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**Constructing Family in the Context  
of Imprisonment: a study of  
prisoners and their families in  
Scotland**

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

I hereby confirm that I have composed this thesis and that this thesis is all my own work. I also declare that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_.



## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores what it is like for families when a person is sentenced to a period of imprisonment in Scotland. Drawing on interviews with men and women in custody, family members in the community and relevant professionals this thesis will argue that the family relationships affected by imprisonment are many and varied: just as in wider society there is no one model of “prisoners’ families”. Despite the restriction of liberty inherent to a prison sentence, these families find creative ways to maintain relationships through active, embodied ‘displays’ and ‘practices’ such as physical affection, revisiting shared memories and traditions and the sharing of food, routines, family time and other ‘home comforts’. It is these displays that define and characterise family relations, rather than strict categories of blood or marriage. Yet imprisonment imposes a number of barriers to reciprocal family relationships and maintaining these active displays takes considerable effort on the part of the family outside. This division of emotional and practical labour is highly gendered, and as a result supporting a family member in custody can serve to entrench both gendered caring roles and the social marginality already experienced by participants. Finally, this thesis will argue that the complexity of family life is often not fully reflected in criminal justice policy or practice, yet the ways in which families are seen and responded to have implications for the overall legitimacy of the system. Together, these claims should cause us to reflect critically on the wider costs of imprisonment.



## LAY ABSTRACT

This thesis explores what it is like for families when a person is sentenced to a period of imprisonment in Scotland. Rather than questioning how imprisonment affects any particular group of prisoners or relationships (such as partners or children) this project instead seeks to explore what families who experience imprisonment look like, how this contact with the criminal justice system is experienced and what might be the possible future implications for the family as a whole. Drawing on interviews with men and women in custody, family members in the community and relevant professionals this thesis will argue that the family relationships affected by imprisonment are many and varied: just as in wider society there is no one model of “prisoners’ families”. Despite the restriction of liberty inherent to a prison sentence, these families find creative ways to actively maintain relationships, for example by the sharing of physical affection, memories and traditions, food or other ‘home comforts’. It is these connections that define and characterise family relations, rather than strict categories of blood or marriage.

However, maintaining relationships takes considerable effort on the part of the family outside, and this support is generally given by women, regardless of the gender of the person in custody. This drains both the time and financial resources of families, further entrenching the social marginalisation that many participants were already experiencing. There are also costs to relationships, as imprisonment strains relationships and the strategies that families adopt to cope can undermine openness, honesty and reciprocity. This raises questions not only as to whether it is possible for families to assist in resettlement and reintegration after release, but also if there are particular aspects of the prison regime that can alleviate some of the strain placed upon prisoners’ relationships and promote more positive interactions with the criminal justice system.





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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Until very recently, families affected by imprisonment remained largely neglected by both researchers and policy makers. Indeed, despite groundbreaking research by Pauline Morris in the 1960s which found that these families can often experience profound hardships (Morris 1965), as little as ten years ago they were often described as the “hidden” or “forgotten” victims of the criminal justice process by the few researchers working to better understand their experiences (Light and Campbell 2006). This is now beginning to change, and there is a growing research and policy interest in this area not only in Scotland, but also in many jurisdictions across Europe and the US. It has been suggested that any discussion of the impact of imprisonment on families, at least in a US context, must be situated within a wider appreciation of the phenomenon often referred to as “mass incarceration”: a stark increase in the prison population that has brought many thousands of individuals into the prison system since the mid-1970s (Comfort 2008). While the Scottish prison population has not risen so dramatically, it has nonetheless increased steadily from an average daily population of below 5,000 in 1980 to just over 8,000 in 2011-12<sup>1</sup> (Scottish Government 2012a). With this in mind, this increased academic and policy interest is perhaps unsurprising, particularly given research findings which suggest active family supports are associated with a reduced likelihood of reoffending (Mills and Codd 2008; see also Barry 2009; McNeil and Whyte 2007; Visher and Travis 2003; Social Exclusion Unit 2002).

An understanding of these issues is useful not only for contextualising the findings of this research, but also how the project itself came to fruition. It has been argued that researchers do not only bring their values to a project, but also their own history and experiences (Devine and Heath 1999; Creswell 2013), and this is undoubtedly the case here. In 2008 I accepted a post as a Research Assistant at the University of Edinburgh, conducting an evaluation into a prison throughcare project that also contained a family support element. Over the three years that followed, I interviewed workers,

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<sup>1</sup> Due to technical issues, these are the most recent figures published by the Scottish Government.

previous service users and family members and heard numerous accounts of how the reach of this particular punishment extended far beyond the prison walls, as both prisoners and their families struggled to cope with the impact of imprisonment. I listened to these accounts with both interest and frustration, as it seemed that many of the very real difficulties they faced continued to be unrecognised and unaddressed by the criminal justice system.

Indeed, many of stories I heard resonated with growing body of literature that suggests families affected by imprisonment often suffer from high levels of social disadvantage (Murray 2007) and the imprisonment of a loved one may exacerbate poverty, trigger a range of difficult emotions and pose considerable barriers to maintaining contact, such as geographic distance, poor and expensive public transport and restrictive visiting times (Braman 2002; Morris 1965; Codd 2008; Peelo et al 1991; Light and Campbell 2006; Condry 2007; Lourerio 2010; Social Exclusion Unit 2002; Travis and Petersilla 2001; Mills and Codd 2007; Comfort 2008; Loucks 2004; Peart and Asquith 1992). Yet, as I became more familiar with this literature it seemed that families affected by imprisonment were often discussed in fairly uniform ways, as if there were one single or dominant model of family life. For example, it has been argued that the term “family” is generally used in this context to refer to nuclear, heterosexual models of families of origin and formation with other less traditional family models being neglected, and little known about the more diverse family models (Codd 2008).

It was with these issues in mind that I submitted a proposal to the ESRC and the University of Edinburgh for a PhD research project focusing on the experiences of families affected by imprisonment, seeking to explore three key research questions:

- What do prisoners’ social and family networks look like?
- How are these relationships affected by imprisonment? If there is a negative impact, how could the criminal justice system ameliorate this?
- What are the implications for desistance?

As I sought to construct “family” as widely as possible, these questions were to be explored through interviews with both men and women in custody and also families in the community. This would require my fieldwork to be conducted across two research settings, but would allow me to explore the experiences of both men and women in custody and families in the community without the recruitment of either group being dependent on the consent of the other, and also to hear the stories of people in custody who may not currently enjoy the active support of their family.

Reflecting on these research questions, it is evident that my previous role as a Research Assistant not only brought the advantages of having already established relationships with relevant agencies and some experience of conducting research in a prison environment, but also some considerable conceptual “baggage”. Much of the focus of criminal justice projects undergoing evaluation is to find evidence that they are effective, and this is very often understood in terms of evidencing a reduction in reoffending (Bisset 2014). Having spent three years working in this area, it seemed plain to me that if some audiences might be resistant to arguments that families affected by imprisonment should be recognised and supported for normative reasons, they would likely be more convinced of the utility of such initiatives if they could be shown to support desistance. Indeed, such claims are not unfounded, as there is a considerable body of academic work to suggest that significant relationships can play a key role in the desistance process for example: by providing “turning points” and informal social controls (Sampson and Laub 1993); by reflecting back and strengthening new social roles and self-identities (Giordano et al 2003, 2007); by providing opportunities for generative activity (Maruna 2001) and by increasing the social capital available to the offender (McNeill 2006) and (perhaps) the wider community (Bazemore and Erbe 2004).

This is not to suggest that I was unaware of the criticisms made by those who argue that families affected by imprisonment should not only become visible when it is felt that they can fulfil the utilitarian function of reducing reoffending and ultimately saving financial resources (Codd 2008). Indeed, there are also other criticisms to be made of the treatment of families within



the desistance literature, including a lack of attention to a range of important issues such as; the gendered nature of family life, the deprivation and marginalisation experienced by many communities that disproportionately affected by imprisonment, and indeed whether or not families might wish to support the person in custody (see chapter two for a further discussion of these arguments). Rather, I would suggest that my original decision to frame the project in this way reflects my desire for the findings to have an impact outwith academia, the nature of my previous research experience, and perhaps most importantly the dominant policy narrative surrounding families affected by imprisonment (also discussed further in chapter two).

However, like many PhD projects, the focus of this research has now somewhat shifted. While I remain interested in the nature and quality of family relationships and how they are affected by a period of imprisonment (questions one and two), I am now of the view that my third research question was too narrowly conceived. Rather than focusing on what the impact of imprisonment on families might mean for the process of desistance, I would now suggest that it is more fruitful to question the longer-term implications for families, prisoners and the criminal justice system more generally. Indeed, I wish to argue that a continued focus on the role of family relationships in the desistance process has deflected attention from a wider examination of the implications of the impact of imprisonment on families, and that other conceptual tools, and in particular Sparks, Bottoms and Hay's work on prison legitimacy, are better placed to illuminate the true costs of this form of punishment. Put simply, a research and policy focus on families affected by imprisonment and the implications for desistance alone is not only too narrow, it also short-sighted.

To this end, this thesis will make three key arguments.

Firstly, there is no single model of prisoners' families; family is something that is actively constructed through family practices (Morgan 1996, 2011) and displays (Finch 2007) such as sharing meals, mementos and family traditions. As a result, families are fluid, flexible and shifting; yet family relationships are also shaped by imprisonment in a number of ways, as those

both inside and outside the prison walls seek to cope with the often very traumatic circumstances in which they now find themselves.

Secondly, and somewhat paradoxically, despite this fluidity, there are notable commonalities amongst the families affected by imprisonment who choose to actively support the person in custody. For these families, providing this support can have considerable costs in terms of time, money and emotional labour, and this caring burden is overwhelmingly shouldered by women within the family. As many families are already experiencing social marginalisation, imprisonment serves not only to entrench social disadvantage, but also gendered caring roles.

Thirdly, the complexity of family life is often not reflected in criminal justice policy or practice, and many families felt that the criminal justice system did not recognise their individual circumstances or concerns. This often led to adversarial interactions with criminal justice professionals, as families attempted to navigate their way through the criminal justice system and professionals sought to reconcile the often competing demands of their role. Importantly, this feeling that they have been treated unfairly raises fundamental questions about how legitimate the criminal justice system is perceived to be amongst some of Scotland's most marginalised families and communities. Together, these three arguments add a more detailed and nuanced account of how family life is constructed and maintained in the context of imprisonment. They should also cause us to question the costs of imprisonment not only with regard to social justice, but also the potential implications for the longer-term effectiveness of criminal justice practice and policy.

## **RESEARCH SETTINGS AND CONTEXT**

As the above discussion suggests, this thesis explores the experiences of families affected by imprisonment in Scotland. A range of methods were utilised over the course of the project including qualitative interviews, the collation and analysis of visiting data recorded at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre, and an analysis of 13 criminal justice social work files. By

the conclusion of the fieldwork, in-depth qualitative interviews had been conducted with: ten men and four women serving a custodial sentence in HMP Greenock (12) or HMP Edinburgh (2); nineteen people from 14 families visiting a family member in HMP Edinburgh; eight prison officers from across both prisons; and four members of the staff team at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre.

There are a number of points I wish to make here with regard to the research setting. Within Scotland, the Edinburgh Prison Visitors Centre is somewhat unique as it is a large, architecturally significant building situated within the prison grounds but physically separate from the prison itself. It is run by the Salvation Army, working in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service and Families Outside, and much the work at the Centre is underpinned by the principles of community education (Cesay 2012). Consequently, there is a program of activities delivered at the Centre that focus on learning and community development and this is likely to have impacted on both how participants used the Centre and the data I collected, as I will go on to discuss in chapter three. Therefore, the accounts upon which this thesis is based very much reflect a particular time, space and place.

Indeed, it should be noted that Scotland not only has a separate legal and criminal justice system from England and Wales, but also a distinct civic and political culture (McAra 2005; 2008). To reflect this, I have included a discussion of the Scottish policy context pertaining to families affected by imprisonment in chapter two. The distinctiveness of Scottish culture and Scottish criminal justice institutions can also be seen in some of the terminology used by participants and the words and language that they use to describe their experiences. For readers who are less familiar with these expressions, Appendix I gives their meaning in "plain English".

Finally, I wish to make a brief point here with regard to my use of terminology throughout the thesis. The term prisoners' families has been criticised for placing the person in custody at the centre of the enquiry (Codd 2008), and consequently I have referred to this group of participants as "families", "families affected by imprisonment" or simply "participants"

throughout. This second term has also been criticised for obscuring the heavily gendered burden of caring labour shouldered by *women* supporting a family member in custody (Halsey and Deegan 2015); however while this argument is clearly valid, I have not been able to find a more suitable collective term for this group of participants. Nevertheless, gender is an important theme throughout this thesis, and I have referred to “men” and “women”, or simply the participants’ pseudonyms where relevant. Indeed, I have sought, as far as possible, to make each participant visible as *individual* throughout the thesis, and to this end a brief biography of each participant can be found in Appendix II.

## THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter two provides the conceptual context for the rest of the thesis, and here I seek to bring together a number of strands of research to argue that criminologists have tended to conceptualise families in three distinct ways: as a potentially criminogenic influence; a resource to promote desistance; or as the “forgotten victims” of the criminal justice process. While these three discourses might appear to be contradictory, I will suggest that each has had an influence on Scottish criminal justice policy and practice. Arguably, this has led to a relatively narrow focus on prisoners’ partners and children, and this chapter will go on to suggest that more sociological theoretical models of the family that emphasise the values and emotions that characterise family relationships (such as love, care, reciprocity and commitment), and in particular Morgan’s concept of family practices and Finch’s model of family displays, can provide useful tools for better understanding the shape of families affected by imprisonment. Finally, this chapter will suggest that the focus on trust, openness and respect inherent to these models of the family also alerts us to the importance of these values in ensuring the moral performance and legitimacy of prisons. This chapter concludes by arguing that many of the key claims of the literature can equally (and usefully) be applied to the experiences of families visiting the prison.

Chapter three will describe the epistemological approach taken, the research methods used and the ethical and theoretical issues that arose over the course of the project. As noted above, the fieldwork that informs this project was conducted over two fieldwork sites (HMP Greenock and the Visitors Centre at HMP Edinburgh), and some of the challenges arising from this methodological design will be discussed. The research was very much grounded in feminist methods, and sought (as far as possible) throughout the project to minimise hierarchal relationships and recognise the individuality of each participant. This chapter will reflect critically on the extent to which I achieved this, and how the adoption of these methods shaped the research process.

Chapter four is the first of four findings chapters, and seeks to address the first of my research questions: “what do families affected by imprisonment look like?”. Through a close analysis of the accounts of men and women serving a custodial sentence, families in the community, professionals and the quantitative visiting data I will demonstrate the heterogeneity of families affected by imprisonment. Each participant’s account of their family life is highly individual, perhaps unsurprisingly, given growing diversity of family forms across modern Scottish society. Yet, these stories also raise something of a paradox: while a wide range of relationships can be affected by imprisonment, it is overwhelmingly mothers or female partners that play a key role in supporting the person in custody. This chapter will then go on to demonstrate the often acute social marginalisation experienced by these women, and argue that this raises serious questions as to the capacity for these families to support resettlement.

Chapter five builds on these themes to explore the impact of imprisonment on the lives, families and relationships of participants. It will argue that families devote considerable time, effort and financial resource to supporting a person in custody, and that the vast majority of this caring labour is provided by women. As a result, imprisonment compounds not only social marginalisation, but also gendered caring roles within the family. Yet despite this considerable effort on the part of families, relationships affected by imprisonment do not go unchanged. The

reciprocity that is central to family relationships is undermined not only by restrictions on physical freedom, but as a result of the strategies both families in the community and men and women in custody adopted in an attempt to cope with their current circumstances. This leaves relationships fundamentally unbalanced, and perhaps sheds some light on the reasons why so many relationships are damaged by imprisonment.

Chapter six examines in more detail how families affected by imprisonment should be conceptualised, given the arguments made in the previous chapters that family relationships are inherently fluid and diverse. This chapter argues that family relationships are actively constructed through deliberate family practices (Morgan 1996, 2011) and displays (Finch 2007), such as sharing meals, memories and traditions, as these actions demonstrate love, care and commitment. This analysis helps us to understand why seemingly everyday objects and routines, such as children's drawings or a phone call home, become so significant to families affected by imprisonment. However, this chapter will also argue that for some families, maintaining these active family practices may lead to relationships within the family being renegotiated, and the person in custody being positioned as lacking in full adult autonomy.

Chapter seven focuses on how families are understood and constructed by various criminal justice professionals. It will argue that different professional groups construct families in different ways, and that in some instances the multifaceted role of the prison officer can cause tensions with families who are struggling to navigate their way through the criminal justice system. It will suggest that the quality of these interactions between professionals and families matter greatly, as repeated adversarial contact between the criminal justice system and these families and communities (who are often already socially marginalised) can erode the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system. Importantly, this chapter will then go on to argue that applying this literature to the experiences of families also highlights some potentially fruitful ways of promoting legitimacy. Finally, chapter eight will draw all of the above arguments together, before

discussing the wider theoretical, methodological and policy implications of this thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORISING THE FAMILY

### INTRODUCTION

The shape of families in the UK has changed dramatically in recent years, with more families than ever before rejecting the stereotypical 2.4 children “nuclear” family model. These changes have been succinctly summarised by Fiona Williams, who argues that families are both fluid and shifting, and increasingly numbers of people will now experience significant changes in their family relationships over their life-course:

Family lives are changing. Over our lifetimes many of us will cohabit, marry, separate, parent on our own or do all of these. Our family support networks may well include parents and step-parents, children, close friends, same-sex partners, ex-partners or ex-sons- and daughters-in-law. There is a greater acknowledgement of the diversity of living arrangements and family forms. Other social changes have altered the contours of family lives and personal relationships: more mothers work, we are an ageing society, more people live on their own, and global migration means that family commitments cross continents. (Williams 2004: 6).

Indeed, the popularity of marriage is in decline as more couples choose instead to cohabit (Hunt 2009; Shaw and Haskey 1999). It is perhaps unsurprisingly, then, that the number of children born outside marriage continues to rise, and that most are jointly registered to both parents (National Records of Scotland 2014; Hunt 2009). Single-person households are also increasingly becoming a significant demographic group; a category which can encompass a range of relationships such as those who are separated or divorced, widows and widowers, those who are in ‘living apart together’ or LAT relationships (where both partners maintain their own households), or those who are not currently in a relationship at all (Wasoff et al 2005). Indeed, all recent empirical research has highlighted the decreasing dominance of the traditional, nuclear, heteronormative family model (Finch 2007), and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Scotland in late 2014 is further testament to the growing diversity of family life.

In light of these shifts, David Morgan has argued that the boundaries of contemporary families cannot simply be ascribed by academic researchers or other external parties:

Alternatively, friends and sexual partners may define their relationships as being more like ‘real’ family relationships than their actual family connections. What this



means is that the boundaries around and the framing of the meanings of intimate or personal relationships is something carried out by the participants themselves and not simply by external agencies or researchers (Morgan 2011: 24).

This is an important argument, and one that highlights some of the difficulties facing researchers who wish to explore contemporary family life. However, these challenges are further heightened for those seeking to research the experiences of families affected by imprisonment, as the fluidity and individuality of family life is perhaps equalled by the complexity of the criminal justice system. Overcoming these challenges, I would suggest, requires an inter-disciplinary approach that can capture what it means to be a family, what this might look like in the context of imprisonment and the wider implications for both families and criminal justice system. To this end, this chapter will draw on a range of literatures from within criminology and sociology, and will also discuss the current policy context surrounding the issue of families affected by imprisonment in Scotland. Such a broad approach inevitably encompasses a large volume of literature, and in this chapter I have sought to draw out and distil the themes that are of most relevance to this project. This allows connections to be made across disciplines that can shed greater light on these questions than a focus on a single aspect of the criminal justice system or body of literature alone.

This chapter will begin by discussing the criminological literature surrounding families, arguing that much of this research constructs the family as a potentially criminogenic influence (the risk factor paradigm) or as a resource to promote a pro-social lifestyle (the literature on desistance). Importantly, while such polarised discourses have neglected the views and experiences of families themselves, this is remedied by a growing body of research into the wider impact of imprisonment on families. While these three discourses appear to be at odds with each other, the next section of this chapter will demonstrate that each has had an influence on Scottish criminal justice policy, a sphere in which families affected by imprisonment are becoming increasingly visible. Many of these developments are positive and are to be welcomed; however I will argue that the influence of criminological thinking and wider cultural narratives surrounding family life

have led to a relatively narrow construction of the family – often focussed around partners and children – and that this may have implications for the support received by less conventional families.

This raises questions as to how we might better understand the family in a way that more closely reflects the diversity of contemporary family life. To this end, this chapter will move on to review the literature on more sociological approaches to researching family life, arguing that these provide more nuanced conceptual tools for exploring the impact of imprisonment on families. Finally, I will argue that conceptualising the family in terms of the nature and quality of relationships (such as trust, openness and reciprocity), rather than their legal categories, alerts us to the importance of these attributes in day-to-day prison life more generally and their implications for the moral performance and legitimacy of prisons. This chapter will then conclude with the suggestion that wider literature on the legitimacy of prisons can fruitfully be applied to the experiences of families who come into contact with the criminal justice system to develop a truer understanding of the costs of a prison sentence.

## **CRIMINOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE FAMILY**

### **A Risk of Intergenerational Offending**

The idea that crime might run in the family is not a new one, and the question of whether criminality can be inherited has concerned early criminologists from the mid nineteenth century (Vold et al 2002). Interest in this area has not abated, although the research questions and methodologies have become more sophisticated, with attention increasingly becoming focused on the interaction between biological and social factors (Wright et al 1999). Perhaps one of the most well-known studies of inter-generational criminality, particularly in a UK context, is the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development. The Cambridge Study is a prospective longitudinal study of 411 South London men aged 8-48, which aims to explore how delinquent behaviour develops, explain why delinquent behaviour begins and desists, and to investigate the extent to which delinquency can be predicted. The

findings of this research provide evidence that offending behaviour can be concentrated within families: 63% of boys with convicted fathers, and 61% with convicted mothers, went on to be convicted of at least one offence themselves; compared with 30% of the remainder (Farrington et al 2001). This association between the offending of family members and offending by the boys themselves was not limited to parental relationships; having a convicted brother or sister also predicted a boys own convictions (Farrington et al 2001). Further, the study also found some evidence for intergenerational continuity in offending: almost half the total offences recorded were committed by only 6% of the families in the sample, while the strongest indicator of antisocial personality at age 32 was having a convicted parent at age 10 (Farrington and Coid 2003).

The findings of the Cambridge study have found support internationally. For example, Moffitt has argued that for many people antisocial behaviour is limited to certain times and contexts (usually adolescence), whereas for a small minority the disposition towards antisocial behaviour is relatively constant (Moffitt 1993). Moffitt suggest that these are two distinct groups, adolescent limited offenders and life course persistent offenders respectively, yet at certain points in the teenage years the two groups are indistinguishable as the former emulate the latter in an attempt to exert autonomy and develop an adult identity. However, only the latter will continue their antisocial behaviour into adulthood, as this group not only tend to have cognitive and temperamental disadvantages, but because these traits are hereditary these children are also likely to be born into families suffering from multiple disadvantages who are less able to foster a pro-social environment (Moffitt 1993). There is some further empirical evidence for this proposition: the Pittsburgh Youth Study found that arrests were highly concentrated within families; 8% of the families sampled contained 43% of all arrested persons, with an arrested father being the best predictor of a boys own delinquency (Farrington et al 2001: 592). Also in the US, the Rochester Intergenerational Study found that adolescent drug use and antisocial behaviour by parents increased the risk of antisocial behaviour in their child, but only where the child and parent are in ongoing and regular contact (Thornberry et al 2009).

In a European context, an analysis of data from the Stockholm Birth Cohort Study found that the children of convicted fathers were at least twice as likely to have a criminal conviction themselves as the children of non-criminal fathers (Hjalmarsson and Lindquist 2012). Similarly, the Netherlands Criminal Career and Life Course Study explored intergenerational transmission of offending amongst a sample of 4,615 research subjects (4,271 men and 344 women) who were tried for a criminal offence in the Netherlands in 1977. The authors modelled the criminal career trajectories of different groups of fathers and their children, concluding that the children of persistent offenders tended to commit more offences at each stage of their life course than children of fathers who did not offend, or did not offend as frequently. Children of persistent offenders were also found to have become involved in delinquency earlier than other children (Van De Rakt et al 2008). The influence of siblings was also found to be important, with more convictions being found amongst children who had a brother or sister who had also been convicted of at least one offence (Van De Rakt et al 2008).

While there is, then, a consistent view in the literature that anti-social behaviour continues between generations, the causal mechanisms for such inter-generational continuity are less clear (Thornberry et al 2003). Disentangling the causal mechanisms that lead to offending across generations is challenging, as many offenders report chaotic lives, characterised by poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol, homelessness, disrupted relationships and abuse (Scottish Prisons Commission 2008; Malloch et al 2015; Hedderman 2013; Murray 2007; Lewis, Maguire et al. 2007; Social Exclusion Unit 2002). Indeed, Farrington et al argue that the extent to which this association is attributable to environment rather than genetic factors is not clear (Farrington et al 2001), and there are six possible, and not mutually exclusive, explanations for why crime is concentrated in certain families:

- Intergenerational continuities in exposure to multiple risk factors (e.g. poverty, use of physical force to discipline) thus offending is part of a larger cycle of deprivation and antisocial behaviour.

- Assortive mating: female offenders have children with male offenders as people are attracted to others similar to themselves and physical proximity.
- Direct and mutual influence of family members on each other e.g. siblings encouraging one another to be anti-social.
- Environmental factors: poor neighbourhoods and poor parenting
- Genetics
- Criminal Justice System bias towards some families. (Farrington 2011)

The challenges in determining causal mechanisms are exacerbated by the interrelated nature of most risk factors identified by the research, making it difficult to establish their independent, interactive and sequential influences on offending and antisocial behaviour (Farrington 2007). That being said, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that parenting may be a key factor in the transmission of anti-social behaviour (Thornberry et al 2003; Wilson 1987, 1980; Gorman- Smith et al 1996; McCord 1991). However, it must also be recognised that the presence of risk factors does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes as it is thought that between one third and half of children identified as ‘high risk’ of adult anti-social behaviour will not go on to offend, instead leading happy and productive adult lives (Losel and Bender 2003). Furthermore, the ‘risk factor research’ paradigm has been strongly critiqued by Case and Haines (2009; 2010), who argue that while this body of research is presented as coherent, scientific and theoretically neutral, it is in fact theoretically and methodologically biased toward psychosocial epistemologies; lacks clarity in defining and measuring risk factors; draws “overconfident” conclusions from weak evidence; and oversimplifies complex social processes and problems.

## **An Aid to Desistance**

The picture is further complicated by a second body of literature which suggests that rather than promoting criminality, family relationships may be able to support the complex process of desistance. Much of the desistance literature that argues for the importance of family or community ties builds on, expressly or implicitly, ideas of social capital. Perhaps the most well-known criminological use of social capital is Sampson and Laub's age graded theory of informal social control, informed by their reconstruction the data set from Sheldon and Eleanor Gluecks' *Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency* study. The Gluecks' collected data on 500 delinquent and 500 non-delinquent boys and men born between 1924 and 1935, at ages 14, 25 and 32 and Sampson and Laub went on to re-interview 52 of the original delinquent sample at the age of 70 (Laub and Sampson 2003). Following their re-analysis of the original Glueck data, Sampson and Laub suggest that changes in criminality over the life course can be explained by varying levels of informal social controls felt by individuals at different points in their lives, which influence whether or not adults will engage, or continue to engage, in criminal behaviour (Sampson and Laub 1993).

Here Sampson and Laub draw on the theorising of James Coleman (1991) on social capital to argue that happy marriages, fulfilling employment or a career in the armed forces act as "turning points" and provide the social capital, reciprocal relationships and social bonds that keep individuals from offending (Sampson and Laub 1993). Importantly, they draw a distinction between "good" marriages and satisfying employment and social bonds of a lower quality, arguing that higher quality social bonds are more likely to promote desistance, but will take longer to establish. This is because social capital and social ties are reciprocal, and therefore stronger social bonds will not only provide greater informal social controls, but will also lead to the "former delinquent" to invest more heavily in these social bonds, in turn producing more social capital (Sampson and Laub 1993:142). Yet, while the scale of the empirical data collection that informs this theory is undoubtedly impressive, this perhaps also highlights the need for a degree of caution when applying these theoretical concepts in a modern context, given the social

changes discussed above. Nevertheless, Savolainen's study of social bonds and offending in Finland found that marriage, cohabitation, parenthood (particularly when parents remained together) and employment to all be associated with reductions in criminal activity, leading Savolainen to conclude that criminologists should not abandon Sampson and Laub's theorising prematurely (Savolainen 2009).

In contrast to Sampson and Laub, others have taken the view that rather than promoting desistance by acting as a mechanism of informal social control, social capital is instead a resource that can be utilised to help offenders resettle into the community by resolving personal difficulties such as homelessness or unemployment (McNeill and Whyte 2007). This argument has been usefully summarised by Stephen Farrall:

Good familial relationships provide a further resource: advice on problems faced; loans of money or expensive items; contacts with parental friends; somewhere to live when other accommodation proves unsatisfactory; and so on. Social relationships forged at work and at home create a sense of obligation, reciprocal trust and provide individuals with information channels and knowledge. In short, they provide people with social capital. (Farrall 2004:64)

In this model, which overlaps considerably with Putnam's theorising in social capital, social and family networks play a central role in the desistance process, allowing offenders to access much needed social capital. Indeed, McNeill argues that it is not enough for probation workers to simply seek to build the client's capacities or human capital, but that it is also essential to build the individual's social capital by providing opportunities for change, for example allowing opportunities for new skills to be used in an employment environment, rather than just accessing training alone (McNeill 2006; McNeill 2003). It is this social capital, McNeill argues, that will foster participation and inclusion in society and promote desistance (McNeill 2004). This has been argued to be a cyclical process, as building or improving social relationships may also further increase social capital, as Farrall observes: "*good family relationships and employment are not either the precursors or the outcomes of social capital but are rather both the precursors and the outcomes*" (Farrall 2004: 61).

However, it has been questioned whether it is possible to claim that those involved in offending behaviour, and the youth justice system in particular, have access to stocks of social capital (Barry 2007). Therefore Barry rejects this model of social capital and draws instead on the theorising of Bourdieu, to argue that to reduce offending it is not simply sufficient to provide young people with alternative means of capital production. Opportunities for expenditure of capital are also required, as the young people participating in this study placed considerable emphasis on taking responsibility for their past actions and making appropriate reparation. Such capital expenditure might be achieved by taking responsibility (for example by sustaining employment or taking an active role in family life) or through “generative” activities (Maruna 2001); such as volunteering, training for a career that can help others, or providing a better life for one’s own children (Barry 2007). Interestingly, Barry suggests that the process of social capital expenditure is gendered and therefore female offenders may find desistance easier as they have more opportunities to assume a responsible/caring role, either for their own children or other family members, whereas men had fewer such legitimate means of social capital expenditure and accumulation.

Importantly, Barry’s model emphasises the importance of emotions in the desistance process, and there is a growing body of literature examining the role that agency, emotions and self-narratives might play in moving away from offending (Vaughan 2007, Uggen et al 2004, Giordano et al 2003:296, Giordano et al 2007, Paternoster and Bushway 2009, Bryne and Trew 2005, Maruna 2001). One such example is symbolic interactionist theories of desistance, which suggest that an individual’s self-identity is constructed through a process of role-taking and social interaction (Uggen et al 2004). As a person’s commitment to the role they have assumed deepens over time through their interactions with others, the informal social controls upon them strengthen (Uggen et al 2004). These theories emphasise the importance of adult roles and pro-social relationships in the desistance process, as new roles are often accompanied by the formation of new identities. Emotions are also important in these models, as negative feelings towards criminality and the feared self can catalyse the desistance process (Paternoster and Bushway



describe this as the “crystallisation of discontent”), while feelings of optimism may influence the working (or current) self and therefore behaviour (see also Bottoms and Shapland 2011 and Burnett 2004 here).

Similarly, making reference to Braithwaite’s theory of reintegrative shaming, Giordano et al argue that as offenders age they experience a gradual erosion of the positive emotions connected to offending (excitement, toughness, fun, self-worth) which may also be associated with the desistance process (Giordano et al 2007). These patterns of change, and also stability, in emotions and emotional responses can occur both in conjunction with and in isolation from significant life events such as marriage (Giordano et al 2007). In the latter context, love may not only provide a suitable environment for individual change and increased informal social controls, but may also explain *why* some offenders make the initial move to begin to establish a pro-social identity. A positive, pro-social partner will reaffirm this new positive self-identity, provide insulation from negative emotions and erode the importance of emotions derived from offending (Giordano et al 2007). Importantly, however, Weaver has argued that a positive relationship with a partner alone is not enough here; rather it is the meaning that individuals reflexively attach to the relationship, and the eventual incompatibility of offending with maintaining this relationship, that leads to desistance (Weaver 2012; Weaver and McNeill 2014).

This latter point highlights the importance of social relationships in the construction of a non-criminal identity. It has been argued that desistance cannot be achieved by the offender alone, as to successfully achieve desistance requires the individual to adopt a new role or identity, but also for this “changed self” to be reflected back by society. Therefore, building a “redemption script”, or a new self-narrative that confirms the good in the individual – and having this changed self reflected back by society can assist offenders in going straight (Maruna 2001, 2004). As Uggen explains, “*work, family and community inhibit (or promote) crime by changing the way offenders think about themselves as citizens*” (Uggen et al 2004).

In summary, then, the above review of the literature points to a range of ways in which families may assist the reintegration process. Many of these models overlap, and in recent years there has been some convergence between those that emphasise the significance of informal social controls and those that argue that the importance of cognitive transformations must also be recognised (see Bottoms and Shapland 2011; Farrall et al 2011 here). However, the key point here is the consensus that the actions of one person can affect the lives of others in their network. Indeed, despite the range of theoretical models, a common thread running through this literature is that *trust* (Farrall 2004; Coleman 1990; Putnam 2000) and *reciprocal relationships* (Weaver 2012; Farrall 2004; Coleman 1990; Sampson and Laub 1993; Putnam 2000) help to reinforce social norms (Farrall 2004; Bourdieu 1986, 1989; Coleman 1990; Sampson and Laub 1993; Putnam 2000) or pro-social identities (Uggen et al 2004; Giordano et al 2007; Maruna et al 2004; Patternoster and Bushway 2009; Bazemore and Erbe 2004; Farrall et al 2010; McNeill 2006). Yet in each of these models, is only seen in terms of their capacity to support resettlement, and there is little discussion of the needs or concerns of families as individuals in their own right.

This particular construction of the family as a potential resource to support desistance is problematic, as desistance theorists have not engaged with the burden that this might place on family members, and often fail acknowledge that many of the men and women in custody come from communities experiencing multiple deprivations (Malloch et al 2014; Murray 2007; Lewis, Maguire et al. 2007; Social Exclusion Unit 2002). Indeed, prisoners disproportionately originate from the most deprived communities and are more likely to be unemployed, have drug or alcohol problems, suffer from poor mental and physical health, have had negative experiences of education and have prior experience of abuse or relationship breakdown (including having been in Local Authority care as a child) than the non-prison population (Scottish Prisons Commission 2008). This is also reflected in research carried out by Houchin, who found that on the night of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003 half the Scottish prison population had home addresses in just 13% of the 1222 local government wards, and that in the 27 most deprived of these

wards the overall imprisonment rate for men was 953 per 100,000 compared with a national rate of 237 per 100,000 (Houchin 2005). This raises questions as to whether the support that desistance theorists envisage family members might provide is possible (or indeed desirable).

Furthermore, there is also a lack of attention to gender, and much of the theorising on the process of desistance has been informed by empirical research on male offenders (for example Sampson and Laub 1993; Maruna 2001; Bottoms and Shapland 2011). The constructions of the family in the desistance literature are often heavily, yet uncritically, gendered. This is reflected in much of the conceptual language used, for example, Maruna entitles his summary of social control theories as *“A Steady Job and the Love of a Good Woman”* (Maruna 2001:30). This is evocative of what Bottom’s et al describe as the English Dream: *“a not-too-onerous but safe job as an employee of a stable company, enough money, some consumer luxuries, a steady girl-friend and (possibly) kids”* (Bottoms et al 2004: 384) and their finding that many participants desired to lead a *“normal”* life or become a *“family man”* (Shapland and Bottoms 2011). However, these accounts give little consideration to the burden that this might place on female partners, or how this might be experienced by the women concerned. This is a considerable oversight, given that there is a growing body of literature that suggests that families affected by imprisonment may face a range of issues and difficulties of their own, and therefore may not be in a position support the desistance process.

### **Impact of Imprisonment on Family Members**

Indeed, as noted in chapter one, there is now a large and growing body of research exploring the effects of imprisonment on the family, and a growing consensus that while in some instances imprisonment may offer some respite from a violent or chaotic family member (Comfort 2008; Codd 2008; Louerio 2010); very often the imprisonment of a family member has a range of negative implications for those left behind in the community. Families affected by imprisonment may experience a range of complex feelings including sadness, confusion, fear, anxiety, anger, loneliness, jealousy,

shame, guilt or relief (Moore and Convery 2011; Ritchie 2002; Louerio 2010; Light and Campbell 2006; Loucks 2004; Social Exclusion Unit 2002; Travis and Petersilla 2001). For some families, such emotions can be compounded by practical issues such as increased financial strains (Codd 2008; Smith et al 2007; Peelo et al 1991) or difficulties with housing, child care or other family responsibilities (Loureiro 2010; Nesmith and Ruhland 2008; Arditti et al 2003). There may also be considerable extra expenses associated with legal proceedings and visits, phone calls and gifts for the prisoner (Light 2006 and Campbell; Comfort 2008). Such practical and financial difficulties can exacerbate the high levels of social disadvantage already experienced by many families affected by imprisonment (Murray 2007).

Further, many families place considerable importance on being able to maintain their relationship with the person in custody and can suffer from anxiety and stress when this is not possible (Codd 2003; Dixey and Woodall 2012). For many families visits may be the best way to “keep in touch” with the person in custody, as phone calls can be expensive and low levels literacy may make letter writing difficult (Light and Campbell 2006; Social Exclusion Unit 2002). However, visiting a prison can be a daunting, confusing and difficult experience. The prison may be a considerable distance away, difficult to reach by public transport and visiting times may conflict with school, work or other commitments (Higgenbotham 2007; Loucks 2004; Light and Campbell 2006; Loucks 2008). As a result journeys to the prison are often long, expensive and frequently undertaken with small children. While financial assistance is available for those who qualify through the Assisted Prison Visits scheme many families are not aware of this, and the need to reclaim expenses retrospectively can be an insurmountable barrier for some (Mills and Codd 2007; Loucks 2004). Indeed, the provision of information available to families as to how to arrange visits, travel to prisons and what to expect when they arrive has been criticised (Mills and Codd 2008; Peart and Asquith 1992).

Families may also be anxious about the prison environment and security procedures can be experienced as humiliating and degrading (Mills and Codd 2007; Comfort 2008; Loucks 2004; Peart and Asquith 1992).

Children and young people have been found to have mixed feelings about visiting a parent in prison as while they are happy to see their parent they also reported more negative emotions such as being angry, sad, scared of the prison environment, stressed, nervous, tired or bored (Loureiro 2011; Nesmith and Ruhland 2008; McCulloch and Morrison 2001). More encouragingly, however, this body of research also suggests that visitors' centres can help to address these barriers in a range of ways, such as: by providing a valuable source of information; promoting a warm and friendly atmosphere; and assisting with problems or concerns (The Robertson Trust 2013; Woodhall, Dixey and Kinsella 2012; Dixey and Woodhall 2009; Families Outside 2009; Loucks 2010, 2008, 002; Hartworth and Hartworth 2005).

This growing body of literature is interdisciplinary and often policy-focussed in nature (Comfort 2008). However, there have also been notable sociological studies of the impact of offending and imprisonment that lend greater depth and nuance to the research in this area. Rachel Condry's ethnographic study of the experiences of the families of serious offenders provides a powerful account of how the emotional impact of a serious offence on the family. Condry argues that the shame stemming from the criminal act can be "transmitted" to family members in five distinct ways: association (proximity to offender, same stock), genetic (bad blood), omission (knew/should have known/should have stopped the offence), commission (something done in the immediate or long term past e.g. colluding with offence or parenting) and continuation (supporting the offender). These five mechanisms function together as the "web of shame", with the first relating to contamination and the latter three causality. The web is underpinned by ideas of family having responsibility for actions of all members, and this experience of shame and stigma may be more powerful for the family than the offender, causing some families to devise and adopt a range of strategies for stigma management that might ultimately exacerbate their isolation from the wider community.

Outside of the UK, Megan Comfort's research focussed specifically on women who supported their partners by visiting them in San Quentin prison.

Comfort found that when visiting the prison families are subject to a weakened version of the prison regime, and therefore also suffer the pains of imprisonment depicted by Sykes through a process of secondary prisonization. Thus in attempting to maintain her relationship with her partner the woman often forfeits her privacy or emotional wellbeing. Perversely, this secondary prisonization of women eases the management of the institution: as the women ameliorate the pains of imprisonment felt by their partners the men become easier to manage “docile bodies”. This management role also often continues following release, as the female partner becomes both an auxiliary parole officer and a “secondary parolee” as women ensure their partners’ attend supervision meetings, stay away from drugs and alcohol and help them look for, or maintain, employment. However, Comfort argues that for some women the prison functions as a “social agency of first resort” that aids in the management of the sometimes violent, abusive or drug-addicted men in their lives, allowing them to achieve some level of stability, safety and control. Importantly, then, none of the women who participated in the research were wholly positive or wholly negative about their experiences with prison, and Comfort argues that these feelings of ambivalence are key to understanding the experience of secondary prisonization.

There are some important, overlapping themes arising from this research. The first is the consistent finding that imprisonment can cause emotional, financial and practical difficulties for the wider family. This supports Codd’s argument families affected by imprisonment continue to face many of the issues identified by Morris in the 1960s, including hardship, lack of support and difficulties knowing what to tell the children (Codd 2008). Condry and Comfort’s work is particularly instructive here, providing detailed theoretical frameworks to shed light on *why* and *how* the imprisonment of a family member can be so emotionally difficult for those “left behind” in the community. These accounts challenge the utilitarian construction of families as potential aid to resettlement seen in the desistance literature. Indeed, it has been argued that families affected by imprisonment are the “forgotten victims” of the criminal justice process, and

supports should be available to families as individuals in their own right, regardless of their relationship with the offender (Light and Campbell 2006).

This research also highlights the need for the closer attention to gender, as both Condry and Comfort's work provide a useful illustration of Codd's observation that regardless of the gender of the prisoner, caring tends to be a gendered activity mostly carried out by women (Codd 2008). A result, it is often a wife or mother who takes on the primary role of not only supporting the person in custody, but also other family members such as siblings, children and grandchildren; something that can come at considerable cost to her own quality of life (Condry 2007). Indeed, the caring roles adopted by women, particularly in families affected by imprisonment, are often simultaneously overlooked and undervalued by the criminal justice system (Richie 2002). Female partners are often seen as a form of social control, and if their partner offends they are deemed to "failed" in their "civilising" role, and are thus unworthy of support (Peelo 1991; Halsey and Deegan 2015; Condry 2007). However, it has been argued that this focus on the experiences of partners and children has led to the neglect of wider or more diverse family relationships (Codd 2008; Paylor and Smith 1994; although for an exception see Meek 2008). This is perhaps an area where more research would be beneficial, particularly in light of the increasing fluidity of family life discussed above.

## **CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY AND THE FAMILY**

So far, this chapter has argued that criminologists have conceptualised the family in three distinct and particular ways: either as a "risk" to be managed; as a potential resource to aid desistance; or as "forgotten victims" of the criminal justice process. Here I wish to suggest that just as families affected by imprisonment have begun to attract greater attention from researchers, they are also becoming increasingly visible to policy makers in Scotland. Interestingly, as I will demonstrate below, each of these three bodies of criminological research can be seen in these policy discourses.

In many respects, the competing influence of these contradictory accounts should not surprise us. Policy narratives surrounding the family can be complex, and families - or perhaps more accurately particular family models - have often attracted blame for a variety of social problems. For example, the decline of the nuclear family has prompted a moral panic in some quarters that individualisation and consumerism have led people to become increasingly selfish and less committed to their personal and family relationships (Jamieson 2005; Mason 2011). Similarly, other popular narratives suggest that the increasing diversity in family forms reflect a decline in morality, and it has been argued by some that women are primarily to blame here, as these narratives construct the increasing agency enjoyed some women as a negative force that is undermining traditional family structures (Smart and Neal 1999). A further strand of these arguments is that such trends have been encouraged by the welfare state, which is seen as undermining the role of the father as a provider (and therefore also the male work ethic) and supporting fatherless families, leading to a range of social ills including crime and disorder (Jamieson 1998).

There is a connection to be made here between political narratives that situate the causes of crime within the family, and the risk factor research paradigm, discussed above, which suggests that intergenerational criminality is perpetuated by a lack of parental supervision or other poor parenting strategies (Condry 2007). Indeed, this body of research has had a significant impact on recent government policy (Muncie 2002; Case and Haines 2009; Pitts 2001). In some ways this pervasive policy influence is perhaps unsurprising, as the scale of the research is not only methodologically impressive, but also because the premise behind this discourse is reasonably “common sense” and accessible. As a result, the risk paradigm provides simple solutions for tackling intergenerational offending, in form of risk factors that can be targeted through interventions such as parenting courses or improved early-years’ service provision (Muncie 2002; Case and Haines 2009; Farrington 2007; Prior and Paris 2005). Indeed, while these arguments have not, as noted above, been



uncontroversial (Case and Haines 2009); they can also be seen in the rhetoric of the Coalition Government. Indeed, David Cameron announced his intention to tackle “problem families” and “broken Britain” through a range of initiatives intended to identify and engage with the 120,000 “troubled families” argued to cost the state the most in social and criminal justice interventions (David Cameron 15 December 2011; although see Levitas 2012 for a critique of this figure and analysis).

Yet policy discourses and political and civic culture across the UK are not uniform (McAra 2005, 2008; Souhami 2013). While the influence of the risk discourse is certainly not absent from policy making around criminal justice and the family in Scotland (see for example McNeil et al 2009; McNeil and Whyte 2007; Walters and Woodward 2007); much of the recent policy activity surrounding families affected by imprisonment seem to be more closely grounded in ideas of desistance than risk. Indeed, over recent years there has been a growing interest in families affected by imprisonment amongst both academics and policy makers (Barry 2009); stemming at least in part from Ditchfield’s finding that prisoners without active family support are between two and six times more likely to reoffend than those who have maintained relationships with their families (Mills and Codd 2008; see also Barry 2009; Moran 2013; McNeil and Whyte 2007; Visser and Travis 2003; Social Exclusion Unit 2002).

The influence of desistance thinking on Scottish policy can perhaps be most clearly seen in the Scottish Government’s own evidence review of what works to reduce reoffending (2011); a piece of research underpinning the flagship Reducing Reoffending Program which, amongst other initiatives, introduced the new Community Payback Orders (Scottish Government 2013). Drawing heavily on the wider literature on desistance, this review concludes that while anti-social peer groups may undermine desistance, family relationships should be supported as these can help to reduce reoffending by providing emotional support and informal social controls (Sapouna, Bisset and Conlong 2011). The review also highlights that interventions that help to support and improve family relationships may be

particularly beneficial in reducing reoffending by women and girls (Sapouna, Bisset and Conlong 2011).

A similar line of argument can be seen in the report of the Commission on Women Offenders which, chaired by Dame Elish Angiolini, was tasked by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice with providing recommendations to improve the outcomes for female offenders in Scotland. The review took place in the context of a disproportionate and rapid rise in the female prison population (McIvor and Burman 2011) and a highly critical inspection report that, while also highlighting areas of good practice, found Scotland's only designated prison for women to be "overcrowded", "in a state of crisis" and "suffering from a lack of strategic direction (HMIP 2009; 2011). The Commission argued that a distinct approach should be taken to working with female offenders as they have different needs and backgrounds to men, their offences are less likely to be serious or violent, and their pathways into and out of offending are distinct. The Commission suggested that promoting and supporting family relationships is particularly important for female offenders, and initiatives that improve family contact and support parenting may contribute to a reduction in reoffending (2012: 23).

To this end, the Commission made a series of wide-ranging recommendations, the most relevant of which here are that women should be held in local prisons wherever possible to help maintain tie with their families and communities, and that Cornton Vale should be replaced with a new, smaller purpose built national prison that should be equipped with a high-quality visitors' centre as "*evidence shows that women who do have positive contact with their children while in custody are less likely to reoffend*" (2012: 65). Similar sentiments were recently echoed by the Justice Secretary Michael Matheson on his announcement that the Scottish Government no longer planned to go ahead with the building of a large new facility for female prisoners at Inverclyde, which had been widely criticised for going against the recommendations of the Commission, as he emphasised that damaging family ties could lead to further offending by both women and their children:

We also know that the families and children of female offenders are more likely to go off the rails and offend themselves if mothers are jailed miles away from home. This turns into a vicious circle, affecting future generations, and is doing nothing to address reoffending. (Justice Secretary for Scotland 20/01/2015)

Any discussion of the future development of the Scottish prison estate must also be seen within the wider context of the recent Scottish Prison Service Organisational Review, the title of which - *Unlocking Potential, Transforming lives* – also encapsulates the new vision for the SPS (SPS 2014). Underpinning this new vision is the shift towards a more future-oriented, “preventative” approach that seeks to recognise assets rather than deficits, and is informed by the broad principles of the literature on desistance and the Scottish Government’s own Evidence Review, referred to above (SPS 2014: 25). As a result, there are a number of references to families and communities in the Organisational Review, but these are made primarily with regard to the role they might play in aiding resettlement and supporting prisoners in becoming responsible citizens, rather than recognising the needs of families themselves.

In contrast, other influential publications have highlighted the need to support families in their own right. The previous Chief Inspector of Prisons, Brigadier Hugh Munro, was particularly vocal in his support for purpose built visitors’ centres to not only promote family contact as a potential means of rehabilitation, but also to meet the needs of families both when visiting the estate and with any difficulties they face in the community (HMIP 2012); and similar sentiments have been expressed by his successor, David Strang (HMIP 2014). The emphasis on the benefits of high quality contact and appropriate supports for *both* the person in custody and the family in the community is notable, as it recognises many of the difficulties faced by families affected by imprisonment identified in the review of the literature discussed above, and goes some way to countering criticisms that families only tend to become visible when they can serve a “useful” purpose such as reducing reoffending (Codd 2008).

Indeed, the influence of research into the needs and experiences of families affected by imprisonment can be seen particularly clearly with regard to the

high level of policy interest are children affected by parental imprisonment; something that perhaps reflects a tendency amongst researchers to direct their attention towards more nuclear family models (Codd 2008; Paylor and Smith 1994). In 2008, the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young people published an influential report “*Not seen. Not heard. Not Guilty. The rights and status of the children of prisoners in Scotland*”. This report criticised the invisibility of the (then) estimated 13,500<sup>2</sup> children affected by parental imprisonment and made 28 separate recommendations with a view to promoting children’s rights amongst criminal justice professionals, minimising the harm to children and improving their experiences at each stage of the criminal justice process if they are affected by parental offending (Marshall 2008). In 2011 a second report was published, which made a further 19 recommendations designed to maintain momentum towards these achieving these goals. Importantly, the 2011 report also noted that considerable progress had been made since the original publication, including: wide dissemination of the report’s findings, further research into the experiences of children affected by parental imprisonment in Scotland, the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 which introduced both the Community Payback Order and a presumption against sentences of less than three months, and steps taken by the Scottish Prison Service to improve family contact and the experiences of children who visit the prison estate (Baillie 2011).

Children affected by parental imprisonment were also identified as a group in need of particular supports in the Scottish Government’s parenting strategy, published in 2012, which reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to supporting relationships encouraging meaningful contact between parents in custody and their children (Scottish Government 2012). In addition to introducing and championing the Parenting Strategy the Minister for Children and Young People, Aileen Campbell, has also previously attempted to bring amendments to the Criminal Justice and Licencing (Scotland) Bill that would have required the court to consider the

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<sup>2</sup> This figure has now been increased to 27,000 but remains an estimate as this information is not routinely recoded (Roberts 2012).

family circumstances of each individual before sentencing, including their responsibilities towards children or dependant adults. This was in response to concerns that the needs of families and the potential impacts of a prison sentence are not adequately captured by current justice practice, however this amendment was ultimately unsuccessful.

This parliamentary work to increase the visibility of children and families affected by imprisonment has been supported and continued by the Cross-Party group on Families Affected by Imprisonment, formed 2011. Chaired by Mary Fee MSP, with support from Families Outside (Scotland's only national charity that works solely to support families affected by imprisonment), the group meets monthly with the purpose of championing the legitimate support needs of families, and emphasising the position of families as ignored but innocent parties to the criminal justice process (Scottish Parliament 2011). The work of the group has culminated in the recent proposal of the Support for Children (Impact of Parental Imprisonment) Bill, a private members bill that aims to increase the support provided to children affected by parental imprisonment (Fee 2015).

At the time of writing, the Bill is a proposal for legislative action rather than a draft piece of legislation, but its primary purpose is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to create a statutory duty on the court to order a Child and Family Impact Assessment after an individual has been sentenced. The purpose of such assessments would not be to influence sentencing decisions, rather to ensure that each child receives the support they require if their parent is imprisoned, as it is argued that the current Criminal Justice Social Work Reports are rarely used and focus too narrowly on the circumstance of the offender, rather than the needs of children. The second strand of the Bill seeks to supplement this by creating a presumption that children affected by parental imprisonment will have additional educational needs, and therefore requiring schools to consider if the child would benefit from a co-ordinated support plan (Fee 2015).

Overall, then, it can be seen that there has been a considerable growth in awareness amongst both policy makers and the statutory and voluntary

sector as to the needs of families affected by imprisonment, and also a flurry of recent activity to better support children and families. These developments have been informed by the competing constructions of the family by criminological researchers discussed above, and indeed all three discourses can be seen in many of these initiatives. For example, while the SPS Organisational Review has its roots in the desistance literature, this is not to suggest that the SPS has not taken steps to directly assist families or to support and maintain relationships. Indeed, the work of the Scottish Prison Service in this area, for example drafting minimum standards for family support and taking steps to improve the visiting experience and environment, has been praised by both the Scottish Government and the Scottish Commission for Children and Young People (Scottish Government 2012b; SCCYP 2011). As the SPS note, much of work to improve the visibility and experiences of families affected by imprisonment has been overlapping and carried out by a range of organisations working in partnership (SPS 2014: 23).

These are welcome developments, as families affected by imprisonment have long been ignored by both researchers and policy makers. Yet it does seem that particular forms of the family are more visible in these recent initiatives than others, as much of this attention has been directed towards children and parents. For example, the consultation document pertaining to the Support for Children (Impact of Parental Imprisonment) Bill suggests that children affected by parental imprisonment are larger in number and potentially more vulnerable than dependent adults affected by the imprisonment of their carer, who are excluded from the scope of the Bill (Fee 2015). This emphasis on supporting parents and children can also be seen in the influential Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People reports, and the National Parenting Strategy.

Yet this relatively narrow view of the family is problematic for two reasons. The first is that it excludes broader relationships such as nieces and nephews, siblings and adult children from much of this discussion. Secondly, as the premise that family contact can reduce reoffending underpins many of these initiatives, such an approach risks placing a very

heavy burden on families but only offering support in a very narrow form that does not recognise the diversity of contemporary family life or the social changes discussed at the outset of this chapter. However, if the nuclear model of the family that informs much of this research and policy making is argued to be too narrow to capture the lived realities of many families affected by imprisonment, this then raises questions as to the theoretical tools we might use to better understand the experiences of this group. To this end, the final section of this chapter will explore how we might better reconceptualise relationships to better capture the diversity of family life discussed above, and the understand how this particular form of punishment impacts family relationships.

## **RECONCEPTUALISING RELATIONSHIPS**

In contrast to the fairly traditional models of the family that are reflected in the criminological research and policy discussed above, there is a diverse and growing body of sociological research that suggests that contemporary family relationships are becoming increasingly fluid, shifting and diverse. The work of Beck and Giddens on the “individualisation thesis” has been credited with rekindling mainstream sociological interest in the family, as the debates around the rise of individualism and its impact on families and relationships dominated much of the academic discourse of the sociology of the family in the 1990s (Dermott and Seymour 2011; Smart and Neal 1999). This argument asserts that Western societies have experienced a shift that has caused many traditionally key social structures - such as class, gender and the family – to lose much of their prior significance (May 2011). This allows individuals to choose how to live their lives as part of a self-reflective project (Spencer and Pahl 2006); and gives both men and women the autonomy to end relationships that are no longer satisfactory, equal or fulfilling (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002; Giddens 1992). However, while the individualization thesis has been influential, as I will demonstrate below this argument has been challenged by those who suggest it is not that we have become more selfish, less connected or less

committed; rather it is that changes in family structures represent a shift in *who* is significant and *how* we care for them (May 2011; Mason 2011; Weeks et al 2001; Williams 2004).

### **Fluidity and Diversity**

The fluidity and diversity of contemporary family life is reflected in a growing body of scholarship which suggests that clear boundaries cannot be drawn between family and friends, much of which focuses on the lives and experiences of gay, lesbian and other non-heterosexual communities. It has been argued that as non-heterosexual couples are not defined by traditional gendered narratives of family life, this provides the opportunity to develop families of choice, which may include lovers, ex-lovers, intimate friends and blood relations (Weeks et al 2001). These relationships are characterised by support, care, trust and love; and Weeks et al draw on Morgan's model of family practices here, which will be discussed below, suggesting that families of choice should be understood as something that people "do" through everyday activities (Weeks et al 2001). Indeed, Weeks et al argue that friendship is particularly significant for non-heterosexual individuals, as they are not necessarily seen as an alternative source of emotional support and acceptance to the family; they may be the only source (Weeks et al 2001).

This acceptance provided by friends reflects the freely chosen nature of these relationships; indeed, friends are often seen as a more committed source of support than romantic partnerships. These qualities can be conceptualised as the "friendship ethic", which encapsulates these values of care, responsibility, respect and knowledge. Interestingly, Weeks et al argue that care is just as likely to characterise male relationships as female, despite the generally gendered nature of caring as a female activity in most Western societies. They argue that care is most significant in times of crisis and that for many non-heterosexual communities the AIDS crisis served to strengthen the friendship ethic and the importance of care. However, friendships as family are not limited to the non-heterosexual community. Indeed, it has been argued that for many people a clear distinctions cannot



always be drawn between friends and family, as these categories often overlap, and friends now play an increasingly central role in lives of many individuals, providing care, support and intimacy (Davies 2011; Spencer and Pahl 2006; Roseneil 2005).

One way of capturing this diversity of the modern family and the most important and central relationships to individuals is by mapping their “personal communities”, which *may* include friends, neighbours or colleagues as well as kin (Spencer and Pahl 2006). By exploring the personal communities of their 70 participants, Spencer and Pahl concluded that not only do people continue to have real and lasting personal and family relationships, but also that there was no one dominant typology of personal community. Boundaries between friends and family could become blurred with friends being referred to as “brothers”, “sisters”, “cousins” or “aunties” (and family members as friends) to denote that the relationship had taken on a special quality; usually due to the longevity of the relationship or the strength of affection and commitment between individuals (Spencer and Pahl 2006). Spencer and Pahl refer to this blurring of boundaries as “suffusion”, and while they acknowledge that the degree to which friends are seen as “family” will vary between individuals, they conclude that drawing a stark division between friends and family fails to account sufficiently for the complexities and subtleties of people’s lives (Spencer and Pahl 2006: 125).

### **Family Practices and Displays**

Perhaps one of the most influential accounts of how these more diverse family models might be understood is David Morgan’s work on family practices, in which Morgan argues that families should be thought of in terms of the things that they “do”. Thus family practices are very much active, for example cooking a family meal or forgoing a social event to be home in time to put the children to bed (Morgan 1996; 2011). As the latter example suggests, family practices need not be carried out in the home; however they are characterised by a sense of the everyday and tend to be

conducted with some regularity. These practices reproduce and reaffirm the relationships between actors, giving them social meaning, grounded in their history and biography (Morgan 1996, 2011). Family practices also have a sense of fluidity and “fuzziness”; both in terms of who is included or excluded from a particular activity, and that a particular family practice may also be seen as some other element of a person’s life – such as gendered practices or employment practices (Morgan 2011).

Importantly, while family practices reaffirm family relationships, Morgan’s analysis is centred around a fairly narrow understanding of the family, including only relationships such as spouses, partners, parents, children and other kin (Morgan 2011). This has led to criticisms that the family practices approach perpetuates a heteronormative model of intimate relationships (Roseneil 2005). However, an alternative development of Morgan’s work that can perhaps more comfortably encompass a diverse range of relationships is Janet Finch’s argument that it is not enough for families to be defined by the things that they “do” (rather than simply “being”); but that these family practices also need to be “displayed”. Thus “family practices” must not only be actively “done”, but these actions need to convey (and be recognised by others as conveying) meanings associated with family (Finch 2007). Finch argues that this need for display arises from the decline of the heteronormative nuclear family and growing diversity of family structures, which, as discussed above, may include (for example) permutations such as those who “live apart together”, former partners who continue to co-parent after the end of their relationship, and extended networks of wider kin and friends. Therefore, as the family can no longer be defined as simply belonging to the same household, and because family relationships are becoming increasingly fluid, family displays are required to demonstrate *“these are my family relationships, and they work”* (2007:72).

These displays might include in wide range of individuals and take a variety of forms, including group activities (such as going for a meal), physical objects or photographs and also individual or group narratives; all of which can convey the significance of the relationships and that they “work” as “family” (Finch 2007). Importantly, in addition to evidencing and

authenticating family relationships, family displays also serve to reinforce an individual's own personal identity, as our personal relationships are linked to our own sense of self. However, there may be circumstances or occasions where the need for family displays becomes more intense. This might occur when family dynamics are subject to change (for example when a child leaves home or when parents agree on a divorce), or where the family has moved a considerable distance from traditional conceptions of the family (Finch 2007).

Interestingly, Heaphy suggests that while all family displays are concerned with "claiming" family and demonstrating commitment, some family displays may be more readily recognised and validated by external audiences than others (Heaphy 2011). Family displays may be measured in relation to a middle class benchmark of family norms and expectations, against which working class families may be seen as failing. This can have significant consequences, such as being labelled "feckless", "workshy" or irresponsible; and in extreme cases may see children being taken into care (Heaphy 2011). Similarly, others have argued that working class displays such as tattooing often go unnoticed as they do not necessarily fit within middle class sensibilities (Gabb 2011).

Finally, Carol Smart has also extended Morgan's concept of family practices in her theorising on personal life. Through the concept of personal life Smart seeks to reflect the realities and complexities of people's family and intimate relationships, and move beyond ideas of "the family", which are often suffused with white, middle-class, heterosexual norms (Smart 2007). Interestingly, Smart argues that the (overlapping) areas of memory, biography, embeddedness, relationality and imaginary are key to researching personal life. What may seem to be mundane or everyday activities can be the basis of family traditions and histories; in turn the telling of family stories can function as a way of linking different generations together and creating both a shared history and emotional bonds. Indeed, Smart suggests that sociology has neglected the importance of how people *feel* when thinking about families and relationships and that greater attention should be paid toward emotions when researching family

life. Memories are important here too; the remembering and telling of family stories and histories quite literary brings the past into the present and embeds the teller (and perhaps the listener) in their family heritage. Thus by reciting or recalling a story the teller is not only saying something about their family, but they are also saying something about themselves, and weaving connections across generations.

### **Relationships in the context of imprisonment**

As demonstrated above, there are a number of sociological models that can aid us in better conceptualising the fluid and dynamic nature of modern family life, such as: family practices and displays; personal lives; personal communities and chosen families. These theoretical tools remind us that family relationships are not defined by ties of marriage or blood alone, or even at all. Memories, emotions and many of the facets of everyday life such as the cooking and sharing of food, the telling of stories and anecdotes and family rituals and traditions are key to substantiating and maintaining family ties.

In the context of families affected by imprisonment, the concepts of family practices and displays in particular provide useful theoretical tools for exploring the role of these everyday occurrences in actively constructing and maintaining family ties, as they resonate with the existing literature documenting the importance placed on visits, photographs, gifts and other mementoes by families affected by imprisonment (see, for example, Comfort 2008). Importantly, conceptualising families in terms of their nature and quality (for example characterised by connectedness, memories and emotions) rather than through simple legal categories or their utility for supporting desistance not only raises questions about which relationships are affected when a family member is imprisoned, but also the wider impact of this form of punishment.

Indeed, while criminologists have generally not engaged with these more sociological models of the family, it would be a mistake to suggest that the nature and quality of relationships within the context of imprisonment, and

the importance of family contact, have gone unremarked upon in the criminological literature. It has been argued that prisons as institutions have both a moral and emotional character or climate, and that the way in which the men and women who reside within them are treated is fundamental both to their individual wellbeing and the functioning of the institution as a whole (Liebling 2004). As a result, respect, relationships, trust, wellbeing, humanity, order, safety, personal development, family contact and fairness are key to assessing the “moral performance” of our prisons (Liebling et al 2005). This emphasis on the importance of relationships is notable, and a close reading of Liebling’s argument suggests that there may be stronger parallels between the criminological research into prison life and the wider sociological theorising of the family than might initially appear:

What goes on in prison is shaped by structures, systems, ideas (held by those outside and those with influence inside), and physical layout. Prisons are also, and crucially, shaped by relationships. These relationships are formed over time, by values, practices, memories, and feelings, and by the way these interact. (Liebling 2004: 462)

As this quotation illustrates, Liebling expresses her understanding of the nature, quality and construction of relationships, and their importance in social life, in very similar terms to much of the sociological literature discussed above, emphasising the importance of practices, memories and emotions. While this body of work is directed towards understanding the experience of prison culture from the perspective of those who live and work within the prison walls, rather than the family outside, I wish to argue here that Liebling’s attention to the nature, quality and emotional character of relationships within the context of imprisonment opens up lines of theoretical enquiry with considerable relevance to the current project.

Importantly, Liebling’s work directs us towards a strand of criminological theorising that can usefully illuminate the experiences of families when they interact with the criminal justice system, and the prison in particular. As Liebling observes, “moral performance” overlaps closely with ideas of

“legitimacy”<sup>3</sup>; a concept utilised by Sparks, Bottoms and Hay in their study of the problems of order in two English dispersal prisons to explore the circumstances in which prisoners are more likely to accept or co-operate with the power that is exercised over them (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996). Drawing on the theoretical model of legitimacy devised by David Beetham (1991), Sparks et al argue that legitimacy is inherently a moral concept (Sparks and Bottoms 1995; Sparks et al 1996). As a result legitimacy, or the “rightfulness of power” (Beetham 1991: 26), cannot be achieved through the imposition of legal rules alone. The social actors subject to these rules must express consent to the particular form of power relations imposed upon them, and this power relationship and resultant rules must also be “justified in terms of their beliefs” (Beetham 1991:11; Sparks and Bottoms 1995). Where these three conditions are fulfilled the degree of legitimacy afforded to a given power relationship is increased, and the co-operation of subordinate agents is more likely as the moral nature of the relationship creates normative reasons for compliance (Beetham 1991).

Therefore, at the heart of legitimacy are ideas of respect, justice and fairness. With regard to imprisonment, if prisoners feel that they are treated in accordance with these values they are more likely to perceive the regime as legitimate and therefore comply with its demands. Yet, as Sparks and Bottoms emphasise, legitimacy is not simply about “pleasing the prisoners”: as legitimacy is a moral (and political) concept, appeals to legitimacy (or a lack thereof) must resonate with the wider social and political context (Sparks et al 1996; Sparks and Bottoms 1995). As they suggest, any request from prisoners that jars with these wider normative beliefs (they give the example of luxury accommodation) will be easy for prison managers to resist (Sparks and Bottoms 1995: 58). However, if a prison regime can be seen as fair, just and legitimate within this wider context then those who are subject to the exercise of power will comply for normative and moral reasons, rather than simply as an outcome of coercive control (Sparks et al

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<sup>3</sup> Although Liebling argues that the former goes further than the latter in that it attempts to capture a sense of moral community in addition to an exploration of power relations (Liebling 2004: 474).

1996; Sparks and Bottoms 2007). Conversely, as proponents of procedural justice argue, where treatment is perceived to be unfair, unjust or discriminatory this not only undermines trust in the criminal justice system, but also reduces the likelihood of compliance (Tyler 1990; Tyler 2011; Sunshine and Tyler 2003).

However, while there is a growing research interest in this area, the central focus of much of this theorising remains within the prison, or on the experiences of individual members of “the public” generally, rather than specific families or communities (see, for example, Crewe 2009; Sparks et al 1996; Tyler and Sunshine 2003; Bradford and Myhill 2015; Tyler 2011). This is perhaps a missed opportunity, as Megan Comfort’s work (discussed above) has convincingly demonstrated that the prison wall is by no means impermeable (Comfort 2008). Therefore, just as the moral and emotional character of the institution can have a profound effect on the lives of those who live and work within the prison, it will also impact upon the families who visit it. Just as the women who informed Comfort’s research experienced a process of secondary prisonization through their relationship with an incarcerated partner, families supporting somebody in custody will be subject to some form of prison culture when visiting the institution.

Therefore, what I wish to suggest here is that the concept of legitimacy can usefully be applied to the experiences of families affected by imprisonment as a means of better understanding the wider impacts of this form of punishment. Indeed, by utilising the concept of legitimacy we see that the ways in which criminal justice institutions perceive and relate to families may in fact be very important indeed, as these interactions are hugely symbolic (Loader and Sparks 2013; Bottoms and Tankebe 2013). Through these exchanges criminal justice agencies communicate with individuals their status and place in society, and therefore poor or careless treatment matters greatly, particularly to the most vulnerable, excluded or precariously placed (Loader and Sparks 2013).

These arguments have particular resonance when we consider the both high degree of social marginalisation experienced by many families and

communities affected by imprisonment, and the obstacles and demands that families face when attempting to maintain their relationships and navigate their way through the criminal justice system, discussed above. As Bottoms and Sparks remark, “every prison officer in a real sense represents the whole of the Prison Service each time he/she goes on duty” (1997: 30), as indeed does any criminal justice professional (Bottoms and Tankebe 2013). Furthermore, in contrast to many academics who may choose to focus on one area of the criminal justice system (be it policing, sentencing or imprisonment), by the time they come to visit somebody in custody the family will have encountered nearly every agency involved in the criminal justice process. It therefore follows that a cumulative experience of opaque bureaucracies, administrative delays and thoughtless or indifferent treatment by professionals may serve to undermine the degree of legitimacy which families attribute to the criminal justice system, while more careful and considered treatment may do the opposite.

Yet, extending the concept of legitimacy to include the experiences of families affected by imprisonment also increases the number of actors and audiences to whom the prison regime must be “justified in terms of their beliefs”. This is by no means straightforward, and the body of literature reviewed above has been criticised for failing to take account of the wider social context outside of the prison, including social relationships, cultural norms and gendered roles (Bosworth and Carrabine 2001; Bosworth 1996). However, the issue here may be with the way in which criminologists have utilised Beetham’s model of legitimacy rather than the model itself.

Beetham emphasises that the process of legitimacy is very much situated within the established power relationships that characterise a *particular* social context. Therefore, this concept seeks to illuminate power relations as they are, rather than in an ideal or abstract form, and Beetham utilises the example of the use of traditional gender roles to marginalise the power held by women as an illustration of this argument (Beetham 1991: 79-99).

Indeed, while critical of the lack of attention to gender within the literature on legitimacy, Bosworth does not suggest that this concept should be abandoned; rather that it should be extended through small-scale, qualitative



projects that can better capture the impact of imprisonment on participants as reflexive, gendered and agentic individuals (Bosworth 1996).

I would suggest, then, that the application of legitimacy to the experiences of families affected by imprisonment fits well with the development of the concept envisaged by Bosworth, as looking beyond the individual in custody brings the wider social and relational context outside the prison gate sharply into focus. Importantly, as legitimacy is also a normative and aspirational concept, it asks us to consider not only how our systems and institutions work in practice, but also how they could be improved (Sparks and Bottoms 2008). Thus issues of legitimacy also raise wider philosophical and political questions about how, where and why coercive power is exercised, and how we might wish to see it deployed in the future (Loader and Sparks 2013). This centres our analysis on the moral and symbolic role of the prison in wider social and political spheres, and the pains it imposes on those within it (Liebling et al 2005). Extending this analysis to include families affected by imprisonment provides a fruitful way forward in conceptualising the impact of this particular form of punishment on families, and raises pressing questions about the true costs of imprisonment.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has sought to set the context for this thesis by providing an orientation and critique of a number of strands of relevant literature: the variety of ways in which criminologists have conceptualised and operationalised the family; the influence that this thinking has had on Scottish policy narratives surrounding families affected by imprisonment; and finally the wider literature on the sociology of the family and the connections that can be drawn between this and theorising on the legitimacy of the prison. The first section of this chapter suggested that the family is perceived and utilised by criminologists in a range of different and somewhat contradictory ways, as either an aid (or risk) to desistance, or as a forgotten or neglected party that often suffers a range of hardships in the

aftermath of the imposition of a prison sentence. While the former are instructive for exploring how the inter-connected nature of family relationships and their potential influence over offending and desistance; they shed less light on how imprisonment might impact on the family in their own right, who are often only discussed in relation to the offender. The growing body of literature on families affected by imprisonment is instructive here, highlighting the negative impact of imprisonment for many families.

The above discussion has also demonstrated that the influence of each of these strands of criminological thinking has had some influence recent policy initiatives that take greater account of families affected by imprisonment or that seek to provide greater visibility and support. While the growing body of research into the experiences of families affected by imprisonment and the corresponding policy initiatives are to be welcomed, there is a need for caution that families are not seen only in utilitarian ways, as a potential aid to resettlement. Further, the argument that families should be supported in their own right is made most often with regard to children affected by parental imprisonment; illustrating the fairly narrow “nuclear” (parent, child and possibly partner) view of the family that is often taken with regard to families affected by imprisonment. This not only risks overlooking the needs of less conventional families; but taken together with the clear influence of the desistance literature on policy making in this area, potentially risks placing a burden to support reintegration on the family while only offering support in a very narrow form.

This narrow view of the family is also at odds with the increasing diversity of family forms in contemporary society. Therefore, if we wish to better understand who is affected when a custodial sentence is given, we must take a more open, flexible approach to researching families affected by imprisonment. Reconceptualising the family in terms of how relationships are actively constructed and maintained through family practices and displays way will allow a more subtle, detailed and nuanced picture of what families affected by imprisonment look like to be developed than is currently seen in

much of the existing literature. I have also argued that a focus on the emotions, values and memories that constitute and maintain family relationships alerts us to the importance of these aspects of relationships in the context of imprisonment, and their implications for the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system. These conceptual tools will be utilised in the remainder of this thesis in an attempt to generate new insights into what imprisonment means to those families who are affected by it, the impact that this has on relationships, and how this is experienced by both those in custody and at home in the community. The following chapter will discuss the methodological approach used to explore these questions, reflecting on critically on both the design of the project and the realities of the collection, analysis and reporting of the stories told by participants.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### INTRODUCTION

Often, research is published and presented as a completed product and it has been argued that such “neat” and “clean” accounts of the research process are not so much a true account of the field, but rather they represent a “chronological lie”, employed to emphasise the most productive and successful elements of the research process (Bosworth 1999: 83). Yet this “lie” is not adopted by all scholars and there is a growing body of literature, often informed by feminist epistemologies, exploring the more “messy” parts of the research process (see for example Bosworth 1999; Jewkes 2012; Liebling 1999; Creswell 2013; Souhami 2007). Such reflexive accounts are more honest, and recognising and critically reflecting on both problems faced in the field and our own research practice as individuals (rather than detached, neutral observers) can serve as an important analytical tool, allowing others to critically reflect not only on our findings, but also *how* the reported conclusions are reached.

It is within this diverse, dynamic and growing body of scholarship that I wish to situate this chapter, and indeed this thesis as a whole. Feminism, and the postmodern turn in social sciences, has challenged the traditional positivist approach to research where an objective truth is seen as “out there”, waiting to be collected by an unbiased researcher applying a neutral method (Usher 2004; Hawkesworth 2012; Stanley and Wise 1993; England 1994). Indeed, feminist scholars reject many of the facets of objective inquiry – such as detachment, distance, impersonality and universality – on the grounds that this is practically and morally problematic, objectifies participants, promotes hierarchical and exploitative relationships and will not in any case produce objective findings (Stanley and Wise 1993; Oakley 1981; England 1994). The project was very much informed by this theoretical and epistemological approach, and I sought to embody these values at each stage of the project, whilst also reflecting critically on my own research practice.

Therefore, throughout all research encounters I sought to treat participants as a person and an equal, rather than a “mine” of information (England 1994). I also embraced the feminist principle of seeking the sympathetically listen to and believe the accounts given by participants (Liebling 1992; Harding 1987). Thus, at no point did I seek to understand an objective account of what “really” happened (even if such a thing were achievable). Instead, I aimed to understand the experiences of participants from their *own* perspective and explore the meanings that they place on particular events and relationships. This chapter will describe and reflect critically upon how I sought to do this. As the fieldwork was conducted in two different localities (HMP Greenock and the Edinburgh Prison Visitors’ Centre), the first part of this chapter will provide an overview of the research design and the research activities at each site, before moving on to reflect more critically on the overlapping methodological and ethical issues that arose over the course of the project. It will conclude by arguing the hard to reach nature of families affected by imprisonment requires researchers working in this area to be highly reflexive about the potential impacts of their methodological choices, and to be particularly cautious before claiming that their analysis can speak to the experiences of “all” or “most” families. However, when critical, reflexive research practice is embraced, this can strengthen our claims to knowledge and the rigour we bring to our analysis.

## **PROJECT DESIGN**

### **HMP Greenock**

The decision that HMP Greenock would host the element of the project involving interviews with men and women in custody was taken by the SPS Research Access and Ethics Committee (RAEC). After receiving Level Two ethical approval for the project from the University in mid-December 2012<sup>4</sup>, I submitted my research proposal to the SPS RAEC that month, and

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix III for the ethics form and accompanying documents that were submitted and approved.

in January 2013 and received approval for the project to go ahead in HMP Greenock. The Committee also suggested that I might find it interesting to include some interviews with prison officers, and because it was felt to be likely to be difficult for me to recruit large numbers of prisoners, it was also recommended that I undertake an analysis of social work files to see what information was recorded about family relationships and to ensure that I recruited interviewees from a diverse a range of circumstances as possible.

I was happy to agree to these suggestions, something that on reflection was very much influenced by my position as a novice researcher. However, these early decisions had a greater influence on the final shape of the project than I had perhaps anticipated. While I had been hoping for a speedy entry to the field, several weeks into the process of negotiating access with my contacts in Greenock it transpired that the SPS did not own the data contained in the social work files and I would now require approval from the Local Authority Ethics Committee. This was eventually given in mid-July 2013, delaying my entry to the field by five months. This had implications not only for the timing of my fieldwork at Greenock, but also the second part of the project at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors Centre.

The suggestion to include an analysis of social work files and the decision to base the research at HMP Greenock also had unforeseen influence on participants that I was able to recruit. HMP Greenock holds a diverse population providing accommodation for male convicted and remand prisoners (both adult and under 21s); female prisoners<sup>5</sup>; and also a National Top End facility, which holds prisoners serving sentences of over 12 years in comparatively more open conditions<sup>6</sup> as they prepare for their release. Greenock is also a relatively small prison, with an average daily population of 257, and holding a maximum number of 311 prisoners (246 male and 66 female) in the year 2011-12 (Scottish Government 2012). It quickly became clear that by recruiting through social work this diversity was not reflected

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<sup>5</sup> while originally a male prison, in 2009 Darroch Hall became dedicated to female prisoners

<sup>6</sup> This latter group hold the key to their own cell, and can also leave Greenock to attend work placements in the community, or to undertake escorted or unescorted leave to approved addresses

in my participants: of the 13 people who agreed to take part 11 were serving a life sentence or in one case an Order of Lifelong Restriction<sup>7</sup>.

This was not a group that I had sought to focus on at the outset of project. I was initially of the view that a life sentence was in many respects an atypical event in a person's life, that their family would likely be as much affected by the severity of the offence as their resultant contact with the criminal justice system, and I had concerns about the potentially high incidence of serious mental health problems or personality disorder in this group. However, I would now argue that the latter concern in particular was unfounded. Of these 11 men, none had serious mental health problems (although one had been treated for depression). That being said, I also acknowledge that by this point in the project and following all the delays I had experienced to date, I took the pragmatic advice of Loic Wacquant to just "get on with it" and begin the data collection and to do what I could to recruit a wider range of participants as the research progressed (Wacquant 2002).

### *Interviews with Officers*

I began my fieldwork in Greenock by interviewing officers who have an involvement in, or responsibility for, throughcare, family contact or visiting. These interviews were semi-structured, and explored the themes of family contact, diversity in family relationships and prison throughcare. Most interviews with officers were generally around 40 minutes in length, although some were longer. While the lives, views and experiences of prison officers is now a growing area of research (see for example Crawley 2004b; Arnold et al 2007; Liebling and Price 2001), prison officers have until recently been largely invisible to researchers, policy makers and the wider public (Arnold et al 2007; Coyle 2005); and indeed myself, as I did

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<sup>7</sup> The Order of Lifelong Restriction was introduced in 2006 by an amendment to the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 as a means of improving the supervision of very high risk offenders. Those subject to an OLR serve a minimum 'punishment part' of their sentence in custody, but remain under supervision (with the potential to be returned to custody) for the rest of their life.

not include interviews prison officers in the methodological design of this project until this was suggested to me the SPS. Indeed, it has been argued that there is a perception amongst prison officers that “nobody cares” (Crawley 2002; Liebling 1992) and I often began my own interviews with officers by noting that they had been neglected by other researchers and that I was particularly interested in their experiences, and this was generally well received.

As others have noted, recruiting officers to participate in research can be challenging: institutional demands, shift patterns, sickness and other unforeseen events make it difficult for officers to participate in research (Crawley 2004; Crawley and Sparks 2005; Liebling 1992). By the end of my time in Greenock I was only able to interview five officers, and it might be argued that this is a very small number. I sought to increase numbers by also interviewing officers in Edinburgh, where I was successful in recruiting a further three participants. Interviews with these officers were conducted in the Prison Visitors’ Centre and followed the same format as above, but interestingly were much longer (between one and one and a half hours), perhaps because these participants were in physically separate space from the prison and therefore less constrained by the regimented nature of the prison day.

### ***Social Work File Analysis***

The second element of my research at Greenock was the analysis of social work files. Informed consent for a file to be included was sought by letter, whereby an information sheet and consent form<sup>8</sup> was drafted by me and sent out by social work to their entire caseload on my behalf, with the request that the consent form be returned by internal mail if the person was happy for their file to be included. While explaining the purpose of the research and obtaining consent in person may have led to a higher response rate, this was not felt by the social work team to be practically feasible given the

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix IV for examples of all information sheets and consent forms.



range of different prisoner groups (and therefore daily routines) in Greenock. Obtaining consent by letter gave prospective participants time to consider if they wished to give to be included in the research.

I received 13 completed consent forms from 12 men and 1 woman. These files were then read thoroughly and information on relevant themes (demographics; offending; family; employment and education; health, mental health and addictions; friends; visits and family contact) was recorded in an anonymised format. The key sources of information contained in the files tended to be pre-sentencing reports (Social Enquiry Reports); various risk assessment tools (predominantly the LS/CMI<sup>9</sup> but occasionally an HCR 20<sup>10</sup> or RM 2000<sup>11</sup>); or progression assessments such as parole board reports or reports annual “Integrated Case Management” case conferences. Files also sometimes contained disciplinary records from their time in custody, issues raised to social work by the person in question, copies of the court judgements and more occasionally letters to or from family members. It was not just the content of files that varied between participants but also the volume: some “files” stretched over two or three bulging folders, while others barely filled one.

As Liebling observes, the information recorded in prisoners’ files has inevitably been collected and recorded with a different purpose in mind than the questions a researcher is seeking to answer, and the difficulties in analysing this information can often be compounded by various weaknesses of data of this sort: records may be incomplete, conflicting, selective, vary considerably from the perceptions of the individual concerned, and fail to capture relevant contextual information (Liebling 1992). However, data of this type can also contain valuable clues as to how a particular element of the person’s life is viewed by the institution and shed light on decision making processes (Liebling 1992). I would agree with Liebling that such records-based analysis alone could not satisfactorily address the research

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<sup>9</sup> Level of Service/Case Management Inventory – the risk assessment tool that is currently used across criminal justice agencies in Scotland.

<sup>10</sup> Historical Clinical Risk – a tool for assessing risk of violence.

<sup>11</sup> Risk Matrix 2000 – a tool for assessing sexual violence.

questions set, but that it did provide useful additional data. In the context of this research, such records-based analysis perhaps best served to highlight the relative invisibility of family relationships in certain professional discourses, but also supported the conclusion that there is no one model of families affected by imprisonment.

### ***Recruiting Participants and Interviews with men and women in Greenock***

After the file analysis had been completed, each participant was sent a letter containing an information leaflet for the interview phase of the research and a consent form to be returned if they wished to take part. While I had originally envisaged using the file analysis as a way of sampling my interviewees, in light of the small numbers I instead sent letters to all participants. There was one participant I felt some reluctance about inviting to be interviewed, as he had already participated in a focus group I had conducted in another prison as part of a different project. My reluctance stemmed partly from concern about the methodological implications of interviewing the same person for different projects; but also because from our previous encounter I knew he was very unhappy with particular decisions and I suspected he was trying to recruit a potential ally to his cause. After some discussion with my supervisors I decided to put my reservations aside. However, in the weeks that passed between the conclusion of the file analysis and arranging the interviews this individual was amongst a group of men (including three of the men who had given consent for their file to be analysed) who had been transferred to another prison, so it would not have been possible to include him in any case.

I would argue that this highlights a very real methodological point that when researching hard to reach groups there may well be some people who are more willing to take part than others. This should alert us to exercising caution before claiming that our findings can speak to the experiences of “all” or “most” of the members of this group; when in fact they are more representative of the most engaged, most vocal or most willing to participate (for whatever reason). Yet it is not only the willingness of potential

participants to put themselves forward that will influence the research as gatekeepers too play a key role: after this group of participants had been transferred, one of the social work team revealed that she would not have been comfortable with me interviewing one of her clients from the group, although I was never quite clear if her concerns were for his wellbeing or for mine.

Conversely, good relationships with gatekeepers proved to be essential in resolving one of the biggest methodological difficulties in this phase of the research: the fact that only one woman had given her consent for her file to be included in the analysis. I had sought to include both men and women in the research from the outset, as I had concerns that by excluding men I would be perpetuating a notion that family life, caring or parenting are somehow more relevant to women than to men, and perhaps also the “ghettoization” of women’s experiences to the fringes of criminological research (Walklate 1995). However, with all but one of the participants recruited so far being men, I was concerned that the research would be (inadvertently) marginalising the voices and experiences of women in prison.

With hindsight, given the anxiety many women feel about social work involvement in their family life that I only recruited one woman in this way is perhaps unsurprising, and the solution came from an alternative recruitment strategy. The assistance of the team of officers who staffed the prison Links Centre – a separate building within the prison where agencies such as social work, addictions support or throughcare services meet their clients – was key here. The Links Centre was the setting for all but one of my interviews and as I became a regular presence there, these officers became interested in the research and were able to suggest two women who they thought might be keen to take part. Both agreed to be interviewed, although I did not read their files, bringing the total number of participants to eleven men and three women.

Conducting the interviews in the Links Centre provided both a quiet and private space. A number of interview booths run along the back of the

Centre with partially glazed doors so that the officers sitting at the main desk in the Links Centre can keep sight of what is happening but cannot hear the conversation. Only my interview with Mark was conducted in an empty room in a residential hall, because as he was a protection prisoner he could not be in the Links Centre at the same time as the mainstream population. All interviews were qualitative and unstructured, centring around the construction of a life history or “life line”, outlining key events and relationships in participants lives. They began by drawing a single line down the middle of a large piece of paper with “birth” (and a drawing of a baby) marked at one end, and “now” (and a larger stick man) at the other. This was used as a visual tool as relationships that are (or were) most important to participants were marked closest to the line, while less significant relationships could be marked further away. Follow-up questions were asked around the key themes of families and social networks, their current sentence and previous offending, help and support, and self and hopes for the future.

For many participants, the interview tool served as a useful mechanism to break the ice, and for some it was a source of considerable amusement:

Ross: Is this me as a baby? And this is me the now?

**CJ: Yes, you can tell that art was not my forte**

Ross: Yeah I've got no arms and legs (laughing)

**CJ: You are in your wee baby blanket that's why you have got no arms and legs!**

While focusing the research encounter around a life line was familiar to some participants from groupwork sessions that had adopted a similar approach, others found this unstructured approach to be difficult. When this happened, I generally invited participants to start with the “now” end of the line and to tell me about something or someone that they felt was currently important to them, or was particularly concerning them. Indeed, I often felt that participants came to interviews with something on their mind that they wished to discuss, such as something that was troubling them (a recent downgrade) or particularly important to them personally (often education, art or religion). This is perhaps reflected in the relatively lengthily nature of these interviews;

the longest of which was 2 hours and 18 minutes, with an average length of 1 hour and 23 minutes.

In summary, then, my fieldwork in Greenock was largely conducted over a six months between July and December 2013, although I was by no means a daily presence over this period. Rather, this phase of the fieldwork was characterised by intermittent flurries of activity as I interviewed officers (n=5); analysed files (n=13); and interviewed men (n=9) and women (n=3) in custody. These bursts of activity at Greenock were interspersed with time spent at the second research site, Edinburgh Prison Visitors Centre, which I will discuss below.

### **Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre**

The Visitors' Centre at Edinburgh Prison was the setting for the second element of the research. There is no single model of a prison Visitors Centre: some may be (but are not necessarily) physically separate from the prison itself and can provide a range of services and information, while others may simply be a place to wait (Families Outside 2010). At Edinburgh Prison, the Visitors' Centre is a separate, purpose-built facility situated inside the prison grounds. It is owned by the Onward Trust and the service is delivered by the Salvation Army, in partnership with other organisations including the Scottish Prison Service and Families Outside (Ceesay 2012). One of the aims of the Centre is to provide visitors with support and information (Ceesay 2012), and the Centre is also the base for a Children and Parenting Worker who facilitates two structured children's visits a week, and two Families Outside Family Support Workers. Importantly, all visitors must come to the Centre to "book in" at least 30 minutes before their visit – something, which as I will show below, proved to be particularly beneficial for me in the course of my research.

I had hoped to conduct my fieldwork in two distinct separate phases; completing all the data collection at Greenock before beginning the research with families affected by imprisonment at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors'

Centre. However, when it became clear that the research in Greenock was not progressing as quickly as I had hoped I started the process of negotiating access to the second research site in June 2013. Typically, just like buses, access to both research sites materialised in July and while I predominantly focussed on Greenock over the summer I kept in contact with the staff team at the Visitors Centre over this period in a number of ways – occasional meetings, events and by volunteering in the visit’s room “tea bar”; which while situated in the prison itself rather than the Visitors’ Centre, nonetheless gave me an unobtrusive reason to informally drop in for a “catch up”. In October and November I spent a couple of days each week at the visitors centre familiarising myself with the field, until mid-November when I returned to Greenock to interview the prisoners who had expressed an interest in the research.

Due to having to divide my time between two research sites, most of my fieldwork at the Visitors Centre was carried out between January and May 2014. Over the course of my fieldwork I spent around 370 hours “being there”, spending time at the Centre at various different times of the day and week. While my research was not intended to be ethnographic, it soon became clear that recruiting participants would not be possible without spending considerable time being there to build relationships with potential participants, many of whom were suspicious of perceived authority figures or criminal justice professionals. Indeed, it has been argued that gaining acceptance and building relationships is one of the most challenging, complex and time-consuming elements of the research process, particularly where the individuals in question have experienced some involvement with the criminal justice system and may be wary or suspicious of researchers (Sharpe 2010). Furthermore, I also needed to be present in the centre and available to do an interview at a time that suited the participant. Making appointments to meet on a specific date simply did not work in practice, as the personal circumstances of participants meant that the research was low on their long list of priorities (see Chapter Four). Indeed, even despite maintaining a regular presence at the Centre there were a number of visitors

who I never ultimately succeeded in interviewing, despite their interest in the research, due to competing demands on their time.

While at the Centre I spent time with the staff, chatted to visitors, played with children, answered questions when other staff were not available, helped with everyday tasks (such as tidying the playroom) and simply observed what was going on. I developed strategies to make my presence as a researcher as visible as possible – I put posters up about my research, informed people early in informal conversations that I was a “student writing a book” and always tried to maintain an awareness of when my presence might be intrusive. Over this period I kept a detailed research diary recording not only what I had seen, but also any conceptual, methodological or personal reflections that began to emerge. The inclusion of such incidental, unanticipated or “serendipitous” ethnographic methods and data in an otherwise non-ethnographic study has been referred to as “soft mixed methods<sup>12</sup>” or “embedded” qualitative research (Jenness 2010; Harvey 2008). Such approaches have a number of benefits: they facilitate a greater depth of understanding of the field, provide rich contextual data and can stimulate the sociological imagination (Jenness 2010; Harvey 2008). This was very much my experience as these hours spent “hanging around” allowed me to begin to develop a deeper understanding of both the research setting and the wider social context of the lives and stories of participants.

### ***Interviews with families visiting the prison***

Over time I did successfully forge relationships with many of the visitors, with some beginning to know me as “the sociology girl”, and by the end of May 2014 I had conducted 14 interviews with a total of 19 participants. These were fluid, in-depth qualitative interviews, guided by the key themes (family relationships; the impact of imprisonment; experiences of the

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<sup>12</sup> With the “soft” pertaining to the degree of integration between qualitative and quantitative data rather than an assertion that the latter is ‘hard’ data while the former is not.

criminal justice system; and self and hopes for the future) rather than a formal interview schedule. The only criteria for participation were that the person was visiting someone they thought of as family in the prison and that they were happy to participate in the research. The majority of participants were visiting a child (n=8) or a partner (n=7) although two children, a niece and a great aunt also took part. Most participants were recruited either by myself or with the assistance of members of the staff team who knew them well and thought they might be interested in taking part. Only one participant, Leah, became interested in the project as a result of seeing one of my posters. She then told her support worker that she might like to take part, who then relayed this to me and I contacted her directly.

Leah's interview was also exceptional as it was the only one that I conducted in the participant's home. The remainder were conducted in the Visitors' Centre, generally before or after a visit, or while waiting to hand in money or property. This was partly for safety reasons, but mainly to minimise inconvenience to the participants. As a number of other authors who have sought to research "sensitive" (be that emotionally, politically or otherwise) topics in environments specifically designed for some other purpose, it is not always possible to achieve the "textbook" ideal of conducting audio-recorded interviews in a private room (Piacentini 2004; Wardhaugh 2000). Like Julia Wardhaugh during her research on street homelessness partly conducted at a day centre, myself and my participants retreated to a "quiet corner" of the Visitors' Centre to conduct the interviews (Wardhaugh 2000). In the majority of cases this worked well, however on one occasion I abandoned an interview with a young woman visiting her brother when a number of other family members and friends joined the conversation. While the discussion that followed was lively and informative, I had lost all control of the situation as a formal research encounter. Indeed, it seemed that some of the visitors were keen to use this as an opportunity to ask questions of each other that they might not have broached before. I took the decision to sit and listen but to exclude this "failed" interview from the final analysis.



By recruiting participants in this way it is likely that I reached a different group of families than if I had sought access through a supportive service, as those who actively seek help may have different characteristics and experiences than those who do not (Hoyle 2000). In the context of families affected by imprisonment, it is likely that I recruited a more socially marginalised group than I would have had I recruited participants exclusively through a supportive service (Condry 2007). Only two of my participants recruited at the Visitors' Centre were being supported by a formal service, but nearly all (with the possible exception of Susan and the Collins family) could be described as socially marginalised to a greater or lesser degree. Of the 19 participants only four were coming into contact with the criminal justice system for the first time and some, such as Alisha who told me that she had visited nearly every prison in Scotland, had been visiting prisons for years.

### ***Staff Interviews and Analysis of Visiting Data***

This insight gained from becoming “embedded” in the Centre also brought a new element to the research design. In terms of qualitative methods, as I had already added interviews with prison officers to the methodology I sought permission from the relevant organisations (the Salvation Army and Families Outside) to also interview the staff team based at the Visitors' Centre. I interviewed four members of staff, and like interviews with prison officers these interviews were semi-structured and focused on the backgrounds and characteristics of the families who use the Centre, how imprisonment affects relationships and how families facing issues or difficulties as a result could best be supported. These interviews were between 40 minutes and 2 hours long and were usually conducted during the quieter moments in the Centre, such as the “break” between the afternoon and evening visits or early in the morning, although some were “squeezed in” to unexpected free moments. Ideally I would have liked to interview all eight members of the team, but unfortunately this was not achievable in

practice due to time constraints. As noted above, latterly I was also able to recruit a further three prison officers to participate in interviews.

A second, quantitative addition was made to the methodology as a result of the time I spent “hanging around”, as I became aware that the staff team receive daily lists (Visits Sheets) of not only the names of expected visitors, but their relationship to the prisoner, as stated by the prisoner on the “visit pass”<sup>13</sup>. I sought permission from the SPS to conduct an analysis of these sheets, creating a spreadsheet for each hall in the prison (who all have separate visiting times and hold distinct prisoner populations including remand, short-term convicted, long term convicted and female prisoners). I then recorded the frequency with which each relationship (e.g. Mother, Brother, Friend) visited, and the gender of the visitor which I deduced from the relationship designation or the name of the visitor. When this was not possible, for example because both the name and relationship designation were gender-neutral, this was recorded as unspecified.

I did this for an eight week period from 04 February 2014 to 03 April 2014. On two occasions during this period I could not access a visit sheet for a particular day or visiting session as they were shredded after use, and instead substituted the data for the same visits in the week following the end of the data collection. As a result, the data collected does not give a fully accurate picture of *exactly* how many people visited in this eight week period, however I felt that that making these substitutions would be better than omitting the visiting sessions altogether, as they allowed the visit time table in its entirety eight times. The other key limitation to this methodological approach is that as the relationship on the Visitors Sheet is specified by the prisoner the wording or designation they choose may not in fact reflect the true nature of the relationship. For example, one of my interviewees who was visiting her partner and had recently given birth to his child was described on the visiting sheet as a “friend” – although as I was not sure if she was aware of this I did not want to ask her why.

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<sup>13</sup> In Edinburgh Prison all visits are booked by the prisoner who specifies the name and relationship of the person they would like to come and see them. This is then recorded on the Visits Sheet which is ‘sent down’ from the hall to the Visitors’ Centre.

Nevertheless, I feel that the analysis of this data was a useful addition to the research, and would not have been included had I not spent so long familiarising myself with the workings of the Visitors Centre.

### **Recruiting additional interviewees?**

The original methodological design of the project included the possibility of recruiting additional participants through interviewees, allowing whole families to be interviewed. Therefore, in Greenock, after the conclusion of the interview, I asked participants if they thought any of their family members would be interested in the research, and if so, I provided them with the participant information for families to pass on. It could be argued that I might have had more success if I had asked for permission to contact families myself, and this might well be true, however it felt given the sensitive nature of the research it was more ethically sound to limit any pressure participants might feel to give their consent. Indeed, some participants opted out at this stage, suggesting that their family lived too far away or that they did not wish to burden them further. Others took the information, but I did not subsequently recruit any participants in this way. I would suggest that the difficulties I experienced in recruiting participant's families are very much connected to the characteristics of the prison population in Greenock: many of these participants were a considerable distance from home and kept in touch with their family through Special Escorted Leaves rather than visits, which combined with geographical distance and the length of sentence may have reduced the interest of both the participants interviewed in custody and their families in the research. Finally, a third group of participants (Colin, Lorna, Ross, Yvonne and Ian) had very limited contact with their families and in these cases it did not seem appropriate to ask for consent to pursue this element of the research.

I also had little success in Edinburgh, however the barriers to recruiting whole families were different. The prison were happy for me to conduct the interviews, but required me to provide proof that I have no criminal convictions or charges through a Disclosure Scotland background check,

undertake Control and Restraint training and undergo an induction. I had not anticipated that this training would be required, as it had not been asked of me in Greenock or in any prison where I have worked or volunteered. It took a few weeks to arrange this training, but considerably longer to provide an acceptable background check as at the time of the fieldwork there had been recent changes to the Disclosure Scotland scheme meaning that I could not apply for the enhanced level of checking required of me by the prison as an individual but neither the prison nor the University were initially prepared to request one on my behalf. After months of negotiating and filling in no less than five sets of forms, I eventually received the certification required.

The result of this delay was that many of the people that the participants I had recruited through the Visitors' Centre were visiting had been released or moved, and I was only able to ask one participant (Susan) for permission to invite her son Liam to participate. Susan gave me her consent to do so, and I explained the purpose of the research to Liam at one of the children's visits that are run in the prison by members of the Visitors' Centre staff team. He was happy to participate, and was interviewed in the "agents visits" facilities, where prisoners meet their solicitors and other professionals. This interview (and my interview with Yasmeen, discussed below) focused on the same themes as those conducted in HMP Greenock<sup>14</sup>, but I did not use the visual lifeline tool because as I had already met Liam's mother and children on a number of occasions I felt it might seem somewhat artificial and hinder, rather than aid, the flow of the interview. While it took many months to achieve, hearing how his sentence had affected the family from both Liam and Susan's perspective was fascinating and I attempted to recruit some more families to participate with the help of the Visitors' Centre staff. I recruited Yasmeen, who was serving her sentence in Edinburgh and who took children's visits with her young nephew in this way and hoped to also interview her sister, however I was unfortunately unable to do so by September 2014 when it was decided in conjunction with

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<sup>14</sup> families and social networks, current sentence and previous offending, help and support, and self and hopes for the future.

my supervisors that time necessitated that my fieldwork should be brought to an end.

Overall, then, I interviewed a total of eight prison officers, four members of the Visitors' Centre staff, fourteen prisoners (ten men and four women) and nineteen family members (a total of 45 participants). However, attempting to conduct the research across two sites caused practical and logistical difficulties, and I was largely unsuccessful in my attempt to recruit whole families (meaning both the person in custody and their family in the community) to participate. That being said, I feel that the dual site methodology was successful in that I was ultimately able to recruit both men and women in custody and families affected by imprisonment to participate in the research. This allowed me to explore my research questions from a range of different perspectives, and without including both groups I feel the ability of the project to address the central question "who are prisoners' families" would have been limited. Perhaps more importantly, despite the practical difficulties discussed above, conducting the research across two sites provided an ethically sound way of recruiting both groups without either feeling obligated to give their permission to invite their family members (whether in custody or in the community) to participate in the research.

### **Recording and Transcription**

All interviews were digitally recorded where consent was given for this. Amongst professionals and men and women in custody refusals were rare, but did occur (one prison officer, one member of the Visitor Centre staff team and one person in custody declined to have their interview recorded). A series of security concerns prevented me from being able to record my interview with Mark, as this interview was conducted in the residential area of the prison rather than the Links Centre and I was not permitted to bring my dictaphone into this part of the prison. In contrast, a number of family members (Chloe, Ruby, the Taylor Family, Jackie, Lynne, Alisha and Leah) declined to have their interview recorded, and in two instances (interviews

with Bill and Becky) I took the decision not to record the interview because of the participant's poor mental health or learning difficulties or disabilities, and my own concern that they might later become anxious about the recording and its use. This might (perhaps correctly) be seen as paternalistic decision making and treating people differently due to my perceptions of their health and abilities; however given the limited time in which to make these decisions and my own lack of experience of interviewing people with very poor mental health or learning difficulties I felt it was preferable to err towards caution rather than risk causing my participants harm or distress.

Those who refused to have their interview recorded generally did so on the grounds that they did not feel comfortable with this for a variety of reasons: Leah has a health condition that can affect her speech and she feel self-conscious about this; Lynne, Chloe and Ruby were quite nervous at the start of the interview; the children in the Collins Family participated in the interview and their grandmother did not feel comfortable with them being recorded. Other refusals seemed to be grounded in previous experience of the criminal justice system or mistreatment by the media and a general mistrust of perceived official figures; as Alisha remarked "how do I know you are going to do what you say you are going to do with that recording?". Where consent was not given to record the interviews contemporaneous notes were taken that were then written up in full as soon as possible after the conclusion of the research encounter. All notes, transcripts and recordings were stored securely, either in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected computer.

Recording interviews is often presented in methods texts as being preferable to note taking as it allows more detailed data to be collected than the researcher's memory will allow, reduces the potential for (or accusations of) bias and frees the researcher from taking notes and allows them to concentrate on the dynamics of the research encounter (Bryman 2008; Kvale 2009). It has also been suggested that recording interviews can help to build positive relationships between interviewers and participants or allow for a more natural style of interviewing (Liebling 1992; Appleton 2010). In contrast, others such as Jewkes have taken the opposite position,

suggesting that recording devices may constitute a “betrayal” of the intimate nature of the research relationship and render participants reluctant to discuss personal or sensitive topics (Jewkes 2002: 77).

While both positions might hold true in some circumstances, neither fully reflects my own experiences. While the interviews I recorded highlight the additional detail and depth that can be captured when not simply relying on memory alone, to have only recruited participants who were willing to have their stories recorded would have excluded and silenced a number of participants. I found that taking notes could enhance rapport particularly with some of the most vulnerable or distressed participants, as this helped to slow the pace of the interview and gave people who were upset time to gather their thoughts. Writing down what is said necessitates a break in eye contact which I felt was appreciated by some participants when discussing sensitive or upsetting topics, and it also demonstrates to participants that you are taking what they say seriously (Genders and Player 1995). Indeed, two participants – Becky and the ten year old son of the Collins family – seemed to enjoy reading over my notes with me and the latter in particular was quite taken with the idea that the things he had told me “were going to be in my book”. Yet other participants were happy to discuss sensitive subjects as part of a recorded interview, perhaps demonstrating the benefits of a flexible approach to fieldwork rather than a full endorsement of recording or note taking.

One difficulty that I did encounter with note taking was that while I was writing up my notes from my interview with Jackie, I found myself using particular turns of phrase or sentence constructions that I am aware are a feature of my writing style, and I worried that I was overwriting Jackie’s words with my own. Conscious of the risk of this, I have followed Jewkes example and have only taken direct quotes from these interviews when I am confident that these are the words of the participant and not my own (Jewkes 2002). However, while the process by which the observations, conversations and interviews that form the basis of the research project are recorded and transcribed or transformed into data often receives little critical analysis or discussion, it is important to note that recording and

transcribing interviews will not eliminate the impact of the researcher on the data. Transcription is not a mechanical or neutral process, and some criminologists have questioned the lack of attention paid to it by researchers (Liebling 1992). Inevitably, the resulting transcript of an interview will always be partial as subjective decisions will be taken by the transcriber as how to convert speech, which rarely follows the grammatical rules of the written word, into text while any attempts to capture non-verbal communications will necessarily be done from memory (Mason 2002).

This was starkly highlighted to me when, struggling to balance the amount of time I was spending at the Visitors' Centre and the time demands of transcription, I took the decision to have three interviews transcribed by a private company. This raises a potential ethical issue, as I had not included this in the original project design I did not advise participants at the time of interview that the recording would be transcribed by another person. With this in mind, I took a number of steps to ensure that the guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity I had given were upheld as far as possible: I chose a large, professional company with strict data protection policies that is used by a number of universities, I uploaded the files for transcription remotely so no other information about the project was available to the transcriber and I ensured that names and locations were not included in the title of the file uploaded. While I am not suggesting that ethical issues are any less applicable to particular groups of participants, and I also deliberately selected interviews for professional transcription that were with the least vulnerable participants and that did not contain any potentially "controversial" moments (such as Tracey's conviction for "passing" drugs in the visiting room).

As it turns out, this process was expensive and did little to save me time; it seemed that a combination of criminal justice jargon and Scottish accents greatly reduced the advertised accuracy rates, and I spent almost as long listening to the interviews and correcting the transcripts as I would have done if I had simply transcribed them myself. However, even where the transcription was technically correct, when listening to the recordings the differences in the way in which the voices on the tape were "translated" into



words on a page by myself and the professional transcriber were stark. This serves as a reminder that when working with transcripts we are analysing a particular representation of the researcher encounter, rather than an objective record of “what really happened” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

### **Analysis and Reporting of the Data**

This process of listening and re-listening to recordings of interviews and creating and re-reading the transcripts (and field notes and diaries) on multiple occasions was an essential part of the analysis of the data. I adopted an abductive strategy to analysis, whereby the development of theory and the generation and analysis of data are inextricably linked, and undertaken simultaneously and iteratively (Mason 2002). Therefore the data was analysed thematically, with QSR Nvivo being used as a tool to assist in the coding and reduction of the data. These codes were then used to interpret the data into thematic representations of findings (Roulston 2010). As noted above, this was very much an iterative process, and I frequently returned to the transcripts in full to revise and refine the codes I was developing.

Indeed, this process of revisiting both the coding and the transcripts regularly and in reference to each other was not only desirable, but also necessary, as early on in the data when coding my first “set” of interviews with prison officers I made the error of coding too densely (at one point I had over 50 codes), which as Mason cautions, allowed me to do very little other than “slice” the data into descriptive chunks that do little to aid detailed or nuanced analysis (Mason 2002: 163). Interestingly, as my familiarity with the data and the key analytical themes of the project grew, I became more confident utilising a more minimalist and flexible coding structure, and my final set of interviews with Visitors’ Centre staff had only 16 unique codes. Throughout this iterative process of re-reading and re-coding I was also mindful to actively look for patterns in the data that contradicted, challenged or suggested new directions from my emerging analysis.

Actively seeking counter-interpretations was not the only way in which I sought to add rigour to my analysis. A short biography of each participant is included in Appendix II, as means of not only recognising and individuality of each participant, but also to add another layer of detail to the analysis presented. Throughout this thesis I have also made use of lengthy quotations from interviews, both to substantiate my arguments and to invite alternative interpretations from the reader. While in some instances some sections of quotations have been omitted for reasons for brevity, I have left many of my own utterances verbatim: inclusive of poor word choice, potentially leading questions and often a lack of eloquence. I have done so in an attempt to recognise issues of power in the reporting of data: as my participants have no control over how I have presented their words, it seem unfair for me to afford myself the luxury of a more flattering portrayal, whether through judicious editing or omission.

In summary, then, this section has sought to provide an overview of the methodological design of the project, and how the data that informs it was collected, recorded and analysed. The decisions made at each stage of this process was underpinned by my feminist research ethic, and an attempt to minimise the impact of potentially hierarchical research relationships. However, this is not to suggest that ethical or methodological issues or challenges did not arise within the course of the project, and these will be discussed in the following section.

## **METHODOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **Informed Consent and Slow Ethics**

While all research prompts ethical considerations, given the sensitive nature of this project, I was acutely aware of the need to consider, prepare for and reflect on potential ethical difficulties. The ethical dimensions of qualitative research can be approached in two ways; by adhering to procedural ethics (that is seeking the appropriate advice, permissions and approvals) and through ongoing consideration of the “everyday ethics” or “microethics” which may arise in the course of carrying out the research project, often

after formal ethical approvals have been given (Willis 2011; Guillemin and Gillam 2004). Throughout the project I sought to attend to both by submitting my research for approval from the relevant institutional research committees, which given the dual location of the project included the University of Edinburgh, the Scottish Prison Service, Inverclyde Community Health and Care Partnership and The Salvation Army, and also by continuously reflecting on “ethically important moments” as they arose (Guillemin and Gillam 2004).

This need for an ongoing attention to ethical issues perhaps has particular salience when conducting research in prisons. Indeed, while good relationships with gatekeepers can be useful in recruiting participants, this can make it more difficult to be confident that the consent of the individual was freely given, especially within a prison environment (Cree et al 2002; Miller and Bell 2002; Drake 2013). Therefore it was crucial that the question of informed consent was kept live throughout the research process, and I took a number of steps to ensure this. I explained the purpose to the research clearly both verbally and in writing, and redrafted my information sheets for families when it became clear that a simpler format would be more effective<sup>15</sup>. I also invited potential participants to ask any questions they might have and emphasising that they may withdraw their consent at any time during the research encounter. Consent forms were provided to interviewees, asking for their active consent for the data to be used at each stage of the research process (e.g. to be included in my thesis, to be published, to be archived). While at many points in the research I felt concerned that my participants truly understood what PhD research *is* given the considerable social distance between myself and many of the participants, occasions where my questions were met with a refusal to answer reassured me that interviewees had actively chosen to participate.

At the outset the research encounter, I also emphasised that the interview is confidential and that findings will be reported anonymously, with any potentially identifying details changed or omitted. Some participants chose

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix IV for all examples of information sheets and consent forms.

their own pseudonym, and where they did not, one was chosen on their behalf. Due to their small numbers, all prison officers and members of the Visitors' Centre staff were assigned gender-neutral pseudonyms as a means of further protecting their anonymity. However, as in all research, this guarantee of confidentiality cannot be absolute, and it was explained to interviewees that if they disclosed something that suggested a risk of serious harm to themselves or someone else then appropriate supports would have to be notified. When I explained this, one participant directly challenged me – arguing that she was able to decide what she wanted to tell me and that qualified guarantees of confidentiality only served to build mistrust:

**CJ: the other thing that this form says the is because this is for my Ph.D. and I'm part of the University, I'm totally independent from the prison, I'm totally independent from social work so everything you tell me it's completely confidential unless you told me something that made me really worried about you, it's like a risk of harm thing**

Yvonne: see this is where I think the system fails, do you get what I mean. I think that if you are going to come and see me in and say that this is an confidence, then it should be in confidence no matter what I tell you because of if I was going to come and tell you something that I wanted only you to know I have a mind of my own and and I am not daft. And if you are concerned about me, if I had any thought that you would worry that way, I wouldn't come and tell you that....and that's where I think that system fails. I sometimes feel like I am taking a break down in here and I can't go and speak to people because it could harm my weans, get my weans taken off us.

In some respects this exchange was quite difficult for me as to some extent I could very much see her point. However, this was perhaps an occasion where my status as a student rather than a professional was beneficial, as I emphasised that this was something that the University required from me and that she could choose what to tell me or not and the rest of the interview continued smoothly. Yet I do feel that this highlights a real point of anxiety for many women participating in research if this type – they worry that anything they do disclose could lead to increased social work involvement in their family, or ultimately their children being taken away – and researchers may have to work particularly hard therefore to establish trust with this group.

However, my sympathy with Yvonne's desire for someone to confide in without fear of any future social work involvement should not be interpreted as a lack of concern for her wellbeing or an unwillingness to involve

supportive services if necessary. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter four, in addition to focusing on a sensitive topic, many of the men and women who participated in the project could be seen as very vulnerable in that many reported experiences of poverty; abuse or victimisation; relationship breakdown; drug or alcohol misuse, addiction or dependence; or poor mental or physical health, culminating in some instances in self-harm or suicidal thoughts or attempts. It was therefore key to the research design that not only were participants advised at the outset that were they to disclose that they (or someone else) were at serious risk of harm then I would not be able to keep this confidential, but also that I could be confident that appropriate supports could be accessed if necessary.

This was very much part of the rationale for recruiting participants through prison social work teams and the Visitors' Centre, as this would guarantee me a key contact with professionals to whom I refer participants if required. In practice I did not need to make any such referrals. Only Bill (who was interviewed at the Visitors' Centre) disclosed anything to suggest an immediate risk of harm, and he already had a multi-agency care plan in place, and I discussed his participation in the research with his support worker before the interview. While I was fortunate that I did not need to call on the support of these professionals, I would argue that considering not only the potential limits to confidentiality, but also what can be done following a disclosure of harm is key to ethical research practice.

It was also important to me to ensure that the research was not presented or interpreted as being able to provide more to or for the participants than a chance to "tell their story" to a sympathetic and interested listener. While I would hope that this research may be able to have some impact (perhaps on criminal justice policy or practice) at some point in the future, it is unlikely that I will be able to facilitate any real or immediate changes in the lives of my participants. My anxiety not to overstate to participants the impact that my research is likely to have is evident in an interview I did with Lorna, a woman serving a sentence in Greenock for drug possession and shoplifting. After discussing the impact her sentence has had on her feelings about herself and the difficulties she has had maintaining a relationship with her

young daughter, Lorna asks me what difference my research will have, and I felt compelled to admit that at least in the short-term, probably not a considerable amount:

Lorna: So see the thing that you are doing, is there any sort of outcome from it from what you find?

**CJ: Part of the reason I wanted to do it is because I think it is something that needs to change and improve and it affects whole families and nobody is looking at it – but probably immediately from what I’m writing there is not going to be a huge amount of difference. Universities talk a lot now about your research having impact so I might present it to the Scottish Government or the prison so it might be somebody else talking about it – but I don’t think anyone is going to be ‘oh that student says that this awful and we have to change the way we treat women’ (both laugh)**

In terms of “ethically important moments”, my interview with Lorna also highlighted an unexpected difficulty of using a visual life-line to frame the research encounter: while this tool worked well for some participants and was useful for “mapping out” large family groups and changing relationships it also very starkly highlighted isolation and relationship breakdown. In this instance, Lorna had no significant relationships except for her young daughter with whom she had very limited contact. As a result, early in the interview I abandoned the visual “life line” tool altogether, feeling that representing this visually did not add anything to the research and could be distressing for her. Given that imprisonment can be a very lonely experience, I perhaps should have anticipated this. However, I had thought that even where family relationships had broken down, participants would have significant or close friendships – and my naivety here is a clear example of how researchers inevitably bring the “baggage” of their own biographies and experiences to their work (England 1994).

Finally, mindful of the sensitive topic of this research, I also attempted to manage the endings of interviews with both men and women in custody and families visiting the prison carefully. I sought to introduce lighter or more positive topics towards the end of interviews so as not leave participants upset or distressed. In some instances positive notes in participants’ stories could be difficult to find, and here discussing their other interests (such as film or television) could be a useful strategy. This was another instance where the feminist approach to the research was beneficial, as this literature

promotes reciprocity, openness and attempting to create non-hierarchical relationships over detached, “objective” research practice (Stanley and Wise 1993; Roulston 2010; Bryman 2008; Punch 1998); allowing me the space to freely discuss shared interests or answer participant’s questions.

## **Reciprocity**

Indeed, throughout the interviews I answered questions that were asked of me as openly and honestly as possible (these ranged from “how old are you?” to “will this research make any difference?”) and I volunteered information about my own family when asking questions (e.g. fallings out, who does the washing up and my partner’s aversion to talking on the phone). While I approached interviews with all participants in this way, I would argue that reciprocity was particularly important when interviewing men and women in prison as Bosworth notes, making a connection with someone from the community can make participants feel “*a bit more like a human being and bit less like a prisoner*” (Bosworth et al 2005: 257). This was also my experience, as this extract from my interview with Euan illustrates:

**Euan:** I think that you are doing well if you finish a lifer with your sanity still intact, do you know what I mean because it can be the loneliest place ever, even though there is a lot of people in there, do you know what I mean. And even some of the times you don't even want to talk to the people over there, because it is the same shite all the time about crime and drugs and fucking this and that. That is a good thing see about speaking to people like yourself, it's a normal conversation, for a change, do you know what I mean.

Indeed, many participants noted how much they enjoyed these “normal” conversations, and Alex even sent me a card thanking me for taking the time to come and talk to him.

However, it soon became clear to me that I tended only to disclose things about myself “*to create closeness rather than distance*” (Fieldnote August 2013). I was less forthcoming when disclosure of my views or experiences would have created tensions. Although this did not happen often, these situations tended to arise when prison officers expressed negative views of prisoners or their families and when family members appeared to minimise

or deny serious offences. It would seem that I am not the first researcher to avoid challenging participants views as Jewkes describes discretely agreeing with whatever both prisoners and prison officers said about the as “*the least troublesome strategy*” for maintaining positive relationships with each group (Jewkes 2002: 68). Given that some of the views expressed in these moments conflicted with some of my core beliefs surrounding equality, respect and dignity, I have questioned whether my silence constitutes a portrayal of an inauthentic version of myself. Yet I ultimately took the view that my role was to try to learn about and understand my participants’ views and experiences rather than challenge them.

### **Self-Presentation**

My attention to self-presentation was not limited to being mindful about the opinions I expressed. While conducting my research at Greenock in particular, I made a number of changes to the way in which I physically presented myself. During my time at Greenock I dressed with two audiences in mind: the prison officers and the weather. Getting from my home in Edinburgh to the prison in Greenock was a six hour round trip involving a bus, two trains, a change of station and a long walk up the steep hill to the prison in the December weather, as financial constraints left me reliant on public transport and prevented me from staying in Greenock. As a result I dressed with practicality in mind, and sought compose outfits that would keep me warm, dry and would not cause difficulties getting into the prison. Therefore I would wear shoes that I could get on and off reasonably quickly as this is sometimes required by security, a hooded coat – negating the need for an umbrella as these are not permitted in the prison, no jewellery and a plastic watch that would not set off the metal detector. The futility of such strategic dressing was highlighted to me when a kindly female officer whispered in my ear while searching me “*don’t worry, it’s probably just your bra, this happens all the time*”<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Comfort has written powerfully about women visiting San Quentin who are forced to wear non-wired bras – or what one woman in her study described as ‘penitentiary bras’ -



However, as suggested above, practicality was not my only concern when dressing for my prison-based fieldwork as I was also very conscious of how I would be perceived by the officers with whom I came into contact. As Bennett notes, clothing has a particular significance in a prison context:

In prisons, clothing has a particular meaning and is used in order to communicate distinctions of rank and purpose. There is a long history of prisoner clothing being used as a reflection of changing penal philosophies.....For staff also, the use of prison uniform and military style insignias of rank are used in order to convey a sense of order, status and discipline, with governor grades distinguished by the fact that they wear suits, sometimes even being referred to as “suits” and promotion into their ranks being described as “getting your suit”. (Bennett 2012: 70)

As a result, Bennett adopted a more casual appearance when researching in a prison environment, I also followed this example. However given my positionality as a young(ish) woman, this was not my primary concern, as women working in a prison environment have seen the gendered aspects of their physical appearance subject to scrutiny. Interestingly, the messages from the literature are not wholly consistent – Liebling remarks that prison staff “do not like women in trousers”, while Genders and Player report a hostile reaction to the perceived shortness of their skirts (Liebling 1992:119; Genders and Player 1995). While in certain contexts adopting an overtly feminine appearance or demeanour may ease access to the field (see for example Piacentini 2004; Rawlinson 2000; Smith and Wincup 2000); women who are perceived to be “incautious” with their sexuality, or who are seen to be accentuating this aspect of themselves through the use of cosmetics or jewellery, have not only attracted criticism not only from officers (Genders and Player 1995) but has also been reported somewhat reproachfully by other researchers (Crewe 2006; Jewkes 2002:89).

With this literature in mind, I left many elements of my usual physical appearance at home: make up was pared down, dresses were left in the wardrobe and anything that might denote an interest in anything as frivolous as fashion was dismissed. However, what is perhaps of greater interest than

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to gain entry to the prison or to cut the wire out of their own bra if they are unaware of this rule before they arrive (Comfort p54). While I did purchase a hooded ‘prison coat’, I drew the line at penitentiary bras.

my feeling that I should adopt a more casual, practical and arguably androgynous uniform over the course of my Greenock fieldwork is the fact that I have *not* felt the need to do so while working in a prison environment in other contexts. Over the course of this project I have also regularly volunteered in two other prisons where I have still sought to dress practically and professionally I have not felt that make up or feminine clothing has been a barrier to this. Therefore, I would suggest that my own feelings of the need to conform to a (perceived) expectation of acceptable femininity to ensure entry to the field are an important analytical tool (Brownlie 2011). This allowed me a small insight into the coercive control experienced by some families visiting the prison (Comfort 2008); particularly when entry to the establishment is not guaranteed.

### **Positionality and Gender**

I would argue that my gender not only had an influence on how I chose to physically present myself, but it also had an impact on both the recruitment of participants and the research encounter itself. In terms of the former, it is of particular note that only two of the nineteen participants I recruited at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre were male, one of whom was a child. In some respects this reflects the nature of prison visitors centres, which have been argued to be very much female spaces (Comfort 2008). However, this is not the whole story, as I would argue the predominance of women amongst these participants reflects both my positionality as a woman and my personality as an individual. Many (female) researchers note that their gender can ease rapport with women who find themselves within, or as is the case for prisoners' families at the fringes of, the criminal justice system, as many of these women who may have experienced violence, abuse or mistreatment at the hands of men or simply prefer to discuss the intimacies of their family lives and relationships with another woman, and my experience at the Visitors' Centre reflects this (Smith and Wincup 2000; Liebling 1992; Condry 2007).

Yet I also felt more comfortable striking up relationships with other women, and while considerable social distance did exist in terms of education, class and access to social capital, common experiences and interests such provided a mechanism for building relationships. When it came to making connections with male visitors I was less well equipped in terms of the social scripts and shared interests available to me. Indeed, Mazzei and O'Brien have argued that researchers can agentially negotiate and "do" gender within the context of their research setting as means of actively and ethically building rapport, drawing on the concept of intersectionality to argue that while researchers will "*simultaneously overlap and diverge*" from participants the personal attributes they seek to emphasise in the field will be determined by an interactive and negotiated process of reading the social context and determining which aspects of the self will best aid the building of relationships (Mazzei and O'Brien 2009: 363). This is something that I certainly did with many of the women who participated in the research: Sophie and I often talked about her young children and the challenges of toddlers; with Chloe, Ruby and Brooke many of our conversations were about relationships; amongst other things Tracey and I talked about make-up and marriage. By sharing stories of element of our gendered identities that overlapped, myself and these participants built relationships and rapport.

The argument that gendered roles are not passively occupied, but are rather something that is constructed and negotiated over the course of the research encounter also has implications for the interviews I conducted with the men and women in custody. I approached interviews with women and men in prison in largely the same way, influenced by the principles of feminist research discussed above. However, I suspect (but cannot know for certain) that participants responded to me in different ways. The women who I interviewed tended to be of the view that they were in a system (and a prison) that had been designed with men and in mind, and there seemed to be a tacit assumption underpinning these interviews that I would understand, or at least be able to empathise with what it meant for them as women and mothers to be separated from their families and children by imprisonment.

As Lorna remarked, “*it’s good to know at least that somebody is on the same wavelength*”.

Interviews with men also provided a space for particular performances of gender. Crewe argues that relationships with female officers working in a prison setting serve as a resource for achieving masculinity as these relationships with women allow prisoners to assert their masculinity in a number of different ways; whether by sexualising women, using their “softer” nature to meet emotional needs, or by constructing them as in need of chivalrous protection (Crewe 2006). Interestingly, unlike Jewkes’ participants, some of whom attempted to engage her in a “mild flirtation” (Jewkes 2002: 85), none of the men I interviewed positioned me in this way. Rather, they tended to have largely given up on romantic relationships for the duration of their sentence (see chapter four), and seemed to have left this aspect of themselves outside the prison. Indeed, when I remarked to Simon that nearly all the people on his lifeline were women he somewhat reluctantly acknowledged that “*all his pals were girls*” and seemed embarrassed at my question as to whether this made him something of a “*ladies’ man*”.

Instead, male participants tended to emphasise to me how much they respected women, for example by emphasising how much they valued the support of their mother. Others drew on discourses of chivalry to evidence this, expressing severe condemnation towards domestic abuse, but showing a willingness to use violence to defend or protect women if necessary. While Crewe argues that only about 20% of his participants primarily identified interactions with female officers as an opportunity to express emotional openness or needs, I would suggest that the majority, if not all, of my participants positioned me in this way, as can be seen in the following exchange between myself and Simon:

**Simon:** there’s many times I’ve laid in my bed at night and I’ve turned my telly off and my head’s just sat and spun.... There is people you can go and talk to (sigh) but sometimes (pause) there’s things that you can speak to people about and there is things you cannae speak to people about do you know what I mean. For me....

**CJ:** Is that the thing of not wanting anybody to see your weakness?

**Simon:** Aye, it's that as well aye. It's the male bravado isn't do you know what I mean – but (sighs) I am who I am – unfortunately, do you know what I mean. ...

**It's quite lonely then being in the jail?**

**Simon:** Aye – you'll no get many people in the jail admitting that but aye. Times in the jail where I (long pause) believe it or not and I'll be honest, you're actually the first person I'm just about to say this to right....

Such exchanges were not unusual or perhaps surprising, as Liebling observes men in custody may be more likely to see female researchers as a source of unconditional emotional support (Liebling 1999). Importantly, she goes on to argue that as a result, these encounters will be qualitatively different from the “man to man” conversations shared with a male researcher (Liebling 1999: 160). Indeed, a number of the families who participated in this research highlighted the absence of fathers or other male father figures as particular difficulty for the teenagers and young men in their families, for precisely this reason. I was only able to access these stories through wives and mothers, and I often felt regretful that this was a solo PhD project and was not being conducted by a mixed gender research team. That being said, many prison researchers have also noted that participants enjoy the experience of talking to someone who is prepared to listen to them and take their stories seriously (Jenness et al 2010). I would therefore suggest that while my gendered positionality was a factor that likely influenced the tone and content of the interviews both in the prison and the Visitors' Centre, a willingness to listen and to understand was by far more critical to the success of the project.

### **Research and Therapy**

Finally, in light of the above discussion of the potential value of sympathetic listening, it is important to note that the boundaries between a successful research interview and a therapeutic encounter can become blurred (Souhami 2007). Both invite the telling and re-telling of personal narratives as a means for understanding past events and constructing personal identities (Gelsthorpe 1990; Birch and Miller 2000; Mason 2002; 2013); and many of my participants had few opportunities for such personal exchanges due to their imprisonment or isolation in the community. The way in which

meaning and identity can be constructed through the telling of a narrative became particularly clear to me when interviewing Simon, who had received a life sentence as a teenager and is now in his early 30s.

Throughout the interview Simon gave numerous examples of how he had responded to stressful or upsetting events with violence, particularly if in his view his family were being threatened, and I asked him if he felt there was a connection between some of these incidents:

**CJ: So do you think that's kind of connected to your big offence...**

Simon: Not really no, I've never actually thought about it that way to be honest

**CJ: You know, it's kind of the same sort of you are making me angry because that's my family**

Simon: Aye, as I said to you I'm very protective of the people that I care about and my family, people I love and care about I'm very protective of, I always have and I always will be, it's just the way that I am, the way I'm wired, the way I've been brought up – do you know what I mean. But I don't think it intertwines in any way, no.

**CJ: It just sounds similar**

Simon: Aye, it is similar aye, definitely. But maybe it's a pattern that's basically stating (big pause) I should put that on a poster on a billboard outside (unclear) I wouldnae say it intertwines no, I don't know I've never actually sat and thought about it that way. I havenae, you know what I mean I don't know.

**CJ: Were you close to your gran, would you have her up here?**

When listening back to this exchange, I can hear my own discomfort growing as it is clear Simon has never really given this any consideration – part of me cannot quite believe that as a life sentenced prisoner what was obviously to me an established pattern of behaviour had not been explored with him, while at the same time I feel woefully underqualified to be having this conversation. My anxiety is evident even in the transcript with the speed at which I change the course of the discussion to his relationship with his gran. While this is perhaps the clearest example of where an interview slipped from research encounter into quasi-therapeutic exchange this also happened with other participants, particularly around issues of drug or alcohol use and parenting. However, in contrast to *Genders and Players* I did not find this therapeutic identity to be “extremely seductive” or “flattering” (*Genders and Players* 1995: 40). Rather, I felt uncomfortable, underqualified and a huge weight of responsibility.

Where such situations arose I tended to change tack, as I did with Simon, or to retreat to the role of “sympathetic listener” rather than offer advice I did not feel qualified to give. If anything, it might be argued that I could perhaps have asked more questions, as on some occasions I left aspects of participant’s accounts that were fundamental to the research questions under-explored. For example, Bill told me that his partner “ran away” following his step-son’s imprisonment but despite this being a relatively lengthy interview I never got a full sense of exactly how the relationship ended as Bill seemed reluctant to elaborate and given his poor mental health and repeated suicide attempts I did not wish to press this. Another researcher may have made different decisions, and may have generated richer data. However, when Jackie – who had told one of the most traumatic stories and who was the most visibly distressed throughout our encounter – remarked at the end of the interview that she felt “comfortable with the amount that I have told you”, I took some confidence from this that I did not overstep my role as a researcher in a way that could have been damaging to participants, and this ultimately is more important to me than prioritising the research at all costs.

## **CONCLUSION**

Fundamentally, this is a thesis about relationships, and in this chapter I have sought to provide an overview of both the methods that I employed to explore how they are affected by imprisonment, and also reflect critically on how my own relationships with participants, gatekeepers and the data itself. I have argued that while the inclusion of two distinct research sites in the methodological design (HMP Greenock and the Edinburgh Prison Visitors’ Centre) posed practical difficulties and time pressures, this did ultimately serve as an ethically sound approach that allowed me to capture the experiences of both men and women in custody and families visiting the prison. This granted access to a wider range of voices and experiences than if I were to have focused on one group to the exclusion of the other, not least because a number of the men and women interviewed in custody had

little or no contact with their families. Yet, I was only able to recruit one “whole” family to participate in the research. Ideally this number would have been higher, so it must be borne in mind that while I was able to gather both the perspectives of those in custody and in the community, generally these stories do not originate from the same families. However, I have also suggested that all researchers working in this area must reflect critically on their recruitment and sampling methods, as the most vocal or most able to seek help may also be the easiest to reach.

I have also argued for the ongoing attention to “everyday” or “micro” ethics, particularly when researching a sensitive topic in a prison environment. While there are strong similarities between a research and a therapeutic encounter, researchers must always be mindful of the wellbeing of their participants and the limitations of their skills. In the context of this project, these everyday ethics were prioritised over a strict adherence to consistency of approach. Therefore, when I felt the lifeline methodology could be potentially distressing for Lorna, it was abandoned. Similarly, where participants preferred that the interview was not recorded, I simply took notes. I would suggest that this flexibility reflected my feminist research ethic and was integral to recruiting some of the most marginalised participants and the success of the project as a whole.

Importantly, I do not mean to suggest that this flexibility implies a lack of rigour. Throughout the project I adopted a number of strategies to strengthen the analysis presented in this thesis, for example by actively seeking alternative interpretations and counter-arguments while analysing and reporting the data collected. I have also attempted to reflect critically on the way in which the data was generated, arguing that gender is both actively embodied and performed by both myself and participants throughout the research encounter. Therefore, while the data generation and analysis was both fluid and flexible, and the discussion above has highlighted a number of limitations to the methodological approach taken, I am nonetheless hopeful that the discussion of these “messy” elements of the research process will strengthen the claims to knowledge made in the following chapters. This thesis does not claim to speak to the experiences



of all families affected by imprisonment; rather by presenting a careful and detailed analysis of the stories of a particular group told in a particular space and place I hope to open new lines of enquiry that might allow a more nuanced account of the shape of families affected by imprisonment and the impact of this particular form of punishment to be developed, with the first of these questions being the focus of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT

### INTRODUCTION

*There has been a long-standing emphasis in research and policy in this field on the social consequences of imprisonment for prisoners' partners and children. Necessarily, this focus entails the neglect of relatives of prisoners who have no partners and children. It reflects a view of what "family life" means which is arguably outmoded for the population as a whole and is certainly inappropriate for the prison population. (Paylor and Smith 1994: 131)*

In their 1994 article Ian Paylor and David Smith highlighted the narrow view of the family taken by researchers and policy makers when considering the impact of imprisonment on families and argued for the need to look beyond traditional nuclear constructions when attempting to answer the question "who are prisoners' families?". Indeed, these concerns are also central to this research, and in an attempt to provide a more nuanced answer to this question this chapter will draw together a range of data including interviews with men and women serving a custodial sentence, interviews with family members supporting a relative in prison, quantitative data on the relationships between visitors and the person in custody from Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre and interviews with Visitors' Centre staff and prison officers. Together, this data strongly suggests that just as there is no one model of the family in contemporary Scottish society, the same holds true for families affected by imprisonment.

However, this data also raises something of a paradox: while the impact of imprisonment is widely felt by a range of different relationships; at the same time all of the family members who participated in this research were female partners or mothers, and the professionals who were interviewed attested to the highly gendered nature of the family support received by prisoners. The focus of this chapter, then, will be to further explore and substantiate these parallel claims, through a discussion of the themes of "difference" and "sameness". It will begin with a discussion of the heterogeneity, or differences amongst, families affected by imprisonment.

The latter half of the chapter will then go on to demonstrate that despite this

diversity of family backgrounds and circumstances, there were two key themes that emerged with overwhelming consistency. Firstly, that women very often take on a key caring role in families affected by imprisonment; and secondly, that they often do so in the context of high levels of social marginalisation. Indeed, for all but one participant, poor mental or physical health, caring responsibilities or addictions served as barriers to employment and often also stable or suitable housing. The high levels of marginality reported by participants raises questions as to whether it is possible, even if it were desirable, for families to provide the type of support to the person in custody envisaged by many desistance theorists. Perhaps more importantly, these accounts also further evidence the need for the provision of high quality and appropriately targeted supports for these families.

## **DIFFERENCE**

### **Participants Families**

Of the 14 participants who were interviewed while serving their sentence, 12 were recruited in HMP Greenock. As the recruitment of participants is described in detail elsewhere (see chapter three), here it is only important to note that as Greenock holds a National “Top End” facility for men serving a sentence of over 12 years which allows them to progress towards release, eight participants (Simon, Adam, Mark, Euan, Ross, Colin, George and Alex) were serving life sentence or an Order of Lifelong Restriction. The remaining participants who serving their sentence in Greenock were serving short-term sentences (Lorna, Ian and Yvonne) or had a much shorter sentence (Donna). Two participants were serving long-term sentences at HMP Edinburgh (Yasmeen and Liam). An overview of the participants’ ages and index offences is given in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Summary of Participant Characteristics**

Participant	Age	Offence	Sentence
Simon	30	Violence	Life
Adam	32	Violence	Life
Mark	26	Violence	Life
Euan	29	Violence	Life
Ross	39	Violence	Life
Colin	58	Violence	Life
George	56	Rape and Assault	Recall – Life
Alex	26	Sex offences	OLR
Yasmeen	40	Not Recorded	13 years
Liam	32	Violence	11 years
Donna	31	Drugs	4.5 years
Lorna	Not recorded	Drugs	3 years
Ian	34	Violence	2 years
Yvonne	47	Drugs	27 months

Participants were asked to describe the most important people to them at various points throughout their lives. Of the 14 participants, 11 took part in interviews that used a life-line to ‘map’ the relationships that had been most significant to them at various points in their life. This approach was abandoned when interviewing Lorna for ethical reasons, and wasn’t used when interviewing Liam and Yasmeen as they were recruited in a slightly different way (see chapter three here). The key relationships placed by participants on their lifelines (and described by Lorna, Liam and Yasmeen in their interviews) are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Participants' key relationships**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Siblings</b>	<b>Extended</b>	<b>Chosen</b>
<b>Simon</b>	Daughter	Mother	Brother	Niece	Ex-wife, female friends (2), male friend
<b>Liam</b>	Sons	Mother	Sister	Nephew, Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents	Friends
<b>Yvonne</b>	Children (3)		Brother, Sister	Grandchild	
<b>Ian</b>	Son	Mother, Father (adopted)	Brothers, Sisters		
<b>Donna</b>	Son	Mother	Brother	Aunts, Uncles, Grandmother	
<b>Ross</b>	Daughter	Father, Mother	Brothers, Sisters	Grandmother, Cousins, Nieces, Nephews, Aunts and Uncles	
<b>Colin</b>	Daughter, Granddaughter				Friends, Church
<b>Lorna</b>	Daughter				
<b>Euan</b>		Mother	Sister	Nephew	Care
<b>Mark</b>		Mother, Father	Sister	Niece, Aunt	Psychology
<b>Yasmeen</b>		Mother, Father	Sisters	Nephew	
<b>Alex</b>		Aunt, Grandmother (Kinship carers)	Brother	Uncle, Cousins (2), Cousin's husband and their children	
<b>Adam</b>		Mother, Father			
<b>George</b>			Sister, Brother		

While Table 2 above is useful for providing a sketch of the shape of the relationships that are most important to participants, clearly a more detailed analysis is required to attempt to answer the question “who are prisoners’ families?”. However, what is immediately apparent from even the most preliminary analysis that the lens of the tradition nuclear family is too narrow to view the full range of participants’ relationships.

For example, while many participants drew considerable support from their families of origin and those who had cared for them as children, their relationships with their parents and home lives when they were growing up encapsulated a broad range of circumstances. Ross, Mark and Adam’s parents all separated when they were children, and given that the divorce rate in Scotland more than doubled between 1970 and 2011 (General Register Office for Scotland 2011) this is perhaps unsurprising. Despite a “moral panic” amongst some that single parent families (and in particular single mothers) are a symptom of moral decline and responsible for a range of social ills (Medlicott 2007; Carlen 1998), none of these participants attributed their offending to their parents separation or felt that this had been a profound or negative event in their lives – as Adam remarks he was ‘fine’ about his parents’ divorce as they shielded him from any animosity and his dad was “always around”.

In contrast, other participants described unhappy childhoods and relayed stories of victimisation, neglect or abuse by family members. It is notable that both Yvonne and Colin felt that the sexual abuse they suffered as children played a role in their later involvement in the criminal justice system; Yvonne began using (and selling) drugs as a means of coping and providing for herself, while Colin attempted to find an outlet for his anger through drinking, violence and fighting. While both Yvonne and Colin remained with their families, other participants spent parts of their childhood in Local Authority or Kinship Care due to parental addictions, offending or poor mental health (Alex and Euan). For example, Alex’s aunt and grandmother were given joint custody of him and his brother when he was 12, due to concerns his mother was neglecting the children. As the following exchange shows, for Alex these supportive relationships with his

aunt and grandmother (and also his brother, his cousins and their partners and children) have become more important to him than the relationship with his mother:

**Alex:** My family is really close, and really important to me, they have stuck by me with everything – all my offences they know about, everything. It is kind of a hard subject for me to talk about, my family

**CJ: Because you are away from them?**

**Alex:** And because of stuff that has happened when I was younger – I don't know if you know about my mum? When I was 12, me and my wee brother got taken off my mum.....I lost touch with my mum, nobody really in my family talks to my mum

**CJ: So that must have been really difficult eh?**

**Alex:** No

**CJ: No?**

**Alex:** No, because I've tried speaking to her and seeing her or whatever and my mum doesn't want to speak to me (pause ) I'm not really wanting to go into it too much but my mum has learning difficulties and she was in a mental hospital

**CJ: So, yeah**

**Alex:** And my father I don't know who he is, I've never known who my father is

**CJ: So does that make all these people who you do have more important now?**

**Alex:** Aye, because if it wasn't for my aunty and my granny and my uncle, me and my wee brother would have been put into care when we were 12

Similar sentiments as to the significance of these wider family relationships were expressed by Euan, who along with his siblings spent some time in Local Authority care while his father was in prison and his mother struggled to cope both with the children and her own alcohol use. As Euan's father was frequently absent from the family home, Euan's uncle played a more consistent role in his life and was more "like a dad" to him, and it was therefore very difficult for Euan and his family when his uncle committed suicide. However, this is not to suggest that Euan did not have any relationship with his father, as Euan grew up wanting to "be like his dad", and his father remained a sporadic presence in his life until he died of an overdose a few years before the interview.

**Euan:** Yeah it's mental. Like I say he was also the jail but when he was there used to be proud of him [my dad] and that and as I said I wanted to be like him. But he was hardly ever there to be honest. That's how my uncle, as I said, it was more of a dad to us. Like he used to try his best with us, he had never been in trouble or anything he is my mum's brother. He used to stay down in London and he used to take me down there on holiday, he used to take me to Blackpool, he used to try everything with us he was good to us. And he worked for the Royal Mail and he got paid off and he couldn't cope with it and he ended up - he stayed 18 stories up in the high flats and when my auntie got there in the morning the window was open

and he jumped out the window do you know what I mean. So he committed suicide, so that hit us hard do you know what I mean. It obviously devastated for my mum as well, but as I said I was close with him he used to come up and see me on a lot of visits.

These accounts demonstrate not only the traumatic backgrounds of many of the men and women held within the prison system (Scottish Prisons Commission 2008; Corston 2007; Commission on Women Offenders 2012), but also that for many participants it is the nature and quality of their relationships with the “parental” figures in their lives that matters, rather than the biological or legal status of the relationship. Ian’s account of his childhood also attests to this: his aunt and uncle became his foster carers when he was a small baby as his mother was not coping, and then started formal adoption proceedings a few years later when it was decided that this would be best for Ian. Ian explains that he thinks of his adopted parents (his aunt and uncle) as his “real” parents, and has never really felt adopted at all. This positive and supportive relationship contrasts with Ian’s relationship with his birth mother. As she has continued to live in the same community, Ian has seen her periodically throughout his life and feels she is always “making trouble” for him. When I ask if he would place her on the life-line used to structure the interview, he replies “*[I would put her] as far away from me as possible*”. Yet, this emphasis on the importance of the quality of parental relationships was not only seen in the accounts of participants who had experiences of kinship care. Both Simon and Liam reported having little contact with their fathers; Liam because the relationship between his mother and father ended when he was young and his father “*has never really been an influence on my life*”, and Simon because of a serious argument between himself and his father while he was in custody.

Yet, while many participants felt their family of origin (in some form) was an importance source of support, it would be a mistake to construct parental relationships as participants’ only significant family connections. All but three participants (Lorna, Colin and Adam) included their siblings amongst their most important relationships; however it is of note that Adam is an only child and both Lorna and Colin would have liked to have a relationship with their siblings, but these had been damaged by their offending and



imprisonment. In describing their relationships with their siblings, Mark described his sister as “*one of my closest supports*”, while Donna remarked that she, her mother and her brother were “*thick as thieves*” – with many other participants telling similar stories of the support that they received from their siblings. Alex included not only his brother on his life-line but also his two cousins (his aunt’s children), which given that he had been cared for by his aunt from the age of 12 is perhaps unsurprising. For some of these participants, close bonds with their siblings also facilitated good relationships with their siblings’ children. Indeed, a number of participants (Alex, Euan, Mark and Yasmeen) often spoke warmly about their nieces and nephews, and how much they looked forward to spending time with them:

**Euan:** Aye, my wee sister, I’m close with her and all, she’s just had a wean and all

**CJ: A new one?**

**Euan:** That’s the first one for my wee sister

**CJ: that’s exciting**

**Euan:** aye, he is his lovely, he’s cracking he just laughs all the time. I think he is about eight-month now and he laughs his head off – see if you kid on the you’re sneezing he just goes into fits of laughter so he’s brilliant

Mark also spoke about how much he enjoyed visits with his niece, and felt that she had helped to “bond” the whole family, while Yasmeen valued being able to take children’s visits with her nephew which she felt helped to maintain their close relationship. Indeed, as many participants are serving long sentences, their relationships with their nieces and nephews may be particularly cherished, allowing them to be a caring and involved aunt or uncle at a time where becoming a parent is not a possibility if they have not had children before they were sentenced, as was the case for almost half the participants (6 of 14).

However, just as not all participants relationships with their parents were the same, it would also be misleading to suggest that that all participants had close and supportive relationships with *all* of their siblings. Euan placed his youngest sister on his life-line but not his oldest, as nobody in the family talks to her because “*she has done a lot of horrible stuff*”. Euan also has deliberately limited his contact with his two half-brothers as they are involved in drug use and offending and have “*burnt their bridges*” with the rest of the family, but does have a relationship with his nephew (his oldest

sister's son) who is cared for by Euan's mother. Similarly, Mark no longer has any contact with his brother, while Simon does not speak to his sister. Interestingly, three participants (Ian, Euan and Colin) attributed the source of tensions in their families to conflicts between the Catholic and Protestant sides of their families. This resonates with the argument made by McEvoy et al, informed by their research with the families of politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland, that families affected by imprisonment are not a culturally homogenous group (McEvoy et al 1999). While there is a growing awareness of the distinct needs and experiences of BME families affected by imprisonment (The Robertson Trust 2013), this should alert us to the importance of being sensitive to all family backgrounds and recognising the cultural, geographical and religious differences amongst families affected by imprisonment.

Amongst the participants who do have children, their relationships with their sons and daughters vary widely. Liam and Donna both still maintain regular contact with their young children with the help of their mothers, while Lorna and Ian struggle to see their children as their ex-partners are refusing to facilitate this. Yvonne also has difficulties maintaining contact with her daughters as her oldest is caring for her youngest and struggles to find the time to visit. While Simon has maintained a positive relationship with his daughter and ex-wife, shortly before the interview he decided to stay in contact with his daughter by phone alone, as he is struggling with his sentence progression and feels taking visits could set him back (see chapter five for further discussion). Ross has never had a relationship with his daughter, while Colin ended his with his now adult daughter when he was sentenced as she faced reprisals in the community, but has had sporadic (and volatile) contact with her and his granddaughter throughout his sentence.

Relationships with partners and ex-partners are equally complex; Yvonne has been separated from her husband for many years, but explains that he refuses to divorce her. Similarly, Donna is still married but emphasises that she does not see her marriage as "conventional" and explains that this was something they did on the spur of the moment which she now regrets. Over their ten year marriage, Donna and her husband have often been separated

by one or other of them serving a prison sentence, although Donna emphasised throughout her interview that she was a “bad influence” on him and explains that he now “hardly” uses drugs and hasn’t served a long sentence for a number of years<sup>17</sup>. Donna also tells me that while she still loves her husband she is no longer “in love” with him and plans to separate from him on release, although he will always be in her life because of their son. Similarly, Simon’s story also illustrates that former partners do not necessarily lose their significance just because the relationship has come to an end: Simon married his ex-wife at 17 (*because we were in love*) but divorced a year later when he was given a life sentence, yet she continues to be one of his most important relationships in his life.

**Simon:** She was the one woman that I knew would always be there, and even to this day I know that she is always going to be there....But there’s two things that she’s done for me in my eyes that I’ll never ever ever forget and I’ll always respect her and appreciate her for. One was my wee lassie and the second one was the best days of my life.

However, while he seems not to have fully shut the door on a possible reconciliation, Simon also seemed not to want to dwell on this possibility. Indeed, some of the participants serving long term sentences spoke of romantic relationships as a source of pain rather than support, suggesting that they could be “nippy” or a “hassle” (Ross). As Euan explains, having a partner on the outside can feel that “the sentence triples” due anxieties that she might be unfaithful or end the relationships:

**Euan:** In here you think the worst all the time you think she's going to leave me she's going to leave me and you see it with guys you see a lot of them worrying about it and it just drives them mental and it's hard to expect somebody to wait for you for years - especially doing a life that's near on impossible that somebody is going to wait for you for 10- 15 year, and even a long sentence and all it's asking a lot of somebody. I was with a lassie when I got jail and I just said to forget all about me and she was like ‘no I’ll stand by you’, and I was like ‘yeah right’, and she came up to see us a couple times and I was like just go and forget about me, because like I say it is pointless, because most of them if they're lucky it will last a couple of year and then they are devastated so yeah... It would be good sometimes,

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<sup>17</sup> This contrasts with much of the literature on male and female co-offending, which tends to position women in a secondary role (Jones 2008). While it is not possible to make a definitive comment on this issue drawing on one interview alone, it is notable that Donna strongly resisted being constructed as lacking in agency in this way.

don't get me wrong, when you're bored out your brains and there are some guys whose lassies have stuck by them but it is few and far between.

These fears and anxieties, together with the large number of life sentenced prisoners amongst the participants, perhaps go some way to explaining why so few men and women in custody identified a partner or spouse as amongst their most important relationships. Their stories also illustrate and encapsulate the complex, fluid and messy nature of human relationships, emphasising that there are not always clear beginnings and endings and that the nuances of how relationships are defined and experienced by individuals cannot be captured through simple legal categories such as spouse, partner or cohabitee. However, it is also notable that while relationships cannot always neatly fit within the parameters of a traditional family model, most can be encapsulated by wider ideas of kinship, as the majority of participants named parents, children, aunts and uncles, grandparents, siblings, nieces and nephews as amongst their closest relationships. As Finch has observed, while the fluidity and diversity of family forms must be recognised and better theorised, some of the least traditional family forms, such as transnational families or families of choice remain a small proportion of the UK population (Finch 2007). Thus, it might be suggested that while family forms are become increasingly varied, this does not amount to a complete erosion or abandonment of kinship ties in favour of chosen relationships. That being said, a smaller number of participants did include a more diverse range of relationships on their life-lines; including friends, professionals and even pets, and each of these groups will be discussed in turn below.

### ***Friends***

Colin and Simon both had friendships that they felt were more akin to family relationships. Simon included two childhood friends who he describes as closer to him than his sister while they were alive (one died in an accident when they were 17 and the other committed suicide while Simon was in prison) and one of his friends that he had met over the course of his sentence on his life-line, describing him as “like a brother” (while

Simon tells me his friend describes the relationship as “the father figure Simon wishes he had” while growing up) who he still phones every week. For Colin, these close friends that he met during the course of his sentence through his church were currently his main supports, as his relationships with his family have been strained to the point of breaking by his offending:

**Colin:** I mean I’ve got a lot of really good friends, Christian friends, people in my church, people outside my church who I am very very close to now – probably more like a family to me, rather than my own family. Even though my sisters and my nieces and my nephews, I would love to have contact with them but I just don’t. Prison certainly destroys relationships – very few people manage to go through a prison, especially a long prison sentence, (unclear)...good and good luck to the ones that do.

These accounts resonate with the growing body of scholarship that argues that the boundaries between family, friends and kin are increasingly becoming blurred (Roseneil 2005, Davies 2011; Spencer and Pahl 2006; Weeks et al 2001; Smart 2007). Yet it must also be recognised that imprisonment can be profoundly damaging to relationships, including friendships. Indeed, Liam was the only other participant who discussed having friends in the community who regularly came to visit him, although he seemed to draw a clearer distinction between his “family” and “friends”. Importantly, again other than Simon, only Liam felt that he had meaningful friendships within the prison, explaining that he had managed to form friendships with a group of “like minded” men on his hall, who all wanted to progress through their sentences as smoothly as possible. This contrasts starkly with that of the other 11 participants who felt that while they may have a few “pals” or “acquaintances” that they would pass the time with, these were not particularly close or meaningful relationships, and the possible reasons for this are explored in more detail in chapter five.

### **Pets**

Liam was also one of two participants – the second being Yvonne – who discussed their pets in ways that might be seen to challenge traditional constructions of the family. For example, Liam mentions his dog at a number of points throughout the interview, explaining that she is very

important to him, while Yvonne also comments on how much she loves her pets:

**Liam:** I miss my dog like crazy, I really do because that is two years since I clapped a dog and she was my best friend's dog and when he committed suicide he left a note saying that he wanted me to have her so it really hurt, it felt like I had let him down when I came in here. But I really miss my dog – my mum has her so again I know she is well looked after but now as well when I get out I have pretty much lost her because now she won't come back to me now that my mum has pampered her and looked after her and let her do what she wants. Like I was quite strict

**Yvonne:** But we were let down all the time when we were younger, see when we were young we didn't even get a birthday card, we didn't get wished happy birthday to you know what I mean. The big differences I don't let anybody hurt my weans or my animals, because I love my animals just as much.

The fact that only these two participants talked about their pets may suggest that relationships with animals are only significant for a small number of people. However, this was not something that I directly asked questions about<sup>18</sup>, and participants may have been embarrassed to include their pets in an interview about their most significant relationships (Charles and Davies 2008, see also Tipper 2011 here). Indeed, there is a growing body of research that suggests that people do form intimate or family bonds with animals, and come to see their pet as “part of the family” and a significant relationship in its own right (Charles and Davies 2008, Tipper 2011, Gabb 2008). This is potentially an interesting direction for future research, and perhaps raises questions about the role animals or “therapets” might play in rehabilitation (for an interesting discussion of this literature see Moran 2015).

### **Professionals**

Finally, a small number of participants added professional relationships to their life-lines; for example Euan added the staff team that had cared for him in the secure unit he was held in as a teenager, whereas Mark added a psychologist who had worked with him in custody. There are important

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<sup>18</sup> Liam was the last interviewee to be recruited – had I interviewed him earlier I may have introduced this topic with other participants.

similarities between Mark and Euan’s cases – both men committed serious offences at a young age and have been in custody since their early teenage years, something that may well have had an impact on which relationships are most meaningful to them, as they have not had the opportunity to form relationships as adults in the community. The perhaps more interesting similarity, however, is that they both included professionals that had particularly helped them by spending time with them doing focused pieces of work or by demonstrating a commitment to their wellbeing:

**Euan:** And see since I have been in about drugs since I was just a wee boy, maybe about eight years old or something, I ended up really bad valium that I committed this crime just fucking valium and drink and it just sent us cooking. I could hardly speak right to anything, so they got speech therapist then because they used to mumble everything. But I did a good bit of education in there as well – I learnt my reading and writing and all that so it was good for us. And the thing that I appreciated the most that I could be a bad wee bastard and all in there, I used to smash things up and I had a lot of anger in us and they stuck with us when it would have been easier for them just to kick me out into the jail.....They done a lot of good work with us, do you know what I mean. I saw a psychologist and things and it definitely did us the power of good and I think I'm a much better person now than I was, put it that way - I think I was a bit fucked up to be honest.

**CJ: So would you put any of those people on here?**

**Euan:** I think I would put it [the whole unit] because there was too many to name, but they definitely helped, especially like calm us down and give us a wee bit of education and made me see things a lot differently do you know what I mean.

I would argue that these relationships sit somewhere on the boundaries of family life: Euan does not name one person in particular as being particularly important to him, but rather sees the whole staff team as playing an important role in his life. He refers to the time that he spent in the secure unit as “*the happiest I have ever been*” and expressed regret that while some of the staff had written to him after he had moved on, he had eventually fallen out of contact with them. Indeed, the ambivalence of staff and young people toward the construction of a residential unit as a “normal” family has been captured by McIntosh et al who point out that while these units contain many features of an “average” family home (for example shared mealtimes) they are also workplaces for staff and care for children who are away from home (McIntosh et al 2011). Yet, while these relationships exist on the edges of family life, they may prove an important

respite from the loneliness and isolations that a prison sentence can bring. Indeed, this can perhaps be seen on George's lifeline, as the only person he has semi-regular contact with is his sister, and he also included professionals such as prison officers, the police or voluntary organisations as part of their support network, but seemed to view this as distinct from their family.

These accounts that included professionals amongst their significant relationships were very much in the minority. While some did report positive relationships and getting a great deal out of interactions with professionals, and in particular from group work programs, other participants' relationships with professionals such as prison officers seemed fairly superficial. Indeed, there was a general consensus amongst participants that there are both "good and bad" officers, and while they would have a "laugh and a joke" with most, the relationship was unlikely to be particularly meaningful to them.

Overall, then, this section has sought to demonstrate the complexity of participants' family backgrounds and relationships. Many participants gave full and rich accounts of their families and relationships which were often, despite their current imprisonment, were warm, heartfelt and at times humorous. However, for many this was also a difficult and sensitive topic to discuss; bringing to the fore feelings of separation, sadness and regret. Most importantly, however, is that while many drew on wider kin relationships for support, these accounts were also individual and unique. As I will demonstrate below, this diversity of family life was not limited to the accounts of participants who were serving a custodial sentence, as this theme of the heterogeneity and complexity of family life also flowed through the data collected at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre.

### **Families visiting HMP Edinburgh**

As noted in chapter three, interviews were conducted with 19 people from 14 families visiting someone in HMP Edinburgh. As Table 3 below



illustrates, participants were visiting a range of family members: seven interviewees are partners, eight are parents, two are children and two are extended family (see Appendix II for a brief biography of each person).

**Table 3: Summary of Participant Characteristics**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Relationship to prisoner</b>
Tracey	30s	Remand	Partner
Chloe	18-24	Remand	Partner
Ruby	18-24	Remand	Partner
Brooke and Darcy	18-24	Remand	Partners
Sophie	18-24	Remand/short-term	Partner
Collins Family	45-55, 16, 8 and 14	Short-term	Mother, Daughter, Son, Niece
Becky	45-55	Remand	Mother
Lynne	45-55	Short-term	Mother
Jackie	45-55	OLR	Mother
Alisha	45-55	OLR	Mother
Susan and Erica	45-55, 65-75	Long-term	Mother and Great Aunt
Bill	45-55	Short-term Protection	Step-Father
Joanne		Short-term	Mother (visiting daughter)
Leah	30s	Long-term	Partner

Participants' accounts of their family lives echoed the complex stories of modern family life told by the men and women interviewed in HMP Greenock. For example, the children in the Collins family explained that their parents had separated when they were younger and prior to their father's imprisonment he was their main caregiver; they now lived with their mother full-time, but in their father's house. Other participants recounted how their children had been particularly affected by the

imprisonment of a sibling, as Alisha remarked; *“his younger sister, because he is so much older he’s more like a father to her than a brother so it has been really hard for her”*. A number of women told of children from a previous relationship that their partner no longer had contact with either through choice, relationship breakdown or in one case the suicide of the child’s mother (Joanne<sup>19</sup>, Ruby and Chloe). Leah explained that she had a child from a previous relationship with additional support needs who the family decided should live with his biological father following Leah’s husband’s sentencing as she could not cope with him on her own. These accounts illustrate not only the complexity of family life, but some of the difficulties in estimating the number of children affected by parental imprisonment as it cannot be assumed that because a person in prison has a child that they also have a meaningful relationship with him or her, or indeed that just because the child does not live in the family home that they do not (Scharff-Smith 2014).

The diversity of families affected by imprisonment is also reflected in other forms of data collected at the Visitors’ Centre, as an analysis of the visits booked and taken over a two month period suggests that imprisonment affects not only large numbers of people but also a wide range of relationships. Over the eight week period of analysis (from 04 February 2014 to 03 April) 11, 604 visits were booked and 7, 141 visits were taken<sup>20</sup>; and the 43 different descriptions of the relationship between themselves and the person visiting were given by the prisoner who booked the visit. A further analysis of this data reveals that while partners were the most frequent visitors to the prison, they were closely followed by an equal proportion of parents and friends (Table 4).

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<sup>19</sup> Rather than discussing her own relationship Joanne was describing her daughter’s partner’s relationship with his children.

<sup>20</sup> Importantly, the fact that all the visits were not taken up does not necessarily mean that the prisoner was expecting visitors who did not materialise (although this might be the case) as some prisoners book all the visit times available for all their visitors and let their family choose when is most convenient to come to the prison.

**Table 4: Relationship of visitors to prisoner**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Partner	1835	26%
Parent	1388	19%
Friend	1386	19%
Child	866	12%
Sibling	778	11%
Extended	546	8%
Grandparent	124	2%
Inlaws	159	2%
Grandchild	31	Less than 1%
Other	28	Less than 1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7141</b>	<b>100%</b>

The number of children visiting the prison is strikingly similar to the numbers of siblings. While it was not possible to distinguish from the visiting data whether these are adult siblings (and it is likely that many are as 276 nieces and nephews attended visits in the same period), it is notable that there is currently considerable policy attention directed towards improving the experiences of prisoners' children, while prisoners' siblings (and their children) remain largely invisible (Meek 2008). Similarly there is also little research and policy attention directed towards the impact of imprisonment on parents or friends, despite these two groups each accounting for almost one fifth of visits.

However, the characteristics of these participants also suggests that while families affected by imprisonment are by no means homogenous, different relationships might be particularly significant to different groups of prisoners. For example, of the eight families visiting men serving a short sentence or a period on remand six were partners or children; while four of the five participants visiting men serving a long-term sentence or being held on protection were parents. The only participant visiting a female prisoner

was her mother. Therefore, partners appear to be a more significant source of support for men serving a sentence of less than four years or a period on remand, while parents (and particularly mothers) may play a more important role in the lives of women in custody and men serving a longer sentence. Indeed, the importance of parental relationships to female and long-term prisoners is also reflected in the accounts of participants who were interviewed in custody (Yasmeen, Donna, Liam, Ross, Euan, Mark, Alex, Adam and Simon), as is illustrated by Table 4 above.

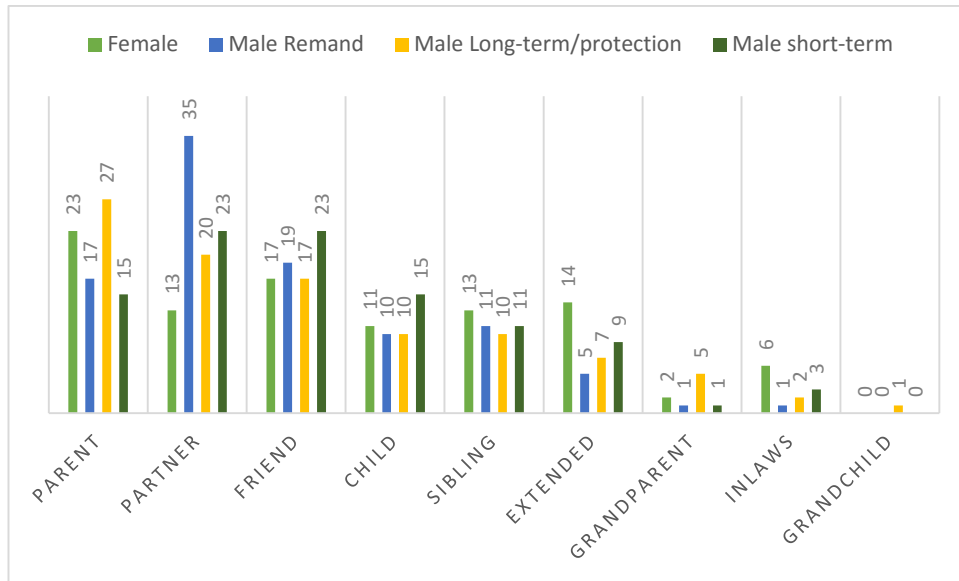
The quantitative visiting data also appears to support this argument. HMP Edinburgh holds a mixed population in four different halls: Hermiston houses convicted men serving a short-term sentence; Ingliston holds male prisoners on offence or non-offence related protection or who are serving a long-term sentence; men on remand are housed in Glenesk and all female prisoners are housed in Ratho. When the visiting data is analysed by hall it appears that families of origin (parents, siblings, grand-parents) are the most regular visitor to female prisoners and the men in Ingliston (long-term<sup>21</sup> and protection prisoners). Female prisoners also received a greater percentage of their visitors from their in-laws and extended family (which includes aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces), which perhaps suggests that as a lesser proportion of women receive visits from partners than other groups of prisoner, their wider family becomes more important. In contrast, families of formation (partners and children) are the most frequent visitors to the men serving short-term sentences<sup>22</sup> held in Hermiston and those who are on remand. Indeed, perhaps particularly notable is the large percentage of partners who visit the men who are held on remand (see Figure 1 below).

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<sup>21</sup> Serving a sentence of over four years.

<sup>22</sup> Of less than four years.

**Figure 1: Relationship of visitors to prisoner (% by prisoner category)**



Furthermore, both prison officers and Visitors' Centre staff who were interviewed were keen to highlight that there is no single model of families affected by imprisonment, and that different groups of prisoners were likely to receive active support (in the form of visits, phone calls, handing in money or property) from different family members. While some members of the Visitors' Centre staff team also emphasised that it is important not draw hard and fast distinctions between different types of prisoners or families, participants suggested there were some general patterns that they had observed. For example younger prisoners were more likely to receive visits from parents or friends, while older prisoners were visited more often by partners and children; women received far fewer visits than men; and that there were some prisoners who did not have any active supports at all.

**Ali (prison officer):** Lifers families tend to be their parents and if there are older children – that's who comes in to visit them. Men – it could be multiple partners, ex-partners and various offspring, whether it's theirs. Women are different – they tend to lose the biggest contact with their family. Because a lot of their children get taken into care – society says that women are the biggest care givers so a lot of the kids end up in care, or the children end up in the care of the prisoners mother. If it's left up to the prisoner's male partner to bring the children in then 9 times out of 10 they won't.

Participants also observed that families affected by imprisonment had different experiences of contact with the criminal justice system, and that this may sometimes vary by offence type:

**Ashley (Visitors' Centre):** There is a huge variation in visitors. And I think sometimes that is not necessarily recognised when they are painted under the label of 'families affected by imprisonment'. And I do think that there needs to be different approaches to different families. Sometimes you can particularly pick it up in terms of the crime. So a lot more sex offenders families will be more middle class, they might have less experience of imprisonment, crime isn't a norm as it can be for some other people – I am not saying it is – but for some other people they've visited their dad, their granddad, their uncle, their brother, they boyfriend and that is just the way it is and crime, well not crime, but visiting prison is second nature.

**Charlie (Visitors' Centre):** so in this prison you have got long-termers, short-termers, women, men, convicted, untried – they all have different groups of people visiting them. So it may be that your short-term convicted have a lot of friends, whereas your schedule 1<sup>23</sup> and sex offenders are more likely to have wives, mothers, close family members – less friends are likely to come and visit.

Yet the analysis of the visiting data did not only reveal patterns in which relationships are most significant to different groups of prisoner; it also revealed notable absences and omissions. One particularly interesting example is that a very small number of women (n=3) and no men at all booked visits for same sex partners. As this is a "snap shot" analysis conducted over a short period of time it is important not to overstate this difference between men and women, however one prison officer who was interviewed felt that female prisoners may be more willing than male prisoners to be open about their relationships and sexuality:

**Jude (prison officer):** It's different with the women, because the women are more kind of – its how to say this nicely – there are more kind of relationships over in the women's hall. I don't know if it is a comfort thing or a companion thing but the amount of – I don't think it is even gay relationships, I don't think it is even lesbian relationships, I think it is just a relationship.

**CJ: Like a best friend?**

**Jude:** It does get a bit more than best friends

**CJ: But they might not be like that outside?**

**Jude:** Yeah, yeah, totally. Whereas probably 90% of Ratho [the women's hall] are like that, on the male side there is probably only about – and this is just off the top of my head – about 5% that are like that. So the difference between male and female.

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<sup>23</sup> A person convicted of an offence listed in Schedule 1 to the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. These are a physical, emotional or sexual offence against a child.

**CJ: Looking at the visits sheets I haven't had a single guy in any of the halls book a visit for a boyfriend or male partner – but it cannot be that there is not a single gay man out of all 900 of them**

**Jude:** No, no, no – I would probably be about 9 in 900

**CJ: Would any of them be out?**

**Jude:** The 9 in 900 will admit it – over in the women they can't stop telling you about it! (both laugh)

Indeed, one member of the Visitors' Centre staff team explained that many men would deliberately keep their sexuality hidden for fear that this would leave them open to victimisation or bullying within the prison:

**Ashley (Visitors' Centre):** You never see boyfriend – I think I have once seen a boyfriend and that is in years and years.....

**CJ: Why is that, because they wouldn't come or because they would lie and say friend?**

**Ashley:** They would lie

**CJ: Its really interesting – because you would think we would have to have some gay men in prison**

**Ashley:** But they are not very vocal. And I know we have had in the past, there was one family that came in and their son had been in with a gay man and the family were a traveller family and in their exact words 'he kicked the shit out of him but it was ok because he was gay'. So you totally see why some men wouldn't put down that they are partners.

This is not only illuminating in terms of the masculine nature of the prison environment and how this might constrain certain relationships or render them invisible<sup>24</sup>, but also illustrates that although families affected by imprisonment can be 'seen' through their interactions with official agencies this is not a passive or unilateral process (Condry 2007). Prisoners and their families may resist or reshape this process through their decisions as to how much to reveal, to whom and in what circumstances. Indeed, same-sex relationships may not be the only family ties that prisoners might wish to conceal: fear that revealing the true nature of any romantic relationship will affect their benefit status, not wishing to attract the attention of social workers towards their family or children, or (simply) because they have multiple partners visiting might all cause prisoners to book visits under a different designation than is truly the case. While this is an obvious limitation of the methodological approach employed here, these negotiated

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the complexities of how homophobia and "banter" regulate social relations within the prison see Crewe 2014.

processes also have implications for both policy and research, as those seeking to collect (or rely upon) statistics on families affected by imprisonment should be cognisant of the potential impact of these social processes on how family relationships are seen, counted and recorded.

## **SAMENESS**

### **Social Marginality**

The previous section has argued that there is no one model of families affected by imprisonment, and family lives of participants recruited at HMP Greenock and through the Visitors' Centre at HMP Edinburgh encapsulated a diverse range of family backgrounds and circumstances. Yet, there was also an important commonality running through their accounts: that the majority of participants in this research experienced social marginalisation to a greater or lesser extent. Of all 19 participants, Susan was the only one to discuss being in stable employment, although Alisha had recently done some casual work in her friend's business, and the Grandmother of the Collins had been a foster carer prior to retirement. Other participants were not currently in employment due to poor mental health (Alisha, Bill, Brooke, Chloe, Jackie and Lynne) serious physical illness (Leah) learning difficulties (Becky), caring responsibilities (the Collins Family, Joanne, Sophie and Ruby) or addictions (Tracey). Joanne had been forced to give up her job when her daughter and her daughter's partner were sentenced to care for her grandchild, while Sophie had been made redundant when she fell pregnant with her first baby.

For many, their mental health problems had a serious impact on their general wellbeing. Alisha said that she sometimes had suicidal feelings and would go to the supermarket at night to avoid seeing anyone and could not face going into town without taking Co-codomal<sup>25</sup> first. Bill estimated that in the fifteen months that his step-son had been in prison he had attempted suicide "five or six times". Chloe took an overdose after her abusive partner kicked her in the stomach while she was pregnant (I didn't press her on this

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<sup>25</sup> An opiate based painkiller.



in the interview but it is implied that she then lost the baby). After the death of her husband in custody and her parents in the same year, Jackie has only recently felt able to leave the house and has medication prescribed for anxiety and depression. Similarly, Lynne suffers from anxiety and feels uncomfortable being away from home. Sophie explained that while she was coping better after the birth of her second baby she had suffered from such severe post-natal depression after her first child that she felt suicidal.

While a number of participants were in their late teens and early 20s (Sophie, Chloe, Ruby, Brooke and Darcy), none were currently in training or education and many reported “not being very good at school”. As a result, nearly all the participants were dependant on benefits for their income and housing. This was difficult for some participants such as Sophie, who was scared to be alone in her home since her partner was remanded in custody, but often chose to stay in as she felt her community had few facilities or resources for young families:

**Sophie:** A couple of months before I moved in, I think, there was a murder on my floor. And it’s just...that petrifies me. Like I keep my doors locked constantly....It’s scary, but I hate living in those flats on my own. That’s all just...it all just adds up and builds into one big problem that you got because you’re like...because the kids can’t even get out to play. Well, she can’t get to play because I’m so high up and there’s no nice parks because the parks that’s there are, well, it’s like disgusting. There’s like beer bottles, smashed glasses, syringes and everything. It’s just such a horrible place. It’s like I don’t want my children to go and play there. I’d rather she’d be stuck in the house all day than go in there. But, I don’t know. So it just...it all builds up, so, it’s not a very nice place to be.

Other participants also had experienced difficulties with housing and had lived in temporary or hostel accommodation either in the past (Ruby) or, as was the case for Tracey, at the time of the interview. Tracey been briefly held on remand following her partner’s arrest and as their home had been in his name and he was still remanded in custody, Tracey felt her best option on release was to present as homeless. While this strategy allowed her to avoid both returning to live at the scene of the alleged offence and her neighbours’ questions (see chapter five for a further discussion); it did leave Tracey without access to her clothes and other personal possessions.

Just as some participants experienced greater degrees of marginality than

others, the families who participated in the research also reported various levels of prior contact with the criminal justice system. Some, such as Joanne, Susan and Erica and the Collins family were visiting someone who had never previously been in custody, while for other participants visiting the prison had been a part of their lives for many years. For example, Tracey commented that she had been visiting the prison to see a range of friends, family and partners for the last twenty years; Jackie had visited her husband and then her son in prison for many years and Alisha remarked that she had been to “nearly every” prison in Scotland visiting various family members. Both Darcy and Brooke’s fathers were in prison, although Brooke no longer wanted to maintain a relationship with her father.

Indeed, participants’ accounts suggest that simple distinctions between the “prisoner” and the “family in the community” cannot necessarily easily be drawn. While they were not convicted or sentenced on this occasion, at the time of interview Tracey and Brooke were both named on their partner’s current indictment, while Leah was also charged at the same time as her husband, but for perverting the course of justice after she washed the clothes he was wearing on the night of the offence. However, both Tracey (who was interviewed in the community) and Lorna and Donna (who were interviewed in custody in HMP Greenock) explained that both they and their (ex) partners had previously been in and out of custody; while other participants such as Chloe had been expecting a custodial sentence in the past but had received a community order instead. For Tracey, when she was younger visiting the prison was a way of earning enough to support her addiction. As she explains, she would visit someone in custody (whether she knew them or not) and smuggle in drugs to be “passed” at some point during the visit. For this, she was paid in heroin, creating a vicious circle whereby she needed to work more to fund her increasing use:

**Tracey:** I used to come up years and years ago and there was a guy from Glasgow I would visit him and he was on remand so I used to visit him six days all week and I used to give him something. And I ended up if you getting what I called a jail habit because I ended up getting myself in the habit of coming up here every day if and getting paid for it in heroin if and that's why I called it a jail habit I got. Because of me doing that, I was getting paid in that.

As Tracey later goes on explain, she is now stable on methadone and that having served custodial sentences in the past she no longer feels that this source of income is no longer worth the risk. While Tracey was the only participant to describe supplementing her income in this way, she is not the only participant who has been convicted of bringing drugs into the prison. Alisha told me how she was so worried about how her son was coping in custody that she brought in some hash in for him on a visit, but was caught while passing it over. This ultimately resulted in Alisha being convicted and receiving a community penalty, and serves as a further illustration of the complexity of the interactions some families have with the criminal justice system.

It is difficult not to be moved by these stories how participants struggled to cope in the face of multiple victimisations, deprivations and barriers to good health and wellbeing. Yet, in many respects their stories should not surprise us, as there is a considerable body of research demonstrating the links between offending, imprisonment and social deprivation (this is discussed in chapter two). Indeed, there is now a growing body of research suggesting while not all families affected by imprisonment will live in conditions of deprivation, many do (Comfort 2008; Halsey and Deegan 2015). Halsey and Deegan argue that given the abuse, victimisation, addictions, poverty and criminal justice contact that characterised the lives of many of the female partners and mothers of prisoners who they interviewed, families must *“not be used as proxies for chronically under-funded rehabilitation programmes and/or post-release transitional arrangements”* (Halsey and Deegan 2015: 132). The findings of this project strongly support this argument, as despite their willingness to support the person in custody, the realities of their personal circumstances greatly undermine their capacity to provide material supports or social capital. Rather, their stories suggest that many participants would benefit from appropriate services and supports to meet their own needs and vulnerabilities, rather than further drains on their already scarce resources.

## Gender

In addition to the social marginality experienced by participants, there is one further obvious and important commonality between the participants recruited through the Edinburgh Prison Visitors Centre: all, with the exception of Bill, are women. This gendered pattern is also reflected both in the quantitative data collected on the relationship between the person in custody and their visitors. Of the 7, 141 visitors to the prison over the two month period of analysis 4,108 were women and 2348 men, which as Table 5 below illustrates, this equates to 62% and 35% of visitors respectively.

**Table 5: Percentage Gender all Visitors**

Gender	Visits Booked (%)	Visits Taken (%)
Not Specified	5	3
Female	60	62
Male	35	35

Further, both prison officers and Visitors' Centre staff observed that it is very often female partners and mothers who do the majority of the work associated with supporting a person in custody, such as visiting or handing in clothes or money:

**CJ: One thing I have found is nearly all my interviewees are women – and I think part of that is I find it easier to build relationships with women – but do you think there is also a gender thing going on there?**

**Chris (Visitors' Centre):** You do see that it is the women running around after the men and the mums in particular are much mistreated and maligned – they are doing everything for the person and maybe having one night out every two months.

**Nicky (Prison Officer):** If you think about partners and stuff you know wives and girlfriends – you see both sides of the coin because we've got men and women in here. The guy comes into prison and she is in the community and she's maybe got the kids and you see her in the pissing rain walking up and down that hill, pushing a pram with bags of stuff underneath, clothes whatever it is and they come in and put money into their property and drag the weans in. And when the table turns you know the girls in custody the guy is God knows where, the grandparents maybe got the kids and then she gets one visit and three months.

Thus, the overall picture emerging from both the quantitative visiting data and the interviews with men and women in custody, visiting families and

relevant professionals poses something of a paradox: while the imprisonment can affect a wide range of relationships, it seems to be predominantly women (and in particular partners and mothers) who regularly visit the prison and support the person in custody. What this reflects, I would argue, is that while the impact of imprisonment can be felt widely across the family – affecting (amongst others) siblings, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and friends – there is very often one person who takes on the bulk of the work required to maintain contact between the person in custody and their family, and this person is very often a woman. For example, Lynne (Kian’s mother) commented that while she had done a lot to care for Kian’s brother’s baby while he was in prison and made sure that he received visits, she had not done so much for Kian because Sophie (Kian’s partner) was there to do it:

**Lynne:** this time it has been easier because Sophie has done a lot of the coming up and seeing him and taking the bairns up. When his brother was in I used to come up every day with his bairn, I had that wee girl more than her mum did. So with Sophie being round the corner she has done more of this time.

Similarly, Darcy was willing to miss visits to attend her prenatal appointments, but only if her partner’s mother was able to come up and visit him. Darcy was so committed to ensuring that her partner received a visit that she made sure he always booked a visit for her even on the days his mum was due to come and see him, just in case she did not turn up and then Darcy could still come in her place. Another example can be seen in Susan’s account; while when I interviewed her she had brought her son Liam’s great aunt (Erica) with her to visit, on other occasions she brought his children – yet it was always Susan who co-ordinated these visits and ensured Liam had everything he needed. Indeed, some participants also viewed the prisoner’s friends as unreliable (Sophie, Lynne, and Joanne), and Sophie and Lynne were both scathing of Kian’s view that he had a lot of friends because none had come to visit him (although perhaps because they both felt his friends were not a particularly positive influence on Kian):

**Sophie:** But then I said to him, he always says that he's got so many friends the outside. And then I said, 'But you don't. Because look where you are. Look how many have actually come and see you, and have actually bothered about you.' It was like, none of them. Nobody had actually bothered their arse about you being in there.

This tendency for women to take a "lead" caring role in families affected by imprisonment has also been observed in the wider literature: for example Condry found in her research on the families of serious offenders that where the family chose to support the offender, most of the work involved in this (and in supporting other family members) was done by wives, partners or mothers (Condry 2007; see also Codd 2008 and Comfort 2008). In many respects this view of girlfriends, wives, mothers and partners as the "proper" people to care should not surprise us as in Western societies generally, women continue to be responsible for the bulk of caring for children and elderly relatives, housework and domestic labour and also supporting other women in their caring activities (Skeggs 2014; Hochschild 2012; Le Bihan and Martin 2008; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Smart 2011; Jamieson 1998). Furthermore, as Smart argues, these decisions and choices about who should care are made in the context of the presence (or absence) of structural supports, the financial resources available and prevailing social attitudes toward gendered roles and behaviour (Smart 2011). Therefore, many female partners and parents may feel a social expectation to fulfil this caring role, may have little choice but to do so, or may also use caring as a way of expressing their own identity and social worth, particularly when social marginalisation leaves few other avenues to do so (Skeggs 2013).

Indeed, families themselves noted that the decisions about who should visit and support the person in custody reproduced patterns of caring that were already established in family or community: Susan and Erica explained that Liam's father had only been to visit him once since he was sentenced, but that this reflected his general involvement in his life in the community.

**Susan:** His father has been once in 20 months, and brought his new wife (laughing)...I am glad that he has come, but it has taken him long enough to do it and he hasnae exactly supported him

**Erica:** he hasnae Susan

**Susan:** he hasn't supported him at all really but that is just his dad, he never supported him when he was on the outside so why would he change when he is on the inside?

While this finding is perhaps not particularly novel given the wider literature both on the gendered nature of caring labour generally, and in families affect by imprisonment in particular, I would argue that its continued reproduction across a range of research settings is of importance. Indeed, this pattern can be seen in Comfort's work with female partners of prisoners in California (Comfort 2008); Condry's research with families across England who were seeking mutual help and support to come to terms with serious offending by another family member (Condry 2007); Halsey and Deegan's research in Australia (Halsey and Deegan 2015), and also in earlier research into female imprisonment more generally (Carlen 1983). The reoccurrence of this finding across time, place and social groups suggests not only that large numbers of women are negatively affected by the imprisonment of a family member<sup>26</sup>, but also much more needs to be done to support these families.

Further, it should also be noted that this gendered pattern of caring has considerable implications for women who are in custody as they are less likely to have a partner on the outside who is willing and able to support them. This is apparent in the accounts of the women who were interviewed in custody (only Donna's husband was willing to visit her, although she did not want him to), and was also raised by six of the eight prison officers and all four members of the Visitors' Centre staff team who participated in the research. As both Edinburgh and Greenock prisons now hold female prisoners, these participants are well placed to observe gendered differences in the provision of care and support, and all ten participants noted that when a man receives a prison sentence his partner will tend to not only to visit him, but also (continue) to take charge of other domestic matters, such as caring for children or maintaining their house or tenancy.

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<sup>26</sup> While it must be recognised in some instances that imprisonment can be beneficial for the family (Travis and Petersilia 2007; Halsey and Deegan 2015) as the following chapter will show where the family choose to support the person in custody the effects are often very much negative

**Jude (Prison Officer):** I went up to Cornton Vale and they had a visit session on and it was two women having visits and Cornton Vale at that time was holding about 400-450. And I said ‘are these special kinds of visits?’ no this is just general visits, much like we have here. I said we could have about 25-30 on a session ‘no’ she said ‘they don’t get, women don’t get visits.....they just don’t get guys coming up to visit them, either husbands or boyfriends or that’. Basically when they are in jail they are no use to them. But working in the visits, which I have done here, I have seen women in the middle of winter coming across, there has been a foot of snow on the ground, they have come here with two kids, two toddlers and one in the push chair, they have come here across three buses probably to get here, and they come in the visit to visit their husband or their boyfriend and the first thing they get asked is ‘did you put that £20 in my PPC?’. Which is a bit sad as well.

**CJ: What do you think that is about that women don’t get visits?**

**Jude:** I think it is an indictment on the male psyche I think.

**Robin (Prison Officer):** the women definitely get less visits and I think being in jail they’re usually the first point of contact with the parents, they’re usually in charge so they lose their kids and they kind of lose everything. A lot of them have lost their kids - the majority of them are going to children's panels where they've already lost them. So the women definitely get less support than the men....

Indeed, when female prisoners do receive support from their families this is often from other women, and two officers noted that when women are given a custodial sentence their own mothers often become the main carers of their children. As these participants explained, while this may prevent the children from entering Local Authority care, it can also be very tiring for grandparents, potentially raising questions about how long such arrangements might be able to continue. A further consequence of this is that the demands of raising grandchildren may leave little time for making the often long, difficult and expensive journey to the prison to visit the daughter in custody, potentially leaves the female prisoner very isolated.

This was clearly reflected in the stories of the women who were interviewed in custody and in the accounts of those visiting the prison. In terms of the latter, Joanne was forced to give up her job to care for her baby granddaughter while her daughter Aimie served her sentence. Fortunately for Aimie, Joanne was also able to maintain her daughter’s tenancy for her so she could return home on release, however it is not unusual for female prisoners who do not have a parent or partner to do this for them to lose their housing while in custody (Medlicott 2007). Indeed, as noted above, this was very much the case for Tracey who became homeless following a



brief period on remand as the lease for their property had been in her partner's name and he still faced a prolonged period on remand.

Of the women interviewed in custody, two (Yasmeen and Donna) maintained good contact with their mother's and the rest of their families, while two (Lorna and Yvonne) were desperately struggling to maintain regular contact with their children. In Lorna's case she is serving her sentence over 200 miles away from where her daughter lives with her father, a distance that is largely prohibitive of regular visiting due to the commitment of time and money such a trip would require. However, Lorna described how her ex-partner was "punishing" her by refusing her any contact with their daughter, despite Lorna being willing to bring their daughter to visit him when he was in prison "years ago", and how the relationship between them had deteriorated to a point where Lorna had to involve the courts to secure telephone contact between her and her daughter. While her ex-partner was now allowing this telephone contact, he would immediately pass the phone to their daughter and refused to have a meaningful discussion with Lorna about their child. In the absence of meaningful communication with her ex-partner, Lorna was so anxious for more information about how her daughter was growing and developing that one of the officers had downloaded the curriculum for her daughter's year group to help Lorna find out what she was learning at school.

Yvonne also felt the absence of someone who can (and is willing to) bring her children to visit. Yvonne's parents had both died in recent years and her sister has poor mental health – something that Yvonne sees as a result of the abuse they experienced at the hands of their father. Her oldest daughter is currently caring for her youngest, while social work have placed her middle daughter with her father, a decision that Yvonne disagrees with and sees as "taking her away from us", although she doesn't want to discuss this in too much detail "in case social work are reading your book"<sup>27</sup>. Yvonne describes how her oldest daughter is "running ill with exhaustion"

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<sup>27</sup> I often described my PhD research to participants as similar to writing a book – explaining that it would be about the same length, placed in the university library and all of it or parts of it might be published as a book in the future

combining work with looking after her sister and her own child and due these competing commitments finds it difficult to come up to visit. As a result, Yvonne has been attempting to find others who might be able to do this on a one off basis:

**CJ: So how often do they come up and see you?**

**Yvonne:** Sometimes it is every three weeks....I've had to try and ask my neighbours, my nieces or my brother, and I've not seen my brother for eight weeks because he works seven days a week from and my daughter works four days a week and she works at weekends so I can't get a bonding visit with them. That is all I care about, I don't want visits from anybody else, as long as I can see my weans I am more than happy to do my time. See when my weans are low outside I am very low inside, a cannae cope.....It's only 25 min in the motor, but it is getting somebody to bring them up. And I would like to see them every week and I don't think that is a bad thing to be asking for. The panel said I can see them once a week and but I can't get them up once week.

In addition to struggling to see her children, without regular visitors paying in money to her their PPC, Yvonne also found it difficult to afford enough phone credit to maintain regular contact with her daughters.

Thus the assumption that all prisoners will have someone in the community who is willing to support and facilitate contact with their family and children can have serious implications for women in custody. Lorna and Yvonne spoke movingly about their desire for greater contact with their families, and their distress at being unable to achieve this. Further, the gendered patterns of caring labour were not the only obstacles facing some participants. As there are fewer prison facilities for female prisoners, women like Lorna found themselves a considerable geographical distance from their families. The personal costs of this, which can extend beyond the duration of the sentence, should not be underestimated: Lorna also spoke movingly about how she wanted to be rehoused near her daughter on release to continue rebuilding their relationship, but that the relevant Local Authority would not accept her case as she did not have sufficient ties to the local area, despite there being no facilities for female prisoners in the vicinity. Indeed, the difficulties female prisoners can face in regaining care of their children as they may not have appropriate housing, but are only a priority for local authority housing if they have their children with them have been documented in the wider literature (Brooks-Gordon and Bainham

2004). Joanne's effort in caring for her granddaughter and maintaining her daughter's tenancy ensured that she did not face these difficulties upon release, but as stories like Lorna's attest, not all women in prison are so fortunate.

Finally, it is interesting to note that one participant questioned whether the existing policy approach and service provision perhaps played a role in perpetuating this dynamic, and questioned whether it met the needs of all families affected by imprisonment:

**Chris (Visitors Centre):** I think that the burning issues for me are firstly the hidden families, you know understanding that family means lots of different things to different people and is not just partners and children. So for example I would like to see more men accessing services – although there is two parts to that. Firstly do they want the services in the first place? And then I wonder if the way that services are geared is more towards women and what they want.

This is an interesting point, particularly as very little known about how men experience the imprisonment of a family member as virtually all the research to date has focussed on the experiences of female partners and relatives. While in some instances this is by design (see for example Comfort 2008), in others – including this project – it is because of two interlinked issues; that women *do* seem to be the main providers of support for people in prison, but also because they seem more willing to engage with researchers (see Condry 2007 here). Yet, I would suggest that it would be a mistake to assume that men are not affected by the imprisonment of a family member as even within this relatively small-scale project there are examples of men who place considerable importance on supporting a family member in custody and dedicate large amounts of time to doing so. For example, Bill visited his step-son in prison nearly every day, and during the course of my fieldwork at the Visitors' Centre I saw other men who were clearly distressed while visiting the prison:

I arrived at the Centre and sat behind the desk. A visitor for the Hermiston session had brought in doughnuts for the staff so I had two for my lunch. A first time visitor arrived to see his son on the remand session and was obviously very nervous – his hands were shaking and he said that the last time that he had felt the way he did now was when he went to visit his father in hospital. You could clearly see how difficult it is for someone to take in everything they need to know at the first visit – he didn't have the correct ID with him so he wasn't able to hand in the

property he had brought. He decided to take the visit and come back with the property the following day. On his way out he thanked us for our help. (Fieldnote April 2014).

Similarly, Adam explains that while he maintains regular contact with both his parents, it is his father who will attend the prison to accompanying him to meetings or hearings as his mother finds this difficult:

**Adam:** Exactly, and that is and that's why everything since been in prison, like ICM's and tribunals and any kind of trouble I've been to anything like that of phone calls or getting solicitors up because I've been in trouble my dad helped with the lot of it.

**CJ: Why is that, because it is easier for him?**

**Adam:** My mother cannot listen to me being criticised - she cannot listen to me being criticised at all. And she understands what I am and what I've done that she just, she worries about how she would react

**CJ: So she's never gone to any of your ICMs or anything?**

**Adam:** No, my dad has always done that side of it.

Therefore, while the gendered dynamics of support within families affected by imprisonment must be recognised, it also seems then that both researchers and service providers working in this area may need to do more to successfully engage with men affected by imprisonment. Indeed, failure to do so is problematic not only as it risks silencing their voices, but also because an assumption that men do not want support is both reductionist and perpetuates troubling gendered stereotypes. As Newburn and Stanko argue in their critique of the lack of service provision for male victims of crime, “*services that assume that men do not need help or will not accept help merely collude in the reproduction of an ideology which places the traits of ‘strength’, ‘resilience’ and ‘emotional independence’ at the centre of the dominant conception of masculinity*” (Newburn and Stanko 1994: 163). Indeed, encouraging male participation in this area may not only allow men to access supports, but may also help to reduce the weight of the caring burden that is generally largely shouldered by mothers and partners alone.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that just as in Scottish society more generally, there is no single model of ‘families affected by imprisonment’. Participants’ accounts conveyed a wide variety of family backgrounds and

experiences: while many of the men and women interviewed in custody felt the support of their family of origin to be very important to them, this could encompass parents (who may or may not still be together), adopted parents or kinship carers, siblings (but not necessarily all of them) and cousins. Romantic relationships were equally complex, with some participants receiving significant support from ex-partners, while others such as Donna sought to use their sentence as a tool for negotiating the end of the relationship. Some participants, such as Liam and Donna, continued to play an active role in their children's lives, whereas others struggled to do so without wider family support (Yvonne and Lorna), or were no longer in contact with their children (Ross and Colin). Importantly, these stories demonstrate that families are not homogenous or static: relationships are fluid, messy and complex and may not fit comfortably into legal categories or be easily captured by official statistics.

Yet despite this diversity of family backgrounds, virtually all participants' accounts told of social marginalisation to a greater or lesser degree. Only Susan reported being in regular, paid employment and many participants had experiences of victimisation, poor mental or physical health or drug or alcohol misuse. As a result, nearly all were reliant on benefits and as a result could exercise little autonomy over their housing or access to community resources. An appreciation of the impact of these cumulative issues and difficulties on participants' day-to-day lives and emotional wellbeing is key to understanding the problematic nature of the suggestion that families may be able to aid in the desistance process. While participants recruited through the Visitors' Centre were keen to support the person in custody, their resources are limited and unlikely to provide access to employment, housing or even financial security. This suggests that rather than viewing families as a potential resource to promote desistance, families should be offered high quality services in their own right.

The stories presented in this chapter also clearly demonstrate that supporting a person in custody is an overwhelmingly female enterprise, as mothers and female partners play a key, co-ordinating role here. While this reproduces the gendered patterns in caring labour seen in families and communities

more generally, it can have particularly serious implications for women who find themselves in custody. These women are much less likely to benefit from active family supports, and where they do this is often provided by another female relative. As a result, these family members are more likely to already be overburdened with caring responsibilities, potentially leaving the woman in custody extremely isolated. Indeed, this gendered caring burden can have costs for not only the woman in custody but also the partners and mothers who provide considerable practical, financial and emotional support, and it is these costs that will be explored in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER FIVE: THE IMPACT OF IMPRISONMENT ON FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

### INTRODUCTION

As has been noted in earlier chapters, in recent years there has been a rapid growth in research and policy interest into the wider impact of imprisonment on families. Much of this research paints a bleak picture, suggesting that families affected by imprisonment are likely to experience emotional upset, financial disadvantage, disruption to housing, employment and childcare, and difficulties navigating that bureaucracy of the criminal justice system (Codd 2008; Smith et al 2007; Comfort 2008; Light and Campbell 2006; Braman 2002; Peelo et al 1991). In many respects the accounts of participants confirm many of these earlier findings. However, rather than simply documenting the issues faced by families, in this chapter I seek to draw on the experiences of the families in the community and the person in custody to make three distinct, yet related, claims. The first is that supporting a person in prison requires considerable investments of time, money and effort; but importantly, as the majority of participants were already experiencing marginalisation to a greater or lesser degree, imprisonment compounds this, shrinking the resources and the social worlds of families that are already experiencing disadvantage.

Secondly, supporting a prisoner and managing the impact of the sentence on the rest of the family requires considerable emotional and caring labour, something that is disproportionately provided by women, reproducing and reinforcing the social positioning of women as the “right” person within the family to care. Finally, imprisonment undermines reciprocity within family relationships through physical separation, barriers to open and honest communication and the difficulties faced by men and women in custody in coping with their sentences, ultimately eroding opportunities to fully participate in family life and fundamentally unbalancing relationships. These three arguments will be supported by the accounts of both families affected by imprisonment and men and women in custody, and together perhaps go some way to explaining why so many relationships affected by imprisonment are damaged or break down.



## ENTRENCHING MARGINALISATION

### Financial Impact

The financial impact of the imprisonment of a family member was discussed by virtually all participants: only Leah, who wryly observed that due to her health problems and her husband's long sentence she now probably received more benefits than ever before, and Ruby whose partner was serving a relatively short period on remand did not feel this was an issue. For the remaining participants financial pressures arose from changing living arrangements and a range of costs associated with providing for the person in custody, a finding which is very much in-keeping with the wider literature (Codd 2008; Smith et al 2007; Peelo et al 1991; Arditti et al 2003). For some, these changes were dramatic and distressing. Following his stepson's conviction, Bill's relationship with his partner broke down, and in addition to the inevitable emotional impact, this also caused a number of practical problems for Bill as he struggled to manage financially and navigate the bureaucracy of the benefits system:

**Bill:** My partner ran away and I had to deal with the DWP and that puts a huge strain on you. I had debts that I couldn't pay, I couldn't manage my gas and electricity. I had to go down to citizens advice to get help because the woman on the phone from the DWP was using lots of long DWP words that I didn't understand, not normal words.

Another parent who saw a marked change in their personal finances following the imprisonment of their child was Joanne who, as noted in chapter four, gave up her job to care for her granddaughter when her daughter Aimie received a custodial sentence. This shift from employment to claiming benefits was difficult for Joanne, both financially and emotionally:

**Joanne:** I'm just not used to living on no money – I cleared £250 a week wages and now I get £70 a week. I have never been on the dole in my life, it is quite embarrassing.

Similarly to Bill, Joanne also found the practical process of claiming benefits difficult, as this must be done online, and as she is not confident using a computer Joanne spent a month without any income at all. Further, as was seen in chapter four, this significant drop in income coincided with a

considerable increase in expense as Joanne sought not only to care for her baby granddaughter but to also maintain her daughter's tenancy so that she would not be homeless on release. As Joanne explains, while they were able to find someone else to live in the property, the cost of this was not simply limited to covering the rent; she also had to maintain all the utilities so that these would not be disconnected.

Increased costs do not only originate from changing family circumstances: they are also inherent to the process of staying in touch with the prisoner (Comfort 2008; Light and Campbell 2006). Edinburgh is now a Community Facing Prison, with much of its population originating from Edinburgh or the surrounding area, and Lynn was the only participant who live further afield. Nevertheless, a number of participants found transport to and from the prison to be expensive (Lynne, Brooke and Darcy, Joanne and Sophie), and given that Edinburgh is an easily accessible prison that is well served by a number of local bus routes, this reflects the participants' low incomes as much as the costs incurred by prison visiting. The expense incurred will also be influenced by often the family are permitted to visit: remand prisoners are entitled to six visits a week and many of participants would visit this regularly, despite noting that the cumulative cost of visiting every day soon adds up.

Transport to visits was not the only financial burden placed on families; many also make financial contributions to the persons PPC account in an attempt to make their time in custody less difficult, and to allow the person to phone home. While families valued being able to stay in contact through phone calls a number of participants, particularly those without landlines, felt the cost of phoning out of the prison was very high (Dickie 2013). Many also provided clothing, books, DVDs or other personal items for the person in custody, something that could be costly, particularly as many of these items of clothing or other property often had to be purchased new. Participants explained that items such as books or games consoles must be sourced from approved retailers to meet security requirements; while the relatively sedentary prison regime could cause the person in custody to gain weight, as was the case for Liam, with the result that the clothes he has

home no longer fit (see Smoyer 2015 here for a discussion of similar findings).

Some families tried to share this additional financial burden amongst themselves, by each making a regular contribution to the person's PPC:

**Alisha:** Like for example I get £60 a week, and I give him £20 a fortnight. His older sister gives him £20 a fortnight too, although she didn't give him any money when we was on remand, she only started when he was convicted. And when his little sister gets a job, she'll start helping too.

This is almost one fifth of Alisha's monthly income and therefore the contribution from her daughters will help to relieve some of the financial pressure she is under, however it also widens the scope of the 'collateral' impact of imprisonment to the siblings in the family, a group who have been neglected by much of the literature to date (Meek et al 2010). Other participants, in contrast, rather than sharing this financial burden found themselves supporting more than one prisoner. Tracey described how occasionally she will also pay money into the account of someone that her partner has befriended who does not receive any money from family outside, that the two of them will then share (see also Comfort 2008: 80 for a discussion of similar findings).

Many participants felt that without their regular financial contributions their family member would struggle to cope in custody. In addition to the prison environment being characterised by the deprivation of goods and services (Sykes 1958), participants worried that their partner or son would be victimised by other prisoners if they did not have sufficient resources to display their material worth through a sufficiency of toiletries, tobacco and designer clothing. These concerns are not unfounded as Crewe has argued that being unable to afford toiletries and sweets, or not being seen to take care of oneself by wearing designer clothes, trainers or jewellery can be equated to being judged a "social and criminal failure" by other prisoners (Crewe 2009: 278; see also Jewkes 2002 here). However for many participants providing this financial support that can provide the person in custody with food and other necessities was also hugely symbolic, serving

as a way of demonstrating their love and commitment (Smoyer 2015), as Chloe explains:

**Chloe:** I do loads for him – I put money in his PPC and hand in clothes and property. It’s ok because I get ESA [Employment Support Allowance] and DLA [Disability Living Allowance] but that money is meant for me and not for him but then I want to provide for him so it is my own choice. That’s what it is to be committed, I don’t want him to be in there and not have anything.

This perception that prisoners need additional income from their family to cope is perhaps unsurprising given that prison wages range between £4.80 - £12.00 a week (Scottish Parliament 2013), and many prisoners do not work while serving their sentence. Remand prisoners are exempt from work (Prison Rule 85); and there is a reported reluctance amongst this group to participate in work or education as this may be construed as an admission of guilt, or because they are focused on settling into the prison regime (Scottish Parliament 2013). Others, like Tracey’s partner, may actively resist working in prison for fear this will affect their benefit entitlement upon release. These prisoners are therefore entirely reliant on their families for access to the canteen, and as they do not generally have work or education to fill their time they may often be bored, which perhaps might explain how Brooke’s view that her partner needs the £80 - £90 she hands in for him each fortnight.

## Time

Yet supporting a family member in prison does not only strain financial resources, it also takes up considerable amounts of time. While a visit may only be 30 minutes – an hour long, families are required to arrive at least half an hour before the visit is scheduled to begin, and many arrive far earlier for fear of being late. Further, many participants found travelling to the prison to be time consuming, often taking between an hour and two hours. As a result, attending a single visiting session can take up much of the day, and many participants (13 of 19) remarked that visiting had become a routine or dominant part of their lives. For example, Brooke and Darcy explained that they felt that the “*whole day revolves around this place*”;

while Tracey remarked that both she her friend who also had a partner on remand felt that visits and phone calls had become “*their lives*”, replacing everything else she used to do. Sophie elaborated on this further, explaining that because she did not want to miss her visit she organised her whole day around this, but because visits were often in the middle of the day this left her with little time to do anything else with her young children.

Further, physically visiting the establishment was not the only drain on participants’ time: Becky, Jackie and Susan also noted that they felt “tied to the house” waiting for the prisoner to phone, as they did not want to miss any calls and phoning a mobile is too expensive. As for the women in Comfort’s study, this was experienced as frustrating, at times distressing, and caused some participants to limit their activities outside the home (Comfort 2008: 88). For other participants, the desire to provide clothes and shoes for the person in prison were not only a drain on their limited budgets, as items that fulfilled the dual requirements of being of sufficient value to guard against bullying, but also satisfying the Prison’s specifications of acceptable property, could be difficult to find:

**Sophie:** he needs clothes put in, but he’s not allowed specific kinds of clothes, I have to give him specific stuff and it is like, why?...its like now I’ve got to go and rake in shops for trousers that dinnae have these strings and it is always really expensive and it’s like ‘How do you expect me to keep buying the things that he needs when you make them so expensive?’

As noted above, demands on time can be particularly high for families of remand prisoners, as they are entitled to six visits a week and all the participants in this situation (Tracey, Sophie, Chloe, Ruby, Brooke and Darcy) often visited that frequently. Further, the uncertainty created by a period of remand dominated their thoughts these women who are waiting to find out if their partner will be convicted, how long their sentence might be, and in some cases struggling with what to tell the children. Yet, while this “not knowing” was particularly difficult for the partners of remand prisoners, the feeling that their life is “not their own” was also expressed by participants visiting a family member who has been convicted. Susan felt that she was “*wishing my life away*”, always thinking ahead to her son’s liberation date, while Jackie remarked that in her experience of visiting her

husband and then her son for many years, families affected by imprisonment often feel that the prison plays a central role in their lives:

**Jackie:** People up here are all in the same circumstances – their lives revolve around visits and phone calls and making sure that he has enough in his PPC

**CJ: Is that how it feels, that your life revolves around this place rather than being your own?**

**Jackie:** This has become my life, it's had to.

This phenomenon has also been observed by Kathleen McDermott and Roy King who argue that like prisoners, families affected by imprisonment also “do their bird a day at a time” as they too attempt to cope (McDermott and King 1992:58; see also Codd 2000). Indeed, these accounts of the time spent visiting, waiting at home for phone calls, shopping for the prisoner and worrying about their wellbeing resonate with Comfort's argument that supporting their partners in prison subjects women to secondary prisonization - a weakened version of the prison regime that erodes privacy, financial security and emotional wellbeing (Comfort 2008: 66). This is reflected in the sentiment that “we do the sentence too”, which was commonly expressed by participants:

**Tracey:** We are the ones that are coming up for visits, We are the ones that have got to put the money in the PPC, We are the ones that make sure you are clothed and everything do you know what I mean and like that you have got visits and ken you have got letters and pictures and ken like we are the key, his link to the outside world. But it is hard because if he gets five years, I get five years do you know what I mean.

Comfort develops this argument to suggest that the women who participated in her research who had the higher levels of education and financial income were better able to resist secondary prisonization, as the social and financial resources gained from their professional and personal lives enabled them to maintain a stronger foothold in life outside the prison. This can also be seen here, as the families who were most able to resist the feeling that they were “sentenced too” were Joanne, Susan and the Collins family, all of whom were visiting first time offenders, and in contrast to some other participants, did not live in conditions of acute deprivation. For example, some members of the Collins family were quick to highlight that nothing about prison visiting was “normal” to them:

**Daughter age 16:** what's scary is this feels normal now, this is what we do

**Granny:** it's not that it feels normal...

**Niece age 14:** it's more like this is our routine...

**Granny:** That's right, it's more like a routine, it's not normal.

This extract perhaps reveals the power dynamics between Granny Collins and younger members of the family; while prison visiting might feel normal to her granddaughter, she emphasises that it remains an exceptional or alien experience that has had to be incorporated into their routine. As the mother of a first time (but serious) offender, she perhaps wanted to distinguish herself from more regular visitors like Tracey, Jackie and Alisha (Condry 2007). However, the key point here that Granny Collins was keen to draw boundaries the time they spent visiting the prison and the rest of their lives in the community.

The separation these families drew between the prison the remainder of their lives can also be seen in the coping strategies utilised by Joanne and Susan. For instance, Joanne explained that while the small numbers of women receiving visits in HMP Edinburgh created an opportunity for her to visit her daughter every day if she wished (as Yasmeen's family did), she limited her visits to twice a week otherwise she would be at the prison "*half my time as well*". While her life had changed dramatically after her daughter's imprisonment as full-time employment was replaced with full-time care of her granddaughter, in contrast to other participants (discussed below) Joanne did not use the Visitors' Centre as a source of support or entertainment for the baby, looking instead to her own mother and father when she needed help. Susan also utilised resources outside of the prison environment to cope with the additional caring labour she had undertaken as a result of her son's imprisonment, but for Susan this took the form of a short holiday once a year:

**Erica:** if you ever stopped Susan, I mean if you ever sat down and really really thought about your life you would never get back up again, you would grind to a halt

**Susan:** I would never get back up – I mean I'm wanting to get away to the sun and normally when I go on holiday its four days, I can only handle four days because I go myself just simply because I sleep for four days in the sun or I read a book.....Well as I say last year I had four days, and the year before I had four

days and I know I did have quite a big bit of a breakdown myself at one point last year

**CJ: With all the pressure**

**Susan:** aye and emm it was just like no I need a break. If I go abroad, nobody – if I stay at home I will end up with the boys or I will end up doing something, whereas if I leave the country then I do nothing.

This contrasts starkly with the accounts of some of the most marginalised participants, who were much more likely to use the Visitors' Centre as a key (or very often only) source of support. For instance, Bill felt that regular visits helped him to structure his day and manage his poor mental health. Ruby made similar remarks, explaining that visiting her partner every day while he was on remand served as a way of filling her day and entertaining her baby son:

**Ruby:** I like coming up to see him – it fills up my day, otherwise I would just be sitting in the house doing nothing....We get up, get the bus, have the visit and then by the time that we get home its nearly his bedtime. And then we get up and do it all again the next day!

Sophie also explained that she was always early for visits because she had “nothing else to do with my day”; while Jackie and her friends would come to the Visitors' Centre to meet up for a coffee and a chat even when they did not have a visit booked, because they felt comfortable there, as the following extract from my fieldwork diary illustrates:

As the afternoon progressed the Visitors' Centre became very quiet so as there was little to observe I began tidying the playroom. In the middle of this Jackie and her friend arrive, playing a drum and singing, explaining amidst much hilarity that they are “busking” for a cup of tea. It turns out that Jackie had wanted to hand in the drum in for her son, but the prison had not taken it so they had come to the Visitors' Centre instead. (Fieldnote April 2014).

There are again connections to be made between the way in which some participants used the Visitors' Centre as a source of support and Comfort's work, as she argues that for some of the most marginalised women, the prison system becomes a social agency of first resort. In the absence of services that might help their partner address their unemployment, addictions or poor mental health, or indeed support the women suffering domestic violence, the prison provides these women with safety, financial security and greater emotional intimacy in their relationship (Comfort 2008). Yet the argument here is subtly different: for the most vulnerable



and marginalised participants of this study, the Visitors' Centre (rather than the prison) can improve their sense of wellbeing, not by providing a tool for crisis management, but rather as a means of maintaining or fostering feelings of community participation.

Indeed, participants' accounts suggest that the most vulnerable and marginalised participants are unlikely to be accessing services or even resources such as baby groups, parks, cafes and other leisure activities in their communities. As noted in chapter four, Sophie felt there was nothing for her young family to do where she lives. This resonates with the argument of Malloch, McIvor and Burgess that for many of the areas where women who come into contact with the criminal justice system in Scotland reside are characterised by a profound "absence of meaningful community" and very few resources that could be drawn upon to foster a sense of connection or provide support (Malloch et al 2014). As a result, the Visitors Centre may be the only resource of this kind available to the most marginalised participants. However, as noted in chapter three, this is almost certainly linked to the research setting as Edinburgh Prison has the only purpose built Visitors' Centre in Scotland, which is run by the Salvation Army who provide support and advice to families, and also a programme of activities and events underpinned by the principles of community education (Ceesay 2012).

### **Stigma**

Indeed, that participants such as Jackie actively choose to use the Visitors' Centre rather than other amenities or resources raises questions as to how families affected by imprisonment feel they are perceived by their communities, echoing Condry's argument that secondary stigma can have very real, serious and prolonged consequences for offender's families (Condry 2007). Many participants reporting struggling with feelings of stigmatisation: Bill was so worried about reprisals that he is trying to sell his house in case someone "smashes it up"; while Alisha had faced threats that neighbours would burn her house down. While with the exception of

Joanne who had experienced some teenagers throwing things at her house - but she had “put a stop to this” quite quickly<sup>28</sup> - this victimisation had not escalated past threats, both Colin and Euan who were interviewed in HMP Greenock explained that their families (and in Colin’s case children) had experienced serious violence in retaliation for their offence:

**Euan:** It has been horrible, my mum got a hard time and all because of what I've done, people spitting on her face and all that and somebody shot up the front of the house with a shot gun and my dad got stabbed twice and I've been stabbed in the jail and all because of it. So like I said it has been horrible for them.

Some participants found simply being talked about in their local community very distressing. Susan explained that while she was “past” getting upset about constant discussion of her son’s conviction, it continued to be very difficult for her adult daughter who cannot go out without “*somebody bringing it up*”. Similarly, Tracey chose to become homeless rather than return to the property she had shared with her partner as she didn’t want to face questions from her neighbours after she spent a short period on remand. Others, such as Susan, Bill and Joanne, had experienced hostile reactions from family members who had reduced or ended contact either with the whole family or the person in custody. For example, Joanne explained that relationships between her daughter Aimie and her parents (Aimie’s grandparents) were so strained that her parents were currently refusing all contact with Aimie, and had initially offered her little support in caring for Aimie’s young baby.

These feelings are not just only painful to live with, but can cause family members to actively withdraw from their social networks. Bill told me that in addition to his own children having no contact with him and his step-son due to the nature of his step-son’s offence, he has “*only have about five numbers*” in his phone as he fears that that people will mock or taunt him. Similarly, Tracey explained that while she visited her partner on remand nearly every day, she was reluctant to tell her friends where she had been for

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<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Bill, who appeared very vulnerable as a result of his poor mental health, Joanne presented as resilient and tenacious – she once recounted a story to me about having her purse stolen on holiday – rather than chalking this up to experience Joanne chased the person who had stolen it and demanded it back!

similar reasons. While this point should not be overstated given that only one male family member participated in this research, it may be that there is a gendered element here. Indeed, previous research has found that female partners or mothers of offenders can be seen as undeserving of support, as the very fact that their partner or child has committed a crime means she has failed as a wife, a mother and a civiliser (Peelo et al 1991; Condry 2007; Halsey and Deegan 2015). Indeed Adam, who was interviewed in HMP Greenock, felt that his conviction had been harder on his mother than his father as his mother cares more about how she is viewed by her community:

**CJ: Do you think your sentence has had an impact on your family?**

**Adam:** Oh horrifically so...obviously the psychological impact of your son is a murderer. Not that anybody ever said that my mum, but probably the looks, do you know what I mean. My mum will forever be infamous as

**CJ: Is she, did your offence have quite a big impact where you're from?**

**Adam:** Definitely, my mum grew up in that scheme. It didn't have an impact in the sense that she had to move away from the area or anything like that...but I'm quite sure for probably a year or two their mum was probably more embarrassed than anything else. Because my mum is when these crazy people who sort of, I don't know, cares about what everybody else thinks is a gets the living room decorated every year when we don't even sit in the living room, we sit in the kitchen.

Finally, for almost a third of families (4 of the 14 who participated), these feelings of stigmatisation were compounded by unwanted media attention. Joanne and Leah explained how journalists had “turned up on the doorstep” or waited for them outside court, something that they experienced as an intrusion into their lives at an already difficult time. This intrusion was heightened, however, when the story was published, something that could be experienced as a “punishment” for the whole family.

**Granny Collins:** It was in the news as well so everyone knew – they had a big photo and everything. Being in the news was a nightmare. I know that he has done wrong and that he deserves to be punished, but we are all punished

Leah attempted to protect her children from the worst of the media coverage by keeping them off school the day her husband was sentenced. There is a growing body of research suggesting that the reporting of family member's offences can be particularly upsetting for children and young people (McCulloch and Morrison 2001; Boswell and Wedge 2002; Meek 2010); and that the pervasive nature of modern media can undermine strategies like

Leah's to "manage" the disclosure of the offence and sentence and the impact this has on children (SCCYP 2008, Condry 2007). Indeed, Euan explained that his case continued to attract media attention and journalists would "doorstep" his mother asking for photos or comments to accompany their latest article, despite well over a decade having passed since the original offence:

**Euan:** it [ongoing media coverage] doesn't do anybody any good it opens old wounds for the victim's family and as I said they are at my mum's door and all...and its things like that just fry's your nut, see when you think about getting out because you are never allowed to forget it. Don't get me wrong, I'll never forget it – there is not a day goes by that I don't think about what I've done, but its hard when people keep raking it up and all.

The seemingly permanent and also instantly accessible nature of modern media also greatly worried Jackie, whose son committed a serious offence as a child. Jackie was primarily concerned with how the further media attention would affect her son, as she felt he may be forced to defend himself from other prisoners and would struggle to find employment on release. However the effect that this had on Jackie herself should not be underestimated, and she frequently became visibly upset when discussing this. Describing her situation as "soul destroying", Jackie gave one of the most serious examples of mistreatment by the media as she told me one newspaper had used entrapment techniques to find out more about the family.

Overall, then, participants' accounts clearly demonstrate that choosing to actively support the person in custody comes at considerable cost to the family who must shoulder the cumulative burdens of financial expense, domestic upheaval and emotional distress. Importantly, as was argued in chapter four, a large majority of the participants are women who are already experiencing social marginalisation to a greater or lesser degree, and this encroachment into their lives, finances and thoughts of families serves only to entrench this further. The prison functions as a drain on the already scarce resources of these families, taking away their time and money, leaving many feeling that they too are serving a sentence or that their lives revolve around the prison. While those with the most resources may be able

to resist this process to a greater extent they by no means are unaffected: Joanne was forced to give up her job, the Collins children experienced a change in primary carer and Susan took on part-time care of her grandchildren. Further, material resources cannot protect families from the impact that imprisonment can have on relationships, or the increases in gendered emotional labour required of families. Consequently, as I will argue below, imprisonment can not only have a considerable emotional impact, but it also *reinforces* this wider social pattern by increasing the domestic and caring labour required of women.

## THE COSTS OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR

### Gendered Caring Roles

Indeed, it is well established in the existing research that families affected by imprisonment may experience a range of difficult emotions (Loureiro 2010; Light and Campbell 2006; Loucks 2004; Social Exclusion Unit 2002; Travis and Petersilla 2001; Condry 2007; Braman 2002; Peelo 1991; Travis and Petersilia 2001) and this was very much reflected in the stories of those who participated in this research. Many participants spoke movingly about the difficult emotions triggered by the imprisonment of a family member: the sixteen year old daughter of the Collins Family described how she felt about her father's imprisonment as "*It knocks the breath out of you, its soul destroying*". Leah felt that her husband's imprisonment was "*tearing the family apart*"; while Jackie likened her son's imprisonment to "*a bereavement without a body*". Erica put her feelings about her great-nephew's imprisonment simply: "*I was just awfully, awfully sad hen*". Partners in particular expressed feelings of loneliness or abandonment, and Tracey described being without her partner as "*pure boredom*"; while some parents, such as Alisha, felt at least partly to blame for the offence because she thinks that her family "*bring him down*". Perhaps the most extreme example was given by Bill who, as noted in chapter four, had attempted suicide on a number of occasions following his step-son's imprisonment, which he felt had left a "*big hole in my life*".

For many participants, these feelings were complicated by the additional caring work generated both by providing for the person in custody and keeping the family going in the community. Some, such as Sophie and Alisha, also felt strong feelings of anger that they had committed the offence and left them to cope with the “fall out”. As Sophie explains, the imprisonment of a family member can affect even the smallest aspects of daily life:

**Sophie:** I spoke to a few people [who are also visiting], you can see that they’re just like so exhausted. It’s tiring. It’s draining. It’s boring. It’s a big thing on your life. Like everything changes. Like, even things you don’t expect to change, it changes. Like, going to the toilet myself, I can’t. Because (laughter) Rosie [Sophie’s daughter] is here. That changes. I can’t walk down the hall myself because she is chasing me. But when he [Kian – Sophie’s partner] was there, she could play with him so I could have like two seconds just to go and do what I need to do. All those things change. The littlest things change, like getting buses, that’s stressful. And if I had to fold the buggy<sup>29</sup>.....

**CJ : Oh my god.**

**Sophie:** Oh my goodness. I’m not...I haven’t folded that thing yet.

(Laughter)....But, even going shopping on my own, that’s stressful.....at least once, twice a weekend I need to go shopping.

**CJ: Because you can’t carry that much. And they need so much.**

**Sophie:** Because I can’t even.... The buggy that I’ve got hasn’t got handles. So I can’t even have a bags, hang bags on it. I need to try and fit as much as I can under the buggy and that’s all I can get.

To cope with these changes, some participants had to take on the role of the person in custody within the family. Leah explained that she had to become both “mum and dad” to her children in the absence of her husband, and as her older sons were entering their teenage years, this meant guiding them through the typically male domain of puberty, girls and shaving:

**Leah:** But it has also had a big impact on the boys as well because they are at an age when they need their dad. Like he has missed one of them starting shaving – I had to sit down man to man with him and show him how to do it – and no boy wants their mum to show them how to start shaving.

Susan made a similar observation with regard to her nephew, who had

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<sup>29</sup> At the time of interview Sophie’s baby is only a few weeks old, while her daughter Rosie is around 18 months. Sophie has one of the biggest double buggies I have ever seen, hence my trepidation at the thought of ever having to fold it. Despite its size, the buggy does not fit Rosie well and her feet can touch the ground. The team at the Visitors’ Centre are working to try and find funding for a more suitable buggy for Sophie as she cannot afford one herself.

looked to her son Liam as a father figure as his own father is not in his life, remarking that he is “*at that age that he needs to speak to a man*”. While families may attempt to compensate for these additional pressures and shifts in roles, for example Susan was keen to allow her nephew time alone with his uncle now that he was old enough to visit the prison without another adult, there may inevitably be less time and emotional energy available for other children in the family (Codd 2008; Moore and Convery 2011; McCulloch and Morrison 2001). However, I would argue that these findings do not only apply to children, and adult siblings may also be resentful of the lack of time their parents now had for them. Susan explained how her adult daughter had struggled to cope following the offence and felt that her brother “always comes first”. Lynne also noted that her other children felt that she did too much for Kian and Sophie, and were always “nipping” at her as a result.

For some families, these feelings were exacerbated by the absence of personal responsibility within the prison, and their view that the prison was like a “playground” (Lynne, Leah and Sophie). For example, Lynne and Sophie felt that Kian was just running around “having a laugh with his pals” whilst in custody, without having to do any caring or domestic tasks.

Similar remarks were also made by Leah:

**Leah:** And the thing is its alright for him in there, they have no worries in there. I hand in £20 a week for him, he’s well kept, he has no responsibilities, it is the family that suffer not him – he is probably enjoying the break while we are getting punished!

**CJ: Do you think he knows how hard it is for you?**

**Leah:** He couldn’t imagine how hard it is for me, I couldn’t even say it in words

These feelings were further complicated, however, by a recognition by the same participants of the distress of the prisoner, and the need for them to develop ways to cope. Sophie explained that while Kian would not want to admit it, he was “lonely and scared” being in the jail; while Lynne acknowledged that Kian had been very upset to miss the birth of his and Sophie’s first child. Tracey explained how her usually insomniac partner would sleep all day while in prison as a way “blocking things out”.

Similarly, Alisha recounted that her son had said “nobody can hate him

more than he hates himself”; while Jackie remarked that prison “destroys you” as you have no dignity and are “always watching your back”. Alisha and Jackie had both had a family member who had died in custody they were particularly fearful that something might happen to their sons; however similar fears were expressed by many other participants (Susan, Erica, Sophie, Bill, Alisha and Becky). In the most extreme cases, concern about the prisoner could also cause families to take undue risks with their own liberty. For example, Alisha explained that she had taken cannabis into a visit for her son because she was worried about how he was coping:

**Alisha:** But it is hard for him, like his classes [group work for sex offenders] and that he talks to me about the stories ... And he can't talk to the prison about it because they might think he is talking about it in the wrong way so he talks to me about it. I don't want to listen but I do because at least he is getting it out, but I worry because the calls are recorded. Like there was one time that a young lad got raped by four other guys on the hall and he was sobbing down the phone to me about it, telling me about how he could hear the screaming. And I've never seen him like that before, because like I said big boys don't cry, that's what it is like where we are big boys don't cry or you get called a pussy. So I was so worried about him that I got caught passing hash on a visit.

While many would view the decision to take drugs into the prison for her son (which ultimately resulted in Alisha being convicted herself and serving a community penalty) as a poor one, I would argue that this can be understood as a tangible manifestation of the emotional labour Alisha is already undertaking to support her son. As she explains in the extract quoted above, she listens to details from her son's sex offender group work – even though she does not want to – because she thinks it is better for him “to get it out”. Alisha's account resonates with much of the literature on gendered nature of emotional labour as “*it has often been observed that women fulfil a cathartic, quasi-therapeutic function in regulating men's emotional lives, calming their anger, helping them accept the injustices and difficulties of life*” (Bourdieu 2001: 77; see also Reay 2004; Duncombe and Marsden 1995; James 1989). Yet, as I will demonstrate below, the gendered dynamics of emotional labour within families affected by imprisonment can have considerable costs for women, even where they do not adopt such risky strategies as Alisha's drug smuggling as a result.

### Costs of Emotional Labour



In their insightfully titled chapter “*Prison rule 102: stand by your man*” McDermott and King observe that not only do female partners often feel considerable pressure to provide emotional and practical support to their partner, even at expense of their own welfare, but also imprisonment damages reciprocity and promotes selfishness in relationships as the person in custody struggles to cope (1992: 63). This argument was reflected in participants’ stories, many of whom felt that the person in custody could be demanding in their repeated requests for more money, visits or property from their families<sup>30</sup>, as Lynne explains:

**Lynne:** They can be on at you all the time, they want money for this, they need money for that, clothes and all that. And I would come up every day, because he wants a visit every day, and I would go because he can be controlling from in there.

Interestingly, Lynne made a connection here between the prisoner being quite controlling and the burden of meeting all their demands often being shouldered primarily by one person, explaining that the person in custody can “*take everything out on you, because they have no one else to take it out on*”. Thus it may also be that by shouldering the majority of the caring burden alone leaves women more vulnerable to this type of demanding behaviour as they feel that if they do not provide for the prisoner, no one else will. For some women, these demands may escalate into abusive behaviour; as one member of the Visitors’ Centre staff team observed, there is a connection between abuse, power and control in relationships and the construction of caring as central to a woman’s social identity:

**Ashley (Visitors’ Centre):** Men get more visits than women, and a whole lot more, this isn’t just a little bit more they get a lot more..... Women in the community, and we hear it a lot, are told that they should come and visit, this is an expectation that you are the carer and you will take care of your partner. And so you will come up and see him, and you will hand money in and you will get him clothes and if you are and you will bring the children up and you will make sure that you are here all of the time. That you are there for phone calls etc etc and there is no expectation like that on men. If your bird ends up in the jail then chuck her and get another one is basically the response that there is. And I do think that it comes from this carers perspective and...in the past few months we have had a huge amount of domestic violence disclosed. And the thing that I keep hearing is

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<sup>30</sup> This view was also shared by many prison officers, as will be discussed below

but I need to take care of him, and he says that I am the only one that can do it, so I and the only one that can change him you know it is up to me to do this.

Similarly, prison officers also observed some men could secure the ongoing support of their partner through coercion or control, with the result that “*she’ll come to visit because of fear or intimidation*” (Sam, prison officer), but that female prisoners did not have the same power over male partners. Thus, violence or abuse in a relationship may be interwoven with gendered social narratives about caring behaviour, creating an expectation that women will “stand by their man”, even when this is to not only to the detriment of their own wellbeing but also where it jeopardises their safety. Indeed, while Comfort has argued that the prison can provide respite from a violent or controlling partner (Comfort 2008), this reprieve is by no means absolute. For example, prisoners can exercise power over their partner by phone contact; demanding that she be home at certain times to receive phone calls (Comfort 2008), although men in custody may construct these calls as motivated by concern for their partner’s welfare rather than an exercise of power:

**Chloe:** Yeah he can’t trust no one – he says that ‘you just go out after the visit and you forget about me’ but I told him that its not like that. So he phones me to see where I am and things. He also worries that I might take an overdose because of what happened with his ex, but I’ve told him that I am never going to do that again.

Indeed, positioning themselves as powerless may paradoxically allow men in custody to continue to influence the lives and actions of their partners. In addition to phoning at particular times, men may express concern that their girlfriend will be unfaithful (as Brooke, Tracey and Chloe’s partners did), with the result that Tracey had limited her own social life when her partner had been in prison in the past as it would not be “fair” on him to go out. Other men, such as Chloe and Sophie’s partners, positioned themselves as powerless by refusing to take full responsibility for the offence by attributing at least part of the blame to their partner: Chloe because she had thrown him out of her house while he was using drugs and Sophie because she had not answered her phone to him in the middle of the night. Yet, alongside these narratives of blame, Chloe and Sophie’s partners also emphasised their love and commitment to the relationship, and these

complex dynamics can be seen in the extract from my interview with Chloe below:

**Chloe:** I chucked him out of my house and he took valium, so he says that it is my fault that he got caught.

**CJ: Really? He said that to you?!**

**Chloe:** Aye, I made him hand himself in because I won't have any of that in my house. He came round to be house valled up looking to get changed and I made him get changed out in the stair. I don't want the police coming to my door so I made him hand himself in – I think if you've not got anything to hide then you've got no problems with the police – I don't want to be involved in any of that.....

**CJ: What do you want to happen in the future?**

**Chloe:** I want him to come out and settle down, I want him to get a job and to get married and have a bairn. I want to go back to work as well.....

**CJ: And do you think that will happen, that he will stay out of trouble?**

**Chloe:** He says that he will and I hope so, but at the same time you know that it is 'jail talk'

**CJ: What do you mean 'jail talk'?**

**Chloe:** They just tell you what they think that you want to hear when they are inside.

Chloe's discussion of "jail talk" resonates with Comfort's argument that imprisonment can heighten emotional intimacy within relationships, as male partners become more attentive and expressive (Comfort 2008). Yet the undercurrent of blame introduces an additional degree of complexity when seeking to understand the emotional character and tone of relationships affected by imprisonment. It has been suggested that blaming themselves for their partner's offending can make it easier for women to make sense of the offence and in turn to continue to support their partner (Condry 2007: 131); yet I would argue that by attributing blame in this way male prisoners are attempting to place an obligation on their partner to "stand by her man" and actively support him throughout the sentence. This may be an implicit rather than explicit process, and is likely to function alongside the other social pressures on women to provide caring and emotional labour discussed above. Nevertheless, the attribution of blame in this way seems to be of greater benefit to the man in custody than his partner in the community.

This conflation of love, commitment and control can also be seen in the account given by Joanne of the actions of her daughter Aimie's partner; perhaps unsurprising as she is on the outside of her daughter's relationship looking in with concern. Joanne explained that Aimie's partner had

suggested they try for another baby once he was moved to the open estate, something she interpreted as an attempt to maintain his “hold” over Aimie:

**Joanne:** So he’s put this great idea in my daughter’s head that if that’s the case [that he will get home leave when in the open estate] then well you could get pregnant again. I’m like, no, no!

**CJ: But why?**

**Joanne:** Obviously so that he has got a hold on her while he’s still in the jail

**CJ: Do you think that’s what he’s doing? He’s worried that without another baby if she is on her own for a year and realises that she is fine without him**

**Joanne:** Mmmm Hmmm, completely – whereas if she pregnant and having to cope with that, and cope with her and everything then she will be pretty tied down to the house sort of thing.

These examples illustrate that abusive and controlling behaviour can take many forms, and that different audiences may derive different understandings from the same events. This can also be seen in a story Tracey told me about her partner’s refusal to take drugs from her that she had smuggled into the visiting room at the request of another prisoner, which I interpreted as controlling or abusive behaviour, but that she told in a rather “matter of fact” way, as if it was of little consequence:

**Tracey:** My partner, I can remember the last sentence my partner had, we were in, and I took something for somebody and he wouldnae take it, I had to swallow it in the visit room, he wouldnae take it off me

**CJ: Oh shit, why not? He didn’t want to get caught?**

**Tracey:** Nah because he said ‘no, folk arenae using my girlfriend as parcel force, no danger’....he was like swallow it...I was like what?! And he was like get in swallowed I dinnae want it. And I had to swallow it.

These accounts should alert us to the reality that domestic violence can continue despite imprisonment, particularly as women who are being victimised in this way are perhaps amongst the least likely to participate in research. Indeed, while Tracey resisted being positioned as a victim here, I observed a number of serious examples of abusive behaviour over the course of my fieldwork, as the following extract from my diary illustrates:

When I arrived a very anxious (and I thought pregnant) woman was waiting in the Visitors Centre. She had obviously been there a while and had been in discussion with the staff. It transpired that her partner in the jail had told her that she had to come and meet his cell-mate and give him somewhere to stay, but he had not turned up and she thought that possibly he was ‘a junkie’ and had disappeared looking for drugs, but as she had never met him so she didn’t know. She said that she was concerned that her ex could have put the cell-mate up to it in an attempt to find out where she was as she had been moved following his conviction for a

violent murder. She was clearly really scared and explained that she couldn't leave as she was waiting for her partner to phone her, and if he phoned and she wasn't in the visitors centre he wouldn't believe that she had come up at all. I felt quite unsettled at how vulnerable and fearful this woman was. (Fieldnote April 2014).

Therefore, while imprisonment physically separates families it does not necessarily disrupt either the gendered burden of care placed upon women or power dynamics that exist within relationships. Smart's critique of the propensity to romanticise the family, without recognising the "darker side" of family life (Smart 2007), has particular traction here, given the considerable policy interest in families affected by imprisonment. This argument adds further weight to Codd's assertion that policy makers should not see families as a resource for reducing reoffending rather than individuals with legitimate needs of their own (Codd 2008); and we should recognise that for some women domestic abuse may be a very real risk to their safety.

## **UNDERMINING RECIPROCITY**

So far this chapter has argued that supporting a family member in custody and coping with the repercussions of their imprisonment may require a considerable flow of resources from the family, in terms of time, money and emotional labour; potentially increasing the marginality experienced by families who may already have scarce resources. Further, as the bulk of this support is often provided by women, be it the prisoner's mother or partner, this flow of resources can serve to reproduce and strengthen the wider social patterns of gendered caring labour. This final section will develop one of the themes alluded to above: that these processes are further compounded by the barriers that imprisonment poses to the reciprocal exchange of love, care and commitment between the person in custody and their family in the community that are now thought to be amongst the defining characteristics of family relationships (see chapter two for a discussion of the relevant literature). As will be shown below, imprisonment disrupts reciprocal family relationships in a range of complex ways including physical separation, difficulties navigating the prison system and the strategies that participants adopt to cope with a sentence.

Perhaps most obviously, once a family member receives a prison sentence their freedom to interact with their family is reduced, as all contact between family members and the person in custody must be mediated through the prison and its operating procedures. For example, at HMP Edinburgh visits are booked by the prisoner rather than the family. While this system may be necessary in that it protects prisoners' privacy in that it allows them control over who to disclose their imprisonment to, it also largely allows them to conduct relationships on their own terms. This was clearly illustrated to me one day by Sophie's frustration that Kian had booked her in for a morning and afternoon visit on the same day:

Sophie was in for a bonding visit this morning and her partner had also booked her on the first visit in the afternoon. She told us 'why would you do that, I've got milk to buy and nappies to get' – but she is still waiting for the visit anyway (Fieldnote March 2014)

Conversely, it can also be distressing for families when the person in custody withdraws from family life and does not book a visit, as they may be very concerned about the wellbeing (and possibly also whereabouts as a number of participants interviewed in custody were not expecting to receive a prison sentence) of the person in question. For example, Becky was interviewed while waiting to hand in money for her son, who had recently been brought into custody on remand, in the hope that he would use some of this for phone credit so he could then contact her and arrange a time for her to come and visit and was visibly distressed by not knowing when she would see him.

Further, booking visits in this way also allows prisoners to use the prison rules and regulations to manage their relationships. For example, prior to our interview Donna had made up her mind that she no longer wants to be with her husband, and seems to be utilising her sentence as a tool for managing the end of her marriage, explaining that she has told her husband that he is permanently barred from visiting her when the ban is only temporary:

**Donna:** I speak to him all the time on the phone and he would come and visit in a second but...the first visit we had, they put him out and barred him. It was a suspicion so he's only barred for three months, but I've just told him he's barred.

**CJ: Just because its easier?**

**Donna:** I dunno, I just cannae be bothered, I don't know what it is....

**CJ: Is it because you can't be bothered seeing him, or is it because you can't be bothered with the staff waiting to catch you doing something?**

**Donna:** I don't know, I just think that because like I'm out soon and my head is just a bit like I really need to start distancing myself if I want to get out and make a clean break and go and get my own place and whatever I really need to start doing it the now, I cannae just let him come up and visit and then get out and say 'see you later' you know what I mean it wouldn't be fair. So that's why I'm trying to distance myself, I've tried it a few times before – because I feel bad because I do love him and I've got a lot of respect for him but I'm just not in love with him anymore and I don't want to be in a relationship with him anymore.

Thus here Donna is using the “excuse” of prison security and bureaucracy, something that is often a source of considerable frustration for prisoners and their families<sup>31</sup>, as a means of exerting some control over her relationship.

Further, while men and women in custody can now keep in contact with their families by phone, family members must not only often provide the money to fund these phone calls, but also then wait until that money has processed and added to the person's PPC, and then for that person to phone them. This prevents families from being able to immediately contact the person in custody if something happens, or indeed as many female partners noted they simply need some emotional support from their partner. While they are able to contact the prison if they have particular concerns to request that the prisoner phone home, Sophie wryly observed that as the prison had not told her partner Kian when she went into labour, she had little confidence in this system:

**Sophie:** But knowing that they never told him I was in labour, what makes them...what would make them [go and tell him]....so I have to wait until he managed to get in touch with me. Because he's not got any money on his phone at the moment so he can't phone my anyway because he never got the money on time because their canteen is on a Tuesday and I don't get paid until Wednesday. So its going to be a full week before he can use anything.

The issue of phone contact between prisoners and their families has recently received political and media attention in Scotland, as the Chief Executive of

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<sup>31</sup> This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Seven.

the Scottish Prison Service Colin McConnell suggested that providing phones in each cell could be beneficial and allow more “normal” family contact, however this was then ruled out by the Justice Secretary Kenny McCaskill following a hostile media reaction (see Schinkle 2014: 131 for a discussion). As Schinkel observes, the adverse reaction to this proposal is unfortunate as regular and reciprocal phone contact may be a useful tool in attempting to ensure that family relationships remain part of the day-to-day lives of those in custody.

Yet, while all participants greatly valued their family relationships, their accounts suggest that such a task is by no means straightforward, as many took steps to reduce the frequency of contact with their families or limit who they would permit to visit them. For some, the decisions were borne out of a desire to protect their families from what they felt are the worst aspects of the prison regime. For example, Liam only allowed his sons to attend the designated children’s visits, while Alex did not have regular contact with his young cousins to avoid “putting them through” the process of visiting. In contrast, others participants struggled with the frequency with which their family wanted to see them. For example, Ian explained that his own reservations to regular visits stemmed in part from the mundane nature of day-to-day prison life, which left him with little to say to his family:

**Ian:** I don't really like visits - as I say my mum and that will come up - before my son was born and I was remanded they used to come up maybe once, twice a week and I hated it because they are walking away. It is not so much that they are walking away, it is more so that they are coming up and you have got nothing to say to each other, unless something is happening outside because nothing happens in here.... And then for them to come up two days later, I've never ever really seen the point, it is more so for them.

Participants also noted that even if they did have things that they wished to discuss with their families there are features of the prison environment that prevented them from being able to do so. Some, such as Ross, felt that the limited duration and frequency of visits had restricted his interactions with his family to a fairly superficial level with the result that “*you never talk about anything personal*”. Similarly, For Ian, who describes himself as “*quite loud*”, the lack of privacy in the visiting room was an issue that left him and his visitors feeling “*awkward*” when they came to see him (see



also Schinkel 2014; Light and Campbell 2006, Peelo et al 1991 here).

These barriers these difficulties pose to open and honest communication may also be compounded by visitors actively seeking to avoid sensitive, personal or difficult subjects for fear of ruining a “good” visit (see Nesmith and Ruhland 2008; Jewkes 2002; McDermott and King 1993). Indeed, a number of participants interviewed in the Visitors’ Centre reported concealing any distress or upset that they felt as they did not want to add the worries or difficulties of the person in custody:

**Bill:** I started calling myself two face because when I go in I put a brave face on because I don’t want him to worry but sometimes I do come out and I cry.

**Brooke:** it is breaking me on the outside but I dinnae want to show him that but and its breaking him and all (sighs)

However, Chloe was also anxious not tell her partner anything that might cause him to lose his temper because he “*can go from zero to 90 just like that*”, echoing Comfort’s argument that women will jeopardise their own emotional wellbeing to promote that of their partner, partly because they love him and partly for fear that any incidents in the prison could result in additional criminal charges or time in custody (Comfort 2008). While the desire to shield the person in custody from upsetting events is understandable, particularly given that participants like Simon and Liam described how difficult it could be for them to feel helpless to comfort or assist their family when they had previously been “the man of the family”, many others who were interviewed in custody described their distress at what they saw as a misguided attempt to protect them (Liam, Adam, Ross and Lorna). Even those like Ian who felt some relief at being insulated from major family traumas noted that they also felt considerable guilt at having not been able to support their family in a time of crisis, as he explains reflecting on the death of his father and brother through illness:

**Ian:** I think that is the hardest part of being in [explaining what prison is like to my son]; that and guilt towards obviously my mum, and my dad and my brother when they had cancer - because I kind of seen the two of them going through it at the beginning and then the last year of it I was in [prison] and I kind of felt relief because I didn't have to see them going through it all the time, but then when they eventually passed away I felt guilt that I wasn't there.

Despite these feeling of distress and guilt, participants who were interviewed whilst serving their sentence also withheld aspects of their lives or feelings from their families, similarly motivated by a desire to protect those who are most important to them. Some, such as Lorna, would deliberately conceal events that she knows particularly worry her family, such as the availability of drugs in her hall or violence within the prison:

**Lorna:** But if I've had a shite week and there's been some stuff going on in the hall, there's been fights broken out in the hall or there's been drugs flying about or whatever I don't go and tell my mum all of that stuff – I know that there are things that I keep from my mum and from my family so I'm pretty sure that there are things that they keep from us. Even my aunty dying, my mum didn't tell me.

Indeed, Liam, Lorna and Yasmeen all noted that they were very concerned about their family's perception of what being in prison was like, as with little prior experience of the criminal justice system these were often informed by Americanized television portrayals that bear little resemblance to life in a contemporary Scottish prison. They explained that their families worried about if they would be safe from other prisoners, if they were allowed out of their cell, where they ate their meals, and perhaps particularly movingly Liam recounted how his son had asked him if he had a bed to sleep in. This highlights the very real need for the provision of accurate and accessible information to families not only about how to navigate the prison system (how to book visits, pay in money, where to go for help and support etc.) but also on what a typical prison day and environment is like to help to assuage these concerns. This can be a particular issue for parents, as both Liam and Ian described how they had attempted to strike a delicate balance when talking to their children about the prison environment: on one and they wanted to reassure them, but on the other they did not want their sons to think prison is "easy".

Participants who had experienced more contact with the criminal justice system or who are serving life or indeterminate sentences had different reasons for concealing certain elements of their lives. This was not only limited to "bad" or distressing events: some would conceal (or delay revealing) positive news, for example that they may soon be progressing to open conditions, because they felt that their families did not understand the

complexities of their sentence and the prison system, and they wanted to protect their families from disappointment. Again this strategy is understandable as Alex explained he had first been told he would be able to progress to open conditions “soon” many months ago, and he felt that he and his family had been “*messed about for almost two years*” because of changes in his sentence plan. Further, many participants who are serving a life sentence were also painfully aware that their families’ lives had moved on without them during the years that they had been in custody, and would therefore conceal any difficulties they were experiencing to prevent burdening their families with their problems.

Additionally, some life sentenced prisoners limited their interactions with their families as a means of coping with their sentence. For example, shortly before he was interviewed Simon had taken the decision himself to withdraw from his family network, despite being amongst the participants with the largest number of significant relationships in his life. Prior to the time of interview Simon had kept in touch with his daughter, ex-wife, mother, brother and his brother’s wife and child through visits, telephone calls and as he had progressed through his sentence Special Escorted Leaves (or SELs). However, Simon was currently experiencing some difficulty with his sentence progression and had taken the decision to reduce the amount of contact that he has with his family, refusing visits and phoning only his daughter regularly. Simon worries that having his family visit him will make him more likely to become involved in an altercation with prison officers, which in turn would hinder his progression through his life sentence, so while he is “choking” to see his daughter and baby niece he has chosen to greatly reduce contact with his family because “*if I don’t keep my head focused on this [my sentence] then I am as good as done*”.

Similarly, Euan recalled how while he was now actively taking steps to maintain a positive relationship with his mother, in the past he had retreated from his family relationships as he was instead using drugs and alcohol to cope with his sentence and found it easier to shut his family out than to “face them”:

**CJ:** So why is it that you went off visits for a while, its just harder?

**Euan:** Aye, having to face them – and at the time I had lost loads of weight I was getting full of it all the time and my mum says you're a mess do you know what I mean, and it was easier just to switch off do you know what I mean. Even though looking back on it it wasnae nice because she was worried sick, do you know what I mean because if I don't phone for a few days my mum thinks something's happened do you know what I mean. But at the time I just couldn't deal with things – because even in here I'm not a great fan of talking on that phone, I just need to do it to keep the peace do you know what I mean, because like I say I don't want her to worry.

There are interesting parallels here with Schinkel's research with men serving a long-term sentence, a proportion of who also chose to reduce contact with their families as limiting their horizons to within the prison itself was an effective strategy that helped them not only to cope with imprisonment itself, but also the damage that it can do to relationships through fear that that they themselves would be rejected, or because relationships were eroded by the monotony of the prison environment which left men with little new to say to their families:

Cutting off contact...solves several problems: it reduces thoughts of those outside, thereby minimising the pain of missing them, it helps to maintain control over relationships and means that they are not diminished through superficial interactions (Schinkel 2014: 74).

As Schinkel rightly observes, such a strategy will not be employed by all prisoners, however the difficulties that prisoners might experience when attempting to cope with their sentence and the potential impact this might have on relationships should not be underestimated. Indeed, Jewkes, drawing on the work of Liebling, has questioned whether it is appropriate to talk about "coping" with imprisonment at all, given the psychological distress experienced by many prisoners (Jewkes 2002:12). It should perhaps then not surprise us that for some, particularly those serving a very long sentence, reducing family contact and thoughts of outside can help to ease some of the worst pains of imprisonment (see also Schinkel 2014, Cohen and Taylor 1972 here).

Yet the accounts of participants in this research also illustrate that this is not necessarily an 'all or nothing' process: while some participants reduced contact, or particular forms of contact, as a means of coping, none wanted

these relationships to end permanently. Indeed some, such as Euan, resumed more active contact with his family at various points of his sentence. Therefore, while difficulties coping and other barriers to reciprocal relationships such as lack of privacy, practical barriers to regular communication and a desire to protect family members from bad news may help to explain why many relationships break down following the imposition of a custodial sentence, what I instead wish to argue here is that imprisonment *unbalances* relationships and undermines the reciprocal nature of family bonds. Indeed, McDermott and King argue that coping with the prison environment – characterised insecurity, stress and fear – can a “kind of wilful, childlike selfishness” on the part of the prisoner which also negatively affects family relationships (1992: 63). As they go on to explain:

Imprisonment can be seen as a massive process of social deskilling. All too often it takes away or severely damages the capacity to interact with people in a normal, open, give and take manner: the ability to share in the responsibility for the self and others has been largely replaced by a need to gratify selfish whims. It is not that they do not try; rather that, by the time they get a chance to try, the whole task is so daunting and so pressured that they are just ill equipped to cope. (McDermott and King 1993: 69).

However, I would go further and suggest that imprisonment may not only lead to emotional deskilling, but also emotional suppression. A number of participants (Colin, George, Simon, Adam, Lorna and Liam) noted that prison itself greatly reduced any opportunities to display kindness, caring or compassion because “*a nice person is hated and ridiculed*” (Colin) or seen as weak. There was a general consensus amongst participants that it is very difficult to develop meaningful friendships while in custody, and only Liam and Simon felt they had achieved this (see chapter four and also Jewkes 2002 here for discussion of similar findings). A number of reasons were given for this, for example Alex, Colin and Mark highlighted that as they were currently serving their sentence in a national facility, everyone would be moving on at different times and returning to different areas so it is difficult to form real friendships. Others, such as Euan and Ian also felt that “jail politics” undermined friendships in the prison, and participants who were on offence-related protection in particular felt that they were viewed

negatively by other prisoners who did not allow them to put their offence behind them. However participants also described avoiding becoming 'camped up' with other prisoners (*"because if you are camped up with somebody it means like if one of you is fighting then two of you are fighting"* - Euan) and the "politics" involved in obtaining and sharing drugs or alcohol.

Yet, the overwhelmingly most common reason given by participants as to why they did not have any meaningful friendships is that it is very difficult to fully trust other people in prison:

**CJ: is there anyone that you are friendly with?**

**Ross:** Aye, I've been in the jail over a decade so I've got a lot of pals

**CJ: Would you put any of them on here?**

**Ross:** Trusting them? Not 100% you can't trust someone 100% in the jail, they are in the jail for not being 100% trustworthy. And I don't think anyone would put me down as 100% trustworthy that's in the jail. No I wouldn't put somebody on there, not from the jail no. That is just being naive doing that, if you think about it I'm not being horrible I'm just being realistic. I'm not going to put anybody on that list.

**Lorna:** But no, you've got no friends in here. I could honestly hand on heart say that every single person that I've become friendly with in here, and I say friendly and that is friendly to an extent where you know they are not your friends, but every single person has proved me right in that they have let me down in one way or another. Whether it be lies, gossip, backstabbing whatever every single one of them has let me down. So you just get to a point that you know that nobody is your pal you just tolerate people for the peace and you just avoid who you really don't like.

It is interesting that this view was expressed by participants from a range of backgrounds and personal circumstances: men, women, protection prisoners, lifers, long-termers and short-termers. This has profound consequences for people serving a prison sentence, especially if their relationships with people in the community become strained, because it leaves them very isolated with no one to trust or confide in. I would argue that this isolation can be seen running through many of the interviews with participants: many remarked how much they enjoyed having a "normal conversation" that wasn't about drugs or crime, while others prefaced personal disclosures with "I've never told anyone this before". Indeed, this need to present a tough, masculine persona free from vulnerabilities and inappropriate emotional displays has been well observed in the literature

(Ricciardelli et al 2015; Crewe et al 2014; Jewkes 2002; Genders and Player 1995), and this was echoed by many participants who felt becoming increasingly emotionally disengaged was a necessary strategy for coping with their sentence and the prison environment:

**Adam:** maybe it's growing up in this environment eh, because you become so hardened to things you could maybe see a guy getting - and I'm covered in scars myself right - but I could maybe see that being inflicted on somebody 5 foot away from us and the only thing I would be thinking about is God we are going to get locked up now for hours and hours.....

**CJ: Why is that? Is that because....you just get used to it, or is it because if....you were locked up for the next however many hours and you are thinking oh good god that's awful you just drive yourself.....**

**Adam:** Exactly. I think you kind of – one, you get used to it. Two, you don't understand the damage that is being done – physical and emotional. And if you did think about it – it could horrify you to such an extent that you could end up maybe a paranoid nervous wreck, do you know what I mean, it could kind of have an indelible effect eh. So you put the barriers up and don't let anything – there isn't anything that can get to you or can affect you, and that's right across the board, that's with everything – if you don't let things in then they cannae come out, do you know what I mean – they cannae affect you if you don't let them in, and maybe that is a coping mechanism or something, I don't know – but I've met an awful lot of guys like me in prison, so I can't just pin it on my attitude and my behaviour.

Interestingly, while this was not the focus of the interviews, a smaller number of participants also felt that the prison regime reinforced, rather than challenged, a highly gendered dynamic. Both Liam and Ross felt there was a greater emphasis on encouraging contact between female prisoners and their children, and that little support was offered to men who might be struggling with this. Ross argued that the lack of proactive support here was problematic, as men in prison may feel unable to ask for support or communicate their distress; while Liam felt that the assumption that women (rather than men) are “naturally” caring was also reflected in the employment opportunities open to men within the prison:

**Ross:** But a lot of guys will just shut things out and kid on that it is not annoying them [not seeing their children] because they are the big hard man in the jail and all that crap. They are not prepared to put their cards on the table. But then a lot of guys put their cards on the table and then the next minute the cons are making a cunt of it so it's a catch 22

**CJ: So is there a lot of that big man macho culture?**

**Ross:** Aye, but its just all bullshit to be honest with you (both laugh)....

**CJ: I think it is quite interesting because there is a lot about mothers and kids and family contact but there is not so much about dads**

**Ross:** Oh no we can deal with all that, we don't need to be in touch with our weans we are big macho men and we can deal with it, do you know what I mean

**CJ:** **But if nobody can say I would really like some help to stay in touch with my kids, or I would really like a service to come up if my partner won't because if everyone feels like they can't say that because they have to be big manly men in the jail**

**Ross:** But most guys will say it if you get them thereselves – if you get an environment like this instead of sitting with one of the wardens and them asking you or instead of in a group with ten other guys...you need to get them individually.

**Liam:** the women in here they seem to have sheds like caring for the chickens, caring for the beehives and things like this and when I questioned one of the officers and said why don't the men get anything like this they said 'because to care and nurture for something helps women with rehabilitation' and I said 'well that goes for men as well, that is sexist to say that it is only going to help one sex'...I feel like it is quite discriminative because it would also benefit males. But yeah it seems like it was key for women to maintain a bond with their children but they weren't so interested in men doing it. And I think it is maybe because a lot of guys hadn't pushed for it before....[but] I can't fault them now, things have changed and they have a lot more activities on for the children but I think initially it wasn't as key for men or their opinion wasn't that it was as key for men to do it as it was for women.....like I have a homemade plant pot and I've got plants in it – they don't come in and take that off you. But if you were ever to get our cells searched we would get that taken off us. But my argument is that that is caring and nurturing for something.

Two of the four women who were interviewed in custody, Yvonne and Lorna, also felt that the prison regime was underpinned by very traditional constructions of gender roles. However, just like Liam and Ross, neither felt that they benefited from these pervasive gendered norms. Rather, they felt like women had been “added on” or “fitted in” to a regime designed for men, which did not take sufficient account of their family circumstances, health needs or individual issues and interests. Lorna noted that there was inadequate social work and sexual health provision for women within the prison, and felt that Cornton Vale<sup>32</sup> offered better facilities for visiting children. Similarly, Yvonne was extremely critical of the lack of a service that can bring children to visit their mothers in prison, and that only the women in the prison performed tasks that might be seen as domestic labour:

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<sup>32</sup> Scotland's only dedicated female establishment which, as noted in Chapter Two, is to be replaced, although the detail of plans for this remain uncertain at the time of writing



**Yvonne:** Some people don't want their weans up to the jail, but most people do. See 95/100 would want their weans. To be brought up and taken back then and the and the wee bottle of juice and a sweetie bought for them that would be great; but we don't get anything like that....I've got to fight for it because nobody else is fighting for it so I want to try and fight for it because somebody has got to try and make the change

**CJ: Is it quite hard to fight for things?**

**Yvonne:** Aye because it is a man's prison so we are later and later and later and later and they are always early they are always first and we are always the last. We do the laundry and they don't do anything for us

**CJ: That is so bad, really? Is that true?**

**Yvonne:** It is the only job that guys don't do in here is laundry so we have to do their slave labour to 8 or nine pounds a week. All their underwear, all their washing folded up and put back in the bags. That is the only job that the guys don't do it is the launderette they do everything else. We can't do industrial cleaning in here because the guys say we can't do it because they are doing at

**CJ: I think they should swap around and make the men do the bloody washing**

**Yvonne:** So do I so do I. That is the pure major issue for me and in here.

While they are drawn from the accounts of only a small number of participants, these findings resonate with arguments in the wider literature that prisons can be a highly gendered environment (Gelsthorpe 2010; Bosworth 1996; Carlen and Tchaikovsky 1985; Carlen 1983; Eaton 1993; Crewe 2009; Crewe 2014; Bosworth and Carrabine 2001; Ricciardelli et al 2015). Importantly, it seems that within the context of a prison setting, the continued dominance of traditional narratives of gender norms serve to undermine the family relationships of both men and women. With regard to the latter, as noted in chapter four, both Yvonne and Lorna were struggling to maintain regular contact with their children in the absence of someone in the community who was willing and able to bring them to visit. It would appear, then, that prison visiting regimes are underpinned by a general assumption that all prisoners, regardless of gender, will have somebody in the community willing to facilitate contact with their children; and that there has been a failure to recognise the impact of gendered caring roles on women in custody. In contrast, while men may be more likely to have the support of a woman in the community, the masculinised prison environment can create pressure to suspend or repress "positive" emotions and present a "toughened" exterior (Crewe et al 2014: 65). This may leave male prisoners reluctant to ask for help of support (bell hooks 2004, Clowes 2013, Horowitz 1997); perhaps in turn perpetuating a perception that men do not

need assistance in maintaining their family relationships. While Crewe et al (2014) suggests that some prisoners may find respite in certain spaces within the prison such as the gym, education and the visits room; yet while this spatial analysis is undoubtedly helpful in developing a richer account of prison life, it is important not to overstate the emotional freedom of the visits room given the barriers to reciprocal relationships discussed above.

It seems, then, that the impact of the prison environment on relationships should not be underestimated. Indeed, some male participants felt that these barriers to maintaining open and reciprocal relationships had fundamentally changed them and their relationships:

**George:** And the last time I did meet the brother...one thing he said to me, he was driving me to my flat and he said you are awful harsh... But when you are in prison it rubs off on you if you will. And he says you are awful harsh, and I said what do you mean? And he said that if when I speak there is no softness to your voice there is a hard edge. And it is prison that has done this. And that is what makes prison different from outside, people outside have got that softness do you know what I mean.

Given that our relationships are inextricably linked to our sense of self, George's assertion that both he and his relationships have changed by his imprisonment should perhaps not surprise us. Indeed, similar sentiments were expressed by Lorna, who explained that the damage done to her family relationships as a result of her addictions, offending and imprisonment had undermined her self-confidence and her sense of value as a person:

**Lorna:** [if] you're not getting to see your wean that often, and you've fallen out with your mama and your sisters arenae talking to you (pause) you just feel less of a person and your self-confidence is away to fuck....(pause) its like that Maslow's hierarchy of needs if you know what I mean – you also need good, solid relationships to feel valuable as well know what I mean.

These accounts raise an interesting counter-narrative to the perception of all but one prison officer who was interviewed that the men and women in their care are generally demanding, selfish, abusive, manipulative or controlling. Many of these officers felt that prisoners only valued the material benefits that family relationships could bring, rather than the relationship itself:

**Robin (prison officer):** it must be hard them travelling, and they're so demanding prisoners - they want money in all-time so they can get their tobacco, so some of them are getting 20 or £30 a week handed in, their getting new clothes handed in every month and I'm thinking you're not out there working so somebody else is doing it and if they don't get the right trainers it's insane how demanding they are on their families. That's where I feel sorry for the decent families whose mum and dad have just got basic earning jobs but this feeling the need to come up with 20 or £30 a week because the prisoner is saying you've got to do this.

**Nicky (Prison officer):** I remember a guy shouting and bawling his grandmother in the visit room because she is only fiver in his PPC instead of a tenner. And he was shouting and bawling, and you're thinking this wee old woman she's maybe 70 and she's come up with her walking stick and taken it out her pension.

This chapter has argued that there is little doubt that female family members often *do* feel considerable pressure from both the person in custody, and from social norms more widely, to provide financial, practical and emotional support. Yet the analysis presented here suggests that it is too simplistic to construct these demands simply as selfishness. As the accounts of both family members and participants in custody attest, imprisonment can be experienced as profoundly distressing. The prison environment can pose considerable barrier to balanced and reciprocal relationships, causing some prisoners to “close off” the more trusting, caring or open sides of their personalities. However, in many respects the construction of these coping strategies by officers as selfishness should not be surprising; as the quotations from Ross and Adam above demonstrate, many participants went to considerable lengths to conceal any distress they felt. As Adam notes, putting up barriers can be a fruitful coping strategy because *“if you don't let things in then they cannae come out”*.

Arguably, this can then become something of a vicious circle whereby officers do not know that the person might benefit from some additional supports, and the person in custody feels that prison officers are not interested in helping them. Indeed, it is notable here that one of the prison officer participants who was most sympathetic to the difficulties prisoners faced in maintaining relationships had spent a number of years working with women in custody. This officer explained that some women found the fear of reassuming responsibility for their children and their lives outside as

overwhelming, terrifying and perhaps ultimately paralysing in terms of moving forward with their lives:

**CJ: So are a lot of them in and out, in and out?**

Jude: Yeah a lot of them are – a great deal of them don't want out

**CJ: Really?**

Jude: Yeah – they find the security and the safety quite comforting, the routine. And the thought of getting back out and facing the big world again and having responsibilities – the likes of kids, family and letting them down again is terrifying. I would say maybe about eight out of ten women that I get in, I usually get them in the office a couple of days before they get liberated and just saying to them 'is everything alright? Do you want me to do anything for you, have you got everything set up?' I would say eight out of ten the reply is 'I don't want out'

**CJ: Gosh, even if they have got kids and stuff**

Jude: Yeah, yeah. because usually the kids are in some kind of council care or they are getting cared for by their mum and dad, like the grandparents or another family member so to them they are sorted at the moment. So I think it could be like a fear of getting back out and having the responsibility and then mucking that up again. Which is sad.

It may be, then, that women in custody are perhaps more willing to be vulnerable, and less likely to suppress their emotions to the same extent as men attempting to cope with the highly masculinised prison environment. For example Simon described how he felt he had been “*left to rot*” without any support in re-establishing contact with his family after an argument with his parents that led to him having no contact with his mother for a year. For Simon, then, while he acknowledged that the SPS had introduced initiatives to help maintain family contact, he felt that they were only interested in people who already had the active support of their family – or as he put it “*the ones that are going to make them look good*”. Yet a few minutes later in the interview, Simon describes a time where unbeknownst to the officers he was struggling to cope with a bereavement, and as a result a genuine mistake in processing his PPC led to a violent altercation:

**Simon:** I've only reacted, to anything against a member of staff, once before in my full time in the jail. Not just this sentence – the full time I've been since I was 15 – and that was when [describes how a mistake in processing his PPC left him with no phone credit around the time of a family funeral]... But he didn't know anything about this because ***I had just bottled it up and kept it to myself and never told anybody.*** And when I spoke to an officer about it...he said 'I'm not fucking interested in what your problems are, get out of my office'. And I said I'll have your attention in 30 seconds –so I went up the stair, grabbed my telly, walked down the section and put it through the office window. (Emphasis added)

This is obviously an extreme example: as Simon notes this is the only time he has ever reacted to an officer in this way. Yet it is also illustrative both in terms of the extreme distress that some participants attempted to conceal, and the potential costs of maintaining this strategy in the longer-term. To be clear, I am not arguing here that all prisoners will be fundamentally changed or emotionally hardened by their experiences. Rather, I wish to suggest that imprisonment offers reduced opportunities for the open and reciprocal exchange of emotions for a number of reasons; the desire to cope and to present a “tough” persona being just one. The impact of these barriers to reciprocity may manifest themselves in different ways in different relationships, and as relationships are fluid the way in which they are impacted by imprisonment may change over time, as Euan and Simon’s accounts suggest.

Yet, while relationships can change over time, it should also be recognised that it can be very difficult to rebuild damaged relationships from within the prison. For example, as Lorna does not have anyone adding money to her PPC she felt she had to choose between phoning her daughter or phoning her mum, both of whom she was trying to rebuild her relationship with, because she could not afford to do both. While sending letters may be a more affordable option, Lorna went on to explain that she found it difficult to express what she wanted to say in writing. These sentiments were echoed by Ian, as while his family had supported him in the past, this time Ian’s mum has “had enough” and has decided to greatly reduce contact with him in the hope that this will deter him from ever returning to prison.

Reflecting on this experience, Ian also felt that face-to-face communication, even if this was through a mediator, would be a better way to address problems in relationships.

**Ian:** I think there should be somebody like maybe a social worker in the prison or working with somebody on the outside but willing to go outside and try and kind of sort problems.....I think there should be somebody willing to go out and mediate. See when I first came in and I had those first six weeks when nobody was talking to me that was murder, I wasn't sleeping the night through worry is it that they have gave up on me, and the is that me abandoned, they weren't answering the phone for replying to my letters and it was hard.....So I think there should be somewhere where you can go and explain how you are feeling about it and for them to maybe go out and speak to somebody in the flesh, do you know I mean there is a

difference between somebody phoning or writing letter to somebody actually going out.

This is a difficult area, not least because the family in question might have good reasons for cutting off contact with the person in custody and have a right to have that decision respected. Ian himself recognised this, suggesting it would help the person in custody to “settle”, even if the mediation did not go as they hoped, as the element of uncertainty would be removed. However, what is clear from Ian’s experience is the distress that he felt at being unable to communicate with his family due to his imprisonment. Such accounts highlight the wider emotional costs of this particular form of punishment, and suggest that the resulting impact on relationships should be afforded greater attention by researchers, criminal justice professionals and policy makers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Drawing on the accounts of men and women serving a custodial sentence and families visiting HMP Edinburgh, this chapter has sought to demonstrate how imprisonment can have a profound, damaging effect on the day to day lives and relationships of participants. Many of the family members who took part in this research were already experiencing social marginalisation to a greater or lesser extent, and these a problems and difficulties are often exacerbated by the acute distress, loneliness and uncertainty felt by many participants following the imposition of a prison sentence. Furthermore, actively supporting the person in custody serves only to compound many of the practical problems they face, serving as a drain on their already scarce supplies of time, money and emotional energy. The weight of this caring burden is heightened by the fact that it is very often shouldered alone, with mothers and female partners providing the bulk of the time, money and emotional labour required to “stand by their man”. The cumulative effect of this is to not only further entrench marginality, but also to reinforce the social positioning of women as the “right” people to carry out this caring labour. While some women may embrace this role, and

prison visiting may become a resource to structure the time of some of the most vulnerable participants, the potential for violent or abusive relationships to continue despite imprisonment should caution against uncritically accepting the social positioning of women in this way.

Yet it is not only the family outside who feel distress after a prison sentence is given. The accounts of men and women in custody should leave little doubt that a period of imprisonment can be experienced as profoundly traumatic. While participants highly valued the support of their families, many attested that features of the prison environment, such as distance from home, security procedures and lack of privacy mitigated against high quality contact with their family. Further, some participants adopted a strategy of emotional suppression to cope with the situation in which they now found themselves, reducing or cutting off contact with their families as this was too painful in the context of imprisonment. This, combined with the tendency of both prisoners and families to guard against sharing potentially distressing news or events as a means of protecting one another, and the flow of resources from the family in the community into the prison, ultimately serves to undermine the reciprocal sharing that characterises family relationships. As a result, relationships become unbalanced, although as the accounts of participants such as Simon and Euan show, this may be more pronounced at some points over a sentence than others. Despite these considerable barriers, the fluidity of relationships described by Simon and Euan also raise questions as to how family relationships might be continued and supported despite imprisonment, and these will be explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: FAMILY PRACTICES AND DISPLAYS

### INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters have made a number of distinct, yet overlapping, claims that suggest that while there are common themes and experiences that run through the accounts of participants (in particular the social marginalisation experienced by families and the gendered burden of care felt by many women), there is no one model of “prisoners’ families”. Indeed, as chapter five has demonstrated, it seems that not only are modern family relationships innately fluid and shifting, but also that imprisonment further complicates relationships by unbalancing relationships and undermining reciprocity. Yet if, as has been argued in the preceding two chapters, traditional nuclear models of the family cannot adequately capture this complexity, this inevitably raises the question of just how we should conceptualise family relationships generally, and in particular those affected by imprisonment. Drawing on the fruits of a resurgence of sociological interest in the family that has sought to look beyond middle-class heterosexual norms that have permeated much of the earlier literature, this chapter will argue that families are not simply constituted through blood or law, rather they are actively constructed through deliberate family practices (Morgan 1996; 2011) and displays (Finch 2007). Morgan suggests that families should be thought of in terms of the things that they “do” (family practices) such as cooking a family meal, and emphasises the importance of the routine, regular and everyday nature of these active practices. Similarly, drawing on the work of Morgan, Finch argues that active demonstration is required to define what a family looks like and to show that “these are my family relationships, and they work” (Finch 2007: 73).

This emphasis on the active processes through which people establish and reinforce their family relationships by doing “family things” (spending time together, sharing food, engaging in family traditions and telling family stories) is a useful conceptual tool for developing a more nuanced picture of the contours of families affected by imprisonment, that sheds light *why* seemingly everyday objects and activities, such as photographs and



phone calls, are accorded such significance by men and women serving a prison sentence. Importantly, while these practices and displays were used by participants to define the boundaries of their families not all families look the same, and I will show how participants utilised a ranged of resources such as visits, mementos and traditions to “display” family. In the final section I will draw on the interviews with Liam and his mother Susan, to explore the ways in which the family displays employed over the course of Liam’s sentence have helped to maintain relationships, but have also reshaped them, effectively eroding Liam’s full adult status within the family.

## **HOW FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT USE DISPLAY**

### **Visits**

One of the primary ways through which family displays are enacted is on visits, as these provide a space establishing some sense of the routine and every day nature of family life. For example, Yasmeen takes a visit every day as this gives her a sense of “normality” spending time with her family and she particularly likes being able to take a visit on a Sunday because it is a longer session and she feels more “*at home*” as a result. This face-to-face contact provides many opportunities for the demonstrations of care, love and commitment (doing family things) that family displays entail. Indeed, as can be seen from the interviews with family members, the mere act of coming to the prison alone can be a considerable display of commitment to the relationship as prison visiting can be have many costs for family members financially, but also in terms of their time and wellbeing (see chapter five for a fuller discussion). The routine and the frequency may also be important here – while friends may visit occasionally, family will visit with more regularity or routine. Participants also described how visits can also be used to mark significant family occasions, particularly for people who are serving their sentence a considerable distance from their home community. For example, due to the distance from his family home Ross does not regularly take visits but chooses to do so around birthdays and

Christmas, the latter in particular being very much seen as traditionally a family time (Lupton 1996).

Other routine elements of the visit – a hug hello and a kiss goodbye, drinking tea and sharing family news and stories – can all also be viewed as family displays and a means of maintaining family bonds. Indeed, a number of participants (Yvonne, Liam and Simon) commented in their interviews that they missed (or their children were missing) the physical contact that had previously been part of their relationship, while physical greetings and goodbyes as that punctuate the beginnings and ends of visits peppered participants accounts:

**Simon:** But the thing was, I thought it was priceless, I was out there for two hours and she [Simon's new baby niece] never opened her eyes once – as soon as I'm going out the door and G4 start saying right that's it and I'm like nae bother I give my mum a cuddle and a kiss, and shake my brother's hand and give him a cuddle and give the wean a cuddle and kiss and then she open's her eyes and I'm like you wee wideo! You fucking wideo – I've been here two hours...

**CJ...and you wait until I'm away! (laughing)**

**Simon:** But she's gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous you know what I mean.

The importance of these embodied physical displays was also highlighted by family members visiting the prison and were particularly missed by those who were currently restricted to "closed" visits as Brooke explains; "*open visits would be much better because at least you get a cuddle and ken it cheers you up*". A number of participants noted that children who were used to the greater freedom permitted in children's visits missed this when they attended the more regimented regular visits; as the youngest child of the Collins family told me "you can't give lots of hugs when you go over there". Further, parents who were visiting adult children in custody and therefore did not get the opportunity to attend these more "relaxed" visits also missed the unrestricted physical contact with their children:

**Alisha:** He says that nobody can hate him more than he hates himself. He can't remember if he did it or not, so he doesn't know if he is what everybody says he is.

**CJ: That must be difficult as a mum to hear your child say that**

**Alisha:** It is, because I cannae help him, I cannae cuddle him or anything.

The emphasis placed on physical affection by participants should not be surprising as one of the vehicles for doing family practices is with our

bodies (for example holding hands) and even when these practices or displays are not physical, we inhabit our bodies while we do them (for example physically entering the prison for a visit with all the accompanying sounds, smells and searches). Further, we feel physical, embodied responses to the words, actions and communication from others (Gabb 2008).

Therefore the everyday nature of embodied physical actions must not, Morgan has argued, lead us to discount them as “*a modish addition to spice up what might otherwise seem routine accounts*” (Morgan 2011: 92).

Rather, we must recognise embodied exchanges of affection as central to family practices and displays.

Similarly, the importance of everyday family activities - such as the sharing of food and drinks - should not be underestimated. Food can be understood as central to displaying family, as eating together and sharing a meal are closely connected to dominant social narratives of what families “do” and form a central part of family life in societies across the globe (Lupton 1996; McIntosh et al 2011; Gabb 2008). As Gabb has observed, as the dominant emotion associated with food is love, cooking and sharing food has a strong symbolic function in sustaining relationships as it can be seen as an “emotional currency” that can be utilised to nourish others (or themselves), or may be withheld to demonstrate tension in the relationship (Gabb 2011).

While families affected by imprisonment may rarely get the opportunity to cook together, I have volunteered in a visiting room “tea bar” for over two years and can rarely recall (if ever) visitors who have not bought food or drink, even when the visit is only half an hour long. I would argue that when we take account of the emotional symbolism associated with food and love, this should not surprise us.

Food is not only associated with emotions, it is also strongly linked to memory, and in particular memories of the childhood home, and therefore can evoke warm memories and feelings of comfort (Lupton 1996; Smith 2002). This increases its importance as a mechanism for displaying family as it then becomes not only a vehicle for nurturing and loving another person, but it also brings alive family memories and stories which in turn can be seen as family practices and displays in their own right (Morgan

2011). As Ugelvik observes, in the context of imprisonment, being able to consume the food that would be eaten at home can allow the person to “figuratively climb the prison wall” by not only serving as a tangible reminder of home, but also as a connection family on the outside (Ugelvik 2002; see also Comfort 2008 here). For example, Yasmeen takes advantage of the children’s visits to see her nephew and a few weeks prior to the interview the session had been structured around the celebration of Eid, and Yasmeen had been able to eat a meal with her family to mark an event that was religiously and culturally significant to them. She explained that this had been important to her, not only because it was an opportunity to spend time with her family, but also because they were able to recreate something they would traditionally do at home:

**Yasmeen:** The Eid celebration was really appreciated, it is just really good that the prison are supporting different religions and making an effort, it is amazing how much you appreciate that. It was great to be able to have more of my family there and be able to do something we would do at home.

Yasmeen’s account resonates with Earle and Phillips’ argument that facilities to cook their own food were highly valued by the men in HMP Maidstone, not only because cooking and eating form part of the fabric of everyday life, but also because food provides a connection to memories of home and also a vehicle for expressing different cultural and ethnic identities (Earle and Phillips 2012). Indeed, given the strong connections between the food we eat and our own identity and sense of self, it is perhaps unsurprising that Yasmeen particularly enjoyed the Eid meal and that the inability to access culturally relevant foods has been found to be a particularly painful aspect of imprisonment (Godderis 2006).

However, these accounts also illustrates that some facilities allow greater scope for family displays than others. For example, the children’s visits that Yasmeen attends are facilitated in Edinburgh Prison by the a team of staff from the Visitors’ Centre in partnership with the prison, and do not require prisoners to remain seated (as is the case with “normal” visits), allowing them instead to get up and play with their children or participate in the structured activities organised for each session, such as arts and crafts, chocolate making or visits from outside organisations like the local city

farm. Parents such as Liam, Yvonne and Donna spoke highly of these visits and similar initiatives provided by the SPS that allow them to spend time with their children in a more relaxed environment, doing activities that can be understood as “family things”:

**CJ: So how important are the bonding visits? Because they are reasonably new**

**Liam:** Invaluable, really, honestly I can't – without the bonding visits I probably would have lost, not quite fully lost, but I would have lost the close bond that I have with my children. So I can't, honestly, I can't praise them enough. As I say it really, really hurt a lot because at the time when they refused me my bonding visits.

**Donna:** Aye he comes up on a Saturday or a Sunday – he's coming up this Saturday which is a family day visit so I'm able to like walk about with him and go over and play games with him which is a lot better...whereas the other visits I'm not allowed off my seat.

By allowing parents this freedom to interact more freely with their children, these sessions provide greater scope for “displaying family”. Participants described how much they valued being able to play with their children, eat a meal together or take the time to talk to one child about anything that had happened at home, knowing there would be activities to entertain the other. For parents who saw the role in terms of the activities they did with their children in the community (**Liam: I was the person that took them swimming, I was the one who played football with them, I was the one that taught them to tie their shoelaces...I was the one that would discipline them and was strict**) this was invaluable.

Similarly, as many participants were serving a life sentence at the time of the interview, as they progress through their sentence they can become eligible for Special Escorted Leaves (SELs), which are visits of a couple of hours to a family member or a place of interest in the community, but escorted by security personnel. These were generally preferred by participants to regular visits, and I would suggest that it is not simply the chance to leave the prison that is appreciated by these participants. Rather it is the opportunity to do what Adam refers to as “normal” family things:

**CJ: So if you could, would you go home more?**

**Adam:** I would sit on the train every day for hours for just for two hours in house.

**CJ: Is it worth it, the round-trip, for just a few hours at home?**

**Adam:** Definitely, definitely a because it's just normality. Believe it or not, normality is good enough for me like sitting in the house and taking the dog for a walk, I used to but now I have no sort of delusions of grandeur. I don't want to be a big drug dealer and have a big flash motor and have a big huge house

By being able to spend time “sitting in the house” together, Adam and his parents are partaking in a display that reaffirms that they are a family and that they care for one another. Indeed, this commitment to the other members of the family is demonstrated by Adam’s willingness to travel long distances for a short visit home, and the effort made his divorced parents (who Adam describes as “*absolutely hating*” each other) to put their differences aside so he can see them both on the same visit. These community based visits were highly valued by virtually all participants who were eligible to take them; only Euan preferred his family to come to prison to visit him, because he felt “awkward” seeing his family in the presence of the G4S staff who accompanied him on Special Escorted Leaves. Yet, this not to suggest that they did not come with a cost to participants. Alex explained that when his first SEL came to an end he “*almost started crying*” at the thought of having to return to the prison. While returning to the prison after a short period of comparative freedom in the community will inevitably be difficult, as Simon explains his feelings about leaving his family are more complex than simply not wishing to return to custody. For Simon, part of the distress he felt at returning to the prison stemmed from a new appreciation of how difficult it must have been for his mother to visit him in custody and then leave and return to her life in the community:

**Simon:** after my first SEL I sat with my head up my arse for about three month - it wasn't nice, I had that taste of freedom that have to come back here. And no, it just wasn't nice at all, it was the fact of having to leave people that you love and people that cared about etc etc and it just wasnae nice. It wasnae nice at all. I basically wanted the ground to open up and swallow me whole do you know what mean - it is if somebody stuck in a knife in you and it was straight in through my heart and it wasn't coming out it was stuck there permanently it just wasn't for budging and it wasn't easy, it was hard. But, in time, just like everything else you get used to it do you know what I mean.

**CJ: What you think there is so much harder? See if you're in here, and your family come to visit, they still leave you, you still go back up to the hall and you still separated so why is that so much harder?**

**Simon:** Because it's a different angle, it's a different perspective. Because when they are up here visiting you they are the ones that are leaving the jail, and you don't see and you don't feel how they are feeling and you don't think about how they must be feeling having to leave you here, you know what I mean....Whereas, me going out there for SELs and me walking away....the tables have been turned now because it is me that is walking away and is me is experiencing what my mum and everybody else who has been in visiting me have experienced when they are leaving the jail I've experienced it when I'm leaving their house and coming back here, do you know what I mean. It's no nice. It's a whole different....sighs... its a whole different atmosphere altogether....I wouldn't wish it on my worst nightmare put it that way, and I've got a few nightmares out there.

Simon's experience of SELs is of interest for two reasons. Firstly, it is further evidence of the emotional impact visiting a family member in custody can have. This should not be underestimated, and even the otherwise mild-mannered Granny of the Collins family remarked "*see when that woman calls the last five minutes I could cheerfully assault her (joking), when he walks through that door that is the bit I will never forget*". However, Simon's account also raises questions as to whether particular forms of family contact such as SELs provide greater opportunities to counter the "unbalancing" of family relationships that was discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, when participants were asked what they felt could help them to maintain relationships with their families many participants discussed changes that could be made to the visits available to them that could help to improve the *quality* of the interaction they have with their families, rather than simply increasing the *quantity* of visits (although some participants did suggest this). For example, Lorna felt it was unfortunate that more relaxed environment of the children's visits is not open to other family members as her mother is particularly nervous about visiting the prison; while Ross explained that he felt that the Scottish Prison Service should allow weekend "family" visits, as are permitted in other jurisdictions (see Comfort 2008; Scharff-Smith 2014 and Loucks 2004 here for examples of such schemes).

**Ross:** But I think throwing up a wee house somewhere in the jail and giving them access to a room. You could be self-sufficient

**CJ: Yeah more like being at home**

**Ross:** So you could make the dinner for her and she could make the dinner for you and you could turn it from a Friday to Sunday – but you only get it once a year but you have to be clean of reports and if you get a report you don't get it, that would bring down lots of other things and all

**CJ: Do you think that would give people quite a lot of motivation?**

**Ross:** Aye, of course it would – thinking that you are going to get a weekend with your wife and your weans och aye, who wouldn't want that?

Indeed, Ross's suggestion of weekend visits with his reference to cooking meals and *sharing* chores strongly echoes Adam's account of "normality" being what he values about his trips home to his family. Some family members also expressed similar sentiments, as Sophie felt that being able to spend a whole day alone with her partner Kian would help to maintain their relationship and help her to cope with some of the issues and difficulties experienced by families discussed in chapter five:

**Sophie:** I wish I could go in a jail for a day. You know, like with him. Be with him for a day or two. Sit and watch telly together or something. Be in the cell with him and just.... Not even with the kids, just me and him. Just so he can.... So then I've got somebody, have like a little a good old chat with. Then I'm feeling.... Because even if like, when I was feeling down about, anything, it doesn't matter what it was. It can be the stupidest thing in the world I'd tell him. And he would be like, 'Can you give me advice?' But he'd come to me and he'd tell me like.... It just made feel better.

Given the hostile response from the media to the suggestion that prison cells might become equipped with telephones (see chapter five), it is unlikely that an extension of Special Escorted Leaves to more groups of prisoners, or the introduction of "family visits" of the type envisaged by Ross and Sophie would be favourably received. However, if such proposals are conceptualised as means of supporting and maintaining family displays, it seems irrefutable that for some people they are likely to limit the damage done to family relationships by imprisonment, and perhaps also promote reciprocity within relationships. This would suggest that they are worthy of further consideration, particularly given the value placed on face-to-face, embodied contact by both groups of participants. This being said, physically visiting the prison or the home was not the only mechanism for family practices and displays employed by participants, as the following sections will illustrate.



## Objects, Mementos and Memories

As argued in chapter five, imprisonment can limit the freedom and opportunities for families to spend time together, and can ultimately unbalance relationships. In the face of these barriers, participants sought alternative and creative ways to maintain relationships through various forms of family display. One way of being able to display family while physically distant is through the photograph and mementoes, as Almack argues these “*can convey and reinforce meanings about the relationships between the displayer and those featured in the photographs*” (Almack 2011: 113). This can be very much the case for people serving a prison sentence, and Liam described his family photographs and pictures his children had drawn as “*your prized possessions*” and explained that it could cause considerable resentment amongst prisoners if these were ever damaged during cell searches:

**Liam:** But yeah a lot of things that people do, like the pictures from their kids, it is memories, it is things that you hold sentimental, it is things that remind you of home and I think that is the majority of things. That is sort of why a lot of issues and bitterness can arise with prisoners when security come in and rip down all the pictures because they can go home and see their kids at any point, and we can't. there are some guys whose families live through in the west or up north and they only get to see their kids once every two months so to come in and rip their pictures down, to be honest I think it is quite low.....But yeah a lot of things in here it is your home comforts, your home comforts to remind you of things or make you feel normal and make you have your sense of normality.

This fear that pictures drawn by his children would be damaged was so real for Liam that despite never having had his cell searched to date he kept these in a folder so that were this situation ever to arise security could go through these “*one by one*”.

Importantly, it was not only families in the community who demonstrated their ongoing care and commitment through gifts and objects. While not all participants exchanged letters, Kian often sent Sophie “*soppy*” letters telling her how much he missed her; while Valentine’s day prompted much discussion amongst young women visiting the prison as to who had received a card and who had not. Just as for the women who participated in Comfort’s research (2008), these tangible manifestations of love and care

from beyond the prison walls were highly prized; something that was reflected in the way in which participants such as Brooke spoke about gifts from their partners, as she proudly told me how her fiancé had bought her a “*best mum in the world*” key ring from the canteen for mother’s day<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, it seems from Lorna’s account that the opportunity to demonstrate the love and care they felt for their families is also hugely important to some people serving a prison sentence. Lorna told me about how as her daughter’s birthday is in December she had made an advent calendar for her and had wanted to put individually wrapped sweets in each pocket and a piece of jewellery in the pocket that she would open on her birthday. However, Lorna could not buy individual sweets from the canteen, and without someone outside to purchase a piece of jewellery on her behalf, she could not buy this present for her daughter either. Lorna explained that in the end she had bought a large bar of chocolate from the canteen and had broken it up into pieces, and had taken some money out of her PPC to send to her daughter in a birthday card, but this “*did not mean the same or feel the same*” as being able to send the advent calendar the way she had planned.

Reflecting on this experience, Lorna felt her child was being punished as a result of her imprisonment and that the SPS should do more to help parents send their children gifts, particularly where relationships have become strained and they have no one to help them. Lorna also stressed the importance of assisting mothers who only have “letterbox” contact with their children, without drawing attention to this:

**Lorna:** It is just wee things like that that kind of get to you...at Christmas time, they’ll have Christmas parties right and they’ll get like goalie gloves and a football for boy or a doll for a wee lassie or whatever it is, but there are lassies who don’t get visits with their weans. And that is where people need to be pulling their wee extra thing out of the hat for the mothers that don’t get to see their weans. And there are lassies that like even when they are out they don’t get to see the weans whereas when I am out I do get so see her but there are lassies who don’t get to see them at all, they’ve only got letterbox contact. And even just having a class or something with these parents can go to, to make their weans stuff to send them do you know what I mean. There is a craft classes aye, but a lot of parents in here who

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<sup>33</sup> This was particularly meaningful to Brooke as their baby daughter had died earlier that year

don't see the weans don't want to openly admit I don't get to see my weans because a lot of folk frowned upon them as if you've got to have done something wrong...I just think they should be more support for parents and who do and don't get to see the weans, they really should.

Here Lorna poignantly demonstrates the meanings associated with seemingly ordinary family objects such as birthday cards and Christmas gifts, and the role that these can play in helping men and women in custody in maintaining family relationships and displays. However, her distress at not being able to send her daughter a birthday or Christmas present illustrates more than just the importance of gift giving as a vehicle for family practices and displays: it also highlights the (overlapping) role of traditions and rituals in marking out and sustaining family relationships. As Lorna goes on to explain, every year her family exchanged presents in a particular way, but she can no longer take part in this family convention which while she is in custody and without the support of her family. This is difficult for Lorna for a number of reasons: she feels that her daughter is missing out on a Christmas present from her mum, but it is also a painful reminder that she is separated from her family.

**Lorna:** Really she should get a Christmas present as well. For all that she believes in Santa and all that we've always made a point that we buy each other at present to open up on Christmas morning and so Santa brings her all her toys but the mummy got you that and daddy got you that and her dad always buys her something to get me and I always buy her something to get her dad. It is just wee things like that that kind of get to you.

This powerfully demonstrates how the actions and activities we come to regard as family displays or practices are grounded in our own (relational) history and biography (Morgan 2011). Indeed, Morgan argues that the individual and collective family memories that provide the backdrop for family practices are given form through photographs, stories, “in-jokes”, celebrations and more mundane everyday events (Morgan 2011: 118). Thus, family relationships do not come to end simply because the opportunity for family practices or displays is limited by geographical distance (or indeed a prison sentence), as they are grounded in memory and tradition. This insight illuminates not only how family relationships can continue despite the considerable barriers imprisonment poses, but can also

help us to understand why such importance is placed by participants on seemingly everyday or mundane interactions such as helping with homework, giving cuddles, preparing school uniforms and reading stories were frequently cited by participants as things that they missed. Indeed, the significance of these actions *are* their unremarkable nature. The importance of the everyday should not be underestimated; even the smallest acts from washing clothes, to eating meals and organising possession are not only rich in social meaning, but they also actively reproduce and reinforce these meanings (Carsten 2004).

There is a second, related point to be made here. Objects such as photographs, drawings and gifts do not only serve as a vehicle for family practices and displays and their importance to participants does not just derive from the fact that such objects are a concrete demonstration of the love and care that suffuse family relationships (although this is significant). Objects themselves can provide great comfort, providing a means of curating and storing memories that can be drawn on in times of difficulty or loss (Miller 2008). Objects not only evoke memories but also materially ground them in a form that cannot disappear, and in this way provide “reliable foundations for constructing the past” (Hurdley 2013: 96). The relevance of this argument to prisoners, and in particular long-term prisoners, is striking. However, manifestations of this can also be seen in the accounts of family members, as Leah explains how she has used her husband’s deodorant as a source of comfort:

**Leah:** But the first time my son went up, nearly the whole visit room was in tears. He was only three and at the end of the visit when they are all being taken back to the hall he was saying ‘bye daddy, I love you, I love you’ and you could hear in his voice how he felt, and honestly I was crying and lots of the other visitors were crying, it was so sad. One day when he was first inside I had sprayed his deodorant because I was missing him and my three year old came in saying ‘I can smell daddy, I can smell daddy’.

This construction of family or personal objects as tools for not only supporting family practices but also materialising memories, facilitates a deeper understanding of why, for example, Liam’s children’s drawings are his “prized possessions”. They are a means for materialising the connection between him and his children (Carsten 2007). Importantly, however, these

family objects do not just serve as foundations for summoning the past; both memories and family relationships are inalienable from identity, and inextricably bound up in our own view of our selves (Carsten 2007). This becomes particularly salient in the context of imprisonment, a punishment that left many participants feeling worthless or hopeless. Indeed, Lorna felt that these feelings could be particularly strong for women who have children, as there is a social expectation that women should be the main caregivers within a family:

**Lorna:** See when you are in jail, aye ok I know I done wrong – I took drugs and I shoplifted and I've got issues involving men and all that and I've dealt with them all the wrong way but I just think that they punish people in the wrong ways, when they should be putting more things in place to help people get out of the cycle and maybe also deal with issues.....the folk that are sentencing women, especially women, they are sentencing the weans as well. They weans have got to live for however long without the mummies – or without their daddies, I don't mean any different – but a wean needs its mother more than it needs its father. It needs it just as much, but I just think it's more socially accepted for a dad not to be about, than it is for a mum not to be about. You are the worst person to have ever walked the earth to abandon your wean like that. And it makes you feel less of a person, it does, and over the last few years my confidence is away to fuck.

The connections between memories, family practices and displays and identity alerts us to a final point to be made about family memories in the context of imprisonment. While it is important that families affected by imprisonment can continue traditions (for example giving gifts) and exchange mementos, they should also be given opportunities to create new family memories that will sustain relationships in the future. While there is a clear connection here to the participants' stories and the arguments presented above, this insight is taken is not my own. When a member of the Visitors' Centre staff team was asked in media interview what difference she felt the programme of structured children's visits run at HMP Edinburgh made to the families that participated in them, she replied that they provided an opportunity for the children to form "*meaningful memories*" of spending time with the person in custody (these visits are taken up by parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts).

However, I would go further and suggest that the creation of new memories is important for all family members and not just children. A shared (or co-

created) body of memories can allow those who are physically absent to be incorporated into family life (Morgan 1996; see also Finch and Mason 2000 here). Morgan makes this argument with regard to physical distance or death, but it is equally applicable to families who are separated by imprisonment. Providing the opportunity for families to spend time together that is relaxed, enjoyable and ultimately fun will not only help to maintain relationships in the short-term: these experiences become the memories that constitute a shared family history, and perhaps also the form part of the “in-jokes”, traditions and family stories which as noted above, Morgan sees as key to constituting family practices.

Similarly, family objects such as photographs are not only a means of capturing the past in a concrete form as they can also, as Carsten argues, be used to create a picture of what we hope our families will look like in the future:

House decorations, including photographic images, are not, however, simply oriented to the past and to the fixing of memory. The photographs of kin displayed in the homes I visited whilst interviewing adult adoptees about their experiences of meeting birth kin, rather than evoking previous lives, seemed to express the desire of these interviewees to demonstrate materially their immersion in their present and future families. The mixing of elements of old and new furnishings, heirlooms, and objects may thus express the creative and regenerative aspects of memory work, rearranging the past and setting out a vista for the future. (Carsten 2007: 18).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that amongst Liam’s treasured photographs are pictures of himself with his sons, taken by the Visitors’ Centre staff at the structured children’s visits. These pictures reaffirm his continued presence in his sons’ lives, his ongoing role in their future, and his identity as a “good” dad. Therefore the significance of these photographs should not be underestimated, and throughout my fieldwork I heard numerous inquiries as to whether family photographs could be arranged.

Yet, despite their significance, photographs are just one tool for “displaying family”, and as I have argued above embodied physical contact, mementos, traditions and memories may all also be used to sustain relationships.

Indeed, none of these tools for family display or materialising memory have a *discreet* role to play in family life. Each is interconnected and overlapping, and each has the potential to influence how we look back on

our family history in the future. However, much of the analysis presented above has drawn on tools for family display that are widely culturally recognised as associated with the family; such as photographs, meals, celebrations and traditions. In the following section, I will explore more unconventional methods of display, arguing that we should also recognise displays by omission.

## **Unconventional Displays**

The question of what we recognise as family displays has been raised by Heaphy, who argues that displays that are closest to the experiences and values of white, middle-class families are more likely to be validated as successful family displays (Heaphy 2011). Gabb develops a similar argument, suggesting that the more conventional family displays are, the easier they may be for others to read. Thus displays by groups who deviate from this white, middle-class norm and employ unconventional displays may struggle to have their family displays seen as displays of ongoing care and commitment between family members (Gabb 2011: 49). Interestingly, Gabb gives the example of tattooing here: while I did not systematically ask participants about this but noticed that some, such as Lorna, had visible tattoos of their children's names. This not only illustrates the embodied nature of display, but also serves as a further example of the connections to be made between the tangible or embodied tools for family display and the materiality of memory. Miller has argued that tattoos also serve as a tool for anchoring memories in the way discussed above, an argument he makes in his discussion of one particular participant, Charlotte:

One advantage of bodily decorations is that she can look down at them any time and be reminded of who she is and what she has done. As she puts it, 'you can't just run home and get a photo'. She also wants to control the precise way the tattoo is created in order to facilitate the connection with one particular moment or decision in a relationship....Ultimately she sees this laying down of memory as a resource she will be able to call on when times become difficult. (Miller 2008: 89)

As I did not explore the meaning they attribute to their tattoos with participants this argument is made somewhat tentatively, primarily to illustrate the need to be open to different forms of family display. Indeed,

we should be alert to unconventional family displays, not least because the white, middle-class model of the family is often privileged in the literature (Heaphy 2011; Gabb 2011), but also because one of the difficulties of researching families is inevitably everybody's understanding of what a family looks like is grounded in their own experience of family life. Participants in both the prison and the community gave specific, and often unexpected, examples of what they missed – be it the chaos of a busy house or arguing with their (now adult) child. A particularly striking example of the diversity of family practices was given by a regular visitor to Edinburgh Prison who often brought her children to visit their grandfather (her father), who I spoke to often, but she did not take part in a formal interview. However, when in passing she began to talk about things her father missed, I asked for her permission to note down what she had said, as it clearly demonstrates the individual nature of family practices:

My dad says that he really misses having a cup of tea and a fag with my mum because that is what we did every morning, because my mum and dad didn't do big things together – like they went on holiday but they didn't go out drinking or anything so it was just a little thing that was part of their routine. Or going out for a meal or eating together, that was something that my family did a lot so things like the Italian night<sup>34</sup> that meant the world to us. And it is not even just for the family, it could make my dad feel better too; like my dad always says I'd love it if they had a garden for tea and a fag with your mum, and these are just little things but they mean the world to us. (Fieldnote 1 October 2014).

For this family, then, it is not just the more visible family practices, such as eating a meal together, that are meaningful, it is also the cigarette with the cup of tea. While perhaps less obvious than a family meal or photograph “a cup of tea and fag” shares a number of common features with the family practices and displays discussed above: it is grounded in tradition and routine, it was integral to family life before imprisonment, and it is sorely missed now that it can no longer be enjoyed. Similarly, perhaps another example of these more unconventional displays can be seen in the way in which the families of participants such as Ross and Donna used television and DVD box sets to maintain closeness. This not only demonstrates the care and commitment on the part of the family who shop for and send or

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<sup>34</sup> One of the recent children's visits had been an Italian themed night where families could share a meal together.



hand in the DVDs to the prison; it can also provide prisoners with feeling of closeness with their families by watching the same programs and ‘seeing what they see’ and giving them something to talk about on visits (Jewkes 2002; see also Comfort 2008 here).

The above discussion of tattoos, cigarettes and DVDs is not intended as an exhaustive list of the more unusual vehicles available for family practices and displays. Rather, these examples are given to alert us to the need to be open to the diverse and individual ways that family displays and practices might be enacted. Taking this further, here I also want to make a case for “displays by omission”: arguing that by *not* doing something the person concerned is also marking out that these are their family relationships and that they are committed to sustaining them. This idea is touched on by Morgan in an example grounded in somewhat uncritically in some rather pervasive gendered stereotypes, but is not developed further:

The first point to note is that this is a good example of how family practices can occur some distance, spatially and temporally, from the home. Consider the mother who asks to be excused from a particular meeting at work because last minute difficulties have arisen with her child-care arrangements. Or consider the father who skips the after-hours trip to the pub in order to get home for the children. These and other numerous everyday examples show how family practices, practices carried out with reference to other family members, are enacted away from home and involve interactions with non-related colleagues or workmates (Morgan 2011: 157)

While Morgan draws on gendered narratives of mothers as carers and fathers having more leisure time (see Hochschild 2012 here) the argument that care and commitment to other family members can be demonstrated by *not* doing something is an important one, particularly in this context. Given the limited opportunities for prisoners to undertake family practices and displays, I would argue that many participants demonstrated their care for and commitment to their family through negative rather than positive acts. For example, by not getting drunk in the prison and jeopardising his progression, Euan is displaying commitment to his mother:

**Euan** And going back to relationships, since I lost my dad and my uncle it feels as if I've hardly got anybody out there. And as they say if anything were to happen to my mum wouldn't get out of here and think I would just throw in the towel to be honest. That is the thing that keeps me going to be honest, I think I would be devastated if anything happened to be honest. I just wouldn't want to go out then do

you know what I mean. Then after I fucked up last time, my mum was devastated, and I didn't think it would hit her so hard. So that's what's keeping me going right now, because as like I say some days I just want to go and get fucking bloated just to take your head out and all do you know what I mean, that it's all that is kind of keeping me away from things do you know what I mean. And as I say she's not been keeping me too well, and I just don't want to let her down do you know what I mean because I've done that enough times so that is what is keeping us motivated, just to keep my nose clean.

It is not simply because Euan has a relationship with his mother that has given him motivation to change, as he himself acknowledges he had a relationship with his mother previously and he “fucked up” before. Rather, it is because he *now* understands how upset his mother will be if he has another setback and because he loves and cares about her that this time he wants to change. Similar sentiments were also expressed by Adam, who explained that he had previously had a poor disciplinary record (*I've been charged with staff assaults, prisoner assaults all sorts of nonsense, absolutely tons of it*), but he underwent “*an epiphany*” whereby he came to realise the ongoing impact this was having on his parents, and he is now concentrating his efforts towards release (and indeed was on course to soon be transferred to the Open Estate).

These decisions to adopt a different, more positive course of action are complex. For example, Ian also described how this sentence was the first time he had actively avoided drug and alcohol use, something that I would argue demonstrates care and commitment towards his family. However, this is my interpretation; Ian himself placed a greater emphasis on the guilt he felt about how his offending and addictions had impacted on his family:

**Ian:** And it hit home all the more so in talking to my mum and her saying your brother and your dad aren't here and talking to my older sister and she saying your brother and your dad aren't here and talking to my younger sister and she is saying you were out four months and you saw my daughter all of twice - you cannae keep going on like that. I think the guilt makes you want to change more than anything, do you know what I mean, more than the punishment, more than what you've no got or what you are missing and I've not had that mindset of I want to go and get wasted. Even in prison I've always took something - whether it be hash, or whether I've made hooch and I wouldnae say I've been sober throughout this sentence but nowhere near the way I've ever been and its been a lot easier I'd say this sentence than most.

Similarly, while Adam was very much motivated by a desire to allow his parents to put his imprisonment behind them and for the whole family to move on with their future, he also emphasised the role of aging and maturation in his account, remarking *“you get older and your priorities change and you become a wee bit more realistic, and you think I'm sick of this nonsense. Because what happened to me, I just got bored of jail.*

Therefore decisions to adopt a more pro-social lifestyle seem to be motivated by a range of complex factors, including guilt, growing tired of the pains of imprisonment, ageing and wanting the whole family, including themselves, to be able to move on with their lives. Yet the key point here is that the decision to change, and the consequent commitment to this goal can also be understood as a display of commitment to family relationships, not least because realising this goal can be very difficult given the often “back and forth” or “zig zag” nature of desistance (Rex 1999; Shapland and Bottoms 2010). However, we should also not overlook the significance of a commitment to a pro-social lifestyle as this is perhaps one of the few means open to prisoners to actively try and improve the life and wellbeing of the families who have stuck by them.

Overall, then, the accounts of participants were imbued with a number of examples of family displays that can continue to be “done” despite imprisonment. Indeed, it seems that families affected by imprisonment utilise family displays in a number of creative ways to demonstrate which relationships are important to them and that these nonetheless continue despite their physical separation. I have argued that while these displays can be embodied demonstrations of care and commitment, primarily facilitated through prison visits, direct physical contact is by no means required as objects, mementoes, stories and memories can all be utilised as tools for family display. The way in which each family utilises these tools will be highly individual, and I have also argued that more unconventional displays that perhaps not have immediate or obvious connections to dominant cultural narratives surrounding the family, including omissions, should also be recognised. In the final section of this chapter, I will explore these ideas further through a close, case study analysis of the interviews I

conducted with Liam and his mother Susan.

## **CASE STUDY**

As discussed in chapter three, while I had hoped to be able to recruit whole families to participate in this research, I had limited success here and Liam and Susan were the only family where I was able to interview both the person in custody and the family in the community (see chapter three here). Yet, while they are only one family, I would nevertheless suggest that being able to explore the impact of Liam's imprisonment on his family from both perspectives has allowed me to develop a greater insight into the effects of imprisonment on families and prisoners, but also their *relationships with each other*. To this end, the case study will begin by presenting a detailed analysis of how the family continue to actively engage in family practices and displays despite Liam's imprisonment. Through this analysis I will suggest that Liam's imprisonment has caused Susan to increase her role in the lives of his children, and while this is essential maintaining contact, it may also blur the boundaries between the roles of "parent", "child", "adult" and "dependant".

### **Case Study: Susan and Liam**

As noted elsewhere (see Appendix II), Liam is in his early thirties, a father to two sons and is a number of years in to a long-term sentence. Prior to his conviction Liam and his ex-partner had a joint custody arrangement to care for their children whereby Liam had the boys most weekends, often from Thursday to Sunday. Liam's mother Susan has assumed a greater caring role since Liam was sentenced taking on his side of this joint custody arrangement and bringing the children to see Liam once a fortnight for the Sunday children's visit session, which are available to male prisoners and female prisoners on alternate weeks. Both Liam and Susan felt the children's visits are a particularly valuable means of maintaining the relationship between Liam and his sons as the child focused atmosphere allowed his sons to feel comfortable visiting the prison and allowed the

children to continue to do the things they would “normally” do, whether that be running around and playing or spending time alone with their father:

**Susan:** what they love about a Sunday bonding visit is that they can run riot like they were outside. I mean they come in and they are absolutely soaking, soaking with sweat by the time they come out. They cannae get a drink over there or anything like that, that is a downside because you know it depends – sometimes there are officers on who will go and get them diluting juice but others just no, they won’t even get them a glass of water. That’s, you know, but you know – now I know who it is and I say don’t even ask for a drink today because you are not going to get one – but they absolutely love the fact that they can run about daft, they can play games, guess who or whatever, but they also like the structured ones. I mean they have come to see the animals, they have come to see the birds, they’ve come to....the Christmas nativity got thrown on them on the day because I wasn’t sure I was getting to bring them in but they got that thrown on them. Last week they were making planets and they absolutely love it because they are doing it with their dad.

**Liam:** the actual bonding visits have been invaluable to me, they really have. If it wasn’t for them I probably, I phone my kids every night but I can tell when I am speaking to me that there are things that they can’t tell me or things that they don’t want to talk about when their mum is sitting listening in. Its things like the father influence that I had on them that is difficult to maintain without actually getting to see them so, yeah, they are really good.

There are a number of points of interest in these extracts that demonstrate the ongoing relevance of family practices and displays to families affected by imprisonment and illustrate many of the arguments made above. By taking up the fortnightly children’s visits, Liam’s family are actively displaying that these relationships are continuing despite his imprisonment. This can be seen in both the regular and routine nature of the visits, and the value placed by both Liam and Susan on the opportunities for him to do “normal” family things with his boys. This emphasis on being able to physically interact with the children demonstrates the embodied nature of family practices and displays, and Susan explains to me that while the primary purpose of this visit is for Liam to spend time with his children she still “*gets a cuddle when I go in*”.

Importantly, the fortnightly Sunday children’s visits for male prisoners was the only routine opportunity that Liam had to spend time with his children, as for a variety of reasons this was the only visiting session they could attend regularly. While there are children’s visits on weekday evenings, as the family live outside central Edinburgh these do not suit Liam’s young

sons as they would get home too late for a school night. Liam is reluctant to allow them to attend regular visiting sessions which he feels do not offer the same quality of interaction with his children. Further, as Liam is serving a long-term sentence, the visiting sessions available to him are shared with protection prisoners, a group that he does not want his sons to have contact with, both because he would feel uncomfortable with this and because of the questions his children might ask. As a result, his children only rarely attend regular visiting sessions to mark special occasions such as Christmas or birthdays:

**Susan:** Well the older one is funnily enough of the two, actually just doesn't want to come in on a proper visit because of all the bad people. Now that is nothing from us, that is obviously what he has been told by his mum. And I keep saying to him that it is not bad people, it is people like you or dad, but my son as well because obviously there is you know sex offenders on the same visit the would just rather that they didn't come in. Unless it is a particularly special, like they came in on Boxing Day because it was Christmas time. And the younger one, he came in on his dad's birthday last year. But the older one just wouldn't come, he just cried and cried and cried

**Liam:** And I just won't, the fact that I know that there are convicted paedophiles sitting within that radius of my children I wouldn't feel comfortable with it, and I don't know how I would answer the questions from them 'why have they got maroon tops on daddy, why have you got a green top?'<sup>35</sup>. And for the fact that the environment that they come to, the bonding visits, are amazing – the fact that I can get up and interact with my children and go down and play with them and go to the chalk board or play tig or whatever. At the normal visit they have been in a couple of times like on my birthday they came in. On the first year my oldest one decided he didn't want to come, he was quite scared, he didn't know how it was going to be while my youngest jumped at the chance. Then last year for my birthday my oldest decided he wanted to come as well and it was good because the FCOs [Family Contact Officers] are brilliant and I can't praise them highly enough – I spoke to them beforehand and I requested to get a table right down next to the play area so I was as far away from these categories of prisoners and they were brilliant, they did move me right down there and obviously the kids came and sat on my knee the whole time. But I could sense that they wanted me to get up and they wanted me to be able to play with them and do things with them and it wasn't the same environment. So for those reasons really is why I won't get them into a normal visit.

While the potential barriers to maintaining family relationships in the context of imprisonment have been discussed elsewhere (see chapter five), Liam and Susan's accounts illustrate that these will manifest differently for

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<sup>35</sup> Prisoners housed on different levels of the residential hall wear different colours on visits.

different families. While Edinburgh is the closest prison to the children's home it is still too far to visit on a school night and this, combined with Liam's unwillingness for them to attend the same visiting sessions as protection prisoners, restricts the number of visiting sessions available to them. Perhaps more encouragingly, that both adults contrast how much Liam's sons enjoy the children's visits with his oldest son's fearfulness of regular visiting sessions demonstrates how different visiting environments can promote high quality contact, and how much initiatives to support family contact such as the Family Contact Officers and the children's visits are valued. Indeed, the only real issue that either Susan or Liam expressed with these visits is the small number of spaces available, and the way in which these were allocated:

**CJ: they do the bonding?**

**Susan:** yeah every second Sunday if he can get the visit. It is getting harder and harder to get the visits because they are only allowed four and he works inside so he is not always there to put his name down

**CJ: Ok, is it like first come first served?**

**Susan:** they say it is, they say it is. And of course it depends what side of the hall they open up first. And there mum doesn't let them come on a Monday night or a Wednesday night unless it is the school holidays or she just takes it up her back to let them come.

**Liam:** My issue is the inconsistencies throughout the system. And my issue is it was a special occasion, it was Father's day, and they only had four spaces available. So that is one thing if I had any sort of wish for them to change anything would be that they have more spaces available on a Sunday visit, or they could change it so we had the opportunity of every Sunday. Because as I say if I couldn't get one week it wouldn't bother me if I get the next because I would still be seeing them regularly but if I only get to see them once a month or once every six weeks it really destroys me, it really does and it has a detrimental effect on them as well.

The language that Liam uses here, in describing how not seeing his children regularly "destroys him", leaves us in little doubt as the emotional investment that the family has in regular visits. I would suggest that Liam's use of Fathers' day to illustrate this point, and his willingness to relax his restriction on his sons attending regular visits around significant occasions such as his birthday or Christmas, demonstrates the importance of celebrating family occasions as a means of conducting family displays and practices. This also illustrates how upholding (as far as possible) traditions play a crucial role in the maintenance of family relationships when someone

is in custody, as Liam's family have sought to do through the exchange of gifts to celebrate occasions such as Christmas or birthdays. For Liam, the support of his mother here is invaluable, as she takes on the responsibility for shopping for, wrapping and funding the presents for the children.

**Liam:** my mum has helped endless amounts with getting kids Christmas presents and birthday presents. Because although I am in here I don't want them going without. The first year that I was in here it was fine because I had money saved up from when I was working and now that money is gone so I am having to rely on my mum to do it but she knows I will pay her back when I get out.

However, while Liam is not able to shop for his sons' presents while in custody, he was able to make gifts for Susan and Erica. While Liam did not discuss this in his interview, both Susan and Erica recounted how the hand-made Christmas gifts they had received from Susan's son Liam were more meaningful than anything he had ever bought them in the past:

**Susan:** My son has made a vases a couple of vases, it is like a paper vase and it has flowers on it, I can't really explain it but I have photographs I could show you but he made one for me the first Christmas he was in....

**CJ:** See like you have been talking about things he makes for you and you were talking about sending photos for him – is all that kind of stuff quite important, being able to have something that he has made or share something that you have done?

**Erica:** oh aye definitely oh aye

**Susan:** I mean he is 31, 32 in a couple of months time and that is the most important Christmas present that I have ever had.

**Erica:** because he was thinking about her

**Susan:** because he made it, he made it himself. Every year since he has been an adult he has given his sister the money and said you go and get the present so there wasn't a lot of thought went into it if you like. Whereas with that it was the fact that he actually took the time, and I know how many hours it took him to make it, and that is important. That is very very important. Well it is to me, it is to me.

**Erica:** I was awful emotional because I hadn't expected it and it was beautiful, and it let you ken he was thinking about you too.

This extract from my interview with Susan and Erica clearly demonstrates a number of the theoretical arguments made in the body of this chapter. We can see here just how much these gifts from Liam are treasured (not least because Susan has photographs of them to show me). Further, they are treasured not because they were received in his absence, but because of the time, effort and care that they represent. We see very clearly here then that the tools for family display discussed above – whether they be photographs,



gifts, visits or hugs – are so important to participants because of the meanings and emotions that are ascribed to them.

While Christmas is widely culturally understood as a time for marking family traditions (Lupton 1996), Liam's family also sought to continue family rituals and conventions that were more unique to them. Liam noted that one of the things he found difficult about the weekend was that the prison regime did not allow him to phone his sons late enough to discuss the outcome of the day's sports; but while recounting his frustrations he told me that when his nephew was younger Liam had helped him to set up a fantasy football league, and that his nephew was now doing the same for Liam's oldest son:

**Liam:** what really frustrates me as well is like at the weekend, I always try and phone the kids at eight o'clock before they go to bed but at the weekend we get locked up at half four and it is usually about six o'clock, seven o'clock at night that I feel like this is when I should be speaking to them and I feel like I have got so much I want to tell them, and my oldest has got to the age now where he is a really really keen enthusiast in football and he's started up a fantasy football team online that I used to do with my nephew....my nephew's dad is an alcoholic and he is off the scene so he doesn't have any male influence in his life other than me, so things that me and him used to do my oldest has now grown up and is wanting to do the same things. So I am lucky that my nephew is doing the fantasy football and that with my son.

This extract not only demonstrates that television can serve as a useful tool for connecting prisoners to the world and their families outside the prison gates (Jewkes 2002). Here, we can see Liam's nephew passing on the tradition of playing fantasy football to his oldest son in Liam's absence; providing a poignant illustration of the argument made above that memories of the past (Liam's nephew's memory of this) can create connections between people in the present (Morgan 1996, Finch and Mason 2000). Liam's son and his nephew are not only spending time together creating their fantasy football league, they are also jointly remembering Liam and making him and continued presence in their lives. This should alert us to the power and significance of more "unconventional" family displays.

Liam and Susan both independently raise the topic of Liam's nephew in their interviews, describing how he is particularly close to Liam and has been affected both by Liam's imprisonment and the fact that as he is not yet

sixteen he could not come into the prison to visit Liam without being accompanied by another adult. There are subtle differences in their accounts as to precisely why Susan and Liam feel this is problematic: Susan feels that as he is growing older Liam's nephew needs some time alone with him to "speak to a man", whereas Liam feels that his nephew struggles to get a word in edgeways when accompanied by their female relatives. Susan also notes that the effort Liam puts into maintaining his relationship with his children contrasts markedly with the absence of Liam's nephew's own father:

**Susan:** I had to be strong for the boys, and I had to be strong for the boys' mum, and I had to be strong for my daughter and also my other grandson because of his uncle was his role model, because his dad is not in his life. So although the boys had lost their dad's, like you know not lost him but lost having him there, my grandson had also lost his uncle.

**CJ: And would you say it is kind of like the same for all three of them?**

**Susan:** Yes, yes

**CJ: It is almost like all three of them lost their dad's eh?**

**Susan:** Yes, yes it is isn't it

**Erica:** oh aye

**Susan:** Aye it is, because I mean my grandson because he was older and knew from the beginning and it took a while because he was scared at first to come into a visit and now he comes in and he is fine. And he is 16 this year so he is able to come in on his own, because he wants to spend time speaking with his uncle and he can't do that because he comes in with me or he comes in with his mum or whatever. And he is at that age that he needs to speak to a man.....So he really feels it I think, and I think as well on the outside because his uncle has tried so hard to keep a bond with the boys and he feels it because his dad who is on the outside doesn't do that.

**CJ: Yeah, that is a whole other side of it I hadn't thought of it is yeah**

**Susan:** Yeah you know his uncle is still trying, I think the first Christmas he [Liam] had managed to phone about three times that day, every time he got opened up he phoned the boys. And my other grandson's dad hadn't even bothered to pick up the phone once.

This exchange between myself, Susan and Erica shows not only how the impact of imprisonment can be far-reaching in terms of the number of people it affects, but also in the unexpected ways that it manifests itself. Importantly, this extract also alludes to the amount of caring labour taken on by Susan in the aftermath of Liam's imprisonment: she not only has taken on a far larger amount of the care of the boys, but she also facilitates contact between them and Liam, supports other family members such as Liam's sister and nephew, and also spends considerable amounts of time and effort

visiting Liam herself and ensuring he has everything that he needs. Indeed, Liam spoke at length – and at a number of points in his interview - about how much he valued not only the regular contact he has with his children and their pictures and photos that are sent in by Susan; but also the “home comforts” that the money Susan puts in his PPC allowed him to buy, such as “edible” food, toiletries and such:

**Liam:** The money that I had saved up before I came in here is long gone and I am really really lucky that I have got my mum, and my mum still pays in £20 a week for my canteen so I can buy home luxuries like Lenor softener and Daz hand wash and things so that my clothes smell good and that I feel normal because even the washing stinks when it comes back, so it is just things like that.

**Liam:** So you turn your cell into your home, you try and put pictures up that are homely, you are allowed posters and you try and get your own things handed in – which again is another issue that I had but I won’t go into that – you just try and get as many home comforts as you can, do you know what I mean, things that remind you of home.

On a practical point, Liam’s comments on the difficulties he experienced in trying to have his own possessions handed in further illustrate the time that Susan dedicates to supporting him, as she tried on multiple occasions to satisfy the prison’s security requirements. On a more theoretical point, I would suggest that Liam’s choice of words here are revealing: through his use of the phrases such as “home comforts” he providing clear illustrations of the power of objects such as clothing, posters and washing powder to evoke memories of home. These do not only make his time in custody more comfortable, but also reinforce his own identity as both part of the family and the “normal” person he was before his sentence. Yet it was not just Liam who sought comfort in his possessions, or used them as a tool for materialising memory. Just as Leah described in the previous section, Susan also used Liam’s aftershave as a source of comfort when she was particularly missing him:

**Susan:** mmm hmmm – I do miss him being there, I miss the smell of his aftershave in the house, I miss him coming in at two or three in the morning and me having fell asleep on the couch and him leaning over and giving me a kiss

**CJ: Aww**

**Susan:** I miss things like that you know. But I did for a while I had his aftershave on a cushion and I quite often sleep in his bed, I sleep in his bed so that the dog can get up beside me because the dog is not allowed on my bed! But she is allowed on his bed.

These family practices and displays are highly person to Liam's family, and have allowed for relationships to be maintained despite his imprisonment. However, this is not to suggest that their relationships have remained unchanged. In their study of problematic gambling, Hughes and Valentine argue that the family displays adopted in the wake of a disclosure of problematic gambling can *temporarily* reposition the gambler as a child within the family, as the family seek to support them both financially and emotionally through strategies such as the repayment of debts, assuming control of finances, policing Internet access and researching appropriate supports (Hughes and Valentine 2011). I would suggest that a similar analysis can be applied here, as Liam himself remarks "*in here you are solely reliant on people outside*". Thus the need for Liam to rely on his mother for financial and emotional support and the care of his children effectively repositions Liam within his family as lacking full adult status; as can be seen in the following extract where Susan describes him as fifteen (years old) times two years old rather than a thirty year old grown man with two children of his own:

**Susan:** My son has a dog and I've had to take the dog

**CJ: (laughing) because you didn't feel that you were quite busy enough**

**Susan:** well exactly, I mean do you know if you speak to people about me its like oh aye she is always on the go, she is always working. Well now I'm always working but I have also got a six year old, an eight year old and a fifteen year old times two and a dog.

That Liam feels a lack of personal autonomy while in custody resonates with the wider literature which suggests that the prison can be experienced as an infantilizing environment (Crewe 2006; Smith 2002; Ugelvik 2011; Carlen 1983; Eaton 1993). However the key point here is not that Liam is dependent on the prison regime to access many of the basic necessities for everyday life – such as showers, food or clean clothes – although this undeniably important. What is key here is that many of his previous adult roles and responsibilities have not just been taken on by the prison estate, but also by Susan. In many ways this is experienced positively by Liam and his family; this contact facilitated through Susan is treasured by Liam, and as can be seen from the accounts of other participants such as Lorna and Yvonne, separation of parents and children by imprisonment can be

experienced as deeply painful. However, like the tendency of families to keep potentially upsetting news from the person in custody discussed in chapter five, this reduced autonomy and denial of full adult status can be troubling:

**Liam:** But things like that terrify me [the thought of anything happening to my mum], it really terrifies me because in here I'm completely no control over anything that happens outside, I've got no influence on anything that happens outside and I was quite an integral part to my family because my mum and dad split up when I was young, I was the man of the family, I looked after my mum and I made sure my sister wasn't taking the piss out of her, just things like that.....In here you feel like, you can see how a lot of people can give up, because you feel worthless, you feel like you have not got a purpose, you have not got any meaning, there is no point, you have got no control, they are in complete control of you.

It may be then, that we can conceptualise the presents made by Liam for Susan and Erica as not only a display of love and care, but also as a means of providing something for his family himself, and not being reliant on his mother for every element of the Christmas celebration. Indeed, as Susan notes, that given the skill that went into making these gifts Liam must have always had an "artistic side to him", but this was not an interest he had ever pursued in the community.

This resistance toward being positioned as another child of the family to be looked after is even more evident when in Liam's discussion of his future. While Liam had settled into his sentence well, one thing that did concern him was the release plan that was being put together by his social worker, who feels that Liam would benefit from a period of living at Susan's address upon release. However, Liam feels that such an arrangement would undermine his ability to "stand on his own two feet" as a mature adult, and while he wants the support of his family upon release, he would rather live in his own house:

**Liam:** [my social worker] wants me to be released to a stable and secure environment and I can fully appreciate the logic behind that. However what he can't seem to understand is I moved out when I was 15 because I was a mature person who wanted to stand on my own two feet and to me a stable and secure environment was standing on my own two feet, being close to my children, living close to my children and having joint custody of my children again, not going back to my mum's.

I would suggest that Liam’s strength of feeling here not only illustrates just how difficult release on licence can be<sup>36</sup>; but also his discomfort at being denied the opportunity to resume a fully independent adult lifestyle. Indeed, Liam goes on to distinguish his own circumstances from those of some other long-term prisoners, who may have never lived apart from their childhood home in the community. He explains that he already has what he sees as the “foundations” of an adult life outside as he left home as teenager, plays an active part in lives of his children and has held a professional job for a number of years. As a result, Liam feels that *“my real life, just got put on hold while I am here”*, and that for him the task will not be so much reintegrating into the community upon release, but rather trying to pick up where he left off:

**Liam:** But it is going to be difficult – the problems will start when I get out to try and rebuild my life but I am lucky that I have got the foundations in place, it is not starting from scratch, it is just trying to pick up the pieces.

It is notable that Liam draws such a sharp distinction between his time in custody and his “real life”, and that he sees the latter as something that requires rebuilding, and will not simply just resume as soon as he is released. This supports the argument presented here that his imprisonment has not only limited Liam’s liberty but has also eroded his adult identity. It seems that for Liam these two concepts are distinct, and while being released to Susan’s address will allow the former, it will not necessarily guarantee the latter. The exact details of Liam’s release plan seem to trouble him more than they do Susan, as in my interview with Susan and Erica the discussion does not linger on this topic for so long<sup>37</sup>. For Susan, her primary concerns stem from the relatively small size of their community, which causes her to worry that people might seek to “make trouble” for Liam while he is still on licence. The different emphasis placed on this topic by Susan and Liam perhaps suggests two things: that the

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<sup>36</sup> Indeed a number of participants had fears about how they would cope in the community knowing that under the terms of their licence they could potentially be returned to custody.

<sup>37</sup> Of course this may also reflect Susan’s self-professed tendency to focus on the present as a means of coping with the sentence, or it may be that she did not wish to discuss this with me.

renegotiation of their relationship is perhaps more difficult for Liam; and secondly, like many mothers, all Susan wants is what is best for her son, no matter how old he is.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has sought to explore how families affected by imprisonment use a range of strategies to enact family displays and practices. These are active processes, utilised by families demonstrate their care and commitment to the person in custody, and that they are still part of the family. Visits provide a key resource here, allowing families to spend time together, share embodied physical contact and for significant dates and events to be marked and celebrated. It must be noted that some families may be more willing or able to visit regularly, and those that do will be better able to display family in these ways. However, the variety of experiences of participants with regard to visits also perhaps points to ways in which the quality (rather than frequency) of family contact can be improved. Cultivating an enjoyable atmosphere and allowing families to do “the things we would do at home” such as playing with children, sharing a meal or marking a culturally significant event makes the visit something that the family look forward to, and may perhaps reassure those such as Lorna’s mother who are scared or reluctant to visit the prison. These experiences will not only be more enjoyable in the immediate term, but also create new family memories which in turn help to support and maintain family relationships in the future.

An appreciation of the significance of family memories and traditions is also key to understanding how relationships continue in the absence of the person in custody. Everyday items such as photographs, drawings, Christmas and birthday presents and even aftershave or washing powder can be used to demonstrate care and love for other members of the family and to physically materialise memories, offering participants comfort at times of distress. The importance placed by participants on upholding family traditions also perhaps provides a useful means of helping to support or

rebuild more fragile relationships, or to maintain closeness when visiting is not possible. For example, Lorna's suggestion of craft classes where parents who have limited or letterbox contact with their children could make gifts for them, without drawing attention to their family circumstances, could be a useful way forward here.

Finally, this chapter has suggested that while the ability to continue to engage in family practices and displays, whether in person or through more creative means, are highly valued by participants, these displays are shaped by imprisonment. This reflects the restrictions of the prison environment, such as the imposition of set visiting times, security procedures and regulations on acceptable property. However, drawing on the accounts of Liam and his mother Susan, I have also argued that a renegotiation of relationships can also be the result of the considerable effort made on the part of women in the community to support both the person in custody and the rest of the family. While Liam treasures the time he has with his sons, which is facilitated by Susan, and appreciates the efforts she make on his behalf, he feels that his imprisonment has undermined his key role in the family, while Susan talks about him as another child of the family to be cared for. In this way, at least for the time being, imprisonment appears to have cost Liam both his liberty and his full adult status within the family. I have also suggested that while this argument is drawn from interviews with only one family, being able to interview both mother and son has allowed a more nuanced analysis of how imprisonment affects relationships to be generated. The following chapter will offer a contrasting account of family life, exploring how families are viewed by professionals working in the criminal justice system. As we will see, different professional groups tend to construct families affected by imprisonment in particular ways, and these often fail to capture the subtleties and fluidity of family life discussed above.





## CHAPTER SEVEN: FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

### INTRODUCTION

Drawing on an analysis of social work files and interviews with prison officers and Visitors' Centre staff, this chapter will explore how families are viewed by those working within the criminal justice system, and the wider implications of the resulting interactions between families and criminal justice agencies for the perceived legitimacy of the system as a whole. It will argue that in social work files in particular, families tend to be seen as a potential aid to resettlement or a criminogenic factor. Similarly, while prison officers were aware of the potentially damaging impact of imprisonment on families, they too tended to discuss families in terms of institutional concerns (e.g. "a good visit makes a quiet jail"). It will be argued that different professional groups also adopted contrasting understandings of the families who come into contact with the criminal justice system as prison officers tended to suggest that families affected by imprisonment were "different" to "normal" people, while visitors centre staff emphasised structural disadvantages.

These "simplified" narratives contrast with the more sociological account of the family given in chapter six and may be an inevitable part of working with large numbers of prisoners and families on a daily basis, as a large bureaucratic system often struggle to recognise each person's individual circumstances. Yet they also raise questions as to whether different professional roles impact upon how families interact with criminal justice professionals. Drawing on the wider literature on legitimacy in prisons, I will argue that repeated negative interactions with criminal justice professionals can serve to entrench oppositional relationships and undermine the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system. More positively, however, this literature also suggests that both legitimacy and prison security can be improved where officers are more willing to build relationships with regular visitors as individuals, and such efforts are highly valued by family members both in custody and in the community.

## PROFESSIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT

### Prison Officers and Visitors' Centre Staff

First and foremost, it is notable that the accounts of prison officers and Visitors' Centre staff supported many of the arguments that have been made elsewhere in this thesis. Both prison officers and Visitors' Centre staff were keenly aware of the gendered dynamics in family support (see chapter four), and there was also agreement amongst both groups of participants that many families affected by imprisonment experience social marginalisation to a greater or lesser degree. Prison officers emphasised that many of the people in custody had issues or difficulties relating to poverty, drug and alcohol misuse, and abusive or "chaotic" family or personal relationships, with one officer noting that many of the men in the prison had been brought up on "skid row" (Nicky). They gave examples of having seen multiple members of the same family in the prison or having heard that other family members were elsewhere in the prison estate; while one participant with a relatively long career recalled having seen some of the men that were now in custody as children in the visits room, coming up to the prison to spend time with the fathers, brothers or cousins. There was also a general consensus that many prisoners live in the same communities, where contact with the criminal justice system was regarded as "normal", unremarkable or even inevitable. Three officers recounted stories of people they had known who had not wanted to be released or had deliberately reoffended (and in one case sat and waited for the police) so that they could return to the relatively simple life in prison (Ali, Jude and Nicky).

Yet, while the prison officers who were interviewed did recognise the social marginality experienced by many prisoners, they also tended to emphasise the difference between the family lives of many prisoners, and those of "normal" people in "mainstream" society. Officers generally noted that the lives of the people who ended up under their care in the prison were very different from the experiences of "ordinary" people and often used phrases like "it's a different world", "it's normal for them", "it's just difficult to understand", "they have different values and expectations" when talking

about the home and family lives of prisoners (Nicky, Jude, Ali and Robin). Some officers also appeared to make moral or normative judgements about the prisoners they held and their families. In the mildest form, this was evidenced through connections being drawn between poverty, education, addictions and offending. Prison officers questioned how parents who were also in prison could encourage their adult children to “go straight”, particularly if the parents were still continuing to use drugs, and interviewees spoke with disbelief of parents who would have their children’s drugs ready for them to celebrate their release from prison, or of families where the parents had actively introduced their children into drug use.

**Nicky (Prison officer):** If families are chaotic as well themselves, that doesn't help. And the families love them, and they keep in touch with them and they say that they support them but when you're sending somebody back to a mother who is also a heroin user when the daughters also heroin user and trying to stay off it then that's difficult.

Similar accounts were given by members of the Visitors’ Centre staff team, and indeed one participant remarked that over the course of their career they had come to think of the prison as “*an extension of a marginalised community*” (Jamie). However the way in which these participants discussed the lives and participants of the families that they worked with was subtly different, as instead of emphasising intergenerational criminality or drug use Visitors’ Centre staff tended to stress the links between poverty, structural inequality and contact with the criminal justice system.

Consequently, while interviewees from the Visitors’ Centre recognised that many of the families who visit the prison had (sometimes considerable) previous experience of the criminal justice system, they tended to attribute this to wider experiences of poverty or marginalisation than individual choice:

**Charlie (Visitors' Centre):** Our model is an assets model and it is based on the fact that these people have the capacity to change and they just need access to information about their background and be able to realise that there are other ways in life that there are other opportunities. It is very difficult when you have had a poor interaction with the education system, is when you have had a poor interaction with the state, and when the state has been dictating to you: you don't choose where you live, you don't choose what school your child goes to, you don't choose what kind of health care system you are going to get because you have no choices in that way you don't have the money for the access to services that other people who work in society have. These people's choices are very limited and I think people are in the main society think people choose to get involved in criminal behaviour, whereas we would disagree most of the staff team here would disagree, and see a lot of people are victims of circumstances and inequalities in society.

Thus the accounts given by prison officers and members of the Visitor Centre staff team were reminiscent debates amongst desistance researchers, some of whom see personal agency as the most important factor in moving away from offending and others who emphasise the importance of structural factors (for a critique of this debate see Farrall and Bowling 1999; Weaver 2012). Like Farrall and Bowling, both groups of participants recognised the impact of social structures and individual decision making on the lives of families affected by imprisonment, however prison officers tended to place greater weight on individual decision making, while Visitors Centre staff emphasised the structural disadvantages experienced by many families who visit the prison. These contrasting perspectives are no doubt influenced by differences in professional backgrounds, training and roles. However, what is perhaps key here is the suggestion by both professional groups that many of the prisoners and families who become entangled in the criminal justice system live with poverty and social marginalisation which can impact upon the social and financial resources they have available, but also the frequency, intensity and nature of the contacts between themselves, their families and communities and the criminal justice system.

Importantly, both groups of interviewees also recognised the problems that imprisonment could cause, and were keen to support families. Prison officers who were interviewed in both establishments were very aware that the imprisonment of a family member can have negative implications for those left behind in the community, as a source of income may have been lost and the family may have to shoulder additional costs associated with

legal proceedings and supporting the person in custody. One officer interviewed at HMP Edinburgh also noted the demands placed on families time by prison visiting, observing that even coming to visit Edinburgh prison could take a number of hours despite it being more accessible than many other prisons in the Scottish estate. Further, the same participant emphasised the potential emotional impact, explaining that families affected by imprisonment “*need to live with a stigma that he’s brought shame on the family*” (Danny). Similarly, two officers noted that the family can be particularly badly affected if they have had little prior contact with the criminal justice system or where the prisoners’ parents are employed in “respectable” professions such as teaching, social work or other criminal justice agencies:

**Nicky (Prison Officer):** it is difficult for a lot of families they are really really impacted, especially if the families are non-chaotic and there is no other offenders in the family, no other drug users in the family it's really really difficult for them to cope but they will try and pull out the stops and do everything they can. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

However, due to their different professional roles and understandings of the difficulties facing families affected by imprisonment, each group of participants sought to go about this in different ways. As the above quotations from interviews with Visitors’ Centre staff suggest, they felt that key to supporting families affected by imprisonment was providing them with good quality information and promoting the community education ethos of the Centre. This ethos has two elements: answering any immediate questions that the families might have, and also trying to empower visitors and promote change in the longer-term. Indeed, as has been noted in chapter five, having a limited knowledge of the criminal justice or prison system can be a source of considerable distress for families, and over the course of my fieldwork the Visitors’ Centre team were responding to this by working with the families visiting the prison to develop two booklets to help answer questions children might have about visiting mum or dad, and a third to help support parents or carers. This was just one strand of the informal education work developed by the team in response to the needs of the

families visiting the prison, as the following extracts from the fieldnotes illustrate:

One of the young women on this visit had obviously been here yesterday as she said she ‘had heard what was going in it [the soup] and didn’t want it’. The soup is winter veg and all the staff who are in encouraged her to try it. One said ‘it has pumpkin in it – you can say you are dead posh and you’ve had pumpkin soup dah-ling’. She tried a little bit of soup in a cup, liked it, and then ordered a bowl....when I discussed this with the staff team one explained ‘that is how we do health promotion; it is done by our workers, it is part of what we do here. Maybe next time that lassie will come in and ask for the recipe. And because we make it here, all the staff can tell her how to make it. Where else would you get that opportunity to do that bit of work with that lassie? Do you think she would go to a community centre when her boyfriend is in and out of the jail?’ (Fieldnote November 2013).

When I arrived at the Visitors’ Centre there was a little boy who was having a total meltdown – screaming, shouting and running away from his mum. His mum was struggling to cope with his behaviour and was shouting at him, so a worker tried to diffuse the situation by offering him a book to take on the bus. He didn’t really want to take one at first but then chose one and his mum took it. When I was talking to the worker later they said ‘maybe next time she’ll take a book for him on the bus, and will help her cope with his behaviour because he gets bored – it’s a long bus journey for a wee one’. (Fieldnote February 2014).

In contrast, the prison officers who were interviewed tended to focus on the things that they could do to support and maintain relationships and make visiting as easy and enjoyable as possible, rather than adopting the “social change” approach of the Visitors’ Centre staff. Interviewees discussed a range of relatively recent developments that aim to help prisoners maintain their relationships; such as more informal and relaxed children’s visits where prisoners are able to leave their seats and play with their children, “email a prisoner” schemes, family fun days, increased capacity for officers to deal with the concerns of prisoners or family members, new throughcare initiatives and a general increased awareness of the anxieties that family members might have when visiting a prison, and a desire for this to be as “normal” and enjoyable as possible. Some interviewees gave examples of when they had proactively sought to help improve family contact – either by playing a key role in introducing one of the initiatives noted above, or in a smaller way for example going out of the way to be polite and welcoming to families, encouraging prisoners to phone home on a regular basis or promoting active family interactions on visits such as allowing prisoners to

change their baby's nappy.

Officers were generally open to, and enthusiastic about, such initiatives and only one interviewee expressed any reservations about opening up children's visits to all prisoners, regardless of their behaviour, suggesting that this could potentially undermine security and send the "wrong" message to prisoners by "rewarding" them whether their conduct in the prison warranted this or not.

**Sam (Prison officer):** I think that you have to earn privileges. It's not right if someone is kicking off in the hall, being abusive or not doing what they are supposed to that if they then apply for family contact that they will get it. It's like anything in life – people should have to earn. They are making it too easy, it's undermining discipline.

In contrast, six officers observed that encouraging family contact could in fact promote discipline within the prison; explaining that a "good" visit can have a positive impact on the atmosphere in the prison and leave prisoners "on a high" whereas a bad visit – generally characterised by bad news or strained or difficult conversation in the visit room – could result in prisoners coming back to the hall "*wanting to kill everything in their path*" (Robin). Consequently, these participants observed that visits did not only serve to maintain family relationships, but it also has the additional advantage of making the prison easier to manage:

**Ali (Prison officer):** But on the whole if you've got happy prisoners then jail life kind of goes a lot more smoothly, rather than having somebody saying 'no you're not going to be able to spend quality time with your family'. I think it's definitely more the way forward, and I think it definitely keeps prison life a bit quieter.

This simultaneous desire to improve the experiences of families visiting the prison and the recognition that a "good visit makes for a quite jail" is perhaps both symptomatic and illustrative of the multifaceted nature of the prison officer role. On any given day an officer may be asked to embody a range of (often conflicting) roles, including that of a parent, a mentor, a counsellor, a teacher, a social worker, an administrator, a security guard and a police officer (Arnold et al 2007; Crawley 2004a; Crawley 2004b). Becoming a "good" officer, then, requires the careful use of discretion; selecting the most appropriate skills and personal resources to resolve any



given situation (Arnold et al 2007) but also a sensitivity to what prisoners perceive as fair treatment (Liebling and Price 2001). However, it might also be argued that suggesting that prison visiting should be improved because it has a positive influence on the atmosphere in the prison can be seen as constructing families as a resource to promote good order (Comfort 2008). Yet, the tendency to view families as a potential resource is by no means unique to prison officers, as the following section will demonstrate.

### **Criminal Justice Social Work Files**

As noted in chapter three, I undertook an analysis of 13 criminal justice social work files as part of my fieldwork at HMP Greenock before seeking participants to be interviewed. While this is a relatively small number of files, and therefore the following conclusions are made somewhat cautiously, this analysis nonetheless revealed some interesting themes of note. The first is that the key sources of information on the person's family relationships and friendships contained in social work files are primarily assessments that focus on the needs of the person awaiting trial or sentence (such as Social Enquiry Reports, which have now been replaced with Criminal Justice Social Work Reports) or their risk of future offending, such as the LSCMI<sup>38</sup> or in a smaller number of cases the HCR 20<sup>39</sup>.

Consequently, families and relationships are primarily seen in these social work files through the lens of risk and criminogenic need. This is perhaps unsurprisingly given that discourses of risk and psychological assessment have become increasingly influential in both the criminal justice system and the modern prison environment (Garland 1996; Feely and Simon 1992; Crewe 2009). Yet this emphasis on risk and the power afforded to criminal

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<sup>38</sup> A tool which has been adopted by the Scottish Government as a means of providing an objective and consistent measure of offenders risks and needs across criminal justice agencies in Scotland (Scottish Government website, accessed May 2015)  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/archive/law-order/offender-management/offender/community/16910/Inventory>

<sup>39</sup> A tool that assesses the risk of violent recidivism (Risk Management Authority website, accessed May 2015)  
[http://issuu.com/risk\\_management\\_authority/docs/2.2\\_violence\\_risk\\_validated?e=6723696/4551505#search](http://issuu.com/risk_management_authority/docs/2.2_violence_risk_validated?e=6723696/4551505#search)

justice professionals such as psychologists has not been uncontroversial; it has been argued this has become an inherent part of the modern pains of imprisonment, contributing to a feeling of “tightness” as prisoners feel their every move is observed and permanently recorded, but at the same time the outcome of this process is experienced as inconsistent, unpredictable and lacking in transparency (Crew 2009). Indeed, while this aspect of imprisonment was not the focus of this research, participants spontaneously discussed their scepticism as to the predictive power of these tools (Adam) or were critical of decisions about their progression that they perceived to be made on “suspicion and risk factors” alone (Simon).

This emphasis on risk also inevitably has implications for how relationships are constructed and understood: for example in the files that were analysed friends are often referred to “criminal friends and associates”, “delinquent peers” or “offending peers” which says little about the nature and quality of the relationship. Similarly, family members tended to be discussed with regard to their housing or employment status, drug or alcohol use and own attitudes to or involvement in offending; attributes that are often identified as “criminogenic risk factors” (Hannah-Moffat 2005). Where such criminogenic factors could be shown to be absent, relationships were described as “strong and prosocial” or “close and supportive”. In contrast, when there was evidence of that family members possessed such criminogenic factors relationships were depicted as “needs monitoring”, “need tested in the community”, “neutral” or “unclear if they are prosocial”. As criminal justice professionals can have greater power to define relationships than families themselves (Condry 2007), this focus on risk factors and the potential support offered by families can overshadow the person’s own views on how they experienced their family relationships. This can be seen in Ian’s account – his family relationships are depicted in his file as positive because no one else in his family is involved in offending behaviour, however as noted in chapter five, when I interviewed him he had gone for 15 months without a visit from his family, was struggling to maintain a relationship with his son and strongly felt the prison service should do more to help people in his position.

Indeed, as risk assessment tools were the main source of information on participants' relationships, much of the information recorded focused on the potentially negative effects or influences of relationships. For example, the LSCMI assesses the likelihood of reoffending with reference to eight central risk factors including "family/marital issues" and "anti-social associates". Thus many of the relationships that interviewees described as a positive part of their lives were absent from the files. For example, Donna described enjoying a close relationship with her brother who still lives at home with their mother and helps Donna's mother to care for her son, however this is not recorded in her file. Similarly, while a number of participants reported enjoying good relationships with their nieces and nephews these relationships were also absent from many files.

Further, friendships that are particularly significant to participants were not recorded or viewed with suspicion. For example, in his interview Colin described his friendships formed through his Church as "more like a family", however they are described as "quasi professional" in his file and concern is expressed about the appropriateness of him visiting them without supervision. Similarly, while few participants felt they had formed genuine friendships in custody, Simon explained he thought of one friend as "like a brother" yet this relationship is not recorded in his file, either as a supportive relationship or a potential "risk" or concern. The absence of any comment about this friendship contrasts with some interviewees perceptions that their social interactions were being observed and recorded, and a number of participants expressed frustration that they were expected to socialise within the prison (because to isolate themselves might be seen as a lack of social skills that could potentially jeopardise their progression) but were not permitted to maintain these relationships after release (as associating with known criminals would be in breach of the terms of their licence). Due to the small number of files it is not possible to make a definitive comment as to whether social interactions amongst prisoners were observed or recorded to the extent feared by participants, rather this tension is highlighted as a further example of the perceived power of criminal

justice professionals both to define relationships and influence sentence progression.

In contrast, positive relationships with parents or previous partners were recorded more often, perhaps suggesting that the construction of family relationships in the social work files is not only influenced by the risk discourse, but also by traditional models of the nuclear family. Indeed, depictions of family relationships often seemed to reflect fairly normative, traditional constructions of what families “should” do and “should” look like; reflecting arguments that while risk assessment tools are presented as a scientific and morally neutral, they are in fact heavily predicated upon highly gendered, racialized and middle-class conceptions of appropriate, normative behaviours and lifestyles (Hannah-Moffat 2005, 2006, 2001, 1999; Shaw and Hannah-Moffatt 2000). These normative constructions can be seen in some of the language employed in the files: for example, File No 11 notes that 11 is the father of two children who “have been adopted due to the mother’s drug use”, yet makes no mention of his own drug and alcohol use in relation to the care of the children (although it is well documented with regard to his offending history). Similarly, file No 2 states that No 2 has never had a relationship with his father because “given his mother’s promiscuity it would appear that his father’s identity is unclear”. This moralistic tone reflects dominant social narrative that care of children is ultimately the responsibility of the mother, and that drug use, overt sexuality, rejection of “conventional” lifestyles or neglect of caring responsibilities by mothers is more reprehensible than that by fathers (Carlen and Worrall 2004). This observation is perhaps somewhat troubling in light of the argument made in chapter five that the prison system itself may contribute towards the entrenchment of traditional gendered roles.

This predominant focus on risk in criminal justice social work files also has implications for the family of the person accused or convicted. The narrow view of the family taken in many social work files does not only contrast with the more active, reflexive and sociological constructions of family relationships presented in chapters five and six, it also renders invisible relationships that fall outside the norm of the traditional family. This may

prevent families affected by imprisonment receiving appropriate services and supports. For example, nieces and nephews visiting a prison are just as affected by the prison environment and regime as sons and daughters for the time which they are there and are likely to benefit just as much from facilities provided for children<sup>40</sup>.

Further, even reports that are not in themselves risk assessment tools, such as Social Enquiry Reports or their replacement Criminal Justice Social Work Reports, are designed to assist the courts and other criminal justice professionals in making decisions about the offender. Therefore while these reports may give consideration to the impact of a custodial sentence on the family this is not their sole purpose, and they are also to consider how the family may or may not support reductions in reoffending (Scottish Government 2010: 30). As a result, as noted in chapter two, a number of organisations have questioned the suitability of Social Enquiry Reports as a mechanism for ensuring that the needs and voices of family members are recognised by the criminal justice system. While this analysis had a small sample size of only 13 files it would seem to support this argument: three files made reference to the effect of the offence on the family (such as facing reprisals or media attention in the community) but none commented on the impact of the sentence on family members, even when the person had young children, a finding that was also echoed in interviews with participants.

Indeed, similar sentiments were echoed by Liam, Lorna and Yvonne (who were interviewed in custody); all of whom felt that the needs of the children in their families and the implications for their care arrangements were not considered by the court when sentencing. For Yvonne and Liam, sentencing had been particularly traumatic as neither were expecting to receive guilty verdicts or custodial sentences:

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<sup>40</sup> For example the Visitors Centre at Edinburgh Prison facilitates children's visits that can be attended by any child that has a significant relationship with the person in custody (e.g. grandchild, niece or nephew, step child etc).

**CJ: So when you went to court for this sentence and you weren't expecting to get the jail, who told them? Did you get to tell them?**

**Yvonne:** No, I went straight to prison

**CJ: And did you get to see them?**

**Yvonne:** No – I never thought I was going to get the guilty until I got the guilty and I was absolutely devastated

**CJ: And where were they, just at school as normal?**

**Yvonne:** Aye, and then there was a total breakdown and my whole family was devastated.

**CJ: And see when you were getting sentenced did they take any account of your kids?**

**Liam:** No, they didn't, no. when I was going up for obviously the trial – as I said I believed that I wasn't going to get a guilty verdict – so I had taken four days annual leave from my work, I hadn't informed my kids, I hadn't informed anyone.

Joanne, Leah and Susan (Liam's mother) who were interviewed while visiting HMP Edinburgh also felt the court had not taken into account their specific family context while sentencing. As noted elsewhere, Joanne ultimately took the decision to give up her job to care for her infant granddaughter when both her daughter and her granddaughter's father received custodial sentences, and felt that the sentencing judge was "not bothered" about the care arrangements for the baby. Similarly, Leah had expected that the court would take some account of her health condition and the needs of her children, but this had not been the case. Leah's children also felt ignored by the court process: her daughter told me that she had written a letter to the judge but no one had taken the time to read it (*Leah: the kids wrote letters to the judge; the lawyer said it was sweet but he didn't pass them on*).

Overall, then, the experiences of participants do seem to suggest that not only does the criminal justice system tend to construct family relationships in fairly traditional or nuclear terms, but these relationships also often only become visible to criminal justice professionals when they are thought to be potentially useful, for example in reducing reoffending (Mills 2005; Marshall 2008; Codd 2008). Yet the construction of families in this way is problematic, as I will demonstrate in the following section, not least because successfully navigating the criminal justice system can be difficult for families who may themselves require additional supports and information. Importantly, the various ways in which families affected by imprisonment

are perceived by criminal justice professionals may also influence interactions between families and professionals, the nature and quality of which may ultimately have implications for the perceived legitimacy of the overall criminal justice system.

## **INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PROFESSIONALS AND FAMILIES**

I have noted above that the prison officers who participated in this research were largely sympathetic to the difficulties experienced by some families, and enthusiastic about initiatives aimed at improving family contact. However, I have also highlighted the diverse and challenging nature of the prison officer role, which inevitably means that the experiences of families visiting the prison cannot be their only concern. Here I wish to suggest that the multi-faceted role of the prison officer the discretion that is inherent to their role can cause friction in the relationship between prisoner officers and the families who visit, as families are generally only concerned with being able to do what they came to the prison to do (be it visit or hand in property or money) rather than the competing demands placed on officers. This, combined with the multiple rules and regulations inherent in the running of a large organisation, can perhaps shed light on some of the tensions (and inconsistencies) that arise in the interactions between officers and visitors, as one member of the Visitor Centre staff observes:

**Ashley (Visitors' Centre):** Issues with staff in the prison – if we are having a particularly poor relationship. I think our relationship sort of has peaks and troughs with members of the prison staff. So some days they can be really really helpful, and some days – I think basically just based on what security concerns are being pushed on them at the time – that can have a big impact. So if you have someone who isn't being as helpful as you would like them to be that can cause things to be a bit frustrating and it means that your interactions with visitors are very much trying not to blame the prison staff. Because we don't ever want to make them out to be the bad guys in this; but about making sure that they are aware that some of the rules sometimes can't be massively logical.

Indeed, prison officers also highlighted the multifaceted nature of their role, and suggested that relationships with families visiting the prison could be further complicated by the fact that the person in custody may not be giving their family accurate information – either because they themselves do not

understand the prison bureaucracy or because they are actively hiding something from their family (for example that they have refused a job or are using drugs). One officer in particular questioned whether relationships with family members visiting the prison might also be influenced by staffing structures and procedural decisions. This officer explained that new officers often started on the front desk, as roles with prisoner contact are seen as more suitable for experienced officers, with the result that they too are often unfamiliar with the rules that are of most concern to visitors (e.g. what identification will be accepted, what property can be handed in etc.) which can cause tensions:

**Franky (Prison officer):** And 99 times out of 100 the staff are having problems down at the gate are trying to explain something which they have been told by somebody else. And although the person has told them is perfectly sure of why it should be done, they might not be too convinced, they might just say well they have told me. And the person is there arguing it and putting valid points across. But you don't know the answer to that... because all you can say is that as much as I agree with you... that decision is gone, its been made. So, that becomes difficult. And I've walked past when some visitors are saying don't treat me like a piece of shit, I'm not the one that's in the jail. And you feel sorry for the wee lassie that is not long in the job.... How wrong did they get that? So, you get somebody who's maybe weeks in the job, working at the vestibule.

The distress and frustration caused to visitors by changing and inconsistently enforced rules has been well documented by Comfort (2008), and this was highlighted by participants and something I frequently observed over the course of my fieldwork. While it must be recognised that I also witnessed positive interactions between prison officers and visitors, at the same time the serious consequences that can flow from poor or unfair treatment of families visiting the prison should not be minimised or underestimated. As Lorna explains, her mother found herself in a confrontation with prison officers at the end of a visit as she did not realise the visiting procedures in HMP Greenock were different from those in Corton Vale; and as a result of that argument Lorna's mother has not been to visit her since:

**Lorna:** They treat your visitors as if they have done wrong as well, do you know what I mean it's not nice....normally up in Corton Vale the visitors are the first to leave but down here [Greenock] you leave and then your visitors leave. So my mum had been up the road visiting and then when they said right end your visits



blah blah I've gave her a cuddle cheerio and I've gone to walk away and my mum went to walk out at the same time this officer was like 'hang on Mrs just you sit down' and pushed her down into the chair. And my mum is just a law abiding citizen to you know what I mean and she got pushed onto the chair that she didn't like it and she ended up arguing with them and my mum says she'll never be back again and she never has come back again

**CJ: And what has that been like for you?**

**Lorna:** It's hard, aye, it's my birthday tomorrow and..... I phoned her and she was like...I'll come up and see you and I said 'that would be nice mum when will you come up?' And she said 'I'll surprise you' and I said 'it would be nice if I could see you for my birthday', and she said 'I'll surprise you'. And I don't think she really wants to say what day because she doesn't want to come up. But I would love more than anything just to see my family.

This example is not given to make any claims as to the representativeness or wider generalizability of the experiences of Lorna's family. Indeed, the small-scale nature of this project means it is not possible to make any wider claims as to the general or overall quality of relationships between visitors and prison officers. Rather, what I wish to do here is to make the argument that the quality of interactions between criminal justice professionals and families affected by imprisonment matters. As noted elsewhere, Megan Comfort has argued that women with a partner in custody ultimately becomes subject to secondary prisonization, a process that is in part characterised by the long waits, changing rules, uncertainty and time wasting that these women experience when visiting the prison (Comfort 2008). This rich analysis is useful here as it not only highlights the costs and pains women suffer as a result of standing by their man, but also because it illustrates how the theorising of prison sociologists can fruitfully be applied to families affected by imprisonment to shed greater light on the implications of negative interactions between these families, communities and the criminal justice system.

Indeed, the importance of these interactions should not be ignored, as it has recently been argued that punitive, "tough on crime" narratives, penal populism and the stigmatisation of families affected by imprisonment together may leave children who experience parental imprisonment vulnerable to social exclusion, administrative exclusion (in other words, overlooked and ignored by official agencies and public policy) and increasingly oppositional relationships with authority figures such as prison

officers and social workers (Scharff Smith 2014: 80). This analysis is helpful in alerting us to the wider costs of imprisonment; however I wish to suggest here that it can be usefully extended by looking to the wider literature on the sociology of the prison, and in particular the work of Sparks, Bottoms and Hay on legitimacy and order in prisons (1995, 1996; see chapter two for a more detailed discussion). Of particular importance here is their argument that the moral authority claimed by the state and its subsequent right to punish offenders are undermined where the representations of that authority are seen as inherently unjust, unprincipled or unfair (Sparks et al 1995: 308). In this analysis, then, each instance of poor or wrongful treatment serves to delegitimise the prison regime as a whole, as Sparks and Bottoms explain:

Every instance of brutality in prisons, every casual racist joke and demeaning remark, every ignored petition, every unwarranted bureaucratic delay, every inedible meal, every arbitrary decision to segregate and transfer without giving clear and well founded reasons, every petty miscarriage of justice, every futile and inactive period of time is deligitimising (Sparks and Bottoms 1995: 607).

With the possible exception of inedible food, each of these examples can equally be applied to families visiting the prison. Over the course this research I often observed families in the Visitors' Centre who were angry, frustrated or distressed as a result of a prisoner being transferred with little or no prior warning, being unable to visit a partner who was "in the digger", what they felt was unsympathetic or rude treatment from officers, or spending hours waiting for a partner or child to be released or returned from court, as these extracts from my research diary illustrate:

A visitor had travelled to the prison with her two nieces to find out that the person she had come to see had been moved to Addiewell<sup>41</sup>. She was very upset as she had been up at the prison the day before and had been refused a visit, but no one had told her that he was going to be moved (Fieldnote February 2014)

One of Brooke's friends arrived not long after me [I arrived at 12 noon] as her partner had been in court in the morning and she didn't see the point in going home before the visit [the remand sessions were at 14:30 and 15:30]. As it turns out, she didn't get her visit anyway; as she is a "local" the prison's view is that she can visit later in the week. Both she and Brooke have been having trouble accessing appropriate ID that would allow smooth entry to the visit. (Fieldnote March 2014)

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<sup>41</sup> A relatively rural prison situated in the Central Belt between Edinburgh and Glasgow

The purpose of these examples are not to suggest that the decisions taken in regard to the relevant prisoners were wrong or unwarranted, as there may well have been institutional requirements or particular circumstances that were impossible for me to observe from the Visitors' Centre. Rather, the point that I wish to make here is that the timing of these decisions and the way in which they were communicated to families could be distressing and, as argued in chapter two, can suggest to families that they are viewed as unimportant or inconsequential by the criminal justice professionals taking these decisions. Indeed, visitors often had personal circumstances that could render the decision to move the person elsewhere in the prison estate particularly problematic, which they felt had not been taken account of:

I spoke to a young women who told me that when her partner was a couple of weeks away from release [last time he was in custody] he was moved to Barlinnie. She could not go and visit him because she was too pregnant to make the trip to Glasgow, and she was only told a few days before he was moved – I should have asked her what this meant for the birth (Fieldnote October 2013)

A young woman came into the office to speak to the Visitors' Centre staff – she was stressed and upset because her partner had told her on the visit that he as being moved to another prison. She was in the office for about an hour and was in tears twice. She seemed very vulnerable: her baby is in care; she takes large amounts of prescription medication daily; she is on dialysis; she had a miscarriage and feels like everything is falling apart because she doesn't know where he is going to be tomorrow and cannot settle while he is on remand (Fieldnote March 2014).

These observations are also supported by the accounts of participants.

While it is important to note that some participants like Bill and Alisha only had positive comments to make about prison staff, many others (Brooke, Darcy, Chloe, Leah, Ruby and Sophie) reported more difficult relationships with prison staff. For example, Leah felt that the staff on the desk were “awful” and “mean” as they had accused her of being under the influence of drugs when difficulty with speech and movement are a symptom of her illness, and had been rude to her father in law. While trying to be tactful, Susan explained that you get “nice officers and not so nice officers”, although she had been upset when one had broken a gift her son had made

by “throwing” it at her<sup>42</sup>, and like a number of other participants, also highlighted the inconsistencies inherent in navigating the prison system:

**Susan:** The time that I went over with a calendar and they told me it was too big, and I took it home and I measured it and it was half a centimetre too big, no it was may be more than half a centimetre, half an inch or something you know but it was tiny. And it was simply because the person over there was having a bad day and didn't want to measure it you know...but then you speak to somebody else and they are like I am on on Wednesday put it in then and it gets accepted.

The worst relationships with Brooke and Darcy felt that they were treated without respect and “like prisoners”, or as Darcy puts it “like dogs”. Brooke and Darcy who felt that they were treated worse than other visitors because of their young age, and disappointed that the officers they had regular contact with seemed disinterested in building a co-operative relationship with them. As a result, when they had difficulty navigating the prison bureaucracy (for example money they had paid in had gone missing) neither were reticent about putting in formal complaints, although they had little confidence that they would be listened to. This fed into a downward spiral in relationships with the prison (both young women visited six days out of seven) which ultimately led both young women to disregard the officers altogether, illustrating the delegitimising effects of perceived poor treatment by prison staff:

**Brooke:** A screw turned round to me and said ‘dinnae tell me how to do my fucking job’.....

**CJ:** **Aye does that make you kind of not care about the rules and wanting to listen to them?**

**Darcy:** nah because they dinnae care about the rules, they dinnae follow them.

**Brooke:** they don't treat us with respect

**Darcy:** they have a set of rules that they are supposed to treat us and the prisoners with respect, no matter what they have done, but they dinnae do it so why should we care? We go in there with an attitude because they have one.

Extending this analysis of legitimacy to families affected by imprisonment also resonates strongly with the accounts given by Visitors' Centre staff. For example, three of the four of these participants argued that imprisonment does not simply exacerbate marginalisation through the reduction of resources available to families, but also that there are a range of

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<sup>42</sup> See chapter 6 for a discussion of the significance of gifts of this type to Susan.

factors that can create an oppositional or “us and them” relationship between families affected by imprisonment and criminal justice agencies and perceived authority figures. For instance, one suggested the decision to support the person in custody may be important here as this often then creates a need to “justify what he has done”, particularly where families did not want the children to blame the person in custody.

**Jamie (Visitors Centre):** I think the effect [of imprisonment] is to reinforce ‘them’ and ‘us’ – I think that is the most dangerous impact of imprisonment is that as a parent you will have to justify to a certain extent what your partner has done. You have to, otherwise you are going to blame him for being an idiot. And if you blame him for being an idiot your child might blame him and they are going to have anger issues.

Yet participants’ accounts suggest this process is more complex than families adopting techniques of neutralisation to justify their continued support, and that the interactions between families and a range of actors such as teachers, the police, prison officers and neighbours and communities also have a role to play in perpetuating these adversarial relationships. These participants observed that some families already held negative views of state institutions, and that these were reinforced by the stigmatising effects of imprisonment discussed in chapter four, and negative interactions with criminal justice professionals such as the police and prison officers:

**Jamie (Visitors Centre):** I think there is a funny sort of dynamic between prisoners and families, and prisoners and partners.... there is always a very funny emm feeling that a lot of the visitors don’t think their partner should be here – most of them don’t think that their partner should be here. Most of them don’t think that they’ve not done it because most of them do know that they have done things but they will say ‘this shouldn’t really have happened’ and ‘he shouldn’t be in a place like this’ and it’s almost as if they don’t really have a sense of citizenship if you get me. Which isn’t really their own fault because it is the fault of structure but there is definitely a really common hostility towards the state for having done this, which is reinforced by the relationships that they have between the prison officers and themselves.

This feeling that one of the most damaging effects of imprisonment is that it can further entrench an adversarial relationship between families from some of the already most marginalised communities had lead the team to develop a program of informal education projects around the themes of communities and citizenship such as the “meet the police” project. This initiative is run

every few months at the Visitors' Centre and allows children and families to interact with the police in a non-threatening environment as the Centre staff try to place a considerable emphasis on fun (for example meeting the police dogs, dressing up, drawing and painting, seeing the police car and bringing in balloons and food) while also trying to foster a dialogue between families and police officers. As one participant explains, this project was designed in response to hearing children visiting expressing hostile views about the police:

**Charlie (Visitors' Centre):** The children [were] saying watch it the police will take you, it's the police's fault your dad's here. So it's that bit about citizenship – that is challenging that and saying actually, this is what you are doing to your kids, you are creating no sense of justice, your child thinks that they will be arrested for nothing, your child thinks that the police are bad, when actually that is not the reason that they police are functioning in society. What you are teaching your child is what they take onto adulthood. Because the families are involved in criminal activity – and it is not that they want to bring their kids up like that, they dinnae think – they've not thought that that is going to have a negative impact on my bairn. So when you say to them you realise that this this and this is a result of you doing that, and your child is screaming at a police car because you have instilled that in them, and they can take that back into the community and they will discuss that in their community without us. That is a good day.

Importantly, as the above example alludes to, utilising the concept of legitimacy to better understand the interactions between families and the criminal justice system also points to potentially fruitful approach to reducing these negative outcomes. Sparks et al make a distinction between situational crime prevention strategies, which attempt to manipulate the environment to reduce opportunities for crime, and social approaches which seek to do so by utilising positive, trusting social relationships; arguing that while a combination of both approaches are required to promote order in long-term prisons, it is the social strategies that are likely to bolster the legitimacy of the regime (Sparks et al 1995). Therefore, while officers working with families will inevitably need to enforce situational security measures – as the accounts of participants such as Tracey and Alisha who have been caught “passing” attest – they may be able to limit negative interactions with visitors and their potential deligitimising effects by also adopting social approaches and seeking to build relationships with visitors as *individuals*.

Indeed, all the participants who were recruited through the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre were overwhelmingly positive about the Centre itself and the team of staff who run it, with many describing it as "fantastic" or "amazing", and as I have noted elsewhere some participants would use the Centre even when they did not have a visit booked just to meet friends or have a cup of tea and chat to the staff (see chapter four). When I asked what it was in particular that they liked so much about the Visitors' Centre, virtually all participants explained that the staff team were "nice and friendly", made the effort to "get to know you on a more personal level", would "make you feel welcome" and were happy to have a "chat" or a "blether". Furthermore, a number of participants also expressed a desire for the officers they interacted with regularly to be "nicer" and more willing to build relationships with them, as Sophie explained:

**Sophie:** And they're quite rude to you as well sometimes. They're really quite pushy. Like the ones that work at the desk when you are going to go in. They can be a wee bit like when I got the two of them [Sophie's children] they can be a bit like, 'oh right, okay, that's fine'. Like, they're not like cheery or happy, I ken its their job but they could be a little bit more like, like Rosie [Sophie's toddler daughter] was talking to one of them one day, just standing in front of them and laughing and smiling and they just totally ignored her, they didn't even look at her or nothing

**CJ: Poor Rosie!**

**Sophie:** I was like 'That's not fair.' Again, it's not the kids' fault that I'm up here seeing him for being stupid. It's not...you cannae take it out on the kids. Like not even look at them, or smiling, or just been like "Hiya"

Thus Sophie's account suggests that the beginnings of a more social approach towards promoting secure and safe visits may be as simple as being welcoming and friendly towards visitors and their children, and indeed the Visitors' Centre team often observed the interacting positively with young children could be a "tool for engagement" with even the most reluctant of visitors. Indeed, Sophie also felt that the officers were unwilling to give her any leeway – for example allowing her to enter the searching area through the gate rather than the turnstile with her newborn and toddler (the former being considerably easier to negotiate with two small children) – but at the same time would not recognise their own mistakes; such as not passing on the message to her partner that she was in labour or bringing her partner down late so that they got a shorter visit. This

perhaps suggests that a willingness to try and meet the individual needs of visitors or to apologise where this is not possible may also be useful ways forward here. Similar sentiments were also expressed by Brooke and Darcy, who arguably had the most adversarial relationships with prison officers, both of whom felt there should be more “give and take” and a greater willingness to explain decisions and regulations:

**Brooke:** I put the fiver in, and he came back and he was only able to put like a tenner on his phone, because that is all he thought he had. And then this money had went missing and they didn't believe it and it wasn't until I came up and seen them. But he had to wait until the next again time [that the money is processed], and they didn't say look sorry it was our fault if we'll put the fiver on to it because it was a mistake. So the between their mistakes they are still making him wait. Now there should be some kind of give and take if between them it shouldn't be it is our mistake but you will wait. So it is not nice the way that they treat them eh. Like just the way that you are treated, you are the visitor not the prisoner and you get treated like one the way that they speak to you ken they will swear, honestly this place just drives me demented it really does.

The importance of social relationships is also underscored by Liam's account of what he particularly values about the children's visits sessions that his sons attend. Liam explained that the Family Contact Officers and the Visitors' Centre staff team (who run the visits in partnership) had successfully created an atmosphere where his children felt at ease, respected and comfortable, something that he felt contrasted with more routine visits and other staff groups:

**CJ: And is it the fact that the visits are more relaxed for the kids visits, or is the things that they have on or is it kind of both?**

**Liam:** Emmm a mixture of both and also the whole, I don't mean attitude but I can't really describe...Just the whole attitude and the way you present yourselves, the way you are, the way you are with the kids, the reassurance, the whole professionalism I suppose of the staff and everyone involved with them is probably the best thing that I can comment on because it's what has helped my kids to come to terms with coming in for visits....*I feel that the whole professionalism, the attitude, just the way that they are with the kids has been brilliant because now my kids look forward to coming in and have no worries, no qualms nothing about coming it...*So I would more than the games and the activities and the environment it is the staff and the people that are there and the way they are with the kids is just outstanding it really is, I feel that is what makes a difference in my opinion. If everyone – if all the visits staff from right through the front gate, right through to the operational staff had the same emm I would say customer service but it is not customer service, the same interaction skills and the same social skills, if they had the same sort of attitude as the FCOs and yourselves it would be so good, and even normal visits would go so much better. I mean I have had visitors



coming in here that have been spoken to like a piece of shit, one turned away from a visit. It is like the actual runners, the actual guys that stand there, are intimidating to a lot of people. (Emphasis added)

Liam's experience not only reflects how much the children's visits are valued by those who take them up, but also demonstrates that building positive relationships between prison officers and families is by no means impossible. Importantly, as Liam suggests, the key to the success that of these visits has not been the extra resources such as games and activities but the willingness of the team who run them to engage with the families on a deeper level and the effort that they put in to building positive relationships. The partnership working between the Visitors' Centre and the prison may have a key role to play here, as it allows the team to capitalise on the comparatively more relaxed atmosphere of the Visitors' Centre (which is physically separate from the prison and therefore does not have the same emphasis on security) to begin building relationships with families as soon as they arrive for their visit.

Indeed, over the course of my fieldwork I saw a number of examples of how the separate space of the Visitors' Centre and good working relationships between the staff team and prison officers could create opportunities to foster positive interactions between families and prison officers. Many of these were simple and everyday in nature, as the following extract illustrates:

It is becoming increasingly clear that having a physically separate building for the Visitors' Centre has benefits for the visitors. Visitors to Edinburgh Prison are reliant upon the prisoner placing them on the visiting order – today there was a woman who had come up expecting a visit but the prisoner had not booked one for her. The Visitors' Centre gave her somewhere to wait while the rest of her group went on the visit. However, because the Visitors' Centre is also used by prison officers and professionals it can also serve as a space for positive interactions between visitors and officers. Two officers had the “drug dog” over in the Centre and a mum and dad were letting their toddler pet the dog – he was loving it! (Fieldnote February 2014).

However, I also saw more structured, formal pieces of work that aimed to break down barriers between officers and families. One example of this was the “Inside Out” day; an event devised by the Visitors' Centre team and delivered in partnership with the prison. For this event, officers and other

professionals from various parts of the prison (such as the gym, the library, the workshops and the kitchen) set up displays and information stands in the Visitors Centre, allowing the families to meet the officers, find out more about the prison regime and to try the food that was being served in the prison that day. As noted elsewhere in chapter five, a lack of information about the prison can be extremely distressing for families, so perhaps it is unsurprising that this event was largely well received:

The Visitors' Centre was really busy; it felt like Christmas. The Visitors' Centre staff worked hard to bring visitors down to the officers so that they could find out more about the prison. When I asked them what they thought about the day most said that it was 'really good' but one or two said 'my boy doesn't like curry' or 'there are too many white shirts for me to feel comfortable'....One of the officers noted 'we're going to get loads of hassle off the guys now; now that the families have seen that they can go to the gym, they can work in the workshed, that they can go to the library etc.'....While some of the families came back out [from the visit] saying 'my boy says the food isn't like that' even the most entrenched families did recognise 'well he would say that he is not going to say anything good about the prison'. The same visitor remarked 'well my boy is getting fatter so he must be eating something!' (Fieldnote March 2014)

As the above extract from my fieldnotes demonstrates, there are numerous benefits to families from events of this type. In addition to a lack of accurate information potentially causing the family to imagine the worst with regard to prison conditions, I have also argued in chapter five that imprisonment can unbalance relationships and that in some instances the person in custody can make onerous demands for visits, money or property. By allowing families to see pictures of, ask questions about and even taste what is already provided in the prison, events like these may allay some of the worst fears of families and perhaps also allow them to resist demands from the prisoner that they cannot afford (or do not wish) to meet. Further, events of this type also create an opportunity for families to interact positively with officers in an environment where power differentials are perhaps less heightened than at the point of admission to visits.

This is important as positive relationships, and a consistent flow of accurate, comprehensible information is also key to promoting the legitimacy of a prison. As Bottoms and Sparks observe, prison officers must not only be seen to be fair in their decision making, but an important part of this is being

able to explain in simple terms why adverse or unpopular decisions have been taken (Bottoms and Sparks 1997). This equally applies to families and visitors, and I often saw examples of good practice in explaining to families why seemingly inconsistent decisions had been made:

**CJ: See if you do that [work with prison staff and rules], do you think that can kind of improve relationships between the visitors and the prison staff – like I saw you do it the other day when you said I’ll never help you get a baby in who is not on the list [where a visit has not been booked before arrival]**

**Charlie (Visitors Centre):** Aye because I’m educating them on why the prison staff do things – so when I say right that is not allowed I will try and let the families know why in a way that they will respect as well.

**CJ: Yeah because all the lassies standing along there, they were like ‘oh aye yeah you can’t do that with a bairn’**

**Charlie:** Aye so because before if they brought a child up who wasnae on the sheet they would start going mental because they cannae see what the rule is that would stop them doing that – that’s their child, that child has been up before, and in their head there is not a reason so unless you explain things, which sounds like common sense but to say to somebody actually we are doing that for the protection of children once you explain that to this group of people they are not stupid. They’ll get it and say oh alright I can see why you are doing that. ***But if you keep banging on about rules and regulations and never explain why a rule is in place then people lose their respect for you*** because they cannae understand and they just see you as putting a barrier in place. (Emphasis added)

Importantly, it must be emphasised at this point that the above analysis is not to suggest that many prison officers are not polite, friendly and keen to help families and visitors wherever they can, or that all families have negative relationships with prison staff. Rather, I wish to suggest that the cumulative effects of a range of factors such as the challenges presented in managing the safety and security of large numbers of prisoners and visitors; the difficulties many families face navigating prison rules and regulations; staffing patterns; and in some instances repeated negative interactions between officers and families can undermine the legitimacy of the prison in the eyes of some families affected by imprisonment. Further, while the large numbers of participants reporting some difficulties with prison staff must be recognised, it is also likely that a single negative interaction with a member of a professional group, particularly if we perceive these professionals as “outsiders” or different to ourselves, may lead to distrust of the professional as a whole (Chatman 1996). Indeed, in an informal conversation one visitor who did not participate further in this project told

me that while an officer had only made her cry once, she always remembered this.

I spoke to one woman who had travelled from central Scotland on public transport as she didn't feel confident driving; this took her seven hours for a 30 minute remand visit. She told me that she preferred Glonochil as she felt comfortable driving there, and Perth because the visits were longer. She said it was hard to learn all the different rules at different prisons. The first time she ever visited a prison she had ID but no proof of address. An officer had shouted at her and she was too intimidated to argue back and was not allowed to visit. While this was her only bad experience in four years, she told me that she still remembers how that felt. (Fieldnote October 2013).

Stories such as these leave little doubt as to the symbolic importance of everyday interactions. These can and do have a profound impact on families affected by imprisonment, communicating the importance afforded by the criminal justice system to their selves, their circumstances and their relationships. This should not only alert us to the potential benefits of utilising social as well as structural strategies for maintaining order, but should also cause us to reflect on the wider costs of the use of imprisonment. Indeed, for many of the families who participated in this research this was not their first contact with the prison system, and these repeated interactions create a greater risk of oppositional relationships being forged over time. Furthermore, the prison is only one part of the criminal justice process, and families also spoke of how they felt the courts did not listen to them (see the accounts of Leah, Liam, Yvonne, Susan and Joanne above), while the children of the Collins family told me how embarrassed they were to return home with their friends to find the house in disarray following a police search of the property (see Moore et al 2011 and Scharf Smith 2014 for a discussion of similar findings). As a result, the cumulative and potentially negative impact of these repeated interactions with the criminal justice system may not only entrench social marginality by draining the already scarce resources of many families, but by also reinforcing an oppositional and delegitimising relationship with criminal justice institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has sought to argue that families affected by imprisonment

become visible through different actions, mechanisms and perceptions as they visit the person in prison, feature in social work reports and interact with professional groups in the prison and the prison Visitors Centre. For example, the information regarding families contained in criminal justice social files was primarily captured in various risk assessment tools and sentence progression reports, and therefore perhaps unsurprisingly largely focused on whether the relationship in question should be seen as a criminogenic or protective factor. As a result, relationships were recorded in a rather narrow way, and many of the people that participants reported to be significant to them in interviews were absent from the file. Further, these reports tended to reflect a rather traditional view of family life, and relationships that strayed from this narrative or that were seen to be less conventional were viewed with suspicion. However, perhaps the most important implication of this focus on risk and protective factors is that the legitimate support needs of the family, particularly at the time of sentencing, went unremarked upon. This finding was also echoed by a number of participants who were interviewed both in the prison and the community, and supports the current efforts to introduce legislation to require that pre-sentencing supports focusing on the needs of any children be introduced that were discussed in chapter two.

Interviews with prison officers and Visitors' Centre staff also supported arguments that have been made elsewhere in this thesis, and in particular the claim that many families affected by imprisonment also often experience high levels of social marginalisation that can be exacerbated by imprisonment. Interestingly, members of the Visitors' Centre staff team were more likely to attribute this marginalisation to wider social structures than prison officers, who were more likely to emphasise individual agency or "lifestyle" choices. As a result, while both groups of participants were keen to help and support the families visiting the prison, officers tended to see their role here in more limited terms, for example being welcoming to families or helping them to navigate the security procedures. In contrast, Visitors' Centre staff aimed to support families to make longer-term changes to their lives by recognising their individual strengths and by

engaging them in informal education activities, such as the “meet the police” initiative discussed above.

While the enthusiasm amongst participants to support families affected by imprisonment is encouraging, when all the data is drawn together it becomes clear that this can be challenging to realise in practice. A large number of participants interviewed both in custody and the Visitors’ Centre described tensions between families visiting the prison and officers, and could give examples of poor treatment. Visitors in particular lamented poor relationships with officers, inconsistent treatment and what they saw as a “lack of give and take”. This discrepancy between the accounts of professionals and the families who participated in the project is likely to reflect the complexity of the prison officer role and the running of a large institution, rather than consistent or deliberate mistreatment of families. Indeed, prison officers themselves discussed the challenges of their role and larger organisational practices, such as placing inexperienced officers on the reception desk, which they felt were not helpful in promoting good relationships with visitors.

I have suggested that the work of Sparks, Bottoms and Hay can be usefully applied here, as their argument for social crime prevention measures presents a possible way forward in easing both interactions between prison officers and visitors while also maintaining (and perhaps improving) prison security. Promoting positive relationships between visitors and officers *as individuals* may potentially go some way to building the more personal relationships that some participants felt were lacking. Furthermore, as Liam’s account of the children’s visits suggests, a positive relationship between families and officers may also play a key role in facilitating high quality contact, where families feel happy and confident in the prison environment. Yet, perhaps the most important insight to be taken from the work of Sparks et al is that repeated, negative interactions between visitors and prison staff risks further entrenchment of oppositional relationships between marginalised communities and the criminal justice system. Indeed, this is very much the rationale underpinning the “meet the police” initiative discussed above, although not expressed in these theoretical terms. This

should not only give reason to reflect on the true costs of imprisonment, but suggests that much of the current policy focus on prisoners' families, informed by the wider desistance literature, is too narrow in focus. Rather than asking how families might support resettlement, we should instead be questioning how the prison system can minimise the damage caused by imprisonment not only to family relationships, but also to the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system amongst some of Scotland's most deprived and marginalised communities.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis has sought to explore what it means to be a family in the context of imprisonment, how these relationships are constructed and maintained, and how those affected by the imprisonment of a family member are perceived by, and interact with, the criminal justice system. The stories of men and women in custody, the families visiting HMP Edinburgh and criminal justice professionals that have been discussed in previous chapters suggest that the answers to these questions are by no means straightforward; as one participant noted “family means lots of different things to different people” (Chris, Visitors’ Centre). In this final chapter, I will seek to bring all these stories, with all their individuality and complexity, together to make three key theoretical arguments. The first is that while family does indeed mean different things to different people, something that is reflected in the range of significant relationships identified by participants, what unites their stories is that family is something that is actively constructed by all the men, women and children who participated in this project. Participants drew on a range of resources and strategies to actively demonstrate and display their ongoing love, care and commitment to those who are most important to them.

Secondly, and perhaps paradoxically, while the impact on imprisonment was widely felt across these key relationships, virtually all of the emotional, practical and financial costs inherent in maintaining relationships affected by imprisonment were shouldered by women, be they mothers or partners. The implication of this, given the already scarce resources available to these women, is that imprisonment serves not only to reinforce social marginality, but also to entrench *gendered* inequality. Finally, I wish to suggest that this complexity is not always captured by criminal justice policy or practice, and there has been insufficient attention paid to both the importance of the quality of the interactions between criminal justice actors and families affected by imprisonment, and the potential implications for the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system as a whole. This chapter will begin by exploring and substantiating each of these three claims in turn. It



will then move on to discuss the wider methodological issues raised by this project, and the implications of these findings for criminal justice policy in Scotland.

## **THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

As noted in chapter two, the shape of family life in modern Scotland is changing, and it is no longer possible, if indeed it ever was, to speak of a single model of family life. It should therefore not surprise us that the same holds true for families affected by imprisonment: as argued in chapter four, participants' accounts of their family lives encompassed a diverse range of family backgrounds and circumstances. Participants interviewed in HMP Greenock described growing up in the care of parents who were together, parents who were divorced, parents who were separated by imprisonment, one parent alone, adopted parents, kinship care or Local Authority care. Virtually all of these participants emphasised how much they valued good relationships with their siblings, and in some cases their siblings' children, but many noted that their relationship with one or more of their brothers or sisters had broken down. A smaller number of participants described less conventional family relationships, such as Colin's close friendships within his church; Liam and Yvonne's close attachment to their pets; and the importance of particular professional relationships to Mark and Euan.

Notably, none of these participants described a current romantic partner as amongst their most significant relationships, with the exception of Donna who was attempting to use this prison sentence to bring her "*unconventional*" marriage to an end. Yet, just like Simon who still viewed his ex-wife as one his most important people in his life, Donna did not see the end of the marriage as ending all contact with her husband. While she was not "in love" with him she still loved him, and explained he would always play a part in their child's life. Therefore while these stories are highly individual, they also demonstrate the fluid, shifting and complex nature of contemporary family relationships.

These themes of the complexity of family life also flowed through the stories of participants visiting HMP Edinburgh who had experiences of, for example, kinship care, co-parenting after a separation or divorce or relationship breakdown. However, in contrast with the accounts of the men and women recruited in HMP Greenock, of these 19 participants from 14 different families, six participants were female partners of a man in custody. As noted in chapter four, this suggests that there may also be considerable heterogeneity amongst which relationships are most significant to different groups of prisoners. It seems that for men serving a long-term or life sentence (as many participants in HMP Greenock were) and for women in custody, relationships with their children (if they have any), their parents, siblings and extended family may be of particular importance. Conversely, men serving a period on remand or a shorter sentence may be more likely to be supported by their partner and children.

It is clear, then, that the heterogeneity of families affected by imprisonment should be recognised. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, as I have argued in chapter four, in addition to this diversity there are also important commonalities that run through participants' accounts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the well documented links between poverty and imprisonment discussed in chapter two, nearly all participants who were recruited through the Visitors' Centre at HMP Edinburgh were experiencing social marginalisation to a greater or lesser degree. Only Susan was in stable, paid employment at the time of the interview, while other participants were reliant on benefits because of poor mental health, serious illness, learning difficulties, caring responsibilities or addictions. It also cannot be ignored that while a wide range of relationships can be affected by imprisonment, it is very often a female partner or mother who adopts a lead or co-ordinating role in supporting the person in custody, and that as noted in chapter four, this finding has been reproduced across a range of research settings.

Participants' stories clearly demonstrate that this social marginalisation is exacerbated by the imprisonment of a family member. As noted in chapter five, maintaining contact with a person in custody requires considerable

amounts of time, financial expense and emotional labour. Financial pressures on families deepened as they sought to cope with their changing circumstances, while also regularly visiting the prison and providing the clothes, money and other possessions required by the person in custody. Meeting these demands left little time for other aspects of participants' lives, leaving many feeling that "we do the sentence too". Importantly, by adding to the caring burden already carried by these women, imprisonment not only exacerbates their social marginalisation, but also entrenches the perception that women are the "right" or "appropriate" person to care.

The positioning of women in this way should not be accepted uncritically, not least because it left many participants with little help or support at a time of considerable distress. As I argued in chapter five, the pressure to "stand by your man" can be particularly problematic where there are already issues of power or control in the relationship, as imprisonment by no means guarantees a cessation of domestic violence or abuse. The failure to recognise the gendered dynamics of family support can also be of profound disadvantage to women in custody. As Lorna and Yvonne's stories attest, women are less likely to have someone willing or able to support them or facilitate contact with their children. Indeed, as we have seen from the stories of Yasmeen and Joanne, it is often parents who support women in custody, rather than husbands or partners.

Yet, while women (and one man) in the community directed considerable amounts of emotional labour into the prison, participants' accounts suggest that balanced, reciprocal relationships are difficult to maintain. By its very nature, imprisonment reduces the opportunities for families to spend time together or to communicate openly. Many participants bemoaned a lack of privacy and explained that the routine nature of prison life left them with little to say on a visit, while families struggled with being unable to contact the person in prison whenever they needed them. However, the barriers to reciprocity are not just simply practical. In an attempt to cope with the often deeply traumatic circumstances in which they now found themselves, participants both in prison and in the community explained how they would withhold potentially upsetting, or for those serving a life sentence even

positive, news for fear of how it would affect their family. Further, as I argued in chapter five, coping in the prison environment can necessitate a process of emotional suppression whereby vulnerabilities are hidden, relationships are characterised by mistrust and true feelings are concealed. To maintain this toughened (or perhaps dulled) exterior some participants, such as Simon and Euan, greatly reduced contact with their family at some points in their sentence.

Despite these barriers, participants did find ways to actively construct and maintain their family relationships within the context of imprisonment. I have argued in chapter six that the concepts of family practices (Morgan 1996; 2011) and displays (Finch 2007) have a great deal to offer when seeking to capture some of the fluidity, diversity and complexity of family relationships. A focus on family practices and displays enables a greater recognition of the ways in which participants actively construct and maintain the relationships that matter to them, despite their imprisonment. By applying these ideas to the stories of families affected by imprisonment we can see that visits, hugs, and sharing a cup of tea are just some of the ways in which families seek to demonstrate their continued love, care and commitment to the person in custody. I also suggested in this chapter that particular forms of family contact, such as the more relaxed atmosphere of the children's Visits at HMP Edinburgh, may allow greater freedom for family displays. This is reflected, for example, in Yasmeen's account of how much she appreciated being able to share a meal with her family to celebrate Eid.

Yasmeen's story also illustrates how family displays and practices are grounded in our history, biography, memories and family traditions. Continuing traditions, telling stories and making new memories can therefore serve a resources for maintaining family relationships in the context of imprisonment. Participants' accounts detailed creative strategies for family displays such as using objects, photographs or children's drawings to physically materialise memory, making gifts, or as I have argued in chapter six, omitting to do something that would cause distress to the family. These family displays are often highly personal, as Liam's

fantasy football league attests, yet the thread that unites such accounts are that they are all motivated by love, care and commitment. However, many active family displays, such as visits, require considerable effort on the part of someone in the community. Drawing on the accounts given by Liam and his mother Susan, I have suggested that this may cause family relationships to be renegotiated as Liam has become repositioned as more like another child of the family to be looked after; and in this way imprisonment has not only taken Liam's liberty, it has also eroded his full adult status within the family.

Finally, this thesis has argued in chapter seven that it is not only relationships within the family that are of importance, as we should also have regard to how families are perceived and responded to by criminal justice professionals. The interactions between families and professionals are likely to be shaped by wider professional discourses; be they risk (as reflected in criminal justice social work reports), community education (seen in the accounts of Visitors' Centre staff), or as is the case for prison officers, the multi-faceted nature of their role and the range of demands this creates, of which maintaining security is just one (Crawley 2004b; Arnold 2007; Liebling and Price 2001). The range of demands placed on officers on any given day helps us to understand the tensions between the sympathy of officers who participated in this research for families, and the accounts of other participants who suggest that families could struggle with prison regulations that are difficult to understand or inconsistently applied, a lack of information and decisions (for example to transfer a prisoner) that appeared to be taken without regard to their personal circumstances. Indeed, while the officers who participated in this project were largely supportive of initiatives to support family contact, many families reported negative interactions with prison officers, and contrasted their attitude and demeanour to that of Visitors' Centre staff who participants overwhelmingly felt were "fantastic", "friendly" or "amazing".

The experiences of families visiting the prison are not just of interest for normative reasons. As I have argued in chapter seven, the way in which families affected by imprisonment are perceived by criminal justice

professionals, and the interactions that follow, raise wider questions pertaining to the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. Repeated adversarial interactions with criminal justice professionals can create, or reinforce, a view that the prison system is operating without sufficient regard to what might be seen as fair or just from the perspective of families, and therefore risk undermining the legitimacy of the system as a whole (Sparks et al 1996; Sparks and Bottoms 1995). Importantly, as noted in chapter four, the prison population is disproportionately drawn from some of Scotland's most deprived communities, and many participants, such as Tracy, Alisha, Ruby, Brooke, Darcy, Lynne and Jackie, had come into contact with the criminal justice system on multiple occasions. This suggests that the current policy interest on families as a potential aid to desistance is misplaced, not least because the families participating in this research had few of the resources thought to aid resettlement. A lack of attention toward the damage that imprisonment can do not only to relationships within the family, but also between some of Scotland's poorest communities and criminal justice institutions, significantly underestimates the true costs of imprisonment and fails to engage sufficiently with wider issues of fairness, justice, equality and legitimacy.

Just as this thesis has drawn on a range of theoretical perspectives, these findings have implications for a number of strands of criminological research. Perhaps the key findings relevant to the growing area body of research into families affected by imprisonment are that family relationships are actively constructed and maintained, often in highly individual ways. Therefore family relationships should be understood in terms of the love and care that they embody, rather simply defined by strict legal categories. While the gendered nature of supporting a family member in custody must be recognised, this should not lead to a focus on partners and children to the exclusion of other family relationships. Indeed, as argued in chapter four, it seems that different relationships may be of particular significant to different groups of prisoners. This could be a useful direction for future enquiry, as it would allow a further exploration of the diversity of families affected by imprisonment.

Yet as noted in chapter four, there are commonalities amongst families affected by imprisonment and I have argued that many do not have the resources available that might support resettlement. This raises questions as to how applicable models of desistance that suggest families can provide social capital might be to the large proportion of the prison population who originate from communities experiencing marginality and deprivation. However, it does not therefore simply follow that families and relationships have no role to play in the desistance process, as they have been argued to be important sources of the positive self-identities, motivation and self-efficacy that can promote desistance (see chapter two for a discussion of this literature). Indeed, reciprocal relationships themselves have been argued to play a key role in desistance, as it is an appreciation and attention to the needs of others that eventually leads to a move away from offending as this becomes incompatible with valued personal relationships (Weaver 2012; Weaver and McNeill 2014). While the findings of this research cannot definitively support these arguments as all participants were interviewed whilst still in custody, the connections participants drew between their family relationships, their self-esteem and their hopes for the future (see chapter six) suggest that this would be a useful direction for future research.

Finally, the value participants placed on their family relationships and the means by which they maintained their *connections* to those who are most important to them perhaps highlights the need for researchers and academics to guard against becoming too narrow or restricted in our theoretical interests. To this end, I have argued that concepts from the wider literature on the sociology of the prison, and in particular Sparks, Bottoms and Hay's work on legitimacy, can fruitfully be applied to the experiences of families affected by imprisonment. Yet, this perhaps also conversely suggests that greater attention should be paid to the experiences of families by those researching other aspects of the criminal justice system. As noted in chapter seven, the prison is only one of series of criminal justice institutions with which families come into contact, and it may well be that the treatment at the hands of one affects their perception of another. Similarly, as many families affected by imprisonment reside in the same areas, the experiences

of some individuals may affect the perceived legitimacy of criminal justice institutions amongst a community. While this “connectedness” may be methodologically challenging to capture, the findings of this project strongly attest that relationships, be they with families, professionals or institutions, matter a great deal.

Indeed, the key claims of this thesis – that family relationships are actively constructed, and that the quality of interactions between families and the criminal justice system have implications for legitimacy – also cannot be easily separated. In the context of imprisonment, both relationships and legitimacy are actively “done” by families and professionals. Therefore, easing or improving family contact is also likely to promote legitimacy. The theme of gender also cannot be ignored here, as the gendered caring burden discussed in chapters four and five also raise questions as to how legitimate men and women are likely to perceive the criminal justice system to be, given their experiences as *gendered* individuals. The entrenchment of social marginalisation and caring roles by the criminal justice system may have particular implications for how it is perceived by women. This is perhaps most clearly reflected in the painful accounts of Lorna and Yvonne who without the support of somebody in the community struggled to maintain relationships with their children whilst in custody, and felt neglected by a prison system that they believed to be designed with men in mind.

## **METHODS**

This was a small-scale, qualitative project, firmly grounded in a feminist research ethic. From the outset, I sought to provide participants with a space where they could talk about the things that mattered most to them, and to build research relationships that were as open and reciprocal as possible. As I have discussed some of the challenges I encountered in doing so in chapter three, here I wish instead to reflect on some of the wider implications of the project for others seeking to do research with families affected by imprisonment.



Given the scale and methodological design of this project, the conclusions presented above are very much a reflection of a particular space and place, and I make no claim to their wider generalisability (although many findings do resonate with the wider literature). However, I wish to suggest here that this small-scale, qualitative approach should be seen as a strength of the project, rather than simply as a barrier to drawing generalizable conclusions. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to exploring under-researched areas (Miles and Huberman 1994); and are therefore a considerable asset when seeking to better understand the experiences of families affected by imprisonment. This approach allows respondents to identify and share issues that matter to them, rather than being restricted to the topics that have been predetermined or narrowly defined by the researcher (Gelsthorpe 1990).

As a result, qualitative methods are well-placed to capture the fluid, shifting and messy nature of human relationships rather than imposing our own definitions what families are or what they look like. Indeed, as I argued in chapter four, statistical data on the number of families or children affected by imprisonment will inevitably always be partial, as the ways in which family relationships are seen, counted and recorded are social processes, and men and women in custody may have many reasons for concealing or revealing the true nature of their family relationships in different circumstances. This is not to draw a dualistic division between quantitative and qualitative research or to argue that the latter contributes more than the former; but rather to suggest that when researching families and relationships, all researchers must be clear about what they mean by these terms and how they intend to use them within the context of their chosen methodology.

However, the claim that a piece of research can only speak to a particular space and place does not absolve qualitative researchers from examining the impact of their research practice and design on the findings presented. For example, the way in which potential participants are recruited will inevitably affect the findings of a project as certain groups may be more or less likely to put engage with researchers. I would argue that the decision to

embrace ethnographic methods during my fieldwork at the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre was advantageous here, as it allowed time for me to gradually build relationships with participants who may have been initially suspicious of researchers or perceived authority figures. My continued presence at the Centre allowed interviews to be done at a time that suited participants, and I am doubtful that I would have recruited as many participants had I relied on making appointments or more formal arrangements.

However, it is likely that there were still groups that I was not able to reach. For example, as I noted in chapter five, I witnessed more overt incidents of domestic violence than was discussed with me by participants, and it is likely that families that are suffering from this form of victimisation may be particularly unwilling to engage with researchers. Conversely, as I noted in chapter two, one of the men who volunteered to participate in the research at HMP Greenock was already known to me from a previous piece of research in another prison. While this might reflect the relatively small size of Scotland as a jurisdiction, I would also argue that this highlights the need for caution before representing our findings as speaking for "all" or "most" families affected by imprisonment.

One way in which I was able to access a more diverse range of participants was by conducting fieldwork in both the Edinburgh Prison Visitors' Centre and HMP Greenock. This was a useful approach, and I would argue that the inclusion of men and women in custody added a great deal to the project, and in particular my understanding of how relationships are changed by imprisonment. However, as I discuss in chapter two, conducting research across two localities was challenging as a lone researcher, and a range of practical issues contributed to my ability to recruit only one 'whole family' to take part in the research. A useful direction for future research, then, may be to conduct more interviews with both the person in custody and the family in the community to further explore how imprisonment shapes relationships within the family. If at all possible, these issues should be explored with a men and women serving a variety of sentence lengths, as

the disproportionate number of men serving a life sentence have inevitably had an impact on the findings of this project.

Finally, working as a lone researcher also raises its own methodological, rather than simply practical, issues. Gender has been a key theme running through this thesis, and I have argued that it was situationally performed by both myself and participants throughout the research encounter. I have suggested that shared popular and cultural interests and a perception that I would be able to understand the experiences of other women aided my interactions with female participants; however it is also possible that this was a factor in the recruitment of only one adult male family member. I have also argued that my gender may have caused male participants interviewed in the prison to enact a particular form of masculinity that emphasised their utmost respect for women, while positioning me as a source of emotional support. Reflecting critically on these dynamics can enrich the analysis of the data collected, however it would be interesting to conduct any future research in a similar vein as part of a mixed gender team, whereby these themes could be explored in more depth and perhaps also alternative narratives to be accessed.

## **POLICY**

The above discussion has suggested a number of potentially fruitful avenues for further research into the experiences of families affected by imprisonment. However, the arguments presented above also have a number of implications for professionals and policy makers working in this area.

### **Supporting Families**

As I noted in chapter two, much of the current policy interest in families affected by imprisonment is underpinned by the suggestion that by supporting family contact it might also be possible to support the desistance process, as family relationships may provide practical and emotional

supports or informal social controls. The findings of the project problematise and complicate this claim. It is clear from the accounts of virtually all the participants recruited through the Visitors' Centre at HMP Edinburgh, and many of the men and women interviewed in HMP Greenock, that families affected by imprisonment very often simply do not have the social resources or stocks of social capital that might facilitate or ease the desistance process. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated in chapter four, supporting a family member in custody siphons off and redirects a large proportion of the family's already scarce resources into the prison.

These findings support calls for families to be offered appropriate, high quality supports in their own right. Given the heterogeneity of families affected by imprisonment discussed in chapter four, it is essential that such services are targeted towards the needs of the groups that they wish to work with. For example, young women with a partner being held on remand are likely to have very different needs and concerns to the parents of a long-term or life sentenced prisoner. Part of this should also be a recognition of the gendered nature of caring labour within families affected by imprisonment, and ensuring that service provision is relevant to the lives and other commitments of the many *women* who are shouldering this caring burden. However, services should not passively accept these gendered dynamics, and there is perhaps a need to encourage men to take a greater role in family life, and to ensure supports available to men who might so wish them.

Families should also be offered supports and services as early in the criminal justice process as possible. While this a small-scale project, as I argued in chapter seven, there was a general consensus amongst participants that family commitments or care arrangements were not considered by the court at the point of sentencing, and this was also reflected in the analysis of criminal justice social work files. These findings support the current efforts of the Cross Party Group for Families Affected by Imprisonment, discussed in chapter two, to create a statutory duty on the court to order a Child and Family Impact Assessment after a parent or carer is sentenced. While the

focus on children does reflect a fairly narrow construction of the family, this would seem to be a useful step forward.

It is also clear from this research that Visitors' Centres can play a key role in supporting families affected by imprisonment. The setting for this phase of the research is somewhat unique in Scotland as it is a purpose built, architecturally acclaimed Visitors' Centre that is physically separate from the prison. While the number of Visitors' Centres in Scotland are growing, these are often situated within the prison or are temporary or repurposed buildings. While this project by no means set out to compare different Visitors' Centre models, it seems likely that these attributes contributed to the way in which participants, particularly those experiencing a high degree of vulnerability or marginality, used this space. As I discussed in chapter five, these participants would spend considerable amounts of time at the Centre, even using it on days where they did not have a visit booked.

It seems, then, that the welcoming atmosphere, affordable and healthy café and the ability to access the Centre without having to first face prison security not only eased the visiting experience for families, but also offered a space (and for some participants perhaps the only space accessible to them) where a sense of connection and community could be fostered and the considerable isolation experienced by some participants alleviated. These findings not only resoundingly support arguments for the universal provision of Visitors' Centres, but also suggest that consideration should be given as to the wider role that they might play in communities. For example, it is not difficult to imagine Visitors' Centres becoming more integrated with community centres more generally, and perhaps delivering services such as baby groups, adult education or IT provision or training. In addition to benefitting families, this may be a useful opportunity for services to engage with some of the most marginalised communities who may be difficult to reach in other settings or contexts.

## Supporting Relationships

As I argued in chapter five, many participants reported considerable distress at being separated from their family member by imprisonment, and the findings of this research suggest a number of ways in which family relationships might be better supported. As I argued in chapter six, family relationships are constructed and maintained through *active* displays of care, commitment and that the person in custody is still an important part of the family. This suggests very strongly, as do the accounts of participants who were able to enjoy the more “relaxed” children’s visits or special leaves home, that it is the *quality* of family contact and the extent to which it allows families to do “family things” (such as sharing food, giving cuddles, doing homework, celebrating culturally significant events or playing with children) that will help to sustain relationships. Many of these accounts attested to the importance of everyday or commonplace family activities, and therefore even seemingly small measures, such as allowing families to take photographs together, are likely to support relationships.

Importantly, these findings also suggest that current initiatives by the SPS to improve family contact are not only highly valued by participants, but also crucial to maintaining relationships. These initiatives should be continued and, wherever possible, extended to all families whatever the relationship between themselves and the person in custody. Consideration should also be given to more imaginative and innovative ways to improve the quality of family contact, such as allowing the weekend visits that are permitted in other jurisdictions.

However, initiatives to improve family contact should not just be limited to those men and women in custody who enjoy active support from their families, as many participants had experienced strained relationships or barriers to maintaining contact. For female prisoners, these were often a practical manifestation of the gendered caring burden as they had no one in the community who was willing and able to assist in maintaining family contact. Conversely, male prisoners may be particularly unwilling to seek help or vocalise their distress at the breakdown of family relationships.

There may therefore be a need for a greater awareness of these gendered issues amongst criminal justice professionals, and a greater provision of services that can bring children to visit imprisoned parents.

Other avenues for supporting relationships where regular visiting will not be possible should also be explored, such as Lorna's suggestion of craft classes where gifts for children or other family members could be made. The findings of this research also support the calls for in-cell telephone provision discussed in chapter five; although there is also a need for an awareness that for some families cost can be a barrier to regular phone contact. Steps such as these that can empower men and women in custody to actively contribute to family life and the maintenance of relationships may help to reduce some of the barriers to reciprocal relationships highlighted in chapter five. Importantly, as noted above, promoting reciprocal relationships may be a more fruitful way of supporting desistance than relying on vulnerable and marginalised families to direct their already limited resources and social capital towards supporting resettlement.

### **Promoting Legitimacy**

Ultimately, however, the findings from this project suggest that a preoccupation with the potential for family relationships to support desistance has led to a lack of attention towards potentially more serious policy issues. As I argued in chapter seven, repeated adversarial or negative interactions with the criminal justice system can foster views that it is unfair, unjust and ultimately illegitimate; reducing the normative and moral investment of some those from Scotland's most marginalised communities in complying with the laws and rules that it imposes. It is important to note that such interactions do not stem simply from rude or disinterested treatment of families by officers (although participants did give examples of this). Indeed, the vast majority of officers who participated in this research were keen to support families. Rather, I have suggested, it is often competing institutional demands, complex processes and the multi-faceted

nature of the prison officer role that create tensions between officers and families.

Encouragingly, the findings of this research suggest a number of ways in which legitimacy can be promoted rather than undermined. As I have suggested in chapter seven, social methods of crime prevention, whereby a greater focus is placed on building constructive and personal relationships between visitors and officers may be a useful way forward. As one prison officer noted, decisions as to which officers staff the reception desk may be important here, as people with a good knowledge of the issues that affect families and an interest in supporting them might be better suited to this role. Indeed, an appreciation of the importance of everyday interactions is key here. As a result, encouraging positive relationships between officers and visitors can be achieved in a range of ways: from simply being friendly and welcoming to the families visiting the prison to the more structured “meet the police” or “Inside Out day” events organised in partnership with the Visitors’ Centre. Both approaches are likely to promote legitimacy, and these events should be run at regular intervals.

As I argued in chapter seven, in addition to positive relationships, the provision of clear, consistent and easy accessible information is also key to promoting legitimacy. Indeed, many participants noted that a lack of quality information could create frustration as families could not successfully navigate the criminal justice system, cause poor interactions and tensions with professionals, and also lead to distress as some participants explained that families and children feared for how the person in custody was being treated. Again, both the prison and Visitors’ Centres can play an important role here, both by answering informal questions and queries, and through more structured pieces of work. As an example of the latter, over the course of my fieldwork the Visitors’ Centre’s Parent and Children’s worker developed first a large display with pictures of areas of the prison such as cells, workshops and the gym, and later information booklets specifically targeted for parents and carers, children visiting their mother, and children visiting their father. Participants’ accounts suggest there is a very real need for resources of this kind, which are specific to the individual prison rather



than providing general information, as rules and procedures can vary between establishments. Similar resources should be made available across the prison estate.

Overall, then, the above discussion has made a series of policy recommendations under the themes of supporting families, supporting relationships and promoting legitimacy; and, importantly, has also identified a number of areas of existing good practice. As noted above, in many respects these themes overlap; for example steps taken to improve the quality of family contact by allowing children's visits or special "family days" are also likely to improve relationships between families and the prison, as it allows families to see that they are recognised, respected and that maintaining their relationships is taken seriously by the criminal justice system. Thus what perhaps draws these themes together is the emphasis on the emotions and values that relationships both reflect and embody, whether they be relationships within the family or the relationships between communities and institutions.

This emphasis on relationships, which by their very nature are fluid and shifting, returns us to not only the political and philosophical nature of legitimacy but also its aspirational character (Sparks and Bottoms 2008). As noted in chapter two, the growth of research into the experiences of families affected by imprisonment has coincided with a period of considerable change within the Scottish Prison Service. Perhaps, then, the key message to be taken from this thesis is that there is a need for researchers, policy makers and practitioners to reflect on what we would wish the relationships between our families, communities and criminal justice institutions to look like in the future. Crucially, given the argument that imprisonment can exacerbate the marginalisation experienced by families and the caring burden felt by women, we must ensure that the values of fairness, justice, equality and legitimacy remain at the centre of these discussions.

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## APPENDIX I: TERMINOLOGY

### Scottish Criminal Justice Terminology

Term	Meaning
Children's visit	A less restrictive, 'child friendly' visits session where prisoners are allowed to move around the visits room and play with their child/grandchild/nephew/niece etc.
DLA	Disability Living Allowance: a benefit that can be claimed for care needs relating to a physical or mental disability.
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions.
ESA	Employment Support Allowance: a benefit that can be claimed by those who cannot work due to sickness or disability
FCO	Family Contact Officer: a prison officer responsible for encouraging and maintaining links with families. Can offer advice to families.
G4	A colloquial reference to "G4S"; a private security company which, amongst other functions, accompanies eligible prisoners on escorted leaves from custody.
Glenesk	A hall in HMP Edinburgh housing mainstream male prisoners held on remand.
Hermiston	A hall in HMP Edinburgh housing mainstream male prisoners serving a short-term sentence.
ICM	Integrated Case Management: a multi-agency sentence management and planning process, which can involve annual "case management" meetings.
Ingliston	A hall in HMP Edinburgh housing male prisoners serving a long-term sentence, or who are on protection.
LTP	Long-term prisoner: a person serving over four years.
OLR	Order of Life-long Restriction: those subject to an OLR serve a minimum "punishment part" of their sentence in custody, but remain under supervision (with the potential to be returned to custody) for the rest of their life.
PPC	Prisoner Personal Cash: an account where money earned or provided by family members is held. Allows the purchase of items from the prison canteen.
Ratho	A hall in HMP Edinburgh housing female prisoners.
SELs	Special Escorted Leaves: allow eligible prisoners to visit family or a place of interest in the community while escorted by security staff.

SOTP	Sex Offender Treatment Program
SPS	Scottish Prison Service
STP	Short-term prisoner: a person serving less than four years
The digger	Segregation
Top End	A national facility of life sentence prisoners approaching the end of their sentence.

Expression	Meaning
Aye	Yes
Bairn	Child, baby
Cannae	Cannot, can't
Dinnae	Do not, don't
Hen	Woman, lady (generally older)
The jail	Colloquial expression for the prison; often used in place of "prison/custodial sentence" e.g. 'my son got the jail'.
Laddie	Boy, young man
Lassie	Girl, young woman
Ken	Know, you know
Motor	Car
Nae	No, not
Nae bother	No problem, OK
Peter	Colloquial expression for prison cell
Wean	Child, baby
Wee	Small, young
Willnae	Will not, won't

## APPENDIX II: PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

### RECRUITED IN CUSTODY

**Alex:** Alex is 27 and progressing through his OLR he received in his early twenties. He describes the most important relationships to him as his aunty, granny, younger brother, his two cousins, his cousin's husband and their two children – all of whom he placed on his lifeline consistently throughout his life. Alex and his brother were placed in the care of his aunt and grandmother following an incident when Alex was 12 that raised concerns that his mother, who has learning difficulties, was not caring appropriately for the children. Alex's father has never been involved in his life. Since then his mother has received hospital treatment for poor mental health, and none of the rest of the family has had any contact with her, including Alex.

**Adam:** Adam is 32 and has been serving a life sentence since he was a teenager. The only people on Adam's lifeline are his mum and dad; this is the whole of Adam's family of origin as he is an only child. Adam's parents separated when he was a young, and they both continue to support him. As a result of their efforts (for example visiting him together), Adam only discovered in the last few years that they "absolutely hate each other". Adam has a large extended family but tells me that he does not care about his aunts, uncles or cousins. Interestingly, he sees these in starkly gendered terms – his mother provides emotional support, while his father is his "best pal" to have a laugh with. Perhaps because he feels he only needs his parents, or perhaps due to the length and stage of his sentence, Adam says he currently has no interest in having children when he is released.

**Colin:** Colin is 58 and serving a life sentence for a murder he committed when he was in his late 30s, but he also has a history of violent and sexual offending. Colin explains that he became "rebellious" when he was moved to a school that he did not like, and that his behaviour became worse after he was abused by another family member when he was eleven and starting using alcohol to cope. At the beginning of his lifeline he adds his sisters, mother, father, neighbours and friends, explaining that his family had always stood by him until he was convicted of his index offence, but relationships broke down after this. Before committing his index offence Colin met his (now ex) wife, and he and his wife had a daughter and he formally adopted her young son. Colin received a life sentence when the children were still young, and after his daughter was victimised in the community he felt it was best to end all contact and "let them get on with their life". He has had some sporadic contact with his daughter and explained that his daughter and granddaughter remained important to him despite this lack of contact. Colin's most significant relationships are now with his close friends that he met through his church, which he describes as "like a family", and they keep in contact through phone calls, letters and home leaves. Colin does hope to re-establish contact with his sisters but not until he is released as "prison destroys relationships". Colin only places his



daughter, granddaughter, friends and church at the “current” end of his lifeline.

**Donna:** Donna is 31 and serving a four and a half year sentence for drug related offences; she began using and selling drugs as a teenager and was eventually put into care as her mother, who Donna describes as “having a good job and doing nothing wrong”, could not manage her behaviour. She has one child who currently lives with her mother and describes the relationship with both as “really close”. Her brother also lives with her mother and child, and Donna explained that he helps a lot with her child and that she also has a good relationship with him. Donna also has the support of her wider family, and her aunts and granny will send in money for her, but do not visit now as she has been “in the jail too much to expect them to visit” and her granny is now too old to manage. Donna places all of these relationships on her lifeline. Donna is married to the father of her child, and they had been together for about ten years. However, Donna feels that they got married for the wrong reasons and that it was a “daft” thing to do, and not really a “conventional” marriage. Donna is using this sentence to distance herself from her marriage and does not place her husband on her lifeline.

**Euan:** Euan is 29 and was given a life sentence as a teenager, following a high profile offence that attracted considerable media attention that he committed under the influence of drugs and alcohol, which he began using at age eight. Euan’s childhood was difficult – he explained that he grew up “wanting to be like my dad in the jail”, and struggled after he and his siblings spent some time in care due to his mum’s alcohol use. He described the two years that he spent in a secure unit as a teenager as the “happiest I have ever been”. Throughout the interview he seemed despondent about the significant relationships he has left in his life; his father died following an overdose and his Uncle – who Euan thought of as “like a dad” - committed suicide while Euan has serving this sentence. Euan is no longer in contact with one of his sisters, who he describes “as a bit nuts”. He also only has sporadic contact with his two half-brothers (from a relationship his father had before he met Euan’s mother) who are both involved in drugs and offending. One of his half-brothers was recently held in the same prison as Euan and they had had a few visits but Euan thinks it is better to keep away from them. Euan does have a good relationship with his mother and his sister, who “has never been in trouble in her life”, and his nephews who he keeps in contact with through visits and escorted leaves.

**Ian:** Affable and outgoing, Ian is 34 and serving 24 months for a violent offence but has been in and out of custody since he was 16 with most of his previous offending being related to his drug and alcohol use. Ian was adopted by his mother’s aunt and uncle (who he thinks of as his mum and dad) when he was a baby and describes mum and sisters as his closest supports as his father and brother died of cancer a few years previously.

Although he grew up in the same local area as his biological mother and siblings he does not have a good relationship with them, or his biological father who was not in his life for much of his childhood. Ian has a son with his ex-partner, and while he has played an active role in the child's life he currently does not have any contact with him as the relationship with his son's mother has deteriorated to a point where she will not allow this. Ian explained that his mum has "always been there" for him, but this is the first sentence where she has not visited him, and has told his sisters not to do so either as she wants to deter him from reoffending.

**George:** George is 56 and was recalled to prison after he committed a further violent offence while released on life licence: George became involved in offending with other young people at around 11 or 12, and this escalated with his increased alcohol use. As a result, George spent some time in an approved school as a young teenager, and throughout the interview he emphasised how he had not previously appreciated how "devastating" the impact of his offending was for his family, and in particular his "respectable" parents who have now passed away. George's closest support is his twin sister, who has always "stuck by" him and he maintains contact with by telephone. His sister recently gave George his brother's address, and he is hoping to rebuild this relationship through letter contact.

**Liam:** Liam is in his early 30s and serving his first prison sentence. As a long-term prisoner Liam is keen to progress quickly through his sentence and has taken an active role in prison life. Liam describes the most important people to him as his family and friends, explaining that he is "humbled" by how many people have "stood by him". Liam has two young children who "mean the world" to him. Prior to his sentence Liam had joint custody of his children, and his mother now regularly cares for them at weekends and brings them to visit Liam. At a number of points in the interview Liam also tells me how much he misses his dog, who his mum is also looking after while he serves his sentence. Liam also has a good relationship with his sister, although she visits less often due to work commitments, and explains that his sentence has also had an impact on his nephew (his sister's son) as Liam is a father figure to his nephew, whose own father is no longer in his life. Liam often talks about how much better life will be for his children once he has progressed to open conditions, and is clear that he will rebuild his life upon release and will not be returning to custody.

**Lorna:** Lorna is in her mid-twenties and serving the remainder of a three year sentence on recall after she breached the terms of her licence by shoplifting to buy drugs. Lorna has a six year old daughter who lives over 200 miles away with her father, who is Lorna's ex-partner, and who thinks her mother is "at work" although Lorna suspects she knows the truth as she is not "daft". When Lorna was sentenced her ex-partner stopped all contact with her daughter and Lorna had to go to court to get telephone contact with

her daughter reinstated. Relations are also strained between Lorna and her mother and sisters, and after prolonged periods of little contact Lorna is trying to rebuild these relationships through telephone contact every few weeks. Lorna also desperately wants to rebuild her relationship with her daughter on her release, but is facing difficulties accessing supports to do so. Despite feeling that as a result of her time in prison her confidence “is away to fuck” Lorna is determined that following her release she will never be back in prison.

**Mark:** At only 26, Mark was already a number of years into a life sentence, which he received in his mid-teens. Mark has a large family, and cites his mum and dad (who are separated), sister, niece, aunties, uncles and cousins as his main supports. While his parents and his sister visit him regularly, Mark fell out with his brother ten years ago and hasn't spoken to him since. Despite this falling out, Mark was of the view that this sentence had brought his family closer together, as before he only spoke to his family “when I wanted something”. Yet he confided that he questioned why his family had remained in contact with him as he was the “bad egg” and that while he valued their support he was scared of being released. Mark told me that were he to be recalled to custody, he would cut himself off from his family and live the rest of his life in prison.

**Ross:** Ross is 39 and serving a life sentence. Ross's main supports are his father, mother, siblings and grandmother who he keeps in contact with through visits and escorted leaves. In the interview, Ross places his father as closest to his lifeline, explaining that his mother and father divorced when he was 12 and from that point his father was always his main support as he fell out with his mother. Ross continued to have no contact with his mother for about 20 years, but has rebuilt the relationship over the last few years explaining that he felt that they were getting older and had fallen out over “something stupid” in the first place. Ross also has some contact with his aunts, uncles and cousins but prefers only to have his immediate family to visit. Ross has one daughter but has not had any contact with her since she was a baby.

**Simon:** At 30 years old Simon is 11 years into a life sentence he received as a teenager. Over the course of his sentence Simon's family relationships have been unsettled with him periodically being in and out of contact with his parents and siblings. At the time of interview there was a split in Simon's family, with him, his mother, his brother (and wife and child) on one side, and his father and sister on the other. Simon had been able to maintain a more consistent relationship with his ex-wife, who he married at when he was 18 but divorced less than a year later when he received his current sentence. He also has a good relationship with his daughter, and although his ex-wife has moved on with her life and away from the local area she still facilitates fortnightly or monthly visits between Simon and his daughter, who he speaks to on the phone every night. However, at the time of the interview Simon was have some difficulty progressing through his

sentence and had decided that he did not want visits from his family at this point as he needed to get his “head sorted”.

**Yasmeen:** Yasmeen is in her later 30s and is serving a long-term sentence. She explained that her family is very important to her, and receives visits nearly every day from her mum, dad, sister and nephews. For Yasmeen, these visits offer a welcome respite from prison life and a “feeling of normality” and she also regularly phones her parents and other family members. Yasmeen explains that she is not a violent or “criminal” person and if she had not been able to maintain contact with her family she would have had “a breakdown”. Reflecting on the impact her sentence has had on the family Yasmeen describes this as “awful” and a “huge shock” for the whole family, but observes that their faith has been key to helping the whole family cope.

**Yvonne:** A “larger than life” character, Yvonne is in her late 40s and serving a 27 month sentence for drug related offences. Yvonne was consumed with worry for her three children: one who is now an adult with her own family, one who is a teenager and the youngest who is at primary school. When Yvonne was sentenced her oldest took on the care of the youngest, while the middle child is cared for by her father. While they have remained in kinship care, Yvonne’s family find it difficult to make the trip to the prison due to the physical distance and other caring responsibilities and at the time of the interview she was only seeing them every three weeks or so. Missing them dreadfully, Yvonne spoke to her children on the phone every day. Describing her wider family, Yvonne explained that her parents had both died in the last few years – something that she felt had contributed to her drug use – although she felt that her father had “deserved to go” as he had sexually abused her and her siblings. One of Yvonne’s sisters had also died (from “the methadone”) and her other sister was unable to visit her due to poor physical and mental health, but Yvonne stayed in touch with her and her brother by phone. She is not currently in a romantic relationship, but is still married to the father of her oldest daughter as he will not divorce her.

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**Alisha:** Alisha is in her 40s and visits her son Scot, who is in his mid-20s, and is serving an OLR. Alisha has had considerable contact with the criminal justice system, remarking that she had visited a family member in nearly every single prison in Scotland and that her own father had died while in prison. Scot has an older sister with children of her own and a younger half-sister who is still at secondary school, both of whom are “straight as a die” and visit regularly, and Alisha explained when the children were growing up it was “me and the weans against the world”. Alisha has suffered from poor mental health and explained that last week she had experienced “a breakdown” and had ended up in hospital. As a regular visitor, I had previously had some limited interactions with Alisha,

but had found it difficult to establish rapport with her and was a little intimidated by her. However, once we began the interview I realised she was witty, sharp, honest to the point of bluntness (“sometimes I look at him [Scot] and I just think I could kick your cunt in”) and often made me laugh out loud.

**Becky:** Becky is in her late 40s or early 50s and was interviewed while waiting for the cash office to open so she could give money to her son. Her son is in his mid-20s, and had been brought in a couple of days before the interview on remand. This was the second period he had served on remand in the last few months, and Becky was very distressed as she hadn’t yet been able to contact him. She told me that if she was upset she could talk to her carers, as she lives in supported accommodation due to her learning difficulties and health problems. Throughout the last period that her son was on remand Lizzy had been supported by Families Outside and said that this had helped her and her worker was a “nice lady”. After the interview we had a cup of tea and a chat while Becky told me about the holiday she was planning to take with a friend.

**Bill:** Bill is in his early 50s and the step-father to a man in his early 20s serving a short-term sentence for sexual offences against an adult, but was due for release in the next few months. A frequent visitor to the prison Bill is well-known and well liked. He is friendly, chatty, open and cheerful but has also struggled with serious depression and poor mental health for the last few years. Since his step-son had been convicted his mental health had declined, and Bill estimated that he had attempted suicide “five or six” times. Bill has been able to access a number of formal supports, both through the Prison Visitors’ Centre and in the community. However, he had also experienced relationship breakdown: his son and daughter did not want to stay in contact with his step-son and Bill was not currently seeing his grandchildren. His relationship with his partner had also ended. On release, Bill’s step-son is going to come and live with Bill, and at the time of the interview Bill was trying to sell his house so he could give his step-son a fresh start in a new area.

**Brooke and Darcy:** Brooke and Darcy are young women in their late teens and early twenties who visit their partners on remand nearly every day, and who have become friends over the last few weeks. Both are loud and outgoing, but also have their vulnerabilities. Brooke is currently unable to work due to poor mental health, while Darcy has recently left education because she “isn’t very good at school”. At the time of the interview Darcy was entering the late stages of pregnancy, and the physical demands of visiting every day were beginning to become too much. Brooke and her partner had lost their baby a few weeks earlier. Both Brooke and Darcy had other family members who had served custodial sentences, and both had parents who were currently in prison, although Brooke was estranged from hers. Both women felt that they were treated badly by the prison staff and sought a lot of advice and support from the Visitors’ Centre but were also

suspicious of authority and reluctant to discuss their involvement with the criminal justice system, although Brooke did reveal that she is also facing charges when her partner goes to court. While Brooke and Darcy seemed to be close, their friendship also seemed to be short-lived – ending when one’s partner was released and she no longer needed to come to the prison every day.

**Chloe:** Chloe is a young woman in her early twenties who comes up to the prison most days to visit her boyfriend who is in on remand. Sometimes Chloe is accompanied by two of her friends who are also visiting boyfriends, and on other days she might wait with one or two people she knows in the centre. With her friends she seems outgoing – almost the leader of the group. However, by the end of the interview my view of Chloe as a sort of “ring leader”, perhaps a little loud and bolshy, had shifted to seeing her as really quite vulnerable. Chloe suffers from depression and was “signed off” her work four years ago, something that she attributes to a physically and emotionally abusive relationship with an ex-partner, which came to end after he kicked her in the stomach while she was pregnant and she took an overdose. She would like to return to work one day, but currently much of her time is taken up by visiting her partner and taking on the caring role for his siblings that he used to fulfil as his mother has serious mental health problems. She is also coming to terms with a recent miscarriage, but has the support of her family. Chloe has had some limited involvement with the criminal justice system but has put this behind her and wants to “settle down” with her man.

**The Collins Family:** The Collins family were interviewed as a group: Granny, a sixteen year old daughter, a fourteen year old niece and an eight year old son before they went to visit the children’s father Gavin (Granny’s son/niece’s uncle). Gavin is in his late 30s and has never previously been involved in offending or had any contact with the criminal justice system, so his current sentence had been a considerable shock to the whole family. His imprisonment had also necessitated changes in the children’s care arrangements: before he was sentenced the children lived with him and he was the main caregiver, but now they live with their mum but in their Gavin’s house. The family have another younger child with additional support needs who doesn’t really understand where his dad is, and he was being cared for by his Granny’s daughter (Gavin’s sister), along with Gavin’s other sister who also needs additional care. Granny Collins and her daughter share these caring responsibilities so that each can visit once a week. Despite their initial shock when Gavin was sentenced, the family were striving to remain positive, explaining that “if you put a silver lining on the cloud it has brought us all together” (daughter, 16).

**Jackie:** Jackie is a mother of a teenage daughter and a son in his early twenties, who is currently sentenced to an Order of Lifelong Restriction. Jackie had experienced a number of difficult events in her life – she explained that her son had displayed unusual behaviour from an early age

and that she had been unable to access appropriate support for him. Her son committed his first violent offence as child, and has spent the majority of his life in prison or secure accommodation. His first offence attracted considerable media attention and her son has been periodically in the press ever since, something that Jackie feels has destroyed their lives. While the children were young Jackie's husband received a long prison sentence and died in custody, and within eleven months of his death she also lost a number of close family members including her parents. She is taking medication for depression and anxiety and had only recently begun to go out of the house, although she told me that she never missed a visit if her son put in for one. Throughout the interview she was visibly upset – she would often become tearful and her hands would shake and she would spill her tea. Yet despite her distress in the interview Jackie should not be thought of as downtrodden or meek – she is well known amongst the other regular visitors and is almost a matriarchal figure within the Centre; someone that younger visitors look to for advice, and others seek out “for a laugh”.

**Joanne:** Joanne has a daughter in her early 20s, Aimie, who is currently serving a short-term sentence for living off the proceeds of her partner's offending, while he serves a longer sentence for drug dealing. As Aimie had never been in trouble before, the family hoped she would receive a community sentence, particularly as Aimie and her partner have a young baby who was only a few months old when they were sentenced. To avoid her granddaughter being taken into care, Joanne gave up her job to look after the baby full-time. She explained that this had greatly reduced her income and that she felt embarrassed to be claiming benefits for the first time in her life. Aimie was due to be released not long after the interview and planned to resume full-time care of her baby, while Joanne hoped to return to work.

**Leah:** Leah is a mum of six children who she has been the sole carer of since her husband received a long-term sentence following a violent altercation. Leah's husband has never previously been involved in offending, and both the offence and the length of sentence given were a huge shock to the family. Leah suffers from a serious degenerative illness and after her husband was sentenced the family decided that one of the children, who has additional support needs, should live with his father as Leah was struggling to cope with his needs, her illness and caring for all the other children. Her father in law helps Leah to take the children to visit, and Leah is also supported by Families Outside. While she says their support is “amazing” and that she has become closer to her father-in-law, she also often worries about the how the children will be affected by their father's imprisonment in the short and longer term. While Leah was very keen to take part in an interview, and was very warm and welcoming throughout, she also seemed to be under considerable strain, as if she had been plunged into unfamiliar terrain and was yet to find a way to navigate her family through it.

**Lynne:** Lynne has four children; her second oldest Kian, who is in his early 20s, received a short-term sentence after serving a number of months on remand. Lynne explained that Kian is easily led, and although he has some previous convictions and one prior prison sentence she hopes that he will settle down once he is released as he has a new baby with his girlfriend Sophie, and is an active step-father to Sophie's daughter Rosie. Lynne explained that she has had less to do this sentence as Sophie has done much of the visiting, and that this has been much easier than when Kian's older brother was in prison and she had to make frequent visits with his baby. Lynne has been trying to support Sophie since the new baby was born, but they live a considerable distance from each other and Lynne suffers from anxiety and doesn't like to spend too much time away from home. Lynne did seem nervous as we began the interview, but also came across as a devoted mum who wants the best for her boys.

**Sophie:** Sophie has recently turned 18 and is Kian's girlfriend. When Kian was remanded in custody Sophie was a considerable way through her pregnancy and visited him regularly as her pregnancy progressed, bringing the baby for a visit only three days after the birth. Before the baby was born Kian was sentenced, but because of the time he had spent on remand was due for release a when the baby was a few months old. In addition to the new baby, Sophie also has Rosie - a young daughter from a previous relationship. Since they met, Kian has played a large role in Rosie's life and Sophie says that he is more important to her than her biological father who no longer has contact with her. When Sophie fell pregnant with Rosie she lost her job, and suffered badly from post-natal depression when Rosie was born. Sophie explained that she would like to go back into education so she can get the career she wants, but feels that the children are still too young and childcare is prohibitively expensive. Although Sophie is one of the quieter visitors she is also well liked by both the other visitors and staff, and people often comment on how well she is coping with two very small children.

**Ruby:** Ruby is a young woman in her early 20s, who agreed to take part in an interview as she is friends with Chloe. Ruby's partner was being held on remand, and she and their young child often came to visit. This period of remand had come as a bit of a shock to Ruby as she explained that while her partner had been "in and out" since he was 16, in the last two years they had moved out of hostels and into stable accommodation, had the baby and had "settled down". Despite this shock, Ruby often seemed smiley, happy and carefree. She explained that she thought of this period of remand as a "holiday" from each other that would ultimately make them stronger, although she did think that the baby missed his daddy.

**Susan and Erica:** Susan was visiting her son Liam, who is in his mid-30s, with her aunt (Liam's Great Aunt). Liam is serving a long-term sentence, and as he had a professional job and joint custody of his two children the family had hoped he would receive a more lenient sentence. Susan has now



taken over joint custody of Liam's children and now cares for them every weekend, balancing this with her own job. Susan and her daughter both bring the children to visit Liam, and Susan feels very strongly about the importance of maintaining the children's bond with their father and puts considerable effort into this. Erica visits less often, as her age and the distance to the prison make it more difficult for her, although Susan explained that Liam receives a lot of visits from different friends and relatives. Although Liam's sentence has clearly been very difficult for Susan, she displayed a remarkable resilience and frequently looked for the positives and seemed determined to take any difficulties in her stride.

**Tracey:** Tracey is in her mid-30s and often visits her partner who is on remand awaiting trial for a serious offence. Tracey is also possibly facing charges when the case goes to trial, but is hopeful that these will be dropped. However she is also awaiting sentencing as she was caught bringing drugs into a visit 'for a friend'. Tracey explained that she feels like she is at a crossroads in her life – while her partner has a number of previous convictions and has served custodial sentences in the past, the possible sentence he is facing this time is far longer than ever before. While she has no intention of leaving him, she also wants to do something positive with this time if he does receive a prison sentence. Tracey has previously struggled with a heroin addiction but recently successfully completed a Drug Treatment and Testing Order and feels this is behind her, adding to her motivation to do something new with her life. Tracey and her partner have one child, who is currently cared for by his parents and with whom Tracey has little contact, and Tracey has an older teenage daughter from a previous relationship who was cared for by her mother. Tracey has been visiting various friends and relatives in the prison since she was a teenager herself, and has good relationships with the staff and other visitors. She is outgoing and friendly, and happy to chat to anyone who might be by themselves.

## APPENDIX III: ETHICS FORM AND ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS

### University of Edinburgh, School of Law<sup>43</sup>

#### Level 2 Research ethics approval form<sup>44</sup>

The CHSS Code of Research Ethics applies to all research carried out in the CHSS, whether by staff or students:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/humanities-soc-sci/research-ke/support-for-staff/college-research/ethics-framework>.

In order to ensure that research carried out in the School of Law complies with the Code, this ethics approval form should be completed by the Principal Investigator, leader of the research group, or supervisor of the student(s) involved. Those completing the form should ensure, wherever possible, that appropriate training and induction in research skills and ethics has been given to researchers involved prior to completion of the form, including reading the CHHS Code of Research Ethics. This is particularly important in the case of student research projects.

If the answer to any of the questions below is 'yes', please give details of how this issue is being/will be addressed to ensure that ethical standards are maintained.

When submitting this form, **please also submit a short summary of your project, including the methodology of the project.**

<b>1 THE RESEARCHERS</b>	
Your name and position	Cara Jardine (PhD Student)
Name of supervisor (if appropriate)	Dr Anna Souhami, Professor Lesley McAra
Proposed title of research	Putting the pieces together: an examination of the impact of imprisonment on prisoners and their families and the implications for reintegration, resettlement and desistance.
Funding body	ESRC
Time scale for research	3 years

<sup>43</sup> The School of Social and Political Science also has ethical guidance, available here <http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/research/ethics>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.law.ed.ac.uk/research/researchethics.aspx>

List those who will be involved in conducting the research, including names and positions (e.g. 'PhD student')	Cara Jardine (PhD Student)	
<b>2 RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, RESEARCHERS</b>		
Those named above need appropriate training to enable them to conduct the proposed research safely and in accordance with the ethical principles set out by the College	<b>Yes</b>	Courses undertaken in 2011-12: Listening to Children, Advanced Qualitative Data Analysis, Reflexivity in Qualitative Research
Researchers are likely to be sent or go to any areas where their safety may be compromised	<b>Yes</b>	Prisons and potentially family homes
Could researchers have any conflicts of interest?	<b>No</b>	
<b>3 RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, PARTICIPANTS</b>		
Could the research induce any psychological stress or discomfort?	<b>Yes</b>	This is a sensitive topic and interviews could lead to emotional distress
Does the research involve any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures?	<b>No</b>	
Could this research adversely affect participants in any other way?	<b>No</b>	
<b>4 DATA PROTECTION</b>		
Will any part of the research involve audio, film or video recording of individuals?	<b>Yes</b>	Interviews may be (audio) recorded with participants permission
Will the research require collection of personal information from any persons without their direct consent?	<b>No</b>	
How will the confidentiality of data, including the identity of participants (whether specifically recruited for the research or not) be ensured?		Interviewees will be invited to choose a pseudonym; no other potentially identifying information (location, personal circumstances) will be reported.

Who will be entitled to have access to the raw data?	Myself
How and where will the data be stored, in what format, and for how long?	Audio recordings and anonymised transcripts. Stored on an protected hard drive/locked filing cabinet for the duration of the project (recordings/personal details will be deleted after 6 months); participants consent will be sought to archive the anonymised transcripts once the project is completed.
What steps have been taken to ensure that only entitled persons will have access to the data?	See above
How will the data be disposed of?	Deleted/shredded
How will the results of the research be used?	Published/presented
What feedback of findings will be given to participants?	Participants will be given the option to receive a summary report/be kept undated on the progress of the research.
Is any information likely to be passed on to external companies or organisations in the course of the research?	<b>No</b>
<b>5 RESEARCH DESIGN</b>	
The research involves living human subjects specifically recruited for this research project <i>If 'no', go to section 6</i>	<b>Yes</b>
How many participants will be involved in the study?	A maximum of 60

What criteria will be used in deciding on inclusion/exclusion of participants?	I will seek to recruit male prisoners (n=5) and female prisoners (n=5) aged between 21 – 30, who have at least one child and who have served at least one custodial sentence before their current longer sentence. I will then seek permission to interview their families (n=10). Ten families will also be recruited who have a relative/significant person in prison, and consent will then be sought to interview the person in custody.
How will the sample be recruited?	The SPS will be ‘gate keepers’ to prisoners. Families will be recruited through support organisations such as Families Outside or the Prison Visitors Centre.
Will the study involve groups or individuals who are in custody or care, such as students at school, self help groups, residents of nursing home?	<b>Yes</b> Custody – see above
Will there be a control group?	<b>No</b>
What information will be provided to participants prior to their consent? (e.g. information leaflet, briefing session)	Written information will be provided in an appropriate (e.g. child friendly/plain English) format and explained before interview (where possible at an earlier session)
Participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. Please tick to confirm that participants will be advised of their rights.	<b>Tick</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)	<b>No</b>

Where consent is obtained, what steps will be taken to ensure that a written record is maintained?	Consent forms for adults; consent forms for parents; consent forms for children of appropriate age
In the case of participants whose first language is not English, what arrangements are being made to ensure informed consent?	Simple language will be used/forms verbally explained
Will participants receive any financial or other benefit from their participation?	<b>No</b>
Are any of the participants likely to be particularly vulnerable, such as elderly or disabled people, adults with incapacity, your own students, members of ethnic minorities, or in a professional or client relationship with the researcher?	<b>Yes</b> This project seeks to recruit prisoners and their families (including children). Ethnic minorities are not specifically targeted, nor excluded. Prisoners and their families often have a range of multiple and complex needs including homelessness, poverty, addictions, physical and mental health problems, the need for support with training/ education/numeracy and literacy/ employability, relationship difficulties etc
Will any of the participants be under 16 years of age?	<b>Yes</b>
Do the researchers named above need to be cleared through the Disclosure/Enhanced Disclosure procedures?	<b>Yes</b>
Will any of the participants be interviewed in situations which will compromise their ability to give informed consent, such as in prison, residential care, or the care of the local authority?	<b>Yes</b> Prison



## Ethics Submission: Accompanying Documents

This appendix contains the following interview schedules:

1. Interview 'schedule' for male and female prisoners
2. Interview 'schedule' for adult family members
3. Interview 'schedule' for family members: adaptations for children and young people

As noted in the body of this paper, interviews with prisoners and families affected by imprisonment will be in-depth qualitative interviews, guided by key themes rather than a formal interview schedule. The themes that will inform the interviews are outlined below.

### Interview 'schedule' for male and female prisoners

**Theme one: Families and social networks.** Who does your family/social network include? What are these relationships like? How have they changed over time?

**Theme two: Current sentence and previous offending.** What circumstances lead up to this sentence? How has offending affected your relationships?

**Theme three: Help and Support.** Who visits you in prison? Who is your biggest support? Do you need any help you're not getting?

**Theme four: Self and the Future.** How do you feel about where you are now? What would you like to happen in the future?

### Interview 'schedule' for family members (adults)

#### Background/demographic (e.g. age, gender etc).

**Theme one: Families and social networks.** Who does your family/social network include? What are these relationships like? How have they changed over time?

**Theme two: Impact of prison on relationships, home and family life and self/emotions.** How has this affected you practically and emotionally?

**Theme three: Experience/contact with criminal justice system.** How much contact have you had with the criminal justice system? What has this been like?

**Theme four: Future hopes/needs.** What would you like to happen in the future? Do you think this is likely? What help/supports might you need?



## **Interview 'schedule' for family members: adaptations for children and young people**

If older children or teenagers wish to be involved in the research, they may prefer to participate in an informal interview covering similar themes to those noted above, however, it may be preferable to not to 'press' children and young people on sensitive topics (Cree 2002).

Younger children may also wish to discuss these topics, or may prefer to participate in more creative methods of data collection instead of, or in addition to more traditional discussion based methods. One possible approach to this would be to devise series of 'worksheets' (simple questionnaires) which children can complete using drawing, stickers or writing depending on their age. An example 'worksheet' is given below, focussing on children's experiences of visiting the prison, however this could be adapted to different topics and ages. These 'worksheets' could be done with children on as part of an individual interview, or as activity that children can do while their parent/carer/other family member is being interviewed. As prisoners' families are a 'hard to reach' group it is likely that a high level of flexibility will be required in the research design. With this in mind, a summary of other possible approaches to involving children and young people in the research is given in Table 1 below. Having a range of methods will also allow children a choice of how, or if, they wish to participate.

**Table 1: Adaptions for Children and Young People**

Material/method	Research theme	Other questions
Draw a picture of your family	Family/social networks	Who is in it? Where is the person in prison? How do you feel about that
Write a story about visiting the prison/ having someone in prison/ what you would like to change	Experience with CJS Family/social networks Future hopes	Tell me more about the story?
Draw something you like about visiting your family member	Family/social networks Experience with CJS	Draw/tell me something you don't like
Draw/write a story about what you would like to happen when your family member comes home	Family/social networks Future hopes	How do you feel about this? What would you like to happen
Write or draw 'good things' on green post it notes, 'bad things' on red (e.g. about visiting the prison, their family member being in prison etc).	Family/social networks Experience with CJS	What would make the 'bad' thing better? What do you like about the 'good' things?
Sorting games (placing cards with situations/feelings etc into 'good' or 'bad' piles).	Family/social networks Experience with CJS	What would make the 'bad' thing better? What do you like about the 'good' things?



## APPENDIX IV: INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORMS

This Appendix contains:

Information sheets for:

- Men and women in custody
- Prison officers
- Families (original version)
- Families (simplified version)

Consent forms for:

- The criminal justice social work file analysis
- Adults (in custody and prison officers)
- Families



## Putting the Pieces Together: prison information sheet

### Who am I?

My name is Cara Jardine and I am a PhD student at Edinburgh University. PhD students do a three year research project and write a report.

### What is my project about?

I want to learn more about what changes for people and their families when someone is in prison. This happens to lots of families, but we don't know much about what happens or how they feel about when someone goes to prison.

### How will I learn about this?

One way which I want to learn more about this is by reading as much as I can about who is in prison and their families.

To do this I would like to read the information the prison has on as many people as I can. **I can only read your file if you agree that it is ok for me to do this.**

I will also ask some people if they would like to talk to me about their lives and the people who are important to them.

### What will I do with this information?

All the information I collect as part of the project is **confidential**, so I won't talk to anyone else about it. I will remove all personal information and change anything that might identify anyone who takes part (like names or places). This means that the information is **anonymous**.

After I have made the information anonymous, I will write about it in my project. At the end of my project the anonymous information will be kept safe by the University.

### Taking part

If you want to take part, or have any questions, please speak to someone from social work or a hall officer. Thank you!



## Putting the Pieces Together: Prison Officer information sheet

Cara Jardine, PhD student, University of Edinburgh,

email: [C.Jardine-1@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:C.Jardine-1@sms.ed.ac.uk) phone: 07969311836

### What is the research about?

As part of my PhD research I want to understand more about the people and relationships that are most important to prisoners, how they are affected when someone is in prison and what this might mean for release and resettlement. I also want to explore what can be done to support prisoners and their families.

### Why do I want to interview prison officers?

By interviewing officers I will be able to learn more about how the prison supports family relationships, what are the challenges in doing so, and what this might mean for throughcare and resettlement. Therefore I am particularly interested in speaking to officers involved in family contact or throughcare work.

### What will taking part involve?

Interviews will take between 30 minutes and an hour, and will be audio recorded with your permission.

### What will I do with this information?

All the information I collect as part of the project is **confidential**.

Any data used in my PhD will be **anonymous**. All personal information will be removed and details that might identify anyone who takes part (like names or places) will be changed.

At the end of my project the anonymous information will be held in the University Archive.

### Taking part

Interviews can be done at a time and place that suits you. If you want to take part, or have any questions, please contact me using the details above.

## Who am I?

### Who am I?

I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh.

### What is a PhD?

A PhD is a type of degree. Instead of taking classes PhD students do a three year research project and write a report.

### What is my project about?

My project is about how a prison sentence affects the prisoner and their family. I would like to find out how prisoners and families feel about prison and what things change or stay the same when someone goes to prison.

I also want to know what sort of things could help families when someone goes to prison.

### Who do I want to talk to?

Anyone who has had someone important to them go to prison. This can be a partner, parent, grandparent, child, sister, brother, aunty, uncle or anyone else you think of as family (like a very good friend).



**Putting the pieces together: a study of the impact of prison sentences on families and relationships**

**Has someone important to you had a prison sentence?**

**Would you like to give your views on what this has been like?**

**Cara Jardine**  
PhD Student, University of Edinburgh

### **Cara Jardine**

Research Student  
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University of Edinburgh  
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**[C.Jardine-1@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:C.Jardine-1@sms.ed.ac.uk)**

**Tel: 07580 465 805**

<http://www.law.ed.ac.uk/research/students/208.aspx>

**What happens to the things you tell me?**

While we are talking I will take notes or use a voice recorder if **this is ok with you**. All the information I collect as part of the project is **confidential**, so I won't talk to anyone else about what you say. But if you tell me something that makes me think you or someone else might be in danger I have to tell someone who can help

I will remove all personal information and change anything that might identify anyone who takes part (like names or places). This means that the information is **anonymous**.

After I have made the information anonymous, I will write about it in my project.

At the end of my project the anonymous information will be kept safe by the University. Other researchers may be able to look at it, but all your personal details will have been removed.

**Why do I want to talk to families affected by imprisonment?**  
When somebody goes to prison there can be lots of changes for both them and their family and the aim of my project is to learn more about this.

**What sort of questions will I ask?**  
The sorts of questions I want to ask about might be: who has gone to prison, for how long, is this their first prison sentence, how you feel about this, if you have been to visit them and if you feel like you need some extra support.

**How long will this take?**  
This depends on how much you have to say! But probably about an hour.

**Yes! I want to take part**

**Thank you!**  
•You can tell someone at the Visitors Centre or you can phone, text, email or write to me to arrange a time for me to come and talk to you.

• This can be done at a time and place that suits you.

**Any questions?**  
These are some questions you might want to ask

**What if I don't want to answer a question?**  
That is OK; you choose what questions to answer. We can even practice saying 'I don't want to answer that' before we start.

**Can I bring someone with me?**  
Yes! If you would like to and are happy for them to hear what we talk about.

**Can I change my mind?**  
Yes! You can change your mind any time before we meet or while we're talking. You can also change your mind up to a month after we meet.

**Do I have to be an adult?**  
No, but if you are under 16 your parent or carer needs to agree. I also have special leaflets for parents and children/young people.

**What if I have questions?**  
You can ask me questions at any time, either while we're talking or before or after we meet. My contact information is on the back of this leaflet.



Putting the pieces together: a study of the impact of prison sentences on families and relationships.



Has someone important to you had a prison sentence?  
Would you like to give your views on what this has been like?

My name is Cara Jardine and I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh. I want to talk to people to learn more about what happens when someone close to them gets a prison sentence. This happens to lots of families but we don't know very much about this.



What questions will I ask?

The sorts of questions I want to ask about might be: who has gone to prison, for how long, how you feel about this, if you have been to visit them and if you feel like you need some extra support.

Everything you tell me will be confidential.

This will take about an hour, and can be done at a time and place that suits you.

Taking Part

If you would like to take part you can phone, text, email or write to me.

If you would like to know more there are information leaflets for adults and children/young people (and their parents/carers!)

Phone: 07580 465 805

Email: [C.Jardine-1@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:C.Jardine-1@sms.ed.ac.uk)



## Putting the Pieces Together: Consent form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my PhD research. I am doing my PhD at the University of Edinburgh and want learn more about what happens to people and their families when they are given a prison sentence. More information about the project can be found in the information sheet.

I have read the information sheet and agree to my file being read as part of this project.

I understand that the data collected will be held confidentially and used anonymously as part of this project.

I agree for an ANONYMOUS copy of this information to be kept securely by the University (archived).

**Signed:**

**Print name:**

**Date:**



## Putting the Pieces Together: Consent form for adults

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my PhD research. I am doing my PhD at the University of Edinburgh and want to talk to people in prison to learn more about their lives and what happens to them and their families when they are given a prison sentence. More information about the project can be found in the information sheet. Everyone I talk to can:

- STOP the interview at any time or choose NOT to answer a question
- Tell me any time in the next **month** NOT to use their interview in my project

I have read the information sheet and agree to be interviewed as part of this project:

I have had a chance to ask questions:

I understand that the interview is confidential unless there is a risk of harm:

I agree for an ANONYMOUS copy of this interview to be kept securely by the University (archived):

**Signed:**

**Date:**



## Putting the Pieces Together: Consent form for families

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my PhD research. I am doing my PhD at the University of Edinburgh and want to talk to people who have a family member in prison to learn more about their lives and what happens when someone in their family is given a prison sentence. More information about the project can be found in the information sheet. Everyone I talk to can:

- STOP the interview at any time or choose NOT to answer a question
- Tell me any time in the next **month** NOT to use their interview in my project

I have read the information sheet and agree to be interviewed as part of this project:

I have had a chance to ask questions:

I understand that the interview is confidential unless there is a risk of harm:

I agree for an ANONYMOUS copy of this interview to be kept securely by the University (archived):

**Signed:**

**Date:**