "They [younger inmates] listen, but go out and do the same thing. Selling bodies, doing drugs – takes a piece of you after a while." Many of the younger inmates do not listen, but for the women I spoke with, just saving one person from returning to prison made their effort worthwhile. Frances, a 53 year-old short-termer, discussed her motivation for talking to the younger inmates.

> If I could help one person, that would be worth it. Life is an experience. If you don't learn from it, then it is lost.

While generative inmates continue to encourage younger inmates to abandon their prior lifestyle, they realize that, like themselves at a younger age, many of the younger inmates do not know how to do anything different.

Peggy, a short-termer, believed that patience and acceptance were keys to easing the anger and frustration often associated with incarceration for younger inmates. She observed: "[My experience] is a gift. It can make life so much better, if they could accept it…One thing you learn in here is patience. You aren't going anywhere." Evelyn, a long-termer, said "They have trouble dealing with the outside. I tell them they have to do time in here or outside. You can't do both." Over half of the women I spoke with mentioned, to some degree, the importance of acquiring patience and acceptance for prison survival – something the older women had learned and the younger women had not. For example, Peggy observed:

> All these young girls, they want fight. Get upset when no one answers when they call. I try to give them advice. I can sit there. I have acceptance. If I could just get them to have acceptance, it would be easier to do this time. I tell them time is a healing agent. I've accepted it calmly. Take each day as it comes. I have my goals. I lived through it.

The older women had acquired patience over the course of many years. They reported trying to impart their "patience is a virtue" mentality to a not-so-captive audience of younger women who struggled to acknowledge such experienced wisdom just as they struggled to acknowledge hope for the future. Misty, a long-termer, observed a pattern of learned helplessness among the younger inmates. She stated "I talk to inmates all the time. You'd be surprised the number that want better, but don't know things." Twenty-four (24) of the women I spoke with reported that they tried to inspire hope by setting an example of survival and prodding younger inmates to

"straighten up" and not come back to prison. Elle, a long-termer, said that she was well liked by other inmates and postulated that it was partly because she was honest.

Gina: What do you tell the younger inmates?

Elle: That I made it and they can make it, too. I'm grateful if I can reach anybody. Maybe, they will help someone else. I've learned someone is a little worse off than I am. Young girls will be bellyaching about 4 months. I'll say suck it up and look at those doing 20 years. You aren't really doing time. You're going to cry for 6 months when you were prostituting and doing drugs. You weren't crying then. They actually thank me. I make sense to them.

The older inmates seemed to want to create hope in younger inmates regardless of whether or not they held any for themselves or not. Peggy, a short-termer, was self-deprecating in her talk with younger inmates: "I say I'm 52. I got nothing. I don't care about nothing. It shouldn't be that way." Peggy and other women that I interviewed reported trying to prevent younger inmates from coming back by giving them some hope for their future. Katherine, a short-termer, said "When they leave, I say remember here and don't come back."

Stella gave her children up for adoption, so that the failure of the younger inmates to nurture their children was particularly frustrating. She stated "Their babies can't see everything, but when they grow up, they're either going to love or hate you. Most have family taking care of their kids. For some the state has them, but they are having other babies to make up for the ones taken away. But doing the same thing (drugs). I say they gotta wake up. Only you can change." The majority of the women in my sample reported talking to younger inmates about taking care of their children and "doing the right thing." Raising children is an area of which the older inmates knew much about. They had either successfully raised their children or they regretted their mistakes which prevented them from doing so. For Elle, nothing was more important than children.

> One girl left here. She's 18 now. I know she's drugging again. She has 4 kids, but lost 3 to the state. I get angry. God has given you another chance to be with your child and you're out there doing drugs. Those are innocent children. I can't stand the thought that you let something happen to babies. It tears my heart out. I wasn't blessed to have babies. I always just loved on other people's.

Elle continued:

> I tell girls, "Do I ever hear you say, first, when get out, I'll take my babies shopping or to the movies?" I just hear, "go to a motel with my man." Baby should be your first priority. Girls, nowadays, choose a man or drugs over their own child.

Most of the women I spoke with held a "do what I say not what I did" attitude in regards to child rearing. They reported trying to impress upon the younger inmates the importance of being with your children because many of the older women in my sample are now left to deal with the consequences. Anna observed: "Women are actually doping and giving up kids. That's crazy. We're losing our own kids to this." The older women stated they did not want either the children of the younger inmates or the inmates to suffer as they have.

In some respects, older women within the prison were viewed as matriarchs – a responsibility which they took seriously. Generative inmates pass on the virtues and lessons they have learned, albeit slightly different than those of generative adults in free society, they are nevertheless committed to the continuation and betterment of society. The bestowment of knowledge on the younger inmates becomes, for many of the older women, a labor of love.

Prison Moms and Prison Daughters

Rose, a 60 year old long-termer, talked to me about younger inmates. She stated "I talk to them and tell them to get help. The young inmates call me 'Granny'. Some act like they want to put their head on my shoulder and just bawl, but they hold it in. You shouldn't hold it in. I did and now I'm here." Generative adults outside of prison hope the lives of their children and the

children of others will be good. In this sense, parenting is still considered a major generative outlet. Incarcerated mothers are then at a disadvantage. Separated from their own children, generative inmates may seek a prison substitute. That is, they assume the role of "mother" to younger inmates. Rose continued "They are like kids that didn't listen to their parents. But, they did not get the right attention from their parents and are lacking love from their families." In this role, the older inmates are able to teach and mentor the younger inmates in order to provide them with the necessary abilities to improve themselves; thus, also contributing to society at large by encouraging them to become productive citizens.

Pseudo-families were once thought to be quite prevalent in women's prisons, involving complex interrelationships of mothers, uncles, brothers, sisters, and cousins. However, the women of Pewee Valley mentioned only two such meaningful relationships: mother/daughter (perhaps grandmother depending on the age of the inmate) and sisterhood. The relationships were mutually supportive. The older women told me that prison mothers and daughters will often share food or other items. Generative inmates desire the same things for their prison daughter as they do for their own children. In fact, the interaction is quite similar to that between a birth mother and child. Frances talked about her prison daughters. "She don't have a momma and asked if she could call me 'momma.' I said, 'Yeah.' I told her not to do drugs. I correct them about cussing or acting up and they listen. A lot of younger will turn to older ones who are trying to do right." The women in my sample often reported trying to set an example for the younger inmates, particular in regards to how to do "easy time" – that is, stay out of trouble. Most importantly, older inmates tried to keep their prison daughters from making the wrong decisions. Carol, a short-termer, stated

> A lot of them call me "Mom." It makes me feel good that they look up to me. It's a respect thing. I listen a lot and try to steer them in the right direction. If they are going to fight, I step in and stop them. I have a maternal interest.

In addition, the older women I interviewed said they teach and mentor their "prison daughters" as they would their own child. Betty, a long-termer, reported that younger inmates respected her status of "old-timer" and tended to come to her for advice.

> Several call me "Momma" even in their 30's 'cause I'm more mature. I try to help them. They don't understand how I have done the time. I say you have to be strong.

Prison relationships may endure after one of the inmates has been released. Stella said "A couple of them write to me from the outside. A lot are lost because they never really had a mom or grandmom." The older inmates fill a void for the younger inmates who are often searching for a mother figure to guide them. Betty also recalled "A younger inmate left and said, "Momma, I will never forget you. You've taught me so much." It makes me feel real good. I've helped somebody." The older women in my sample, like Betty, truly sought to make a difference for the younger inmates.

Elle cooked and regularly shared with others who did not have the means to buy for themselves. For her, helping others who were less fortunate was a responsibility.

> Gina: Would you talk to me about the younger inmates?
>
> Elle: I'm a mother figure to the younger ones. They call me "Mamma," but I'm not your mamma. I feed anybody. I get in trouble, but I do it. I encourage young ones to keep them from making wrong decisions. They flock to me…I see young girls in here and try to help them to keep their heads on straight. I've seen it happen. They start with 5 years, come back in here, wind up with 15 years…They do stupid stuff. I get angry. They say that makes sense when I say something. Lot of them don't have anybody. One inmate said, "You fuss and remind me of a grandmother. You teach me things I didn't know." That makes you feel good.

While not all of the women in my sample participated in mother and daughter prison relationships, it was mutually beneficial for those who did. The younger inmates received the nurturing, guidance, and tutelage they were not afforded growing up. The older inmates gained a generative outlet through which they were able to inspire others to do better and pass on what they had learned to others, namely to their young children. Of course, prison daughters served as a convenient substitute to birth children who rather close or estranged, are physically not there.

Biological Children

Generative inmates who have children also expressed hope that their children's lives are good and will have some meaning. Yet, these inmates are not free to monitor the lives of their children as desired. The mother/child relationship during incarceration is a strained one. Maintaining contact, particularly with adult children, is often difficult and stressful; therefore, inmates find it very frustrating and a little convoluted to try to encourage meaning and value while they are behind bars. Many of the older inmates were proud of their children. Some spoke about children who had graduated high school, had gone to college, had good jobs, and/or were handling their responsibilities very well. For others, their children were struggling with hardships and adjusting to the separation. Frances, a short-termer, lamented not being with her adult sons. She said "Only thing I can do is share my wisdom." Many of the older women I spoke with reported they found it difficult to guide their children due to the difficulties associated with incarceration.

Nevertheless, the women often stressed education, finding good jobs, and staying out of trouble. Evelyn, a long-termer, was able to inspire her children to better themselves.

> They [my children] came to my graduation. I was speaker. My son wanted my tassel. I said "No, I worked hard to get it. You work hard too and when I get out- we'll hang them up

> together. He was going to quit school, but after that, he finished. My daughter had quit, but went back. My son is an engineer and daughter is a nurse.

The women I interviewed reported sharing their experiences and what they learned, both for the betterment of their children and as evidence that they were making positive changes. One short-termer said "When my kids visit, I preach to them about what I've learned in here." The last thing any of my participants wanted was for their children to follow their path to prison.

Talking to younger inmates was the most common generative act reported by the women in my sample. The forced interaction imposed by incarceration, while perhaps unpleasant due to noise and lack of privacy, certainly offers the opportunity to listen and share with others. Younger inmates provided older inmates with access to the future generation. Thus, many of the women I interviewed discussed their focus and genuine interest in improving the lives and outlooks of the younger inmates. Generative behaviors regarding the betterment of society through future generations are therefore fairly easily accomplished in the prison environment. Yet, access to the larger society poses greater difficulty.

Sharing With Others

As previously mentioned, some of the opportunities afforded to generative adults in free society are simply non-existent within the confines of the prison. Therefore, inmates must be creative in finding generative outlets in order to help future generations and to fulfill their desires to give back. Some of their expressions of generativity may be easily disregarded: they may be viewed as trivial by comparison to generativity outside of prison. Recall the definition of generativity as a commitment to the larger society and its continuation and/or improvement through the next generation. Sharing food with other inmates may seem to be charity and *not*

generativity, in view of that definition. I do not regard such behavior as trivial, however. For the women I spoke with, sharing was a means of supporting other inmates – which, at least for a time, functioned as their community. Betty said: "I've always helped people. Just because I'm here doesn't mean I can't. I try to turn negative to positive. Helps you make change to help others make change. Just help. Help each other. Get punished for it, but will still do it. It's called survival." I consider this behavior to be *secondary generativity* because the participants spoke of these charitable actions as important to their sense of themselves and, what is more, their daily life behind bars. Inmates do not have easy access to free society, so "giving back" to the prison community – other inmates – provides them with an opportunity to do good and to feel good about themselves.

The older women I spoke with reported feeling good about themselves and their material ability to share with others. Betty, a long-termer, said: "Sharing is not allowed. If you need drink, food, whatever, I'm giving it to you. Write me up. I'm doing it." Even small acts of kindness made the women feel needed and were often reported in conjunction with generative behaviors and desires.

Giving Back to Society

While generative inmates may have limited access to the larger society, they contribute in ways available to them, such as programs offered within the prison. Furthermore, the majority of older women I spoke with had plans, upon their release, to share their experience with youth in order to prevent them from going to prison. Thus, for my research participants, generativity was relevant at present and in the future. Some of the women had twenty years are more before their next parole hearing. Evelyn had just received a twenty year deferment. She declared "I think I'll

be a good influence when I get out, even if I'm 100 years-old. I've set a goal. I'll do it." The older women in my sample shared a determination to give back to society.

Within Prison

I can speak with no authority on the opportunities to contribute to the community offered at Pewee Valley. Specifics to the facility were not my focus and so I did not collect data on such. I can only mention the programs as reported with little detail by my participants. Mable, a short-termer, stated: "I think about what I can give back. I think about talking to people. In here I make books in Braille which is another way to give back." Frances reported that she was on the inmate grievance committee, which gave her a sense of purpose. Clara, a long-termer worked in legal aid within the prison. She was proud of her ability to help others and offer them some hope for the future. Misty, a long-termer, seemed to take pride in her work of cleaning up for the members of the dog program who train dogs for the disabled. The women I spoke with who participated in these programs delighted in being able to make a difference.

After Prison

The women in my sample commonly reported they desired and planned to give back to society upon their release. Most of the inmates wanted to talk with youth and warn them about drugs and prison. Betty, a long-termer, remarked "If you can help one kid, you've made one hell of an accomplishment. Kept one kid from going to prison. I want to do that. Something very positive. A way to give back." Rose said:

> I feel like it is something God wanted me to do. He put me in here to open my eyes – to go around and talk to younger kids. "I could save somebody's child." I'm going to get into helping young kids. Good kids out here trying. I might save them. There are too many

> addicts on the street. People are always out there to tempt child with something. It may take somebody like me to stop it.

Twenty-one (21) of the women in my sample mentioned their plans for a generative future in response to my inquiry of how they saw themselves upon their release. Many of the women became very animated when talking to me about their plans to share with others. Anna declared:

> I'm going to find some way to help other people. I want to do counseling and tell my story to kids. I want to tell my story and help other people. I want to help somebody else. I didn't have anybody to help me.

Some of the inmates shared plans of helping the prison community post-release. They desired to advocate for change and make things better for prison inmates. Sue, a long-termer, declared "I plan on volunteering in several organizations. I want to advocate for change in prison system. Tell my story to other people. I want to volunteer at church, AA, get job. However I need to give back, I'm going to do it. I want to be inspirational in helping other inmates. Anna, a short-termer, mentioned her desire to help inmates upon her release multiple times. She said "I promise I will make a difference, if it is just to go to church and get hats and gloves for these women." For many of the women in my sample, planning their generative activities after their release gave them something to look forward to during their incarceration.

Legacy of an Inmate

The women in my sample were confronting their own mortality and for some it triggered thoughts concerning how they will be remembered. While I prompted my participants to discuss their legacy and how they will be remembered, over half of them admitted having thought about

it several times before. For many, their legacy, as it stood, was not a good one, but that was something they were working on as best they could. Misty, a long-termer, observed

> If I die today – if I didn't change, I would just leave them with me being a drug addict. I wanted to leave them something positive. I can't leave them material things, but I can leave them a better me. Not leaving a financial legacy but instead of leaving a legacy of what I came to prison for, I'm changing.

Dalia discussed her contributions over the years:

> Gina: Do you think about how you will be remembered?
>
> Dalia: I think about it. I think I will be remembered for all the good things I've done in my life. I believe in helping others. I have good neighbors who help me. I'll be remembered as helping people. I go out of my way to help others. Neighbor's grandkids gave me a Christmas card. It said "for all the times you said, "Hi. Button up your coat." and played with us…." That meant a lot to me.

It was genarally important for all of the women I spoke with to leave behind something better than what brought them to prison. They wanted to be remembered for their successes, not their failures.

Conclusion

Generative adults desire to promote the continuation and improvement of the larger society through the next generation: that is, they want to make a worthwhile difference. They are charged with the task of passing on the best of themselves – all the virtues they have acquired in their lives so far, such as their hope, their will, their purpose, their competence, and their love, to future generations.

The women I spoke with reported engaging in generative behaviors during incarceration. Unable to guide their own children, older inmates often "adopt" younger inmates. They pass on values, experience, and wisdom to the younger inmates in hopes of improving their futures and

preventing them from coming back to prison. They offer cautionary tales – encouraging them to "do as I say, not as I did." Furthermore, generative inmates plan to continue giving back upon their release. The women in my sample were almost consumed by thoughts of community service upon release – seemingly stemming from a desire to give back and make up for what they took. The women I spoke with were also concerned not only with how they would be remembered, but also whether they would be remembered at all. Clearly, in order to be a generative inmate, one must confront and overcome obvious limitations and pro-actively seek out outlets, such as community service programs within the prison and utilizing the access they have to future generations through younger inmates.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this dissertation study was to explore the experiences of older female inmates, with a special focus on their experiences of generativity. I conducted qualitative interviews with women at the Pewee Valley institution in Kentucky. The interviews were based on feminist research principles that allow the participants to talk about issues that were important to them. Generativity refers to a desire to give back to the community and a concern for the next generation (Erikson 1950). The interviews, the majority of which (26 of 29) were with older inmates, were intended to privilege first-hand accounts from a prison population hardly heard from before.

The findings supported the existence of generative desires among older female inmates. The inmates expressed desires to give back to the community. They also reported concern for their own children and the children of others. The study also provides insight into how women are able to be generative behind bars. Finally, the findings also revealed several prison experiences that are unique to older female inmates.

Nearly all of the women in my sample were mothers and grandmothers. Their experiences of incarceration is unique, as compared to female inmates and certainly as compared to inmates (male and female) generally, because they are very attached to their children *and* these children are grown. Everything that past research has found about the effects of incarceration on the mother/child relationship does not necessarily apply to older mothers with adult children. Rather than a straightforward dilemma of separation, the women in my sample varied in what the separation experience signified. They "dealt" with motherhood behind bars in four ways. The

remorseful mother regrets her past disregard for her children as a young mother and hopes to reconcile with her children. The *contented mother* enjoys a strong relationship with her children and reports being genuinely content with her current incarceration. The *uneasy mother* worries about the well-being of her adult children during the separation. Finally, the *abandoned mother* is surprised by her children's unexpected lack of support during her incarceration.

The women in my sample indicated that acceptance was a multifaceted concept. Three levels of acceptance were apparent: acceptance of incarceration, acceptance of responsibility, and acceptance of self. Many of the women I interviewed indicated that while they may not like being in prison, they had *accepted* it. Acceptance of incarceration eased the passing of time and often led to peace of mind. Acceptance of responsibility was mentioned by several participants; not that the emphasis on acceptance of responsibility may have inculcated by prison-based rehabilitation programs and self-help classes that emphasize this discourse. Finally, acceptance of self voiced by my older participants was described as a especially difficult kind of acceptance that allowed participants to feel good about themselves for the first time.

Generative desires extended beyond one's family in the free world, to fellow inmates. The prison did not necessarily nurture such desires. Prisons, for the most part, are charged with keeping inmates secure; therefore, they tend to encourage discipline and conformity more than they encourage gestures of generosity and goodwill. While Pewee Valley has several programs which encourage generativity, such as dog training for the handicapped and making books in Braille for the blind, these programs are not available for all inmates. For example, inmates convicted of violent crimes are not eligible for the dog program.

Jane, a long-termer, reported: "They told me on the Parole board that I should start thinking about myself, not others… I enjoy helping people. Tell me in here that I am too soft. Say I gotta quit that."

Older inmates reported that prison staff encourages them to take time to concentrate on themselves. Prisons offer self-discovery classes and treatment programs to promote self-healing. Generativity is about putting others first, so generative inmates often struggle with balancing self-recovery and their desires to selflessly help others.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study indicate that the women inmates of Kentucky's Pewee Valley would benefit from more service opportunities. Furthermore, the experiences of older women, particularly regarding motherhood, were found to deviate from current research mostly pertaining to younger inmates. The state's responses to these findings provide several recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

Use available resources, including educational, financial, and political, when developing generative programming. Society is feeling the negative effects of a growing prison population, so allowing inmates to provide public service would be beneficial. Prison administrators have an opportunity to address barriers that might exist between society and inmates, during and after incarceration. Therefore, stimulating and encouraging generative behaviors through programming can also ease an inmate's reentry into society and potentially reduce recidivism.

Structure generative programming so that inmates begin their transition while still incarcerated. Prison administrators often view transition as a gradual process beginning at an inmate's initial intake. Programming is structured to better enable inmates to be successful upon

release. Developing generative opportunities so inmates will interact with the same people who might work with them upon release offers powerful assistance with the transition back to society. For example, allowing inmates to leave the prison in order to speak with students in public schools would also give them the needed contacts for a possible outlet to share and be generative upon release.

Accept both limitations and possibilities when considering how to provide generative opportunities. A variety of factors must be considered when determining how to provide generative opportunities, including the inmate population, the corrections policies, and community and institutional potential. While not all inmates could or should be taken out of the facility and brought into free society, generative outlets may be implemented in other possible ways. Generative behaviors may be encouraged within the inmate population. For example, inmates could be allowed to work on the sick ward in an effort to help their fellow inmates. Mentoring programs could also be implemented as a way of pairing older and younger inmates together for the benefit of both, but as a strong generative outlet for the older inmates. Understanding what is possible within a particular institution requires tailoring program offerings to a particular goal, such as generativity, and dropping the ideas that will not or cannot work.

Borrow lessons learned from other states and adapt them to fit program goals. All states offering service opportunities will face similar questions regarding funding, community opportunities, inmate cooperation and satisfaction, and effectiveness. While it is unreasonable to expect states to replicate programs exactly (for example, the inmate firefighting reported in Jehl [2000] is regionally specific), many of the ideals of these programs can be utilized and modified

for other states. Regardless of location, all states have community needs for which inmates may be well suited.

Document successes and failures. While various service programs exist in numerous prisons across the country, these programs have not be adequately evaluated for generative components and inmate satisfaction and perception. Though today some states more thoroughly document their efforts of rehabilitation through policy statements and research reports, too often the data are not collected. Understanding what works, and what does not work, in generative programming will help determine the development of future offerings.

Articulate the benefits of inmate generativity so that outsiders understand. One purpose of this study was to explore inmate generativity, so naturally the outside community has a vested interest in programming endeavors. Society should understand the potential benefits that generative programming can offer to the inmate and to others. Reunification is often a difficult process, so programs designed to ease that transition are beneficial to everyone. Articulating these benefits also ensures that policymakers would consider carefully before terminating such programs.

Understand the differences in dealing with motherhood among older women. Women with older children deal with separation differently than women with younger children: their experiences and needs should not be regarded as the same. For older women, the main issue is stable and functional support once they are released. Policymakers would benefit from identifying the different types of mother/child relationships and in helping to strengthen weak or non-existent relationships, possibly as a way to reduce recidivism among older offenders.

Implications for Further Research

My research expands the knowledge base on older inmates, female inmates, adaptation within prison, as well as generativity. My findings may interest life course criminologists, who seek to understand intra-individual trajectories of offending and desistance. Life course criminologists Sampson and Laub (1992) write: 'Qualitative data derived from systematic open-ended questions or narrative life histories can help uncover underlying social processes of stability and change. They can also help to confirm the results derived from quantitative analyses' (p. 80). Although my dissertation does not correlate generativity with subsequent offending (see Maruna 2001), it does suggest connections between generativity and peaceable behavior in prison, as generativity-minded older inmates seek helping rather than harming opportunities behind bars.

Before turning to specifics of future research efforts I view as warranted, I would mention some clear *limitations* of my study. I interviewed each participant once and for an average of two hours. The study may have benefited from follow-up interviews in order to obtain more detailed information about relevant, but lesser topics of interest, such as criminal history and perceptions of prison health care. Furthermore, some inmates seemed tired or somewhat disinterested in the interview. A follow-up interview may have caught them on a better day. I was only able to take hand-written notes during the interviews. Thus, the data may be incomplete due to my inability to document everything that the inmates said. Audio-recording would have allowed for a more accurate transcription and, perhaps, more specific information.

My study concerns generativity, including the desire to give back; it is possible that those who volunteered to participate in the interview saw it as a generative opportunity, and thus that I have a bias in the form of a non-representative sample. This possibility was suggested by one participant, Sue, who told me: "I hope this study helps somebody. This is the first one [study]

I've ever signed up for in 21½ years. I thought it could help." I cannot rule this possible source of bias out.

The study was a preliminary exploration of issues confronting older female inmates. It was not intended for generalization to the entire inmate population or to the rest of the female inmate population. More standardized analyses are needed before any definitive conclusions can be made. The following are suggestions for additional research:

1. An equal number of younger and older inmates should be included in order to determine if generativity is, indeed, age-specific within the inmate population. All prison inmates may exhibit some feelings or desires of restitution, so that the two concepts should be identified and separated to allow for a more accurate evaluation of feelings of generativity.

2. Gathering more background information from the participants or inmate records may also further the understanding of inmate generativity and determine if certain social factors, such as impoverishment, impede or encourage generative behaviors. For example, researchers might in the future explore a possible correlation between type of offense (violent versus non-violent) and the presence and types of generative desires and behaviors.

3. Researchers might conduct follow-up assessments of whether former inmates *actually* give back post-release. Having to delay generative efforts until after release might ultimately inhibit generative action. Or, the generative desires of inmates may be "just talk."

4. Surveys including reliable generativity scales should be implemented to accommodate a larger sample and to provide statistical data for analysis. There if very little research regarding generativity among older female inmates, so there is an immediate need for much further in-depth analysis.

5. Identifying the types of motherhood among both older and younger women inmates may further understanding of inmate social support and identify ways to best assist woman in different age groups during and after incarceration. For example, researchers may want to compare the types of motherhood indicated by this study with the experiences of younger incarcerated mothers. If the *uneasy mother* exists among younger mothers, it is not likely that she is uneasy in the same way or for the same reasons as the older mothers.

Final Thoughts

For prison inmates, participation in generative programs is one link in a chain of positive events. The personal connections and support gained by participating in such service programs may take them beyond the prison walls, providing the resources inmates needs as they prepare to transition back into society. Although this study began with my identifying generativity as not immediately associated with prison inmates, the benefits of this type of programming reach beyond prison walls. That is, average citizens can play a part in giving inmates a chance to give back what they have taken from their community.

Some will read this study and fail to recognize the benefits of providing inmates with more opportunities. The issue of fairness will always be considered in identifying services for inmates, as the principle of “least eligibility” demands that these not take resources such as job opportunities away from free citizens. However, many of the possible generative outlets would be voluntary. For many of my research participants, saving just one child from their incarcerated fate would be enough. I hope that my dissertation provides a launching pad from which we might investigate ways of allowing generative inmates to reach the masses. Subsequently, those who would provide such opportunities must consistently measure, analyze, and publish findings

on the effectiveness of such programming, as well as assess inmate perceptions. Both quantitative and qualitative efforts are called for. Thus, I hope this study helps to stimulate the creation of more generative outlets for a small population of “old-timers” who want to do good.

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Appendix A: Sample Demographics and Criminal History

Table 2: Sample Demographics and Criminal History

PSEUDONYM	AGE	RACE	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	OFFENSE	SENTENCE (yrs)
Jane	55	White	3	2nd Degree Manslaughter	15
Stella	52	White	3	Robbery	3
Misty	50	White	4	1st Degree Murder	Life
Frances	53	White	2	1st Degree Assault, Criminal Facilitation	12
Rose	60	Black	2	Manslaughter	13
Mary	54	Black	2	Possession of Controlled Substance	5
Sue	54	White	3	Kidnapping, Criminal Conspiracy, Robbery, Facilitation to Rape and Murder	Life
Kay	52	White	2	Drug Charge, Possession of Firearm	14
Sally	53	White	2	Trafficking of Controlled Substance and Possession	7
Christy	34	White	2	Sex Offender, Probation Violation	10
Joy	52	Black	2	Felony Possession, Probation Violation	7
Anna	53	Black	5	Possession, Probation Violation	1
Peggy	58	White	0	Trafficking of Controlled Substance, Probation Violation	12
Betty	43	White	3	Child Neglect, Intent to Murder	Life
Dalia	45	Black	2	Trafficking Controlled Substance, Parole Violation	17 ½
Clara	65	White	5	Sodomy 1, Sodomy 2, 1st Degree Incest (Multiple Counts)	530
Elle	51	Black	0	1st Degree Manslaughter, Parole Violation	20
Sarah	27	Black	2	1st Degree Robbery	10
Polly	44	White	2	Assault	15
Katherine	50	White	1	Arson/Insurance Fraud	10
Carol	42	Black	4	Assault, Robbery 2nd Degree	8

PSEUDONYM	AGE	RACE	NUMBER OF CHILDREN	OFFENSE	SENTENCE (yrs)
May	50	Black	3	Trafficking Controlled Substance	12
Doris	62	White	1	Forged Prescription	1
Mable	53	White	2	Trafficking Prescription Drugs	8
Eve	41	White	2	Complicity to Commit Murder, 1st Degree Robbery	Life
Jo	39	White	1	Criminal Attempted Murder	20
Margaret	50	White	2	Alluding Police	4
June	52	White	2	Theft by Deception, Probation Violation	2
Evelyn	44	White	2	Murder and Attempted Murder	70

Appendix B: Research Synopsis

Hello:

I invite you to participate in a study on your life experiences in and out of prison. If you choose to participate, you will be scheduled for an interview lasting up to two hours. The interviews will be conducted in a secure location which is separate from the general population. Your privacy and the confidentiality of your answers and comments will be honored. When I report results, I may describe specific discussion or include direct quotes, but I will not use your real name or any other identifying information. Please let prison staff know of your interest to participate.

Sincerely,

Regina Benedict
Doctoral candidate
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Department of Sociology
University of Tennessee
Regina Benedict and Lois Presser, Principal Investigators
(865) 974-6021 (Benedict)
(865) 974-6021 (Presser)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY (INMATES)

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that the following explanation of the proposed procedures be read and understood. It describes the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. It also describes the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

PURPOSE

I, ______________________________________, agree to participate in this research study. Its purpose is to better understand social issues for female inmates of different ages. Research questions will be asked about self-perceptions and service. Handwritten notes will be taken during the interview, with my consent.

PROCEDURES

I understand that this study involves interviews that may last up to two hours. I may be asked to participate in up to three (3) interviews, for a possible total of six hours.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

I understand that I may feel uncomfortable discussing my thoughts and feelings about my experiences, such as the experience of being incarcerated. There are no other foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in interviews. No medical procedures will be used in this project. Potential benefits of the study include greater understanding of inmates and ways to meet their needs.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW

I understand that participation is voluntary and I may tell one of the Principal Investigators, Regina Benedict or Lois Presser, about any concerns that I have. Alternatively, prison staff may contact one of the Principal Investigators on my behalf with any concerns I may have regarding

the interviews. I understand that I am free to drop out of this study at any time, with no negative consequences to me.

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Any question that I have concerning any aspect of this study will be answered.

I understand that information from the interview with me may be used when the Investigators report study findings, but that my real name will never be used. Records will be preserved with a made-up name substituted for my real name. No other information available to the criminal justice system will identify me as having been interviewed. All records of my real name, including this form, will be kept in a locked box. Only the Principal Investigators will have access to this box.

The information that I provide will be kept confidential after the study is over. I understand, however, that if I tell the interviewer about a crime that I committed in the past (an example would be abuse of a child), she might be forced by law to report this.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

I understand that I will not be paid for participating in this study.

COMPENSATION IN CASE OF INJURY

The research carries no risk of physical injury. If I feel emotionally upset as a result of this research, I may share my experience with one of the Principal Investigators, who will make appropriate referrals to counseling services.

SIGNATURES

I, the undersigned, have understood the above explanation and give consent to my voluntary participation in this research project.

______________________________ ______________________

Participant’s signature Date

______________________________ ______________________

Investigator’s signature Date

VITA

Regina White Benedict was born in Huntsville, Alabama. She received her Bachelor's degree at the Mississippi State University in Sociology. She obtained a Masters degree from East Tennessee State University in Criminology/Criminal Justice.