

AGING IN A TOTAL INSTITUTION:

THE CASE OF OLDER PRISONERS

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ABSTRACT

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AGING IN A TOTAL INSTITUTION:

ACQUISITIONS

THE CASE OF OLDER PRISONERS

by Monika Bexten Reed

A basic assumption of social gerontologists is that the individual's aging experience is largely determined by social and cultural factors. To gain insight into the impact of such arrangements on the aging experience, older prisoners at a major state penitentiary were studied via in-depth interviews. The focus of the study is upon major social institutions and how older prisoners participate in them as compared to persons on the outside. Respondents include all inmates over fifty years of age who have spent at least ten years in prison. This resulted in a sample of nineteen subjects with a median age of sixty. Major findings include the following:

1. Although marriage and children are common among the prisoners, family relations are virtually nonexistent. The family role loss common to old age is experienced by prisoners early in life. In spite of this lack of family contact, the idea of having children and grandchildren (biological renewal) is important to the men.

2. Although prisoners live in an age-dense environment, friendships and confidants are rare. The lack of meaningful social relations often found among the elderly is part of the prison lifestyle for people of all ages.
3. As seems to be the case on the outside, religion is very important to most older prisoners. Personal religious belief and activity is reported to have increased with age.
4. Like their age-peers in the community, older prisoners are quite interested in politics, and they seem to be well-informed by radio, television, and newspapers. Prisoners, like old people, have a great deal of leisure time.
5. Retirement has little meaning in the prison setting. Most older prisoners work to keep busy and there is no age limit on working. Work provides little in the way of prestige, satisfaction, financial rewards, social relations or routine. Social status is based primarily on type of offense.
6. Physical and mental condition are much more important than chronological age. Inmates report feeling younger than people on the outside. The interviewer's subjective impression is that they look younger as well.

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Much of what is viewed as part of normal aging does not take place in the prison setting. Many of the losses associated with normal aging take place in young adulthood among prisoners. Retirement and widowhood are not meaningful. Chronological age does not possess much salience for prisoners. Even some of the effects of environmental stress on appearance are mitigated.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty-five years the study of the social aspects of aging has become well-established. This has come about in response to changes in the demographic profile of the United States and as part of an increased awareness of the deprived circumstance of many older Americans.

A basic assumption of social gerontologists has always been that the individual's aging experience is largely determined by social and cultural factors. Although all peoples of the world experience biological aging, it is the shared definitions of that process which determine the meaning of aging to the individual. For example, in a society which values age, one would expect that wrinkles would be positively evaluated. Unfortunately, it is not always so easy to separate cultural definitions from the underlying biological phenomena associated with aging. The culture can define social phenomena as biological in origin. This is clearly the case with race relations, and a similar argument can be made by gerontologists. For instance, forgetfulness among teenagers is common, but is defined as irresponsibility or lack of maturity. On the other hand, forgetfulness among older people is often

defined as a sign of mental deterioration in spite of the fact that many perhaps more plausible explanations exist.

The Problem

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of aging as compared to the developmental phenomena of aging. In order to accomplish this task it is possible to take one of at least two approaches. The most common approach has been the cross-cultural study. By studying people of different cultures it is often possible to determine that various behavior patterns are indeed social in origin. Such an approach has proved fruitful in social gerontology (Cowgill and Holmes, 1972). A second approach would be to observe people aging outside of the social arrangements which are typical in their society. Because putting human subjects in a laboratory for thirty years is out of the question, one could look for natural settings which are at considerable variance with the society at large. In the United States this category might include such persons as lighthouse keepers, monks, prospectors, the Amish and so forth. By studying such persons, most of whom would have been socialized into the dominant culture as children, one might gain insight into the impact of social arrangements on the aging process.

This study will employ the latter approach. Specifically it is a study of social aspects of aging in a total institution--a prison. According to Goffman (1961: XIII) a total institution is a place where "a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life." Up to now, studies of aging in total institutions have focused on mental hospitals, nursing homes, and homes for the aged. Given the many physical and mental problems common to such settings, the findings of these studies have limited relevance to normal aging.

As the setting for a study of aging, a prison has a number of advantages. Perhaps most important is the fact that prisoners can be expected to be as healthy as the general population. It takes a degree of vitality and mobility to commit many crimes. Furthermore, the availability of regular meals, rest, and medical care exceed that which is available to many adults in the general population. Related to this fact is the observation that the effect of economic factors is greatly reduced in the prison setting. Many of the problems associated with aging can be traced to poverty. Although prisoners may have differential access to economic resources, poverty within the walls is not a powerful variable, nor is it related to aging as it

is in the community. On the other hand it must be recognized that the prison population tends to come from the lower and working classes of society. Even within these groups prisoners are probably atypical in many respects given the small number of persons who are actually incarcerated.

The focus of this investigation of aging in the prison setting will be upon major social institutions and how prisoners participate in them as compared to older persons on the outside. Social institutions are defined as "an interrelated system of social roles and norms organized about the satisfaction of an important social need or function" (Theodorson and Theodorson, 1969: 206). Sociologists usually include the following among the major social institutions: family, religion, economy, polity, military, and education. In American society older people have generally been excluded or at least uninvolved in the military and educational institutions. Therefore this study will investigate the behavior and attitudes of older prisoners with respect to family, religion, work and retirement and politics.

In addition to this institutional focus, there will be an investigation of interaction patterns among the inmates as well as an attempt to elicit the prisoners' subjective impressions of growing old in prison. Because

prisoners have experienced childhood socialization in the dominant culture, it is assumed that they will be able to make comparisons between aging on the outside and aging inside the walls.

Theoretical Perspective

Aging can be approached from a number of perspectives. Perhaps the most common perspective is the biological. We are aware that our bodies grow, reach a plateau, and then decline in ability to cope with the environment. The biological changes associated with later life reveal themselves as a slowing down of performance, a decline in energy, and a variety of cosmetic and structural changes. There are declines in sensory processes, perceptual ability, motor skills and mental abilities. For most people the physical decrements of aging rarely have a serious effect upon functioning in everyday life. However, what is important for everyday life is how the social environment of the individual relates to these decrements.

This is the realm of social gerontology. Here we are concerned with how the biological processes of aging are defined and how these definitions affect the individual. It is a basic assumption of social gerontology that the personal experience of aging is largely socially determined. The roles, norms, and values relevant to aging

are part of the dominant culture into which all of us are socialized. Most of the personal problems associated with aging are social in origin.

It is from the perspective of social gerontology that this study is undertaken. By looking at a unique social setting, a prison, it is hoped that insight into the social aspects of aging may be gained which will be applicable in a broader context. By investigating how older prisoners relate to major social institutions and how they personally experience aging it may be possible to separate some of the social and cultural aspects of aging from the developmental. Additionally, it is expected that such a study will be of interest to criminologists in their attempt to understand the nature of prison life.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although there is a lack of formal research on the aged in prison, biographies of convicts sometimes touch the subject matter. In A Thief's Primer Jackson (1969: 171) presents the experiences of prison inmates over time. One convict points out:

There's something else funny that happens to some people; they come down here and their age seems to fix at what it was when they come in. And something else: I don't think they age as much in appearance as they do in the free world. Down here I see guys all the time that are sixty or seventy-five who look like forty to forty-five. Physically they stay younger.

This observation suggests that there are patterns of aging within the prison community not found in civilian society.

In order to find out what distinguishes the aging process in a total institution from that in normal society it becomes necessary to investigate the aging process as it exists in American society. For the purpose of this study literature concerning the social aspects of aging and research on the prison community is examined. Special emphasis is put on material dealing with how the individual relates to the social institutions of family, religion, economy, and polity. The topic of social relations will also be reviewed.

Family Relations

Marriage

In old age one's marital status is of great importance for physical and mental well-being. Married people are happier and healthier than their widowed counterparts (Riley and Foner, 1968: 352). The mere fact of being married seems to facilitate a certain degree of life-satisfaction. Generally at the postparental stage, the couple experiences a time of freedom from financial responsibilities, freedom to be mobile, and freedom to be oneself (Deutscher, 1964). Although Pineo (1961) argues that the fit between two individuals which leads them to marry reduces with time, most people value the postparental stage as a happy time. Feldman (1964) says that after the child launching period, frequency of discussion and marital satisfaction which have decreased since marriage, increase again. The postparental phase occurs earlier for lower and later for the upper socio-economic level.

In prison, marital patterns are very different from those on the outside. The forced separation of family members requires unusual adjustments. In many cases prisoners have never married. Thus, the significance of marital relationships to older prisoners is worthy of investigation.

Children and Grandchildren

In free society there is generally good rapport between old people and their children. Over three-fourths of old people have at least one living child and eighty percent report that they have seen one child within the last week (Riley and Foner, 1968: 160,541). Here it must be noted that the frequency of parent-child contact is in direct relationship to the proximity of children. Youmans (1962: 14-17 in Riley and Foner, 1968: 546) reports that old people's contact with children decreases as the intervening distance increases. Due to the location and/or regulations regarding visitations, one can expect to find different visitation habits between prisoners and their children.

One family role that has received little attention until recently is the role of grandparent (Kalish, 1975: 80). Atchley (1972: 303) points out that today seventy percent of the people over sixty-five have living grandchildren. Most grandparents gain pleasure and comfort from their role as grandparents. Meanings of this role include a source of biological renewal, emotional fulfillment, and the feeling that the grandchildren will accomplish what the parent generation and grandparent generation were not able to accomplish (Neugarten and Weinstein, 1964).

In prison literature, there is no evidence of grandparenting within a total institution. It is possible that the role of grandparent is relatively unknown in the prison setting. This possibility will be investigated.

Kinship Patterns

In American society there is an extensive network of help patterns within families. Aid is given in many forms which include exchange of services, gifts, advice or financial assistance (Sussmann and Burchinal, 1962). These types of help are more widespread among the middle class than among the upper class. However, Hill (1965: 293) found that help exchange within vertical kin exceeds all other categories and that this is especially true for grandparents for whom sixty-five percent of the cases of help received came from children, the parent generation or the grandchildren. On the whole, the level of assistance is high for the parent generation and low for the grandparents. The amount of mutual help is not related to either frequency of visitations or residential proximity (Troll, 1971). However, there is a difference in the type of aid given, financial versus personal services, with regard to social class. Working-class parents give services such as babysitting, middle-class parents give financial aid.

Little is known about the patterns of kinship assistance among prisoners. This aspect of family relations will be investigated. Also, the special relationships between prisoners and their families will be investigated.

Social Relations

Although nearly eighty percent of old men and about sixty percent of old women live in independent household units (Kalish, 1975: 77), people become increasingly dependent as they grow older. Although close kin, in most cases the daughter or siblings, are consulted in times of need (Sussman, 1953), many old people have a reasonable amount of interaction with neighbors and friends. Kalish (1975: 87) points out that old people establish and maintain friendships with age peers mostly because they feel excluded from younger groups. Rosow (1967) states that the presence of age peers in the immediate neighborhood is conducive to a person's morale, especially among working-class elderly. It has been found that having a confidant is one major correlate of happiness in old age (Lowenthal and Haven, 1968). Most old individuals have at least one person whom they trust and to whom they relate closely.

Associations between prison inmates are generally less self-determined. The selection of cell-mates and the

assignment of work is largely unrelated to the age and personal preferences of the prisoners. "The major axis along which prisoners are classified by the administration is custodial convenience" (Mattick, 1959: 240). Prisoners are placed where a vacancy has been reported. The fit between prisoners is ignored.

Religion

As one grows older, there appears to be a change in religious behavior and attitude. Moberg (1965) reports that church attendance rises with age until the late years when it declines mostly due to health reasons or transportation problems. He adds that for the same reasons active church involvement diminishes slightly; however, Bible reading, praying, and listening to church services on the radio or television increases with age. Also, belief in God and immortality is greater among the aged. Older people often report that religion has become more important to them over the years (Moberg, 1965).

Whether or not people in prison go through the same changes is not known. Different behavior patterns can be expected because some institutions encourage religious participation of inmates whereas others do not offer church services in the institution or grant permission to attend off-prison churches. Informal prison norms may affect the degree of religious activity among older prisoners. Such a

situation conforms to the conclusion reached by Heffernan (1972) that there is a discrepancy between formal control of power by the staff and the actual prison structure in operation.

Work and Retirement

Although there are many indicators of old age, retirement is one of the major milestones in the life of men in the outside world. Besides the loss of income, a person may lose his identity. This is of considerable importance in family relations and friendships (Maddox, 1966). In many instances, social interaction which has been facilitated by the occupational setting diminishes. The individual has to establish a new routine for himself in order to give meaning to his life. For old people who do not succeed in this task there can be feelings of uselessness and obsolescence. However, Glamser (1976) states that workers who can expect a retirement financially and socially rewarding are likely to have a positive attitude toward retirement. In fact, recent studies indicate that the great majority of workers have little difficulty adjusting to retirement (Streib and Schneider, 1971).

Little is known about retirement in prison. It is possible that something analogous to retirement exists in the prison setting, but that remains to be demonstrated.

Some retirement related questions are:

1. What is the meaning of work in a total institution?
2. Is there retirement in prison?

Banister et al. (1973) found that after long-term incarceration prisoners showed increased hostility and introversion. His findings imply that the disengagement pattern may prevail in prison. However, this requires further investigation.

Political Participation

In examining changes over the human life span, changes in political participation have been noted. Atchley (1972: 254) points out that older people are concerned with politics and government because they participate in politics through voting, working in political organizations and holding offices, and they are objects of governmental programs. People in the United States are most likely to vote during their fifties and this diminishes somewhat after age sixty. There is a strong party identification among the aged resulting from long time affiliation (Neugarten and Moore, 1968: 143). Party membership is generally split evenly between Democrats and Republicans. On the whole, old people are well informed about political events such as campaigns or pertinent issues. However, unlike their younger counterparts old people do not form opinions as readily on current events.

Up to now, the political behavior of old prisoners has been virtually ignored. At different periods in history, prisoners have been denied civil rights, thus making active political participation impossible. However, it is possible that there are some comparisons and contrasts between old prisoners and the aged in the free-world with regard to political behavior. Questions to be raised are:

1. Can people in prison vote?
2. Would they vote if they were allowed to do so?
3. To what degree do prisoners keep up with political events?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

The major objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of aging as compared to the developmental phenomena of aging. For this reason a group of people aging outside of the social arrangements which are typical in society as a whole will be investigated.

The Population

The subjects of this study were drawn from the population of a major prison in the southeastern United States. The State Penitentiary was built in 1898 and approximately 2300 inmates live within the walls of the main institution. Additionally, there is an Annex for older prisoners, young men who attend universities on the outside, and young first offenders. There are approximately 49 inmates at the Annex. At times some of the old men are transferred back to the main prison if they engage in illegal activities of any kind.

The subjects include all inmates over 50 years of age who had spent at least ten years in prison. Two younger men, age 42 and 48 were included in the study

because one individual had served a continuous sentence of 20 years and both had frequent contact with the older inmates. The age range was 42 through 77 years with a median age of 60 years and a mean of 59.5 years. This resulted in a total sample size of nineteen subjects. Each subject had served at least 10 years of his life in prison. The mean stay was 23.37 years. Because all of the older prisoners at the penitentiary were included there is no problem of representativeness. Also, the small number of subjects allows for a depth of understanding not often found in survey research.

Permission to conduct research on aging in the state penitentiary was obtained from the Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Corrections. Initially, the Assistant Commissioner refused to allow research to be conducted with older prisoners on the grounds that the institution does not want publicity of any kind. Furthermore, since most old long-term inmates were convicted for violent crimes and could be dangerous, (Table I) there was concern for the safety of the researcher. In addition, since the researcher was a woman and women were not allowed to enter the Annex building, the danger would be even greater. After a lengthy discussion with the chief of record clerks, however, permission was granted to conduct interviews of an anonymous nature with the residents at the Annex. Each interview required the inmate's approval.

Table I. Prisoner's Age and Time Served

Name of Subject*	Age (years)	Time Served (years)
Roy Walker	77	28
Donald Strong	72	37
Ben Knox	67	10
Robert Smith	66	30
Joseph Kelly	66	20
Kendall Pitts	65	20
Wayne Schroder	65	28
Frances Brown	65	24
Edward Fowler	62	34
John Queeney	60	20
Richard Sanders	58	24
Steve White	54	14
Mike Morton	54	14
Arnold Webb	54	14
Bill Greene	54	26
Thomas Rose	52	29
Maurice South	51	25
Sam Baker	48	10
Jack McBricht	42	21

*Throughout this study fictitious names are used to identify the inmates.

The majority of subjects were born in the State of Tennessee (Table II).

Table II. State Where Born

State	Number of Subjects
Tennessee	11
Ohio	2
New York	1
Georgia	1
Kentucky	1
Louisiana	1
Virginia	1
No response	1

Fifteen men grew up in the same state where they were born; three grew up in a different state from where they were born. One person gave no response.

Although most men grew up in the same state where they were born, men now in prison showed a great deal of geographical mobility when they were in free society (Table III).

Table III. Prisoners and Geographical Mobility on the Outside

<u>States lived when on the outside</u>	<u>Number of Subjects</u>
Lived and traveled all over the U.S.	9
Lived in Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Michigan	1
Tennessee, Michigan, Mississippi, Illinois	1
Tennessee, Illinois	1
Tennessee, Georgia, other U.S. prisons	1
Lived in Tennessee but traveled a great deal	1
Tennessee	3
No response	2

It appeared that most subjects had traveled more than was verbalized during the interviews. Many men simply could not remember all the places where they had lived during their lifetimes.

The Instrument

A structured interview schedule of eighty-four open-ended questions was employed for data collection. Since there is virtually no information on aging in a prison, the use of open-ended questions was deemed appropriate. According to Kerlinger (1964), interviews are a good "exploratory device to help identify variables and relationships, to suggest hypotheses and to guide other phases of research."

Another advantage of the interview technique is that it

permits the researcher to explain terms which otherwise might not be clear. The latter is quite important since most older prisoners have little formal education.

The interview schedule includes demographic items, information about family relations and friends, attitudinal items on religion and politics, and some questions related to specific life events. Some of the questions which have been used previously in gerontological research were adapted to fit the prison situation. For the sake of clarification and organization, the interview items are discussed in the order in which they appear on the interview schedule (see Appendix A).

The first three items relate to general demographic information such as the subject's name, place of birth, and birthdate. Items four and five ("Where did you grow up?" and "Where have you lived?") were included to examine the subject's background in order to determine the generalizability of this study.

Items six through twenty constitute an attempt to investigate the individual's family relations. Family relations are known to be a major aspect of aging in the community. The questions were taken from Lopata's (1973) study of family relations of widows, and adapted to the prison situation. Some of the major items deal with the frequency of visitations with family members, relationship to siblings, and geographical distance between the prison and the convict's family.

Items 21 and 22 were included to determine the subject's length of incarceration. These questions are necessary, for as already mentioned, in many instances prison records do not reveal sentences served in other states. The items were actually placed at the end of the interview, because they could have been a threat to rapport.

The next three items (23-25) are measures of help giving and receiving. It is crucial to find out how much help is returned in any way. As with other items, an attempt was made to verify responses through conversations with the counselor of the institution.

Items 26 through 28 deal with the subject's special interests and memberships in organizations of any kind. The purpose of these items was to find out if older prisoners like to participate in collective activities like the aged on the outside or if they choose other means to gain or maintain life-satisfaction.

The next three items (29-31) are an attempt to measure the amount of contact maintained with the outside. Questions are: "Do you ever make any phone calls?" "Do you write letters to anybody?" "Do you ever get phone calls or receive letters?" This information was also verified through consultation with the administration.

Items 32 through 35 are used to find out about friendship patterns among the aged in the prison. Besides self-report the interviewer's personal observations of the subject's relations with peers were used.

The next nine items constitute a measure of religiosity. Question 36 ("Do you have any kind of religion?") elicits the person's denominational affiliation, while the next eight questions comprise a measurement of religiosity.

Items 45 through 53 ask about the subject's participation and interest in politics.

The next 15 items deal with work and retirement. A large number of questions was needed, for there is virtually no information on retirement in a total institution.

Items 69 through 78 relate to the respondent's subjective aging experience. Item 69 has previously been used (Glamser, 1976). Age identification as "old" is assumed to be a somewhat negative evaluation of oneself, at least in a youth-oriented society.

The next three questions (79, 80, 81) are designed to gain insight into the prisoner's definition of the prison situation. The subjects were asked to reveal specific events that affected their lives. Responses to these items are expected to be somewhat idiosyncratic.

Item 82 asked the subject if he ever concerned himself with the thought of dying in prison. The question was placed at the end of the schedule for it was assumed that this item would be a threat to the subjects.

Essentially these questions cover aspects of aging which have been studied extensively by gerontologists so as to allow for fruitful comparisons. As stated previously, it is hoped that insight into the social aspects of aging will be gained by applying to the prison situation questions that have been studied relative to the aged population on the outside.

Data Collection

Prior to the initial interviews with inmates, the interviewer obtained general information about the subjects from the warden and the counselor of the older men. It was difficult to determine from records which subjects were first offenders in late life as opposed to those who had grown old in prison. In most cases, records did not reveal how much time each individual had spent in prison throughout his lifetime. Generally, records only indicated prison sentences served in the state where this prison is located. For instance, a man's prison record may show a five-year sentence that the individual is serving without mentioning that this sentence followed a twenty-year incarceration in another state.

It became necessary to talk to each resident of the Annex building to find out each man's length of incarceration and previous prison experience. Initially, the interviewer was received with great mistrust, and was

often perceived to be "from the parole board" or "a shrink". After several visitations, however, the relationship between the researcher and the convicts became less formal and the convicts gradually accepted the interviewer. Informal conversations with the convicts facilitated good rapport which increased the likelihood of honest responses during the subsequent interviews.

Approximately two months after the initial contact, the subjects were contacted again by the researcher to reaffirm the nature and objectives of the research. This took place approximately two weeks prior to the main interviews. By this time, the interviewer was approaching the status of a confidant. Besides sharing their experiences in the prison, the convicts also shared their food and visitors with the researcher and gave her small presents such as coins, rocks, and flowers.

The main interviews for this study were conducted in a relatively informal manner. Initially, the researcher sat at a desk that could be viewed by most prisoners, taking notes as the man sitting near the desk responded to the questions. Experience revealed, however, that better responses were obtained when the researcher took brief notes while sitting on the bed of the convict.

Each subject was interviewed over a total of the hours or more. The interview schedule had to be completed over a period of days due to the length of the schedule.

In many instances, the subjects related experiences irrelevant to the question asked before responding to the subject matter. However, their spontaneous remarks provided a great deal of background information.

While collecting data at the Annex, it was brought to the researcher's attention that some old convicts remain at the main prison rather than at the Annex if there is a detainer on them. This means they are wanted for a different crime in another state. With the help of a resident counselor, it was possible for the interviewer to meet two of these old men from the main prison at a Seventh Step meeting. The Seventh Step Foundation is comprised of inmates and concerned citizens with the objective of rehabilitation. The meetings of the organization were somewhat formal yet the possibility for casual conversations did exist. All Seventh Step meetings took place at the main prison with both convicts and outsiders present. The addition of these men of the main prison to the sample added to the representativeness of the sample.

Due to the length of the interview schedule, interviews at the main prison had to be conducted by a resident counselor who was informed of the purpose of the study. Furthermore, the counselor was able to locate three additional older prisoners from the main prison who were not members of the Seventh Step Foundation and who met the criteria for this study.

In short, subjects at the main prison were interviewed by a resident counselor. However, the interviewer met with two of the latter subjects at rehabilitation classes to verify the data collected at the main prison. It is interesting to note that the resident counselor had difficulties locating old men at the main prison because "it's hard to tell who the old guys are."

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

The focus of this study is upon the major social institutions and how prisoners participate in them as compared to older persons not in prison. The study investigates the behavior and attitudes of older prisoners with respect to family, religion, work, retirement and politics. The study also investigates the incarceration patterns among elderly inmates and prisoners' subjective impressions of growing old in prison.

Marriage and Family

The family is one of the major social institutions in Western society. Among the aged in general there is a direct relationship between marital status and life satisfaction. Married people are happier and healthier than non-married individuals. For these reasons family patterns of older convicts are an important part of this study. As compared to aged men on the outside, men in prison show a distinctly different marriage and family pattern. Among free-world elderly, 65 and over, approximately eight out of every ten men are married (1970 Census of Population, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 1-278, table 54). Men in prison, on

the other hand, show a variety of marital patterns (See Table IV).

Table IV. Marital Status of Prisoners

No. of Subjects	Marital Status
3	never married
2	still married to one and only spouse
3	married and has been married previously
1	married by common-law
1	married twice by common-law (killed his second wife)
1	has common-law wife, but does not know if still "married"
1	does not know if still married
1	does not know if still married, was divorced previously
3	widowed (one subject killed his wife)
1	widowed twice
2	no response

There is a great variety of marital patterns among prisoners. Only one individual reported being married to his original spouse. Three men were never married; three others reported being married more than once. The remaining subjects have unusual marital patterns such as, marriage by common-law. Other men reported being married several times during their lives, yet there is uncertainty if these men were ever divorced from their first wives.

It appears that family relations of older prisoners are "poor" and almost non-existent. Promises of faithfulness made in the aftermath of courtroom convictions soon become a burden too large to bear for the wife. In many cases, marital relationships were strained before the individual became incarcerated. The results were divorce and/or alienation.

One strange situation encountered was that of Mr. South (51, white) who has spent 25 years in prison. South got married early in life and separated from his wife before their first child was born. In 1951, while in prison, Mrs. South filed for divorce and Mr. South "signed the papers." Thereafter, Mr. South thought that he was divorced, but in 1969 he found out that he still was legally married. Mrs. South let her husband know that she was willing to get back together again. South, however, was uninterested for he had established several relationships in the meantime with other females. There is no contact between Mr. South and his child.

Although most men in prison do not have and sometimes never have had a family in the conventional sense, 16 of the 19 subjects have children (See Table V).

Table V. Prisoners and Their Children

No. of Children	No. of Subjects
0	1
1	5
2	3
3	3
4	0
5	2
6	1
7	1
8	0
9	1
no response	2

One of the subjects with two children also has two stepchildren. One subject with seven children has an additional five stepchildren.

Although there is some uncertainty by some men with regard to their children and their ages, all the men responding, except one, have one or more children. The most children for any one prisoner is nine. Most of the children of residents are in their 20's and 30's, though one is 42. At the other end of the age range there was a five year-old, a 10 year-old, and five teenagers. Five prisoners do not know the ages of any of their children.

Grandchildren

In the United States, about 70 percent of people over 65 have grandchildren (Havighurst and Albrecht, 1953, p. 89). In this study, 8 of the older prisoners have grandchildren, one has great-grandchildren and grandchildren. Furthermore, four do not know if they have any grandchildren.

Of the nine people who indicated they have grandchildren, two men have never seen their grandchildren. Two men have seen some of their grandchildren and feel positive about being grandfathers. Five men have seen their grandchildren and feel very good and proud about them.

It appears that older prisoners perceive the grandparent role in the same way as old people on the outside. Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) report that most old people gain pleasure and comfort from their role as grandparent. People in prison express the same feelings even if there is little contact between the grandfather and grandchild.

Generally old people live near their children. Shanas (1967 in Neugarten, 1968: 302) reports that "between half and two-thirds of all old people with children irrespective of class, either share a household with a child or live within ten minutes distance from the child." It is unusual for an old person to live more than one hour away

from his nearest child (Riley and Foner, 1968). Of the men in prison, five reported having families and five reported having friends in the area nearby, that is, within a driving distance of three hours. Eight people did not have family or friends in the area; however, of the eight, six have family or friends living six or seven hours away. One man did not respond on this item.

One of the eight men who has neither family nor friends in the area reports that he sees his family once a year. One man has only seen his children twice in eight years; one subject has not seen his children in twenty years; four men report that they never see family or friends.

Although the families of some prisoners live near the prison, there is little contact with relatives. One man reports that he sees his family once a week. Two men, however, report seeing family members twice a year. One man said he sees his family when he asks them to come, and one prisoner said he sees his family "whenever they feel like coming."

Six of the nineteen subjects report having friends living in the area near the prison. One man sees his friends once a week, another subject sees his friends four times a year, and one man sees them three times a year. One inmate reports that he writes to his friends but rarely sees them; one prisoner never sees his friends. One subject did not respond.

On the outside, 80 percent of old people report that they have seen one child within the last week. In the prison setting, this is true for only one of 19 individuals. There are many forgotten men in the prison like Mr. Schroder, for example. Mr. Schroder (65, white) has spent 28 years in prison. Although Schroder lived only 40 miles away from the prison before committing his crime, has five siblings and was married, nobody remembers Mr. Schroder ever receiving a visitor. Mr. Schroder tries to keep the prison out of his life and become psychologically disturbed. When asked about visitations from his family, Schroder says, "I have a lot of friends. They (administration) don't let a one of them visit me or me see them. I know they (administration) say different, but it's true."

Also, Mr. Queeney (60, white), who has served 20 years in prison, never receives visits from his family. Mr. Queeney has been pardoned by the Governor, yet he still remains in prison. None of his three children is willing to sign out his or her father.

Another man (65, Black), who has served over 24 years in prison and has never been married but has four children, never receives visitors. He says, "They never come to see me and it does not bother me. One of my boys is here in prison right now, at the 'walls'. He has a 120-year sentence. Sometimes I go to see him. I knew it would happen to him."

Siblings

Although 13 of 19 prisoners have siblings, there is only a minimum amount of contact between prisoners and their siblings.

Table VI. Old Prisoners and Contact with Siblings

<u>No. of Subjects</u>	<u>Last Time of Visitation with Siblings</u>
1	one week ago
1	one month ago
2	less than one year ago
2	less than two years ago
2	less than three years ago
2	less than 10 years ago
5	ten years ago and longer
2	have no siblings
2	no response

The loose bonds between the prisoners and their brothers and sisters may be due to the fact that only 10 of the men's siblings live in the area. For the remaining subjects, six men's siblings live less than 6 hours away from the prison, and two less than two hours away. (Two did not respond, one's sibling had died, and two have no siblings). In five cases, it takes more than six hours traveling distance for a brother or a sister to see their sibling in prison.

Nevertheless, nine subjects report feeling particularly close to a sibling. One man does not know if he is close or not, and two men have no siblings. Five of the nine men who do feel close to a sibling feel close to a brother and in four cases a man is close to his youngest sister. It appears that even though there is a minimum amount of contact between these men in prison and their siblings, there is a feeling of "belonging together". This is reflected by the fact that 15 men have had close relatives die since the subject's incarceration, and nine men report that this did affect them. One subject says he does not know if this affected him; five men report not being affected by a relative's death.

Mr. South is one of those men who considered the death of a relative as a rather tragic event. When talking about his father's death, South says:

"I did not go to the funeral of my father. I was in my cell when I was told that I had a phone call. Back then (1960) that was a big deal, and I got real uptight. The warden called me and told me that he had died. The letter came from the pastor who did the services. My sister had told him to write me. The letter was written a couple of days after my father died. I got real mad at them, but I forgave them. Then I could have killed them. I laid in my cell for three days. Friends came by and asked if they could help me, but I told them they couldn't. When my mother died, I was in Tennessee. They don't let you go out of state for the funeral."

Exchange of Help Among
Prisoners and Their Families

On the outside, there is an extensive network of help giving and receiving between vertical kin (Hill, 1965). The type of help given or received varies from babysitting to financial aid. Troll (1971) points out that the amount of mutual help is not related to either frequency of visitation or residential proximity.

Men in prison seem to be excluded from the normal helping pattern. Only one of 19 inmates receives help from his children. Fifteen subjects don't receive help of any kind, one man has no children, and two subjects gave no response.

Ironically, regarding help-giving, six convicts give financial aid to their children. Two men give only when they are not incarcerated and eight men report that they don't help their children. One subject does not have children, and two men gave no response. On the whole, one man perceives himself as a receiver, three men see themselves as givers and two men consider themselves to be givers when out of prison. Four men did not commit themselves and 6 subjects neither gave nor received (two did not respond, and one has no children).

It must be noted that the four men who did not see themselves as givers or receivers were actually givers. In

casual conversations it was found out that these four men send their social security checks to their families to assure them of a more comfortable life. Two of the three men who consider themselves to be givers did not give while in prison.

It becomes evident that many old prisoners are meager givers and meager receivers. It can be observed that those men who give rarely receive any kind of help from their children. Mr. Brown (66, Black) has spent 24 years in prison. He has given a total of about \$2,000 of his social security payments to his daughter "to get her through college". Brown also sends money to his 26 year-old son. During the 24 years of incarceration Brown has had only two visits from his children.

Mr. Strong (71, Black) who has spent about 40 years in prison, gives money to his son and to his stepchildren by his common-law wife. Strong says, "I help my old lady's children more than I help mine. I send them about \$50-60 a month. Kids can't take care of themselves. The mother can't either. She has no money; she might smoke some reefer."

Religion

As one gets older, religion becomes increasingly important. According to Moberg (1965) active church involvement decreases and praying increases with age.

One could expect men in prison to be deviant from the normal pattern, for a prisoner's life style and behavior are often in violation of religious ethics. In this study, however, it was found that religion was very important to eight men, important to seven men and unimportant to four men.

It can be observed that with regard to religion, old people in prison are similar to the aged on the outside. Bible reading and praying increase with age while church going declines in those cases where it was present earlier.

A typical case is Mr. Queeney (60, white) who spent 20 years in prison. He says, "I am religious regardless of how I'm talking. I love the Bible; I mean that. I got two up there now. I pray every night. I pray for you. I want you to pray for me, too. The Bible says you should pray for one another." Frequently, Mr. Queeney can be seen walking with guards or visitors, holding his Bible pointing out passages that he thinks justify the killings that he committed and his earlier drinking problem.

Although there is a spiritual need among older prisoners, church services within the institution are only available to men behind the main walls. Of the six elderly subjects who are residents of the main prison four attend church on a regular basis, one seldom goes and one never goes to church.

Prisoners in the Annex can gain permission to go to church in the outside community if a citizen provides transportation and assumes responsibility for returning the inmate. Most of the old men, however, do not meet these prerequisites. Consequently, church attendance is a rare privilege for men at the Annex.

It should be noted that some prisoners in their 50's pride themselves in the fact that they have not missed Sunday services in several years. Besides being a place for spiritual worship, for some of the younger men the church serves as a source of social contacts, or as a trading post for cigarettes. Furthermore, a pass to church entitles the individual to stay in free society several hours after services are concluded. However, young prisoners in their 20's often make great efforts to express their atheism in order to gain peer-group approval.

In contrast to this there is a strong and deep rooted sense of religion among older prisoners. Nine men see themselves as strong believers, seven as believers. There was only one agnostic and two non-believers among the older men.

Prisoners' religiosity is reflected in behavior such as Bible reading and praying. Thirteen of 19 men report reading the Bible on a regular basis. Six men don't read the Bible. The number of Bible readers could be higher if it were not for the poor reading skills of many inmates.

Twelve of the older prisoners report praying regularly, four occasionally, and three don't pray at all. Subjects who don't pray tend to be younger than those who do pray.

Ten men report that they felt less religious when they were younger. Four men had experienced no change in religious feelings, and five men were uncertain about any religious change. When questioned if religion had become more important to the men over time, 12 men indicated that religion had become more important to them as they grew older.

Six men, including the non-believers, had not experienced this type of change. One man gave no response.

On the whole, it appears that old people in prison are more religious than their younger counterparts. The old person seems to have a need to "clean house" as he approaches death.

Political Participation

On the outside, old people are active participants in the political processes. Old people are more likely to vote than young people. Voting participation is highest for people in their 50's and diminishes slightly among older age categories.

Although State law allows prisoners to vote in general or primary elections, the men in the state penitentiary are not given the opportunity to exercise this

right. Since a convict cannot vote or campaign, he experiences a lack of political power. In this study, 14 men reported that they would vote if allowed to do so. Three men had no desire to vote; two men did not respond. Nine men said that they did vote when they were on the outside. Four men had never been able to vote due to loss of civil rights. An additional four men had never voted and two did not respond.

Among people on the outside there is also a great interest in political events. At the same time, the elderly are somewhat less likely to form an opinion on a particular issue. Of the men in prison, eleven reported being very interested, two somewhat interested, and four not interested in politics. During the interview, however, it came to the researcher's attention that those men who claimed not to be interested in politics were well informed on political events.

Prisoners keep up with politics through TV, radio, and newspapers, where these are available. Four men report that they watch the news on TV, read the paper, and listen to the news on the radio on a daily basis. Nine men got their political information from TV and newspapers daily, and four persons watched the news on TV only. Two men did not respond. It can be observed that some or most prisoners watch the news several times a day. The old men are highly selective in memorizing particular political events.

If an old convict has an opinion on a particular issue, it is strong, and he is "ready to argue".

For example, Mr. Knox (Black, 67) has spent 10 years in prison. When asked about his interest in politics, he asked the interviewer, "who are you going to vote for? Carter? How can a woman vote for that man? You know what he is going to do. If my wife would have an abortion, I would kill her. You have to think about that, there is a whole heap to that."

Mr. White (Black, 55) has spent 14 years in prison. He says, "I watch the news on TV and read the paper. I wish "X" had been nominated. He could have done a lot for the prisoners. He used to come out here and help the men on death row, and he would not charge them nothing."

It can be said that old men in prison are generally interested in politics although some report that they are not. Some of them voted when they were younger, most of them, however, had their rights as a citizen taken away throughout their voting age. From the interviewer's observations, interest in politics seems to increase with age among the prisoners.

The degree of political interest of aged prisoners was also investigated by means of questions regarding the presidential election.

Four men knew the names of the vice-presidential candidates, 11 did not know and four gave no response. Concerning politics on the state level, six men knew and 8 men did not know who was running for U.S. senator in their particular state. five men gave no response.

Work and Retirement

On the outside, retirement is one of the major indicators of old age. In the United States the meaning of work is multifaceted so that at retirement a person loses more than a source of income. Retirement in free society can result in loss of status, loss of social contacts, a feeling of uselessness, and inability to establish a new life routine.

In prison, retirement is virtually non-existent. Thirteen subjects report that they hold a job. Twelve men get paid for their work (Table VII).

Table VII. Older Prisoners and Income Earned

<u>No. of Subjects</u>	<u>Monthly earnings</u>
1	\$50
9	\$20
1	\$5
1	no response

Twelve men perform their job related duties on a regular basis. Ten men enjoy their work, while three convicts do not. Nine men desire a job of a different kind than the one held presently. Four men are content with their work assignment.

Of the 19 subjects, 13 do not see themselves as retired. All 19 men report that in the prison setting they are allowed to work as long as they wish to do so. None of the 13 working men is looking forward to retirement. The major objective for working for 13 prisoners is to pass time, and to stay busy. Only one man mentioned the monetary aspect of work. Exemplifying this is Mr. Sanders who has spent 24 years of his life in prison. He is in rather poor physical condition due to his long-term drug habit. A resident counselor describes him saying, "he looks like he is going to collapse and fall over dead any minute." However, Mr. Sanders works five days a week at the prison hospital. He says, "I don't really like working as a nurse, but it keeps me active. I do this job regularly because I think men need more help when it comes to being sick, but as far as the job--I don't like it. I work to help control my mind. I'll never stop working."

In general, old people in prison work for different reasons than people on the outside do. Variables such as status, sense of accomplishment, or financial resources as motivation for work are almost absent.

A sense of accomplishment is not likely to result from a job that has been forced upon the individual. Often a man is assigned to a job for which he has not been trained. A surgeon may be assigned work as a cook. According to inmates, the State makes no effort to assign people to jobs for which they have been trained because they would be a threat to the people who already work there.

The possibility of social contacts seldom encourages old people in prison to work. In most cases, inmates work in isolation or with inmates they already know.

Financial rewards as possible motivation for work can also be eliminated, for good-paying jobs are nonexistent. Twenty dollars is the average pay per month; maximum income is \$80. Many old people, however, only earn \$5 per month because of the nature of their jobs. There is little chance for advancement. Ambition is stifled by the fact that one can earn little money, and the job can be taken away from the inmate at any time. Gambling, repair jobs for inmates and guards, crafts, and publication of articles are viewed to be better ways to earn money.

Also, establishing a pattern or routine seldom serves as a motive to work. In prison, everything is routine. Work merely influences the degree of routine and monotony.

Finally, one's job in a penal institution has little influence on one's status among peers. The status hierarchy in prison is based on type of offense rather than occupation. It appears that a white-collar criminal, due to his non-violent nature and personality, ranks at the top, and the sex offender is at the bottom of the social ladder. Physical strength can facilitate leadership in cliques that consider this to be desirable. At the same time, an intelligent person may gradually assume a leadership role. Inmates report that this usually happens over a long period of time by taking on "more and more of the boss's work."

Furthermore, it must be noted that status-seeking is not likely to serve as an incentive for work because it cannot be carried over in the free-world. Mr. Fowler points out:

"Nobody is interested to establish status in prison. If you hold a good job, it is not good as a recommendation on the outside. To an employer, it does not matter if you were the assistant to the warden or worked in the metal shop. All he sees is Prison."

Mr. Fowler also points out the lack of rites of passage in the prison. "It does not matter if you worked here for five or 20 years. On the outside you get a little pin or gold watch or something, but in here there is nothing."

In conclusion, it can be said that old people in prison work in order to avoid thinking about their

situation. Some people do so consciously, others probably do so subconsciously. Among convicts and administrators, there is a consensus that people who stop working and start thinking will soon view life as meaningless and either escape or die.

Some of the six men who reportedly see themselves as retired are quite deviant in their attitude toward work. One man reports that he never worked, and one subject reports that he retired 20 years ago. Another man stopped working 6 years ago, and one subject was forced to retire due to an accident at the prison that caused him to become blind. Two prisoners gave no response. It must be noted that one man who said he retired 20 years ago also said that he never worked in his life. Furthermore, one man would like to work, but will not do so because he never filed an income tax form when employed on the outside, and thus fears prosecution.

Of the retired men, two indicated that they enjoy retirement, and four gave no response.

Throughout the interviews, the subjects freely talked about work and retirement in the ordinary sense. The topic of retirement from crime, however, remained a vague issue. Those men who worked gave the impression of having retired from crime earlier in life probably because of their incarceration. One of the "retired" prisoners, on the other hand, seemed to have a dual concept of the

retirement process. He says, "Last time I was in court for armed robbery, the judge asked me 'Aren't you getting too old for that?' Well, I said, that is what the other judge asked me a couple of years ago, and that's what the other judge asked me before that."

Self Concept of Aged Prisoners

In a youth-oriented society considering oneself elderly has a negative connotation. Of the men in this cohort, five see themselves as young, nine as middle-aged and give as elderly.

Those who consider themselves to be middle-aged give ages ranging from 25 to 52 as the age when beginning to feel middle-aged. The elderly prisoners report having started feeling elderly between the ages of 45 and 58. Upon second questioning, the middle-aged and the young group reported that there is no certain age at which a person begins to feel middle-aged or elderly in the prison. There is a great deal of emphasis on a person's physical and mental condition irrespective of age. The elderly men, however, report that they begin to feel elderly due to certain events such as becoming a grandfather, or as the result of physical injury. The men perceiving themselves as young attribute their condition of youth to the fact that "I took good care of myself."

There was an unusual reaction to the question "How old does a prisoner have to be before people treat him as an older prisoner?" Fourteen men suggested that this "depends on the man's physical and mental condition." Three inmates thought this would happen between the age of 45 and 70. Two people gave no response.

From these findings one can conclude, that one's chronological age is not a major factor in a person's age definition. In prison, a chronologically old man can maintain the status of "young" or "middle-aged" if he keeps himself physically and mentally active. Age-classification seems to be highly individualized rather than superimposed by the system.

When asked about the possible advantage of being an older prisoner, seventeen men report that there are no positive aspects of being an older person in the prison. One subject, however, mentioned the possibility of living in the Annex, and one man reported that there is less pressure to work.

Furthermore, old men report that fellow prisoners do not treat them differently because of their age. Three men noticed a slight difference in treatment such as making a chair available for an older person if he has a physical handicap.

Fifteen of the subjects report that they feel younger than most people of their age on the outside. Two

men report that they feel the same as people on the outside who are of the same age. One man did not know if he felt younger or older, and one said that he felt older. One 52 year-old subject reports, "When I went home I saw an old buddy. We had gone to school together. Man, he was bent over, and he looked like he was 120 years old. He is out there in the rat race."

The Social Life of Older Prisoners

Next, an attempt was made to examine the social life of prisoners. Old people on the outside are likely to seek membership in clubs or organizations. The elderly tend to join groups ranging from bingo clubs and senior centers, to the "Gray Panthers".

It appears that prisoners are also likely to seek group membership. Twelve men reported being a member of an organization. Seven men belong to the Seventh Step Foundation, a self-help organization of prisoners and outsiders. Two men are members of Alcoholics Anonymous and two men belong to the American Legion. Furthermore, one man belongs to the Nashville Pirates (Brail Club), and another subject is involved in various projects related to the prison such as the Half-Way House. Six men, however, don't belong to any clubs. For these men joining an organization means "bad business". One subject gave no response.

It appears that older prisoners, like old people in the outside world, like to join groups. Within the prison setting groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, the American Legion, and Seventh Step are available for membership. It must be noted that the nature of these organizations makes them limited to certain inmates. One has to be an alcoholic or a veteran in order to join either of the first two. The Seventh Step program, designed for the betterment of life inside the prison and to help the individual to make better adjustment upon release, has a somewhat limited membership, too. The individual has to be willing to be rehabilitated in order to join the organization, and it cannot be assumed that all criminals are willing to do so. Mr. Fowler says:

"They talk about rehabilitation here. There is nothing that they can do for me. There are no models. I would rehabilitate for a person who is worth it. This woman (pointing at a photograph of a middle-aged woman with whom Mr. Fowler corresponds) has done more for me in six weeks than they have in 32 years. I would also rehabilitate for a person like you (referring to the interviewer), but not for them."

It appears that prisoners become members of groups such as the Seventh Step Foundation due to lack of other group outlets rather than out of interest in the organizations. Ten men belonged to at least one organization such as the Masons (3 subjects), the American Legion (2), Delta Kappa Epsilon (1), Jaycees (1), the Elks Club (1), a union

(1), or the YMCA (1), before coming to prison. Eight men reported not to have had membership in a group of any kind before coming to prison.

It can be concluded that an old person in prison has only a slim chance to become a member of, or maintain a membership in, an organization of his choice. If membership is available, an old prisoner either joins something that can be beneficial to him upon release or remains an isolate.

Old men in prison also spend a lot of time on their hobbies. These hobbies include writing poetry, playing cards, reading, stamp and coin collecting, fishing on prison grounds, radio repair, and others.

Next, an attempt was made to determine the amount of contact of an old prisoner with the free world. One avenue of contact with the outside world is the telephone. This opportunity for social contact was used variably by the subjects of this study. Three men reported that they call outside at least once a day. Three prisoners call one to three times a week, six men make one to three calls a month, and six subjects seldom make phone calls.

The men who make the most phone calls call friends. It must be noted that only the residents of the Annex have a pay phone available for this use. At the main prison phone calls are difficult to make for they are subject to approval of the administration.

An attempt was also made to find out how much outside contact an inmate maintains by means of writing. Four men write one or more letters a week. Two subjects write one to three letters a month, five men write one to three letters in three months, and four prisoners report that they write very few letters. Three men never write, and one man gave no response.

It was difficult for the researcher to get concrete responses regarding letter writing from the subjects. It appeared that the men may not have remembered how often they call or write friends or family. The subjects expressed that they called or wrote when they "felt like it".

On the whole, due to the low educational level of most old prisoners, phone calls are more popular than letters as a means of "keeping in touch". If letters are sent, the prisoners may not get them until several weeks later. Neither the inmates nor the administration were able to explain this phenomenon. Occasionally a prisoner may receive several letters at one time from a person who is wondering why the first letter has not been answered.

Next, it was determined how many calls and letters an old man in prison can or does receive. Here again, it was most difficult to elicit a precise answer from the prisoners. Two men reported they receive one or more letters a week. Six men receive one to three letters a

month, three men get one or two letters in three months, and six men seldom receive mail. Two subjects did not respond.

There is marked variation with regard to the number of calls which the men receive from the outside. Three men receive at least one call a week. Two subjects receive one or two calls a month, five men get one or two phone calls in three months, and eight subjects seldom receive calls. One man gave no response.

Calls and letters come mostly from friends and family. In some instances, men who had little contact with their families were hesitant to admit this.

It can be concluded that contact with the outside world is variable. Visitations, phone calls and letters are generally received sporadically, if they are received at all.

Social Relations Within the Prison

In examining the social relations among prisoners, a rather unusual pattern was found within the institution. The 19 subjects reported that they knew fellow inmates by name, but friendship in the sense it exists in the community is almost absent in the prison. Eight men report having loosely drawn friendships with one to three people.

For nine men, fellow inmates constitute a body of associates rather than friends. Two men report they have no friends in prison.

For these subjects friendship is rare, and when it does occur it is tenuous. Older prisoners are not likely to trust anybody, not even their confederates. A man may have an acquaintance for a period of years with whom he eats, talks, or plays cards, but he does not confide in the individual.

Mr. Schroder (65, white) has spent 28 years in prison. When asked about close friends, Mr. Schroder says, "If I got a friend in here I don't know it. In a way they are friends. I've had them come to me and tell me, 'I don't think you know I'm your friend, but I rather trust you than anybody in the world', but they cannot show it too much or they will get in trouble."

Mr. Brown (65, Black) who has served 24 years in prison, says, "they are friendly toward me; I am friendly toward them. I tell them some of my business, but I would not give them my last nickel. I would not die for them."

Eighteen subjects did not know their prison friends or fellow inmates before coming to prison. Only one man reports to have known a current associate when on the outside.

When prisoners associate with fellow inmates, 12 of 19 subjects report that they spend their time just talking, or watching TV and talking (2), playing cards and talking (1), or fishing on prison grounds and talking (1). Three men report having no interaction with other convicts.

It can be concluded that prison life forces a man to be constantly on the defensive. Trust is a luxury too expensive to afford. Even upon release, a convict is likely to be a loner. Mr. Fowler (white, 62) who has spent 34 years in various penal institutions (including Sing Sing) demonstrates this when he says "When I go to church, I feel uncomfortable. There, even the people who will be the criminals of tomorrow, look down on you. A black mark on your record is as permanent as the hieroglyphics on the statues of Egypt."

The foregoing data seem to indicate that confidants are non-existent for these study subjects. Contrary to the aged in normal society, men in prison do not have a person whom they trust. In the prison culture, confiding in a fellow inmate appears to be mistaken for personal weakness or as a potential danger. The old convict idea that "hearing nothing and seeing nothing will keep you out of trouble" still seems to prevail in this prison setting.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to gain a better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of aging in the United States. Its major theoretical assumption was that the individual's aging experience is to a great degree determined by social and cultural factors. Even though all people of the world go through the biological aging process, it is the shared definition of that process which determines the meaning of aging to the individual. One of this researcher's objectives was to attempt to separate cultural definitions from the underlying biological phenomena associated with aging.

Although a common approach to study the social and cultural aspects of aging has been the cross-cultural study, (Shanas, et al., 1968; Cowgill and Holmes, 1972) an alternative approach, namely, observing people outside of the typical social arrangement of a society, was employed for this study. Thus, a prison was chosen as the setting for this research. Although the prisoners had been socialized in the dominant culture as children, their unique social situation in later life allowed for a cultural and social pattern of aging uncommon to society as a whole.

The focus of this study was upon major social institutions and how the prisoners participate in them in comparison to older people on the outside. For the purpose of this study social institutions included family, religion, economy (with respect to work and retirement) and politics.

In addition to the institutional focus, there was an investigation of social patterns among inmates as well as prisoners' subjective impressions of growing old in the institution.

The research sample was comprised of all inmates from the population of a major prison in the southeastern United States who were 50 years of age, and who had spent at least ten years in prison. One 48 year-old was included because he was close to the cut-off, and one 42 year-old was included because he had been incarcerated for over 20 years. This resulted in a sample of 19 subjects with an age range from 42 to 77 years with a median age of about 60 years. The average time spent in prison was about 23 years. Because all the older prisoners were included, there is no problem of representativeness with respect to the penal institution studied. Furthermore, the small number of subjects allowed for extended interviews.

An interview schedule comprised of eighty-four open-ended items was employed. Each resident was interviewed over a total of at least ten hours.

Findings showed that there is indeed a marked difference in aging patterns with regard to the social and cultural aspects of aging.

For older people in the community, the family is the major source of primary relations. Relations with spouse, children and siblings help the individual overcome role loss in other areas. At the same time, the loss of family through death is a major aspect of aging for most people.

Family patterns among prisoners are different. Irrespective of the fact that most subjects were or had been married (including common law), there is only vague contact with spouses or former spouses. The same is true regarding contact with children. Although 16 of 19 subjects have children, only one individual has contact with his children on a regular basis. This is in contrast to the aged on the outside where 80 percent of aged people with children report to have seen at least one child within the last week (Shanas, et al., 1968: 246).

With regard to the grandparent role, however, old people are quite similar to their counterparts on the outside. Although there is virtually no contact between prisoners and their grandchildren, the men report positive feelings about grandchildren and their role as a grandparent.

Relationships of prisoners with siblings are almost non-existent. Of the 13 residents who have siblings, only four have seen one within the last year, and five have not seen one in ten years.

As people grow older there is often an increase in religious activities such as praying and Bible reading. This researcher had anticipated this would be different in the prison setting, yet the evidence did not support this assumption. Sixteen of the prisoners reported that they were believers and that religion was important to them. Twelve of the residents said that religion had become more important to them as they grew older, and none of the men reported a decline in religiosity over time. It was found that prayer and Bible reading are quite common among older prisoners, much more so than among the young inmates.

Like the aged on the outside, older residents in prison show a considerable interest in politics. Although the inmates are not allowed to vote, the older men don't appear to feel left out of the political scene. They watch television, listen to the radio, and read newspapers, if these are available, in order to keep up with current political events.

One of the phenomena in which older men in prison differ remarkably from their counterparts on the outside is retirement. In prison retirement is virtually non-existent. Thirteen of nineteen subjects hold a job in

prison, and all but one man receive pay for their efforts. In prison residents at any age level are allowed to work. The concept of retirement is alien to these men, and factors such as status, sense of accomplishment or financial rewards do not appear to be the motive to work. Prisoners merely want to keep active and pass time.

For the purpose of this study the term retirement was used as it is defined in the conventional sense. The issue of retirement from crime remains to be investigated. Although it is generally assumed that crime is a young man's game, this researcher encountered a case that may be an exception or may be a stimulus for further research. After this research had been completed, this interviewer found out that a 72 year-old subject had committed a new crime while out on a pre-release program. This man was returned to the penitentiary, transferred to the Annex (due to his old age) and a week after arrival he escaped from the institution.

Participation in voluntary organizations is as common among prisoners as it is among people on the outside. Although the outlets are limited, two-thirds of the old men belonged to at least one organization such as American Legion, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Seventh-Step.

One area that shows a great degree of variation between older prisoners and old people on the outside is friendship patterns. Older people on the outside who live

in an age dense situation are likely to have a number of friends. These friendship patterns are positive contributors to the life-satisfaction and morale of older people.

Among the prisoners studied the situation is quite different. Although inmates know each other by name, friendship as it exists in the community is almost absent. Older prisoners are not likely to trust anybody. Confiding in a fellow inmate is seen as a personal weakness or a potential danger. Inmates are not likely to have a confidant, and they are also not likely to have high morale. This phenomenon can certainly be linked to the uniqueness of the prison system and the mood of society to punish rather than rehabilitate.

Finally, the old men's perception of aging was investigated. For most Americans there is a high degree of consensus with respect to the importance of chronological age as an indicator of age appropriate behavior and social age. Within the prison setting chronological age is not very important. One's physical and mental condition, rather than age, are the decisive criteria as to how a person is viewed and treated. It appears that, at least in this respect, prisoners are more open-minded than society as a whole. When asked how they felt about their age compared to people on the outside, fifteen of the nineteen subjects reported that they felt younger, and only one reported feeling older. It is this researcher's

impression that the older men in prison even look younger as compared to older people in the community.

On the whole it can be said that much of what is viewed as part of normal aging does not take place in the prison setting. Many of the losses associated with normal aging take place in young adulthood among prisoners. Retirement and widowhood are not meaningful. Chronological age does not possess much salience for prisoners. Even some of the effects of environmental stress on appearance are mitigated.

This is not to suggest that the key to avoiding the problems of aging is spending one's life in prison. It is to suggest that, in the words of Robert Butler (1975:2),

. . . we have shaped a society which is extremely harsh to live in when one is old. The tragedy of old age is not the fact that each of us must grow old and die but that the process of doing so has been made unnecessarily and at times excruciatingly painful, humiliating, debilitating and isolating through insensitivity, ignorance, and poverty.

APPENDIX A
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

1. Name?
2. When were you born?
3. Where were you born?
4. Where did you grow up?
5. Where have you lived?
6. Are you married now, or have you ever been married?
7. Do you have any children?
8. How old are they?
9. Do you have grandchildren?
10. How do you feel about being a grandfather?
11. Do you have family or friends living in this area?
12. How long does it take to get from there to the prison?
13. When was the last time you saw them? How often do you see them?
14. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
15. Do they live in this area? (no where?)
16. How long does it take to get from there to the prison?
17. When was the last time you saw them? How often do you see them?
18. Do you feel particularly close to any of your brothers or sisters?
19. Have any of your close relatives passed away since you have been in prison?
20. Did that affect you in any way?
21. How many years all together have you spent in prison (and jail)?

22. How long was your longest sentence that you served?
23. I realize that some children, because of where they live or because of how much money they make, can be more help to their fathers than others. I'd like to know if you get any help from your children?
24. Do you help them in any way?
25. Do you feel that you give more or less than you receive?
26. I'd like to know something about the clubs or groups you have been involved with during your life. Did you belong to any before you came to prison?
27. Do you belong to any group or club now? (training program courses)
28. Do you have any hobbies? (what are they?)
29. Do you ever make any phone calls? (frequency, to whom?)
30. Do you write letters to anybody? (frequency, to whom?)
31. Do you ever get phone calls or receive letters? (frequency)
32. Do you know very many people around here? (names? or no names?)
33. Would you call any of them your friends?
34. Was he (or they) your friend before you came here?
35. What do you and your friend(s) usually do when you are together?
36. Do you have any kind of religion? (denomination; if not now what religion as a child)
37. How important is religion to you? (probe)
38. Do you have religious services in prison? Do you attend?
39. Do you go to church outside the prison? (frequency)
40. How do you feel about God?

41. Do you read the Bible?
42. Do you sometimes pray? (frequency)
43. Did you feel the same way about religion 10 years ago as you do now?
44. As you get older, would you say that religion becomes more important or less important to you?
45. Can you vote here in prison?
46. Would you vote if you could?
47. Did you vote when you were on the outside, let's say 10 years ago?
48. Are you interested in politics?
49. Do you watch the news on TV, read the newspaper or listen to the news on the radio? (frequency)
50. Do you think that the people have influence over what is going on in politics?
51. Do you know who is running for president of the United States this year?
52. Do you know who wants to be vice president?
53. Do you know who is running for U.S. senator in Tennessee?
54. Do you do any work around here? (IF NO GO TO #60)
55. Do you get paid for that?
56. Do you do that job regularly?
57. Do you enjoy it?
58. Would you rather do something else or quit working?
59. Do you see yourself as retired? (if YES skip 58)
60. Do they let you work in prison as long as you want or do you have to retire at a certain age?
61. Do you look forward to the time when you retire?
62. Why do you work now?

63. When did you stop working?
64. Would you say that you are retired? (if NO skip 65,66)
65. Do you enjoy it?
66. Why did you retire?
67. On the outside most people retire or quit working when they get older. Is there anything like that in prison?
68. At what age does it happen?
69. Do you think of yourself as middle aged, elderly, old, or what?
70. About how old were you when you started to feel that way?
71. Did this come gradually or rather sudden?
72. What happened that made you feel that way?
73. How old does a prisoner have to be before people treat him as an older prisoner?
74. Are there any good things about being an older person in prison? (probe)
75. Do people here treat you differently because you are older? (probe)
76. In the prison, does it matter how old a person is? (probe)
77. Does being in prison keep you young, or does it make a person old before his time?
78. Would you say that you feel older or younger than most people your age? (specify in the prison and then out of the prison)
79. When you think back to all the time you have spent in prison, what do you think is the most important problem of being a prisoner?
80. What was the best/worse thing that happened to you in prison? Can you remember anything in particular?
81. What advice would you give to a young prisoner who has a long sentence ahead of him?

82. Many men tell me that they changed after they came to prison. How do you feel about that? Do you think that prison has changed you?
83. Is there anything about the prison that is better than on the outside?
84. Do you ever think about dying in the prison?

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