How does interaction with prisoners affect punitiveness?
A study of a student choir visiting prison

(*Working version*)

Thomas Hawker
Institute of Criminology
University of Cambridge

Copyright © 2014 by Thomas Hawker
All rights reserved.
Acknowledgments:
I am very grateful to Loraine Gelsthorpe and Ruth Armstrong for their very helpful academic guidance and support, and to the Economic and Social Research Council for the financial support that enabled me to undertake this M.Phil.

Dedication:
This dissertation is dedicated to the ten members of the prison resident choir, and the staff at the prison who made the student choirs’ visits possible.
# Table of Contents

**List of Tables and Figures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1: Introduction</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Project outline</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 What is the value of research into punitive attitudes in the context of prisons? ...</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Overview of dissertation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 What is punitiveness?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1 What are attitudes?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2 What is attitudinal punitiveness?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Improving public attitudes in the context of punitiveness</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Providing information</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Interactive approaches I: deliberative polls and online tasks</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Interactive processes II: contact with prisoners</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 The normalization thesis</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 The intergroup contact hypothesis</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Affective predictors of punitiveness</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1 Prison visitation and punitiveness</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Research questions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Epistemology, theoretical perspectives and methodologies</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Research design</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Mixed methods design</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Quasi-experimental design</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Populations and samples</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Data collection</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Student questionnaire</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Student interviews</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3 Resident focus group</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4 Participant observation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Pre-testing</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Ethics</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Presentation of findings</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Outline of first visit</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Outline of second visit .................................................................33
4.3 Question 1: What are the effects of interaction with prisoners on punitiveness?34
4.4 Question 2: How is the interaction perceived and experienced by participants? 38
   4.4.1 Types of interaction ................................................................................39
   4.4.2 Extent of interaction................................................................................39
   4.4.3 Evaluations of interaction.........................................................................43
4.5 Question 3: What may account for any changes in punitiveness?..............45
   4.5.1 Social and musical interaction with residents ........................................45
   4.5.2 Understanding of prison and prison residents .................................47
   4.5.3 Experiencing the physical prison environment ................................50

Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications...................................................... 52
References.................................................................................................... 54
List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Convergent parallel /explanatory sequential mixed methods design ..................20
Table 1: Items selected to investigate support for more severe punishment ..................25
Figure 2: The seating arrangements in the multi-faith room ....................................31
Table 2: Frequency of individual percentage changes in ATP scores ............................35
Table 3: ATP score average group-level change .........................................................35
Table 4: Group level changes in answers to questions about punishment ....................37
Table 5: Breakdown of participants by direction of changes in ATP and SHP ............38
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Project outline

This dissertation explores the questions whether and how interaction with prisoners affects punitiveness. It contains an empirical component which reflects two visits made to a local prison by a student choir from the University of Cambridge during the academic year 2013-14.

At 148 prisoners per 100,000 of the national population, the prison population rate of England and Wales remains higher than the vast majority of its neighbours in both Northern and Western Europe (Walmsley, 2013: 5). Despite this, and the fact that imprisonment is thought to have a central place within the public consciousness in terms of punishment, members of the public have been found to have low levels of knowledge regarding the workings of and life inside prisons (Roberts and Hough, 2005a; 2005b; 2009). This perhaps reflects the lack of windows that exist into the peculiar carceral world behind prison walls. Those inside are isolated from society outside as a restriction of their liberty, but this seclusion also prevents the public from perceiving the social and physical environment within. The gap in knowledge is then seemingly filled with cultural sources of information such as news media and fiction, which often paint a very different picture to reality (Green, 2009: 524). Whilst this lack of public engagement with the reality of imprisonment continues to persist, notions of public opinion regarding punishment have gained considerable significance in criminal justice. Views held by members of the public are referred to explicitly by sentencers, policy makers and commentators alike as something that routinely informs (and indeed should inform) decision making to some degree (Hough et al., 2008; MoJ, 2012; Ryberg and Roberts, 2014).

However, in one sense prisons may be becoming more porous, as plans for the voluntary and private sectors to play a greater part in providing rehabilitation services have been announced as part of the coalition government’s proposals for ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ (MoJ, 2013: 26). This is likely to broaden the range of members of the public who have personal experiences of some aspects of prison. Research into the effects of visiting prison on public attitudes is therefore timely (Boag and Wilson, 2013). The aim of this dissertation is not to determine the effects of interaction with prisoners to a high nomothetic standard, but to explore whether changes consistent with an effect occur,
and if so, to investigate ideographically what might be behind these changes. It is hoped that the findings may provide a basis for further research, which might test any ideas that emerge.

1.2 What is the value of research into punitive attitudes in the context of prisons?

There are good reasons to undertake the study of punitive attitudes in the context of imprisonment. First, prisons are particularly vulnerable to ‘populist punitiveness’, whereby political parties attempt to gain support by appealing to what they perceive to be the electorate’s inherent punitiveness (Bottoms, 1995: 39). For example, when the Sun newspaper prepared a front-page story condemning Whitemoor high-security prison for permitting stand-up comedy workshops to be run for residents in 2008, the then Justice Secretary intervened to put a stop to the scheme (The Sun, 21 November 2008). Subsequently, a ‘public acceptability test’ was instated, whereby all activities taking place within prisons had to be assessed in order to determine how they were likely to be perceived by the public (PSO 0050, issued 6 January 2009). Thus even the spectre of public outrage as foreshadowed by the media can influence policy makers. The consequences are then keenly felt by the prison residents and staff who are on the receiving end of such policy changes, especially when potentially rehabilitative creative avenues are closed off (Liebling et al, 2012). In light of the significance of punitive attitudes in the context of imprisonment, research examining the processes through which these attitudes are formed would be valuable. Democratic governance of prisons might be improved if it politicians could be shown that there are ways to encourage members of the public to form more considered views regarding punishment through the maximum use of their rational and emotional capabilities (Yankelovich, 2010).

Second, punitive attitudes towards prisoners can also continue to affect them following release (Chui and Cheng, 2013a; Winnick and Bodkin, 2008; Chirico et al, 2007). Thomas LeBel (2012) conducted surveys of formerly incarcerated persons to examine this issue, and found that a quarter of participants believed they were discriminated against either often or very often when facing decisions regarding employment or housing. Further, in an analysis of the employment data for a sample of

---

1 PSO 0050 was replaced on 20 July 2010 by the more prescriptive and explicitly media-focussed PSI 38/2010.
U.S. federal offenders, Waldfogel (1994) found that imprisonment not only reduces the future probability of employment, but also has a depressing effect on future income. Thus it is clear that the negative perceptions of those who have been to prison also have a significant bite outside the prison walls. These views may shape social responses to formerly incarcerated persons in ways which strongly influence processes of desistance, ultimately affecting the rate at which offenders cease to commit crime (Maruna, 2001). Research into the formation of punitive attitudes could investigate ways to reduce the stigmatization of prisoners and thereby increase their prospects of desistance from crime.

Third, some criminologists have made the claim that certain jurisdictions have been witnessing a ‘punitive turn’, pointing to increases in prison populations as evidence of this (Garland, 2001: 142; Pratt, 2002; Waquant, 2000; Simon, 2001). More empirical research is needed that assesses this claim and the reasons for it, in order to contribute to the development of macro-social theory. Research examining the potential for particular experiences to have a direct impact on punitive attitudes in the context of imprisonment may make a valuable contribution to these broader theories behind changes in punitiveness. Such research could address the broader theoretical question regarding the effect of ‘hidden’ modes of punishment on punitive sensibilities (Foucault, 1975/1977: 9; Garland, 1990: 236; Jewkes, 2007: 455).

1.3 Overview of dissertation

This chapter of the dissertation proceeds by explaining the meaning of the term ‘attitude’, and developing a definition of punitiveness in the attitudinal sense. The second chapter reviews the literature regarding improving the formation of public attitudes in the context of punitiveness, concluding that exploratory research regarding the effects of interacting with prisoners on punitiveness is needed. The third chapter sets out the methods behind my empirical component, which involved a mixed methods study of changes in a student choir’s punitiveness following a visit to prison. The findings from this study are reported in the fourth chapter, and conclusions are presented in the final chapter, together with their implications and some suggestions for further research.
1.4 What is punitiveness?

The concept of punitiveness is used in criminological writing at two different levels (Kury and Obergfell-Fuchs, 2011). ‘Systemic punitiveness’ refers to harsh penal policies and practices of states, whilst ‘attitudinal punitiveness’ signifies public attitudes (Hamilton, 2014; Lappi-Seppälä, 2014; Van Marle, 2010; Green, 2009). Although these two ideas may be connected (Lappi-Seppälä, 2014), some commentators note that confusion is often caused by the lack of a clear distinction being made between them (Green, 2009: 520; Matthews, 2005: 189). To be quite explicit, this dissertation focuses solely on the attitudinal variety of punitiveness.

1.4.1 What are attitudes?

Bohner and Wänke (2009: 4; 2002) write that an attitude is ‘a summary evaluation of an object of thought’, and other contemporary psychological writing also places evaluation at the centre of the concept (Stalans, 2002; Van Marle, 2010; King, 2005). Stalans (2002) draws on cognitive psychology to suggest that these evaluations arise in two different layers of memory, with ‘surface’ attitudes being more readily accessible, and ‘inner’ attitudes being more complex and requiring greater methodological sophistication to assess (2002: 18-19). A comparable distinction is made by Yankelovich (1991), who suggests that there is a difference between public ‘opinion’ and public ‘judgement’. The latter is said to involve the detailed consideration of an issue from different angles, alongside an understanding of available choices and the acceptance of their consequences (1991: 6). Attitudes are thus evaluations made through low and high effort cognitive processes.

1.4.2 What is attitudinal punitiveness?

Even solely within the attitudinal context, definitions of punitiveness vary considerably (Wozniak, 2014; Van Marle, 2010; Brown, 2006; Matthews, 2005). For example, Anna King (2005: 9) presents four general categories of definition in her analysis of the literature: ‘support for retribution’, a belief in certain ‘social values such as authoritarianism or conservatism’, a desire for punishment driven emotively ‘by anger, fear or frustration’, and ‘an opposition to or disbelief in rehabilitation’. These kinds of
definition appear to focus on particular factors that are linked to punitiveness, such as attachment to certain theories of punishment, or anger about crime (Maruna and King, 2009; Templeton and Hartnagel, 2012). Whilst these factors may well be related to punitiveness (Payne et al., 2004; Johnson, 2009), it is hard to justify their inclusion in its definition.

In a recent article, Hamilton (2014) makes the case for a broader, multidimensional approach to understanding punitiveness in the context of state policy and practice. She points out that, despite the variety and complexity of penal policies and interventions, scholars continue to use a few narrow indices such as imprisonment rates as proxies for state punitiveness (Hamilton, 2014: 323). Thus they overlook other aspects of punitiveness, and leave themselves open to accusations of selectivity (Hamilton 2014: 323, 337; Matthews, 2005: 180; Kury and Shea, 2011). A broader approach to punitiveness in the attitudinal sense is also desirable for these reasons.

Following the approaches of Tonry (2007), Matthew (2005), and Lappi-Seppälä (2012), Hamilton adopts a holistic definition of punitiveness characterised in part by ‘intolerance’ towards law breakers (2014: 326). She uses Tonry’s definition, in which punitiveness encompasses a:

...mix of attitudes, enactments, motivations, policies, practices, and ways of thinking that taken together express greater intolerance of deviance and deviants, and greater support for harsher policies and severer punishments. (Tonry, 2007: 7)

This overarching approach includes attitudinal punitiveness, which could itself be defined as: attitudes that express greater intolerance of deviants, and support for more severe responses to deviance. Thus, returning to the definition of attitudes, there are really two attitudinal objects involved in punitive evaluations. First, there are wrongdoers (the deviants), and second, there is punishment (the responses to deviance). One final issue that must be brought out is the comparative nature of this definition, which places ‘greater’ and ‘more’ at the heart of what punitiveness is. The extent to which an attitude is deemed punitive will therefore depend on what it is being compared with.
Chapter 2: Improving public attitudes in the context of punitiveness

One finding that pervades research regarding attitudes in the criminal justice context is that, despite expressing great interest in parts of the criminal justice system, members of the public often lack knowledge and experience of it (Roberts and Hough, 2005a; Chapman et al., 2002: 4). This lack of knowledge has been linked to negative attitudes regarding criminal justice (Hough and Roberts, 1998; Mirrlees-Black, 2001). The British government has made attempts to disseminate information in order to rectify the knowledge deficit with respect to criminal justice (Green, 2006). However, this task is complex and requires consideration of issues such as which information to present, how it ought to be presented, to whom and by who (Indermaur and Hough, 2002; Wilson, 2012).

Another important issue is how such efforts are best framed in terms of aims. Indermaur and Hough (2002: 200) acknowledge that there ‘are risks in being seen to move beyond the role of objective researcher’ when talking about influencing public attitudes. Indeed, Indermaur (2009) lists some 33 strategies for reducing punitiveness at both the systemic and attitudinal levels, whilst Hough and Park (2002) have written about methods of ‘changing public attitudes’, with the inference largely being that this change should be in a liberal direction. Green (2006: 149, emphasis in original) describes this as being the ‘criminological utility’ of such methods, whereas the ‘democratic utility’ lies in fostering a better informed and more carefully deliberated set of public attitudes.

When the notion of ‘improving’ or ‘changing’ attitudes or punitiveness is used in this dissertation, it refers to the idea of fostering attitudes that are of greater democratic utility, in that they reflect a better understanding of the attitudinal object. This could well result in increases just as much as decreases or no changes in punitiveness. Various strategies have been attempted to achieve change in this sense, although they have often been government driven programs involving the explicit aim of increasing public confidence in criminal justice as well. Approaches have varied from the distribution of information, to the provision of opportunities that are interactive in various ways. These approaches are discussed below, with reference to the relevant studies, and the section leads on to consider punitive attitude change through interaction in more detail.
2.1 Providing information

Chapman and colleagues (2002) investigated whether providing information through leaflets, seminars and a video has an impact on knowledge of and attitudes towards sentencing. They measured changes in three samples totalling 220 participants by administering a questionnaire before presenting the information, and using interviews afterwards. The study’s limitations included low and inconsistent participant completion rates for each form, ranging from 12 per cent for the seminar through to 56 per cent for the booklet (2002: 57). Further, the booklet and video were self-administered, and it was not possible to know for sure whether participants had carried out the instructions in full.

Nevertheless, the authors found that all three types of information significantly increased knowledge scores, with the mean score from eleven questions improving from 3.9 to 5.9 (Chapman et al., 2002: 13). Participants who scored the lowest initially were the most likely to demonstrate improvements in knowledge following receipt of the information. In addition, more than a quarter of participants showed less punitive attitudes in terms of their view of general sentencing levels after having received the information. The information booklet had the widest impact in this regard, with 31 per cent of its readers becoming less punitive by this measure (2002: 30). Logistic regression analysis showed that an increase in knowledge score was predictive of lower punitiveness among participants who initially thought sentencing was too lenient (2002: 32).

Overall, the Home Office study demonstrates that it is possible to generate some change when it comes to public knowledge and attitudes relating to punishment. However, precisely why the informational interventions led to the changes remains for the most part unclear. Further, the overall durability of any changes is uncertain, given that the second stage of interviews only occurred between 1-6 weeks following dissemination of the information (Mirrlees-Black, 2002: 195; Chapman et al., 2002: 37).
2.2 Interactive approaches I: deliberative polls and online tasks

Green (2006) criticises the educative strategies taken by the British government, suggesting that they are in fact unlikely to lead to enduring changes:

Public education programmes rely... on flawed, one-way exchanges between the expert and the public, insufficient to make a lasting impact on public knowledge and attitudes. These oversights mean that even the most sophisticated assessment procedures typically fail to provide the forum for people to express existing views and make room for new information... (2006: 132)

Instead, he recommends the use of the ‘deliberative poll’ in order to open up ‘expert-to-public communicative channels to two-way traffic’ (2006: 132). This strategy was developed by the American political scientist James Fishkin (1991) in order to determine what an informed and engaged ‘hypothetical public’ would think about an issue given the opportunity to do so (Luskin et al., 2002: 458). Essentially, a representative sample of the wider population is given presentations about an issue from many different angles, followed by the opportunity for discussion, and the completion of a survey. Fishkin hoped this might facilitate governmental decision-making that would avoid the dichotomy of ‘politically equal but relatively incompetent masses, and politically unequal but relatively more competent elites’ (1991: 1-2).

In 1994, a deliberative poll was conducted in Britain using a closely representative sample of the electorate (Luskin et al., 2002; Park and Hough, 2002). The 300 participants spent a weekend in Manchester receiving presentations about criminal justice from various interested parties, such as practitioners, politicians, academics and an ex-prisoner. Before and after the event, participants completed a questionnaire that measured their knowledge and attitudes regarding criminal justice issues. The findings from this quasi-experimental study showed significant increases in average knowledge scores and changes on two thirds of the items relating to policy preferences (Luskin et al., 2002: 475, 467). Further, the trend of the latter was systematically in the direction of reduced punitiveness, and follow-up interviews found that change was still evident ten months following the event (Hough and Park, 2002: 168-174).

Whilst the findings from the Manchester deliberative poll are striking, these kinds of events are prohibitively expensive (Hough and Park, 2002: 180). Less costly
interactive educational experiences have also been developed. The Ministry of Justice developed one initiative to assess and improve public knowledge of sentencing practices, using an interactive website called ‘You be the Judge’. This online tool asks users about their perceptions of sentencing, before showing videos of staged sentencing hearings based on real cases, and inviting users to select an appropriate sentence. The most likely sentence for the case is then revealed, and views regarding sentencing in general are measured for a second time.

Cuthbertson (2013) provides an analysis of the 74,000 complete user experiences from March 2010 to December 2012. He notes an important methodological point: the users are a self selecting sample and are therefore not necessarily representative of the population. Nonetheless, of those who visited the website and answered all questions regarding one case, forty-eight per cent changed their view regarding whether sentencing is too lenient, too harsh, or about right. Of the 30,000 users who initially held the view that sentencing is too lenient, 79 per cent finished with the view that it is either about right or too harsh (2013: 5). In contrast, of the 44,000 who began with the view that sentencing is either about right or too harsh, only 7 per cent ended up holding the view that it is in fact too lenient.

The general direction of change in Cuthbertson’s findings is perhaps unsurprising, given that 84 per cent of users selected a sentence either the same as or less severe than that handed down by the judge in reality. For six out of the eight offence types less than 20 per cent of users chose a more severe sentence. These cases involved murder, drug dealing, mugging, vandalism, threatening behaviour, and so called ‘teen crime’. The study reinforces previous research indicating that members of the public are not more punitive than the courts when given detailed accounts of specific cases in which to pass sentence (Hough and Roberts, 1998: 27-30; Doob and Roberts, 1988: 131). The provision of this detailed information appears to make a considerable difference to punitiveness when this is understood to mean the selecting of more severe sentencing options.

---


3 Though it should be noted that there was variation by case type, and participation rates were unequal between different cases.
2.3 Interactive processes II: contact with prisoners

Other interactive processes that appear to have an effect on attitudes regarding criminal justice involve actual experiences of it, such as day-to-day interactions with criminal justice professionals (Bradford et al., 2009; Tyler, 1990; Wilson, 2012: 55). In a similar vein, research that is highly relevant for current purposes examines whether familiarity with prisoners (through knowing someone who is incarcerated) affects punitiveness, following the normalization thesis.

2.3.1 The normalization thesis

The normalization thesis predicts that knowing incarcerated individuals reduces the stigma of incarceration and results in less punitive attitudes towards prisoners (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010). This is based largely on Erving Goffman’s (1963) exposition of stigma, where he suggested that attributes attracting stigma in one social context may attract praise and admiration in another. Normalization predicts a stark difference in attitudes towards deviants resulting through relatively close relationships with prisoners. It envisages that individuals from highly incarcerated communities will see imprisonment as an experience that is ‘normal, expected, or even valued’ (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010: 28; Fagan and Meares, 2008).

Johnson (2008, 2009) carried out a study in the US that essentially tested this thesis, although it did not mention the theory explicitly. Using data from 1508 random-digit dialling telephone interviews, she examined the relationship between having a close friend or relative incarcerated on views regarding sentencing and parole. The results provided evidence for a link between familiarity with prisoners and less punitive attitudes, with vicarious experiences of incarceration being a strong predictor of lower punitiveness measured in this way (Johnson, 2009: 60; 2008: 204).

Hirschfield and Piquero (2010) specifically tested the normalization thesis in the U.S. using random-digit telephone interviews of 2,282 participants. They measured links with prisoners by asking participants how many people they had known personally or professionally who have been incarcerated. Stigmatizing attitudes towards offenders were measured using four items adapted from Melvin and colleagues’ (1985) attitudes towards prisoners (ATP) scale. The authors found evidence of a strong and significant relationship between exposure to people who had been incarcerated and holding less stigmatizing
attitudes towards offenders (2010: 41-42). However, they note that as the study was cross-sectional, it did not indicate the direction of the relationship (2010: 45). It could be that people with negative attitudes towards offenders are less likely to become familiar with them. Further, the context of any familiarity with offenders appears to be important (Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010: 31). Research has shown that police officers and correctional staff (who have considerable contact with offenders) hold particularly negative attitudes towards them (Kjelsberg et al., 2007; Melvin et al., 1985; c.f. Kelly, 2013). Whilst normalization is an instructive theory regarding attitudes towards offenders, it is quite static in that it really refers to prior relationships with individuals who are incarcerated. A different theory is more dynamic in this regard, though it did not arise in the context of criminal justice.

2.3.2 The intergroup contact hypothesis

The intergroup contact hypothesis predicts that even interaction with unfamiliar members of stigmatised groups will bring about changes in attitudes towards them. Gordan Allport (1954/1979) developed this theory in his work regarding the psychology of prejudice. Because his definition of prejudice as ‘an antipathy based upon faulty and inflexible generalization’ led him to focus on negative attitudes, there is a degree of overlap between his work and the current topic of punitiveness (1954/1979: 9, emphasis added). Indeed, whilst Allport’s focus lay chiefly with prejudice in the forms of racism and anti-semitism, he also mentioned the case of ex-convicts as a ‘borderline instance’ of prejudice (1954/1979: 8).

The intergroup contact hypothesis itself predicts that contact with stigmatised groups tends to reduce prejudice against them (Allport, 1954/1979: 281). Allport believed that four factors were particularly important in securing this effect: equal group status in the situation, the pursuit of common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law or custom (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2005: 264). In his review of the evidence he noted that personality differences cause variations in this effect between individuals, but clear changes tended to occur at the group level. Further research in the 50 years since has continued to yield empirical support for the thesis, and moves beyond it by showing that the effect persists even when all of Allport’s four conditions are not present (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006: 766-7).
Indeed, a much greater range of variables are thought to underpin the contact hypothesis, and affective factors have been found to be particularly important (Kenworthy et al., 2005; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). For example, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006: 767) examined the mediating role of intergroup anxiety, which amounts to ‘feelings of threat and uncertainty that people experience in intergroup contexts’. In a meta-analysis of over 200 studies, this anxiety was linked this to between 20-25 per cent of the reductions in prejudice that occurred through contact (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2005: 272; 2000). The same authors have found elsewhere that lowered intergroup anxiety and increased empathy together account for approximately half of the covariance between contact and prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008: 928). Both of these variables emerged as being substantively more important than increased knowledge about outgroups brought about through contact, although this was still a significant mediator (2008: 927). Other important mediators such as trust, perceived importance of the interaction, and self disclosure (the voluntary presentation of intimate or personal information) have also received empirical support (Turner et al., 2007). Thus the affective dimension to attitudes should not be ignored, and this is now addressed with regard to punitiveness.

2.4 Affective predictors of punitiveness

The topic of emotions in criminal justice has started to appear in the literature, albeit at a very slow pace (Gelsthorpe, 2009). Despite some early work incorporating emotions (Mead, 1918), it is only over the last few decades that commentators have turned their attention to the topic, largely in response to a perceived ‘emotionalization’ of public discourse about crime’ that mirrors shifts in certain aspects of culture (Karstedt, 2002: 301). Arie Frieberg (2001) has described the emerging tension between ‘affective’ and ‘effective’ justice, and appeals alongside others for greater efforts to understand and engage with public emotions regarding wrongdoing (Green, 2006: 144).

I have reviewed the literature regarding predictors of punitiveness extensively (e.g. gender (Applegate et al., 2002), race (Hogan et al., 2005), media readership (Spiranovic et al., 2012), political outlook (King and Maruna, 2009), experience of corporal punishment (Kemme et al., 2014)). Among these, dynamic, affective factors emerge as being particularly important. For example, there is growing evidence linking punitiveness with broader insecurities about society (King and Maruna, 2009; Van Marle,
Further, Posick and colleagues (2014) found that individuals with higher levels of empathy are more likely to be punitive, perhaps due to the moral significance of empathetic feelings towards victims of crime, as argued by Hans Boutellier (2000).

These affective factors are likely to affect the extent to which attitudes are of democratic utility. This is not to suggest that knowledge trumps emotion when it comes to sound attitude formation, as both are ‘indispensable’ in this regard (Yankelovich, 2010: 27). Rather it is to highlight the importance of providing opportunities for people to experience other emotions that help them to ‘overcome the sense of helplessness and insecurity that crime engenders’ (Frieberg, 2001: 274). This should not be mistaken for a cynical manipulation of emotions, as the idea is again to facilitate processes of attitude formation that lead to broader, more considered views. As the research examined above suggests, both the informational and affective processes involved are important in this regard. One effective strategy for facilitating both in the context of punitiveness may be the provision of opportunities for contact with offenders.

2.4.1 Prison visitation and punitiveness

Bringing punitiveness and the intergroup contact hypothesis together, several studies have essentially examined the impact of going into prison on aspects of punitiveness. In a study of New York state legislators’ positions concerning crime issues, this was the only variable found to have a significant relationship with support for a fixed determinate sentencing scheme (Flanagan et al., 1989: 93). Those lawmakers who had visited prisons in the state were more likely to oppose the scheme than those who had not. Thus it seems that visits to penal institutions can be important in shaping views, and one element of such visits may well be interaction that is had with those serving sentences.

Three qualitative pieces of research have examined students’ attitudes regarding incarceration following first hand experiences inside prison. First, Wilson and colleagues (2011) analysed forty reflective accounts written by Criminology students who visited HMP Grendon as part of a degree course, and had a tour, a debate, and a lunch with residents. One of the themes to emerge was that the students’ expectations of the prisoners were challenged on a number of levels, including with regard to demographic
and behavioural characteristics. Students also reported perceiving their own attitudes to have changed due to the visit. Second, Boag and Wilson (2013) thematically analysed a sample of eight students’ reflective accounts from the visit in more detail, looking for evidence of self-reported increased empathy and decreased prejudice. Some changes in empathy were apparent, and a great deal of change was reported in terms of reduced prejudice. The same authors have conducted a quantitative analysis of changes in prejudice from the visit, and although this is yet to be published, they state elsewhere that reductions did indeed occur (2013: 9).

The third piece of work examined contact of a much longer duration when Criminology students carried out work experience at HMP Durham for two days a week over the course of ten months (Ridley, 2014). Extracts from three students’ accounts of the experience are presented, and these report various ways in which the programme was felt to be of pedagogical benefit, including through the facilitation of a deeper understanding of prisoners and a change in attitudes towards them (2014: 24). The actual extent and nature of contact that occurred with prison residents is not wholly clear. However, once again it is notable that students reported shifts in their attitudes after spending time inside prison.

Another study concerning contact with prisoners involved participants who work with prisoners in Hong Kong on a voluntary basis (Chui and Cheng, 2013b). The authors used a cross-sectional research design to compare attitudes of prison volunteers with both people who volunteer in other contexts and individuals who do not volunteer. Whilst the prison volunteers were found to have the most positive attitudes towards prisoners on average, the only statistically significant difference was between prison volunteers and non-volunteers, indicating that it may not be contact but rather personal predisposition that explains the difference. Further, the authors concede that the lack of a time order element in their research design precludes them from considering the direction of any relationship, and conclude by recommending the use of a fixed panel design in future research.

One such published fixed panel design study could be located, in the International Journal of Music Education. Mary Cohen (2012) examined the attitudes of 22 community choir members before and after a twelve week choral program in a medium security state prison in the US Midwest. These individuals joined 22 prisoners one evening per week
for 90 minute rehearsals, which culminated in two concert performances inside the prison gym. The author administered the ATP scale via questionnaire at the start and finish of the scheme, and found that attitudes towards prisoners became significantly more positive, with the mean ATP score rising from 105.92 to 119.33 (2012: 50). Open-ended questions were also used to probe the choral visitors’ perceptions of the experience, and answers indicated that the program ‘shattered their stereotypes of prisoners’ (2012: 51).

One question that has not been answered, however, is whether single visits to prison involving volunteers can have the kind of impact demonstrated by Cohen (2012). Further, there is arguably a need for exploratory research on the topic. This should seek to examine what it is that occurs during contact experiences with prison residents where these are more than just ‘carceral tours’, and how such experiences are perceived by participants on both sides. Such research would aim to deepen our understanding of attitude changes in a context that is potentially different to that examined by studies of prejudice, which is why an initial exploratory study is required. The empirical component of the current piece of work is one such study. An opportunity arose to study the effects of contact with prisoners on the punitive attitudes of a student choir in the academic year 2013/14, and it is this empirical component to which I now turn.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology for the empirical component of the dissertation, which involved studying student choir members’ attitudes towards prisoners before and after performing at a local prison. Early on in my M.Phil studies I was made aware of plans for a choir to sing in a prison, and thus was able to use the opportunity for the empirical component. In the space of five months, two visits were made to the same prison, with each visit largely involving different choir members. The first event comprised a concert-style performance by the student choir, followed by a question and answer session with residents. The second was slightly different, as a small team of students ran a choral workshop in the morning for a group of residents, who then rehearsed and performed with the student choir when it arrived in the afternoon. With the opportunistic beginning of the study made plain, attention now turns to an exposition of the approaches and methods adopted.

3.1 Research questions

Appropriate methodological decisions must be rooted in a solid understanding of the questions that one is hoping to answer. The research questions are listed below as a springboard for this section:

1. What are the effects of interaction with prisoners on punitiveness?
   a. What are the effects of interaction with prisoners on attitudes towards prisoners?
      
      *Hypothesis 1a: Interaction with prisoners leads to more positive attitudes towards them.*
   
   b. What are the effects of interaction with prisoners on support for harsher punishments?
      
      *Hypothesis 1b: Interaction with prisoners leads to reduced support for harsher punishment.*

2. How is the interaction perceived and experienced by those who take part in it?

3. What may account for any changes in punitiveness?
The first question reflects the explanatory dimension of the study, in that it pertains to the identification of effects (Bachman and Schutt, 2014: 34). The two sub-questions reflect the definition of punitiveness adopted above, and have corresponding hypotheses. These are arguably tested only to a limited degree in what follows, due to the lack of control groups in the quasi-experimental design. However, it would be disingenuous to deny that an effect in the direction of reduce punitiveness is predicted, due to the research discussed above in the literature review. The second question differs in that it adds a strongly exploratory flavour to the research, through the focus on investigating the meanings that participants give to their experiences without particular expectations (Ibid, 2014: 10). The third question brings the first two together again in an exploratory manner, looking to understand what it is about the experience of visiting prison that might bring about changes in attitudes.

3.2 Epistemology, theoretical perspectives and methodologies

Explicitly stating the philosophical perspectives that underpin research clarifies the assumptions on which it depends (Creswell, 2014). Borrowing the language of Crotty (1998: 3), the epistemology in which this study is located is that of Constructionism. This reflects the assumption that human beings construct meaning, although there is ‘something to work with’ in the world around us (Crotty, 1998: 44).

In terms of theoretical perspectives, I took a pragmatic approach, bringing together of elements of post-positivism and interpretivism. This pragmatism ‘is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality’, but rather emphasises the need to reach the best possible solution to research problems though being ‘free to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes’ (Creswell, 2014: 10-11). Thus elements of both quantitative and qualitative methodological traditions were combined in this study in a mixed methods approach. This enabled very different kinds of research questions regarding the same topic to be answered together, thus combining the strengths of each approach in order to reach a deeper understanding (Bryman, 2004; Creswell, 2014: 218).

The post-positivist element is located within the notion of ‘effects’ and accounting for changes found in the explanatory research question. In terms of methodology, this led me to use a quasi-experimental design, which is discussed further below. The
interpretivist perspective emerges mainly through the exploratory research questions. Here, a grounded theory methodology was adopted in order to develop theory from data in a context that did not map directly onto previous research (Creswell, 2013: 83).

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Mixed methods design

Quantitative and qualitative methods were mixed in the study in two ways. First, there was an initial ‘convergent parallel’ part, whereby quantitative and qualitative data reflecting participants attitudes were collected simultaneously via questionnaires, and interpreted together (Creswell, 2014: 219). The rationale for this was one of complementarity, as I wished to enable some testable measurement of change, whilst also hearing what participants wanted to say in order to look for themes that accompanied the change (Greene, 2007: 101). Second, there was an ‘explanatory sequential’ aspect, as qualitative interviews and a focus group were used following the interpretation of questionnaires in order to explore participants’ perceptions in a more detailed, open ended way (Creswell, 2014: 224). This enabled me to examine potential reasons for attitude change in the idiographic sense, again justifying the use of mixed methods on the grounds of complementarity. The overall mixed methods approach is illustrated in Figure 1, adapted from Creswell (2014: 220).
3.3.2 Quasi-experimental design

An important element of the research design was the quasi-experimental element. This enabled me to probe, albeit tentatively, for evidence supporting a causal relationship between interaction with prisoners and attitudes towards them. A design with high internal validity would have involved the random assignment of participants to experimental and control groups, pre and post-test measures, and checks on how comparable the control/experimental units of analysis were (Sherman et al., 1998). However, there were a number of obstacles to using a true experimental design in this study. The nature of the research opportunity was such that participants had already been selected in the requisite number for a choir, and the lack of time prior to the first visit to prison precluded the recruitment of further participants in order to facilitate a control group, whether formed through random allocation or not.

Nonetheless, the opportunity did allow for a quasi-experimental design at level two of Sherman and colleagues’ (1998) Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods, through
the measurement of attitudes using questionnaires before and after a visit to prison. This approach is also known as a ‘fixed-sample panel design’ as described by Bachman and Schutt (2014: 170), who classify it as non-experimental due to the lack of an adequate control group. It is true that there are significant difficulties with this approach, not least of which are the threats to internal validity that may be caused by history effects unrelated to treatment, and maturation of the group between measures (Creswell, 2014: 174; Robson, 2011: 112; Sherman et al., 1998: 5). Nonetheless, this was what the opportunity allowed, and findings would arguably still shed some light on the research questions.

3.4 Populations and samples

Student Choir Members

The first population of interest is broad insofar as it is ‘public’ attitudes that are the focus of the research. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to go about constructing a sample that was representative of the wider UK public for the purposes of the study. Instead, the study used a convenience or ‘availability’ sample, as the student choir members were an accessible group of individuals who had volunteered to sing in prison (Bachman and Schutt, 2014: 116). However, a number of other studies have examined students’ attitudes regarding prisoners and punishment (Ridley, 2014; Boag and Wilson, 2013; Mandracchia et al., 2013; Kjelsberg et al., 2007). One advantage of the approach therefore is that findings can be compared with prior research. On the other hand, one drawback is that individuals prepared to volunteer for such experiences may well be more disposed to change their attitudes (Chui and Cheng, 2013b). Due to the lack of representativeness and self-selection in sampling, the findings are not generalizable to the wider public. The sample is nonetheless suitable for the exploratory purposes of the research.

The first visit involved 22 choir members, who all agreed to take part in the study, having been informed of the opportunity at a rehearsal. Recruitment of participants from the second visit was less successful, with 17 of 19 new choir members completing the consent form to take part. This may have been due to the consent form being distributed online rather than at a rehearsal (as discussed below). The total initial sample size was therefore 39, which amounts to a participation rate of 95 per cent. On the first visit, 18 of
the 22 participants successfully completed all of the quantitative sections in both questionnaires. On the second visit, only 11 of the 17 did so, with four individuals failing to answer the post-visit questionnaire altogether. For this visit, a problem had arisen when the final rehearsal was cancelled, meaning that there was no option but to have the questionnaire self-administered electronically online. The post-visit questionnaire was also conducted in this manner to ensure consistency, and this may have been a factor in the lower completion rate. Participants who did not complete both questionnaires were removed listwise from the analysis, leaving complete data for 29 of the 39 students – a total completion rate of 74 per cent. The 29 students comprised 10 males and 19 females, and the mean age was 19.5. Once again, the low average age and gender imbalance of the sample has implications for the generalizability of findings.

Following the preliminary analysis of questionnaires from both visits, 10 participants were invited to attend individual interviews in order to explore their attitudes and perceptions of the visits in more detail. This sub-sample was selected purposively based first and foremost on the scores indicating change in attitudes towards prisoners. A range of scores were selected in order to explore potential reasons for positive, negative and no shifts in attitude. Only one of those invited to attend failed to respond, and this individual had one of the most positive changes in attitude as measured by the questionnaire. The participation rate at interview was therefore 90 per cent.

**Prison resident participants**

A second population is also of interest, in that the research questions are asking about the effects and experiences of interacting with prisoners. The prison administration had control over which residents were permitted to attend either as audience members, or, on the second visit, as members of the resident choir. The chaplaincy did not indicate that any individual had been refused permission to take part, and in fact stressed that the workshop group in particular did contain individuals who were perceived to have caused problems for the prison in the past. Thus the extent to which there was selectivity in terms of residents’ participation in the visit was unclear. Four of the ten members of the resident choir were available to take part in a focus group a week later, with others unable to do so having moved on from the prison. Once again, the convenience sampling approach was taken, with those residents who were available on the day being spoken with.
3.5 Data collection

Four types of data collection were used in total: questionnaires, participant observation, interviews, and a focus group. Each is discussed below.

3.5.1 Student questionnaire

The student choir members were invited to complete a questionnaire comprising closed and open answer questions prior to and after each visit. For the initial visit, paper questionnaires were self administered in a group setting in my presence. The first was completed at a rehearsal three days before the visit, and the second was completed immediately following the visit. For the second visit, questionnaires were self-administered online in individual settings. A web link was sent via email to student participants two days prior to the visit, and another was emailed one day following the visit.

Changes were made to the questionnaire for the second visit in order to facilitate the online method of administration. I was particularly concerned that the participation rate would be low if there were too many questions (see Bachman and Schutt, 2014: 227). Therefore, the total number of questions was halved from over 100 to around 50. In the presentation of findings to follow, data from both visits are combined for analysis under the assumption that the visits and methods were sufficiently similar to justify this. The change in the questionnaire between the two visits is one potential limitation that could have undermined this assumption. The composition of the questionnaire is discussed here by section, with close attention being paid to the research question that each part sought to address.

Attitudes towards prisoners (questionnaire Section C)

The definition of punitiveness adopted in the introduction above entails the holding of ‘attitudes that express greater intolerance of deviants, and support for more severe responses to deviance’. To operationalize the first part of this definition, I opted to use Melvin and colleagues’ quantitative ATP scale (1985) designed to measure attitudes towards prisoners, as this could be analysed statistically for change. Findings would also be comparable with other studies using the same scale (Chui and Cheng, 2013b; Cohen,
2012; Kjelsberg et al., 2007). The scale was originally designed for use in the United States, but it has also been used in the UK and continental Europe (Hogue, 1993; Ortet-Fabregat et al., 1993; Kjelsberg et al., 2007).

The original ATP scale consists of 36 items, with which participants express their level of agreement on a Likert scale containing five possible responses, from ‘strongly agree’ through to ‘strongly disagree’. Each item is then scored from one to five, with 19 of the items being reverse scored due to the need to avoid bias in favour of positively worded items. A constant of 36 is then subtracted: the higher the resulting score, the more positive is the attitude towards prisoners. This positive attitude is taken to be the view that a prisoner is ‘a normal person capable of positive change’ (Melvin et al., 1985: 243), while the negative attitude encompasses that view that prisoners are inherently wicked and ‘incapable of positive change’ (Chui and Cheng, 2013b: 108). The scale has relatively high split half (ranging from $r = .84$ to .92) and test-retest reliabilities ($r = .82$) (Melvin et al., 1985).

One difficulty in measuring attitude change using the same scale twice is that ‘consistency’ or ‘freezing’ effects may occur, whereby participants are inclined to answer questions consistently with previous answers (Foddy, 1993: 6; Bridge et al. 1977: 57-58). This was particularly worrying given that shorter time lapses of days rather than months between measures are thought to be more vulnerable to the problem (Holt, 1989). In light of the fact that the questionnaires were intended to be completed days apart, I decided to reduce the likelihood of participants recalling their answers to the previous ATP questionnaire items by reversing the order in which the items appeared in the second questionnaire. This approach may bring its own disadvantages, as altering the order of items changes the context for each answer, which can lead to changes independent of treatment (Foddy, 1993: 61-63; Schuman and Presser: 1996: 74). As a consequence, there may be threat to the internal validity of the findings, though it is worth noting that these order or context effects do not always occur (Foddy, 1993: 63-66; Converse and Presser, 1986: 40).
Support for harsher punishment (questionnaire Section B)

The second part of the definition concerns support for harsher punishment, and this was operationalized using items from King’s (2005) punitiveness scale. Instead of adopting this as a whole, three items were used that mention prison as punishment, reflecting the prison-centred nature of the study. Two further items were used to measure strength of commitment to action. Because of the way in which the items were selected from the larger 8 item scale, the intention was not to analyse them as a combined scale but to look at the results from each separately. These items and what they purport to measure are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Items selected to investigate support for more severe punishment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Link with support for more severe punishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I’d consider volunteering my time or donating money to an organisation that supported toughening the sentencing laws in the UK.</td>
<td>Strength of commitment to action supporting more severe punishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Prisoners should have access to televisions and gym facilities.</td>
<td>Desire for more imprisonment to be more intense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>If prison has to be used, it should be used sparingly and only as a last option.</td>
<td>General desire for the more frequent use of imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I’d consider volunteering my time or donating money to an organisation that supported alternatives to prison.</td>
<td>Strength of commitment to action supporting less severe punishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Probation or a community sentence (rather than prison) is generally appropriate for a person found guilty of burglary for the second time.</td>
<td>Anchoring of support for punishment to a particular type of offence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open ended questions (questionnaire Section D)

As stated above, the questionnaire also contained open-ended questions. The purpose of these was to investigate participants’ perceptions of: interaction with the residents, knowledge gained from the experience, and emotions that they experienced surrounding the visit. Thus exploratory data was generated that might answer the second and third research questions, through open, axial and selective coding in a grounded theory
analysis. When formulating these questions, advice given by Foddy (1993), Converse and Presser (1986) and Bachman and Schutt (2014) was taken into account. Thus simplicity was sought wherever possible, and negatives, double negatives and double-barrelled questions were avoided.

When asking about experiences with and knowledge of prisoners, it was important to minimise ‘social desirability’ response bias, which might result from specifically inviting explicit perceptions of prisoners. Some participants might not wish to answer such questions for fear of being seen to judge people, whilst others may have felt pressure to condemn wrongdoers else risk appearing to associate themselves with anti-social behaviour. These questions were therefore worded broadly in an attempt to induce honest responses. Before the visit, participants were asked for their expectations of the prisoners, and afterwards they were asked what their impressions of prisoners were. This pair of questions was designed to be flexible, in that they might provoke responses that would provide an insight both into respondents’ experiences with and knowledge of prisoners. Such data would then assist in answering the second and third research questions.

Two further questions were asked in order to generate data to answer the second research question regarding perceptions of interaction. These investigated the kinds of verbal interaction that occurred, by asking participants whether they spoke to prisoners, and if so, what they spoke about. It was regrettable that more forms of interaction were not explicitly asked about, but fortunately other data from observations, interviews and a focus group were able to counter balance this narrowness.

Turning to the third research question concerning possible explanations for attitude change, I asked participants exploratory questions about their perceptions of knowledge gained from and feelings stimulated by the experience, following on from work regarding attitude change conducted in other contexts as discussed in the literature review. The questions regarding knowledge related primarily to the prison itself, although participants were also asked flexible questions about prison staff that were similar to those about prisoners outlined above. An important set of questions examined participants’ feelings about visiting prison that were experienced both prior to and during the visit, with a further question inquiring specifically into feelings regarding interactions with prisoners.
A final set of open answer questions dealt with general aspects of the experience that might be helpful in interpreting other answers. These asked participants about their motivations for volunteering to sing in prison, the best and worst parts of the experience, and anything that surprised them about the visit.

3.5.2 Student interviews

Nine students were interviewed in order to examine their perceptions of the interactions that took place in more detail, and to ask about other features of the visits that may have been related to changes in attitudes in accordance with the second and third research questions. The interviews were between 30 minutes and one hour in length, and took place in an Institute of Criminology interview room, a meeting room in the local library, and in one case, a quiet college café. They were semi-structured, including open ended questions, thematic prompts and space for notes as advised by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). This format enabled me to explore participants’ perceptions in a flexible way, according the things that stuck out in their minds from the experience. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and coded in accordance with the grounded theory approach.

3.5.3 Resident focus group

Given that interaction is a two way process, I was extremely curious to learn how prison residents had perceived the visits. Advantage was taken of an informal feedback focus group with four residents who were in the resident choir during the second visit. The aim here was to understand residents’ perceptions of the visit and the interaction that occurred with students, and to place these perceptions alongside those of the visitors in order to have a more complete picture of the interaction and events that took place. The focus group took place in the prison chapel a week after the second visit, and, similar to the interviews described above, followed a flexible, semi-structured schedule that allowed me to explore the participants’ perceptions. Whilst it was not possible to audio-record the discussion, I jotted notes throughout, and wrote up as much as I could remember immediately afterwards.
3.5.4 Participant observation

The final research method was observation, as I sang alongside the students on both visits in a participant-observer role. The aim was to inform my understanding of what took place generally during each visit, while enabling me to see the experience from the perspective of a choir member myself. Rough field notes were made during the visits, and these were written up on returning to Cambridge. However, it became apparent both during and after these observations that fully systematic data collection using this method was simply not feasible. The requirements of the ‘participation’ element in terms of singing in the choir meant that there were only limited opportunities to focus on what was happening around me in a systematic way. Thus the observational strand of data is used in a supplementary capacity in order to describe the basic outline of the visit and to illustrate events in more detail when referred to in passing by participants.

3.6 Pre-testing

The interview procedure and questions were piloted with two choir members after the second visit, and this helped to narrow down the prompts to discuss with each of the interviewees, as I initially had too many. To pre-test the questionnaire I completed it myself several times, and also arranged for two fellow students to complete it individually and provide feedback. This identified two problems. First, it was easy to muddle answer columns when switching from the five point ATP Likert questions to the six point SHP questions. Therefore, a five point scale was used for the SHP section. Second, it transpired that ATP item 27 caused confusion, as it stated ‘I would never want one of my children dating an ex-prisoner’. The pre-testers found this difficult to answer, due to not having children of their own. In light of this, ATP item 27 was removed, meaning that a constant of 35 rather than 36 would be subtracted to provide each individual’s ATP score.

When planning for the initial visit, it was not known whether a subsequent one would be possible, otherwise I could have used the first visit to pilot all research instruments. Admittedly, pre-testing some of the questions without an actual prison visit was of limited use, and the lack of more extensive pretesting is a significant drawback to the research. To partially compensate for this, the post-visit questionnaire asked for
feedback regarding any frustration or confusion that may have been felt when responding to questions.

3.7 Ethics

Relevant ethical issues included the need to consider the impact of participation on all those who took part, the need to obtain informed consent, to respect participant confidentiality, and to store data responsibly (British Society of Criminology, 2006; Comstock, 2012; Creswell, 2013: 175). The first issue arose with respect to both student choir members and residents of the prison. Whilst the students had already volunteered to perform in prison prior to being invited to take part in the research study, the potential impact of the experience was given serious consideration as part of the research planning. Before the first visit, the organisers decided to hold a short briefing with a member of the Law Faculty in order to prepare participants slightly in terms of what to expect. This occurred a week prior to the completion of the first questionnaire, and thus did not jeopardize the internal validity of the research design, though it may have further limited the generalizability of findings.

Turning to the impact on prison residents, many writers have expressed concern at the trend of ‘prison tourism’ and its potential for objectifying individuals for the entertainment of others (Piche and Walby, 2010; Huckelbury, 2009; Meisel, 2008; Wacquant, 2002). However, visits to prison need not run into this pitfall. As Minogue, writing in the Journal of Prisoners on Prisons states:

For a prison tour to be run ethically the outsiders participating in it must give consideration to the morally relevant interests of the people involved. (2009: 137)

Arguably this study differed from other research regarding prison tours, due to the contribution that the choir would bring to the residents. Rather than being chiefly an opportunity for students to learn about prisons, the main purpose of the visits was to provide residents with opportunities to both listen to and make music. With this as the overall aim, there was justifiably much less anxiety about ‘prison tourism’ effects. Even so there was no complacency, and a member of the Institute of Criminology provided basic advice to students regarding their behaviour in the prison prior to each visit.
As stated in the British Society of Criminology’s (2006: 3) Code of Ethics, the consent of participants should be ‘freely given’, ‘informed’ and ‘continuing’. Consent was obtained from student participants in writing prior to participation. The consent was informed in the sense that the consent form explained the general purpose of the research and what participation would entail. Due to the informal nature of the focus group with prison residents, it was not feasible to obtain written consent from these participants. Oral consent was therefore obtained prior to the start of the focus group, and a note of this was made on the schedule. The group conditions under which consent was obtained were not ideal, as individuals may have felt pressure to participate, and staff were also present to give their feedback on the visit. However, it was very clear from the individuals present that they not only consented to share their perceptions, but were very keen indeed to discuss what had been an enjoyable occasion. I was therefore satisfied that I was fulfilling my ethical duties as a researcher.

It was also made clear to all who took part that participation would be kept confidential. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms in the findings chapter, and names were not attached to data collection instruments. To facilitate the matching of pre and post-visit questionnaires and the inviting of particular students for interview, a separately stored list of participants’ email addresses was coded to match questionnaires, based on numbers that were assigned after participants had agreed to take part. Data were stored securely on three password-protected USB drives - one for use, one as a backup, and the other to hold the document containing email addresses coded to match participants’ answers.

Now that the methods behind the research have been described, attention turns to the findings of the study.
Chapter 4: Presentation of findings

Prior to presenting findings in response to each of the research questions, I provide an outline description of the visits compiled chiefly from observational data and interview comments.

4.1 Outline of first visit

The first visit took place on a Sunday morning in late November, and was comprised of the usual Sunday morning prison chapel service, followed by a choral performance and question and answer session. Students met early to travel to the prison by coach, and on arrival at the main entrance were processed through security. A member of the chaplaincy team then led us outside, where we walked alongside a tall wall topped with razor wire, through various locked gates, and up some stairs to the multi-faith room. The room was well-kept, with sunlight entering through windows at the side and even two small stained-glass windows higher up in the roof. Roughly sixty chairs were placed in two blocks either side of an aisle, and there were two rows of seats at the front of the room facing outwards, where the choir was to sit (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The seating arrangements in the multi-faith room
A small number of residents sat talking with each other as we entered and took up our allocated seats. As we all waited for the rest of the residents to arrive, there was some exchanging of eye contact and smiles. The room became almost completely full prior to the start of the chapel service, which was opened by an exchanging of ‘good mornings’ between the chaplain and the resident congregation. The chaplain then requested respect for those who were present for the purpose of worship, and the short service proceeded with a number of hymns, readings and prayers. At one moment when the chaplain was speaking, raised voices could be heard from the congregation, prompting hushing sounds from several residents. A resident towards the rear left corner of the room shouted back in response, and the chaplain stopped the service briefly whilst two prison officers stepped forward to escort the individual out. Raised voices could be heard from outside, but the service promptly resumed.

When the time came to perform, one of the organisers stepped forward to introduce the choir and thank the audience for attending, explaining the dual purposes of the visit as being to entertain the audience and to experience prison. He also introduced each piece before we sang. Each piece brought warm applause from the audience, and one student also played the violin for a short instrumental interlude towards the end. The audience was focussed intently on her playing, and demonstrated their appreciation with a particularly loud round of applause.

The question and answer session that followed was essentially a dialogue, with questions asked of each other by the choir and the audience respectively. Questions were more forthcoming from the residents, who asked about the length of time it took to prepare the pieces, the way in which the choir followed the conductor, and the standing of the students’ college in Cambridge. Students asked about residents’ music preferences, the availability of musical opportunities in prison, and whether there would be appetite for a more interactive music workshop. The conversation was slightly tricky to facilitate in the group format, but overall it went well, and finished with both groups thanking each other through applause. There was then a brief ten minute lull when it was possible for students to talk to prison officers and residents while other officers began to call residents away wing by wing. Many seized this chance to interact, and subsequently mentioned this in the questionnaire. Finally, the chaplain led us back the way we had come to the exit, where we passed through to take the coach back to college for lunch.
4.2 Outline of second visit

The second visit took place on a Tuesday in the middle of March, and was formed of two stages. A group of eight leaders from the university went into prison in the morning in order to lead a workshop in singing as part of the prison’s community week. The student choir then arrived after lunch to rehearse alongside the newly formed resident choir for a joint concert in the afternoon. Whilst 12 residents had signed up to take part in advance, seven initially turned up on the day, though this number expanded to ten following lunch. The music leaders also took a brief tour of the wings, where they performed for residents, and attended a staff meeting during which staff also did some singing.

The student choir arrived by coach at about 1pm. We made our way through security and up to the multi-faith room in the company of a member of the chaplaincy team. There we waited for the workshop leaders to return from lunch, at which point we ran through some of our pieces. The resident choir then arrived in order to rehearse some joint pieces, and there was a short five minute break, during which some opportunities for informal conversations arose. Residents then rehearsed some of their own numbers. The students then sat watching the residents’ pieces, and rewarded one piece in particular involving two soloists with an enthusiastic round of applause, which was received with wide grins.

The audience was then brought in wing by wing, and a number of staff members also showed up to watch the concert. The layout was slightly different this time in that instead of sitting at the front, both choirs sat in and alongside the audience which made for a more integrated experience (see Figure 2). When the residents began their first piece, there was some restlessness within the audience, and the leader conducting stopped the piece and politely but firmly requested everybody’s attention, given the work that had been put in rehearsing. He pointed out that there would be a chance to participate more actively in a later piece, before restarting the opening number to a virtually silent and much more focussed audience. Loud applause followed each of the numbers, with the loudest being reserved for two resident soloists’ rendition of ‘Let It Be’, by The Beatles. At the end of the concert, the organiser and leader thanked the prison for facilitating the event, and explained its purpose as day course providing an introduction to choral singing and performance. He then presented certificates to each participant individually, and all were applauded.
As officers called out wing by wing for residents to leave, there was again a short period where students and residents spoke to each other. This was especially true for those who had sung together as a joint choir, but conversations with audience members also started up. This was not true for all of the student choir members, some of whom were speaking to each other, but many did interact with residents in this way. After all the residents had left, the chaplain said a few words of thanks to the students, and also explained why the experience would be beneficial to the residents. She informed us of some of the difficulties that had recently been faced by those inside the prison, and this information appeared to have some effect on students, whose faces wore pained and shocked expressions. The choir was then led back down through security to the car park, where we departed back to Cambridge for a pub dinner together.

4.3 Question 1: What are the effects of interaction with prisoners on punitiveness?

The first research question is addressed through the analysis of quantitative data collected via the questionnaires. Mirroring the definition of punitiveness outlined above, the question is split into two sub-questions relating to attitudes towards prisoners and support for harsher punishment.

1a) What are the effects of interaction with prisoners on attitudes towards prisoners?

Hypothesis 1a: Interaction with prisoners leads to more positive attitudes towards them.

As indicated in the methods section, complete data with respect to ATP was obtained for 29 students, and remaining participants were eliminated listwise from the analyses, which were conducted using SPSS. Analysis at the level of the individual revealed that 20 participants’ scores increased, whilst the scores of eight individuals decreased and one score remained the same. Not only were the positive changes greater in frequency, they also tended to be greater in magnitude, with half of them involving increases of 10 per cent or more. Only a quarter of negative changes were of an equivalent size, as can be determined from Table 2. In a group level analysis of the 29 participants, it transpired that the mean ATP score after a visit (104.97) was higher than the mean score before a visit (98.59), reflecting a 6.5 per cent average increase (see Table 3). This higher score reflects more positive attitudes towards prisoners.
Table 2: Frequency of individual percentage changes in ATP scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage change in ATP score</th>
<th>Increases in ATP score</th>
<th>Decreases in ATP score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage of total completers*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10-12%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total percentage less than 100% due to rounding and one participant’s score not changing.

Table 3: ATP score average group-level change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-visit</th>
<th>Post-visit</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>98.59</td>
<td>104.97</td>
<td>+6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>14.70</td>
<td>14.06</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>101.00</td>
<td>105.00</td>
<td>+4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>+13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n = 29)

The distribution of changes in individuals’ ATP scores were non-normal, so the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test for related samples was used. The null hypothesis for this test was that the median of differences in ATP scores equals zero. However, participants’ ATP scores were found to be significantly higher after visiting prison (Mdn = 105) than prior to visiting it (Mdn = 101) using the exact significance test (z = -3.00, p < 0.005, one-tailed). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. In terms of substantive effect, the effect size was of medium magnitude using Cohen’s (1988) criteria (r = -0.39). Thus attitudes towards prisoners became more positive at the group level following a visit to prison, providing support for hypothesis 1a. However, due to the lack of a control group and random assignment, this finding is not probative of but merely consistent with the existence of a causal relationship in the sense intended by the research question.
1b) What are the effects of interaction with prisoners on support for harsher punishments?

Hypothesis 1b: Interaction with prisoners leads to reduced support for harsher punishment.

The five items relating to support for harsher punishment (SHP) were answered in full by the 29 participants who completed the ATP scale. Table 4 overleaf illustrates the percentage of these participants that replied to each item more favourably and less favourably in the post-visit questionnaire, alongside the proportion who gave the same responses as in the pre-visit instrument. The percentage of participants who did not change their answers is high for each of the items, only being less than half in the case of the first item. The second most frequent outcome was the giving of a response generally indicative of lower support for harsh punishment, with the exception of the final item. For each of these items, at least twice as many participants showed lower support for harsher punishment as those that showed greater support. This trend even held for the fourth item, which was worded such that agreement amounted to greater SHP. However, there was an even split between those participants who responded more and less favourably to the final item regarding strength of commitment to less severe punishments.
### Table 4: Group level changes in answers to questions about punishment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage of participants * responding more favourably(^1)</th>
<th>Percentage of participants * responding less favourably(^2)</th>
<th>Percentage of participants * responding the same</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. If prison has to be used, it should be used sparingly and only as a last option.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prisoners should have access to televisions and gym facilities.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Probation or a community sentence (rather than prison) is generally appropriate for a person found guilty of burglary for the second time.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I’d consider volunteering my time or donating money to an organisation that supported toughening the sentencing laws in the UK.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I’d consider volunteering my time or donating money to an organisation that supported alternatives to prison.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(n = 29\)

\(^1\)more favourable responses include both greater agreement and less disagreement.

\(^2\)less favourable responses include both less agreement and greater disagreement.

Numbers from one to five were assigned to each possible answer to indicate the level of punitiveness in responses, in order to facilitate the statistical testing of the change for each item. The distribution of changes for all five items were non-normal, and so the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used again. Significant differences using the exact test were found for only two questions. For item one (regarding the need to use prison sparingly and as a last option) responses were less punitive after visits to prison (\(Mdn = 2\)) than beforehand (\(Mdn = 3, z = -2.06, p < 0.05\), one-tailed exact test). For item four, regarding support for organisations toughening sentencing laws, the respective medians were both two, though the signed-rank test still indicated that there was a statistically
significant drop in support following the visits ($z = -2.53, p < 0.05$, one-tailed exact test). The corresponding effect sizes were small ($r = -0.27$) for item one and medium ($r = -0.33$) for item four.

Bringing these two strands of quantitative data together at the level of individual participants, Table 5 shows a breakdown of participants by changes in ATP and changes in SHP. As the items related to the latter were not used as a scale, ‘reduced SHP’ is taken to occur when at least one of an individual’s responses to the five items shifted in the non-punitive direction, and none of their other answers changed in the opposite direction.

### Table 5: Breakdown of participants by direction of changes in ATP and SHP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reduced SHP</th>
<th>No clear change in SHP</th>
<th>Increased SHP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive change in ATP</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change in ATP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative change in ATP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst positive changes in ATP and reductions in SHP were more frequent than not across the 29 participants from the sample who provided complete responses, only a third of these individuals appeared to change in both these ways. Thus there was both an imbalance and a disconnect between the decreases in the two elements of punitiveness. With this disparity in mind, the third research question focuses largely on the change in attitudes towards prisoners, as this was more clear-cut.

### 4.4 Question 2: How is the interaction perceived and experienced by participants?

The approach taken with regard to the second and third research questions was to analyse qualitative data from the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups in accordance with a grounded theory approach, looking for themes that would aid in answering the research questions. Three stages of coding occurred, with open coding, which involved the identification of information categories; axial coding, which involved the selection of ‘core’ themes on which to focus; and selective coding, which involved the linking of themes in order to develop explanations (Creswell, 2013: 86). In answer to the second
research question, the types of interaction that occurred are described, before three themes relating to the extent of interactions and one theme concerning participants’ evaluations of them are explored.

4.4.1 Types of interaction

Three main forms of interaction were discerned. First, there was informal social interaction, involving chatting in breaks and after performances and non-verbal eye contact and smiling. The time which participants had to freely interact with residents in this way was limited in both visits, though there were greater opportunities on the second visit due to students and residents rehearsing together. Second, more formal interaction occurred. This took place verbally through the question and answer session during the first visit, when residents and choir members asked each other questions in front of everyone. Applause from the audiences was also a feature of both visits as a formal, non-verbal type of communication. Third, there was the musical interaction itself, which involved the usual audience/performer relationship on both occasions, together with co-performing students’ and residents’ heightened awareness of each other and a shared sense of purpose during the second visit.

4.4.2 Extent of interaction

It was evident from observations and participants’ comments that interaction between residents and students was very widespread. Whilst musical interaction occupied participants for the majority of the time, the other types of interaction described above were frequently reported and observed. Informal, verbal interaction was common: 17 of the 29 students reported having interacted with residents in this way. Among those who did not, a number of reasons were provided for why this was. Some pointed out that time for chatting was limited, especially on the first visit. For example, one student remarked: ‘I would have liked more opportunity to talk to the prisoners individually’. Others noted that the spatial arrangement of the choir and audience left them feeling isolated from residents on the first visit. As one visiting choir member put it, there was a sense of being ‘set apart somewhat from the prisoners’.
Anxiety about interacting

Participants reported that anxiety about interacting with residents was the main barrier to it. This theme characterised responses both before and after visits, with two sub-themes emerging from the data. First, students expressed uncertainty regarding how to interact with residents. A typical comment beforehand concerned anxiety due to having ‘no idea what to expect or how to act’, whilst afterwards several noted that ‘it was difficult to know how to strike up a conversation’. Some students explained this feeling of uncertainty in greater detail, regarding both verbal and non-verbal interaction:

I felt a little uneasy about talking directly to the prisoners simply because I didn’t know anything about their backgrounds. It was hard to predict exactly how they may react to different things. (Jessica, questionnaire, visit 2)⁴

Author: How did you feel initially about that momentary eye-contact?

Ellie, visit 2: It was a bit difficult at first I would say, because you didn’t know what the other person was thinking, but as time went on it sort of became easier- you got used to the situation more, and they did. It became more natural.

Anxiety regarding this lack of knowledge about residents’ backgrounds and thoughts was indicative of students’ unfamiliarity with the social context in which they found themselves. It was telling that 27 of the 29 participants who completed the questionnaires in full had never been into a prison before. In this new environment, the visitors were conscious that their words and behaviour might carry different meanings, and were nervous about appearing ‘condescending’ or offending residents when bringing up ‘prison related topics’. Equally, some residents in the focus group expressed discomfort about initial interactions, due to their desire not to make students feel nervous:

You didn’t want to make them uncomfortable. I spoke to one girl, and she looked so nervous holding her paper [music], so I thought I’ll leave her. (Charlie, resident choir member)

Although both groups were anxious about interacting in a mutually acceptable way, there was certainly a desire for interaction on either side. As one student noted ‘they definitely

⁴ All names used are gender-specific pseudonyms, and quotes have been edited for repetitive or redundant language (such as ‘and’, ‘like’, etc.).
wanted to be friendly, but we probably both didn’t know how to be initially’. Many participants worked out how to interact in friendly terms, and did so.

*Anxiety about gender*

A second source of anxiety about interacting was the issue of gender. The choir was a mixed choir, and seven of the 19 female students expressed feeling ‘apprehensive’ about visiting an all-male prison. This could well have been partly due to a request from the prison for female students to be particularly mindful of the clothes they wore. In the event, female participants’ occasionally suggested that their gender afforded them greater opportunity for interaction with residents:

> I got a bit more attention from the prisoners than some of the others, probably because I’m a young, non-uniformed female. (Sarah, questionnaire, visit 2)

However, the gender difference made three students feel more on guard during the visit, inhibiting the ways in which they wanted to interact:

> As a girl I was wary of coming across as too friendly and inviting. I thought they may interpret things I said differently to how they may interpret a guy saying the same thing. (Amy, questionnaire, visit 2)

This fear of being misinterpreted thus led some female students to tone down their friendliness.

> Interestingly, residents also highlighted difficulties in interacting with the female visitors, as they perceived some female students as being particularly young:

> You know what’s hard, some of them – the girls – they looked young. You didn’t know where to look, ‘cos you didn’t want no one to misinterpret what you was thinking.  
>  (Richard, resident choir member)

Thus some residents were concerned not only about making visitors feel uncomfortable, but about fellow residents’ interpretations of their behaviour, given the particular contempt with which prisoners tend to view paedophiles (Crewe, 2009: 276; Winfree et al., 2002). Overall then it appeared that gender differences were a source of anxiety that changed the nature of, and in some cases inhibited, interaction between students and residents.
Musical connections

Other features of the visits were reported to facilitate greater interaction between the two groups. Foremost amongst these was connection forged between visitors and residents through the music, which was the second identifiable theme. One resident pointed to the existence of a link because ‘we shared that natural interest in music’. The shared enjoyment was perceived on both sides, with one visitor noting that she had ‘rarely performed in front of such an appreciative audience’. In general, students indicated that this link made conversation easier following performances, as there was then a natural topic to open with:

Beforehand you wouldn’t know what to say. Afterwards it was much easier to chat to them, to ask them how the concert was, or congratulate them on their performance- that kind of thing. (Robin, interview, trip 2)

For some participants it was eye-opening to see not only that the residents appreciated the music, but that they did so in ways that resonated with the students’ own appreciation of the pieces:

I spoke to a member of the audience who was a prisoner, who said that he especially liked the harmonies because he thought they were really beautiful. I was surprised that he appreciated the music just like me. (Holly, questionnaire, visit 2).

This shared appreciation was a far cry from the expectations of some students, who had envisaged that residents would attend solely to get out of their cells, and who didn’t expect residents to have anything to ask in the question and answer session on the first visit. During the second visit, the feeling of sharing the experience was even stronger between the resident and visiting choir members, who rehearsed and performed side by side. One resident commented that ‘we was all exploring the unknown’, whilst another spoke of sharing laughter with a choir member when they lost their place together in the music:

She got muddled up in the music so I did too- we both giggled so much! It still makes me laugh thinking about it. (Mike, resident choir member)

This moment of shared amusement shows one way in which the musical nature of the activity brought about interaction at a relatively deep level, enabling participants to laugh together. The way in which participants presented these shared musical features of the
visit suggested that they perceived them to be very important in terms of facilitating interaction between the two groups.

**Depth of conversations**

The depth of conversations was another discernible theme relating to the extent of interactions. While six students described their conversations as brief in nature, ten participants covered a range of topics between them, from music and the possibility of further performances, to Cambridge and prison life, right the way through to details of residents’ lives including their families and future hopes:

I spoke with one of the younger prisoners who had taken part in the workshop, and got some indication of his life before prison, his hope to be released shortly, and the fact that he was unsure what he wanted to do as a career once released. We also talked a bit about my course. (James, questionnaire, visit 2)

We talked a bit about their families and where they’d come from. (Daniel, questionnaire, visit 2)

I was touched that a couple of them let me into their stories after I got to know them. (Samuel, questionnaire, visit 2)

There is some evidence in the above quotations of conversations that at least bordered on self disclosure, which was identified as being important to the contact hypothesis in the literature review (Turner et al., 2007). Whilst in some ways many of the interactions were undoubtedly at quite a superficial level, residents in particular revealed aspects of their lives that were quite personal, though students also reported discussing their academic and social lives, albeit in general terms.

**4.4.3 Evaluations of interaction**

Participants who overcame the anxiety described above reported their perceptions of interaction to be overwhelmingly positive. Seven individuals said they would have liked more opportunities to talk, and ten commented that talking to residents was their favourite aspect of the entire experience:
I really enjoyed talking to the prisoners and was really interested in their stories. I wish I had had more time to have proper conversations with them. (Steph, questionnaire, visit 2)

The best part was meeting and chatting to the prisoners. (Harry, questionnaire, visit 1)

Whilst these positive perceptions of conversations were vastly more frequent than negative ones, three participants did report these too. One referred to detecting ‘feelings of resentment/antipathy’, whilst two others spoke about discomfort when a resident expressed the desire to keep in contact after his release. Even then, these three all viewed their interactions as a whole in a positive light.

**Normal interactions**

One theme that emerged was the evaluation of musical or social interactions as normal by 18 students. It was remarked that ‘when the concert got going, it was easy to forget we were in prison’, and thus it was ‘easy to treat it as any other concert’. Regarding conversations, at one extreme there was a student who felt so natural talking to a resident that she was unsure if he was one or not:

I started talking to him and he appeared a completely normal person just like you would meet on the street or in your workplace or at school. I wasn’t really sure if he was a prisoner himself, so I sort of asked indirectly, and he was surprised that I didn’t know he was. (Laura, interview, visit 2)

This specific response was atypical, but the sense of normality regarding prisoners and speaking with them that it evokes was reproduced throughout questionnaires and interviews. A more representative comment about the conversations that occurred was that ‘they were very ordinary, like any other interaction with someone you haven’t met before’. For participants who overcame their initial nerves, little distinction was made between meeting prisoners and other new people. The ordinariness of these interactions was viewed very positively by students, who enjoyed speaking to and singing with residents and were glad when this felt so natural.

Overall, a good deal of interaction occurred during the visits, both in terms of the number of participants who reported interaction and the depth of some conversations. This was despite the fact that opportunities for informal conversations were limited in number and duration. The main barrier to interaction was anxiety, which was
predominantly attributed to wariness about unintentionally doing or saying the wrong thing. Anxiety was heightened for some female students due to their concerns about the gender difference with residents, although this was also reported to afford them greater opportunity for conversations. The shared appreciation of music enabled participants to overcome this anxiety in many instances, leading to ‘normal’ interactions that were overwhelmingly perceived in a positive light by both residents and students.

4.5 Question 3: What may account for any changes in punitiveness?

The final research question seeks to probe the issue of causation, but in the idiographic sense of the word, and in an exploratory manner. Again a grounded theory approach is used to sift data for recurring themes in the three stage process outlined earlier, whilst reference is made to the quantitative findings as the effect to be explained. The findings in relation to the first research question demonstrate changes in punitiveness occurring following visits to prison, in terms of alterations both in attitudes towards prisoners and in some support for harsher punishment. As explained in the answer to the first research question, the focus adopted here is on the change in attitudes towards prisoners, as this change was more clear-cut.

4.5.1 Social and musical interaction with residents

Interaction specifically through talking and singing with residents emerged one potential cause of ATP change. As described above, it evoked highly positive feelings for at least 10 students. Further, all eight individuals whose ATP scores became more negative reported not having spoken with residents directly. This is in stark contrast to the upper end of the positive changes in ATP, where nine of the top 12 said they had done so. Two themes arose that may explain how these types of interaction had an impact on attitudes: the perception of similarities with residents, and reductions in anxiety.

Similarities with residents

The first theme involved students perceiving similarities between residents and themselves in the course of singing together and talking:
Having them sing together in a choir with us really showed a very human side to them that can be related to all, showing how similar they can be to any one of the students. (Ellie, questionnaire, visit 2)

Before chatting to them you were just thinking that they won’t have anything in common with me, because they’re just… completely different- they’re from different backgrounds, they’ll just be really rough and they might not like the sort of music that I like at all, but you just chat to them and you do find things. (Rachael, interview, visit 2)

Whilst many participants mentioned positive expectations of residents prior to visiting prison, this sense of similarity and having things in common was only apparent in reflections following the visits, when it was raised by eight students. It was also only spoken of by those whose ATP scores became more positive, and who felt that they had experienced some kind of interaction with residents. The feeling appeared to engender a degree of empathy among some participants in terms of considering the perspectives of residents regarding being sent to prison:

I was surprised to find how many prisoners are just “normal” people and interested in music like I am: as one of the guards said, you can’t say you’ll never go to prison. It’s easier than you think to make a mistake. (Katherine, questionnaire, visit 1)

It made me realise how potentially easy it is to fall into a particular situation because of circumstances that are not necessarily in your control, or because you have very few options. (Steph, questionnaire, visit 2)

This empathetic perspective taking provides another connection to the contact hypothesis, as evidence suggests that increases in empathy play a large role in reduced prejudice through contact (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). Interestingly, empathy was identified earlier as a predictor of greater punitiveness (Posick et al., 2014). It appears that the opportunity for empathetic attachments to be formed with prison residents may change the relationship between empathetic abilities and punitiveness. Cutting off this possibility through the isolation of prisoners is one way in which a more holistic process of attitude formation is prevented. Garland (1990: 236) suggests that this isolation reduces sympathy for offenders, and it seems that the same may be true for empathy.
Reducing anxieties

The second theme is the way in which interaction was reported to reduce the initial anxieties that students had about the visits and meeting residents. Although not everyone was able to overcome their nervousness about conversing with residents, eight who did later suggested that these anxieties were then dispelled even further during the course of their interactions, whether musical or social:

At first I was a little nervous, but it was OK once we started singing and talking to them afterward. (Beth, questionnaire, visit 1)

It put me at ease. Once you start chatting to them it just becomes a normal conversation really. (Jill, interview, visit 1)

It is admittedly difficult to untangle the precise reasons for this reduction in anxiety. It could have been that students simply felt much more comfortable due to their familiarity with performing and chatting as opposed to the awkwardness of sitting in a room filled with unfamiliar people. However, another explanation is that the visitors’ initial expectations of residents’ behaviour were subverted in a way that made them feel more connected to residents and less vulnerable in the prison environment. This theme again provides a link to the contact hypothesis regarding reducing prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008), perhaps justifying the testing of factors from this field in the criminal justice context.

4.5.2 Understanding of prison and prison residents

In addition to change being brought about through interaction, other aspects of the visits may also have had an impact on participants’ attitudes towards prisoners. All participants believed that visiting prison had contributed something to their understanding of prison, with many commenting on prisoner stereotypes, their expectations of relationships within prison, and their perceptions of negative behaviour.
**Challenges to stereotypes**

One theme here arose through 17 students’ comments that residents did not appear distinctive, and differed from stereotypes. Not one suggested that the experience had confirmed such stereotypes:

> A lot of them just looked like normal people, not like the “prisoner” stereotype with huge tattoos and big muscles. (Katherine, questionnaire, visit 1)

> I certainly wouldn’t have been able to pick them out in a crowd. (Edward, interview, visit 2)

These perceptions were reported to come about purely through observation, and thus may have had an impact on participants’ attitudes independently of any effect due to interaction. The fact that residents looked ordinary may have reassured the visitors that they were not threatening, and had much in common with anyone else.

**Good relationships within the prison**

A second theme arose from nine students’ comments that residents appeared to have surprisingly good relationships both with each other and with staff:

> It was nice to see some of [the residents] talking and laughing with each other. It seemed like there was some sort of a community. (Annabelle, questionnaire, visit 1)

> The prison staff seemed excellent at what they did. They appeared to have a good relationship with prisoners, having clear authority but still talking and laughing with them. (Ellie, questionnaire, visit 2)

Whilst one student believed this may have been ‘put on’ for the visitors, others took this to be indicative of residents’ capability to engage in normal relationships, as was the case with interactions that students experienced for themselves. The effect of this was to reduce anxiety for some, who reported that seeing these good relationships ‘made the prisoners seem less intimidating’. Once again, this reduced anxiety may explain some of the increase in positive attitudes towards prisoners.
**Misbehaviour indicative of danger**

The behaviour of some residents was also perceived negatively by some students at particular moments. During the first visit, one man was escorted from the room when his shouting interrupted the chapel service. During the second, the conductor had to stop just after opening the first piece in order to request the audience’s full attention. Three students, who were part of the audience at that moment, reported that some talking continued intermittently nonetheless. There were two themes regarding students’ negative perceptions of the behaviour of audience members. First, five participants perceived it as a sign of danger. Among these were the three students whose ATP scores decreased the most. One of them perceived some residents to be ‘violent’ as a result of the ejection during the first visit, whilst the other two described this event as indicative of the presence of ‘harmful’ or ‘dangerous’ people in prison. To these visitors, bad behaviour seemed to indicate a rejection of social norms to such an extent that danger was felt to be present. This perception of danger may well have contributed to decreases in scores for some students through general increases in anxiety and the idea that prison residents are threatening.

**Misbehaviour reminiscent of school**

In contrast, a second theme emerged through 14 students’ use of terms such as ‘rowdy’ or ‘childish’ to describe some residents’ behaviour, in addition to mentions of ‘classroom antics’ and other behaviour remembered from school:

> The few rowdy ones seemed to be more immature than aggressive or intimidating; it was surprisingly like a school in that respect. (James, questionnaire, visit 2)

> It reminded me of school assemblies, where kids are always on the edge for some attention. They want to make a noise, and if something happens, they all want to get involved – to be a part of something outside that regulated system – and I definitely felt an air of that. (Steph, interview, visit 2)

This perspective did not denote the same sense of danger. The suggestion instead was that the behaviour of a number of residents in the audience seemed underdeveloped, as it was a little unruly, perhaps in part due to the power context of the prison. These responses tended to come from participants whose attitudes had become more positive, and one
such individual went even further to suggest that some residents may simply have been unfamiliar with concert etiquette:

I suppose they probably hadn’t been to as many music concerts and things like that as I have, but it was really interesting that they had to learn to just listen to the performance— they hadn’t really known that sort of stuff. (Rachael, interview, visit 2)

These very different interpretations of the same behaviour may go some way to explaining the range of changes in ATP scores. When negative perceptions of behaviour were accompanied by explanations that related it to more familiar bad behaviour, the prison context, or unfamiliarity with the performance situation, evidence of increased anxiety did not seem to materialise, perhaps explaining the tendency for these individuals’ ATP scores not to decrease.

4.5.3 Experiencing the physical prison environment

Negative aspects and their messages about residents

The final themes relate to participants’ experience of the physical setting of the prison. Participants tended to discuss this in negative terms. Four individuals noted a feeling of ‘oppression’ or ‘change of mood’ immediately on entering the prison and waiting by the glass reception window to be processed through security. Similarly, two students said that the sight of barbed wire on top of the walls was the worst aspect of their visits. For a small number of participants, aspects of the buildings even appeared to colour their perceptions of residents before they had even met any. The following exchange was had at interview with one student, whose ATP score had decreased by 10 per cent, reflecting the second biggest decrease overall:

Author: What sticks out in your mind most about the visit?

Stephen, visit 1: Probably seeing the suicide prevention chicken wire grills over the windows and in the stairwell. I remember thinking that showed you the kind of place people inside were at in their lives, in terms of thinking about taking their own lives.

Author: Do you think this affected your view of the prisoners?

Stephen, visit 1: Well yes, nine-tenths of my impression was formed prior to meeting them— from how the environment felt.
It is very difficult to characterise how such negative feelings might impact the ATP measure. This participant in particular was unusual in reporting difficulties when it came to interacting with residents, due to the fact that he perceived them to be ‘so different and institutionalised, which overshadowed who they were as individuals’. Perceptions of the effect that the prison environment had on residents, together with the messages that the environment broadcast about residents may well have had an effect on some participants’ attitudes. This may have happened directly, by colouring views of residents, or indirectly, via inhibiting interaction with them.

The multi-faith room and relief at normality

On the other hand, five students made reported positive aspects of the environment. They commented on their surprise and relief at how the multi-faith room was a ‘nice’ and ‘comfortable’ environment, in stark contrast to the ‘white’, ‘grey’ and ‘metallic’ images used in news reports. The following answer was typical of these comments:

Author: What did you think of the venue in the prison?

Jill, visit 1: I felt a bit relieved when I went in and saw it’s not just pure white, oppressive and clinical, with no room for individuality, it’s like they’ve made an effort to make this look nice. It just seemed like more of a normal environment.

There was a sense that this normality helped these visitors to relax more on arrival. None of the individuals commenting on the venue in this way showed decreases in ATP scores. Three of them did note that they were very conscious of not having seen the vast majority of the prison interior. Nonetheless, perceptions of the parts of the prison that were seen certainly had the potential to colour students’ ideas about and approaches towards residents in these ways.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications

The findings of the study are consistent with a reducing effect on aspects of punitive attitudes following a visit to prison. This is particularly so with respect to attitudes towards prisoners, whilst less change occurred in support for harsher punishment. The difference in ATP scores mirrors findings of prior studies regarding contact and familiarity with prisoners, but this appears to be the first time that volunteers’ attitude changes have been assessed quantitatively over the course of a single prison visit. Caution is necessary with regard to the validity of this finding, as the internal validity of the research is threatened by the lack of a control group and the reordering of ATP items between questionnaires. Further, the sample of Cambridge student choir members is representative of only a very limited population, rather than volunteers who work in prisons in general.

The exploration of how volunteers and prison residents perceived their interactions suggests that there can be significant obstacles to interaction between visitors and residents. Anxiety about unintentionally unnerving people due to the meaning of behaviour within the prison context is something which future research could examine in more detail, perhaps with a view to working out how pre-visit briefings could be used to reduce anxiety for various groups of volunteers. This may be especially important in contexts where visits do not revolve around activities (such as music) that rapidly draw out common connections with residents. However, when anxiety is overcome, personal interactions can achieve a level of depth in terms of self-disclosure, and elicit very positive feelings from those who take part in them. Further, the perception that these interactions are unremarkable appears to contribute to a view of residents as ‘normal’, which can then lead to the discovery of similarities and engender empathetic responses.

Finally, the study unearthed a number of factors involved in prison visits that explained attitude changes in the idiographic sense. Some of these, such as reduced anxiety, increased empathy and self-disclosure, have already received considerable attention in the context of reducing prejudice towards other groups, or in studies of variables predictive of punitiveness. The present exploratory findings provide support for a link between these two topics, and justify further research that might clarify this connection and examine the role that these particular variables play within the particular context of visiting prison.
I conclude by returning to the three justifications raised at the outset of the dissertation. Whilst the study makes only a very small step indeed towards addressing the issues of increasing the democratic utility of attitudes, reducing the stigmatization of prisoners and investigating the link between hidden punishment and penal sensibilities, connections can be drawn to these wider issues. First, students’ comments about their experience, together with the attitude change that took place following a brief visit to prison, suggest that their attitudes beforehand were not formed on the basis of careful deliberation after exposure to relevant emotional and informational stimuli. Thus the issue of a deficit in the democratic utility of some punitive attitudes should be taken seriously. Second, reduced stigmatization of prisoners may well have been brought about by interaction with them as volunteers, and at the very least this interaction did not result in overall increases in stigmatization. Third, the anxiety felt by students about visiting what they initially perceived to be an alien environment was very strong, and this is perhaps one indication of just how hidden the penal practices in our prisons are.
References


Punitiveness. (Crime and Policy Vol. 8-2) Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer. (pp. 165-209).


