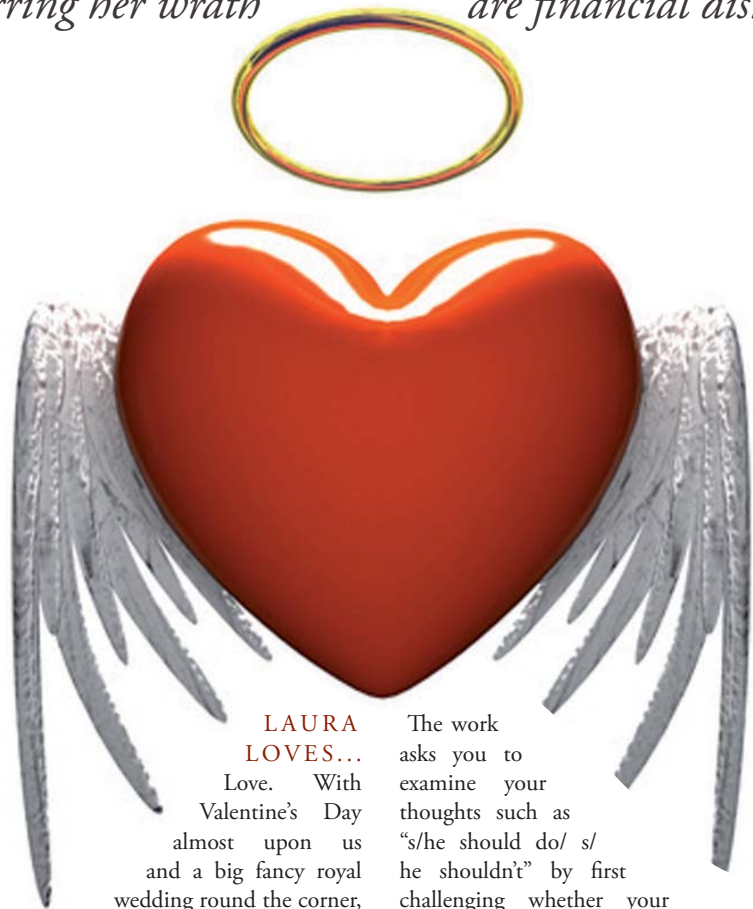


## LAURA LOVES, LAURA LOATHES

*Laura Graham gives a personal perspective on the news, trends, people and events she encounters. She kicks off the new year with a look at love – starting with building a healthy loving relationship with yourself then moving onto relationships with others, and where to find helpful information.*

*Incurring her wrath are financial disincentives to transforming lives.*



**LAURA LOVES...**

Love. With Valentine's Day almost upon us and a big fancy royal wedding round the corner,

The work asks you to examine your thoughts such as "s/he should do/ s/he shouldn't" by first challenging whether your statement is true, really true, how do you react when you have that thought, and who would you be without that thought. The work then asks you to turn the thought around so that "s/he should" becomes "I should". The work focuses on this inquiry of your thoughts so that you remain in your own business rather than in others, noticing when your thoughts argue with reality, and allows you to meet your thoughts with understanding. The work allows you to "make peace with your past and so begin to create better bonds with people in the present". Find out more at [www.thework.com](http://www.thework.com).

Often, early recovery can bring about the ending of a significant relationship. The advice about starting a new relationship in early recovery is generally not to! On [www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Love\\_sex\\_relationships\\_and\\_early\\_](http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Love_sex_relationships_and_early_)

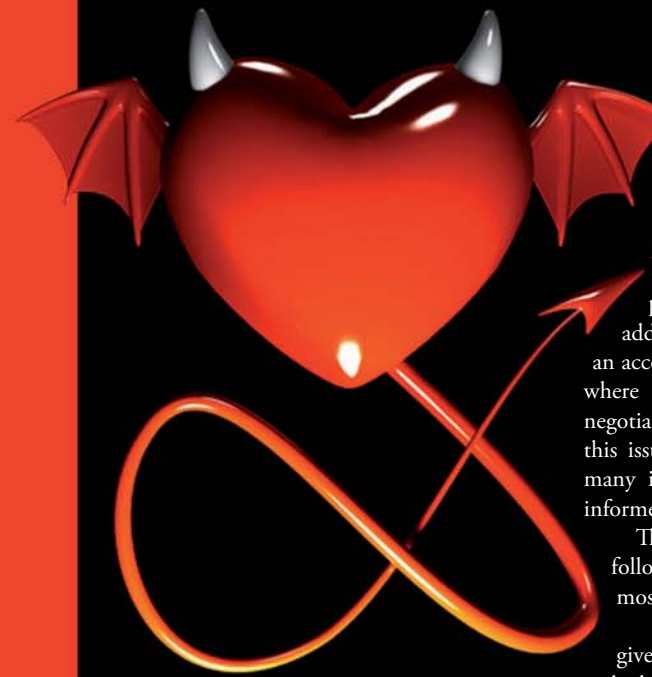
[addiction\\_recovery](http://www.addiction_recovery), William Berry explains that early recovery is a time for individual growth which could be stifled by a new relationship, and a new relationship is likely to be outgrown very quickly. There are issues such as addictive thinking to understand, self-esteem, and emotional intensity which can make new love for someone else difficult to navigate in the early days of recovery. Time to know and grow yourself is the most important relationship to nurture.

Established relationships can wobble when one partner gets in recovery. There can be issues around trust, doubt and difficulties in letting go of past hurts as the result of former behaviour. It can be frustrating for the partner in recovery if their partner does not fully understand how much work is required for that recovery. Partners in these circumstances can benefit from engaging in their own support through Al-Anon or similar support groups right through to S-Anon for partners of sex addicts.

What if your relationship is with sex rather than with people? Patrick Carnes, pioneer and expert on sex addiction, summarises it as any sexually related, compulsive behaviour which interferes with normal living and causes stress to family and loved ones and which can completely dominate an addict's life.

Not one single behaviour pattern defines sexual addiction, which manifests as sexual behaviours that have taken control of a person's life so that it becomes unmanageable. Carnes has authored many books and papers on the subject and more information about his important work, including a sex-addiction assessment tool, is available at [www.sexhelp.com](http://www.sexhelp.com).

Relationships are no easy ride but they can be loving, joyful, satisfying, worthwhile and worth the effort. The effort might be letting go of old hurts, challenging our own thinking to understand our feelings, living without expectation or entitlement, and accepting ourselves and others with honesty and respect. As Byron Katie says, "suffering is optional". Love is a many splendid thing... warts and all!



**LAURA LOATHES...** financial disincentives to change and improvement.

The loss of liberty is the most severe form of punishment in the UK but it comes with many unintended financial consequences, according to the report *Time Is Money*. Supported by the Friends Provident Foundation, the Prison Reform Trust and Unlock – the National Association of Reformed Offenders – this research explores the impact of the criminal-justice system on a person's finances. And the findings reveal that not only are the individual offenders plunged into financial exclusion but so are their families.

The punishment does not stop at point of release from prison but potentially follows them for the rest of their lives and increases the risk of re-offending by adding barriers to housing, employment, insurance and family relationships.

The report highlights how being in prison can lead to an increase in debt. This is most notable when people have direct-debit arrangements with their bank for mortgages, rent or mobile phone contracts and the like which cannot be properly organised while a person is in prison as they are unable to pop into their bank branch, or access

internet or telephone banking.

Prisoners' families are relied on to step in and do what they can.

The research found that often prisoners do not have bank accounts, usually as the result of not having photographic identification documents or address histories as required when opening an account. Some good work has been achieved where individual prisons and Unlock have negotiated arrangements with banks to resolve this issue – but they have also discovered that many involved in this process have not been informed that such arrangements exist.

The report found that the early period following release from prison presented the most risk in terms of financial vulnerability.

On release from prison, some people are given a discharge grant to the value of £46.75 which is intended to fill the finance gap until the first payment of benefits. This level of payment was set in 1995 and has not increased to reflect increasing costs of living or the long wait for benefits to be paid that many people experience.

Not everyone is entitled to this grant. To qualify, the person must have served at least 15 days, must have been sentenced and must not have defaulted on any previous fines.

Many who receive the grant are released to hostel accommodation without access to cooking facilities so that the person has to rely on take-aways to have warm food.

Deposits required to access privately-rented accommodation are out of the reach of this population.

The research looked at the impact of the *Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974* which was introduced to offer some protection to people who had previously offended by limiting requirements to disclose past convictions. The research found that this Act can, in fact, have the opposite impact.

For example, when applying for insurance, "unspent" criminal convictions must be disclosed. This includes those of individuals, family

members, named drivers etc. Even if insurance companies do not directly ask about convictions they must be disclosed as "material facts". To not disclose can render an insurance policy void but to disclose can mean that the premium is higher or that insurance is refused.

One participant in the research said that "My parents told their home insurers and motor insurers of my conviction and they were refused cover. This has stayed on their record and now they cannot get cover at all even though I don't live with them any more".

The terminology of the Act is misleading. A spent conviction is often assumed to mean the period spent in prison. However, the period requiring disclosure of a conviction is currently five years after a community sentence or a fine, seven years if sentenced to less than six months, 10 years if the sentence was between six and 30 months and the rest of a person's life if the sentence was greater than 30 months.

This applies to job applications as well as financial services.

The Act means that people who have received a sentence greater than 30 months are never deemed reformed or rehabilitated regardless of how long ago their conviction was, what their offence involved or what changes they have made in their lives since conviction.

The report makes many sensible recommendations which could help people to overcome some the hurdles that the research showed exists. I hope they are acted on.



**LAURA GRAHAM** is an independent consultant undertaking research, and policy and strategy development on substance misuse, mental health and offender management ([laurasmil@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:laurasmil@tiscali.co.uk)).

Image: Liv Friis-Jensen, Dmitry Kobharov