'He's got a life sentence, but I have a life sentence to cope with as well': The Experiences of Long-term Prisoners' Partners

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ABSTRACT

There is a small, but growing, body of research on prisoners' families. It has shown that these families experience numerous pains and deprivations associated with imprisonment, ranging from financial hardship to social (stigma) and emotional issues (grief-like emotions). It has also been suggested that long sentences could exacerbate and prolong these problems. However, no studies on long-term prisoners' families specifically have yet been conducted in the UK. This study explores the experiences of 33 long-term prisoners' partners. Prison sociology, which has explored imprisonment, and long-term imprisonment specifically, is used to inform the analysis. Themes such as coping with the pains of imprisonment over time and with the length of the sentence and time passing are explored. It is also shown that partners are fundamentally changed, on an identity level, by a long sentence. Furthermore, stigma is explored, and it is argued that partners of long-term prisoners experience especially strong stigma and that it lasts for a long time indeed. Finally, this thesis considers how the partners outside 'do family' across prison walls, and how imprisonment makes this challenging indeed. In conclusion, it is argued that the experiences of prisoners' partners speak to the sociological research on imprisonment more broadly and that drawing on these experiences can develop the prison sociologist's knowledge about the broader sociological impact of imprisonment.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Maria and Jean-Michel Camelin.
Je vous aime.

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

> **Judy**: You know, that's it, I think, a lot of people don't realise that we serve the sentence as well.

The prison has long been a key criminal justice institution. It removes the prisoner from his community and from his family, sometimes for many years. Scholarly work has explored how imprisonment affects prisoners physically, psychologically and emotionally. Yet there have been comparatively fewer research studies on prisoners' families, despite sociological research showing that imprisonment does affect families, often in very profound and long-lasting ways. In this thesis, I seek to show that the effects of long-term imprisonment go beyond just removing a prisoner from his family for many years. I endeavour to demonstrate, through interviews with a sample of long-term prisoners' partners, that they too are negatively affected by imprisonment for many years. They endure long-term separation, a lack of privacy in their interactions with their boyfriend or husband, and the numerous practical and financial consequences of visiting and supporting someone in prison. Moreover, they may be exposed to the full glare of society and the media, and many are stigmatised, with an even greater number fearing stigmatisation. Sustaining relationships and engaging in meaningful family practices are also shown to be difficult when a long sentence is handed down and a man is separated from his partner (and any children they have) for many years.

These complex consequences, as Judy stated in the quotation above, mean that some prisoners' partners feel as though they too are being punished. As I discuss in Chapter 3, there is a link to be made between the broader study of the sociological impact of imprisonment and the experiences of prisoners' partners. Thus far, the sociology of imprisonment has largely focused on prisoners and prison staff, and only recently has expanded its attention to how imprisonment affects communities and families. The purpose of this thesis is to show that the experiences of prisoners' partners can enrich the detailed and well-cited body of sociological work on imprisonment, but also

the work on the sociology of time and family practices.

My interest in the experiences of prisoners' families developed during my undergraduate studies. As part of my BA degree in Law, I chose to study a Criminology and Penology module, which briefly touched upon prisoners' families. This interest developed further when I went on to do an MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice, this time taking Crime and the Family as an optional course. It was then that I became fully aware of the complex ways in which families are affected by punishment generally, and imprisonment specifically. I was exposed to the sociological works of Rachel Condry (2007), Megan Comfort (2008), and others.

My MSc dissertation (Kotova 2012) analysed the blame and stigma experienced by partners of men who committed sexual offences against children. In this theoretical dissertation, I explored the sociocultural conceptions of womanhood, wifehood, and childhood which, I argued, underlie the blaming and stigmatising these partners experience in the community and in the media. Working on this dissertation allowed me to delve further into the literature on prisoners' and offenders' families, and focused my attention on a group of prisoners' partners that is usually more stigmatised than partners of men who committed other types of offences. Moreover, men convicted of serious sex offences usually get long sentences, which made me think about how the severity of the punishment, too, could exacerbate the problems and difficulties faced by their partners outside. As a result, I became interested in those prisoners' families whose experiences of imprisonment could be especially traumatic and long-lasting.

The many difficulties prisoners' partners experience are well-documented and include financial difficulties and stigmatisation, yet little is known about how these difficulties are endured over a long sentence. It seemed logical to me that partners of long-term prisoners are likely to experience more issues, and for longer periods of time. In fact, Rachel Condry (2007), in her study

on families of serious offenders, has suggested that this might be the case:

> Many of the difficulties faced by the wider population of prisoners' families are magnified for the relatives of serious offenders, by the seriousness and stigmatising impact of the offence itself and *by the severity of the consequences, which often include a long prison sentence*.
> (Condry 2007: 3 – emphasis added).

Yet in what ways are these difficulties magnified? How is a long sentence experienced by the partner outside? Do these difficulties become easier to bear with time? A review of the literature made it clear that these questions had not yet been directly addressed by the earlier research on prisoners' families (see Chapter 2). I wanted to delve into this further and provide an empirical exploration of the experiences of a sample of long-term prisoners' partners.

To do so, it was important to ground this thesis in the sociological work on imprisonment. Existing research, with the notable exceptions of Comfort (2008) and Condry (2007), does not often draw upon prison sociology. Prison sociology, however, provides some excellent theoretical tools for exploring the issues faced by prisoners' families, ranging from Sykes' (1958) 'pains of imprisonment' to the more recent work on long-term imprisonment specifically (Crewe 2011, Liebling 2011). This literature is further explored in Chapter 3. Apart from providing useful theoretical tools, drawing on prison sociology also helps draw the attention of the prison sociologist to prisoners' families. This is important because if we are to understand the full sociological impact of long-term imprisonment, it is crucial that we explore how families of long-term prisoners are affected by it. By drawing on the theoretical tools provided by the sociology of imprisonment, as I endeavour to do in Chapter 3, I show that prisoners' families can tell us much about the pains and deprivations associated with imprisonment and imprisonment's wider impact on society.

1.1 THE FOCUS OF THIS THESIS

In this thesis, the experiences of long-term prisoners' partners will be explored, drawing upon a conceptual framework which builds upon Comfort's (2008, 2009) work. In order to develop Comfort's framework, the thesis draws upon recent sociological work on imprisonment, such as Crewe (2009, 2011), Liebling (2011), and Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015). This work not only develops the pains of imprisonment as discussed by Sykes (1958) and applied to prisoners' families by Comfort (2008, 2009), but also explores the pains associated with long-term imprisonment specifically. Moreover, evidence of the psychosocial impact of long-term imprisonment on prisoners is drawn upon to analyse how partners outside experience changes in their imprisoned husbands or boyfriends over a long time.

It is also useful to integrate sociological work on time and family practices into the conceptual framework. Time and the passage of time, after all, are critical aspects of a long sentence, as I set out in Chapter 3. It is important to explore how partners outside make sense of a long sentence but also how they experience the passage of time when maintaining a relationship with a long-term prisoner. Since they are also, fundamentally, *partners,* drawing on the family practices literature will help us to consider how they operate as partners and how they 'do family' across prison walls (discussed further in Chapters 3 and 8). Therefore, this thesis follows the direction set out by Comfort (2008). It takes up the tools provided by the sociology of imprisonment and uses these tools, with the help of work from the sociology of time and family, to explore the experiences of long-term prisoners' partners.

Although previous research on prisoners' families has shown that they experience a number of pains and deprivations (set out in Chapter 2), this thesis develops this research by focusing on the longevity of these pains. I explore how these pains are experienced over time, whether they become easier to bear as the sentence draws on, or continue to be a heavy burden for the partners outside.

Understanding how partners outside experience the pains of imprisonment and the pains associated with long-term imprisonment will help enrich our understanding of imprisonment in general. Sykes (1958: 136) spoke of prison research in these terms:

> The realities of imprisonment are, however, multi-faceted; there is not a single true interpretation but many, and the meaning of any situation is always a complex of several, often conflicting viewpoints. This fact can actually be an aid to research concerning the prison rather than a hindrance, for it is [sic] the simultaneous consideration of divergent viewpoints that one begins to see the significant aspects of the prison’s social structure.

Sykes (1958) highlighted, therefore, that there are different perspectives when it comes to imprisonment. These are not just the prisoners' and the officers' viewpoints, but also those of the communities the prisoners come from and their families. This has been recognised, albeit briefly, by eminent prison sociologists, such as Alison Liebling (2004). If we are to engage in meaningful debates about imprisonment's effectiveness as a method of punishing offenders, we need to understand its full impact. Without an understanding of how families outside are affected, we will not be able to construct a full picture of the various effects of imprisonment. In the same vein, Nicola Lacey (2013) has argued that we cannot think of criminal justice, more broadly, as being separate from other social issues and institutions: racism, poverty, families, and so on.

Secondly, I examine how the women outside experience the longevity of the sentence and the passage of time. This, too, has been researched from the point of view of long-term prisoners, but not yet from the perspectives of the partners outside. Since time is such a critical part of a long sentence, it is critical to examine how it features in the lives of women partnered to men serving long sentences, and how a long sentence shapes both their everyday routines and their life courses. Thirdly, the stigma experienced by families of serious offenders has been researched by Condry (2007) and May (2000). Yet long sentences were not the focus of these studies. In this thesis, I explore how partners of long-term prisoners' experience stigma over a long sentence specifically,

but also how the seriousness of the crime, which often correlates with a long sentence, shapes the stigmatisation they endure.

Finally, I build on family practices research to explore how women engage in family practices across family walls. I explore the difficulties a long sentence creates for women working to sustain family life. In doing this, I seek to develop not just prisoners' families research, but also sociological research on families in general. After all, partners outside, if they decide to remain in the relationship in question, may also experience lost time as they are separated from their partners for a long period of time. Moreover, even though they may not fit the traditional, two-parent, cohabiting family model, they are still a family unit. Understanding how they operate as a family, therefore, can help us comprehend the experiences of families which often remain hidden in society and on a policy level (I will return to this in Chapter 9).

Below, I set out a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of the thesis.

Chapter 2 following this introductory chapter provides an outline of academic research on prisoners' families. It sets out what this research tells us about the problems and issues faced by prisoners' families. It also highlights the gaps in our knowledge, especially when it comes to families of long-term prisoners. The few studies specifically on families of long-term prisoners are discussed, as well as the findings that were used to formulate some of the themes and questions that I explore.

In **Chapter 3**, I set out the theoretical framework for this thesis. I explore why the sociology of imprisonment provides useful theoretical tools for a thesis focusing on long-term prisoners' families. Sociological work on punishment and imprisonment has recently seen an emergence of debates about the boundaries of punishment, which is a pertinent theme of my study. I then set out

the sociological literature which has explored how imprisonment is experienced by prisoners and draw out how it can help us explore the experiences of partners outside. I move on to focus on the literature on long-term imprisonment specifically, and also highlight the ways in which it could help us understand the experiences of the partners outside. Finally, I discuss the relevance of temporality and time, and the literature on family practices. **Chapter 4** moves on to set out the methodological approach taken in this thesis, and then describes the data collection and data analysis processes.

In **Chapter 5,** the findings on the pains of imprisonment and how they are experienced over time are presented. I argue that the partners outside felt the pains of imprisonment set out by Sykes (1958), and move on to consider how these pains were experienced over time. Using the recent work of Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) on long-term prisoners, I show that my study connects with the research on how the pains of imprisonment are experienced over time by prisoners. The final section looks at how these pains were coped with over a long sentence and considers the transformative effect a long-term sentence can have on the partner outside. **Chapter 6** focuses on lost time, the passage of time, and temporality specifically. I show that some women struggled to make sense of a long sentence, and consider how the passage of time was experienced – often in a very gendered manner indeed. The women's interrupted lifetimes and disrupted everyday routines are considered. Finally, the ways in which women coped with the length of the sentence are analysed. The focus of **Chapter 7** is on stigma – a well-documented problem faced by many prisoners' families. I consider both public stigma and self-stigma, and how they were experienced by partners. I show that the media was important, since the sentences were long and the cases often high-profile. Moreover, I explore the mechanisms used by the women to cope with stigma, and how they made sense of their partners' offending, using Condry's (2007) theoretical framework. The final empirical chapter, **Chapter 8**, moves on to discuss how women enacted family across prison walls. I explore how family space and time were created by the women, and the ingenuity they exercised to create a sense of family. Physical and emotional intimacy, and intimate knowledge, and the

challenges that long-term imprisonment raises for exercising these forms of intimacy, are considered.

Chapter 9 concludes this thesis by drawing together the various threads and returning to the introductory chapters. It highlights the utility of prison sociology in the exploration of the experiences of prisoners' families, and the contribution that research on prisoners' families can make to these debates. I outline the strengths and limitations of the study, map routes for future research, and set out the theoretical and empirical contributions of this thesis, as well as a number of policy implications.

CHAPTER 2
Setting the Scene – What do we Know About Long-term Prisoners' Partners?

The last two decades have seen a dramatic increase in the prison population in England and Wales, which in turn means that there has been an increase in families experiencing a relative's imprisonment. In 2015, around 85,600 men were serving prison sentences in England and Wales – this is 766 people more than at the same time in 2014 (Howard League for Penal Reform 2015). Between 1994 and 2014, the prison population in England and Wales almost doubled – from 48,621 to 84,485, most of these prisoners being men (Ministry of Justice 2014). In addition, there has also been a marked increase in families affected by long-term imprisonment. In 1993, 9% of sentenced prisoners were serving a life or an indeterminate sentence, a number that rose to 19% in 2012 (Ministry of Justice 2013). Coupled with an overall increase in the prison population, this means that both the *number* and the *proportion* of male prisoners serving long sentences have increased. By way of example, 3724 male prisoners were serving mandatory life sentences in England and Wales in 2005, and this number increased to 4867 in 2013 (Strickland and Garton Grimwood 2013).

Moreover, there has also been an increase in sentence length – the average time life-sentenced prisoners served in prison rose from 13 years in 2001 to 17 years in 2013 (Ministry of Justice 2014a). Although indeterminate IPP sentences have been abolished, approximately 5,500 prisoners were still serving IPPs in 2014 (Hansard LD 2014). Even though in 2012 60% of prisoners serving IPPs had a tariff of four years or less, 60% had passed their tariff date (Ministry of Justice 2014b). As was noted in a House of Lords debate, some IPP prisoners can 'end up spending many years in custody after the tariff period the sentencing judge considered appropriate to punish the offender for his or her crime' (Hansard LD 2014: column 680). As Rule wrote in an article for The Justice Gap, some IPP prisoners are effectively (still) serving life sentences for crimes which did not call for such sentences (Rule 2016).

With the abolition of IPP sentences, a new sentencing framework was introduced. Following the introduction of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, mandatory life sentences are given upon conviction for a second serious offence, where the offence is of a given type (serious sexual or violent offence) and is serious enough to justify a sentence of 10 years or more (Strickland and Garton Grimwood 2013). Moreover, the individual must have previously been convicted of a listed offence, and that sentence too must have been a life sentence or a sentence of 10 years or more (Strickland and Garton Grimwood 2013). As such, this could mean that the number of men serving long sentence will not decrease significantly with the abolition of IPP sentences.

The backlog of IPP-sentenced prisoners and the new "two strikes and you're out" sentence provisions are unlikely to improve the situation. Yet there are no official statistics collected about prisoners' families and partners, no routine collection of information about prisoners' marital status, and no concrete figures about how many families/partners are affected by imprisonment. A frequently-cited number is that of 200,000 children affected by imprisonment; this number can be tracked back to a Ministry of Justice (2012) study. However, not only is this but an estimate, it is also now dated, as the number is for 2009.

This thesis focuses on the experiences of female partners of prisoners in particular. It is difficult to know how many women are affected by a partner's imprisonment. Just over 30% of male prisoners report being married or partnered (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth 2012), and there is likely to be an additional number of former partners also feeling the impact of imprisonment and, possibly, still maintaining some form of contact with the prisoner. Moreover, some prisoners may not report having a partner because they might fear that their partner will be stigmatised. Based on these numbers, the most modest estimate would put the number of partners being affected by

imprisonment at any one time at over 24,000 in England and Wales alone, with about 4,000 of these being partners of prisoners serving life or indeterminate sentences. This number could be higher if we factor in women who are ex-partners and who still maintain some form of contact with prisoners. Moreover, there are likely to be women whose partners have been released but who are still feeling the ongoing effects of long-term imprisonment such as stigma.

Research has also indicated that many intimate relationships do not last the entire sentence – and those that do may do so at great cost (Rolston and Tomlinson 2013). Sapsford (1978), in a study of sixty English prisoners at different stages of a life sentence, found that by the fifth year, nearly all contact with wives and girlfriends ceased. Merriman (1979), in her US research focusing specifically on families of men serving 10 years or more, also found that contact with partners dwindled. Although this is a brief study and Merriman (1979) does not describe her sample or methodology, this appears to corroborate Sapsford's findings. Lynch and Sabol's (2001) analysis of US Bureau of Justice Statistics, too, showed that 16% of offenders to be released after serving one year or less were divorced – a number that increased to 20% for those released after serving five years or more. The implication of these findings is that maintaining an intimate relationship over a long sentence is difficult, but there is a need to investigate what the difficulties are (Sapsford 1978).

The only studies, to the best of my knowledge, that focus explicitly on the experiences of long-term prisoners' families are Merriman's US study (1979) and a Hong-Kong doctoral study conducted by Tsui (2010). As will be discussed in section 2.2, both studies have flaws which make it difficult to extrapolate empirical evidence from them. Outside of these two studies, there are a range of comments in more general works on prisoners' families addressing the potential impact of long sentences upon these families. These comments, too, can be seen as useful building blocks for establishing the themes to be explored in a study on the experiences of long-term prisoners' partners.

2.1 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON PRISONERS' FAMILIES

Research on prisoners' families dates back to the 1960s. This early body of work considered the experiences of female prisoners and their children (*e.g.* Zalba 1964), and saw families as important tools for reducing reoffending rates amongst former prisoners (Fenton and Fenton 1961, Holt and Miller 1972). The most seminal work of that decade was that of Morris (1965), and was by far the most extensive piece of research on the topic, as 588 wives of male prisoners in England and Wales were interviewed. Morris' analysis drew attention to the fact that the impact of imprisonment on families is a complex issue, and argued that there is a need to recognise that the impact of imprisonment and the impact of criminal activity are distinct issues. Moreover, Morris argued that such families may have been experiencing various socioeconomic difficulties prior to imprisonment. She also, importantly, found that not all families were devastated by imprisonment, thus highlighting the need for a sociologically sensitive understanding of the context. Crucially, Morris went beyond simply discussing families as tools for reducing reoffending, and explored the ways in which the women, as individuals, were affected by their husbands' imprisonment.

As Comfort (2008) notes in her overview of the literature on the subject, later research – through the 1980s and 1990s – usually portrayed imprisonment as resulting in numerous and overwhelmingly negative consequences for prisoners' families. Families were seen as the hidden victims of crime (Bakker, Morris and Janus 1978), and imprisonment was portrayed as causing 'traumatic separation leading to family dismemberment' (Carlson and Cervera 1991: 279). In these two decades, female prisoners and their children continued to be a strong focus of the research (*e.g.* Bloom 1995, Richie 2002). Few, with the exception of those like Hairston (1995, 1998) and Nurse (2002), researched families of male offenders.

Two extensive pieces of work only were produced on the subject of prisoners' female partners in the 1990s; that of Fishman (1990) and Girschik (1996). Both works provide some

excellent discussion of the experiences of prisoners' partners as women and individuals, yet both were conducted in the US, a judicial system very different to the UK. Moreover, there are numerous limitations to these studies. For example, as Comfort (2008) notes, in both studies the sample was made up of either exclusively or primarily White participants, and the issue of race was not engaged with in the analyses of their experiences. These studies were also highly descriptive, with the theoretical framing of the empirical data being limited.

Later work began to become more theoretically nuanced. Concepts such as 'social capital' and how it relates to families of prisoners began to be discussed (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999). Discussion of families as 'collaterally damaged' by imprisonment began (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999, Light and Campbell 2006). The momentum thus built, and resulted in a number of collections of essays on the subject of prisoners' families (*e.g.* Harris and Miller 2003, Travis and Waul 2003). More recent research, such as Comfort's (2008) US study, explicitly seeks to ground its findings in a rich sociological theory of the pains of imprisonment and how they are experienced by prisoners' families, but also engage with issues of gender, race, and the sociological complexity of US prisons. Christian (2005) explored in detail how prisoners' partners in the US negotiated their relationships with the prisoners, and the complex social and economic costs and sacrifices associated with managing the family across prison walls.

Comfort's (2008) work recognises that prisons are not just “good” or “bad”, but that they can carry both negative and positive consequences for prisoners, such as when a drug-addicted prisoner receives treatment in prison. Comfort (2008) shows that families, too, experience this ambivalence. She discusses how a family can experience both negative and positive consequences when a man is imprisoned. For example, a partner could be enduring all the hardships of travelling long distances to visit the prisoner and the expenses associated with supporting him, but also feel relieved that her partner is receiving treatment for mental health or substance abuse problems. Condry (2007), in the

UK, grounded her research on serious offenders' families in a framework built around the sociological work of Goffman (1963) on stigma and stigma management, as well on the criminological work on techniques of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza 1957).

Despite the growing theoretical complexity of more recent research, Comfort (2008: 12) laments the overwhelmingly and simplistically negative view of imprisonment and how it impacts upon families. She argues that prisons should not be seen as just 'people-damaging' institutions, but as 'people-processing' institutions which can, and sometimes do, have both negative and positive, long-lasting, transformative effects on prisoners' families. Moreover, there is still very little serious exploration of whether the difficulties experienced by prisoners' families are rooted in pre-existing causes (poverty, domestic violence, drug addiction, *etc.*) and not solely imprisonment, with the notable exception of the recent study by Halsey and Deegan (2014). At the same time, it is difficult not to acknowledge that imprisonment clearly does result in numerous and often very negative consequences for the family, as extensive research over the past fifty years, across numerous jurisdictions and methodologies, has shown. Furthermore, prisoners' families research has not yet drawn upon the more recent literature on the pains of imprisonment in general, and the pains of long-term imprisonment specifically. To do so is critical, considering that more families are affected by long-term imprisonment, and because there is cause to suspect that long sentences could exacerbate the issues faced by prisoners' families (Condry 2007). I will return to this in Chapter 3.

At this point it is useful to present a brief overview of the problems and difficulties of imprisonment as identified in previous research, while acknowledging some of the positive effects of imprisonment that have also been identified. In summarising previous research, I will focus particularly on findings pertaining to partners of prisoners, but many of the samples in the studies discussed below are not comprised of partners alone.

Financial impact

One of the most well-documented effects of imprisonment on the partner of a prisoner is financial impact. Morris (1965) found that financial problems were the most significant issues for the wives in her sample. On the one hand, this may reflect the fact that in the 1960s, women were more financially reliant on their husbands than in later decades. However, more recent studies have also found that financial impact is often significant and negative, as imprisonment is often correlated with a fall in the prisoner's partner's income. This is either because she loses her job or has to give it up or reduce her working hours to look after children, or because of the loss of her partner's income (Smith *et al.* 2007). Moreover, she may need to leave her job or reduce her hours in order to accommodate visiting the prisoner, or because of the emotional trauma caused by his imprisonment (Light and Campbell 2007). Even if the prisoner and his partner were separated prior to imprisonment, she may lose income in the form of child support payments rather than his wage *per se* (Harman, Smith and Egan 2007).

Some women may also not be used to managing the family's finances on their own, and might find themselves struggling to navigate existing financial problems and facing new issues – such as claiming benefits for the first time (Light and Campbell 2007). These financial consequences need to be put into context. Many prisoners – and, by implication, their partners – are overwhelmingly drawn from financially deprived sections of society (*e.g.* Houchin 2005). This means that even a small fall in income may be acutely felt and have serious ramifications for the partner outside.

Moreover, visiting someone in prison can be very expensive. Although travelling to a UK prison rarely involves the sort of time-consuming, all-night travelling described in some US studies (*e.g.* Christian 2005, Comfort 2008), prisoners are often held relatively far away from home. On average, male prisoners were held about 50 miles away from their home in 2009 (Hansard HC

2010); travelling by train or car could thus be financially burdensome for an already economically disadvantaged partner. This is likely to be more so if children are travelling too, and if an overnight stay is necessary. Although the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme exists to offer financial help to families on low incomes, its scope is limited. Only those on specific kinds of welfare benefits are eligible to apply – such as Income Support, Child Tax Credit, *etc*. Those who are just above the threshold for benefits may still struggle with the potentially significant cost of travelling, and yet be ineligible to claim support (Action for Prisoners Families 2010). Additionally, a visitor can only claim for one visit every 14 days (Action for Prisoners Families 2010), and the scheme has been scaled back, so that, for instance, elderly visitors can no longer claim for taxi fares (Action for Prisoners Families 2010).

Furthermore, the partner may need to support the imprisoned man financially, by sending in money for telephone calls, canteen, post, and other in-prison expenses (Codd 2002). Goods bought from inside prisons, as anecdotal evidence indicates, are more expensive than their supermarket equivalents (*e.g.* InsideTime 2014). Considering that prisoners' earnings average only £10 a week (Prison Reform Trust 2013), it is no surprise than extra financial support is often necessary. The cost of telephone calls from prisons is also notoriously high – even following a consumer complaint and a consequent decrease in prices. A prison inspection in 2016 reported that calls cost about 9.17p per minute to a landline number, and 20.4p per minute to a mobile phone number (HMP Inspectorate of Prisons 2016). Bearing in mind the cheapness of many telephone contracts outside, this is expensive indeed (HMP Inspectorate of Prisons 2016). On average, Action for Prisoners Families estimates that the monthly cost of supporting someone in prison amounts to around £200 (Action for Prisoners Families 2012). Once again, if the partner is already on a low income, this could be a very onerous financial burden (Christian, Mellow and Thomas 2006).

Sending in money may also be emotionally important because it provides an opportunity for

families – and for partners and other female relatives especially – to enact their caring role (Codd 2000). Inability to send in money may thus be accompanied by feelings of guilt. This means financial impact may be also be emotionally painful if the partner cannot afford to send in money or feels she cannot send enough.

In order to cope financially, partners might need to apply for social security benefits (Codd 2000), or take out loans or borrow from friends and family. Debt is, in fact, another difficulty some families experience, as highlighted by an Australian study (Stringer 2000). In the UK, Smith *et al*. (2007) found that store and credit cards were big sources of debt-related problems for prisoners' families. Stigma and lack of access to conventional borrowing also means that partners may be more likely to turn to unofficial moneylenders, and thus have to shoulder very high interest rates.

Emotional impact

When the relationship between the prisoner and his partner was a positive one prior to imprisonment, the partner may miss the prisoner and grieve his loss (Merriman 1979, Arditti 2003). Grief, a sense of loss, and loneliness are some of the emotions many prisoners' partners report feeling (Smith *et al.* 2007, Fishman 1990). Daniel and Barrett (1981), in a study on 20 prisoners and their wives in the US, found that most wives showed emotions associated with grief, and over 90% of couples in the study reported missing each other (Daniel and Barrett 1981). This is a small sample, but is corroborated by other studies, such as those of Condry (2007) and Comfort (2008).

Of course, if the relationship pre-imprisonment was negatively affected by the prisoner's mental health problems, drinking, drug addiction, domestic violence, or was otherwise difficult, then the partner may feel a sense of relief after he is imprisoned. Imprisonment may be thus seen, by such partners, as a chance for the prisoners to get some help and for themselves to enjoy some stability and a 'semblance of order [in] tumultuous and troubled existences' (Comfort 2008: 184).

Comfort (2008), in the US context, found that prison could offer some couples a chance to rekindle their intimate relationship, via increased communication, romantic letters, and so on. Thus, imprisonment could lead to a 'renewed courtship', in the words of Fishman (1990: 151), who also found increased communication to be true in her study of 30 prisoners' partners in the US. More recently, Halsey and Deegan (2014) found that removing a chronic drug user resulted in more stability and more availability of financial resources for his significant other. Likewise, removing an abuser to prison can significantly improve the partner's life, though it is worth remembering that the abusive and controlling behaviour could continue from behind prison walls (Halsey and Deegan 2014). This can be done via the process of 'domestic violence “by remote control”' (O'Keefe 2000: 6). This is when the prisoner is able to control his partner indirectly, via threats of violence and/or via emotional manipulation and pressure.

Visiting and otherwise coming into contact with the prison – via telephone calls and letters/e-mails, all of which may be listened to/read by prison staff – can also be emotionally difficult. Research has shown that visits are sometimes experienced as stressful (*e.g.* Girschik 1996), for a range of reasons. Some women enter the prison, for example, feeling deeply resentful about having their loved one taken away (Dixey and Woodall 2012), while others report feeling emotional pain at having to leave after the visit, but also at seeing their loved one in prison (Arditti 2003). Searching procedures may be experienced as intimidating (Codd 2000), and the lack of privacy when it comes to communication may be galling. Moreover, if children are also visiting, the prisoner and his partner may have to balance having a meaningful conversation in the few hours they share a week/month, and being worried about their child(ren) behaving badly and getting into trouble with prison staff (Nurse 2002). Partners in Arditti's (2003) study said that trying to talk in these conditions is stressful. One partner, in another study, summarised the emotionally complex nature of visiting thus:

> When I visit, I go through all kinds of emotions; I'm knackered, elated, frightened about the long journeys on my own. I am emotionally drained.
> (Prisoner's' partner quoted in Katz 2002: 38)

Social impact and stigma

Prisoners' families do not exist in a vacuum but are 'embedded in a broad sociocultural network that stigmatises imprisonment' (Arditti *et al.* 2010: 1388). This means that negative social reactions to prisoners reach beyond the prisoner himself and affect his family. Recent decades have seen a broader movement away from a rehabilitative to a punitive stance (Loader 2006, Newburn 2007), with offenders, including prisoners, being increasingly portrayed as “evil” and “dangerous”. Offenders are uniformly seen as dangerous “others” (Cook 2006), and mass media vilifies them as being 'thugs' and 'murderers', 'killers and rapists' (Mason 2006). Consider one particular recent case, which illustrates this exclusionary, all-or-nothing view of offenders. This was a case of a young father convicted of murdering his young child. News about the case was reported with titles such as 'Baby killer Aurimas Medvedevas...' (Dean 2014, for IBT) and '”Callous and brutal” father...' (Cockroft 2014, for Mailonline). The case was in fact more complex, with the defence team arguing that the defendant was suffering from mental health issues and a desperate home situation. These complexities, however, are not reflected in some of the newspaper headlines, which opt for overtly demonising the offender. The media presents offenders as being entirely responsible for the offence committed and thus deserving of harsh punishment and exclusion from law-abiding society. In turn, this one-dimensional retributive rhetoric prevents us from taking into account the wider effects of imprisonment (Breen 2008), because the focus is simply on punishing the offender.

This stigmatisation of offenders in general and prisoners in particular transfers to their families via the process of 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman 1963), whereby the identity of the partner (and other family members) is seen as tainted or spoilt by virtue of their association with the prisoner. This concept has been applied to prisoners' families (Goffman 1963), but also to a diverse

range of other stigmatised groups, such as families of people with mental illness (Angermeyer, Schulze and Dietrich 2003). As Condry (2007) rightly argues, the stigma experienced by families of prisoners is mediated by the social reaction to the offender himself and to the offence. If society and the state view and treat prisoners as uniformly “evil”, the courtesy stigma felt by their partners may be all the more severe. The stigma families experience is partly due to 'the specific understanding of the crime', which leads families to fear 'others would see them as nothing more than murderers' [or other offenders']' (May 2000: 205).

Condry (2007) has explored, in greater detail, why prisoners' families are stigmatised. She describes the range of reasons as a 'web of shame', with one strand of this web being 'kin contamination'. Firstly, relatives are seen as contaminated by virtue of their association with the prisoner and are deemed to be of the same bad “stock”. Parents may also be stigmatised for being biologically related to the prisoner, evoking notions of “bad blood”. 'Kin culpability' refers to stigmatisation arising out of the idea that families are responsible for what happens within the family. As discussed in the next chapter, wifehood is still deeply rooted in traditional discourses (Condry 2007), creating the link between prisoner and partner via intimacy rather than biology (the latter links the prisoner and his biological family). Condry found that families can be blamed for omission – failing to prevent the offending behaviour. This, Condry explained, was especially true if the prisoner and the relative in question shared a house, as is often the case with male adults and their partners (especially wives of men who commit sexual offences, where the physical intimacy shared by partners creates a further link between offender and his partner, through which stigma may be transferred). Moreover, relatives can be blamed for commission – being somehow indirectly linked to or blamed for the offending, such as when parents are blamed for “bad upbringing” of the offender and thus are seen as being indirectly responsible for the offence. Relatives could also be deemed to have been colluding in the offence. Finally, blame could also arise out of family members' decision to continue their relationship with the prisoner post-arrest; arguably, a

partner/wife has a choice to sever her ties to the prisoner, an option that the nuclear family does not have. Her choice to continue maintaining the relationship may also thus be used to stigmatise her further.

The social impact on the family, in practical terms, has been found to be dramatic and highly negative. Condry (2007) found numerous instances of public stigmatisation of families of serious offenders, even, in some cases (*e.g.* families of sex offenders) by fellow prison visitors – such as not being talked to. Codd (2000) recounts instances of women being taunted, and in one case, of one participant's washing being fouled with dog excrement, and Halsey and Deegan (2014) recount instances of partners losing close friends and a pregnant woman being violently attacked by her father for being pregnant with her imprisoned boyfriend's child.

Moreover, prisoners' families have also been documented to experience stigmatisation when visiting prisons. Bruynson (2011) found that some prison staff degraded prisoners' partners, with other researchers finding that prison staff were 'unexpressive' and treating visitors as if they were 'not even a person' (Arditti 2003: 127). Fishman (1982: 92) argued that 'because the offender has committed an act that is not socially acceptable, his family members are often thought of [by prison staff] as criminal too...'. Families sometimes feel unwelcome, and as though they are somehow guilty by association (Codd 1998). Even if prison staff do not say or do anything overtly stigmatising, research has found that many demonstrate an attitude of 'contemptuous neglect' (Comfort 2003: 83). This is when prison staff do not show any regard for the needs of prisoners' families because they feel these families are not deserving of assistance. One example of ‘contemptuous neglect’ can be taken from Halsey and Deegan’s (2014) study. A prisoner’s girlfriend, whose father had been extremely violent to her and who as a result suffered a miscarriage, found it impossible to inform her imprisoned boyfriend about what had happened. The Remand Centre staff did not pass her message on, and she had to tell him on a regular visit, which

was very distressing for both.

Even where no overt instances of stigmatisation occur, many partners and other relatives fear stigma nonetheless (Codd 2000, May 2000). Afraid of being stigmatised, some partners may distance themselves from family, friends and neighbours, or the entire community (Jenkins 2013, Codd 2008). They might isolate themselves socially to the extent where going out for shopping is difficult (Jenkins 2013). As Codd (2000: 75) puts it, these women may create 'their own prisons' by confining themselves to the house. They may be anxious about who knows about the offence and who does not, and how much is known, and the potential reactions that would follow, as summarised by one of Vaz's (2015) participants in a Master of Arts in Criminology study on the impact of media reporting on relatives on sex offenders in Canada.

> I think, because you don't know who knows? How much they know, and if they even know at all? You become closed and you can't, it's very difficult to make a friend. […] But the biggest thing is meeting new people or allowing people in your life that don't know... because you have to be honest; you have to be open; you have to let people in your life and this is a big thing to talk about… and then it'd be like... as soon as I leave their house or we leave one another, they'll be on the Internet looking it up and then you've got another person that you don't know how they're going to think or feel.
> (Lynn, quoted in Vaz 2015: 85)

Stigma may, of course, vary according to the individual's socio-economic background. Those whose partners have been in and out of prison may not feel as stigmatised as those who are not used to being associated with a prisoner (Codd 2000), and the same may be true of women who live in deprived areas where going to prison is not seen in a negative light. Yet Halsey and Deegan (2014) found that even women who had had frequent contact with the criminal justice system may feel anxious and stigmatised – for instance, one girlfriend said that she felt people were 'just glaring at you. The eyes and the beaks are just like right at you' (Halsey and Deegan 2014: 9).

Practical impact

There are also numerous practical difficulties associated with having a partner in prison. Firstly, prisoners in the UK cannot receive phone calls, so family members have to wait to receive a call from their prisoners. This sometimes means that they have to plan their daily routines around the prison schedule so that they can be available to answer the phone (Condry 2007, Comfort 2008 in the US). It is, however, now possible to use call divert, which may mean that women are less tied down to landline phones today than in the past. If they cannot use call divert – for financial reasons or for lack of knowledge about it, for example – they may still have to wait for a call, and as a result are less able to socialise with friends and family. Visiting may also involve the logistics of needing to negotiate time off work, if the visit is during a weekday (Louks 2004), and children may need to miss school in such instances. If children are not visiting but the partner is, then childcare arrangements may need to be made.

Visits themselves are fraught with practical difficulties. Booking visits may be, in practice, difficult and frustrating. Light and Campbell (2007) list such obstacles as perpetually busy booking lines, inconvenient booking time slots, and procedures that are excessively complex. Visiting with small children involves the difficulties of negotiating about bringing diapers and other necessities into the prison (Harman, Smith and Egan 2007) or struggling due to facilities being inadequate for visiting with small children (Codd 2003). Furthermore, many prisons are located in remote rural areas, so travelling may not only be expensive, but also time-consuming and exhausting, especially if one is travelling with children and if the trip involves a change of transportation means (Mills 2005). One study in Scotland, in fact, found that about 40% of prisoners' families spent between 5 and 12 hours on the journey (Families Outside 2003). In addition, transport services are sometimes infrequent, which adds to the time it takes to get to and from prison. In one survey, for instance, Action for Prisoners Families (2010) found that the bus service for HMP Bullwood Hall was infrequent, especially during weekends, and HMP Dartmoor was described as located in a very

remote area away from major transport links (Action for Prisoners Families 2010), and thus difficult to reach. Another respondent in that study said that the bus they had to take was about an hour's journey and that there were very few buses in a day (Action for Prisoners' Families 2010). It is not surprising, therefore, that the most oft-cited difficulties across different studies and different countries are to do with the travelling to and from visits (La Vigne *et al.* 2005, Naser and Visher 2006, Mills 2005, Comfort 2008). Christian (2005), in her US study, described the distances prisoners' relatives travelled, with round trips lasting as long as 24 hours.

The year 2014 saw the introduction of resettlement prisons, which aim to house prisoners at the end of their sentence close to their communities. This may mean that travelling to visit may become less time-consuming and expensive. However, with the current state of overcrowding, there are concerns that this potentially beneficial development will not yield many practical improvements, with prisons being full to the breaking point as it is (Day, Hewson and Spiropoulos 2015).

2.2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON LONG-TERM PRISONERS' FAMILIES

As the above discussion shows, imprisonment can and often does have a significant impact on those left outside, even when the sentence in question is short. Yet, as Condry (2007) indicates, might this impact not be all the greater when the sentence is a long one? As discussed earlier, there has been very little research on this issue to date, with no known UK studies looking specifically at the experiences of long-term prisoners' families. The two studies that will be discussed as the only works focusing on long-term prisoners' families have a number of methodological and analytical weaknesses that mean the light these studies shed on the experiences of such families is limited indeed. These studies will be used to glean some themes to explore in this thesis.

There have also been studies looking at families of serious offenders (Condry 2007) and

murderers (May 2000), but the long sentences here were implied and not the explicit focus of the research projects. One research study in Northern Ireland looked at the familial adjustment of political prisoners who served 10 years or more (Grounds and Jamieson 2003), though this focused on the prisoners and did not report on the families themselves. These too will be useful in gleaning some knowledge about long-term prisoners' families.

Firstly, let us consider what we can take away from the two studies looking explicitly at experiences of long-term prisoners' families. The first is that of Merriman (1979), an article in the US Probation Journal. Merriman does not state how many participants she gathered her data from, and how she recruited her sample. We only know that these were relatives of men serving ten years or more in one Maine prison (US). Her analysis is also very general, and there are no quotations from interviews – if the empirical data was indeed gathered via interviews – or other empirical evidence provided.

Merriman (1979) found that communication between prisoners and their relatives was superficial, with very little realistic talk about the future and few deeper, emotional conversations. Families were found to be concerned about prisoners' loss of interest in the outside world and their emotional detachment. Families' social contacts with those outside, on the whole, were said to worsen, with some withdrawing from clubs and other social groups; Merriman wondered whether this was a result of not wanting to publicise their situation. Similarly to previous research, Merriman found that many families suffered emotionally in a way that resembled bereavement, a state that some relatives stayed in chronically, while others returned to a normal emotional state. Women who were used to their partners being in prison appeared to return to normal life quickly, and wives generally returned to normal functioning quicker than parents. This was possibly because wives and girlfriends had other pressing concerns, such as work and childcare. For over 1/3 of the sample, the grief, according to Merriman, was likely to last the whole sentence. We do not know on

what basis Merriman made that approximation. Stigma was also a serious issue for her sample; long sentences attracted significant media attention and resulted in the families feeling as though they were victims of gossip. Finally, as discussed earlier, Merriman found that contact with partners dwindled with time.

This study highlights three themes that ought to be explored further:

1. Does the emotional impact of imprisonment on families last far into the long sentence, or indeed the entire sentence and beyond?

2. The correlation of long sentences, perceived offence seriousness and increased media reporting is something that ought to be explored, as this could have a significant impact on stigma and fear of stigma experienced by prisoners' partners.

3. How and to what extent are partners troubled by prisoners' institutionalisation over time and other psychosocial changes associated with long-term imprisonment?

The second study is Tsui's (2010) doctoral research, in which he analysed 5 case-studies of relatives of men serving 10 years or longer in Hong-Kong. Only one was a female partner of a male prisoner, and the sample was very small. As a clinical psychologist, he was very interested in the psychosocial adjustment processes prisoners' families go through over time and how they endure a long sentence, rather than in the broader range of experiences of such families. Though Tsui drew on the literature on long-term imprisonment in his introductory chapters, something that had not previously been done and provided inspiration for this thesis, he did not carefully integrate that literature into his analysis of the data. The longevity of the sentence was, in fact, rarely discussed in the analysis of his case-studies; rather, the focus was on the stages of adjustment the families go through. There was little focus on temporality and the themes of time, time passing and changes over time. This resulted in some interesting findings that were not fully analysed and explored in as

much depth as they could have been. For example, when discussing one case-study of a participant with two small daughters, Tsui did not hone in on the process of them growing up and the opportunities their imprisoned father missed (attending their birthday parties, school concerts, *etc.*). This was despite the fact that Tsui implies that the themes of temporality and change were important to his study.

There are, however, also some interesting findings to take away from this research. Firstly, Tsui found examples of romanticisation of the long-term relationship and idealising the future – something that he feels helped these families endure the long sentence. Moreover, as prisoners became more institutionalised, their in-prison friendships and prison culture became more important than their family on the outside. One case study also demonstrated how special events, like holidays and anniversaries, could exacerbate the feelings of loneliness and sadness the relatives outside were experiencing. There was also some indication of distancing over time – one former prisoner struggled to integrate back into the family and enact a fathering role to his now teenage daughters and struggled to adapt to a newly independent and assertive wife. Likewise, a mother found that as time went on, her imprisoned son found he had little to write about because his routine was so regimented. A couple found that the media attention garnered by their son's murder conviction meant that most of those around them knew what had happened – it was difficult to hide the truth, though none of the participants reported overt stigmatisation. This media exposure fuelled feelings of shame and fear of stigma. Intriguingly, one prisoner's father also said that with a long sentence, it was difficult to avoid stigma by lying about the prisoner's whereabouts. He could not, for example, claim his son was away on a holiday, and he found that he had to be frank about the situation.

The following gaps in the literature are thus revealed by this study:

1. It is important to carefully consider temporality in the context of a long sentence – how

does the family change over time? How are any missed opportunities – anniversaries, *etc.* – experienced? Does time passing and family changes result in distancing between the prisoner and his family?

2. We need to consider the effects of long sentences on the prisoner – and how they may affect his relationships with people outside. In other words, how is the impact of the long sentence extended to the prisoner's partner?

3. Does it become harder or easier to manage stigma over time? What types of management techniques are used by partners of long-term prisoners?

4. How and to what extent does communication become more difficult as the sentence draws on – perhaps because the prisoner becomes institutionalised and has little to talk about with his family? Is there a distancing over time as the family changes, children grow up, *etc.*?

Let us now turn to those studies which looked at families of serious offenders, but not explicitly at families of those sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. May (1999) explored the experiences of eight families of murderers. This implies, as per English law, that all the prisoners were serving life sentences. All the men, however, were young and were in the early stages of imprisonment – long-term imprisonment had not yet been experienced by any of their families. May's focus, moreover, was on the meaning of the offence for the family, a narrow focus that does not encapsulate the whole range of ways in which a serious offence and a corresponding long sentence could affect the partner. Her second paper (May 2000) dealt with stigma, which is more useful for the purpose of this thesis.

May (1990, 2000) found that it was extremely important for all the relatives to make sense of, or account for, such a serious offence being committed by their loved one. They were very preoccupied indeed with trying to comprehend why the offence was committed; about half offered varying excuses and justifications for the prisoner's actions. Those who accepted the murder

conviction nonetheless tried to diminish the popular image of someone convicted of murder as a cold-blooded killer. They created an image of an essentially non-evil person who had done something very wrong. May's (2000) research also shows that the prevalent social views of murderers – that they were all evil people who commit cold-blooded murder – were well-known to the family members. This meant that they felt stigma acutely. These relatives found their identities tainted by these social views of murderers and taken over by the label “murderer's relative”. Finally, May (2000), following Herman (1994), highlighted three ways in which her participants coped with stigma; a short-term managing of space (avoiding going outside and meeting people), managing information (not telling people about their situation, or revealing information selectively), and managing self-representation (either by rejecting that their relative was a murderer, or via seeking collective support from like-minded people in a support organisation).

Condry (2007), whose work was discussed above, interviewed 32 relatives of serious offenders and stated that all the sentences were more than 4 years. Judging by some of the offences in questions – murder and rape – it is quite likely that many of the sentences would have been much longer, but this is not made explicitly clear as it was not the focus of the research. Although her work is not a study of long-term imprisonment, Condry's (2007) findings are also useful. Like May (2000), she found that one of the most important processes for serious offenders' families was making sense of the offence. These families utilised 'techniques of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza 1957); these are motivational accounts used to justify actions in a manner that protects one from self-blame and blame of others. Originally, they were formulated in the context of how offenders rationalise their offending (Sykes and Matza 1957). Although these are not directly coping mechanisms, they make it easier for families of prisoners to bear the pain and stigma of having a relative sentenced for an offence society deems to be especially reprehensible. As such, they serve to account for the partner's situation and justify the woman's continuing relationship with him (Comfort 2008). These techniques include denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the

victim, condemnation of the condemner and appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes and Matza 1957).

Condry (2007) found many examples of prisoners' relatives using these techniques of neutralisation. Some denied the prisoner's responsibility for the offence (blaming drugs/mental illness instead, for example), while others denied the victim or the injury. Moreover, the families dealt with the stigma in a variety of ways – such as concealing the truth and withdrawal from friends and families, something found in other studies too (*e.g.* Tsui 2009, May 1999, 2000). Of course, concealing the truth may be more difficult with very high profile cases that receive significant media attention. However, Condry (2007) found that the concepts of act and actor adjustment provided a better way of exploring how relatives rationalised the prisoners' offending. Act adjustment focused on the criminal act and sought to minimise it, whereas actor adjustment focused on the offender and presented him as a person with redeeming qualities who had committed a crime. This will be further analysed in the context of my sample in Chapter 7.

Again, there are a number of themes that can be drawn from these studies for further exploration:

1. Is stigma worse for those whose loved ones committed a crime which carries a lengthy prison sentence as punishment? If so, why?

2. How long does stigma last?

3. How do female partners of long-term prisoners make sense of the offence – are there any differences to be found with Condry's (2007) sample?

Another study is that of Jenkins (2013), who looked at partners of men wrongly convicted of murder. Again, the sentence length is not made explicit in that study, though the implication is that it is long. However, all the men were eventually acquitted, so it is unclear how long a term was

served. Jenkins (2013) did find that stigma would continue well into the sentence, and was therefore a long-term feature of some partners' lives. Again, this ought to be explored in this study since the longevity of stigmatisation is likely to be an important aspect of the experiences of prisoners' partners and affect them in highly negative and long-lasting ways.

Finally, a short paragraph in Crosthwaite's (1972) article also raised some interesting issues pertaining to long-term prisoners' partners. We know nothing about the methodology or sample of this study; the author merely discusses her experiences of being a part of a London support group for prisoners' wives. However, she notes that for wives of men serving long sentences, 'the long-term pressures, emotional, social and financial, often become *increasingly* difficult to bear' (emphasis added) (Crosthwaite 1972: 256). Crosthwaite hints that this is because of children growing up and new crises arising regularly, but what sort of challenges arise exactly, and how and why they become more burdensome over time, is not clearly explained. Moreover, Crosthwaite (1972) points out that the degradation women feel when visiting prisons builds up into a heavy emotional burden over time – again, how and why this occurs is not fully explored.

This too raises a theme to be explored:

1. How do burdens – emotional, practical and stigma-related – build up over time, if at all? If they do, what is the impact on the partner?

2.3 THEMES FOR EXPLORATION ARISING OUT OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

It is, therefore, clear that although there is a rich and detailed body of research setting out the experiences of prisoners' families, long-term prisoners' families have not yet attracted much academic attention as a subgroup of prisoners' families. Yet the few studies – and analyses from broader studies on prisoners' families – all indicate that there is a need to explore the experiences of

these partners further. This thesis seeks to explore a number of key themes that come out of earlier research on prisoners' families.

Firstly, I wish to explore how the pains of imprisonment are experienced over time. As this chapter has shown, earlier research has shown that prisoners' families experience numerous pains, but I am interested in whether it becomes easier or harder to cope with these practical, financial, and emotional challenges of maintaining a relationship with someone in prison, over time.

Moreover, we need to explore whether the prisoner's institutionalisation over time – as well as other psychosocial changes associated with long-term imprisonment – affect the relationship between him and his partner. Relatedly, it is possible that the partner herself becomes to an extent institutionalised – a further theme to explore. I will draw on the literature on long-term imprisonment as experienced by prisoners to explore this (Chapter 3), which has not been done in earlier research on prisoners' families, with the exception of Tsui (2010), who does not discuss this in any great detail.

Furthermore, there are a number of stigma-related themes to consider. We know that stigma is a serious problem for many prisoners' families, but there is a need to explore whether stigma is all the more serious for families of long-term prisoners, who are deemed to have committed especially heinous crimes. There is a need to explore, furthermore, how families cope with stigma over time, and whether it becomes easier or harder to cope with as a long sentence draws on.

In the next chapter, I will draw on the pains of imprisonment literature, as well as research on long-term imprisonment, time, and family practices, to explore the experiences of a sample of long-term prisoners' partners. I will show that these bodies of research provide a novel and original theoretical platform for a thesis on prisoners' partners. Moreover, as the data was analysed, more

themes came to light, as often happens when an under-researched topic is being explored. For example, the theme of lost time and how it was gendered came through strongly in the interviews. Building on what we can learn from previous studies on the families of prisoners in general, and combining this with what we know about long-term imprisonment, I will construct a theoretical framework that will help explore the experiences the women who participated in this study described in the interviews. In this chapter, I describe the existing research on prisoners' families and set out some preliminary themes to be explored in this thesis. In the next chapter, I will build a framework that will help answer these questions and will raise some further themes for exploration. At the end of the chapter, I will set out a full list of themes to be explored.

CHAPTER 3
Exploring the Experiences of Prisoners' Partners through the Lens of the Sociology of Imprisonment

Prison sociology is the label usually given to ethnographic work that explores the lived experiences of prisoners and prison staff. This work analyses the social fabric of prison and the many ways in which prisoners adapt to the unique social context of an institution characterised by power inequalities and numerous deprivations, known as the 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes 1958). Yet before setting out the relevance of this ethnographic literature to understanding the experiences of a sample of long-term prisoners' partners, a step back ought to be taken to frame this thesis within a larger debate surrounding the scope and boundaries of punishment. Imprisonment, of course, is an important method of punishing those convicted of a criminal offence, and exploring its impact on families can help further our understanding of the complex, wide-reaching nature of punishment.

There is an emerging trend of questioning the boundaries of punishment, with a recent edition of Theoretical Criminology dedicated to challenging these boundaries within the punishment and society literature (Hannah-Moffat and Lynch 2012). This is that literature which locates the punishment of offenders within a broader social context: literature that explores how punishment interrelates with other parts of society, such as family, civil/administrative law institutions, and so forth. These are complex, larger sociological debates that question the nature and reach of punishment, and the experiences of prisoners' partners, as I seek to show in this thesis, have a place within these debates.

In their forward to the edition, Hannah-Moffat and Lynch (2012: 120) state that the intention of the special edition is to 'challenge how objects, *subjects*, and levels of analysis are defined in most sociological work on contemporary penality' (emphasis added). It is my argument that prisoners' partners are the additional subjects of imprisonment and that their relative invisibility

within prison sociology ought to be challenged as part of the agenda set out by Hannah-Moffat and Lynch in their forward to the special edition.

In this 2012 volume of Theoretical Criminology, contributors explore 'where punishment resides and how it is exercised beyond formal legal structures and punitive institutions such as the prison' (Hannah-Moffat and Lynch 2012: 121). Articles consider how formally non-punitive immigration detention centres mete out punishment (Bosworth 2012), and discuss the 'shadow carceral state' (Beckett and Murakawa 2012: 202), arguing that civil measures are used in a punitive manner in the US. For example, they show how criminal law has permeated civil law institutions (Beckett and Murakawa 2012) such as family and immigration courts. These institutions have acquired the power to impose punitive sanctions even when no crime has been committed.

These analyses explicitly recognise the complex, far-reaching, and at times nebulous nature of punishment. Punishment is not necessarily meted out by a criminal court against a specific offender – it can be used in a civil law context, for example – and its boundaries are far more blurred than has previously been recognised in the punishment and society literature. More recently, Zedner (2016: 4) has asked 'when is a punishment not punishment?'. People may be punished, she points out – *i.e.* subjected to the pains and deprivations associated with a penal measure – even when this punishment is not directly intended. Although her discussion focuses on the meaning of punishment and the "boundary" cases of punishment – such as criminalisation of immigration centres – the crux of her argument is pertinent to this thesis. The boundaries of punishment are uncertain; families, though not the primary subjects of punishment, feel the impact of punishment meted out to the offender, and can thus be said to be 'collaterally punished' (*e.g.* see Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999 for an example of the use of 'collateral' in this context).

The phrase 'collateral punishment' has often been used when discussing the additional

impact of imprisonment on prisoners; that is, consequences for the prisoner that are additional to the prison sentence. There are, of course, some consequences, such as disenfranchisement of prisoners in some states in the US, which exist by operation of the law (see Finzen 2005 for an overview). Yet many collateral consequences for prisoners are less formal and at times unintended by the state. For example, it has been shown that stigma attached to imprisonment reduces prisoners' employment prospects upon release (*e.g.* Holzer 2007, Finzen 2005). This work explicitly recognises that the effect of imprisonment goes well beyond simply putting the offender in prison and depriving him of his liberty – imprisonment continues to affect his life after imprisonment and often reaches into numerous areas of his life (employment, social participation, *etc.*).

It may seem natural to extend this analysis to include prisoners' partners – that is, to argue that they too are 'collaterally punished'. Yet there is a sense in which the term 'collateral' may not be right in the context of prisoners' families. As Condry, Kotova and Minson (2016: 638) have argued:

> It may be that many of the 'collateral consequences' of imprisonment on family members are not really collateral at all, but rather an inbuilt part of a system of imprisonment that is both exclusionary and stigmatising and fundamentally entwined with social inequality.

As Condry (2016) has elaborated further, the term 'collateral' has a number of meanings. More commonly it is used euphemistically, such as in the military term 'collateral damage'; the word thus denotes a consequence that is unintended and additional/subordinate, or secondary. This meaning is problematic in the context of prisoners' partners, whom, it might be argued, the state fully intends to separate from the prisoners. However, there is a more neutral meaning; 'situated side by side; in parallel' (Oxford Dictionary[1]). This appears to be more suitable to understanding the experiences of prisoners' partners, as it highlights the way in which they experience the sting of punishment

[1]http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/collateral

alongside the prisoner.

More directly, punishment and society writers explore the consequences of imprisonment for communities and families. For example, there has been a discussion of how mass imprisonment in the US has affected structures of African-American communities (Roberts 2004), damaged social networks, and destroyed social norms. Removing individuals from communities damages these communities' social ties, and this, in turn, distorts social norms as communities become less able to form socialising groups such as churches and social clubs (Roberts 2004). These consequences may not be desired; it is difficult to assume that by imprisoning an African-American man we as a society are also directly intending to damage the social fabric of his community. Yet these consequences are very real indeed; as Mauer and Chesney-Lind (2002: 1) rightly argue, mass imprisonment in the US has 'transformed family and community dynamics, exacerbated racial relations and posed fundamental questions of citizenship in a democratic society'.

Some of the collateral consequences of imprisonment also extend to prisoners' families. Former prisoners ineligible to receive certain social benefits, or who encounter difficulties in finding a job due to stigma, undermine the financial situation of their family unit. Families may be affected more directly, moreover. As discussed in the previous chapter, these effects include stigma within the community, loss of employment due to being associated with a prisoner, the practical hardship of travelling long distances to visit, and so forth. These punishments are not meted out to the prisoner, but instead affect his family as a parallel consequence of his imprisonment.

Fishman (1990) first wrote about families 'doing time on the outside', and Megan Comfort's (2007) later notion of 'punishment beyond the legal offender' is particularly useful. Discussed specifically in the context of prisoners' families, these ideas highlight the fact that punishment reaches beyond the intended recipient of the prison sentence. Just as civil law measures are being

used to punish – thus extending the punitive reach of the law – so is imprisonment reaching beyond prison walls and punishing, indirectly, the family of the prisoner. This thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing debate about the boundaries of punishment. Although work on the sociology of imprisonment does not usually see prisoners' families as the additional subjects of punishment, there is a need to challenge this view. I endeavour to show in this thesis that 'additional subjects of imprisonment' is a very apt descriptor of prisoners' partners. This is all the more so when imprisonment is long and, consequently, their exposure to the prison is potentially lengthy. Although previous research has recognised the burdens imprisonment often places on families, it has very rarely explored this via the lens of prison sociology. By using prison sociology as the theoretical framework for this thesis, I seek to help place prisoners' families on the agenda of the prison sociologist and contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding the boundaries of punishment and imprisonment.

The sociology of imprisonment, as Comfort's (2008) work reveals, provides a rich theoretical toolbox through which to explore the ways in which punishment extends to prisoners' families. On a broader scale, there are emerging, larger debates within the punishment and society literature about the scope and boundaries of punishment (*e.g.* Bosworth 2012, Beckett and Murakawa 2012). As part of this debate, there has been some discussion of the broad reach of punishment, both in terms of punishment reaching beyond the sentence to affect the punished individual in many indirect ways, but also in terms of reaching beyond the punished individual himself. Framing partners' experiences in the context of these larger emerging debates highlights the broad reach of imprisonment as a method of punishment, and will add a further dimension to these debates as they are occurring within the punishment and society literature.

On the other hand, the work on the pains of imprisonment provides specific theoretical tools for exploring this reach of the prison. Families experience punishment side-by-side with the

prisoner (*e.g.* Comfort 2008). In order to explore, empirically, the experiences of a sample of long-term prisoners' partners, we need to draw on sociological research that has looked specifically at imprisonment as a social institution and has explored the lived experiences of prisoners and prison staff. In the remainder of this chapter, I argue that the literature on the pains of imprisonment, and on the pains of long-term imprisonment specifically, are useful theoretical tools for such an exploration. By investigating whether partners also experience the pains of imprisonment and how they experience these pains over time, we can learn how imprisonment reaches into the lives of these women and thus how they are affected by long-term imprisonment. If the pains of imprisonment literature seeks to explore how punishment affects prisoners, then extending this literature to analyse how prisoners' families are affected is a logical step towards exploring the phenomenon of punishment beyond the legal offender.

Beginning with the seminal work of Sykes (1958) on sociology of imprisonment, this thesis aspires to develop Comfort's (2008) US work by incorporating not only the more recent work on the pains of imprisonment but also the emerging analyses of long-term imprisonment specifically. I also endeavour to deepen the analysis by referring to work on the sociology of time, and, finally, utilise a 'family practices' perspective (discussed below) in order to help gain a fuller understanding of the experiences of my sample of long-term prisoners' partners. I will now discuss each of these areas of sociological work in turn.

3.1 SOCIOLOGY OF IMPRISONMENT – THE PAINS OF IMPRISONMENT

Sociological accounts of prison life have described, in great detail, the everyday pains and deprivations associated with imprisonment in general and long-term imprisonment specifically. These accounts, with the exception of Comfort's (2008) work, have focused almost entirely on prisoners' perspective of these pains and have rarely questioned whether the pains of imprisonment are contained within the prison walls, or whether they “spill over” onto the friends and families of

prisoners. Yet despite Goffman's (1961: xiii) description of the prison as a 'total institution' that cuts the prisoner off from the world outside completely, the prison is, in fact, better seen as porous and 'not-so-total' (Farrington 1992: 7). In a similar vein, Baumer, O'Donnell and Hughes (2009) described the prison as becoming porous due to home visits. These phrases imply not only that visitors from the outside world can enter the prison, but that imprisonment can affect their lives on the outside.

Sykes (1958) set out five pains of imprisonment: (i) deprivation of liberty, (ii) deprivation of autonomy, (iii) deprivation of security, (iv) deprivation of goods and services and (v) deprivation of heterosexual relationships. Loss of liberty refers to the loss of freedom consequential upon being imprisoned; a prisoner's freedom of movement is, for example, severely curtailed within the prison, and he is, of course, confined to a life inside the prison. The goods and services available to prisoners are also limited, and prisoners are not permitted to have intimate (heterosexual or homosexual) relations with their partners, as conjugal visits are not available in the UK. Likewise, prisoners are unable to live fully autonomous lives. Their daily schedules are heavily regimented, they are subject to behavioural rules and regulations, and they may be obligated to take part in courses and other activities. Finally, there is the deprivation of security. This is to do with the fears associated with the prison being an unsafe place.

Comfort (2007, 2008, 2009) argues that families also experience these pains. She highlights the manner in which partners of prisoners become 'secondarily prisonised', a process she defines as 'a weakened but still compelling version of the elaborate regulations, concentrated surveillance, and corporeal confinement governing the lives of ensnared felons' similar to Sykes' (1958) 'pains of imprisonment" (Comfort 2009: 2). Thus, Comfort (2009) makes the direct link between the pains of imprisonment and prisoners' partners, arguing that they too experience these pains. She shows that women's lives are affected by censorship, invasion of privacy, rules and regulations and the

schedules of the prison institution (Comfort 2009). Prisoners' partners are temporarily deprived of liberty when they visit prisons, of intimate relationships with their incarcerated partner, and the many minute rules and regulations associated with visiting (but also with sending letters and receiving phone calls) limit their autonomy. In addition, earlier research has shown that prisoners' families often experience financial hardship; a loss of income resulting from a husband's imprisonment could mean his wife is less able to buy the goods and services she needs/wants. This would be very much akin to the deprivation of goods and services Sykes describes, albeit less direct and severe. In the next chapter, I develop Comfort's (2008, 2009) discussion of how prisoners' partners are subjected to the pains of imprisonment by discussing each type in turn and by showing the particular impact of these pains upon partners of long-term prisoners.

Since Sykes' (1958) elaboration of the pains of imprisonment, other academics have developed our understanding of the nature of the pains of imprisonment. In order to develop Comfort's (2008) work further, there is a need to draw on these more recent discussions of the nature of the pains of imprisonment, particularly the work of Alison Liebling (2011) and Ben Crewe (2009, 2011).

Ben Crewe's (2011) analysis of the depth, weight and tightness of imprisonment provides an opportunity to explore a further dimension of the experiences of prisoners' families. According to Crewe, the nature of penal power has changed in the last few decades, giving rise to a number of pains of imprisonment that operate alongside the more established pains. He argues that modern prisons are no longer places of overt violence and oppressive control. The power which permeates the prison establishment no longer overtly manifests itself in physical violence – rather, it is ‘coiled in the background’ and unpredictable (Crewe 2011: 513, also Crewe 2009). One prisoner in Crewe's (2009: 115) study put this emphatically when he said that 'they [officers] can ruin your life with a stroke of a pen', highlighting the highly bureaucratic nature of modern penal power.

This gives rise to what Crewe (2011: 513) calls 'the pains of uncertainty and indeterminacy'. Firstly, with an increasingly bureaucratic prison system, prisoners experience a lack of certainty in their everyday existence. Prisoners described inconsistency in treatment; they would ask officers a question and receive different answers on different days, for example. This highlights the discretionary way in which the many minute prison rules can be applied. Moreover, this uncertainty surrounding the boundaries of prison rules means that prisoners do not always know when penal power will be activated (Crewe 2011). The pain of indeterminacy refers to the pain associated with indeterminate sentences such as life sentences and IPPs. Not only do prisoners serving such sentences not know when they will be released, but they find it difficult or impossible to plan for the future (Crewe 2011) due to this uncertainty over their release. For instance, rules about what conditions ought to be fulfilled to ensure early release are not always clear.

It has long been recognised that modern prisons have become highly bureaucratised (Crewe 2009, 2011); for instance, the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme means that prisoners' access to privileges such as private cash and family visits is dependent upon their behaviour as perceived by staff, and their adherence to the many rules and regulation of the prison. In 2013, Chris Grayling, the former Justice Secretary, argued that prisons ought to be made “tougher”, with prisoners needing to work for privileges such as cable television, own clothing, and private cash to call families (BBC 2013). Some optimism has been expressed with the appointment of Michael Gove to the post in 2015, especially following his relaxation of Grayling's ban on families sending books to prisoners and condemnation of old, ineffective prisons (Travis 2015). However, it is still too early to say whether any changes will take place, and what form they will take, especially following the political turmoil of the summer of 2016 and the resulting appointment of Elizabeth Truss to the post.

Crewe (2011, 2015) builds on the concepts of depth and weight of penal power as developed by Downes (1988) and King and McDermott (1995) to discuss the changing nature of penal power and analyse the way in which the soft bureaucratic power of the modern prison means that depth and weight are no longer sufficient to describe the prisoner's experience of prison. Downes (1988) defined depth as the extent to which the prison experience is oppressive and (psychologically) invasive, yet King and McDermott (1995) found that when prisoners used this term, they, in fact, meant oppressiveness related to physical security and the length of time spent in prison before release. They argued that what Downes (1988) described was best understood as the weight of the pains of imprisonment; the extent to which imprisonment was heavy/oppressive. Depth, they argued, referred to the extent to which the prisoner is buried deep away from free society and liberty.

However, the depth and weight of imprisonment have changed, and neither are now enough to describe the prison experience (Crewe 2011). No longer is authority just oppressive and heavy, with prisoners being separated from free society and subjected to violent, oppressive control with few bureaucratic rules about what the prisoners ought to do or not do outside the official prison schedule (Crewe 2011). Tightness is a concept which Crewe (2011) develops to help us understand the experiences of modern prisoners. Prisoners are subjected to many detailed rules and regulations specifying how they ought to behave, the courses they ought to complete, and so forth. Constant surveillance and staff oversight are used to ensure that the prisoner becomes a certain type of person (law-abiding, well-behaved, *etc.*) rather than simply to prevent escapes (Crewe 2011). Prison surveillance and staff power are used to entangle the prisoner's very being, rather than just submerge him in the depth of the prison institution. If prisoners do not adhere to the rules, a report may be written up that could damage their chances of being released on parole.

Tightness captures the sense in which authority is both oppressive and light, not heavy, but

all-consuming. Prisoners thus suffer from a lack of ontological security (Giddens 1991) as the experience of imprisonment has come to be defined by unreliability of consequence, a lack of predictability, and an inability to reach the higher levels of prison organisations where major decisions are made (Crewe 2011, 2009). For example, one of Crewe's (2009: 112) participants said that there was a 'brick wall' between him as a prisoner and those higher up in the prison system (*e.g.* the prison governor). Getting a personal and coherent response from these echelons of power was difficult and time-consuming, and often any answers were unsatisfactory. Crewe (2011) describes this well when he says that today, penal power does not so much weigh down as entangle.

Crewe's (2011) broader analysis of the pains of imprisonment relates well to some of Liebling's (2011) findings. Prisoners in Liebling's study (2011: 537, also Liebling 2004) spoke about the difficulties associated with constant “game playing” that permeates modern prison life. One participant said it was all mind games now: staff no longer beat prisoners, because the power lay in the paperwork and the reports that could affect the time to be served and/or chances of parole, something that Crewe (2009) found to be very much the case in his earlier ethnographic research inside a Category C prison.

In his most recent analysis of the nature of the pains of imprisonment, Crewe (2015) added a category of breadth (of the pains of imprisonment). This category taps directly into the numerous collateral impacts of imprisonment and the 'reach and impact of penal sanctions beyond the prison' (Crewe 2015: 60). Although Crewe here is talking about the type of collateral effects that affect prisoners – such as loss of voting rights – it is not too far a stretch to apply the idea of breadth to prisoners' families. Exploring the ways in which they feel the sting of the pains of imprisonment will tell us much about how far penal power reaches beyond the prisoner himself. Stigma, a well-known pain of imprisonment that extends beyond prison walls, fits into this category. We know that prisoners are often stigmatised upon release (*e.g.* Petersilia 2003), and some categories of prisoners,

such as sex offenders, are known to face intense stigma inside the prison (*e.g.* Åkerström 1986).

However, there is a more complex dimension to breadth. This concept, as analysed by Crewe, also includes forms of breadth that are internalised by the prisoners; such as institutionalisation in the form of getting used to the prison routine, psychosocial changes such as loss of trust, and other ways prisoners are marked by prison. These will be discussed later in this chapter, and it will be argued that an understanding of these different forms of breadth can help us to understand the experiences of families. Previous research has begun to show that the pains of imprisonment reach the families of prisoners – and are thus broad – but the many invisible changes the prisoners undergo can, in turn, affect their relationships with their partners and have a marked emotional impact upon those partners. This latter dimension has not yet been explored.

Breadth includes stigma (Crewe 2015), and as discussed in Chapter 2, stigma is a well-documented concern for prisoners' families. Although prisoners experience stigma too, their families continue living in free society and thus are exposed to media scrutiny and gossip, as well as, at times, verbal and physical attacks (Condry 2007). There is a need to explore how stigma is experienced over time; whether it tempers off as the sentence draws on or continues well into the sentence. We also need to explore the techniques partners use to cope with stigma and make sense of a serious offence that has resulted in a long sentence. These themes will be tackled in Chapter 7, which will discuss both the unique stigma-related challenges long sentences give rise to and the coping techniques used by the women that made up my sample. In exploring this, I will draw on Condry's (2007) work, discussed in Chapter 2, and show that coping mechanisms for partners of long-term prisoners were somewhat different for my sample of women. I will also show how the tightness of penal power, and what was perceived as a bureaucratic use of such power by prison officers, was experienced as stigmatisatory by some women.

What the discussion about penal power highlights is that the material conditions of imprisonment (*e.g.* cramped conditions) cannot give us a complete picture of the prison experience. The quality of prison-staff interactions is very important to how prisoners experience imprisonment (Liebling 2004). It is the quality of these interactions which makes prison survivable or dehumanising. As Liebling (2004: 333) notes, 'Even "numbers of hours unlocked" [...] varies in practice, according to staff behaviour on the day'. Liebling is talking about the moral side of imprisonment; how understanding or hostile staff are, how they treat prisoners. Yet the quality of imprisonment is not just shaped by individual staff interactions – the nature of penal power also shapes how imprisonment is experienced, as Crewe (2011) has shown. We need to bear in mind the tight, bureaucratic nature of modern penal power and the way in which prisoner-staff interactions are characterised not by violence against prisoners, but complex rules, regulations, and paperwork.

In order to develop our understanding of how prisoners' partners experience the pains of imprisonment, we need to explore how they experience the prison regime's soft bureaucratic power and how this power does not so much oppress as entangle. Even though the partners are not themselves in prison, there are often also subjected to the many prison rules and regulations (Comfort 2008); detailed visiting rules, rules about what can and cannot be sent in, and so forth. Their visits are observed by prison staff and letters and phone calls are surveilled, especially when the sentence is long and, correspondingly, the prisoner is much more likely to serve a portion of his sentence in a high-security prison. There is every reason to suppose the partners, therefore, also experience the tightness of the pains of imprisonment.

As I will discuss in Chapter 5, the partners themselves become entangled in the prison regime in numerous, complex ways. They too have to navigate the many rules and regulations, and may make complaints if they feel they have been treated unjustly by prison staff (Codd 2000). This means they find themselves having to negotiate prison bureaucracy and facing the challenge of

reaching the higher echelons of prison authority. Most notably, I show that they are subject to the ever-present gaze of the prison institution when they visit, send letters to the prisoners and receive phone calls from them. The lack of privacy and the constant surveillance of prisoners' communication with the outside world brings prisoners' partners within the grasp of penal power and, thus, entangles them as well as the prisoner.

Moreover, intimate partners do not usually operate alone. In ordinary day-to-day lives, partners are emotionally invested in the welfare and affairs of their significant other. Thus, we need to explore whether prisoners' partners become entangled in penal power through the prisoners. As I show in Chapter 5, partners outside may become caught up in the penal power because they hear about the bureaucratic processes their partners go through and may help them with complaints and other official paperwork. They may make complaints on behalf of their partners, liaise with governors and MPs, and communicate with lawyers and other outside agencies since it is often difficult and expensive for prisoners to communicate with the outside world. We need to explore how they navigate the prison bureaucracy and the extent to which they too feel the soft power of the prison.

Additionally, if a prisoner is sentenced to an indeterminate sentence, he not only feels the depth of imprisonment in the sense of being buried far from freedom, but his release is also dependent upon his progression through the system and the Parole Board's decisions, which are in turn influenced by officers' reports and other prison staff evaluations. Their partners would be very much aware of this, and may be kept informed by the prisoner of the various courses, reports and progression requirements. As I discuss in Chapter 6 when I analyse the pain of indeterminacy, some women felt this pain too. They could not plan for the future because they did not know when their partners would be released.

3.2 LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT

To further develop our understanding of the experiences of long-term prisoners' partners, it is crucial that the literature on long-term imprisonment, and the very specific concerns it raises for prisoners, is integrated into the theoretical framework. In the same way that the pains of imprisonment are felt by families (as Comfort 2008 showed), there is reason to suspect that the concerns and anxieties associated with long-term imprisonment might be felt by them too.

Time is an essential feature of a prisoner's experiences, and this is all the more so where a sentence is long. Temporal metaphors are often used in the discussion of prisoners' experiences, such as *Dead Time* (Rives 1989), *Doing Time* (Matthews 2009) and *Out of Time* (McKeown 2001). The first problem raised by long-term imprisonment is making sense of a long sentence. Cohen and Taylor (1972), in their seminal work on long-term imprisonment, argued that the prospect of spending a long time in prison may be overwhelming and difficult to cope with for the prisoner (Flanagan 1981). Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) found that the problems associated with time were most acutely felt by prisoners at the early stages of their sentence, and hypothesise, firstly, that more prisoners of those at the early stages of their sentence were protesting their innocence, and thus most felt that the length of their sentence was unfair. Secondly, thinking of the time yet left to serve was more problematic for those at the early stages, as there is a longer period of time to contemplate and cope with, which may be potentially overwhelming when a sentence is long (Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015).

It thus seems self-evident that the prospect of spending a long period of time in prison is painful for the prisoner, especially early on in the sentence. Yet why exactly might this be so? In essence, a prison sentence represents time taken away from the prisoner (*e.g.* Wahidin 2006), and when a sentence is long, the amount of time taken away is a large proportion of the prisoner's life. Cohen and Taylor (1972) argued that long-term imprisonment shatters one's entire identity and

existence, as long-term prisoners cannot grasp at work, hobbies or friendships in order to help them put their lives back together again since they are removed from all these aspects of their lives for a long time. This Liebling (2011: 541) calls an ‘existential crisis’. With their life interrupted, long-term prisoners' very identities have little to stand up on.

Jewkes' (2005) discussion of the life course and how a life sentence interrupts it is particularly useful in understanding this further. The life course is the trajectory of the human life and includes important transitions that are public rites of passage which validate the meaning of these events for the individual, the social group he belongs to, and the wider society (Billington, Hockey and Strawbridge 1998). Such events are getting a job, getting married, having a child, and so on. There is a social expectation that these life course events or milestones should happen at an “ideal”' time (Exley and Letherby 2001), and, as Jewkes (2005) argues in the context of life-sentenced prisoners, a prison sentence interrupts or terminates the occurrence of these milestones. For example, a female prisoner given a life sentence may never become a mother because she may be too old to conceive a child when she is released. An imprisoned father might not be able to “give his daughter away” at her wedding or be present when his grandchild is born. Interruption of this “ideal” chronology can be experienced as a very painful assault on a person's self-identity (Jewkes 2005).

In Chapter 6, I show that making sense of a long sentence may be similarly difficult for the partner of a long-term prisoner. Although the partner outside is not deprived of other aspects of her life, such as work and friendships, a large part of her life is taken away when her partner is imprisoned. There is a social expectation that partners usually share a house and that their daily lives are closely entwined, more so than, for example, those of the prisoner and his biological family. This is not to imply that the biological family is less close to him or cares for him any less, but the partner who shares his household may experience a greater sense of loss upon his

imprisonment. As I show in Chapter 6, the partner, like the prisoner, may have to cope with the realisation that unless she is willing to end the relationship, she will be separated from her significant other for a long time. Even though the partner outside has the option to divorce or separate from the prisoner – something that may be difficult if the relationship is stable and long-term at the time of the arrest – if she decides to maintain the relationship, she may struggle with the implications this might have for her. Like in the example of the female prisoner above, the partner outside might also experience an interruption of the ideal life chronology and a termination or postponement of milestone life events like childbirth and marriage.

Time, however, is not merely made up of important life course events that shape our overall identity and influence our self-perceived purpose in life, but also the mundane routine events of everyday time. In analysing this, Alheit's (1994) distinction between life time and everyday time is useful. Alheit (1994), in a theoretical piece on the sociology of time, argues that the two types of time are in fact linked. When one's everyday routines are interrupted – such as when a crisis, like imprisonment, occurs – we are forced to renegotiate our life time frame as well. For instance, a woman whose husband goes into prison is no longer able to engage in a couple's taken-for-granted everyday routines (shared meals, evening conversations), and this may 'trigger off retrospective and prospective biographical analyses' (Alheit 1994: 309). In other words, when everyday time is disrupted, life time may need to be reinterpreted as a result, prospectively and/or retrospectively. A prisoner's partner, finding her everyday routines changed for many years to come (Alheit gives a not dissimilar example of a newly widowed woman), may find she needs to reinvent herself as an independent woman, a valuable employee, a volunteer, or adhere to the identity of a stalwart devoted wife campaigning for her husband's innocence. Her focus may shift to goals like getting a promotion or going travelling. These themes will be discussed in Chapter 6.

What the above two dimensions of time – life time and everyday time – emphasise in a

prison context is that a prison sentence, especially a long one, represents 'time lost to the prisoner' (Brown 1998: 94). Prisoners lose the chance to be a part of not only important life-time events like birthdays and anniversaries but also everyday family events like family dinners and trips to the supermarket. Yet the partner, too, loses time, albeit less directly. She loses time with her partner; the holidays they may have shared, the family dinners, anniversaries and birthdays. Although she may choose to terminate the relationship with the prisoner, if she decides to continue maintaining it then she too may experience lost time.

A further useful dimension of time is what Moran (2012: 311) calls the 'embodied experience of time'. This refers to experiencing the passage of time corporeally; via the ageing of the body, for example. Ageing in prison is something elderly female prisoners in Wahidin and Tate's (2005: 70) study reported as being a painful experience, and older prisoners serving long sentences in Crawley and Sparks' (2006) study all feared death in prison. Conversely, in a recent large-sample study of life-sentenced prisoners (Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015), fear of dying before release was not a major concern for prisoners. However, all the prisoners were sentenced before they were 25 years of age, and so they may have been too young for these concerns. Time passing may thus be experienced via physical markers such as weight gain, deterioration of mental and/or physical health, tiredness, *etc*. This corporeal aspect of time passing may also be a very relevant theme for long-term prisoners' partners as they too get older, may fear dying before the prisoner is released, and so forth. This dimension of prisoners' partners' experiences has not yet been explored and could be especially salient when a sentence is long.

Corporeal passage of time is also gendered. Ageing is a normal part of life, and yet today, cultural standards of beauty dictate that an attractive person is young, thin and healthy (Bordo 1993, Brown and Jasper 1993). Moreover, ageing is more harshly judged in women than men (*e.g.* de Beauvoir 1972). Bearing in mind that physical intimacy and physicality, in general, are an important

part of intimate partnerships (*e.g.* Condry 2007), there is a need to examine how corporeal passage of time is experienced by female intimate partners of long-term prisoners.

The third and final temporal pain of long-term imprisonment relates to the pace at which time passes in prison. On the one hand, time in prison appears to pass very slowly because the routine is often very much the same; prisoners 'must learn to live by prison time' (Medlicott 1999: 212). In fact, rigid daily schedules are an integral part of penal control (Medlicott 1999, also Foucault 1977). As a result, prisoners often feel like time passes very slowly indeed; Jewkes (2005) describes this as a stasis, whereby the world outside moves on and changes while the prisoner remains frozen in time. Time might not flow for prisoners; it might instead be an 'inertial state [...] when the changes that normally evoke time are absent' (Dodgshon 2008: 9). People get a sense of time flowing via biological changes, but also everyday and milestone events, and a sense of difference that can occur even during the everyday (Dodgshon 2008), and yet prisoners' routines are normally strictly regimented, especially in higher security prisons, with there being very little variation in prisoners' day-to-day lives. In fact, for Foucault (1977), the very core of prison experience was via time-discipline or the limited extent to which prisoners could make decisions about their everyday activities. This is all the more true in modern prisons, where prisoners are entangled in a regime that dictates the courses they do, meal hours, and so forth (the link to Crewe's 2011 and 2009 work is evident here). Mike, who had served a life sentence, summarised the issue of time in prison neatly in Medlicott's (1999: 222) study:

> Everything in prison works through time. It's like a time machine. At a quarter past eight, you do this. At half past eight, you do that. Time controls your life.

In her sociological analysis of time in prison, Moran (2012) describes how there may be different temporalities in prison, an idea reinforced by Wahidin (2006), who describes time in prison as both frozen and passing. It is frozen for the prisoner on the inside, but the prisoner is aware of

time passing on the outside. First, Moran (2012) theorises, there is external time, as measured by calendars and clocks. This is the time used to measure the sentence, and time as it runs for the prisoner's partner – the normal passage of time outside the prison. For the prisoner, however, there may be another temporality, a stasis caused by re-living the same routine over and over again (Medlicott 1999). For him, little changes as his days remain the same and he is not able to witness the changes happening in the world outside (including those to his own family). As one young offender said:

> [In prison] you don't do nothing, you do the same thing every day. You get up, go to work, eat, have a shower, association, bed, then get up in the morning and it's the same again. The same thing every day.
> (Cope 2003: 161).

Conversely, modern life on the outside is extremely fast-paced – technology advances quickly, buildings and roads are constructed within months, fashion changes rapidly, and so on. Confined to a prison for a long time, the prisoner does not experience these changes and may thus be frozen back in the time when he was first sentenced. There are thus two temporalities he may experience; the slow passage of time inside, and the fast-paced changes his family on the outside goes through. The prisoner may only get glimpses of the latter, during visits, and in letters/phone calls, or on the television. This is not the same as living through the social and technological changes occurring in real-time. As times goes on, the disconnect between the two may be all the greater, as more and more changes on the outside distance the prisoner from the life he knew when he went in. As Wahidin (2006: 6.7) puts it, 'the link with outside time becomes more tenuous'.

We need to explore how prisoners' partners experience time, too – an issue thus far not addressed in the literature on prisoners' families. For a prisoner's partner, time does not stay still. It continues to move at the usual pace of the outside world. Yet for the prisoner, it does not. In Chapter

6, I explore in more detail the disconnect the partner may experience, and the various concerns this disconnect raises for her and her relationship with the prisoner, such as the difficulty of communicating with someone who has very little to share because his daily life is so structured and repetitive.

In thinking about different temporalities as experienced by partners outside on a smaller, day-to-day scale, the concept of juggling multiple temporalities is useful (West, Boughton and Byrnes 2009). This concept is discussed in relation to the experiences of people such as shift-working nurses, but it is possible that juggling de-synchronised temporalities is something that partners of prisoners also have to do on a day-to-day basis (see Chapters 6 and 8), just like shift-workers, whose domestic temporality rarely fits into and coincides with the working shift-schedule. For prisoners' partners, there is the domestic temporality – cooking, childcare, seeing friends, and so forth, as well as the the work schedule. Already, it may be difficult to get to work on time and get the children to school, pick them up, take them to after-school clubs, and so on – a juggling of temporalities many modern working women engage in every day (*e.g.* Maher 2000). When her partner is imprisoned, she has to juggle an additional and often difficult to reconcile prison temporality. The idea of juggling draws attention to the difficult task of keeping everything going, and the hard choices and compromises that may need to be done in order to achieve this (West, Boughton and Byrnes 2009).

Time is thus a key part of a prison sentence, especially when the sentence in question is a long one. It is thus important to explore these aspects of time, the passage of time, and the reasons why the passage of time in the context of a long sentence may be difficult and painful – not just for the prisoner but also for the partner of the prisoner, who experiences it from outside the prison walls. How she experiences time – both time lost and the passage of time – has not yet been directly explored in the prisoners' families literature.

In addition to the passage of time, Cohen and Taylor (1972) uncovered a number of other pains associated with long-term imprisonment. These include worries about making friends, fear of deterioration while in prison, and fear over loss of identity. Other qualitative pieces of research have largely corroborated these findings (Sapsford 1983, Walker 1987). Flanagan's (1980, 1981) work, some of the most widely-cited of the academic works on long-term imprisonment and prisoners' reactions to long sentences, has uncovered that the loss of relationships with those outside is deemed to be the most painful deprivation by long-term prisoners (Flanagan 1980). He argues that although all prisoners are deprived of frequent contact with their loved ones, the length of imprisonment exacerbates this and other pains of imprisonment. Problems associated with imprisonment become, for those serving long sentences, issues of survival on the inside (Flanagan 1980, 1981).

For the prisoner's partner, the loss of a loved one is an especially pertinent concern. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the issue of deprivation of heterosexual relationships with prisoners and how the women in my sample experienced this loss over time, showing that for most of these women, this loss did not get any easier to bear. However, I demonstrate that it was the emotional intimacy that was missed more than physical intimacy (emotional intimacy is discussed later in this chapter, in the context of 'family practices'). In fact, the emotional aspect of the deprivation of intimate relationships has already been noted in research on prisoners' experiences, which has recognised explicitly that the deprivation of emotional intimacy is just as important as the deprivation of physical intimacy (*e.g.* Simpson 1978-1979).

It is critical that we develop Cohen and Taylor's work (1972) and other early studies by considering the most recent research on long-term imprisonment. Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) conducted a large-scale project on the impact of long-term imprisonment, attempting to bring

together and further interrogate the earlier research on long-term imprisonment. Their sample consisted of over 300 men serving life sentences with a tariff of 15 years or more. This project largely corroborated earlier research on the psychological pains of long-term imprisonment; for instance, missing someone was one of the most severe problems reported, as were pains associated with a loss of social life, and a loss of "useful" life.

Not only did Hulley and her colleagues confirm earlier research, but their elaboration of the temporal aspect of experiencing the pains of imprisonment is useful in exploring the experiences of long-term prisoners' partners. They revealed that the initial psychological adjustment to a long sentence was indeed experienced as difficult by many prisoners, with pains associated with the various deprivations (of social life, sexual intimacy, *etc.*) being most acutely felt in the early stages of the sentence. The authors argue that over time, long-term prisoners develop coping strategies[2] and grow used to the various deprivations associated with prison life. This is very much an argument prevalent in the literature on long-term imprisonment (*e.g.* Sapsford 1983, Zamble 1992). So although prisoners report feeling the pains of long-term imprisonment less strongly as time goes on, this may be because they are fundamentally transformed; 'the everyday pains of imprisonment are 'felt' less sharply because, in some sense, they have been internalised into the prisoner's being' (Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015: 20). This does not indicate that the pains are in any objective sense less painful, they simply become a normal part of everyday prison existence, and thus become part of the prisoner's life and identity.

This idea of the pains of imprisonment becoming internalised – a process through which one becomes used to or numbed to them as they become a part of one's everyday life – is key to understanding the experiences of partners. In Chapter 5, I show that over time, they also become

[2]To be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

used to the lack of privacy and other pains of imprisonment. Even though prisoners' partners do not face every concern that the prisoner faces – for example, they do not have any reason to be concerned about losing their identity in prison, though they might have such concerns about their partners – previous research has shown that they experience many of the pains of imprisonment the prisoners feel. Less directly, they may fear or worry about the prisoner deteriorating in prison. As argued earlier in this chapter, the prisoner and his partner should not be seen as two entirely separate, disconnected individuals. What happens to one could raise anxieties and concerns in the other and affect them emotionally. Hulley, Crewe and Wright's (2015) recent work will help us to theorise how partners experience the pains of imprisonment over time, and whether the pains of imprisoned are felt less sharply as time draws on.

3.3 ADAPTING TO AND COPING WITH LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT

In her ethnographic study of prisoners' partners at San Quentin prison, Comfort (2008) considers how prisoners' partners may be fundamentally changed by prolonged exposure to the prison environment and the various deprivations associated with prison. Yet how does this change come about? Comfort (2008) (also Codd 2007) has described the visiting room as a liminal space where the visitor is neither, legally, a prisoner, not a fully free person. Her body becomes imprisoned for the duration of the visit and she is subjected to the supervision and rules and regulations of the prison. She is also subjected to the symbolic degradation inherent in being imprisoned, such as intrusive searches, spatial constraints during visits, supervision by uniformed staff, and so on (see Goffman 1961). It is true that prisoners, too, may experience this liminality when they, for example, participate in family visits (as Moran 2011 found in the Russian context), but on the whole prisoners have a defined legal status in that they are legally imprisoned individuals. Their families, however, are neither legally imprisoned nor fully free (Comfort 2008). It is this liminality that leads to a process of gradual change, as Comfort (2008) argues. I will now discuss this process in greater detail.

Classic anthropological liminality discourse, theorising about the transition from adolescence to adulthood (*e.g.* Van Gennep 1960), emphasises a linear movement from one stage (*e.g.* childhood) through a liminal experience (*e.g.* adolescence) to a post-liminal state (*e.g.* adulthood). It appears that in the context of prisoners' families, the transition is more complex. In terms of physical visitation, visitors go in and out of prison repeatedly, thus experiencing the pattern, again and again, sometimes for many years (Moran 2011). However, this does not mean that prisoners' families remain altogether unchanged by this pattern. The pattern itself may cumulatively lead to a change in the visitor herself and be a transformative set of events (Moran 2011). As Comfort (2008) describes, the partner becomes a quasi-inmate of sorts, becomes stuck – for short but repeated periods of time – in a liminal, ambiguous space where she is neither prisoner nor fully free person (Comfort 2008). This may become a part of her identity over time as the process of entering and leaving the prison occurs again and again. Exposed to the pains and deprivations for a lengthy period of time, the prisoner's partner, too, may experience a profound change to her identity. Identifying the process that leads to change, however, does not tell us much about the form the change/transformation takes. In what sense, thus, can prisoners' partners be said to be changed by repeated, long-term exposure to the pains of imprisonment?

To explore this more fully, it is crucial to draw on the literature which analyses the experiences of long-term prisoners and considers how they adapt to (and the extent to which they are changed by – the two processes are logically linked) imprisonment, over time. This literature provides the theoretical tools for such an exploration and represents a natural progression from the literature on the pains of imprisonment. Usually, studies on the pains of imprisonment progress to discussing how prisoners adapt to and cope with these pains. As discussed above, the classic study conducted by Cohen and Taylor (1972) explored the issue of psychological survival amongst long-term prisoners and argued that imprisonment shatters one's entire identity and existence. As a result,

long-term prisoners need to adapt to this dramatic change in their lives.

Clemmer (1958) coined the term 'prisonisation' to refer to the manner in which prisoners adapt to the pains and deprivations of imprisonment by adopting the mores and customs of the prison. The longer a prisoner was in prison, he argued, the more prisonised he was likely to become. There is reason to suppose that prisoners' partners, too, might become to some extent prisonised over time as they are exposed to the prison regime regularly for many years. In Chapter 5, I explore the extent to which the partners that made up my sample became prisonised, in the sense of internalising prison routines, norms, and language. It should be noted that Comfort (2008) uses the term 'secondary prisonisation' specifically in the context of prisoners' partners, but in a somewhat different way. Comfort (2009) defined secondary prisonisation primarily as the exposure of prisoners' families to the pains and deprivations of imprisonment, rather than an adaptation to the mores and customs of prison, even though she also argues that prisoners' families are changed by prolonged exposure to the prison system. In order to avoid confusion, in Chapter 5, I will thus use 'institutionalisation' to describe the process Clemmer (1958) calls 'prisonisation', and will use 'secondary prisonisation' in the narrower sense Comfort (2008) uses it to denote the exposure of prisoners' partners to the pains of imprisonment.

Another body of literature has explored prisoners' reactions to long-term imprisonment via quantitative measures of psychiatric and/or physical impact using standardised tests. There is little evidence of prisoners suffering from any identifiable psychiatric or physical deleterious effects as a consequence of long-term imprisonment (Zamble 1992, also Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015). Sapsford (1983) found no evidence of depression, apathy, psychosis or personality disorders, and neither did an earlier large project carried out in the UK amongst 175 long-term prisoners (Banister *et al.* 1973, Heskin *et al.*1973). Moreover, long-term prisoners do not appear to lose interest in the outside world (Sapsford 1983). In fact, Flanagan (1980) found that some long-term prisoners

become emotionally and physically stronger over the course of the long sentence.

The research did find some evidence of change over time. One change identified is a reduced time-perspective, with prisoners being less able to see into the future, and focusing on the past (Sapsford 1983). Medlicott (1999) also found that prisoners with long sentences, in order to cope with the overwhelming length of the sentence, would not think too far into the future. Studies have also found that the greater the sentence length and the prisoners' age, the less extended their future time perspectives tended to be (Marques 2013, Snyder *et al.* 2009). Relatedly, some prisoners deliberately did not think too far ahead, preferring to “cut up” their sentences into shorter “chunks” of time (Wahidin 2006). For example, they might tick off weeks or months, instead of thinking of the sentence as one monolithic period of time. Consider the following quote from a prisoner in a study on prisoners' future perspectives (Carvalho, Capelo and Nunez 2015: 10):

> My time is still long and I have to think about each day. I don’t like to make many plans.

Carvalho, Capelo and Nunez (2015) also analysed the content of future perspectives of those prisoners who did think about the future. Though not all the prisoners in that study were serving long sentences, it is still useful to consider how those who were serving long sentences in the study planned for a future post-imprisonment. Many prisoners thought about an idealised, positive future without reoffending, and about changing their environments upon release (leaving the area where they lived prior to imprisonment). Others spoke about lawful employment and about reconnecting with their family upon release. Many, notably, feared the stigma associated with being a former prisoner, and the implications it might have for their future, such as potential difficulties with finding a job. This reinforces the finding of Cohen and Taylor (1972) in their study on long-term prisoners that not all prisoners had a limited future perspective, in the sense of being “stuck” in an extended present. Some did think about the future outside of prison to cope with a long sentence.

In Chapter 6, I show that many partners also avoided thinking too far into the future, and coped with the long sentence by cutting it up into more manageable sections of time. I also show that some had an idealistic vision of the future. These themes, therefore, are also very much of relevance to the prisoners' partners, as they too have to cope with the length of the sentence and making sense of a future that is years away.

Some long-term prisoners also become gradually more introverted (Sapsford 1978, also Richards 1978 and Heskin *et al.* 1973) as a way of coping with the fact that they are removed from friends and family for a long time. This finding has been reinforced by qualitative studies – Crewe (2009), for instance, found that those serving the longest sentences were less likely to have friendships in prison and generally kept themselves at a distance from other people. Crewe (2009: 342) described these prisoners as 'loners' and concluded that 'trust and intimacy became increasingly alien sentiments' for those with long sentences (Crewe 2009: 343). This introversion, or distancing from family outside, was something that was noted by long-term prisoners' families in Merriman's (1979) study; families did not know how long this distancing would go on for and whether it was normal and were thus somewhat concerned about it. First-hand accounts, such as that of Warr (2011) also indicate that some long-term prisoners, at least, become distant and more withdrawn over time.

Yet qualitative, experiential research indicates that long-term prisoners suffer considerably and often tragically (Wormith 1995, see also Kummerlowe 1995). The suicide rate for long-term prisoners is 3-4 times that of the UK prison population as a whole (NACRO 1990, see also Hawton *et al.* 2013). It is worrying that formal experimental psychological research has found few negative effects on long-term prisoners, and yet experiential qualitative research and case-studies report dramatic, negative impact (Jamieson and Grounds 2002). It is entirely possible that quantitative

research is not sensitive enough to pick up the nuanced, complex effects of long-term imprisonment on prisoners (Wormith 1995), and/or that these effects are not psychiatric or physical: rather, they may be deeply psychological and psychosocial. Such stresses and problems may, therefore, be difficult to measure using standard psychometric instruments (Flanagan 1995).

In fact, Liem and Kunst (2013), in a study of long-term prisoners post-release, found some evidence of PTSD-like symptoms amongst their participants. The authors call this the 'post-incarceration syndrome', which they say is not dissimilar to PTSD, albeit with three additional elements. The first is institutionalisation (distrust, difficulties in making decisions), the second is social-sensory disorientation (difficulties in social interactions), and the third is social and temporal alienation (being outside any social or temporal setting). Although their sample was small, consisting of only 25 men, this research indicated that it is difficult to conclude that long-term imprisonment does not have a prolonged, and often highly negative, impact on prisoners.

Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) develop their discussion of the pains of imprisonment by arguing that adjustment techniques used to cope with the pains of imprisonment – techniques such as distancing, adherence to institutional rules and introversion – may be both profoundly transformative and maladaptive in the long-run (see also Crewe 2009). Maladaptive here means that some coping mechanisms could be useful when coping with long-term imprisonment, but be inappropriate for the outside world. High levels of introversion is one example. Hulley and her colleagues argue that the prisoner does not just adjust on a superficial, surface level; instead, his very personality may be changed. This manifests itself in mistrust, difficulties in social interactions, and a certain coldness towards others – all behaviours that may be less than positive in the outside world. One prisoner in Crewe's (2009) study said that he was permanently changed on a deep emotional level. He said that he had become colder as a person in order to cope with long-term imprisonment, and felt that he would never be able to have an intimate relationship again – a good

example of maladaptive adjustment. Similarly, there is a need to explore whether the coping mechanisms utilised by prisoners' partners may also be in some way maladaptive.

These explorations of long-term imprisonment and the psychosocial changes long-term prisoners experience are directly relevant to prisoners' partners, too. Merriman's (1979) study indicated that families are very much aware of the psychosocial changes occurring in the prisoner. We cannot, then, envisage the changes the prisoners might undergo as conceptually separate from their relationships with their partners since such profound psychosocial changes are likely to have an effect on these relationships. We need to explore how a partner experiences what she might perceive to be the prisoner's distancing and increased introversion. Secondly, the partners themselves might need to adapt and cope with the pains of imprisonment over time. What coping mechanisms might they use? As I show in Chapter 5, some partners adapted to the pains of imprisonment by becoming more independent, and in Chapter 7 I discuss how some withdrew from friends, family and acquaintances out of a fear of stigma. There is potential for these coping mechanisms to be maladaptive too.

In thinking about the transformative nature of long-term exposure to the prison system further, there is also reason to suppose that prisoners' families become mistrustful of the prison system and the criminal justice system in general. This mirrors the finding that many long-term prisoners become mistrustful of authorities (*e.g.* Crewe 2009). In fact, Lee, Porter and Comfort (2014) found that the political socialisation of prisoners' families may be influenced by their perceptions of how they are treated by the prison system during visits and other interactions with prison staff. Prisoners' families feel distrust towards the system, which might include police officers, prison officers, and parole staff. Almost half of the sample felt that the criminal justice system did not treat people fairly. This is an interesting finding, and it is necessary to explore how this change occurs over a long sentence when exposure to the criminal justice system is prolonged

and experiences of perceived injustice may be many. The theme of changing perceptions of the criminal justice system over time will be shown to be especially pertinent to partners of long-term prisoners in Chapter 7, when I discuss how partners reacted to what they perceived to be stigmatising treatment they experienced when they visited prisons and otherwise interacted with prison staff.

How do prisoners' families cope with the pains of (long-term) imprisonment? We know very little about this in comparison to our knowledge about the coping mechanisms of prisoners themselves, and one of the purposes of this study has been to map out some coping mechanisms used by prisoners' partners. To recap the discussion from the previous chapter, we know that some families cope with stigma by lying about their partner's whereabouts or isolating themselves from others (*e.g.* Condry 2007, May 1999), and some make complaints and file lawsuits as a possible coping mechanism – a form of resistance (Codd 2008). In Chapter 5 I discuss how women adapted to the pains of imprisonment such as deprivation of an emotionally and physically intimate relationship with the prisoner, and in Chapter 7 discuss how they coped with stigma specifically. In both Chapters 5 and 7, I show that some of these coping techniques – such as withdrawal from friends and broader social circles – could be maladaptive for the prisoner's partner.

3.4 A 'FAMILY PRACTICES' LENS

In her ethnographic work, Comfort (2008) sought to show that intimacy became institutionalised when a woman's partner was imprisoned. She discussed the fact that women continued to enact their roles as partners, albeit within prison walls – so, for example, meals could be cooked inside prisons during family days, and weddings took place inside prison walls with many of the rituals and traditions surrounding such events. Conjugal visits meant that intimacy, quite literally, became institutionalised in the sense of becoming confined to the prison. If the sociology of imprisonment literature helps us explore the experiences of the prisoner's partner as a *prisoner's* partner, then a

family practices perspective will shift the focus and help us consider her as a prisoner's *partner*. In other words, how does she enact her partnership role within the confines of the prison?

Family practices are those actions which constitute 'doing family'; the many activities we do as part of our family life which reproduce the idea of family and the identities subsumed within it (Morgan 2013). These events are everyday, in the sense that they include significant events that nearly everyone goes through (weddings, birthdays, anniversaries) but also the mundane events like family dinners and school runs (Morgan 2013). Comfort's (2008) work gave many empirical examples of how one can 'do family' within prison walls, and the concept of family practices help us develop her work further. After all, the prisoner's partner has to 'do family' without the daily presence of her husband or boyfriend, despite not being widowed or separated. How does she go about this? She may need to keep him psychologically present and bear his wishes in mind. The presence of any children may also mean needing to address their needs and wants. Furthermore, the partner may also be, by virtue of her close link to the prisoner, the person who keeps the extended family informed about how the prisoner is faring and keeps him informed of the wider family's affairs. This is not to imply, of course, that parents are not involved in the emotional and practical care of the prisoner. Yet spouses usually share a home and day-to-day lives with the prisoner prior to imprisonment, and cohabitation has risen significantly amongst unmarried partners in recent decades (*e.g.* Coltrane and Adams 2008). It may be that, because of this, their lives are much more closely entwined that those of the prisoner and his parents, and that this may mean that the loss of companionship that follows imprisonment is more acutely felt. A family perspective allows us to explore how the partner outside 'does' family when her partner – and possibly the father or stepfather of her children – is physically absent but psychologically present (Arditti 2012). Such a perspective allows us to consider the decisions she may need to make not just in relation to herself and the prisoner, but children, extended family, and others.

Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) argue that family practices need not be confined to the home – they can be conducted elsewhere. In fact, the family practices perspective has been used to analyse families that do not fall within the standard two-parent, heterosexual family model. These include non-heterosexual families (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001) and post-divorce families (Smart and Neale 1999). The concept, thus, has a good track record of use in the analyses of the experiences of non-traditional families, of which families operating within a context of imprisonment ought to be seen as one type.

How are family practices enacted when a male partner is imprisoned for a long time, and thus unable to be a part of the family practices, both on a day-to-day level and when it comes to events such as birthdays and anniversaries? How, more specifically, does the partner on the outside 'do' family when she may need to consider the needs and wishes of her partner, who is far removed from her? This links to the theme of 'juggling temporalities' discussed above, and could also help us to analyse the practical aspects of sustaining a relationship with a prisoner, such as sending letters, being home to receive phone calls from a prisoner, and generally ensuring he is kept up-to-date with the goings-on in the family.

Morgan distinguishes between three types of intimacy, a key aspect of family practices, building on Giddens' (1992) seminal work on the transformation of intimacy in modern society. The first is embodied intimacy – that is, physical expressions of intimacy such as sexual intercourse, but also embraces and other types of physical expressions of intimacy. Of course, physical intimacy is an integral part of many intimate relationships – it is seen as key to marriage/intimate partnership, with the role of wife or partner being partly constructed around her responsibility of fulfilling her husband's sexual needs (Condry 2007). Research has linked a healthy, satisfying sexual relationship to marital happiness and lower levels of marital conflict (*e.g.* Brezsnyak and Whisman 2004), further showing that physical intimacy is important for many marriages and intimate partnerships.

The second type is emotional intimacy – that is, disclosure and sharing of deeply personal information. The third is intimate knowledge and relates to the interweaving of personal lives and building up of shared histories over time. It is worth thinking about how each type of intimacy is affected by imprisonment. We know, for example, that opportunities for physical intimacy are severely limited for the prisoner and his partner. Yet emotional intimacy may also be affected over time, especially if deeply personal information is not fully shared due to lack of privacy and constant surveillance. The same might be the case for intimate knowledge, since there are very few opportunities to build up a common familial history and share details of one's daily existence (see Chapter 8, also Chapter 6). In considering how a relationship changes over time, and how the partner reacts to any changes in the prisoner himself, such as distancing, these three types of intimacy will be useful indeed.

Two further useful dimensions of family practices are time and space (Morgan 2013). Time refers to the time the family spends together, and this is entwined with space, as family practices usually involve spending time together (*i.e.* in the same space) with the family. How does this play out when a husband or boyfriend is imprisoned? Time spent together is necessarily limited, and the only space that can be shared is the prison visiting room. Morgan (2013) in fact recognises that the home is not the only family space – a family space can be created outside the home, such as in a regular holiday location. It is also recognised that family practices can be conducted outside the home, such as when family decisions are made at work. For example, a working mother may decide not to go for after-work drinks with her colleagues because she needs to go home and make dinner for her children and husband. In the context of imprisonment, many family decisions will need to be made outside the visiting room, since "time together" is necessarily very limited.

Timetables are often used to organise family life; and they are used to organise events not

only in time but also in space (*e.g.* family holidays, trips to the supermarket). Once again, this harks back to the idea of juggling temporalities, as it draws attention to trying to organise daily life within the confines placed upon one by the demands of work, childcare, and housework. Understanding that family practices are inherently about organising family life, temporally and spatially, encourages us to think how this organisation occurs when a partner is imprisoned. How does the prison schedule fit in within the daily life of the partner outside? How is this additional, emotionally loaded and potentially stressful, addition of the prison time and space experienced? The family space, in other words, has to be reassessed and reconfigured, and the family time becomes limited by the prison schedule.

Moreover, family practices may be diffuse, *i.e.* carried out individually or with a small configuration of family members (Morgan 2013). Going home from work is such a practice – an individual practice, yet one that becomes a family practice once we realise that the person is going home. Such diffuse practices may be crucial for understanding how routine family decisions are made by prisoners' partners; since the imprisoned partner is not present in the daily life of the woman and her actions and decisions are likely to be much more individual that those of women with a partner who lives with her.

Finally, family practices involve doing 'emotional work'. This concept was first used to discuss how paid employees manage their own and their clients' emotions (Hochschild 1983). Yet emotional work can also take place in interactions between family members/partners, thus being an important aspect of family practices (Morgan 2013). For example, a tired wife who had just come back from a difficult day's work may feel she needs to manage her own emotions so as not to lash out at her husband, and in doing so she also attempts to manage his emotions. She may do this because, for example, she does not want to upset her partner and their children, or simply because she does not feel it is fair to let out her negative emotions in front of her family. Emotional work is

generally associated with female work such as housework and nursing, with women usually deemed to be more expert in doing care work (Morgan 2013).

What the concept of emotional work highlights is that family practices involve both actions which give rise to various emotions in the actor and managing others' emotions. If imprisonment involves reconfigurations of family practices, then how emotional work is done is also likely to be affected. We know, for example, that partners of prisoners often keep their conversations deliberately positive (Comfort 2008) – this is a good example of managing emotions and will be explored in Chapter 8. The chapter will explore emotional work on a broader scale, and consider how interactions with the prisoner are navigated emotionally.

A family practices perspective would allow us to consider how the partner outside reconfigures how she 'does family', and in what ways 'doing family' is practised across the boundary of the prison. It would also allow us to explore the family-related decisions the partner makes at work, and how these are shaped by the fact that her partner is imprisoned. Such examples as taking time off work to visit her partner would be relevant here. Family practices will also help bring some of the themes discussed earlier together – such as juggling temporalities, managing emotions, and the passage of time – and help us explore how the partner operates as a partner across prison walls. In Chapter 8, I will show the tremendous amount of work that the women in this sample put into 'doing family' despite the many challenges the prison placed in their way.

3.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER

In order to understand the experiences of a sample of women, we need to recognise that these experiences will be necessarily shaped by their gender. In this vein, prison visiting centres have been described as female spaces (Condry 2007, also Comfort 2008 and Codd 2008). It is primarily wives, girlfriends, fiancees, mothers and sisters who visit and generally support both male and

female prisoners. Studies, as discussed in the previous chapter, have found that the experiences of female relatives of prisoners are indeed gendered; for instance, women are much more likely to have a financial and social status that is dependent on and defined by their male incarcerated family member's status (Hannem 2008, Codd 2002). Moreover, since women's social status is closely linked to the men in their lives, it becomes easier to transfer stigma onto these women when their husbands, fathers or brothers are incarcerated (Hannem 2008). Hannem (2008) argues that the lives of female partners of prisoners are just as affected by the criminal justice system as those of primary female victims and female offenders, in part because they are women.

In order to understand these experiences further, we need to recognise that women's roles are still overwhelmingly seen to be centred on motherhood and wifehood. This tendency can be starkly seen in UK family law cases on financial provision upon divorce. Courts in cases such as Miller v Miller; McFarlane v McFarlane (2006) go to great lengths to emphasise the importance of women's housework and care work in general. This may appear to be positive, were it not for the fact that no similar praise is heard for women in paid employment. In CR v CR (2007) and the aforementioned Miller (2006) case, for instance, women's paid work was seriously undervalued and they were not deemed to be deserving of compensation when they sacrificed their prospects of getting paid work in favour of housework. The implication is that the woman's role as wife and mother is to be glorified, and her role as an employee is to be undervalued.

Family practices, as discussed in the previous section, are also very gendered (Morgan 2013). Housework and domestic labour – such as cooking the family dinner – are a taken-for-granted part of many women's household duties (Morgan 2013). Moreover, family practices are inherently bound up with ethical considerations. Family decisions are made in terms of 'what is best and morally right for themselves and for their children' (Duncan and Edwards 1999: 209). These ethical considerations are also gendered. This is not to say that we need to engage in debates about

the moral decision-making processes of men and women; the argument is, rather, that family decisions made by women are bound up with their identities as women (Morgan 2013). They thus make decisions about the family as wives/partners and mothers. A woman might choose, thus, to forego a day off work and visit her imprisoned partner because she feels that is what she as a wife ought to do. Comfort (2008) provided rich evidence of the importance of familial caring to women – such as feeding their prisoners and sending them care packages, and one participant in Codd's (2003: 7) study said that she felt as though she was 'no longer [her imprisoned husband's] wife' because of her inability to care for him. With women's social identities being so closely linked to partnership and motherhood, the ethical family decisions they make are likely to be very gendered. These issues will be further explored in Chapter 8.

This is not to say that the views of womanhood described above are normatively good. Yet it is crucial to recognise them as ingrained in the fabric of our society, and internalised by some women. This will help us to understand how women experience imprisonment, which necessarily limits – in the case of a long sentence, for a very long time – or curtails altogether their ability to undertake traditional feminine roles.

Condry (2007) has begun to explore this in her work on the stigma experienced by families of serious offenders, within a broader discussion of how stigma is transferred via 'kin contamination' and 'association'. She specifically addresses the social constructions of wifehood/partnership that underlies the blame and stigmatisation of wives/partners and argues that wives are still blamed for not fulfilling their wifely "duties" if something goes wrong in the home. It is useful to ground this discussion in the work on collective responsibility. Collective responsibility is when others, not simply the primary offender, are blamed for the offence (Lickel, Schmader and Hamilton 2003). Denson *et al.* (2006) found that intimacy groups (which included intimate partners) were rated more highly than social (*e.g.* friendship) or task groups (*e.g.* colleagues) in

terms of collective responsibility. Although there appear to be no studies specifically on collective responsibility in the context of intimate partners, the concept can help us understand why partners of prisoners may be stigmatised. Wives/partners are deemed to be close to the men in their lives – they usually share a house, for example. It is, therefore, easy for society and the criminal justice officials to see them as inexorably linked to their male partners and to see them as, at worst, collusive, or, at best, somehow “tainted” by their husband’s/partner’s criminal act.

Realising that caring and motherhood are still seen to be central to how society sees femininity will help us understand how women are affected by imprisonment over a long time. Time passing ought to be explored with the understanding that motherhood and wifehood are key to how we see womanhood, and that time passing may be experienced as especially painful for women for a number of reasons (such as a loss of opportunity to become a mother, for example). The relevance of gender to the passage of time will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Finally, it is important to recognise that women are not all the same, and thus not all women's experiences will be homogenous. Gender, after all, intersects in complex ways with race, age, class, sexuality and disability. Comfort (2008) has explored, specifically, how the experiences of female prisoners’ partners are also shaped by their race in the US context, where the vast majority of prisoners’ families come from ethnic minority backgrounds. Although the racial disparity in the UK is not as marked at that in the US (where the proportion of black prisoners is four times greater than their population share – Ramesh 2010), ethnic minorities are still over-represented in UK prisons (Prison Reform Trust 2015). Racial discrimination – whether overt or not – seems to permeate the criminal justice system (see, for a discussion of discrimination in arrests and stop-and-search procedures, Bowling and Phillips 2007), and may result in racist remarks to female prison visitors, greater chances of minority visitors being searched, and so on. Black, socio-economically disadvantaged female visitors may be stigmatised when visiting as female partners of

prisoners, as black individuals and as socio-economically disadvantaged individuals. These complex intersectionalities must be borne in mind.

3.6 THEMES TO BE EXPLORED IN THIS THESIS

Drawing on both the earlier literature set out in Chapter 2, and the theoretical framework set out in this chapter, the following themes will be explored in this thesis.

Pains of imprisonment over a long sentence

We know from earlier research that prisoners' partners experience the pains of imprisonment. Yet we know little about how they experience the tightness of modern prisons, with all the associated rules and regulations. We need to explore whether they, like prisoners, also become entangled in modern penal power. Moreover, there has yet not been an explorations of how partners experience the pains of imprisonment over time. Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) recent study has shown that for long-term prisoners, the pains of imprisonment do not become easier to bear over time. Is the same true for their partners? Furthermore, in order to cope with the pains of imprisonment, some long-term prisoners become institutionalised and withdrawn. How do partners cope with this? Do they, too, become institutionalised over time? How do they react to the psychosocial changes that occur in some prisoners? These themes will be explored in Chapter 5.

Time

A long sentence represents time taken away from the prisoner. Prisoners sometimes struggle to make sense of a long sentence and their life-courses are interrupted by a long term in prison. Is this also true for their partners, and if so, how? Do partners also experience a loss of time, and if so, in what sense is time taken away from them? Might they experience the passage of time in a gendered manner? How does time pass for them, and how might they experience the difference in how time passes for the prisoner? What concerns and difficulties might this raise for the partners outside?

Chapter 6 will addresses these issues.

Stigma

It is well known that many prisoners' partners experience public stigmatisation, and many also fear that they will be stigmatised. How do partners of long-term prisoners experience stigma? Is public stigmatisation especially serious when a long sentence is handed down, and why might it be so? What role does the media play in these cases? How do women cope with public stigma over a long sentence, and does stigma fade over time or continue throughout the long sentence? How does public and feared stigma shape the women's lives over time? Finally, how do partners outside make sense of a serious offence that resulted in a long sentence? In Chapter 7, I will analyse these themes.

Family practices

When a long sentence is handed down, the prisoner and his partner are, in practical terms, separated for a long time. They are forced to live separate lives. What does this mean for them as a family unit? How does the partner outside 'do family' across prison walls? How does she – and her imprisoned partner – make family decisions, and how might imprisonment make this difficult? How is family time and space created across prison walls? What difficulties might imprisonment – and a long sentence specifically – create for physical and emotional intimacy, and intimate knowledge? I answer these questions in Chapter 8.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The sociology of imprisonment provides some excellent building blocks for exploring the experiences of long-term prisoners' partners. There is a rich tradition of exploring, in great sociological detail, the nuance of prison life and the pains of long-term imprisonment especially. If, as Comfort (2008, 2009) posits, prisoners' families are 'secondarily prisonised', there is reason to suppose that these pains of long-term imprisonment also extend to the partners of men serving long

sentences and that these partners also go through complex, fundamental transformations over time as they are exposed to the prison system and its all-permeating penal power.

In constructing this theoretical framework, the literature on the pains of imprisonment has been used as a starting point. In order to develop this further, I have also drawn upon work on long-term imprisonment specifically, as the focus of the study is partners of long-term prisoners, and there is a need to go beyond discussing how they experience financial, practical, (*etc.*) problems and stigma. Thus, I combined what we know about prisoners' families with what we know about long-term imprisonment, and will use the latter to analyse how prisoners' partners experience long-term imprisonment. I will, therefore, discuss how partners cope with a long sentence and with time passing (both known problems for long-term prisoners), and whether the pains of imprisonment accumulate over time or become easier to cope with. In analysing the theme of time, I attempt to add to the theoretical discussion of time within the sociology of imprisonment, and will draw on the sociology of time and the concepts of life time and everyday time.

This study aims to enrich our understanding of the wide-ranging effects of imprisonment and contribute to and develop the literature on the sociology of imprisonment. Recently, sociologists have become interested in exploring the wide-ranging impact of punishment – this thesis seeks to add to this work by showing how partners of long-term prisoners also feel the impact of punishment. In the next section, I will discuss the methodological aspects of the study and how I went about attempting to investigate the themes and issues set out in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4
Methodology and Data Collection: Researching a Hidden and Stigmatised Population

Prisoners' partners – and families in general – are, as of yet, an under-researched topic in criminology, with a comparatively small, if growing, number of studies seeking to understand their experiences having been conducted to date. Researching the experiences of prisoners' partners is also riddled with practical and ethical concerns, since they are a hidden and often stigmatised population that is extremely difficult to access.

This chapter will consider the methodological approach taken, as well as the specific methods used in gathering the data. The process of conducting the research will also be discussed in detail, as this could prove useful for future researchers conducting studies on prisoners' families or other groups of potentially vulnerable women. I will also discuss the process of data analysis, and will conclude by pointing out the strengths and limitations of the sample of women whose interviews will be analysed in the subsequent chapters.

4.1 METHODOLOGY

In this section, the methodological approaches chosen will be justified and discussed at a theoretical level, and some of my personal experiences drawn from the data collection process will be used to illustrate why the approaches chosen were the most suitable approaches for the research at hand.

A constructivist, qualitative approach

The primary starting point for conducting any empirical work is to settle on an epistemological stance (Levy 2006), on which there are two different perspectives. The first stance is that of objectivists. They believe that it is possible for research to uncover objective, hard truth – provided that the research is properly carried out (Levy 2006). Objectivists believe that reality exists outside

of human beings and that the meaning of the world exists objectively (Lakoff 1987). There is, thus, a single reality that we, as researchers, can uncover.

Opposing this, constructivists believe that objective truth or knowledge does not exist outside the given individual, and therefore there is no hard truth waiting to be discovered by researchers. Truth, thus, is created in the social world, with each individual interpreting and reinterpreting situations, events and interactions subjectively (Levy 2006). Reality is dependent upon context. There may be more than one reality, human thought is moulded by social context and interactions, and meaning is constructed out of each individual's knowledge and perceptions (Lakoff 1987). Constructivists would, therefore, argue that even if a situation is the same, different individuals may experience and interpret it differently.

It became clear to me, very early on, that an objectivist stance was not suited to this kind of research, because the experience of having a partner in prison is too socially complex and emotionally ambiguous for us, as researchers, to be able to condense it into objective facts. Although, certainly, some experiences may be more amenable to objective discovery – such as any changes in prisoners' partners' income following imprisonment (Morris 1965) – measuring these experiences would not give us a complete picture of the partners' experiences. For example, a participant's income may not have fallen in numerical terms because she has taken on an extra job, or chose not to retire. Simply calculating, in financial terms, the change in income tells us very little about the emotional and social costs of taking on an extra job or not retiring. A participant who is used to a high standard of living may experience the loss of the lifestyle she is used to as emotionally and socially painful, even if she is still getting a comparatively good income.

A constructivist approach is also more suited to researching an under-researched phenomenon because it does not take anything for granted when it comes to the social phenomenon

under consideration. It allows us to ask why prisoners' partners are impacted in a certain way, why some may be affected more than others, and why some may experience the same effects of imprisonment more severely than others (Madriz 1997 discusses this in the context of social constructivism and crime). Bearing in mind that there has not been any research on long-term prisoners' partners in the UK, the open-endedness of the constructivist approach allows for a consideration of issues that may not have been apparent to the researcher from simply reading previous literature on prisoners' families.

This thesis seeks to map out the experiences of long-term prisoners' partners from a sociological perspective. As such, it was decided that a qualitative approach was the best approach for exploring the themes set out in the previous chapter. A natural sibling of constructivism, qualitative research is 'mainly concerned with the properties, the state and the character' of what is being studied (Labuschagne 2003: 100), and is as such better suited to studies attempting to uncover meaning and interpretation, as opposed to patterns and frequency (Seidman 2006). It does not focus on issues of wide generalisability, unlike positivist, quantitative approaches. Rather, qualitative research 'focuses on the meanings, traits and defining characteristics of events, people interactions...and experiences' (Tewksbury 2009: 39), accepting that this data will be specific to the group of participants being studied (Wainwright 1997).

Bearing in mind that the group being studied has not received much academic attention, I see this thesis as beginning to map out their experiences in a thick qualitative manner, rather than focusing on causal relations and frequencies, which are focal points of quantitative research (Labuschagne 2003). My aim was not to attain a representative sample – though, as will be discussed at the end of this chapter, qualitative research can be to an extent generalisable to a wider population – but rather to focus on a small group of long-term prisoners' partners and discuss their experiences in qualitative detail in order to uncover the themes and issues inherent in these

experiences.

Moreover, a qualitative approach is more suited to the type of questions this thesis seeks to answer. Themes such as perceptions and experiences of stigma and the emotional impact of visiting a prison are not quantifiable. As seen with the quantitative research on the psychological impact of long-term imprisonment on prisoners (see Chapter 3, pg. 65), quantitative measures are not necessarily sensitive enough to capture the deep, psychosocially complex nature of long-term imprisonment.

Finally, a qualitative methodology also enables the researcher to comprehend the world from the unique points of view of the persons being studied (Kvale 1996) and is thus well suited to making the voices of marginalised groups heard (Morrow 2006). Normatively, I wanted to ensure that the voices of my participants, who were often socially hidden and stigmatised, were made audible. I wanted to ensure they were more than just statistics, but rather real people with real experiences, complex and ambiguous as these experiences often were in the context of long-term imprisonment. It was gratifying that one participant, upon the publication of a paper (Coles-Kemp and Kotova 2014) that drew upon preliminary data from this research project, pointed out how grateful she was that the participants' voices could be heard. Qualitative research, thus, has the potential to empower the powerless and the voiceless – as prisoners' families, very often, are. This potential, however, should not be treated as a given and we should not assume that qualitative research in and of itself empowers vulnerable participants. I will return to this issue later in this chapter.

Interviews with prisoners' partners

I chose to focus my research on female partners of male prisoners serving long sentences in the UK, and the decision to limit the sample to this group of long-term prisoners' partners needs to be

elaborated on at this juncture. Firstly, I decided to focus on female partners of male prisoners, rather than male partners of female prisoners or same-sex partners of male prisoners, because the majority of prisoners in the UK are male (Howard League for Penal Reform 2015). Most of the people supporting these prisoners are women; mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends (*e.g.* Codd 2007, Comfort 2008). Moreover, female partners of male prisoners are much more likely to be carers of the couple's children (Lowenstein 1986) than male partners of female prisoners. Focusing on partners also allowed me to hone in on specific themes, such as the deprivation of physical intimacy, but also on the postponement of milestone events like marriage, having a child, and so forth. There were also gender-specific issues I wished to explore, such as whether the passage of time is experienced in a gendered manner. Finally, including same-sex partners would have likely given rise to specific themes, such as homophobia, which deserve a fuller exploration than a general study on prisoners' partners would permit.

The term 'partner' included unmarried intimate partners, spouses, and fiancées. Thus, in this thesis, the term 'partner' should be taken to include both a married and unmarried partner, unless otherwise specified. Biological relatives were excluded. At the time of the interviews, all but two of the participants described themselves as being in a stable, ongoing intimate relationship with a long-term prisoner. One participant was the ex-partner of a long-term prisoner, but still kept in touch with him. Another woman was in a complex co-parenting relationship with the imprisoned father of her children, and described a very tumultuous, verbally abusive relationship. This reflects the fact that relationships can be "messy" indeed, and do not always fit within neat criteria. One woman I interviewed had been visiting a prisoner – whom she had known prior to his imprisonment – for many years, and claimed they were 'platonic partners'. In the course of the interview it became clear that she was more a friend or carer than a partner, especially since she revealed the prisoner was, in fact, gay. In the end, her interview was omitted, since she was so far removed from the eligibility criteria. This left me with 33 useable interviews out of the 34 conducted.

‘Long-term’ was initially defined as serving a determinate sentence of 10 years or more[3], including IPP sentences where at least five years or more were expected to, or were already, served, and life sentences. However, as will be discussed below, some flexibility had to be adopted in light of complex sentencing practices in the UK. Broadly, all but one of the participants’ partners already served or were expected to spend at least five years in prison. The reason for this minimum point was because previous studies on long-term imprisonment used the equivalent of a 10-year-sentence minimum as a measure of long-term imprisonment as well (*e.g.* Flanagan 1981 – at least 5 years of continuous imprisonment; Merriman 1979 – 10 years). Of course, this may not seem to be long when compared to the long sentences given in the US, which can add up to hundreds of years in some states (Bowcott 2012 for Huffington Post). Yet a 10-year determinate sentence minimum made sense in the context of shorter sentences in the UK, and in the context of earlier research on the topic having similar cut-off points. Moreover, some flexibility had to be exercised because of how sentencing frameworks work and because they change over time[4]. For instance, one participant's husband was given a seven-year determinate sentence but had to serve six years, because – according to the participant – he was maintaining innocence for a sexual offence. Isabella's husband was sentenced to a period of imprisonment falling just short of 10 years. Since the sentence was very close to the minimum, and since her husband had spent more than six months on remand[5], it was decided that her interview ought to be included.

[3]In the UK, a 10-year determinate sentence would result in the prisoner spending five years in prison, and five years on license in the community (*i.e.* only ½ of the sentence is served in prison).

[4]In the UK, a prisoner is sentenced under the rules that were in force at the time the offence was committed. This meant that those who committed historic sexual offences were sentenced under old sentencing rules which stated they had to serve ¾ of their sentence, not ½.

[5]Isabella did not indicate that the period of remand was deducted from the total time to be served.

The main data collection method chosen for this research was the semi-structured interview, which can be defined as a conversation eliciting detailed accounts of lives in context, and is an important source of personal narratives (Riessman 1993). The purpose of interviewing, like other qualitative methodologies, is not to test hypotheses but to uncover the subjective meanings participants place on various experiences (Seidman 2006) – in this case, long-term imprisonment of a partner.

The semi-structured nature of the interview allows the subject extensive freedom to tell her story and structure it in the way she feels to be more appropriate. Of course, the participant will be aware of why she is being interviewed and have a good idea as to what the researcher is interested in, which will naturally structure the story to some extent, but this method still allows more flexibility than a structured interview or survey. Importantly, the semi-structured interview allows the participant to bring up themes and issues that the researcher may not have considered, and the researcher is then able to explore them further. This is crucial for exploring an under-researched topic.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow for a degree of informality and rapport-building that are necessary when researching a stigmatised and potentially vulnerable population. The interview is at its basis a conversation – the researcher cannot simply be a passive question-asking machine, since rapport and flow of the conversation may be lost (Holstein and Gubrium 2004). Although conventionally interviewers are taught not to ask leading questions so as to avoid contaminating the data, in practice interaction and encouragement are necessary. I often found myself saying things like ‘My parents also split up when I was young’ and ‘I also have a stepfather’, and answering questions about myself, such as whether anyone I know has ever been in prison. I felt that this allowed me to build rapport and made it easier for the interviewees to feel more comfortable talking about personal and traumatic experiences with a stranger. I will return to the

issue of sharing and building a relationship later in this chapter.

Exploring sensitive and potentially emotionally difficult issues is also easier through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The interview format allowed me to stop when a participant became distressed, as some did, let them have a moment to cry and compose themselves and then either resume from where we left off or permit them to change the direction of the conversation. As I was fortunate enough to have prior welfare training, I felt I dealt with distressed participants with the necessary sensitivity and compassion and was able to adequately gauge their emotional state both during and at the end of the interview. Fortunately, no-one became so distressed as to require the termination of an interview, and all the participants appeared to be in a sound emotional state by the end of their interview.

Finally, as Riessman (1993) describes in the context of her own research on women and their mothers-in-law, the narrative interview also allows the participants a degree of freedom to tell their story in the way they want to tell it. Telling stories, after all, is a meaning-making process (Seidman 2006). For example, a yes/no question may be interpreted as a cue to embark on a long story, and to reveal what it is they remember, have forgotten, and what their memory has emphasised (Riessman 1993). This degree of empowerment may be important when researching a stigmatised and often invisible group of people such as prisoners' families, as already discussed above. In fact, during the course of this research, many women pointed out that they felt that telling their story had been liberating for them because some had not had the chance to do so before.

Interviews with practitioners

As will be discussed below, recruiting partner-participants for this study was a lengthy and difficult process. Due to this, I came into contact with numerous practitioners working with prisoners' families in various capacities; charitable organisation staff, policy officials working in the criminal

justice system, and others. It was decided that a small number (six) of semi-structured interviews with some of these practitioners would further supplement the interviews conducted with prisoners' partners. After all, these practitioners often worked with a large number of prisoners' families and were very much affected by the socio-political discourses surrounding imprisonment. Although they could not, due to ethical considerations and confidentiality, speak about individual families, they could provide a broad overview of the issues these families faced, and, between them, had many years of experience of working with families affected by imprisonment.

Observations

The second method utilised to supplement the interviews was a small-scale ethnographic observation of two Family Days held in an English prison. Observation, too, focuses on obtaining 'an in-depth understanding of the meanings and "definitions of the situation" presented by informants' (Wainwright 1997: 4), which is the focus of all qualitative research methods and thus fits well into the overall research design. Moreover, observation allows the researcher to learn about marginalised or stereotyped groups of people (Gans 1999). Observation gives the researcher an opportunity to submerge herself into the context/situation and thus gain a rich comprehension of the phenomena being studied (Reeves, Kuper and Hodges 2008).

Although traditional ethnography involves long-term immersion into the field, much akin to anthropology (Knoblauch 2005), this was not possible in the present study (discussed below). What was done, therefore, is akin to 'focused ethnography' (Knoblauch 2005) – short trips into the field, with a focus on a specific issue (the prison visit). Even though this type of ethnography is unlike the year-long conventional ethnographies that epitomise the method, it can still yield intensive data (Knoblauch 2005) – and, in fact, did in this case, resulting in 10 pages of field notes. As Brockmann (2011: 241) argues in the context of a study of apprentices and learning cultures, which also involved short-term observations, 'even within a compressed time period lived experiences of

aspects of the [issue being studied] can be achieved, based on the active involvement of the researcher as an accepted participant...'.

The observations thus allowed me to witness first-hand what visits and visitor-staff interactions were like in one given prison, and experience the atmosphere of the visit. I also had many informal conversations with prisoners, staff and visitors. This proved to be useful as part of a broader research design and yielded some illuminating contextual data that spoke to the data that emerged from the interviews themselves. After all, if people's identities and social roles are shaped by social contexts, then it is useful for the researcher to participate in these social contexts (Brockmann 2011).

4.2 ACCESS AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In this section, I will discuss the process of gathering data via interviews and observations, and reflect on the specific features of the data as well as the challenges and difficulties encountered during the data collection process.

4.2.1 INTERVIEWS WITH PRISONERS' PARTNERS

Having settled on a constructivist, qualitative approach, I embarked upon what was to be a long and arduous process of accessing partner-participants. Even though I had accepted, from the outset, that any sample I was going to get would not be random or strictly representative of all long-term prisoners' partners, I was still interested in getting as great a variety of individuals as possible. This meant trying to recruit women of different ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and those who visited their partner in prison as well as those who did no visit.

Recruitment

I used social media, including Twitter, Facebook, online forums and blogs to reach out to women

who were active on social media platforms. I also contacted a range of prisoners' families' charities and other charities whose work involved interaction with prisoners' families and asked them to distribute my recruitment flyer. This resulted in hundreds of e-mail exchanges and numerous telephone calls – I contacted more than two dozen organisations. These organisations included those working specifically to support prisoners' families, such as AFFECT, Action for Prisoners Families, and Sussex Prisoners' Families. Others were campaigning groups that were not specifically for, but included, family members – such as FACT, an organisation for those falsely accused of abuse and their families.

Some of these charities included a recruitment flyer with my contact details in their electronic newsletters, others spoke directly to individual women they were supporting. Others yet invited me to conferences where I was given the opportunity to meet prisoners' families and introduce my research. Not all organisations were able to help. Two replied that none of the people they were supporting would consider participating in my research. Many initially said they would be happy to help me recruit participants, but then did not reply to further communication. It is possible that with many of these charities being underfunded and understaffed, a researcher's plea was not a high priority. One organisation simply told me they were not willing to help me with recruitment.

I also published a short piece in InsideTime, a nationwide newspaper that is distributed in prisons and read by many prisoners' families. This proved to be by far the most effective recruitment method as it helped me reach a great number of prisoners' families across the country. A small number of the women I interviewed also told of my research to other women they knew – and passed on my contact details to them. However, only a very small proportion of the women recruited were found via snowballing.

Finally, I put up flyers in a small number of prison Visiting Centres, in order to reach out to visitors directly. This, however, did not prove fruitful. It is possible that visitors are so busy and focused on going into the visit that they do not pay much attention to flyers on walls/boards. In fact, as a volunteer in a prison visiting centre, I have often witnessed anxious or stressed visitors; it is not at all surprising that the situation was not conducive to a careful reading of a research recruitment flyer. During my observations of Family Days, I saw many nervous visitors and understood that they were indeed so focused on the visit that they were were not likely to read any materials put up on prison walls. My lack of success in recruiting in this way was disappointing, since I required NOMS permission to put up the flyers, and gaining this permission was a difficult and time-consuming process.

Despite the many difficulties, the breadth of recruitment methods meant that I was eventually successful in recruiting and interviewing 34 women (as discussed above, 33 interviews only could be used). They included those who visited their partners in prison, but also those who did not, or who visited infrequently. It also meant that women who were supported by one or more prisoners' families' charities were included, but also women who were not formally supported. Furthermore, the women I interviewed lived all over the UK, and the sample was thus not limited to a specific geographical area or prison. Although this meant many hours of travel on public transport, the geographical breadth is certainly a strength of the sample as it allowed me to explore the experiences of prisoners' partners across the country and across many different prisons.

In addition to access difficulties, a number of other challenges arose during the recruitment process. Firstly, a number of people contacted me who did not fulfil the research criteria. These included same-sex partners and parents of prisoners, as well as partners of men serving shorter sentences. Although most understood that they did not fall within the research criteria, they still wanted to share their story, and I had to explain why I could not include their stories, in a sensitive

and sympathetic manner. Nonetheless, intimate relationships can be complex – thus, Rachel, who continued to maintain contact with the father of her children, despite the relationship being tumultuous and difficult, was included. Bella, who was the ex-partner of a long-term prisoner (at the time of the interview, released), was also included as she maintained some contact with him and it was clear that she too was being affected by his long-term imprisonment, as will be discussed later.

Secondly, the sentence length requirement proved to be ambiguous in some instances. Although most participants' partners were serving a life sentence or a determinate sentence of 10 years or more, there were a few instances of less straightforward sentences. Rebecca's partner was serving two sentences, one being a sentence for default of payment; added up, these sentences, running cumulatively, were more than 10 years. IPPs, too, were complex. Although the tariff could be short, very often the men would serve longer than that. I adopted the requirement that when an IPP was involved, the participant's partner must either have a tariff of five years or more, or he must have already served five years or more, regardless of the tariff.

The third difficulty related to participants who met their partners during the current sentence, and had therefore not known them prior to their imprisonment. Early on I decided to omit couples who started off as pen-pals due to a potentially different relationship dynamic – this is because the woman here actively seeks to enter into a communication arrangement with a prisoner. Nonetheless, I was contacted by women who met their imprisoned partners when working in various capacities inside prisons and were, at the time of the interview, in long-term exclusive relationships with them. All of these women had been in their relationships for at least one year. These women's stories, it was decided, were also valuable. Although they did not go through the shock of arrest and trial like the women who were in a relationship with the prisoner prior to the current term of imprisonment, they nonetheless shared many of their experiences. This included long periods of visiting, making phone calls, planning for the future, coping with stigma (which was often exacerbated by the

circumstances in which the couple met), and so on. There are, however, differences that will be discussed in the following chapters.

Relatedly, I opted not to require that the participant and her partner be in a relationship for a given amount of time prior to imprisonment. This was primarily for practical reasons. Such a requirement would create the risk of narrowing the sample to the point where it would have been even more difficult to get participants. Moreover, the complexity of intimate relationships makes it difficult to define when a relationship began. For instance, the couple could be "on and off" for a period of time. Moreover, as was the case with Mary, intimate relationships can begin as friendships. She had known her partner for a long time before he was imprisoned, and had visited him regularly as a very close friend before they became a couple. At the time of the interview, they had been a couple for more than two years. Even before then, however, she had been experiencing some of the challenges associated with maintaining a relationship with a long-term prisoner, such as missing his company, visiting and coping with stigma.

Finally, it was decided early on that it would not be practicable to set a minimum time served, and thus women whose partners were in the early stages of a long sentence were included as well as partners of those who were well into their sentence and partners of men who had already been released. The benefit of including women at varying stages of the sentence was that two perspectives could be gained: that of a participant who was just adjusting to a partner being given to a long sentence, and of one who had already quite a bit of experience of her partner being imprisoned for a long time. I could also touch upon the challenges that arise after release, since some of the women's partners had been released not long before the interview. A longitudinal study would have been ideal to examine the continuing nature of the impact of the impact of long-term imprisonment, but this was not possible for practical reasons in the context of this study (difficulty of gaining access to the participants and limited time for data collection).

Overall, the challenges of access meant that a flexible approach to recruitment had to be adopted. It became clear early on that definitions which seemed, initially, to be relatively clear and straightforward were, in reality, far from it. Researchers working in such a sociologically complex context must, therefore, exercise flexibility and be ready to adapt to the unexpected.

Interview process

Once a participant was recruited – a process that took 24 months in total – they were sent an Information Sheet outlining the details of the study and covering confidentiality and anonymity, as well as the complaints procedure. The participant was given time to read the information and consider whether they wanted to participate, as well as to ask any questions. Once they were happy with the information provided, the process of finding a date, time and place for the interview began. This often involved many e-mails and/or telephone calls, but even though the process was time-consuming, it provided an opportunity to build rapport and allow the participant to be as much at ease with the prospect of talking to me as possible.

All but three interviews were conducted face-to-face (three were conducted by phone – discussed below). Primarily, the interviews were conducted in the town/city/village where the participant lived, so as to make it more convenient for her and to save her having to cover travel costs. During pre-interview communication, I asked the participants if they knew of a private place that would be convenient to them but was not their home – some, in fact, went on to arrange a location for their interview. One participant chose her church building, and another a room in the university where she was studying. Most interviews were conducted in private function rooms of public houses, cafes or restaurants, which I arranged myself. Others were conducted in empty hotel dining rooms, others yet in community centres, churches, and university offices. All these locations were neutral in the sense of being neither the participant's home nor the researcher's office, and

most were private. One interview only was conducted in a quiet corner of a public house rather than a separate room. The participant wanted to use this location and insisted she had no issue with the venue not being a private room.

All the interviews were one-to-one, except one, where the participant, Estelle, unexpectedly brought a female friend to sit in on the interview with her. Although I had not been warned about this, I decided to go ahead with the interview, especially since Estelle's friend did not interrupt the interview and seemed to provide a sense of comfort and security for the interviewee. This highlighted the need for adaptability and flexibility when it comes to conducting interviews. The process does not always go to plan and there is, at times, a need to make decisions on the spot.

Although I had an interview schedule with a list of topics I wanted to cover with each participant (Appendix 2), I adhered to Seidman's (2006) advice that such schedules should be used cautiously. After all, the in-depth interview seeks to explore the participant's experiences and the meanings she makes of them, and not to test a hypothesis (Seidman 2006). Any questions should, therefore, follow from what the participant is saying. The conversation flowed more naturally as I quickly became familiar with the topics on the guide. I usually opened with the question “Can you tell me a little about yourself?”, and this was taken by most participants as an opportunity to launch into their story. I could then pick up on specific themes as they arose. For example, if they mentioned they visit their partner in prison, I would ask – “What are these visits like?”. Where issues I wanted to cover did not arise naturally, I waited for an opportune pause in the story to ask them. For example, the issue of whether the imprisoned partner had become, to any extent, institutionalised while he was in prison rarely came up on its own, though when asked, most women understood exactly what the term meant and discussed whether their partner was, in their opinion, institutionalised.

Feminist approach to interviewing

One strength of interviewing as a research method is that it explicitly acknowledges the role of the interviewer as a flexible, adaptable and sensitive research instrument (Seidman 2006). Traditionally the interviewer is encouraged to be neutral and impersonal, merely asking questions and gathering data, so as to ensure the data is as much a reflection of the participant's experiences as possible (Seidman 2006). This was not an entirely appropriate approach to take in this instance. These were women who were often stigmatised and who feared stigma, and some of them were in various ways vulnerable (to be discussed later). I was also asking them to talk about potentially traumatic events in their lives, and to reveal details about their intimate relationships with their partners.

I thus turned to the feminist approach to research, one that encourages non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships between researcher and research subject (Reinharz 1983, Oakley 1981). Feminist scholars tend to eschew the strict positivist separation between object and subject of research and promote research that reveals the actual voices and experiences of women (Stacey 1988). Such an approach encourages the researcher to answer interviewee's questions, share her own knowledge and thoughts, and give support when asked (Oakley 1981). This is said to promote equality of relationship and build rapport, something that is both ethically necessary when interviewing stigmatised and vulnerable populations, but is also practically important, since a positive, open relationship promotes openness and honesty of response.

Yet what makes the feminist approach to interviewing feminist – what sets it aside from ethically sound, sensitive, interpretive interviewing that seeks to understand individuals' stories and treat them sympathetically and with a great degree of understanding? It is not unusual for writers on feminist methodologies to avoid discussing exactly what makes these methodologies feminist. For instance, DeVault, in her book *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research* (1999), has a section entitled 'What is Feminist Methodology?', and yet merely sets out common themes of

feminist methodologies, and eschews giving a fixed definition (Richey 2001).

What, then, is feminist interviewing? Burgess-Proctor (2015) set out several guiding principles to feminist methodology:

1. Centering the lives and experiences of women and making their experiences known

My research focused explicitly on female partners of long-term prisoners, and as such sought to uncover their experiences.

2. Reducing power differentials between research and participants

As discussed in this chapter, I sought to reduce power differentials by giving participants the freedom to participate, choose the location of the interview, elect whether the interview was recorded or not, and answered questions and engaged in a conversation with them, thus reducing the distance between interviewer and interviewee.

3. *Researcher reflexivity*

Below, I discuss my own role as a young, female, middle-class, Oxford-educated researcher and the impact this may have had on the interviews.

4. *Ethics of care (a concern for respecting the participants)*

I was concerned with the ethical dimension of the interviews; I ensured all participants understood the research and its purpose, protected their identities, was sensitive to their emotional state and provided them with details of external support organisations to talk to in case of any distress. I sought full ethical approval from the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee before conducting any interviews.

5. *Advancing social justice and achieving social change for women*

One of the reasons for conducting this research was to uncover the experiences of an under-researched group of women. Considering the pains and deprivations prisoners' families often endure, making these experiences known has a chance of adding to a momentum of social change

and could help bring about more help and support for prisoners' families in general and long-term prisoners' families in particular.

None of these principles are exclusively feminist (Pini 2003). What makes the combination of these principles feminist is the way they are engaged in the context of feminist theory and epistemology (Pini 2003). Moreover, my approach, though it does not go to the extent that Oakley (1981) advocated in her earlier work, goes beyond simply ethically sensitive, interpretivist research. As the principles set out above show, there is an explicit desire to reduce the distance between researcher and participants; this feature does not appear within traditional interpretivist interviewing. Combined with a focus on women's experiences, therefore, the approach set out above becomes indeed feminist.

I did my best to be friendly and informal in both my communication with the participants and during the interviews themselves. I engaged in joking and informal chats about family, weather, hobbies and pets, and consciously avoided dressing in formal business attire, resorting to casual clothing for the interviews. I found myself answering questions about my own personal life; such as whether I myself am in a relationship, if I have children, where I am from and what motivated me, personally, to embark on this research project. Some writers (*e.g.* Seidman 2006) warn against excessive sharing, on the basis that it could distort what the participant is saying and distract the participant from her own experiences. Thus it was a fine line to tread. Although I wanted to be open and honest when asking for openness and honesty from the participants, I was careful not to overwhelm the interviewees with too much speaking. Looking over the interview transcripts I realised I primarily spoke at the beginning and at the end of the interviews, allowing the participants to engage in detailed discussions of their own experiences, with me only asking questions and making short comments.

The feminist approach at its fullest, however, goes further than this. It encourages the researcher and the participant to move beyond an “I-Thou” relationship (Schutz 1967). This relationship is where the “I”, the interviewer, sees the participant as a “Thou”; not simply an object of research but a person with consciousness and agency. Schutz goes on to argue where both parties see each other as a “Thou”, a relationship emerges that is a “We” relationship; one characterised by a high level of mutual intimacy and openness.

The feminist approach as advocated in Oakley's (1981) earlier work encourages the researcher to establish a full “We” relationship between herself and the participant, and yet this is not what I strove for. I was acutely aware that I was going to interview the participants only once, which meant that establishing a full “We” relationship would not have been ethically sound. Such a relationship in this context would create a risk of exploitation of the participant's trust since a “We” relationship promotes high levels of honesty, openness and emotional intimacy (Stacey 1988). Considering I would not have been able to sustain that relationship after the single interview, this would not have been fair to the participants. Neither would it have been possible to establish such a relationship within such a short period of time. In fact, in her most recent discussion of feminist methodology, Oakley (2015) appears to accept some of these criticisms of her earlier work.

Seidman (2006) advocates a research relationship that is close to the “We” relationship but is not a “We” relationship in full, with the researcher keeping enough distance so as to allow the participant to speak independently and in her own voice. I certainly shared more stories of my own than would be conventional, but was careful not to confound the question as to whose experiences and meanings were being discussed in the interviews: mine or the participants'. In short, I sought to be friendly and open, but not to become a friend. I thus sought to have a balanced approach which was at its core feminist, but not going quite as far as advocated by feminist writers such as Oakley in her earlier work. I was careful not to make promises of an ongoing relationship to any

participant, and though always open to future communication, ensured I did not cross the line that separates "friendly" from "a friend".

This approach proved to be fruitful, as most of the participants answered my questions with honesty and a richness of detail, often speaking about deeply personal and profoundly emotional issues. In fact, one participant said that she would likely have not agreed to be interviewed had I not told her that someone in my family too had been in prison, albeit not in the UK. She felt that this had established a connection between us. Most participants were willing to share deeply personal stories and at times embark on lengthy monologues, clearly feeling they were able to vent their frustrations about the criminal justice system, prisons, and other issues, at me. The fact that I was able to elicit detailed narratives without too much speaking on my own part indicates that my approach worked sufficiently well.

However, I was conscious of not embarking on certain discussions. For example, a few participants, upon finding out I came from a legal background, asked me for my opinion on their partners' cases. I had to explain that I was in no position to give an opinion as I had not been privy to the full details of the case. This explanation appeared to satisfy these participants. Where participants were clearly distressed by a topic or where it was potentially distressing – such as a participant's ill health – I was careful to phrase any questions probing further into such issues sensitively and asked them in a gentle, quiet tone so as not to pass across as interrogatory.

The women saw me as both a 'friendly stranger' and a 'sympathetic listener' (Cotterill 1992: 596). I was a friendly person they could share their frustrations and traumatic experiences with, without fear of stigma, and with a degree of sympathy and understanding. However, I also a stranger, and our relationship was a temporary, transient one. They were risking little by sharing their experiences with me, since I was not in their social circle. I was there to listen to their stories,

but was not a friend or relative, and our relationship would terminate when the interview was over. Naturally, I felt that some participants were more candid than others, but at no point did I feel that any participant was distant, uncomfortable, or withholding significant amounts of important information from me.

It was harder to negotiate my role during the interview when participants became distressed or spoke about highly disturbing issues, such as histories of sexual abuse. Should I, as a researcher, have let them talk about such things and risked them becoming upset? It would have been ethically wrong to try and divert the topic of the conversation if a participant wanted some talk therapy (Cotterill 1992). Like Cotterill (1992), I preferred to be the sympathetic listener and allowed the participants to talk, offering tissues and giving them time to compose themselves as necessary. As I had not gone through such issues, I could not pretend to comprehend them or their traumatic impact. When participants began to cry, I adopted the approach advocated by Seidman (2006) – give the participant time and do nothing. I did offer them tissues and reassured them that it was alright to cry, but did not take any undue responsibility for their distress. If their distress had continued, I may have had to either end the interview or change the topic of the conversation – however, no-one got distressed to the point where I felt this would be necessary.

Finally, it should be pointed out that a fully equal relationship is arguably impossible in a research setting. There are always ways in which the researcher holds power; at the very least in the sense that it is the researcher who interprets and analyses the final data (Cotterill 1992). What the researcher produces is outside the power of the research subject. The participants' experiences and stories are redefined for a wider academic audience. Of course, some researchers attempt to involve research participants in the sense of allowing them to give feedback on interpretations of data and/or drafts of publications (see Seidman 2006 for a discussion). Yet this is likely to be time-consuming and potentially difficult if a participant asks to withdraw something that informed the

analysis to a large extent, for example. In any case, there comes a point where the researcher has to take full responsibility for what she produces (Seidman 2006) – and at that point, the power balance is in her favour.

Gender, age, status, ethnicity and class of the interviewer

The impact of my age, status and class on the interview process is also worth discussing. Firstly, I was a young woman in my 20s interviewing women older, sometimes significantly older, than myself. Only one was younger than me, and most participants were in their 40s or older (see Appendix 1). As such, there was a sense in which the power balance was in favour of the participants because they had significantly more life experience than me (marriage, divorce, childbearing, decades of employment, and so forth). In fact, once or twice comments to the effect of 'when you're my age...' slipped through, making it clear that some, at least, were conscious of this. At no point did I feel, however, that the participants were "talking down" to me, or that I was unable to comprehend their experiences due to my age. I was also prepared that some participants may be older and hold traditional views of womanhood and wifehood – views I did not necessarily hold myself – and approached such views with an open and accepting mind.

I found that being a woman made it easier for me to connect with the participants and attain some degree of trust. A few told me outright that they would have not participated had I been a man. At the same time, I was careful not to assume that I would have much in common with the interviewee purely because we were both woman. Levels of education, race and socioeconomic class certainly also play and ought to be considered.

In terms of class, I was a middle-class, Oxford-educated and Oxford-based researcher. The reputation of Oxford as an educational institution certainly helped to garner more trust. I vividly remember one woman, as we were going to the room where the interview was to take place, telling

a colleague with some degree of pride that I had come all the way from Oxford to talk to her. However, many of the women I interviewed were themselves well-educated and professional; legal professionals, social workers, retirees, and two women pursuing higher education at the time of the interview. Thus there was often little or no gap in terms of class or socio-economic status. In a few cases, such as with Mary, I even felt like I was talking to fellow academics. With Cara, especially, who was in the process of doing a university degree, we bonded over some discussion of academic research.

Having a degree of class versatility certainly helped me to be confident when interviewing women from all backgrounds (Seidman 2006). I have not had a sheltered upbringing, and although I was brought up middle-class, I have seen poverty and violence in post-Soviet Russia and grew up in a single-parent family. I, therefore, felt equally at ease with a professional, highly educated participant and with the few vulnerable, economically disadvantaged participants who took part in this study.

My personal status as a woman who spoke fluent English without any regional accent meant that some women found it difficult to place me, and some asked me about my background. I found that in a few cases, my revealing that I was of Russian origin seemed to make it somewhat easier for the women to open up; there were no class-based prejudices that are often attached to one's region of origin. It also provided a topic for a short, ice-breaking conversation. At the same time, my early childhood memories of post-Soviet violence and poverty in Russia meant I could connect with Sally, who had experienced gang-related issues for many years.

Most of my participants were of White British ethnicity, with only one Black participant and one mixed-race British participant (see Appendix 1). As such I shared the ethnic background of most participants, being White myself, and the issue of racial disparities between interviewer and

participant did not arise (Seidman 2006). However, even with those participants who were of a different race to me, there seemed to be very few problems arising out of our differences. These participants appeared to be just as candid and open with me as other women I spoke to, perhaps because we had other commonalities, such as educational background and experiences of violence. However, Sally, a mixed-race participant, mentioned experiencing racism while visiting, and my attempt to explore this further did not yield any results. Perhaps there was very little to it beyond what she said – she did not appear to be overly troubled by these experiences. Nonetheless, it is also possible that she did not feel able to talk to a White researcher about these issues.

Vulnerability

It is well known that many prisoners are socially excluded. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) defined this as having a history of high levels of familial, educational and mental and physical health disadvantage. Prisoners were found to be much more likely to have grown up in care and/or poverty and have a family member who had been convicted of a criminal offence. They were also much more likely to have suffered disrupted education and most left school at 16 or younger. Moreover, most were found to have never experienced regular employment. Other problems identified included a prevalence of mental health disorders and chronic physical illnesses.

We do not have such data for prisoners' partners, though one might assume that partners would come from similar types of backgrounds and thus also be socially excluded and vulnerable. As a matter of fact, few women I interviewed could be firmly classified as socially excluded in the sense of suffering from clusters of problems identified by the Social Exclusion Unit. Many were professional women or professional but retired, and a large proportion was well-educated. Most were not impoverished, and there was no prevalence of addiction or troubled backgrounds – only one woman had been to prison herself, and most came from ordinary middle or working-class backgrounds. This is not to say these women did not have problems. A large proportion of

participants was suffering from depression or other mental health issues, and although the vast majority had enough money to pay their bills and put food on the table, most were not wealthy. Overall, this sample was similar to the sample of serious offenders' relatives in Condry's (2007) study.

Only two women could be said to be socially excluded. Jenny had had her children taken into care, was economically disadvantaged, had serious mental health problems, and was not working. Casey lost her job after her partner was imprisoned, also had a number of mental health issues, and was struggling financially. Others had various problems, but these were usually isolated problems and most of the women were not suffering from clusters of socioeconomic issues that would class them as socially excluded. Perhaps the nature of academic research lends itself to such a sample – women with severely troubled lives may not have any time to spend on meeting a researcher.

Still, I was concerned about the interview being a source of further anxiety and about the possibility of it exacerbating existing mental health issues. This was because, despite not being socially excluded, many of these women had various vulnerabilities, after all. Yet none seemed obviously distressed at the end of the interview, and many reassured me that they felt better after talking to me, reinforcing Finch's (1984) suggestion that women find an opportunity to talk to someone welcome. Nonetheless, I was very much aware that I could not be a source of sustained support and thus made sure I handed out a debrief document with the details of some support and counselling organisations at the end of the interview. I also assured the participants, especially those who had gotten upset during the interview, that if they ever wanted to talk to me, I was available for informal communication over the telephone or via e-mail.

Moreover, issues pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity highlight a further source of

vulnerability. Speaking to a stranger meant that the participants were making themselves vulnerable to a risk of further stigmatisation. One participant thus asked me – apologetically – for a piece of ID to prove that I was who I claimed to be. Others admitted to Google-searching my name to ensure I was not an undercover journalist who would make their story public. I, therefore, had to be careful to assure them I would not reveal their names, that I would transcribe the audio-recorded interviews myself, and that the consent forms – which bore the participants' real[6] names – would be kept safely locked away. Moreover, I made it clear that all names, dates, and places would be redacted or changed in any publication. I also told the participants that if they told me anything they did not want to be published for identification reasons, they should point this out and I would redact that piece of data. One participant, for example, asked me not to reveal her partner's offence.

There are also vulnerabilities created by qualitative research and the close relationships it is conducive to. Although qualitative research has the potential to empower vulnerable participants, I was aware that this could too easily be taken as a default benefit of this kind of research. The closeness developed could be exploitative, as Maher (2000) discussed in the context of her ethnographic research on female sex workers. Although my research was not an ethnography, meaning the period of time I spent with these women was comparatively short, the feminist approach I took meant we developed friendly relationships. Was it fair to ask these women – some of whom were vulnerable indeed – to give up some of their time and effort to take part in an academic endeavour that would further my own career (Maher 2000)? I attempted to mediate this by making sure I asked the women if they needed to be away at certain times, being very flexible with scheduling interviews, and so forth. I also avoided becoming a friend and offering any help or advice I felt would not be ethically sound (such as expressing opinions about legal cases,

[6]I, of course, cannot be entirely sure that the names the women put on the consent forms were in fact their real names. I use this term to distinguish these names from the pseudonyms I gave the participants when I transcribed the interviews.

relationships, and so on).

Yet we also cannot ignore the fact that researchers in general, and female researchers especially, are also vulnerable in some ways (Cotterill 1992). Ultimately, I was dependant entirely on the participants stepping forward and volunteering to speak to me, and on them actually attending the interview. In fact, a few women who contacted me expressing initial interest did not reply to my following communication; whether this was because they did not like some aspect of the study upon reading the Information Sheet, lost interest or were simply too otherwise occupied to go through with the interview, I will never know. In order to not inconvenience any potential participant unduly, I developed a policy of not following up with anyone more than three times, with a few weeks in-between each message. If no reply came through, I assumed the person was no longer interested in participating.

Moreover, I was unable to offer any remuneration to the participants, other than offering them a drink if the circumstances permitted (*i.e.* if we were at a venue that sold refreshments). This meant extra care had to be taken so that those who were not well-off did not have to travel far and incur expenses. I thus conducted all the interviews in locations close and convenient to the interviewee. Nonetheless, this lack of remuneration did not seem to be an issue; most of the participants told me, either before or during the interviews, that they were motivated by a desire to share their story and make the experiences and struggles of partners of long-term prisoners more widely known. Many also appreciated being listened to and the opportunity to talk openly to a non-judgemental person (Seidman 2006), and expressed a hope that their stories might make a difference in the long run, for example, by raising public awareness of the difficulties prisoners' families face. Yet I also had to be careful not to create undue expectations (Maher 2000). After all, one piece of research can only hope to generate interest and dialogue, not wholesale socio-political change.

I was fortunate that all participants did keep their appointments as planned, despite the fact that some had to reschedule at the last moment due to unforeseen circumstances. They could also choose what they did or did not tell me – I had no way of ascertaining whether anything was being kept back other than my own subjective feelings. Finally, as a new researcher conducting her very first empirical study, I did not believe myself to be an expert (Cotterill 1992) and was constantly concerned about upsetting and/or annoying my participants either in pre-interview communication or during the interviews themselves. I was, therefore, eager to be helpful and accommodating, perhaps sending too many e-mails and being overly cautious about ensuring the date, place, time (*etc.*) of the interview were convenient. Likewise, being asked my opinions on politicians, policies and legal cases made me feel vulnerable because I had to consider whether I could comment without unduly affecting the interview.

Being a physically small young woman, travelling long distances, sometimes very late into the evening, also made me feel vulnerable, especially where the areas concerned were somewhat "rough". I remember standing on a train platform late at night after the participant mentioned that the location was not especially safe and feeling ill at ease until a group of young women joined me in waiting for the train. In one case I had to take an overnight bus and wait at a bus station well past midnight.

Most of the interviews were also conducted in towns, cities and villages I had never been to. The process of arriving early in order to find the place and avoid being late for the interview also placed me in a somewhat vulnerable position. I recall one unfortunate instance of an address where the interview was supposed to take place being identical to an address in a nearby village. By the time I realised I was in the wrong place, I was running late for the interview and had to rush to the correct place in a taxi that a kind passer-by called for me. Train and bus delays and infrequent

running times, too, were a constant source of stress during the interview process. As I do not drive, I was entirely reliant on public transport.

The researcher's emotional work, inherent in doing qualitative research, is not often discussed (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2009), and yet is a large part of such research, especially when the topic is sensitive and potentially upsetting or traumatic. I myself was made vulnerable in the sense that during this research, I was exposed to numerous stories of suffering and trauma, and at times abuse and violence. As a woman, I could relate to topics of (often acute) loneliness, thwarted hopes of a happy marriage, and missing a partner. These issues could not fail to touch me, and I often left interviews feeling sad myself; the threat of emotional exhaustion arising out of doing such research was certainly present (Dickson-Swift *et al.* 2009). Thankfully, the interviews were far enough in-between for me not to feel emotionally worn out.

Women are also expected to undertake more emotional management than men (Hochschild 1990), and even within the same occupations, women perform more emotional labour than men (*e.g.* James 1992). Socially, therefore, women are conditioned to be more receptive and sensitive to emotional issues and concerns of others. As a female researcher, I certainly felt emotionally sensitised to the issues that my participants discussed. Their tears moved me, and I felt acute indignation when I heard stories of stigmatisation and mistreatment by prison and other criminal justice staff, for example. Yet I felt able to manage these emotions, as I could speak to my supervisor, who had done very similar research in the past, and, being welfare-trained, knew much about self-help. Moreover, my legal background had already exposed me to stories of abuse, violence and suffering – hearing about these things, though undeniably saddening, did not come as a shock, and I knew how to shelter myself from becoming seriously distressed.

Despite being able to manage my own emotions, I could not fail to note a shift in my own

worldview. In their research on female mental health professionals working with survivors of sexual assault, Schauben and Frazier (1995) found that some perceived a change in how they viewed the outside world – *e.g.*, whether the world was a "good" place or not. Listening to stories of women who felt they and their partners had been treated unfairly and unjustly, sometimes in a stigmatisatory and highly punitive manner, I felt I was becoming more critical of the criminal justice system than I had been before. Although I had, of course, read about these themes in the literature on prisoners' families, listening to real people brought these issues closer to home.

Recording and note-taking during interviews

All but two interviews were audio-recorded, with the participants being given the option of asking for handwritten notes to be taken if they were uncomfortable with their voice being recorded. The interviews lasted between 45 and 130 minutes. I was careful to ask, at the beginning of the interview, if the participant was happy for me to turn the voice-recorder on, and reinforced the fact that I was quite happy to take notes if they preferred me to.

Audio-recording allows for a verbatim record of the interview and means that the researcher's attention does not need to be split between conducting the interview and taking notes. In fact, I felt that I was able to focus better on the interviews that were recorded, as I was able to hone in on what the participant was saying and ask follow-up questions. This was harder when I had to also take notes.

However, audio-recording interviews is not without its own issues. Participants may be reluctant to speak openly when an audio-recorder is working, even if they had agreed to the interview being recorded (Booth and Booth 1994). Although all the participants in this research appeared to be mostly candid and open during the interviews, some did apologise for swearing being recorded, which shows that they were at least somewhat conscious of the conversation being

recorded. There were certainly some topics a few participants did not wish to talk about – such as children and other family members – but this appeared to be a general reluctance to talk about a very sensitive topic to a stranger rather than anything to do with the voice recorder. Nonetheless, the fact that some felt comfortable enough to opt for handwritten notes indicates that participants did not agree to the interview being recorded out of a sense of obligation to make the researcher's job a little easier. In addition, I opted for a very small voice recorder, so that it would be as easy to ignore as possible. Despite being a very small recorder, the quality of the audio did not appear to have been affected (Seidman 2006 expressed concerns about sacrificing audio quality for the size of the recorder).

There are, of course, other limitations to recording. Although the sound quality was usually excellent due to the interviews being conducted in private rooms, there was sometimes music playing in the background, and, at one point, my stirring tea made what the participant was saying completely inaudible. Such interruptions were, however, brief and infrequent, and it was usually possible to deduce what the participant was saying from the context. The only major difficulty with audio was Helen's interview, which was conducted on an empty open heath – the noise created by the wind meant that audio quality was far from stellar, something I had not considered at the time of the interview. Accents proved to be a challenge when transcribing some interviews; a small number of interviewees had heavy regional accents and this prolonged the transcription process.

Three interviews were conducted by phone. In one case this was because the participant was concerned about anyone seeing her with a researcher, and in the other two for practical reasons. One woman was elderly and going out of the house would have been difficult for her, and the third lived in a very rural area that would have been prohibitively expensive for me to reach. All three were happy to be interviewed by phone and appeared to be open and forthcoming despite the interview not being face-to-face. In these cases – with the permission of the interviewee – the voice-recorder

was placed next to the telephone and the interview was recorded in full.

Reliability, validity and generalisability

Internal validity, or reliability, is an issue to grapple with in qualitative research. Would the participant tell the same story, in the same way, on a different day? What if she was in a different mood and/or mental state? Is she telling the truth, or saying what she thinks she ought to be saying to me as a researcher?

Although only one interview was conducted with each participant in this study, the often painstaking efforts I went through to arrange a convenient date and place for the interview and my informal, friendly approach helped to build up sufficient rapport and increase the chances of greater openness and honesty – and thus greater internal validity. I also did my utmost to pick up any inconsistencies during the interview itself. For example, one participant described herself as 'single', even though I knew she was in an ongoing relationship with an imprisoned partner. I followed up on this, asking what she meant by that word, and she revealed her unease with telling anyone she was in such a relationship. Another participant discussed being generally content with her life as it was at the time of the interview, and with her relationship with her imprisoned partner. She then, however, opened up and revealed that the status quo was best simply because she could not bear the thought of anything changing and starting a new relationship. She anticipated that her partner's criminal behaviour may not change in the future. A research structure that allows participants to thus make sense of themselves and their experiences points to high levels of internal validity being achieved (Seidman 2006).

Another clue to internal validity is how much the interviewer herself speaks (Seidman 2006). I spoke relatively little, with the interview transcripts being mostly long sections of the interviewee's speech. This indicated to me that the words were the interviewee's own and that they

reflected her experiences.

Ultimately, as Booth and Booth note, 'in this type of research, the [internal] validity of the data is the stuff of the relationship between interviewer and informant' (1994: 421). What they mean to say is that the interviewer is best placed to gauge the internal validity of the interviewee. A participant who tells me about a profound life-changing event that alters her perception of her relationship with her imprisoned partner is unlikely to be untruthful, for example. The same can be said of a participant who sheds real tears, or who speaks about highly intimate aspects of her life (such as having phone sex with her partner). Such a relationship can be established only if time is spent together with the participant and sufficient rapport is built up (Booth and Booth 1994).

Although generalisability, or external validity, is the focus of quantitative, positivist research, it need not be thus dismissed in qualitative research either (Levy 2006). Nonetheless, some writers (*e.g.* Wolcott 1990) are critical of using the term when it comes to qualitative research because the focus of such research is depth and understanding (Levy 2006). Ward-Schofield (1993) thus proposes that qualitative researchers use terms such as 'comparability' and 'translatability' instead of generalisability, and Guba (1981) propose the term 'fittingness'. These terms refer to the extent to which the given findings fit, or are transferable to, other contexts. For example, findings from this study of the impact of long-term imprisonment on partners of prisoners may be transferable to prisoners’ families in general and may inform the support given to all long-term prisoners’ families by front-line support organisations.

Differences between the ethnic backgrounds, class, social status, and age groups of participants are thus also important and insightful and could increase the generalisability of the findings if as large a variety of views and opinions as possible is present and carefully explored:

> Generalisable [qualitative] studies actively draw on a well-developed theoretical framework and sample for key theoretical concepts, diversify their sample to derive an explanatory model that is relevant to a broader range of settings, and can be implemented in practice with a high degree of confidence. An important purpose of diversification of the sample is to search for disconfirming cases, *i.e.* those participants who do not fit the developing conceptual understanding of the data, and to explore the nature and extent of these differences. This contributes to the generalisability of the findings by providing a comprehensive explanation of the research issue.
> (Gibbs *et al.* 2007: 543).

In order to maximise translatability, maximum representativeness needs to be achieved, as far as possible: this can be done by ensuring that the sample is sufficiently varied (Kitto, Chesters and Grbich 2008). I certainly tried to ensure as varied a sample as possible. I publicised my request for participants widely and via a variety of methods. My participants included women who were married, engaged, and partnered with a man serving a long sentence, as well as women who were members of support organisations and those who were not. Women at varying points of the sentence were also included, and my participants lived all across England and Wales, with one in Northern Ireland and one in Scotland. A range of offences was also represented; from sexual offences to firearms and fraud offences.

Nonetheless, there are a number of ways in which my sample is not fully representative. Most of the women were White British, for instance. This does not reflect the racial composition of the sentenced population (though it is much harder to gauge the racial composition of prisoners' partners since there are no statistics that are routinely taken). Moreover, most of my participants were older, with few younger women represented in the sample. The majority were also middle-class and educated, and a half of the sample maintained their partners were innocent. In Appendix 1, I provide a table of the participants' characteristics, including their age and ethnicity. Few women had young children, primarily because the sample, on the whole, was older.

Although generalisability was not a key focus, I wanted to ensure as much comparability as

possible, and thus took careful note of ages, marital status, ethnic background, and an approximation of class based on what the participant said about herself and her family. This should ensure that any further research would be able to compare the findings from this study to findings arising out of a study with a different sample, and provide further comparison and analysis of differences and similarities.

4.2.2 INTERVIEWS WITH PRACTITIONERS

Interviews were conducted by telephone, and contemporaneous notes were taken. As I was already acquainted with these practitioners, no additional work had to be done in order to access them. The participants included two individuals running a support organisation, a former head of another support and advocacy organisation, a front-line criminal justice system worker working with prisoners' families, and a person who had established a support organisation for falsely accused prisoners and their families.

As the interviews were about the individual's professional work, the ethical concerns were considerably fewer than with interviewing partner participants. Nonetheless, I had to ensure I respected professional ethics and did not ask the interviewees to speak about any individual cases or ask for any names of people they have worked with or supported.

4.2.3 OBSERVATIONS OF FAMILY DAYS

The site for the observational element was chosen because it is a prison that houses primarily long-term prisoners, and is conveniently local. Family Days specifically were chosen because they lasted for around 5-6 hours, and thus provided an extensive insight into these types of visits rather than the usual, shorter visits. Although it was hoped that numerous Family Days would be observed, the complexity and time-consuming (around 10 months) process of gaining access and approval, combined with the fact that only a small handful of Family Days occurred in the prison each year,

meant that only two Family Days could be attended. Still, extensive negotiation, gaining permission from the wings and prior interaction with the prisoners meant that my presence during the Family Day was accepted and did not result in any noticeable awkwardness or tension. Because there were plenty of people walking around, staff and visitors alike, it was easy to blend in.

During observations of the Family Days, I arrived before the visits started, to attend a wing meeting with the staff and was then allowed to walk around the wing and talk to the staff and prisoners. Once the families arrived, I was also free to talk to them, though I was careful not to impose on any private conversations. I found that most prisoners were more than willing to engage me in conversations, introducing me to their families as a researcher and talking candidly about the visits, the prison, their experiences, and so on. Family members, too, were happy to talk to me and some assured that I was not imposing because they had quite a few hours to visit and thus I was not taking away from their time with their loved one (something I was especially concerned about). After each Family Day, I wrote up field-notes of my experiences, conversations and impressions, from memory, as I was not allowed to bring any paper, pens, or voice recorders into the prison.

I found the short-term immersion in the Family Days to be a useful exercise indeed. As useful as detailed stories about visiting are, nothing can replace actually being present during visits and feeling the atmosphere; the initial excitement, the emotionally charged meetings between family members, the nervousness many family members appeared to feel upon entering the wing, and so on. Talking to prison officers allowed me to get a sense of institutional attitudes within that particular prison, and informal conversations with prisoners and family members informed my analysis by providing further insights, without the constraints of a formal, time-consuming interview.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a key, if often under-discussed in methods sections, aspect of research methodology (Willis *et al.* 2007). Making the process of analysis clear allows the quality of the research to be assessed (Willis *et al.* 2007), and for judgements about generalisability to be made because good analysis creates the link between the data (the interview quotations) and the conclusions/findings of the study as a whole. Willis *et al.* (2007) set out four steps for effective data analysis:

Immersion in data: This refers to the analyst being deeply involved or submerged in the data she is analysing. This was not difficult in the present context because I both conducted the interviews and analysed the data that came out of them. I thus saw the participants in person, witnessed any hesitation or confidence in answering the questions, and so on. I also interacted with them pre- and post-interview, and experienced incidents such as being asked for my ID, and in one case a lengthy discussion via e-mail about my motivations and intentions when it came to the research in question.

The interviews that had been audio-recorded were transcribed, with names, places and dates being changed in the process of transcribing. Some other data – such as professions – was also anonymised, because many of the cases were moderately or very high-profile and had received media attention. Participants and their families thus could be identified using this information.

All the interviews were transcribed in full, even when, at first glance, an interviewee seemed to go "off-topic" and embarked a long discussion of her husband's or boyfriend's case or the different kinds of injustices they experienced in the criminal justice system. These "divergences" were deemed to be as important as stories the participant told about stigma, financial impact, and so on, because they indicated what it was she deemed to be important and what concerned her most. A heavy focus on a trial the participant perceived to be unjust, for example, indicates that she was

greatly affected by the experience, especially if she returns to the events again and again and recounts them in great detail.

During the transcription, the interviews were “cleaned up” so that repetitions were omitted, as were my own verbal cues (such as 'Mmm...'). Interviewees’ speech, grammar and syntax were maintained.

Coding and *Categorising*: coding is the process of organising the large volume of interview data and adding labels to various parts of the interviews. These are then categorised/linked under a general category term. I had a list of pre-prepared categories I suspected would be relevant, such as ‘financial difficulties’, ‘stigma’, ‘emotional impact’, ‘physical and mental health’, ‘pre-existing disadvantages’, and so on. Others emerged during the process of coding using NViVo software. As new codes emerged, it became necessary to move back and forth between the interviews to make sure the old categories still applied and to check whether already the coded interviews also had data pertaining to a new category emerging from a later interview.

Identification of themes: this is the step that takes the research beyond simple categories or descriptions but into the domain of ‘an explanation, or, even better, an interpretation of the issue under investigation’ (Willis *et al.* 2007: 549). This is the step where the data is linked to the theoretical framework of the research and where the relevance of the data to people in other contexts is discussed. Without the careful identification and elaboration of the themes, no claims as to the generalisability of the research in question can be made. As Pyett (2003: 1173) explains, ‘analysing data involves critical assessment and interpretation of the participants’ narratives and understandings of their lived experience’. The data has to be woven into sociological theory and context if the findings are to ‘go beyond the perspectives of the participants’ (Pyett 2003: 1173).

The specific type of analysis undertaken was influenced by the thematic analysis tradition (Riessman 1993). The starting point is pre-existing theory, which guides the analysis, even though the researcher remains open to new theoretical issues to emerge out of the data (Riessman 1993). Moreover, the analysis is concerned more with what was said rather than how it was said, and the goal is to uncover thematic categories spanning numerous interviews (Riessman 1993). These categories are then illustrated using small sections of the interview transcripts.

In order to maximise internal validity, a sample of the interviews was peer-reviewed by the research supervisor in order to verify the codes and categories arrived at. This allowed for a form of academic validation (Pyett 2003). Any contradictory or unusual findings were also discussed extensively in order to ensure that a valid explanation for them was provided and that they were not ignored. The data from the interviews with the partners and professionals and the observations was also triangulated. Notes taken shortly after the observations of Family Days in a UK prison were coded and categorised together with the interviews and analysed thematically.

4.4 CONCLUSION

As this chapter shows, researching prisoners' families is fraught with difficulties. It is time-consuming, access can be exceptionally difficult, and there are numerous ethical considerations to bear in mind. The researcher also needs to exercise a degree of flexibility, since a rigid approach to participant eligibility risks narrowing an already difficult-to-access and hidden population even further. Regardless of this, determination and a sensitive, feminist approach meant that 33 interviews were conducted with partners of long-term prisoners, and the interviewees were, on the whole, forthcoming, candid, and willing to talk about sensitive and deeply personal issues.

Although it was not my aim to gather a representative sample of long-term prisoners' partners, I was successful in recruiting women from different areas of the UK, as well as those who

were part of support organisations and those who were going through the prison journey on their own. A Table of Participants is provided in Appendix 1. Having set out the methodological challenges and the process used to gather the data, it is now time to move on to a discussion of the themes that came out of the interviews and observations.

CHAPTER 5
'You settle into it. You adapt.'
The Pains of Imprisonment Experienced Over Time

This chapter begins by setting out the extent to which women in my sample of long-term prisoners' partners were secondarily prisonised – that is, the extent to which they felt the pains of imprisonment (Comfort 2008). I will then show how these pains tended to become, over time, a normal, everyday part of their lives. The third section of the chapter will discuss the coping mechanisms used by prisoners' partners to cope with the pains of imprisonment and how adapting to and coping with these pains transformed some of the partners in a fundamental manner. Comfort (2008) argued that the process of secondary prisonisation, when it occurs over a prolonged period of time, results in the prisoner's partner being fundamentally changed via repeatedly being exposed to the people processing organisation that is the prison. She has argued that

> When the experience of being processed is particularly intense or humiliating, one can posit that recurrent exposure to this ordeal will itself become a transformative course, especially if each occurrence is followed by immersion in a distinctively abrasive and depersonalising environment, constructed to modify and control behaviour.
> (Comfort 2008: 28)

The final section will consider how changes in the prisoner affect his partner. I build on the research that discusses the impact of long-term imprisonment and show that prisoners' partners are both very much aware of and concerned by the changes they see happening in their imprisoned partner over time. This indicates that the pains of imprisonment as experienced by the prisoner also have an indirect effect on his partner. Moreover, I show that some partners also experience the types of changes prisoners go through, such as a degree of institutionalisation.

5.1 SYKES' 'PAINS OF IMPRISONMENT'

Comfort (2008, 2009) showed that prisoners' families in the US experience the pains of

imprisonment, albeit in a muted and temporary manner. This was certainly the case with my sample of prisoners' partners. In this section, I will take each of the pains of imprisonment in turn and explore how the women that made up my sample experienced them.

Deprivation of autonomy

Sykes (1958: 73) defined the deprivation of autonomy as 'subject[ion] to a vast body of rules and commands which are designed to control [the prisoner's] behaviour in minute detail'. He went on to argue that prisoners found regulation by a bureaucratic system to be galling, resenting the trivial nature of much of prison officers' control. This was also a theme to come out of the interviews with my sample of partners of long-term prisoners.

Firstly, almost all the women experienced a deprivation of autonomy. One sense in which this happened was that their contact with their partners was entirely controlled by the prison, and they thus had very little autonomy when it came to when they saw their partner. They could only visit on designated visitation days. Almost half of the sample were employed, and volunteering, childcare, and other commitments also took up time. There are only 8 high-security prisons[7] in England and Wales, and most men sentenced to a long term will start off there, so is not surprising that most of the women had at some point needed to travel far to visit. Freeing up a day or a large part of the day was often not straightforward, especially when visits were weekly or biweekly (Christian, Mellow and Thomas 2004 discuss this in the US context). Juggling competing schedules was somewhat easier for women on flexible working hours, as those participants could arrange their work commitments around prison visits, but for Elsa, for example, who worked during weekends, finding time off for a visit was challenging, especially as some prisons do not have visits every day. Trying to accommodate the prison routine and juggle it alongside work, childcare, and other

[7]These are Belmarsh, Frankland, Full Sutton, Long Lartin, Manchester, Wakefield, Whitemoor and Woodhill.

commitments (to be discussed fully in Chapter 8) was far from easy and sometimes frustrating. Cara's case is a good illustration of this. She worked full-time in the City, and although her employer was sympathetic to her situation, finding time to visit and bring clothes to her partner was, in practical terms, challenging and represented a limitation of her autonomy because the rigid visiting schedules meant she was not free to do what she otherwise wanted to do (such as sacrificing a day off work):

> **Cara**[8]: [I] turned up [at the prison] on a Saturday and they were like – 'no, we don't take clothes on Saturdays'. And I'm like – 'well, I'm pretty sure when he did the form he put the Saturday, because that's the day I told him I was coming with the clothes. Why didn't no-one tell him that you don't take clothes on a Saturday so I wouldn't turn up here with loads of clothes?'. They were like – 'huh, sorry. We don't take clothes on Saturday'. So I'm like, 'great, for someone who works full-time as well, to get him clothes, I have to take a day off. Have to book a visit just so I could give him clothes'.

Similarly, the prison routine often shaped the daily schedules of some women because they found themselves needing to be home in order to receive phone calls from the prisoner (discussed later in this chapter as an example of the women becoming institutionalised). This too limited their autonomy because they could not always go about their lives as they wanted – they needed to wait for the call. Interestingly, with the advent of call-divert, a prisoner's call could be directed from the landline number to the partner's mobile telephone, thus ensuring she was able to enjoy greater autonomy in her daily life. Yet call-divert can be expensive, and this could be a problem for women like Casey, who was not well-off financially. She had call-divert set up on her phone, but because it was expensive, and she still preferred to be at home when her husband called her.

Secondly, visitation itself was often strictly controlled, with the couple having very little autonomy in *how* they interacted. There were rules about what could be taken in and the type of

[8] As noted earlier, the participants' names have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

contact that could take place – some prison allowed hand-holding, for instance, while others did not – and rules about where the visitor was to sit. In this sense, what the partner could and could not do once she stepped inside prison walls was very regulated. She had to sit on a particular chair, and her physical contact with the prisoner was strictly controlled. Visitation thus was a dramatic way in which the partner's autonomy was limited. Once inside the visiting room, she became a 'quasi-inmate' in the sense that Comfort (2008: 21) described: subjected to the same kind of controls and regulations that the prisoners were subjected to. Of course, this is partly due to the fact that the sentences the men were serving were long and thus the crimes they were convicted for were serious. This meant that most of the men were, at least at some point, in high-security prisons where visitation was subject to numerous and rigid rules. Almost all the participants described themselves as law-abiding working/middle-class women, and thus some did not feel it was just for their autonomy to be limited and for officers to have the right to control their behaviour. These participants resented the control officers had over what they could and could not do during visits, just as prisoners resented such control in Clemmer's (1958) study. Consider Elly's words below: she was a well-educated women who felt that the degree of control staff had over her frustrating and difficult to endure.

> **Elly**: ...it's the element of control and them purporting to tell you how to behave. I find quite disturbing. Because... This is gonna sound terrible – I am better educated than most prison officers. As far as social status is concerned, my social status, being in the legal profession, is above theirs. I probably earn more money than they do. Not that any of these things make me better, don't get me wrong. But what it does... I find it very difficult, yeah, for these people to turn around and purport to tell me how to behave. I don't think I need them to tell me how to behave, thank you very much. I find it quite sinister...

Thirdly, lack of privacy was a strong theme to come out of the interviews and observations. This ought to be considered as a further dimension of deprivation of autonomy because constant supervision within the prison is intended to control the behaviour of the prisoner and ensure he obeys prison rules. The women in this study, too, felt that their freedom was limited by the fact that

their visits were scrutinised by officers on duty, phone calls were listened to and letters were read. This was all the more so when they could hear clicking or echoing that signified a call being listened to. Most of the women said the lack of privacy meant that there were topics they were unable to speak about over the phone or in letters, and, more rarely, during visits. These were either deeply personal topics – emotional conversations and conversations about family members – or discussions of the prisoner's legal situation. In this sense, they experienced a deprivation of autonomy because they did not feel that they were free to discuss whatever they wanted to discuss with their partners.

> **Isabella**: [The] phone calls are a waste of time because you can't say anything, he has to be careful, if he talks about his case he has to be careful.
>
> **Sarah**: I think the hardest part is when you know there's things you want to talk about, but you can't talk about, you know, because they're quite personal. Because when you're on a visit...
> **Anna**: You mean kind of emotional things?
> **Sarah**: Well, I'm talking about, I'll give you for instance... I don't mind telling you... Because my doctor seems to think I might benefit from surgery. And it's things like that, you know, I don't want to be talking about on visits, because I think, I don't want the whole world and everybody else to know my business. For me, I find that quite difficult, you know, to share. You know, because I think... I know I can talk to him about it, but I just can't talk to him about it knowing there's people, you know, people within my scope, you know what I mean? So it is very difficult, from that point of view. […] ...there's just some things you can't talk about. Because of the things that my husband's been accused of [a sex offence involving a child], I am wary of the fact that they are listening for anything in relation to that. So I can't...I find it very difficult, you know, to talk about his nieces and nephews. I should say great-nieces and nephews...because they are under the age of 18, so I have to be very careful what I say. It's absolutely awful, because all I want to tell him is how they are developing, because he loves all his nieces and nephews because it's a natural thing for any uncle or aunt to feel.

Even though the Family Days I observed allow for much more freedom than ordinary social visits, the lack of privacy was still evident. There was a great number of people in what was a relatively small space, with tables very close together. There were few to no opportunities to have private conversations. Some families sat in a narrow corridor, where people – visitors, officers and other staff members – were constantly walking about. Needless to say, this too did not make the visits any

more private.

It is likely that the lack of privacy and the constraints this put on participants' communication with their partners was such a strong theme because all the sentences were long, and thus all prisoners were, at least at the beginning of sentence, in higher category prisons, where it is more common for calls to be listened to and letters to be read. The women were very conscious of prison staff being privy to all their communication with their partner – for instance, one woman commented that her phone calls 'are *all* listened on. Oh yeah...'. This was a taken-for-granted, but often unpleasant, feature of maintaining a relationship with a long-term prisoner. Even when the women became used to the lack of privacy, they still found it to be galling. There is a clear link here to the later discussion (see section 5.2 of this chapter) of the pains of imprisonment becoming routinised but not objectively less painful over time.

What made the lack of privacy all the more troubling for the women was also the fact that they not always know when their phone calls were being listened to and what, precisely, the officers were listening out for. They of course knew that words like 'escape' and 'weapons' should not be uttered, but had little more knowledge than that. There is a lack of information and certainty when it comes to how prison rules are applied – this is the uncertainty that Crewe (2011) says is an additional pain of imprisonment. These rules and regulations were not made clear to the prisoners' partners and thus they did not always know precisely what they needed to avoid talking about, if anything. This relates to Crewe's (2011) discussion of the 'tightness' of imprisonment. Nebulous, minute rules can entangle because there is very little information about how, precisely, they are to be applied, and thus partners are constantly aware of the need to tread an invisible line. These are all problems Crewe (2011) found modern prisoners experiencing and, as the following excerpt from Elizabeth's interview shows, the partners too can feel caught up in these rules when they communicate with the long-term prisoner. They too often have limited information about how and

when they will be subjected to surveillance in the form of their calls being listened to and letters read.

> **Elizabeth**: Apparently they have code-words, and if you say certain code-words, then it flags up things... I don't know, like "weapons", "drugs", the word "escape", things like that. But you're not given any guidance, you know, at all. It's just from what I've actually heard [from other visitors].
> **Anna**: Do you think it would be good if there was more guidance?
> **Elizabeth**: Um... Yeah, in some ways. Because how do I know that I'm not actually holding back too much, if you like, on the phone? I've got no idea, and I don't know whether every phone call is listened to, whether they just pick some at random, or, I don't know, for example, if somebody's actually going through their trial. Maybe they highlight that person and listen to everything.

Rules were sometimes applied in an inconsistent manner, with different officers interpreting prison rules differently. Some were lenient and would exercise flexibility, and some would apply rules and regulations inflexibly, which resulted in uncertainty and frustration for the visitors. The extent to which the women's autonomy was limited, therefore, was not consistent. Fiona described this vividly (quote below) in relation to clothing rules for visitors, using the analogy of game-playing that prisoners in Liebling's (2011) study also used. Although all the women described themselves as being respectful of prison staff and prison rules, they saw some application of prison rules as petty and unnecessary (see also Chapter 7 on stigmatisation within the criminal justice system).

> **Fiona**: The rules all change every time there's somebody else, saying that... Go in there saying – 'have I got to wear my jacket today? Can I take my belt off or shall I leave my belt on? Do I have to take my shoes off today?'. That's what you're doing when you're going in there. And of course, when you go in through those doors, and you get to the other side and [inaudible], it does have an effect on my mind.
> **Anna**: What sort of effect?
> **Fiona**: The effect... They're playing, they're making things a bit ridiculous.

The deprivation of autonomy, overall, was very much felt by almost all the participants. Lisa's passage, below, summarises this eloquently. She met her husband while he was serving his

current sentence, but nonetheless experienced a deprivation of autonomy in the same way that all prisoners' partners did. Lisa gave a number of examples of how prison officers could use their powers in ways that she perceived to be unjust – such as stopping her mail for reasons not obvious to her.

> **Lisa**: It is a controlled relationship. Obviously. It is controlled by the prison. To a very large extent, and... And I think one of the things I really struggled with... I think, in some ways, I've chosen to be in an abusive situation. Where people [prison staff] are going to control me, take away my freedom... […] When they stop your mail... When they... Yeah, the other thing they did to us, they would bring everybody in for the visit, and they wouldn't bring him in.

Deprivation of goods and services

Next, many of the women described what is, in one sense, a deprivation of goods and services. Previous research (*e.g.* Morris 1965, Codd 2000) has shown that prisoners' partners often experience some loss of income, and this was very much true of this sample. Eight of the women in the sample lost their partner's income when he was imprisoned, either in the form of his wage or his welfare benefits. Jenny, an older, retired participant, lost her husband's pension when it was stopped upon his imprisonment. Those women who were not in employment at the time of their partners' imprisonment, either due to health problems or childcare commitments, felt the loss of their partners' income all the more acutely, and following their imprisonment had to rely on welfare benefits. This shows that partners can be affected by imprisonment much more than other family members, since parents and siblings are less likely to be financially dependent on the prisoner's income.

Navigating financial problems resulting from a loss of a breadwinner's income was difficult for the older women who found themselves having to manage the family finances on their own. As Practitioner 2 said – 'if the man has been the breadwinner, she [the partner outside] has to find out what's available' in terms of financial support. Some of the women interviewed, for example, had to

find out how to apply for welfare benefits for the first time in their lives.

A significant minority of participants, moreover, lost their own incomes after the arrest and imprisonment of their partner. Often, this was because employers did not wish to employ a woman linked to a prisoner – the theme of stigma at work will be discussed in Chapter 7 in more detail. For the purpose of this chapter, what is important is that these women suffered a loss of their own income. A minority of women were unable to work because of mental or physical health problems. It should be noted that the women felt that imprisonment either triggered these problems, or, where they were pre-existing, exacerbated them:

> **Anne**: I've noticed, this is stupid too, I've developed a sort of nervous, I think a nervous thing, that makes my face itch. And I know that even today, when I came out, I wondered will my face itch today. Because I find that whenever I get stressed about anything, I develop this very... itch. Around my face. My nose and my cheeks. And that hasn't happened today, but I find that in the prison, if things start to stress me, I go into the visit and I'm itching like mad around my face.
> **Anna**: Has that been from the beginning?
> **Anne**: No, that's just developed from the last year or so.

> **Jane**: I don't think the arthritis would have kicked in [if it had not been for the imprisonment]. He [her partner] reckons it's stress-related – I wouldn't be surprised. I'm sure I'm depressed, there are some evenings I sit there and cry. Just sitting there and then you're – urgh... God. It's ridiculous. But there's no point going on antidepressants because it's not clinical depression. And they can't remove the cause. So, to me, I've just got to cope with it. Some people crack up and have a nervous breakdown. But if I do that, there's no-one to help him and support him. So in another way it's come out is in the arthritis, probably. The stress has come out in that.

Of course, the financial issues described above are a muted version of what Sykes (1958) calls deprivation of goods and services. Although prisoners are directly barred from having access to certain goods and services, this was not the case for the women outside. Yet less disposable income meant that the partners outside were less able to buy the goods and services they had been able to buy previously. Jenny, for example, was struggling to find the funds to replace a broken laptop and said she could only afford the cheapest food, and Susan, having had to leave her job after

meeting her partner in a prison, was no longer financially able to have a 'nice car'. Rebecca, who enjoyed a very comfortable lifestyle prior to her husband's imprisonment, now found herself unable to afford most of what she was used to. She had been dependent on her husband's income and stated that not only did she have no skills that would enable her to find employment, but that she was also too unwell physically to work.

> **Rebecca**: Since we've been married, I've always had some live-in staff, or gardeners and whatever. Now suddenly I've got nothing.

Moreover, there is a temporal aspect that ought to be highlighted. When the sentence is long, the loss of income is long-term. It is not simply a matter of waiting for a short period of time for the financial situation to return back to what it was before. The women had to make serious, long-term financial decisions about taking on more work, staying in a job past their intended retirement age, or deciding whether to sell the family home. Anne, for example, was in her mid-50s, and had to work full-time in order to sustain herself as she had lost her husband's income. She had been planning to work only part-time at that age, but these plans had to be postponed for at least another decade.

> **Anne**: We were only married 4 years, and everything...future looked good. Looked forward to a lovely retirement and enjoying life until the crisis happened. And I work full-time, Anna, work full time. […] I've been able to cope on my pay, full-time, but I do resent, I must say, I do resent, sometimes, that I have to work. And especially when the retirement age has gone up, Anna. I think that I can't even get away when I'm 60 now. You know, I'm gonna have to go till I'm 66 I think. So I'm really looking at 10 years, you know, working full-time. But at the same time, I'm able to do it, and it's just... It's not the way I wanted it to turn out.

The second dimension of deprivation of goods and services relates to the expenses associated with maintaining a relationship with a prisoner (Christian, Mellow and Thomas 2004). Most of the women had to spend money to visit, and all but four sent in money to their partner either regularly or occasionally. Those who did not send in money said they either did not have any money to send, were in negative relationships with the prisoner, or, as in Susan's case, it was the imprisoned partner

himself who sent the participant money he received from working in prison[9]. More usually, thus, they described an additional financial burden associated with a partner being imprisoned. The participants pointed out how expensive phone calls and some prison canteens could be, and that they were the ones to send in money to cover these costs. The money the partner spent on visiting and the money she sent into prison was an additional financial burden that reduced her disposable income. This was made explicitly clear by Lucy, a woman who was not financially well off and, in addition to the normal household expenses, sent in money to her imprisoned partner. The description of her partner as 'an extra bill' is interesting since it highlights how the financial burden of imprisonment fell on her, the partner outside.

> **Lucy**: And [partner] is now classed as my extra bill now.
> **Anna**: Really?
> **Lucy**: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, he says to me – 'just count me as a bill'. Every week when I pay my bills and like I'll send [partner] a £10, so he's like classed like... You know, you pay your bills, so...

Even those who had not lost their partners' or their own incomes – for instance, the women who had met their partners during the current term of imprisonment and those who had been in a relationship but not living together prior to imprisonment and were therefore not financially co-dependent – still felt this additional financial burden and thus had less disposable incomes as a result of the partner's imprisonment. These extra expenses were, in Lucy's words, an 'extra bill' to cover. Those women who were already not financially well-off – and thus did not have much disposable income as it was – felt the burden of this 'extra bill' all the more acutely (Christian, Mellow and Thomas 2004 discuss this in the US context).

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[9]This was very unusual indeed. Most prisoners simply do not earn enough to be able to send money to their partners. In some prisons, however, prisoners are employed for a real wage. For example, a program in HMP Coldingley employed prisoners as graphic designers, and ran until 2008 (Daniel 2015). Such programs are very unusual, and most prisoners earn only £9.50 a week (on average) – BBC 2008.

Finally, although most of the women did experience a deprivation of goods and services, there was one participant who explicitly said she had the same amount of disposable income as she enjoyed prior to her partner's imprisonment. Sally, having lost her job in education as a result of being partnered with a prisoner, said she enjoyed being a 'lady of leisure' and spending time with her daughters, and was financially just as well off as before since she had savings and was financially supported by her partner's friends. She, thus, was able to afford the standard of living she was used to. This, nonetheless, was unusual.

Deprivation of liberty

Deprivation of liberty, in the sense Sykes (1958) described it, is the simple fact of prisoners being confined to a prison and thus their liberty – in the sense of their ability to move about – being severely limited. This is, after all, the fundamental part of imprisonment – confining offenders to one institution and removing them from free society. Offenders are confined both to the prison and, within the prison, to their cell. There are thus two senses in which they are deprived of their liberty.

Partners, of course, were not thus confined, at least not permanently. Yet those who visited – this was the overwhelming majority of the participants – felt some deprivation of liberty when they entered the prison. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many felt they were very limited in what they could do during visits. More simply, they too were confined to the visiting room during the visit, and in this sense, their liberty was limited for the duration of the visit. The participants saw this as a normal consequence of visiting a prisoner and accepted this deprivation of liberty, and yet a minority found it very unpleasant. Holly, for instance, described the experience of visiting and being deprived of her liberty as 'absolute hell'. Elly, in the following extract, describes the lack of liberty experienced by visitors: they are told exactly where to sit and are unable to move about freely.

> **Elly**: One [visiting room] is a table and three chairs, it's a low table and there are three plastic chairs bolted together to the floor and there's a plastic chair on the other side. Again, you are put in a certain place and there is a certain distance.

However, there is likely to be a difference between prisons and prisons of different categories. Higher security prisons are likely to limit the liberty of the visitors more than lower security prisons. Moreover, certain types of visits in certain prisons – such as Family Days – allowed more freedom, with visitors allowed to walk around. In fact, during my observations I saw that prisoners were free to walk around with their families, and even go outside and enjoy some fresh air. These visits, thus, provided a great degree of autonomy and freedom for both prisoners and their families. These visits, however, were quite rare – once or twice a year – and only reinforced the deprivation of liberty experienced by partners during normal visits. Moreover, this was the only prison in the country to allow such a degree of freedom. Lisa, in the following extract, describes the freedom of a Lifer Day, a special type of visit for prisoners serving life sentences and their families. Her description indicates the extent to which she has experienced deprivation of liberty during normal visits, since walking around the garden – an otherwise mundane, everyday activity – during a prison visit was, for her, something rare and unusual.

> **Lisa**: And we've got a Lifer Day coming up soon, at the end of the month.
> **Anna**: That's a specific visit for lifers?
> **Lisa**: Yeah, yeah. They have a whole day, where you can go in for a whole day. You have... You eat together, you have a meal, you can walk around the garden. We've been on one before, when he was in [prison], and it was just fantastic.

Deprivation of heterosexual relationships

Unlike prisoners, partners outside are not necessarily deprived of all sexual relationships. They are, however, deprived of sexual intimacy with their imprisoned partner, since conjugal visits are not permitted in UK prisons. Although sexual intimacy is socially seen as an integral element of marriage/intimate partnership (Condry 2007), only four women said that they missed that element of their relationship. It is possible that the women were reluctant to speak about sexual matters to a

stranger, especially if the prisoner was someone accused of a sexual offence. It is also possible that one reason why, for some, the deprivation of sexual intimacy was not experienced as especially painful was because many were older and in established, long-term relationships. Some of the women in long-term marriages said that physical intimacy was no longer a critical part of the relationship, though this is not to say it was altogether unimportant. Holly, for instance, said explicitly that as she was older and because she and her husband had been 'married for so long, sex [was] not important'.

Notably, two of the women who met their partners in prison and said that they had never been intimate with them, wished there was an opportunity for sexual intimacy (*e.g.* through conjugal visits, which do not happen in the UK). They experienced the deprivation of physical intimacy acutely because they had never had an opportunity to engage in this form of intimacy with their partners.

> **Lisa**: Actually, I think, I got to know myself as a sexual being and him as well and what intimacy is really about through being in a relationship with him, much more than when I was married. Because of what he is like with me and how I'm able to be myself. And he's somebody that I am able to trust with that part of myself in a way that I wasn't able to trust my husband. He had quite a lot of problems with pornography and [partner] doesn't use pornography. One of the things that attracted me to him in the first place. Because I feel quite strongly about pornography, you know, I just do. And because he doesn't use it... That was one of the things, I remember first thinking – 'wow'... Because that's very-very unusual. So we've talked about why, and we've talked about what sex is for and what it's not for. And how he views women, and all of that. It's been incredibly liberating, and at the same very painful, because you can't help thinking – 'wow, it would have been brilliant'. You know, to be able to be together [physically].

Yet the deprivation of heterosexual relationships should not be seen as merely limited to a deprivation of physical intimacy. Imprisonment results in involuntary separation, and when long sentences are involved, this separation may be for many years. Emotional intimacy and intimate knowledge (Morgan 2013) are also important types of intimacy, and partners in this study felt

deprived of both of these types of intimacy, too. In other words, the participants did not miss their partners just in terms of physical intimacy. They also missed them on an emotional level. Let us now turn to these types of intimacy and discuss them in greater detail.

Emotional intimacy is an important part of any familial relationship (Morgan 2013) – this is the type of intimacy that comes from caring for and supporting someone, and simply from sharing day-to-day lives. This certainly came through in my sample, as almost all of the women spoke about missing the emotional intimacy that comes with marriage or partnership. It was evident during the Family Days how much both the prisoners and their relatives missed each other; I saw numerous prisoners waiting eagerly in the hallway for their visitors to arrive, and visitors rushing towards their imprisoned relative upon arrival. As Anne discusses below, intimacy is comprised not just of sexual intimacy, but also of companionship and sharing a house. Her quote illustrates that a partner may miss all three types of intimacy Morgan (2013) describes; this includes physical intimacy, but also emotional intimacy (companionship).

> **Anne**: Like, I miss [husband], you know, I miss him about the house, I miss him... You know, he would potter about the garden, I miss the company, he was a good cook and all. I miss the intimacy. You know, that [sexual] side of marriage...

Even those women who met their partners in prison missed certain elements of domesticity that they had shared. Judy met her husband in a secure environment and had never lived with him – yet she spoke about putting on a television program about prisons and listening to a short snippet of his voice. In fact, she knew exactly at which point in the program his voice could be heard, which shows the extent to which she missed the emotional intimacy associated with simply being with someone. Susan met her husband in a prison, where they sometimes worked alongside each other – she said she missed those moments of domestic-like companionship:

> **Susan**: [When] he worked on my wing, I used to do the washing up and he used to do the drying up. And I miss that, I miss that so much... I miss that more than anything. And I often joke, say – 'I just wanna do the washing up with you'. He knows what I mean. Anybody else would be like – 'what's wrong with you?!'. But that was really special. Because even though they mean nothing to anybody else, that's just like normal time that we could have together.

Almost all the women missed the emotional intimacy that comes with sharing a household and everyday lives. This is unsurprising since most of the women in this study described close and loving relationships, yet even Rachel, who had an abusive relationship with the father of her children, admitted she still had moments when she missed his 'nice side'. Only Bella stated she did not miss her ex-partner at all: he had been very abusive to her, and she experienced his long-term imprisonment as a form of relief. This reinforces the point that we should not assume all partners would experience involuntary separation from their partner as necessarily a negative thing (see also Comfort 2008). In Chapter 8, I will return to this issue when I consider how some prison relationships were controlling in complex ways, and how imprisonment can create opportunities for coercive control of the partner outside.

The third type of intimacy Morgan (2013) describes, intimate knowledge, will be more fully discussed in Chapter 8. This type of intimacy relates to shared biographies and entwined personal lives and the closeness that arises out of this. I will show that as time went on and life moved on outside, the partner and the prisoner had few opportunities to develop intimate knowledge and some experienced this as very painful indeed.

Most of the women in this sample missed the emotional intimacy and experienced the separation as unpleasant. Over time, the emotional pain associated with the involuntary separation that is brought about by imprisonment did not lessen. In other words, there women did not miss their partners less as time went on. This was because this kind of loss is liminal (Arditti 2012); the imprisoned partner is not dead, but also not present on a day-to-day basis. There is grief and a sense

of loss being experienced by the partner outside, but it is an ambiguous state with no real finality. Unlike when a partner dies, the women could not grieve and “move on”, because their partner was still alive and psychologically present in their lives. Rebecca, for example, described the state she was living in as a 'limbo', and Martha said that she could not grieve and come to terms with the loss because her husband was still alive, and compared the emotional state of having a partner in prison to 'a bereavement, but without that finality of death'.

> **Martha**: It's a bereavement, but without that finality of death. Which sounds really awful. It's that continuum – because you've got... They've been taken away from you, so you've got all your feelings of loss, and having to cope and having to get through it, but you've still got a little bit of contact with them. So you'll see them... Once a month. Or they'll pick up the phone, so you haven't got that... I think with death, that's it. You've got to deal with it. You've got that finality there. With an imprisonment, it's ongoing. So you can't... You can't... There is no chop, there's no finish to it.

The deprivation of emotional intimacy is likely to be a more pronounced problem for partners of prisoners, as opposed to other family members. This is of course not to imply that mothers, fathers and other relatives do not miss prisoners. However, the partner is who the prisoner is more likely to have shared his daily life with, and thus she is deprived of not only physical intimacy, but also of his daily presence. As Casey sets out in the passage below, when a person is imprisoned, a larger part of his partner's life is taken away than that of his other relatives' lives.

> **Casey**: I don't mean to say that a partner's pain is worse, but you have got to understand that if you're partners with someone in prison, you do share your whole life with them. It's not just... Obviously, they [other family members] might love them a bit more because they're family, you know, but the point is, yeah, you share everything with that person. So once they go, you sort of... It's like your life's been cut right in half. It's not just something's been cut out of it, it's like everything's just gone. When they go, everything goes.

Deprivation of security

This pain relates to the inherently unsafe environment associated with putting many offenders together into one confined institution (Sykes 1958). As one prisoner in Sykes' study said – 'The worst thing about prison is you have to live with other prisoners' (Sykes 1958: 77). A prisoner might not see himself as capable of committing acts of violence or aggression in prison, but he may believe his fellow prisoners to be capable of such acts and thus feel unsafe in their presence.

Prisoners' partners, of course, do not live inside a prison in the company of men convicted of – sometimes very serious – offences. Yet almost all the women in my sample visited their partner in prison, at least at some point during the sentence, and this meant they came into contact with other prisoners since visiting rooms are almost always communal areas. Although communication between visitors and other prisoners is often discouraged, a minority of the women in this study certainly did not enjoy visiting and did feel some reduction in their sense of security when they did. Jenny, for example, opted not to take her young son to visit her husband because she feared for the child's safety. Fiona felt unsafe and humiliated when she had to walk through prison wings in order to see her husband, who was in a wheelchair and was unable to have visits in the normal visiting room.

> **Jenny**: The way it is, is that [there are] criminals in this [prison]... There's more criminals [who have done] what they're accused of, especially child sex offenders. And if they see a pretty little boy like that, thinking – mmm. Thoughts going through their head.
>
> **Fiona**: The lifts weren't working. So he couldn't get to the visits. I had to walk through the prison and get humiliated by all the prisoners and rude remarks said through the windows.

The women were not only deprived of a sense of security by being exposed to convicted prisoners. Some of the women in my sample also spoke about a deprivation of security they experienced in the Visiting Centres, while coming in contact with other visitors. This, of course, is

not to say that other visitors were violent or behaved in any criminal way. Yet the participants described some visitors as being of a very different social background to themselves. Some of these other visitors would swear loudly and act boisterously – behaviour which was described as intimidating by some of the women I interviewed. It is possible that the women were, consciously or unconsciously, attempting to distance themselves from the stereotypical image of the troublesome, socioeconomically disadvantaged prisoner's wife. Susan, for example, said she did not want to be 'lumped' with other prisoners' partners, whom she described as impolite and boisterous.

This likely reflects the fact that most of the women in my sample said they came from untroubled middle- or working-class backgrounds and thus had little to no prior experience of prison. Consider, for example, Sandra's description of other visitors. She described herself as a middle-class, well-educated woman in full-time employment who visited her husband in prison for more than five years. Because of her social background, she found other visitors to be intimidating –

> **Sandra**: I mean, it's not the most pleasant place to visit, a prison. A lot of hanging around, people you see in the waiting room who look like they should be inside as well... Uh... Hope you don't catch their eye funny, you know. Oh... The tattoos and the... Urgh. Some of them have been self-administered. And it's quite clear that some of them regard prison as being a normal part of life, you know, it's sort of like one of the things you do. Like going to college. You go to prison.

5.2 THE PAINS OF IMPRISONMENT EXPERIENCED OVER TIME

The next step in the analysis is to consider whether the pains of imprisonment, over time, became in any sense less painful for the partners. Certainly, it comes as no surprise that arrest and sentencing were traumatic for most partners, a finding that supports earlier research on prisoners' families (see, for example, Condry 2007, Comfort 2008). Shock and confusion characterised these early stages, with participants using words such as 'utter shock' and 'horrendous' to describe the arrest and conviction. The early visits, too, were described as unpleasant and frightening because the women knew very little about how to go about booking visits and visit procedures. The search procedures,

in these early stages, were, by many, seen as frightening. Notably, even the women who met their partners in prison went through a traumatic early stage. This was because they had to go through the realisation they were in love with a man serving a long prison sentence, a realisation that was experienced as traumatic by all in that situation. Lisa, for example, described the realisation as 'deeply shocking':

> **Lisa**: But it was very early on that I realised I'd fallen in love with him, which was deeply shocking to me. And although I'd had a lot of training and a lot of years working with people, it still was very shocking. And I think I kind of kept it hidden even from myself, other people picked up on it before I did. […] You know, for obvious reasons this was not going to be an easy thing to decide. And he... Was married. And he had children. And I felt at one point just before I left [her job], that this was impossible, and I told him that.

However, what I wish to explore in this section is how the women experienced the pains of imprisonment over time. In other words, did the partners stop feeling the pains of imprisonment to any extent as the sentence drew on, or did they continue to find the many pains and deprivations associated with imprisonment as unpleasant and burdensome as at the beginning of the sentence?

Getting used to the pains of imprisonment

This sample supports and helps develop the finding of Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) pertaining to how the pains of imprisonment are experienced over a long sentence. In their study, Hulley and her colleagues found that long-term prisoners became used to the pains and deprivations; these pains and deprivations became a routinised, normal part of their lives. Hulley and her colleagues argue that pains of imprisonment do not objectively lessen over time; instead, they are internalised, a process that leads to a deep and significant change in the prisoners:

> The everyday pains of imprisonment are 'felt' less sharply, because, in some sense they have been internalised into the prisoner's being, and have made him or her become a different person. […] The conceptual distinction between 'self' and 'problem' no longer holds: the former has become adjusted to the constant presence of the latter.

(Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015: 24).

I found this also to be very much the case for this sample of long-term prisoners' partners. When asked if it got easier over time, many struggled to answer that question. Some of the women initially answered the question in the affirmative. Yet upon a closer reading of the interviews, it became evident that they got used to the practicalities of visiting and became much more knowledgeable when it came to prison rules and regulations. At the same time, the emotional impact of the pains of imprisonment often lasted far into the sentence. Missing the prisoner, especially, did not seem to get easier over time and women spoke about experiencing a sense of loss and grief well into the sentence. This suggests that Merriman (1979) was right to argue that a sense of grief might stay with prisoners' relatives throughout the long sentence. In fact, as time went on and the period of separation became greater, a minority of the women admitted to missing their partners even more. For these women, the pains associated with loneliness became worse with time.

Words such as 'used to, 'settle into', and 'adapt' were used to describe the women's broader experiences of imprisonment. They got used to not simply missing the prisoner but also to the lack of privacy, the practical difficulties associated with travelling to prisons, and so on. These phrases create a sense of longevity, of imprisonment becoming a routine part of the woman's life. Yet these words do not imply that the pains are felt any less; rather, they are still there, simmering in the background. Consider the following quotes, which show that getting used to something unpleasant does not necessarily mean it becomes less unpleasant or painful.

Martha: D'you know, I don't think it gets easier. I think you settle into it. You adapt.

Practitioner 4: I don't think it ever becomes easier.... They learn how to manage it.

As the following passages demonstrate, when the pains of imprisonment became a normal part of the women's everyday lives, it became difficult for some of them to understand whether they

were actually suffering – in the sense of feeling the burdens of the pains of imprisonment – or not. They got used to the state of being that was inclusive of the pains of imprisonment and the associated stress and sadness, and over time, started to forget what their life was like before imprisonment. In other words, as Casey and Anne describe below, the pains described earlier in this chapter became so normal that their reference points changed: living with the pains of imprisonment became the norm for them.

> **Casey**: I don't actually know if I am still suffering as much or whether I've just got used to it [her partner's imprisonment]. It is difficult. I do know, deep down, that I am suffering. You know, I am suffering with depression, I can't sleep, I am on tablets and the time I would be sleeping I... I suffer with anxiety and I get spots and stress migraines and things like that. I think it's happened for so long I'm just sort of just getting used to it.
>
> **Anne**: But, obviously, there are things that are affecting me that I'm not really conscious that it's having as much of an effect. It's having more of an effect than I'm aware of. In other words, I think I'm coping, and really underneath it all, it's worse than what I actually, I suppose, I recognise.

Only one participant, Bella, appeared to be wholly untroubled by any of the pains of imprisonment, but this is likely because she was an unusual participant. She was in prison at the same time as her ex-partner, and their relationship had deteriorated during that time – this meant that did not experience the separation in a negative way, but, instead, as relief from an abusive partner. It is possible that for these reasons, she was less affected by the pains and deprivations of imprisonment than the other participants.

Most of the participants, thus, still experienced the pains of imprisonment as unpleasant as the sentence drew on. At times, moreover, these pains struck out with renewed strength – the experience of long-term imprisonment was not simply a traumatic early stage, followed by a process of getting used to the pains of imprisonment. Many likened their experiences of secondary prisonisation to an 'emotional rollercoaster', which indicates a presence of emotional troughs. The

participants discussed how a wedding song might remind them of the fact that their partner is in prison and sharply bring out feelings of loneliness, and how a rejected appeal might result in acutely painful feelings of hopelessness and helplessness well into the sentence (this reinforces Condry's 2007 findings). Special occasions, such as Christmases and anniversaries, were for some women especially painful as they renewed feelings of loneliness (confirming Tsui's 2010 findings):

> **Martha**: You know, anniversaries are always a bit of a tough one. [...] Yeah, it's just hard, you know, they're not here. They're not there to celebrate it, and the kids sort of do that happy anniversary, get you a card. And my husband will ring the children and say, you know, 'scrape some money together or borrow some money off mum, go get her a bunch of flowers or something like that'.

In addition, even if a partner got used to the practicalities of visiting and got to know the prison rules, something could happen to disturb the familiar routine. Almost all the women said their partners had been moved at some point in the sentence, sometimes as much as six to eight times. When a prisoner was moved to another prison, his partner would have to get used to a new regime, new schedules and new staff and staff attitudes. Fiona discussed, in the following passage, the upheaval associated with the prisoner being moved to a different prison and the need to adapt and get used to different regimes:

> **Anna**: Does visiting get easier?
> **Fiona**: It got a little bit easier until they started moving him about. So they started moving... He'd go from one prison to another one. He went to [prison]. And then from [prison] he went to [prison], and there was a... [inaudible]. So he's been in three prisons.
> **Anna**: And it's different?
> **Fiona**: Totally different. Different regime, different feelings, you don't know who they are, what they're about. Different people.

Coping and adaptation techniques

Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) argued that long-term prisoners undergo profound identity changes over a long sentence, as a result of having to cope with the pains of imprisonment for a long time. Coping mechanisms, thus, lead to 'deep and profound impact on the person so that the

process of coping leads to fundamental changes in the self' (Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015: abstract).

Similarly, long-term imprisonment of a partner was not a highly unpleasant but transitory event. For this sample, it was deeply transformative. The participants' lives and identities were sometimes changed by the fact of their partners' imprisonment, often in fundamental and dramatic ways. Consider the following excerpts from Elly's and Lisa's interviews. Both were highly educated women who spoke poignantly about how they had been changed. Even though both met their partners while the men were serving the current sentences, they had been with them for a long time at the time of the interview and thus felt the transformative impact of imprisonment as strongly as those who had been in a relationship with their partners prior to imprisonment. This was because, like the other participants, they too experienced the numerous deprivations associated with imprisonment such as control, surveillance and stigmatisation.

> **Elly**: Your life is no longer your own. And some of the things that can happen can be quite intrusive. And you become aware that you're not like other people. You're not being treated like other people because you are a prisoner's wife now. And that means the Prison Service will look at you in a certain way, and will treat you in a certain way. And for a long time you try to push that away. But after a while, you realise that you actually... Internalised – is that a word? – internalised it.
>
> **Lisa**: You do it because you have to do it, and then you get used to it. And you change because of it, and you become someone who, that's part of your identity, the fact that you've done this, the fact that you've survived this.

These passages indicate that a long-term sentence changes the partner of the long-term prisoner. How are the women changed by a long sentence? In other words, what types of changes do they undergo?

One sense in which the partners were changed was the simple fact of the prison becoming a normal part of their existence, which is the underlying change described by the participants in the

quotes above. As discussed in Chapter 4, most of the participants had very little prior experience of prison, and thus visiting, prison rules and regulations, and schedules were not, previously, anything that they were used to. After a time, the prison wove itself into their lives and identities as the women learned to cope with the various pains and deprivations. Holly, for instance, said that 'this' – the prison – was now her life because her daily routine was shaped by prison schedule. Lisa's comments above also speak to this process happening over time: the prison journey became a 'part of [her] identity'. The prison as an institution became a long-term fixture in the women's lives. This was because they visited regularly, had to get to know prison rules and regulations, and experienced prison surveillance when they visited and otherwise communicated with their partners. This continued for many years and was a dramatic change for women who described themselves as having little to no prior experience of imprisonment, whether direct or indirect. As Elly states in the quote on the previous page, they became *prisoners' wives* – this became an important part of their identities. It should be noted that, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, many of the women actively rejected the negative connotations of this label. They presented themselves as being different to the stereotype of the socially disadvantaged, boisterous prisoners's wife. Yet in practical terms, being a prisoner's wife was still an important part of their identities because of the regular, long-term contact they had with the prison and because of how it shaped their everyday lives.

The concept of institutionalisation can help us explore this process of change further. I wish to use this term in the sense Clemmer (1958: 299) used 'prisonisation', to denote the process of 'taking on in greater or lesser degree of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary'. Cohen and Taylor (1972), as well as others writing about long-term imprisonment, used the term, similarly, to describe 'apathy and reduced motivation coupled with extreme dependency on routine and the support of the institution' (Sapsford 1978: 128). I use the term institutionalisation deliberately, in order to avoid confusion with the term secondary prisonisation in the sense Comfort (2009) used it to describe how prisoners' families experienced the pains of

imprisonment alongside the prisoner himself.

There was certainly a sense in which the women became institutionalised over time, albeit to a lesser degree than prisoners. The most marked way in which this institutionalisation manifested itself in my sample was a dependence on the prison routine that the women themselves had to develop in order to sustain a relationship with a prisoner. They needed to know what time lockup was, for example, if they were to know when to expect a call from their husband or boyfriend. The women who had worked inside prisons said they had already become institutionalised through their jobs – one described with some amusement how she continued to eat lunch at the same time as she did when working in a prison. Yet maintaining a relationship with a prisoner reinforced this dependence on the prison routine even for these women. Almost all the participants spoke about the highly structured patterns of communication they had developed with their partners; for example, Jane wrote or e-mailed during specific days of the week, and Gemma spoke about receiving phone calls at specific times in the evening, on specific days. Although Martha was at work at the time she received her partner's phone calls, she said they had 'sort of...a routine' of communication. As a result, it was not unusual for the women – even those who had not worked in prisons – to have very extensive knowledge indeed about prison routines and schedules, knowing exactly when lunch, lock-ups, and working hours were. Moreover, the participants developed this knowledge because they were emotionally invested in their partners' daily lives and wanted to know what their partner was doing when.

When the usual routine was interrupted – such as when something extraordinary had occurred in the prison and prisoners were not released from their cells to make phone calls – the partners outside could get distressed. This indicates that over time, some of the women became not only used to but also dependent on the prison routine. This was made explicitly clear by Judy, who described, humorously, both the extent to which she was used to the prison schedule and her

reaction to not getting a phone-call at the usual time.

> **Judy**: You get so much into a routine of they phone on this day, they phone at that time, they write on this day. And when that doesn't happen... […] You sit and you count down, you know what lock-up times are. So, you know... So between quarter past twelve and quarter past two I can go out 'cos he's in bang-up for lunch. And then he goes back in bang-up about five, he got back out at quarter to six, but he's back in bang-up for night at quarter to seven... So I can do something between these hours. The prison shapes our lives as well, very much so. Because we work around their bang-up times. And you get a day when they don't fit into the routine that we're in, because we're so institutionalised by it, and its panic. Absolute panic. Has he been moved? Is he down the block? Does he not love me anymore? Have I been dumped?! The world's gonna end! [laughs]

A second way in which many participants showed signs of institutionalisation was their adoption of prison terminology. Terms such as 'VO' [Visiting Order], 'screws' [officers], 'lock-up' [periods of time the prisoners are locked up in cells], 'bang-up' [same as previous term], 'canteen' [ordering food and other goods from a catalogue], and 'bird' [woman] were sometimes used when they discussed prisons. Furthermore, many of the women, over time, developed highly detailed knowledge of prison administration; they spoke about OASys reports, ACA1 reports, probation officers' reports, categorisation reports, Prison Inspectors' reports, and so forth.

Similarly, many of the women showed signs of being embroiled in prison bureaucracy. Most described close and loving relationships with their partners and were thus emotionally invested in their everyday affairs. As a result, they knew much about prison courses, the minute everyday actions of officers – such as delays in getting materials for a prisoner's educational course – and prisoners' complaints and grievances. They thus experienced an entanglement within prison power alongside their partners. A good example of this Esther, who was very much involved in decisions about the courses her husband was taking, and considered herself to also be playing mind-games with the prison. This harks back to Crewe's (2011) discussion of bureaucratic 'game-playing' that characterises modern penal power; Esther demonstrates that the partner may also be involved in the

penal mind-games.

> **Esther**: I say [to her partner], 'look, those facilitators, they put you on this course', I say, 'don't let them say at the end of it – “it's a good job we put [partner] on that course, he needed it”. Let them say at the end of it – “who put [partner] on that course, he certainly didn't need it”'. And sometimes trying to make that point to him is difficult, because he's like – 'you don't know what these people are like'. I said – 'I do, I know they've got to justify their position', I said, 'someone somewhere's gotta go “why is [partner] on this course? You know...”'. So, so, that's been an area of conflict for us for the last few weeks, and he sent the forms they have to...every day they have to do this homework, [he] said – 'I don't know how to fill it in!'. He said, 'they want me to put down what made me angry today, but nothing made me angry today, because I'm past all that'. He said, 'what do I say, oh, there was not enough butter?'. I said – 'if you put that, this is what annoys me, because if you put “oh, there wasn't enough butter for my bread”, they'll say – “you see, it’s a good job we put [partner] on that course, because, look, he still gets angry that there's no butter for the bread”'. So you're constantly in this game of, or, trapped in this thing of outwitting them so they can't have anything on you. I said it's better to say something like 'my only frustration today was doing the course'. And because he sees it from so within that... That's just one example of where jail causes conflict between us.

The women were also entangled in the sense that they themselves got directly involved in the prison's bureaucratic processes. This was via making complaints on their own behalf or on behalf of their imprisoned partner. If this happened, the women had to navigate complex complaints procedures and attempt to reach the higher echelons of prison power – such as governors. Isabella found it difficult to visit her partner, who was located far away from where she lived, and had been attempting to apply for accumulated visits for a long period of time at the time of the interview. Her frustration in the following excerpt is palpable and shows the difficulty of navigating prison bureaucracy. Even if, in her case, the rules were applied properly, she was frustrated with a time-consuming, complex and laborious process and upset at not having received replies to some of her letters.

> **Isabella**: I've written to my MP, trying to get him back [closer to where she lived] this way, my MP wrote to the Justice Minister, the Justice Minister said – 'after four months, you can get accumulated visits'. That was over a year ago. And he keeps putting in application form after application form and he gets back – 'the prisons are overcrowded, there's nothing we can do'. [...] ...there's just nothing out there and you

> ring and you write, you don't get letters back, in the end, it wears you down. You think – what's the point? He's got so much to do. I have written and e-mailed my MP, he's written to the Justice Minister, the Justice Minister, the Justice Minister didn't even answer..... [...] 'Oh, he's been sent...there's nothing I can do if he's been sentenced. He's a sex offender'. It comes back with all the things that he is, nothing positive. Nothing there to say... Except – 'you can apply for accumulated visits', which we have done, about six times, and got nowhere.

There is a strong parallel here with Crewe's (2011) discussion of the tightness of the pains of imprisonment and the difficulties associated with complex bureaucratic processes and accessing the higher echelons of prison power. Partners, too, could feel there was a 'brick wall' (Crewe 2009: 112) between them and the higher levels of criminal justice officials such as prison governors. Although it was easier, in practical terms, for the partners outside to access lawyers, MPs and other officials, getting a reply from or access to a prison governor was still very difficult and time-consuming.

A small number of women actively exercised agency, and attempted to resist the institutionalising effects of prison. They spoke about making a conscious decision to focus on outside life and not have their lives structured around prison schedules and regulations, instead making an effort to enjoy hobbies, interactions with family, work, and other daily activities. Usually, it took some time for them to realise that they could not live a life that was entirely centred around the prison experience. Initially, most of the women wanted to be home to answer phone calls and otherwise maintain communication with their partners. Some, as time went on, realised that they had become embroiled in the prison routine to an extent they were not happy with, and actively began to resist this by not allowing the prison routine to dictate their own daily schedules. Elly had met her husband while he was in prison and had been married to him for more than a decade; after such a long marriage, she admitted that her daily life was no longer shaped around the prison routine. She felt this might be partly due to having been married to her husband for so long, but went on to say that the other reason was her attempting to resist being entangled in the prison experience. Rachel, also quoted below, actively resisted being bound up in the prison routine

because she had a negative relationship with the father of her children and did not want her daily routines to be shaped by his prison routine. This supports Crosthwaite's (1972) finding that for some women, over time, other things take priority – for example, children or work.

> **Anna**: So your daily routine isn't really dictated by the prison routine?
> **Elly**: I think no, not anymore... I think, it's something that happened a few years ago, the wake-up call – is that the term? Where you think – what have I done? You know, what have I done? I've spent all these years and I've got nothing for it. I think that... I probably had a turn-around in my attitude then and thought – I'm not going to let what goes on in prison... Well, I'm not going to let what [husband] does in prison bother me so much.
>
> **Rachel**: 'Cos he's expecting me to go down [to the prison], and I've already committed to five days with my friends' horses, so... Whereas before, 5 years ago, I'd have been putting him up here, oh, I can't do that, or I might do that... Now it's like – 'sorry, we're doing this. I've got plans. If I can fit a visit in, when somebody can have the dog, bla-bla-bla. Then I'll come. Otherwise... I just don't...'.

Even though most of the women became to a limited extent institutionalised and experienced the tightness of the pains of imprisonment, some attempted to cope by becoming more independent and assertive. When a partner is imprisoned, women may have to cope with living alone, in terms of having to adopt the roles their husbands or boyfriends undertook when they lived with them (Codd 2000). A significant minority – one-third of the participants in this study – said that over the years, they had had to become braver, more assertive and more independent. They had to learn how to navigate the prison rules on their own, travel on their own to visits, and stand up to those officers who, they felt, treated them unjustly (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of stigma within the criminal justice system). Independence, for them, was a way of coping with the lack of autonomy within the prison context and the separation from their partner. This change was especially dramatic for women who were older and had enacted traditional gender roles prior to imprisonment. Anne, for example, was, at the time of the interview, in the process of discovering her independence and making an effort to enjoy her life, even though she found this difficult without her husband. She was a middle-aged, professional woman who had been married to her

husband for a long time and had shared a large part of her daily life with him prior to his imprisonment. Living alone, for her, required significant adaptation. Notably, this process of becoming more independent was only taking place three years after her husband was sentenced.

> **Anne**: I need to enjoy doing that [doing things like travelling] without him. I haven't taken a holiday, now, since he went in. We would have taken a couple of holidays, like, maybe only a weekend to a hotel in Ireland. And a foreign holiday or something. But now his sixteen-year-old daughter and I are going to Rome in the summer, for just a five-day thing. Four nights. That's the first time now, and I'm taking a sixteen-year-old with me! [laughs] But anyway, I thought, well, I couldn't cope with a sixteen-year-old on, like, a sunbathing holiday because she's come to an age when she'll want to do her own thing, so we'll do a cultural holiday. But I know that next year, why, I might go on my own! And I would enjoy it. I don't feel I have to have a friend with me all the time.

Codd (2000), in her research on older partners of prisoners, raised the question whether such independence could be short-lived and whether, upon release, the women might return to normal traditional gender roles. The participants in this study indicated that the changes were deeper and long-term. It may be that when a sentence is long, independence as a coping mechanism may be internalised to the point where it changes the woman permanently – a change that could give rise to problems upon release if it then results in friction between the former prisoner and his partner. This was certainly true in the case of Sandra, whose husband had been released not long before the interview. She had become so independent in the course of his long sentence, and so used to running the household by her own rules, that she found it difficult to adapt to having him back – she said it was akin to 'having an alien in the house'.

Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) show that coping mechanisms may, in fact, be maladaptive in the prison context. If a prisoner copes by withdrawing into himself, he may, upon release, find it extremely difficult to reconnect with family and friends (*e.g.* Warr 2012 is a good example of this, from a prisoner's point of view). Increased independence, though at first sight a positive thing indeed, could give rise to problems when the prisoner is released and is reunited with his changed

partner (Codd 2000). Sandra was experiencing problems with her husband since she had changed over the course of the years he was in prison and was more assertive in running her house the way she wanted to run it. This supports Tsui's (2010) findings in Hong-Kong, such as the case-study he discusses of a father who struggled to integrate into his changed family after a long sentence, and Harman, Smith and Egan's (2007) findings in the US. Both studies found that time caused a disconnect between the prisoner and his family outside; in other words, they lived different and separate lives and needed to get to know each other again upon release. Notably, some women in this study whose partners had not yet been released were also concerned about the relationship problems that might arise out of them having become more independent over time:

> **Martha**: I can see some barneys happening [when her partner is released]. Because I think I've become a much stronger, more independent person, as I said... So I'd hate it to come to the stage where it's a battle of the wills, almost. Well, that's what I do, actually, that's what I do. I'm not gonna change that, because that's my time. I think it's gonna be a lot of getting to know each other all over again. And if you're together constantly, yeah, you change and you mature all the time. But when you've had some years apart, you've got to get to know each other again, and how you function.

Those few women who were unable to become more assertive and independent, however, suffered a loss of confidence and emotional strength. Although this was a minority of the sample – three women – this shows the severely damaging effect imprisonment has on those partners who find themselves unable to adapt by becoming more assertive. Fiona, a soft-spoken woman who sobbed through most of the interview, appeared to be emotionally drained after ten years of supporting her husband. The reasons for loss of strength and confidence were manifold; ranging from stigma and fear of stigma (a theme that will be discussed in Chapter 7) to the fear and anxiety she felt during prison visits. Her fear of breaking one of the many prison rules links to the earlier discussion of the many minute rules that characterise the modern prison, and shows how these rules can be distressing to visitors who lack a certain level of confidence. Notably, she had been visiting for over a decade, and one would assume she would have gotten to know most of the prison rules

over this period of time. Yet this was not the case, which perhaps indicates the extent to which these rules are numerous and complex.

> **Fiona**: Two hours of nervousness, all the way through, till you get to the other side. And then when you get to the other side, you're in-between a table... And I can't show emotion no more. […] Because you're looking over your shoulder, shouldn't be doing this, shouldn't be doing that.

These findings largely support the view that long-term imprisonment can have long-term, profound impact on partners outside. The prison becomes an ingrained part of their daily lives. They internalise prison routines and sometimes prison vocabulary and become, to some extent, institutionalised alongside their partners. Only a few women attempted to resist this institutionalisation. They became, in this sense, quasi-inmates, with their daily routines shaped by long-term imprisonment.

Psychosocial changes in the prisoner

As discussed in Chapter 3, the effects long-term imprisonment has on prisoners have been well-documented (*e.g.* Sapsford 1978, Heskin *et al.* 1973). Not only do some prisoners become institutionalised, but they also undergo various psychosocial changes such an increased introversion (Crewe 2009) and emotional distancing from others (Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015). The women in my sample very were much aware of the changes that were happening to their imprisoned partners, which reinforces the point that whatever happens to the prisoner could and does affect his partner outside. This is because the partner outside is, if the relationship if positive and stable, emotionally invested in the prisoner's well-being and thus is emotionally affected by what she perceives to be adverse or problematic changes in him.

Firstly, almost all the women I interviewed said that their partners were, to various degrees, institutionalised, in the sense of becoming used to and dependent upon prison routines. This

sometimes gave rise to tension between the prisoner and his partner, most notably when it came to visiting and receiving phone calls. Outside, life went on and issues could arise at short notice that would mean the participant was suddenly unable to receive a phone call at the usual time. This was strange and unusual for the institutionalised prisoner, who was used to a very regimented routine, as Esther describes in the passage below. This could give rise to arguments between the prisoner and his partner.

> **Esther**: If I'm not where he thinks I'm going to be, or something happens out of the ordinary in my day that has an impact on him, it does throw him a little. 'Oh, I didn't know you were going there!'. I said, 'no, it just came up'.
> **Anna**: It's strange for him, to think things come up...?
> **Esther**: Yes, yes. Again, this is one of the other things, if we have an argument, that's another way we could have an argument, I could say 'you know what, [partner], sometimes when you phone you're impacting on something you... Well, like anybody does when they make a phone call, you're impacting somebody's world but you don't know what's going on in their world at that moment. You're hoping they're free to speak to you, usually they are, but at the moment I, I can't. Because...'. 'Well, you're always free at 6 o'clock’. 'I know I'm always free at 6 o'clock, but today, this happened'. And I have to say, he has got better at that over the years, and he'll go – 'okay, I'll phone back'. But he'll be like – 'well, I phoned you! ...Why can't you speak to me? Yeah. I phoned you!'. And I say, 'yeah, but there's somebody at the door, give me 10 minutes. Or this has happened, or I've had to go to the doctor, I've had to go to the dentist, an emergency happened'.

Neither were such problems limited to the period of imprisonment. Alice, whose husband had been released not long before the interview, felt that her life was still being indirectly affected by her husband's institutionalisation. This shows that some women may feel the institutionalising effect of prison on their own lives even after a long sentence had ended, because they may have to then share a house and their daily life with a highly institutionalised former prisoner who is used to a strictly regimented routine and goes on to attempt to structure the couple's lives in a similarly strict manner.

> **Alice**: Also, he had the same routine day in, day out, all the time. It's very limited what he could do in a day. Go to the library, go and do some work for a few hours, go back to his cell, get his meals set time. [inaudible] And he wants

> everything...everything's got to be written down on a list that you've got to do that day. Every phone call you're gonna make, everything you're gonna do. You've got to write it on a list. And it's all terribly organised. Which frustrates me, because I'm not organised. In my job I am, but not in my private life. Go with the flow, me. Whatever. But he, no. He wants to know what's gonna be done that day. And before we're even out of bed in the morning, he's talking about what we're gonna be doing that day. And I think – oh god... I say to him – 'just let me wake up, and get myself together. And when I've had my morning cuppa, and I've had my breakfast, my shower, then we're gonna talk about what we're gonna do'. By then, he'll say, 'it's 9 o'clock!'. 9 o'clock, wow! All day's gone, innit? [sarcasm]

Although prisoners' institutionalisation gave rise to occasional tensions, more women were concerned and worried about the changes they were seeing in their partner. This supports Merriman's (1979) finding that if prisoners become more introverted and start distancing themselves from their families, their family members can and do become worried and anxious. The most frequent concern was the prisoner becoming more withdrawn and keeping to himself (*e.g.* Sapsford 1978): Mary said that at one point her partner did not want to communicate to anyone and became very withdrawn, a concern that was echoed by Esther and Isabella, amongst others. A small number of others said they worried about their partners becoming emotionally drained and struggling to keep going: Jane, for instance, said she was concerned about her partner 'really struggling to make himself carry on the fight'. Others feared that the prisoner would continue to keep to himself after he was released, and will be unable to live a full life:

> **Isabella**: And as much as I want him to come out, I'm worried about him coming out because I know it's gonna be hard and I don't wanna let anybody down. So...
> **Anna**: In what ways do you think it's gonna be hard?
> **Isabella**: Well, one, he's been institutionalised, I haven't. If I want to walk down the road, I can. He hasn't been able to do that. And I think he will be asking all the time – 'is it alright if I make tea?'. You know, I've got to get rid of that habit. […] But I just think if I'm gonna make this [the relationship] work when he comes out, I've got to try and get it back to normality as much as possible, and I don't think that's gonna be easy because he will probably sit in his office and not do very much.

5.3 CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, the women in this sample spoke about many of the pains and deprivations that have been highlighted in previous literature on prisoners' families in the last six decades. However, they also demonstrated the complexity of coping with these pains and deprivations over a long sentence; although many got used to and learned to cope with the numerous challenges, this should not be taken as a sign of the pains and deprivations of imprisonment lessening as the sentence draws on. Firstly, the pains became a normal part of the women's existence and yet were still experienced as unpleasant. Secondly, most of the women, even those whose partners were well into a long sentence, suffered from ups and downs, and new challenges could arise at any point in the sentence, such as when the prisoner was moved and a new prison regime had to be adjusted to.

Additionally, some women became institutionalised themselves, though a small number actively resisted this process. Technological advances, such as call divert, meant that some were not tied down to their house, waiting for a phone call, and some made the conscious decision to live a full social life outside of prison. Finally, this research supports Comfort's (2009) suggestion that prolonged prison visiting (and, I would add, other forms of indirect contact with the prison, such as receiving phone calls from prison and sending letters) could be a transformative experience for prisoners' partners over time. Not only did some become institutionalised, but for many, the prison became a major biographical event, and was not simply a temporary hurdle to overcome. Many spoke about having been 'change[d]' (Lisa) by the experience. Having considered the pains of imprisonment in general, and how they are experienced over a long sentence, I will now turn to the temporal pains associated with a long-term sentence.

CHAPTER 6
'Time... Lost Time'.
Temporality, Sentence Length, and the Passage of Time

Time is a critical part of any prison sentence, but even more so when a sentence is long. Firstly, time is taken away from the prisoner, in the sense that he is deprived of his liberty for a period of time and is unable to live a free, autonomous life (*e.g.* Wahidin 2006). He is removed from free society – which includes his family. Therefore, the prisoner experiences lost time, and when he is given a long sentence, the time taken away from him represents a significant proportion of his life. He needs to make sense of a long sentence and learn to cope with this loss of time. In this chapter, I discuss how the prisoner's partner, outside, also experiences lost time and how she makes sense of, and copes with, being deprived of time with her partner. I show that if the partner decides to maintain the relationship, she too feels time is lost for her because she is unable to engage in the normal family routines and rituals. I then discuss how the prisoner missing milestone events like birthdays and anniversaries is experienced by his partner outside, and how lost time is experienced in a highly gendered manner.

I then go on to explore how the women in this study coped with this loss of time and how they learned to make sense of a long sentence, analysing the various coping techniques – such as short-term planning and idealisation – that the women in my sample utilised. Finally, I turn to the theme of different temporalities. I discuss how time passed differently for the prisoner and for his partner, and the tensions and problems this sometimes gave rise to. I explore how the participants struggled to juggle the fast-paced life outside and a relationship with a partner who was "frozen" in time inside the prison.

6.1 THE CRISIS OF A LONG SENTENCE

Learning that a partner has received a prison sentence was, for most women, traumatic in and of

itself (Morris 1965). Most of these women had had very little prior experience of imprisonment, and most of the men had either never been in trouble with the law or had been convicted of unrelated or minor offences some time before the current arrest. Most of the women, thus, described themselves and their partners as having led relatively untroubled lives. Imprisonment, for them, represented a disruption of an otherwise normal, positive relationship (Christian and Kennedy 2011). In two cases only did women talk about imprisonment as being a good thing for the prisoner, because they hoped it would represent him turning away from criminal behaviour. Christian and Kennedy (2011: 385) describe these types of discourses as 'transforming relationships' that emphasise a hope for future change.

Aside from the fact of a prison sentence, its length was also shocking and some partners struggled to make sense of it, similarly to how Jewkes (2005) described prisoners struggling to make sense of long sentences. In the following excerpts, Amanda and Martha discuss the challenge of trying to make sense of a long sentence. As their comments indicate, a long sentence could represent such a lengthy period of time that the mind struggles to understand what that period of time actually means.

> **Amanda**: It's like, when [husband] got sentenced, I don't remember… I was just numb. I just sat there, and I couldn't even cry. 'Cos they kept on saying, numbers and numbers, and I was thinking, this isn't right, this… And I couldn't even sort of take it in, how many years they'd actually said, in the end. It was my niece that told me, she said – 'that's 18 years!'.

> **Martha**: 'Cos I talk quite openly about it [her husband's imprisonment] now, I didn't at the time [after the sentencing], because I couldn't get my head round 24 years myself...

The sentence length was also traumatic for those women who met their partners during the current term of imprisonment. As discussed in Chapter 5, these women described the shock that came with realising that they were in love with a prisoner. For them, the fact that he was a prisoner

who was serving a long sentence exacerbated the dilemma. They were very much aware that this was not just someone who had been convicted of a criminal offence, but someone who would be in prison for a long period of time, and that entering into a relationship with such a prisoner was no mean feat. Elly, for instance, described her initial reaction to the realisation that she was in love with a long-term prisoner as being 'this is ridiculous, I can't do it'. She said that one reason for this reaction was the fact that he was serving a life sentence.

There is a link to be drawn here with the depth of the pains of imprisonment as discussed by Crewe (2011) in the context of prisoners. Depth evokes a sense of being buried far away from freedom, for a long time, when the sentence is long (Crewe 2011). The women too often felt this depth because they knew they would not be reunited with their partner for a long time indeed and that if the relationship was to continue, they would need to visit the prison and otherwise remain under the scrutiny of the prison system for years to come. This theme of being indirectly buried within the prison for a long time came across most starkly in Lisa's interview. She described herself as being buried away from normal free life alongside her life-sentenced husband. Elly reinforced this idea in her interview when she spoke about the anxiety she felt when marrying her imprisoned partner. The fact that the prison was going to be a long-term, if not permanent, fixture in her life had weighed heavily on her mind at that time.

> **Lisa**: This [prison] is my life. So it's very different, I think, it's just a part of your life. And you know it's gonna be a part of your life indefinitely. And the threat will always hang over you, for the rest of your life.
>
> **Elly**: I think a bit of me knew [before the wedding] what was going to happen. A bit of me knew that I was actually going to become part of this prison thing. I can't express it very well, and what the consequences of that would be. And I didn't want it [the prison experience]. No normal person would want that. Being told when you can see your husband, the conditions when you can see him, where you can talk to him... Not really actually having a life with him that hasn't been observed by others...

The pain of indeterminacy (Crewe 2011) was also very much felt by the women whose

partners were serving life sentences or IPP sentences at the time of the interview, as indicated in Lisa's interview excerpt above. For these women, there was no firm end date, no concrete end point to look forward to and plan towards. Sarah, for example, said 'when he gets out' and then immediately corrected herself to 'if and when he does get out […] because you never quite know'. Gemma, whose partner was serving an IPP sentence and coming up the end of his tariff, discussed the problem of the indefinite nature of the sentence and her hesitation to plan for release, since the future was so uncertain. She knew very well that it is not uncommon for IPP prisoners to spend time in prison beyond their tariff date (Ministry of Justice 2014b). Sarah, who was married to an IPP prisoner, likewise, highlighted the pain of indeterminacy she felt.

> **Gemma**: The problem being he's saying – 'I'll be out next year, I'll be out next year', and I keep thinking – I can't say, 'no, you won't be out next year...'. I just said – 'well, we'll just see...'. I just try to tell him to live it week by week and not look ahead. Because I know he'll be so disappointed when he doesn't come out. But I mean it would be a miracle if he did come out then.
>
> **Sarah**: It's that uncertainty, you know? [...] As I've explained to a friend of mine, not being funny, anyone with a fixed sentence, they're in a situation where they can say to themselves – 'well, my husband is gonna get out in four or five years', or whatever. Maybe even less. So they can afford to say to themselves, well, look, you're gonna be out in 4 or 5 years' time, I don't feel the need to visit so much, or I keep to these visits, and the amount of visits that I do, because I know we can catch up... I know where the end is. And I know that I will get to see you. You know, you can catch up with everything then. But for lifers and IPPs, they can't do that. Because they don't know when they're gonna get out.

The indeterminacy surrounding the release of life-sentenced and IPP prisoners is not so different to the indeterminacy of many modern prison rules. As discussed in Chapter 5, the women often did not know how the rules were applied and struggled with the lack of information and inconsistent application of the rules – for example, some officers would apply visitation rules leniently and with flexibility, and some more rigidly. The indeterminacy of life and IPP sentences, therefore, is another type of uncertainty inherent in the modern prison system and another facet of the pain of indeterminacy.

The sentence length could also make the future of the relationship uncertain. Knowing that the prisoner was to serve a long prison term, a minority of the women admitted they were uncertain if they would continue the relationship. This was precisely because of the fact that their partners were serving long sentences. The end-date was so far away that some of the participants found it impossible to plan that far ahead in terms of the relationship. Elizabeth's partner was going through an appeal, and she admitted neither of them knew if they would continue the relationship if the appeal was unsuccessful. If the appeal was denied, her partner would need to serve another 10 years. The sentence being so long, it was simply not possible, in her view, to know what would happen as time went on, even though at the time of the interview the relationship was described as a stable and positive one.

> **Elizabeth**: Because at the moment there's still a little bit of hope that it won't go on for that length of time. Once... If it was to come back that the appeal was not successful, and he's definitely going to be there for nearly the next 10 years, then that would be the time when we would have to sit down and, I don't know, work out what it is that actually we both want. And the good thing about it is that we will do that, because we know that we've got to. I mean I've always, always said to him – 'I cannot guarantee that I'm gonna be around. I can't. D'you know what, nobody can guarantee. Even if you were in a married relationship where it [the relationship] was perfectly normal. But I know, at the moment, that I'm not going anywhere, I don't want anyone else, I don't want to be with anybody else. But I can't make that promise'. And, actually, I don't think he could either.

Many of the women, however, maintained that the relationship was stable and would outlast the long sentence. They realised that post-release life might be difficult and there would be challenges to overcome (discussed later in this chapter), but were confident that the relationship was stable and strong. Of course, it is not possible to say whether the relationship would indeed last the entire sentence – and, in fact, research has shown that many intimate relationships do end after about five years of continuous imprisonment (Sapsford 1978). One possible reason why the women saw their relationships as being able to last the whole sentence was because they were generally

older and many had been with their partners for some years – it was harder to think about ending a stable, long-term relationship than a short-term, tumultuous one. Holly, for example, said that she would never leave her husband, especially after being married to him for over three decades.

To make matters more difficult for some, a small number of prisoners also attempted to end the relationship with their wife or girlfriend as a way of coping with a very long sentence. This is a coping strategy some prisoners have been documented to use and is called 'hard-timing' (*e.g.* Nurse 2002). This is when prisoners cut off all or most social ties in order to make it easier for themselves to endure the pain of being separated from their families and friends. Some of the women noted that in the early of stages of the sentence, their partners felt it would be morally right for him to let her go on with her life and sever his ties to her. The women saw this as a direct way of coping with a long sentence, as Esther discusses below, and this attempt to end the relationship was upsetting for the women who described generally positive, close relationships.

> **Esther**: When [partner] went to, when he was on remand, a lot of them do this, it's like a macho thing they have, when you get a long sentence you're meant to do the right thing and let your wife go and say just get along with your life, don't wait for me. And... When [partner] and I...he said, 'if I get "guilty", I don't expect...' I said – 'oh, stop it', I said, 'd'you know what, that's my choice, not your choice'.

On the whole, the long sentence was often experienced as a crisis in the early stages. The women had to make sense of the sentence length and cope with the realisation that they would be separated from their partners for a long time should they decide to continue the relationship. Most also realised they would need to interact with the prison system for a long time, and be scrutinised by prison staff when they visited, received phone calls, and sent letters. This was especially unpleasant for many because the majority of the women had previously had minimal to no experience of the prison. Finally, there was also the pain of indeterminacy – many of the prisoners in this study were serving life or IPP sentences, and the women spoke about not knowing when they

would be released. Likewise, there was the uncertainty surrounding the relationship. A minority of the women said they could not be certain if the relationship would last throughout the sentence since the sentence was long and it was difficult to know what would happen many years down the line.

6.2 TIME LOST

A long prison sentence is often described as a crisis because it represents time lost to the prisoner, a significant period of time taken away from him as punishment (Brown 1998). Yet it is also time taken away from his partner if she decides to maintain the relationship. It is important to explore in what sense a long sentence represents a period of time taken away from the partner outside – after all, she herself is not imprisoned, and is able to live her life freely except when she visits and otherwise communicates with the prisoner.

Despite being legally free individuals, almost all the women experienced a loss of time. Alice put this eloquently when asked what the hardest thing about being partnered to a long-term prisoner was. Her husband had served almost three decades in prison and had been released not long before the interview took place. Alice was, therefore, able to reflect back on a very long sentence:

> **Alice**: Time. Time, to me. Lost time. 28 years – long time. I mean, I've grown much older in those 28 years. When he left me I was 34, I think, when he went away. And I'm now over 60. So we can't get those years back. We haven't got the benefit of years and years together, like other couples. We've now got to cram whatever time we've got together into a much shorter space of time. [...] So time, to us, it's time that becomes precious when someone's in prison. Especially, you know, for many years.

What is taken away from the partner, Alice highlights above, is time with the prisoner. A long sentence takes away numerous opportunities for a shared life; the couple is unable to celebrate anniversaries, go on holidays, go on dates, or share mundane everyday routines. When they spoke

about what had been taken away from them, the women mentioned going on holidays as a couple, physical and emotional intimacy, shared meals, amongst other opportunities to be a couple.

Jewkes (2005) argued that a long sentence interrupts the prisoner's life-course by delaying such milestones events as marriage, career progression, becoming a parent, and so forth. For the long-term prisoner, these events may need to be postponed until after release, and would thus occur when he is older and thus past the socially ideal age for marrying and becoming a parent, for example (Exley and Letherby 2001). The women in this study similarly spoke about their life-course being interrupted. For example, a small number of participants stated that the long sentence either made it impossible for them to conceive a child (due to age) with their partner or would delay conception until after the socially ideal age for childbirth had passed. Susan was one such participant, as was Elly, who had gone through an emotionally difficult time when she went through the menopause and realised she would never be able to conceive a child with her partner.

> **Anna**: Do you have any children?
> **Susan**: No, I don't. Um... You know, that's a bit of a sore subject, really, because, obviously we were thinking about it, about trying, and then this [imprisonment] comes along and now it's effectively ruled out our chances. Um...
>
> **Elly**: It hit me quite hard a few years ago. It, was – oh... Again, I'm gonna swear. It was – oh f..., what have I done?
> **Anna**: Did anything trigger that?
> **Elly**: I think some... [Husband] says it was the menopause. But I think some of it is age. I think it was realising that, actually, we would never have children. I think that maybe that was it.

This interruption of the life course was often experienced in an embodied manner (Moran 2011). This means that the passage of time was felt through the physical changes in the body, such as ageing. Firstly, one-third of the older participants – whose partners also were older – feared death or physical deterioration over a long sentence. This is contrary to what Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) found in their study of long-term prisoners sentenced at a younger age, and could be

explained by the fact that many of my participants were older and their partners had been sentenced when they were older too. For these women, a long sentence gave rise to the possibility that either the prisoner or she herself may die before release, as Gemma and Anne discuss in the following quotes, or suffer serious age-related physical deterioration. This was painful because they wished to spend their latter days together, as a couple, and to care for their partners when they were ill. They were very conscious of the fact that both their partners and they themselves were physically ageing.

> **Gemma**: So it is a worry. The health problem is a massive worry, especially when you're getting older. And I worry – am I going to be still living when he comes out? You know, all sorts of things go through your mind.
>
> **Anne**: There's a fear from it too, that because of our age, one of us will die, before release. You know, and that's a fear. Because of our age, you know? And that would just be as terrible even with [husband] in prison. […] We have underlying fears about health, if he were to have something... As his age went on.

These embodied experiences of the interrupted life-course were of course very gendered – after all, society draws a clear link between women and motherhood/wifehood. This became even clearer when the women spoke about life-course interruptions such as marriage and engaging in physically intimate relationships with their partners. As discussed earlier, modern standards of beauty see a beautiful woman as a young, slim and healthy one (*e.g.* Bordo 1993). Some of the women in this interview, even those who were in their 20s and 30s, realised that a long sentence meant they would age. They were very conscious of what this might mean for them as prospective mothers and as intimate partners. Susan, for instance, was a young woman in her early twenties, and yet felt that what society deemed to be her "best years" were passing without her being able to engage in a sexual relationship with her partner, get married to her partner, and conceive a child with him. Even though she spoke about this light-heartedly, it was clearly a concern for her. Similarly, Casey, who was also in her 20s at the time of the interview, felt that the socially ideal time for getting married and having children would be when a woman is younger. She perceived the forced delay of these events as upsetting.

> **Anna**: What's the hardest part of maintaining a relationship with someone in prison, would you say?
> **Susan**: I think as silly as it sounds, it's just the practicality of him not being here. Because you miss out on a lot of intimacy. And because I'm only young, I often feel like... I often joke, and I say to him – 'oh, I'm only 21 now and my body is getting touched by nobody, in my best years'. Like, I like proper play it up. But he knows I'm only joking.

> **Casey**: If he's gotta do 10 years, when he gets out... He was sent when he was 28, and, you know, if he does 10 years, it's provided he gets released on his first parole hearing, I'm gonna be, you know, 35, that's dependant if I get pregnant straight away. If I don't I could be, you know, pushing 40 and having children. I never wanted that for myself. […] Even getting married, like. We can get married when we're older, but still... You might call this vain, but you don't wanna get married when you're older. You want nice wedding pictures and you want your children at your wedding, and things like that. Be bridesmaids and pageboys and... I don't wanna be having children when I'm nearly 40 years old.

As Alheit (1994) discussed, however, the life time is not the only dimension of time. There is also everyday time which represents the mundane, routine events. These, too, were taken away from the prisoner's partner in as far as she was unable to partake in events such as everyday family dinners, spending time together on weekends, and so forth. Rebecca, for instance, as we sat in a public house, described what would be happening at this time if her husband was not in prison:

> **Rebecca**: If my husband was here now, he would have all the boys [his friends] there, and the three girls [their daughters], and their three boyfriends there, and you'd have a big table there, food and drink there. That's what my husband liked. That's what he enjoyed more than anything. And he's missing that.

Instead, everyday routines became centred around work, spending time with friends and acquaintances, and being independent. Consider Anne, who explicitly spoke about how her everyday routines changed after her husband's imprisonment. Although she had spent much of her free time with her husband previously, she was now spending more time on her own:

> **Anne**: I just want to say, right, I'm gonna get up today, sit have a cup of coffee in [town], I'm gonna take a walk around the castle, I'm going to, you know, do

> something for me every day. Little things even. I just want to say for the last five years, I have enjoyed doing this, this and this. You know?

What, therefore, did it mean for the participants to have these everyday routines changed? The interviews support Alheit's (1994) analysis of the interruption of everyday time. There was very much a sense in which everyday time being interrupted meant that the women had to reinterpret their life time perspectives (Alheit 1994). In other words, the two dimensions of time are linked, and a change or crisis in one necessarily leads to a need to reformulate the other (Alheit 1994). As Alheit (1994) argued, when the life-course is interrupted, it becomes impossible to continue living in the same everyday routine, and vice-versa. Everyday time needs to be re-interpreted as we, in such instances, are 'forced to exit the time frame of everyday life and to reorganise our whole life' (Alheit 1994: 310).

How was this done by the participants in this study? With their everyday routines changed by the separation from their partners, some of the participants described focusing on other parts of their identities. They focused on themselves as employees, independent women, mothers, grandmothers, and so forth. Their life time narratives, thus, became more about new jobs, career progression, and seeing their children grow up, for example. Holly is a good example of this. She was an older woman who described having a stable, long-term marriage to her husband. After an initial period of shock, she said she was now focusing on her role as a grandmother and on her spirituality. Elsa was thinking about starting a business and focusing on her own career development. This refocusing process was more marked amongst those who were older and had enacted traditional gender roles prior to their partners' imprisonment. Those who were in full-time employment and/or were younger shifted their focus to work or hobbies, but since these were already big parts of their lives this presented a less dramatic change than for those whose identities had been dominated by homemaking. It was thus evident from the interviews that the women reinterpreted their identities as a result of their everyday lives being changed by imprisonment.

Moreover, the women often thought beyond themselves when they spoke about how they experienced lost time. They also discussed the time that had been taken away from the family unit as a whole – including any children they had, extended family and pets. Those who had young children or other young relatives (*e.g.* nieces and nephews, grandchildren) spoke about the prisoner missing out on them growing up; something that upset them as mothers and grandmothers. Again, these were both life time events that the women said their partners missed – such as 'kids passing their exams, passing their driving test' (Sandra) – and everyday events like seeing their children or grandchildren growing up. A family I spoke to during one Family Day said that the prisoner they were visiting might never see the family dog again, because the dog was elderly and might die before he was released. Sarah spoke about her husband not knowing his great-nephew because the child was born after his imprisonment:

> **Sarah**: And he's also an uncle, a great uncle, though he yet hasn't, you know, been able to see them, obviously, because they've not long been born. Well, I say not long been born, I mean, we had one. He saw one before he went in, but the last came long after. I think that's quite sad, you know, because he's never been able to see them. […] But it's quite sad, because he's missed out on all of that. He's not been able to watch them grow up. I mean, obviously, his nieces and nephews, they're grown up, you know, but it's quite sad, knowing the fact that he's never been able to see them either.

The above experiences are also very gendered. The women felt sad as mothers, grandmothers and great-aunts that their partner was unable to be a part of the larger family unit. Their experiences of time passing and time lost were, in this sense, also bound up with their identities as women. As Morgan (2013) argues, family practices are bound up with ethical considerations, which are in turn inherently gendered. In other words, the participants experienced a loss of time not just as partners, but also as mothers and grandmothers. Since the prisoner could not be a full part of the family, the participants felt emotionally affected because they were invested in their children and grandchildren as well as the partner himself. Consider Rachel, who had a

negative relationship with the father of her children, but was still upset that her children were experiencing a loss of a father, even though she realised it might best for them to be removed from a parent she described as being verbally abusive to her. Thus, the decision she was making – taking her daughters to see their father – was entwined with her ethical position as a mother that contact between children and their father was generally a good thing.

> **Rachel**: Yeah, they're unhappy without their dad, and I think they do get upset when they see dads coming up to pick up from school, their kids from school, and things like that. But in a way, I think they'll realise when they get to a certain age that it's the best thing for them, really.

6.3 COPING STRATEGIES

The next step in the analysis is to consider how the participants made sense of, and coped with, a long sentence. Like the prisoners in Wahidin's (2006) study, many of the women coped with the sentence length by segmenting the sentence into shorter "chunks" of time. Whereas thinking about the entire length of the sentence could be overwhelming and difficult, segmenting the sentence into shorter blocks of time made it easier to digest. Anne described this eloquently in her interview:

> **Anne**: I have divided his sentence... If he gets parole after 15 years, right...? I've divided his sentence into, like, blocks. So there's like five blocks of three years. The first block has [now] gone over into the second block. So it's easier to cope with. Four more blocks, I'm already into the fourth block. So there's only really three full blocks to go. It makes it more, in my mind, it's not as hard to cope with as thinking of 18 years.

Others did not overtly segment the sentence into smaller sections of time, but instead tended to avoid long-term planning and focused on more short-term landmarks, much like long-term prisoners (*e.g.* Medlicott 1999). In this sense, the women, like prisoners in earlier sociological studies, experienced a reduced time perspective (Sapsford 1983). Rather than thinking about life after imprisonment – which could be very far off indeed and thus difficult to think about – they focused on the various stages of a prison sentence. Many of the prisoners and families I spoke to

during Family Days mentioned what stage of the sentence the prisoner was at, and when he could expect to be released. Susan, quoted below, when asked how much of her partner's sentence was yet to be served, answered in a way that indicated she was thinking in terms of the different stages of the sentence her partner would be going through, such as different security categories. She was not, in other words, thinking about the sentence as one monolithic block of time. Elsa's excerpt, also below, reinforces this. She compares her coping strategies to those she used when running long distances. When running, she would segment the course into shorter "chunks" to make it easier to cope with. With imprisonment, her landmarks were the different stages of a sentence.

> **Anna**: And how long has he got left, about four-five years?
> **Susan**: It's four years, one month. Two years till D-Cat and then it's like home-stretch from there I guess.
>
> **Elsa**: He used to do a lot of long-distance running, I did one or two races with him. Around the Peak District, 40 miles. The way you get through that is breaking it down into little bits. You think of the whole course, you think – I can't run that! But break it down to five miles, then another five miles, to this landmark and this landmark, becomes possible. Right now, I was discussing the landmark I want to focus to on – next year, with any luck, we may be able to transfer him to mainland prison. Which would make visiting an awful lot easier.

Relatedly, almost all of the women described living 'day-by-day', and avoiding long-term planning more generally. For partners of men who were serving indeterminate sentences planning for the future was very difficult due to uncertainty, but even when the sentence was long but determinate, thinking too far ahead was difficult. Elsa, whose partner was serving a 16-year sentence, said she would 'go mad' if she thought about the sentence length. The release was a point far away in time, and to cope with the sentence length she described herself as taking everything 'one day at a time' (Elsa). Phrases such as 'take each day as it comes', 'take one day at a time', 'just to get rid of another day' and 'it's another week over, another month over, another day over' were used by the vast majority of the participants. Many, thus, lived in the present. This was, it appears, because thinking further ahead into the future was difficult and painful because it highlighted the

fact that there was still a long period of separation ahead, as Isabella made clear:

> **Isabella**: Oh, thank god, it's another week over, another month over, another day over. And that's how I think. Every day. Like today, I would think, another day over. I've been to see you, taken the dogs out this afternoon, another day over. So... The days mean nothing to me, birthdays, anniversaries, mean nothing because he's not there.

Those who were waiting on appeals, especially, saw them as beacons of hope and as something to focus on. They acted as temporal landmarks, in a sense, to plan towards. Elizabeth, for example, was hoping the appeal would mean her husband would not need to serve another decade. Anne, not dissimilarly, was hoping that the law might change and permit her elderly husband to be released before his tariff ended.

> **Elizabeth**: We did talk a lot about the future, but I think that before he was sentenced. Now, it's probably more open-ended because we are hoping to do an appeal. But the thing is, I know now how, you know, how it all works and I should have faith, you know, because I know the majority of what my daughter has written in her statement, which is why his sentence was so harsh, is complete and utter rubbish. […] I can't put all my hopes on an appeal because if an appeal was successful, his sentence would be reduced drastically. But you have to have a little bit of hope but it's knowing how much hope to have.

> **Anne**: Well, I hope that we... I do hope that the law changes, that there will be some concession for older prisoners. And that, as I say, even if [husband] were to get early parole, it would be massive. It would be fantastic, I look forward to that day. But... As I say, the... I see myself... I need to make more of an effort for me. Do things that I enjoy and want to do.

Yet even these women realised they needed to be realistic, and could not pin their hopes entirely on the earliest possible release date or a successful appeal. As Elizabeth noted above, they needed to moderate their hopes and know 'how much hope to have', because they were afraid of the emotional pain that would result if all their hopes were dashed. The hope was, thus, tentative and not all-consuming.

Rather than dwelling on the sentence length, some participants focused on other parts of their lives. Work, education, children and volunteering were used to set short-term goals for the participant to focus on and help distract her from the fact of her partner's imprisonment. This was possible for these women because unlike long-term prisoners, they were not wholly removed from these aspects of their lives. Whereas it is difficult for prisoners to focus on hobbies or friends to distract themselves from the fact of long-term imprisonment and put their lives back together (Cohen and Taylor 1972), the partners were able to use these other aspects of their lives to refocus their identities. In other words, their entire identities were not shattered by long-term imprisonment because they still had family, work and hobbies to focus on. Gemma, Elsa and Elizabeth, below, discuss concentrating on their own daily lives (household, friends, work) and not thinking too far into the future. There is a link to be drawn here to the reformulation of one's everyday routines, as discussed earlier in this chapter, which came about as a result of their life-course being altered.

> **Gemma**: And I have a good neighbour across the road, and we go out a lot together. Well, you know, we go to various places, the market, something like that. It passes the time. So it does get a bit better.
>
> **Elsa**: I'm just trying consciously to go on with life as best as I can. You know? Just try to keep things tidy and organised, you know?
>
> **Anna**: And how do you see the future going now?
> **Elizabeth**: Yeah. At the moment I'm trying to focus on finding out about my job. Because I think for almost my own sanity, you know, my husband is very aware that I'm not coping so well at the moment because I don't know whether I've got a job.

Those who did think about post-release future tended to see it in a positive and idealistic light. Thinking of the future in this way could be a coping mechanism since it gave the participants some hope and acted as a “light at the end of the tunnel”. Susan said she and her partner would 'like to make a home and a family'. Mary spoke about her and her partner, now coming to the end of his sentence, planning a prison-free life together:

> **Mary**: I think we'll have a lovely future. That's what I want. I want us to have a good future. And I think we will. He won't go back inside, I believe that, I believe that, with all my heart, he'll not go back inside. He doesn't want to. I think, I hope that I'm too important to him now. I think life is going to be too important to him. He's missed too much of it.

Yet most of the women were pragmatic, and their interviews revealed that when they did think about post-release future, they realised there may be various difficulties to face. Those who met their partners in prison anticipated a challenging period of adjustment, as they had never shared a house with their partner before. Others, as discussed in the previous chapter, spoke about the potential problems arising out of living with someone who was institutionalised after a long sentence and adjusting to each other after a long period of separation. Even those who were very hopeful for the future revealed, over the course of the interviews, that they were aware there might be problems to face and that the future could not be entirely rosy. For example, Mary, whose earlier quote appears to be very positive, noted:

> **Mary**: But we talk about the future, we plan the future, so our assumption is that we're gonna be together. But like with any relationship, you never know. Because he might come out and completely have a meltdown, or, you know, not be able to handle the change and stuff after all these years. […] And when he comes out, it's just gonna be an adjustment for the both of us, to live in the same house. But we're both aware of the adjustment, we're both aware that we both need space, and that, you know, I need to walk away [sometimes], he needs to walk away and stuff.

Like the prisoners in Carvalho, Capelo and Nunez's (2015) study, some of the women also planned to change their environments upon their partner's release. For them, this formed a part of a positive, prison-free future – a new start to their lives with their partner. Moving away also meant moving to a place where they would not be known, and thus less likely to be stigmatised. This is also an interesting theme because it highlights the extent to which imprisonment was seen as a life-changing event. It was seen as having had such a negative impact on the couples' lives that the women and their partners were willing to uproot themselves and start anew. Jane, for example, was

eager to try and use the Early Removal Scheme[10] so that she and her husband would be able to move away from the UK, partly because it would mean a new start away from people who knew about the conviction. She envisaged a quiet, peaceful life in a community where she and her husband would not need to fear people's reactions. Sally said that moving away would remove her partner from people he committed the crime with, and thus allow them to have a new start.

> **Jane**: But yes, we want to move abroad. Otherwise, I'll sell up and we'll move somewhere quieter, I think. Away from people. Get our own quiet little place where we could do our own thing. Have a glass of wine, listen to music, do a project. He wants to keep working, doing... Help with legal advice. Doing computer work. Because if you go abroad, there's an expat community, you have lots of expats there from our age or older who haven't got computer training who would like somebody who speaks English to come and help. I don't know. That's what we think.

> **Sally**: We're just looking into moving house now out of [city]. 'Cos we've decided if he comes back to [city], mixed with people that he... Even though half of them aren't even from [city], they used to come down... Then he might get out of it [crime].

On the whole, therefore, even those who used optimism and hope to cope with the length of the sentence kept that hope tempered somewhat with a dose of realism. It was not that they were simply seeing the future through rose-tinted glasses. Yet hope for a better, prison-free future made it somewhat easier to endure the long sentence. This was similar to the way women who were waiting for outcomes of appeals or changes in the law kept their hopes in check by realising that they could not hang all their hopes on the ideal outcome.

For those nearing the end of the sentence, planning for release appeared to be easier. There was a more concrete end date in sight and thus post-prison future was not as far away and vague as it might have been in the early stages of the sentence. Mary's partner was months away from

[10]This Scheme usually only applies to foreign national prisoners. Under it, they can return to their home country before their sentence has been served in full. Jane said she wanted to see if her and her husband, both of whom are British, could use it too.

release, and she said that it was only at this, later, stage of the sentence that they were able to see the end and begin concrete planning.

> **Mary**: And probably 'cos once we started talking about Cat D, there was kind of a future, there was a light at the end of the tunnel, so we could both feel a future, d'you know what I mean? We could talk about it properly, we could plan. And now, obviously, you know, hopefully, he gets Cat D this month, that will be massive, massive shift, 'cos that's like town visits and home visits, which is, to me, that's the start of the whole end. It's the beginning of the end, as far as I'm concerned. […] We talk about the future a lot. We talk about the future a lot now. We never used to. But now we do, really talk about the house, we talk about what we're gonna do on visits, and talk about his family, and just all sorts.

6.4 DIFFERENT TEMPORALITIES

A further dimension of time that needs to be considered is the speed at which time appears to pass for the prisoner and for his partner. Firstly, research on prisoners has found that for them, time tends to stand still or pass very slowly in prison, because their schedules are heavily regimented and there is very little scope for spontaneity or variety in their daily lives (*e.g.* Medlicott 1999). The women in this study made it clear they understood this was the case when they spoke about their partners' imprisonment.

> **Lucy**: He's in the same place, doing the same thing.
>
> **Susan**: But he says – 'I haven't got anything to say'. He says – 'you know what I do. I get up, I go to the gym, I go to work, that's just... Every day'.

For the partner outside, time passed at the normal pace. The women went to work, interacted with family and friends, and engaged in routine activities such as shopping. They experienced the usual hallmarks of the passage of time – changing seasons, new infrastructure being constructed and technological advances. Yet their partners could not share in these experiences, and this dis-synchronicity in the speed at which time passed often raised a number of challenges for the participant and her partner. It should be noted that only a very small minority of women explicitly

said that time, for them, had at one point stood still, just like for the prisoner. Anne's interview revealed that at the early stages, time had stood still for her, but she was now learning to live an independent life and was trying to take pleasure in small things, like travelling with her step-daughter.

> **Anne**: Time sort of stands still a bit, you know? Definitely has stood still, like, even physically.

On the whole, however, time moved on at the normal pace for the partner outside, and as time went on, depth of communication became more difficult to sustain. Initially, the prisoner and his partner had many things to discuss – the prison routine that was unfamiliar to most participants, appeals, and so forth – but as time went on, the prisoner had increasingly little to share. Again, the difficulties a strictly regimented routine poses for communication between the prisoner and those outside has been hinted at by a prisoner's mother in Tsui's (2010) study. This thesis provides further evidence of this being the case:

> **Elly**: You [the prisoner] have less and less to say in letters. It's like writing to the same pen-pal... It's like Groundhog Day. They've got less to say to you.
>
> **Cara**: He sends me letters and stuff as well, but not as often and not as detailed as mine are. 'Cos obviously I don't really know what he would say. 'Hi, woke up, ate breakfast, ate lunch, chatted to Dave'. There's not really a lot that he can tell me… But he writes me letters every now and then, saying, like, you know, 'Hi, I really miss you, I think about you all the time…'.

How did this affect the partner outside? Over time, the daily life as the prisoner remembered it and as it actually was became increasingly different, and it became difficult to communicate. In other words, the prisoner suffered from social and temporal alienation since he was living outside his familial setting but also outside the normal temporal setting (Liem and Kunst 2013). His link with outside world became more tenuous (Wahidin 2006). Communication became disjointed, with the participant outside usually having considerably more news to share than the prisoner inside.

Elsa and Elly made this explicitly clear when talking about the topics of conversations during visits. They said that not only did the prisoner have little to share, but as time went on, it was more difficult for the partner outside to talk about things – like new friends and new jobs – that the prisoner did not know much about. As Practitioner 3 noted succinctly, 'After a time, what do you talk about on the phone?'.

> **Elsa**: By the end of the visit you're frantically scrabbling around trying to think of something to say. You know?
> **Anna**: And why do you think that is?
> **Elsa**: Well, part of it is talk... We talk every day on the phone, as you've gathered. Um... I suppose... [long pause] I don't know really. I suppose at the moment it's the hard fact of leading separate lives. Very often some of the things I have in my life, he just wouldn't understand, wouldn't relate to. […] I mean mostly, in previous work, he's known who I've worked with. Whereas if I tell him so-and-so said so-and-so today, he would think – who is so-and-so? D'you know what I mean? It just wouldn't have any significance to him.

> **Elly**: He's alright, he takes an interest [in her life], but again, I'm conscious of the fact that I'm talking about people he's never met. Spouses... I suppose they all have limits about how much either of them wants to hear about the other person's work and people who work... My sister tells me work dramas occasionally, I find after 5 minutes – oh my gosh, I'm quite bored... It all sounds really petty and stupid to me! And I'm sure he thinks that.

Relatedly, the participants were worried about the extent to which their partners were frozen in the past and what that might mean for their future. Some spoke about the difficulties prisoners might face upon release, when they will have to catch up with the social and technological changes they had missed. Even though prisoners can keep themselves aware of social and technological advances, for example, by watching television, they are not living these changes. Susan's quote, below, highlights how in this way, too, the prisoners' link to the outside world was tenuous. Even though prisoners can keep themselves aware of social and technological advances by watching television, reading newspapers and listening to the radio, the women in this sample revealed that their partners were in fact often in the dark and frozen back in time.

> **Mary**: It's quite weird, 'cos he wrote to me one time, and said - 'what's Skype?'. And it made me realise that actually, he's missed out on a lot of technological progress. And when he comes out, he's gonna be like 'what the hell is that?'. D'you know what I mean? Like, 'why do you, you've got Internet on your phone? And you can get onto Facebook on your phone?'. And stuff like that. He's completely outdated on technology. And that's gonna take some getting used to. And he reckons when he gets out, he doesn't want to have a phone. He doesn't want to have a mobile phone. 'Cos he doesn't want people to be able to get in touch with him. And that will last for a day. He cannot not be in touch with people. So that's kind of... It made realise that like he's... He'll be amazed about how technology has changed in just five years.

> **Susan**: Because as much as I hate to say that he is institutionalised, but that is what prison does to you. You don't come out the same person. We talk about... I, like, teach him things about Wi-Fi. He doesn't know what Wi-Fi is. He has no idea. Or, like, he says... 'Cos he works in reception... He said – 'somebody came into prison...'. He puts all their prop[11] away. They had an iPhone in their prop. And he went to put it into their prop box, he said he looked at it for like 10 minutes. He said it wasn't even turned on, he wasn't allowed to turn it on, but he just stared at it. And he phoned me up to tell me about this. 'I held an iPhone!'. I said – 'that's wonderful, sweetheart, that's great'. 'But I held it and I thought of you'. I said – 'why did you think of me?'. ''Cos you do all of those things on the outside that I don't do'. And it's quite sad when you see what somebody's missing out on.

There was also a sense in which the above created distance between the participant and her partner. The women, of course, were up-to-date when it came to social and technological changes, as Susan's quote above shows. They had mobile phones and used Skype and Facebook – for them, modern technological advancement was a feature of everyday life, as Susan's partner pointed out in the quote above. For the prisoners, however, it was not. Sometimes, this could cause tension and misunderstandings when the prisoner would attempt to give advice or otherwise try to help his partner outside on the basis of his outdated knowledge. Susan, for example, spoke about her partner not knowing about the economic situation and supermarket prices, and Rachel spoke about the father of her children being completely unaware of what today's children want as gifts and what these gifts cost.

> **Susan**: Because he was very, very well off before he went to prison, he's got a very... I don't know what the word is, like a jaded [blinkered] view maybe? So he can't

[11]Property

> understand why I won't, like, shop in M&S. Or, like, do things... He's like – 'smoked salmon from M&S...'. I'm like – 'I can't afford that. I went to Lidl'. And he's like – 'Oh. Why did you do that?'. He's like – 'I would go to M&S if I could'. I was like, 'you don't get it, at all'. But obviously, he's been inside for the whole of our economic crash.
>
> **Rachel**: Just think about how much he's missed, things have changed. How much it costs... Kids aren't asking for dollies, they're asking for iPads. And... D'you know what I mean? He'd say – 'how much are they?'. I'm like – '300-odd quid'. Yeah, I'll get three. [sarcasm]

6.5 CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, time and the passage of time were also important parts of the partner's experience outside. Finding out that a husband or boyfriend was given a long sentence was traumatic, for similar reasons why long sentences are difficult to cope with for prisoners themselves. The length of the sentence was at times overwhelming, and the sentence represented a time taken away from the partner as well as the prisoner.

Not only was time simply taken away from the women, but their life-courses were also interrupted. The women spoke about having to delay getting married and conceiving children, and for those who were older, having a child with her partner was made impossible by the sentence length. Key lifetime events, thus, were also taken away from the women or postponed until after the “ideal” time for such milestones. Likewise, their everyday routines were changed by imprisonment, which triggered a reinterpretation of their identities, with most choosing to focus on other aspects of their lives, such as employment, childcare and volunteering.

Like many long-term prisoners, the women coped with long sentences by segmenting them into shorter blocks of time and focusing on shorter goals, such as when the prisoner would be transferred to a lower category prison. Those who had appeals going saw them as something to focus on, rather than thinking about the long sentence as a whole. The women who did think about

the future tended to see it in a very positive light, but at the same time were aware there might be difficulties to face. They were not being idealistic and were not blind to the possibility of the prisoner being changed by a long sentence and to the need to adapt to each other after a long term of separation.

Overall, these interviews highlight how similar the experiences of prisoners and their partners are. This serves to reinforce the point that partners of prisoners can, in fact, be seen as experiencing the long sentence alongside the prisoner himself, albeit in a muted manner. This chapter also, thus, contributes to the larger debate surrounding the boundaries of punishment because it shows how the impact of long sentences extends to the partners of long-term prisoners, too. Long sentences can shape the lives of these partners in many and important ways, such as making it impossible for them to conceive children with their partner, if they are older at the time of arrest or if the sentence is very long. In the next chapter, I will turn to how the women experienced stigma, a well-documented pain of imprisonment felt by many prisoners' families.

CHAPTER 7
'We're treated as criminal.'
Public and Self-Stigma and Stigma Management

Stigmatisation and fear of stigmatisation are the most well-documented pains of imprisonment experienced by prisoners' families (*e.g.* Condry 2007, Comfort 2008, May 1999 and 2000). Across numerous different jurisdictions, researchers have found that partners can experience overt manifestations of stigma, such as verbal abuse and gossip, property being vandalised, and shunning because of their link to the prisoner. Fear of stigma, too, has been noted to be a serious problem, and can be so severe that a prisoner's partner may be afraid of leaving her house, even if nothing had actually been said or done to publicly stigmatise her (*e.g.* Fishman 1988).

This chapter seeks to develop our knowledge further by focusing on the long-term aspect of stigma and how the seriousness of the offences shapes experiences of stigma. The seriousness of the offences in question meant that many of the women faced intense public stigmatisation and lived with a very strong fear of being stigmatised. I also show that long sentences, for some women, meant many years of facing both public and feared or anticipated stigma. I then go on to highlight that since a long sentence often makes a case high-profile, dealing with the media becomes an important facet of the long-term prisoner's partner's experience. Finally, I discuss how the women made sense of the conviction. I show that even those who maintained that their partner was innocent felt the need to rationalise being in a relationship with someone convicted of a serious offence and serving a long sentence – simply stating that he was innocent did not seem to be enough. What this tells us is that conviction and imprisonment are in and of themselves stigmatising.

7.1 WHAT IS STIGMA?

Goffman (1963: 154 and 3) defines stigma both as the situation of the individual who is 'disqualified from full social acceptance' and any 'attribute that is deeply discrediting'. Broadly

speaking, it is something that marks the individual being stigmatised as being in some sense morally bad or otherwise deficient or somehow falling short of what he ought to be. Since Goffman's (1963) seminal analysis of stigma, other scholars have elaborated on stigma further. Nonetheless, most definitions of stigma comprise of two components: the recognition of some characteristic and the social devaluation of the individual that bears this characteristic (Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000).

In analysing the experiences of the women in this sample, however, it is useful to consider the different levels at which stigmatisation occurs. Public stigma consists of the social and psychological reactions to the individual perceived as having a stigmatising characteristic (Bos *et al.* 2014). The second level of stigma is self-stigma, which includes both the individual's fear of being stigmatised and her potential internalisation of the diminished status attributed to her by society. Corrigan, Watson and Barr (2006) see public stigma as the root of self-stigma and stigma by association. They argue that individuals experience self-stigma because they are, or fear, being publicly stigmatised. This distinction between *being* stigmatised (by the public) and *feeling* stigmatised (self-stigma) will be key to understanding the experiences of the women who participated in this study. These two types of stigma are what Jacoby (1994) calls 'enacted' and 'felt' stigma, respectively. I will show that one need not *be* stigmatised to *feel* stigmatised and that the spectre of social rejection was very real for some women. This spectre was all the more frightening because the offences were serious.

Pryor and Reeder (2011) see public and felt stigma as being distinct from stigma by association, which is analogous to the concept of 'courtesy stigma' Goffman (1963: 31) describes. Stigma by association is the social reaction to individuals linked to the stigmatised person, and it is usually through this dimension of stigma that the experiences of prisoners' families are understood (*e.g.* Condry 2007, May 2000). These families are seen as being stigmatised because of their

association with the prisoner rather than due to some characteristic they themselves possess. Nonetheless, I will show that prisoners' families experience public and self-stigma in similar ways to people who possess primary stigmatising characteristics.

How might the long-term sentence affect the levels of stigma experienced by partners outside? Studies on stigma have shown that the perceived severity of the stigmatising condition evokes greater anxiety in the public (*e.g.* Feldman and Crandall 2007), as does the perceived dangerousness of said condition (Feldman and Crandall 2007). Thirdly, perceptions of norm violation are positively related to the levels of societal anger and negatively to sympathy (Dijker and Koomen 2003). I posit that all three are important for analysing the stigma felt by partners of long-term prisoners. After all, the long-term prisoner may be seen as having committed an especially severe crime which may – depending on the type of crime committed – mark him out as a very dangerous individual. The levels of perceived norm violations may also be greater when sentences are longer and thus it is felt that the norm violated by the prisoner is a very important one.

It ought to be highlighted that long sentences often represent the seriousness of the norm violation (*i.e.* the crime) and thus the severity of the stigmatising condition. After all, unlike in the US, where (very) long sentences can be given for comparatively minor offences (*e.g.* low level drug offences), in the UK there is a stronger correlation between offence seriousness and sentence length. The Rockefeller laws in New York resulted in some drug offenders getting sentences as long as 15 to 20 years with the possibility of imprisonment for life (Fried 2004). To compare, possession of Class A drugs in England and Wales carries a maximum determinate sentence of seven years in prison, though supply and production are treated more harshly (Gov.uk 2015). The only mandatory life sentence in England and Wales is applied to murder, and there is only a limited use of mandatory minimum sentences in cases of repeat serious drug traffickers (at least seven years), repeat domestic burglars (at least three years) and firearms offenders (at least five years) (Crown

Prosecution Service n.d.). In the latter two cases, there are provisions for reducing the minimum term. This should be compared to US federal mandatory minimum sentences, which apply to a greater range of crimes and are usually much longer (Families Against Mandatory Minimums 2013).

What are the processes through which stigma is transferred from the prisoner to his family? As outlined in Chapter 3, Condry (2007), in her study on stigma, set out the reasons why prisoners' relatives might be stigmatised by the public. It is useful to briefly summarise her concept of the 'web of shame' again. The first two strands of this web are to do with contamination. Firstly, prisoners' families are seen as contaminated by virtue of their association with a prisoner. In other words, they are seen as the same kind of (bad) person as the prisoner because they are linked to them by blood or marriage. Secondly, those biologically related to the prisoner could be stigmatised because they may be seen as sharing “bad blood” with the prisoner. The next three strands are to do with what Condry (2007: 69) calls 'kin culpability', where families of prisoners may be seen as being somehow blameworthy for the offence. The first type is blameworthiness by omission – that is, the idea that the relative somehow failed to prevent the offence from happening. For instance, wives of sex offenders may be seen as uniquely able to spot and prevent sex offending because they share a house and a bed with the offender (Russell 1986). Other relatives may be seen as being guilty by commission. They may be seen as doing something that resulted in the prisoner committing the offence. For example, a mother may be stigmatised for giving birth to someone who went on to offend. Finally, relatives may be seen as blameworthy because they continue to maintain a relationship with the prisoner.

This study largely reinforces Condry's (2007) work on the origins of stigma, and thus discussion of these issues will be kept brief. Since the participants were not biologically related to the prisoners, they were stigmatised by association (Condry 2007). That is, they were deemed to be

"the same kind of person" as the prisoner because they associated with him. This was certainly confirmed in this study:

> **Anne**: But [husband's] own son has taken nothing to do with him. He's in his 30s, and, you know, that's hurtful. I'm disowned as well, as [husband]. And he's getting married this year, so, you know, obviously [husband] is not going to the wedding and I haven't been invited either. So I'm clubbed along with [husband]. When the rest of [husband's] family are all preparing for a wedding. So it's hurtful.

Another prominent reason for stigmatisation, according to the women, was the fact of their choice to continue the relationship with the prisoner. In other words, they were stigmatised for continuing the relationship instead of severing it (Condry 2007). It may be easier to stigmatise intimate partners for deciding to continue the relationship, since they have the option of divorce or separation. Biological relationships cannot be ended this easily, even though there is always the option of not having anything to do with the prisoner. Alice, quoted below, was thus stigmatised for continuing her marriage with her imprisoned husband:

> **Alice**: And my daughter suggested that I'd chosen [husband] over them. And I said – 'that's absolute rubbish, isn't it?'. She's 40 years old. She's got her own family. She's not a child I've deserted to stand by my love. You know? I'd have never-ever deserted my children, they were my life.

This choice was especially stark when women met their partners in prison and thus chose to enter into a relationship with someone who was a convicted prisoner. Judy made this clear in her interview, as did Susan. Both women met their partners in prison and were stigmatised by (former) friends because they chose to be in a relationship with someone society deemed to be morally deficient. In a sense, this type of choice was seen as being an especially reprehensible one – the woman did not simply choose to stand by her partner after he was imprisoned, she chose a partner who was already in prison. The fact that they were also women who worked in prisons made it especially easy to stigmatise them since it was seen as being especially reprehensible for prison

staff to enter into relationships with men “on the other side of the fence”.

> **Judy**: I've lost my job, I've lost my career, I'm losing my house, I've lost friends. Because I chose to go into this relationship with him.
>
> **Susan**: 'Cos I worked there [in the prison] for two and a half years, the culture is very much like they'd [prison staff who have relationships with prisoners] done the worst thing in the world. Like... They're like worst... They're worst of the worst. If you do that against your colleagues or anything else, you're not even... You're below, like, the lowest of the low. […] They [former prison colleagues] found my new number and sent me a lot of abuse, like, text messages and Facebook messages. And, I just think they could have just left it. Like... I'd resigned. I'd put myself out, I had no job, nothing, and I'd resigned immediately because I'd had more respect for them than to just carry on and let the situation snowball. So I think it's really hard for me that even though they wouldn't want me in their life and they wouldn't agree with [her choice], it's hard for me that they couldn't just leave me be. I think that's the hardest.

It was very uncommon for women to feel or be made to feel like they were in some way responsible for the offence, either by omission or by commission. This could be because they were partners rather than biological relatives, and therefore could not be blamed for, for example, giving birth to someone who offended. Two participants, however, described feeling a diffuse, vague type of guilt. Since guilt is act-focused (Carveth 2001), and involves feeling some responsibility for an act or omission, the implication was that the women felt in some way responsible for the offence. This was the case with Lisa, even though she met her husband after the offence was committed:

> **Lisa**: One of the things that I found difficult was the guilt by association. And only very-very recently have I started to come to terms with that one and accept that that's the case, rather than fight against it in myself. I have guilty by association. I accept that now. That's really... That's been difficult to come to terms with, to say the least.
> **Anna**: What do you mean by guilt by association?
> **Lisa**: Well... I think for a long time I struggled with that because I thought I wasn't with him when he did that, I would never have condoned it, I've always been shocked by it. I've never made excuses for him, I've worked in the criminal justice system, and challenge people about their offending. I've never had to do that with him, I have to say, particularly. We've always agreed about the offence from the... It was horrendous. And that was that.

7.2 PUBLIC STIGMA

More than half of the sample were publicly stigmatised within their social circle and/or community, and for these women, the experiences were often very upsetting indeed. At its most extreme, public stigma manifested itself in vandalised property, which was deeply upsetting for the participants because they were the ones to experience this and had to bear the financial burden of reversing the property damage caused by vandals. Isabella and Gemma, below, describe the emotional and practical and financial impact of vandalism.

> **Isabella**: I've come back and there's been nails in my drive, someone's thrown nails. In one year, I've had six tyres. And then you look... There's none for six weeks, eight weeks, so you get this, oh, it's alright now, and then suddenly they throw nails. I've had wires cut out the back, I've had petrol put on my doorstep, mess put through my door. I just go through it. […] To try and have a normal life – my life isn't normal anymore, unfortunately, because of what my husband's been accused of. I have to suffer the consequences. People don't talk to me because of what he's done. People have been sarcastic. I've had, as I tell you, the nails and things... And I have done nothing wrong! Yet I'm persecuted for it.

> **Gemma**: But the first Saturday after the Magistrates Court, I was going out with my daughter, and she'd come for me, gone to the top of the drive, turned round, and she said – 'oh my god, mother, what's that on the wall?'. And somebody had graffitied on the front of the house. Yeah. So that was awful. Got some graffiti remover, had to get the police. It was another hassle.

Physical violence was not mentioned by any of the participants. However, one participant said that her horse had been killed. It had been injected with drugs and died as a result, and she felt this was done by someone in the community as a way of stigmatising her. She had been frightened by this and gave her other pets away in order to protect them from further violence.

> **Fiona**: Well, we know who it is but we can't prove it. They shot him up with heroin. They found out where the horse was, we know who sent them down there.

Nevertheless, where public stigmatisation was experienced, it usually took the form of shunning and avoiding. This included family, friends, neighbours, acquaintance and colleagues, and

was also felt to be their way of showing the partner that she was deemed to be tainted by her relationship with the prisoner.

> **Elizabeth**: Friends tend to clear off. Most of them have, in fairness. And actually, if you take the friends away and the work situation away, because my employer has not allowed me to have contact with any of my friends I worked with...
>
> **Elsa**: I had a few people avoiding me and that was it. And one or two people made it clear they no longer wished to be friends, and I'm thinking – fine, friends like that, I don't need.

In addition to being shunned, the participants also described being subjected to negative gossip about themselves and the prisoner. People would say negative things about them, shout abuse or otherwise show contempt. This was also the most frequent type of stigma women described coming from prison officers and other criminal justice staff. Although there were stories of polite, friendly officers, the majority of the women recounted instances of prison officers “talking down” to them, speaking harshly or rudely, and otherwise showing a negative attitude to visitors. This is not to say that these officers were intending to stigmatise the participants, but that is how these women experienced such treatment. It it is entirely possible that they were sensitised to such treatment because they saw themselves as being normal, law-abiding women who deserved to be treated with respect. Yet almost all the participants felt that they were being treated badly because of their association with a prisoner and because this association devalued them in the eyes of the officers. This echoes the findings of earlier research, which has found numerous examples of prison staff treating visitors as people who were guilty by association (Codd 1998). Some examples can be taken from Lucy's and Rachel's interviews:

> **Lucy**: Yeah, it is quite daunting, all these people, but, like, some of the prison guards... Like, they look at you like you're the prisoner. They look at you like you've done something wrong. And that's quite awful. Like, there was... The one in there, he has the dog. He looks at you a bit like you're shit. And like [daughter] went to stroke the dog, he was like – 'do *not* touch my dog!'. He was like that. [her emphasis]

> **Rachel**: I've had seven years' experience of it [visiting] now, they're [officers] horrible... They think... I appreciate the fact that they get really scummy people coming through their doors to visit scummy people. It's really bad to say that, but you know what I mean. And I appreciate that people probably do give them mouth and attitude. But they just treat everybody the same. And they're looking at everybody... That's the way I look at it. If you're visiting someone in prison you must be a bad person because... There's no respect, no respect at all.

Many officers were also said to possess an attitude of 'contemptuous neglect' (Comfort 2003: 83) towards visitors – that is, a lack of concern for their wellbeing and needs. Holly, for instance, stressed that '*They* [prison officers – her emphasis] don't care' about visitors. Jenny said visitors' 'values, [their] voice is never gonna be heard. It don't count.' There were also numerous stories of prison staff not notifying partners outside of various issues, such as a prisoner's illness, the fact that he had been moved, and so forth. Again, most of the women seemed to feel that this treatment was due to their status as prisoners' partners. This was further confirmed by a practitioner:

> **Practitioner 1**: They [families] are seen as guilty as prisoners.

In fact, the "stain" of a partner's imprisonment could have very long-term implications for how the women were treated by the authorities. Bella's door, shortly before the interview, had been 'busted in' by the police looking for a drug-dealer. She described incredibly derogatory treatment during the search of her house. She said that one reason why it had been so easy for the police to get a warrant and 'get away with' treating her in a harsh manner was her link to a former long-term prisoner. Even though he was her ex-partner, Bella felt that the "stain" on her identity remained. It should be noted that the fact of her own criminal background also contributed to how she was treated, and she recognised that both her own and her ex-partner's backgrounds played a role.

Another way in which many of the participants felt they were publicly stigmatised by prison officers was when officers applied prison rules in what the women saw as inconsistent manner which resulted in them feeling humiliated. There is a link here to be made with the tightness of

imprisonment as discussed in Chapter 5. Modern prisons are governed by numerous, minute rules, which apply not just to prisoners but also to those maintaining any kind of contact with them. The women were often subjected to rules about clothing, paperwork, and so forth – and sometimes felt that officers used these rules to stigmatise and denigrate them. Esther, who became quite agitated when she spoke about her treatment at the hands of prison officers, described the following instances of officers treating her in what she perceived to be a harsh, contemptuous manner:

> **Esther**: I'm not anti-police, I'm not anti-courts, I'm not anti-the criminal justice system, it's there for a reason, I can understand all that. But when you're dealing one-to-one with a system that says – 'go and wait outside in the rain for an hour, no you can't stand in this little bit that's dry. We want you to stand there in the rain'. And that's what they do to us. […] Every single week, I think, what type of person is gonna search me today, is it gonna be one that's gonna be polite and smile or one that's gonna be 'you can't wear your scarf this week'. 'I've worn a scarf last week'. 'No, you didn't! We don't allow scarves'. I said – 'I've worn a scarf last week'. 'No, you can't, go back and put it in your locker'. 'If I put it back in my locker, I'm gonna lose about 20 minutes of my visit, because I've got to go back to the end of the queue'. 'It's not my fault, you shouldn't wear a scarf'.

As a result, the majority of the women – most of whom described themselves as having grown up respecting the police and other authorities – said their worldview had changed. They became very critical of the criminal justice system. It may be that this was in part because so many were maintaining their partners were innocent, and thus saw the police and the court system as unjust, corrupt or ineffective. However, many also described their feelings about criminal justice authorities changing due to the stigmatisation and punitive treatment they (and their partners) experienced at the hands of prison staff and police officers. This supports Lee, Porter and Comfort's (2014) study, which found that prisoners' families' perceptions of the prison system are affected by perceptions of how they are treated. Crosthwaite (1972) postulated that when a sentence is long, the denigration partners experience when visiting builds up, and this is also supported by some women in this study. Esther's quote on the previous page is a good example of this, as it shows how frustrations can build up over a long sentence. Isabella's views of the prison system also changed

because of how she was treated by officers.

> **Isabella**: When you go [to visit]... Well, if you haven't got any change [for lockers] – 'hard luck!', from the wardens. I feel it's the most uninteresting and uninspiring job that anyone can do, because that's how it comes over. They're there for for punishment, they're not there to help anyone.

Condry (2007) argued that stigma experienced by prisoners' families is mediated by the social reaction to the offender and offence. Certainly, the overwhelming majority of the sample were publicly stigmatised, and the fact that these were partners of long-term prisoners allows us to explore why this was the case for so many of the sample. In other ways, in what sense did the social reaction affect the public stigma these women felt? Most of offences in this study were homicide offences or sex offences, which, research has found, are deemed to be especially serious (*e.g.* Levi and Jones 1985, Stylianou 2003). Therefore, the perceived severity of the condition could be important for understanding why so many of the women were publicly stigmatised. Not only were they partnered to a prisoner, but to a prisoner serving a long sentence for a serious offence. Linked to this is the issue of norm violation. This is reinforced by the fact that murder and sex offences are both seen to be violations of important social norms, and thus the public reaction to the partner was often accordingly highly negative. This was certainly confirmed by the participants, who felt the public stigmatisation they faced occurred because their husbands or boyfriends were deemed to have committed an especially serious offence –

> **Isabella**: To try and have a normal life – my life isn't normal anymore, unfortunately, *because of what my husband's been accused of* [a sex offence]. I have to suffer the consequences. People don't talk to me because of what he's done. People have been sarcastic. I've heard, as I tell you, the nails and things... And I have done nothing wrong! Yet I'm persecuted for it. [emphasis added]
>
> **Anna**: And what sort of things were people saying?
> **Tina**: Oh, obviously, the paedophile thing...

Moreover, some of the women lost their jobs in part, as they saw it, because of the perceived

seriousness of the offence – another form of public stigma. Alice, for example, continuously had her chances of employment in the care sector damaged due to the fact that her husband was serving a sentence for a sexual offence, and something very similar happened to Louise, who was also married to someone convicted of a sex offence. The marked difference is that Louise had had no job-related difficulties until after her husband's release. For her, the stigmatisation began after the sentence was over and her husband was on the Sex Offenders' Register. Again, this is interesting because it indicates that the employers were concerned about the fact that she was sharing a house with someone who had been accused of a serious sex offence, rather than simply because she was partnered to a former prisoner. Both women felt they lost their jobs because of the serious crimes their partners were convicted of – as Louise put it (quote below), deciding to stay partnered to a sex offender meant that employers saw the women's moral judgement as impaired. They were thus deemed to be untrustworthy employees. It is possible, as Louise suggests, that sex offences are not only seen to be especially serious, but that the public sees partners of men convicted of sex offences as 'groomed' and thus weak or gullible. In fact, more than half of the women who lost their jobs were women whose partners were convicted of sex offences.

> **Alice**: The fact that the offences are what they are in itself seems to bias everything. So of course now I'm sort of thinking – I need to go to work, I'm struggling to get a housing benefit, and I need to go back to work, really. But of course, at the back of my mind, I'm thinking, well, what if I go to work and it all happens again? You know? MAPPA get involved... You know, what right do they actually have to sort of interfere with my life. Because me doing my job, I would never disclose... I've never-ever taken work home and I've never discussed my work with my family, anyway, you know. You know, you might say what sort of day you've had at the office, but you don't sort of... You don't, you sign a confidentiality policy, you have to sign up to it because that's what you're doing.
>
> **Louise**: And then that's when it all went bad. They [the police authorities who visited her and her husband after they moved to a new area] said – 'you must tell your employer, and if you don't, we will'. So all my good works, my unblemished career, my right to family and private life, all went out of the window. And I got suspended.... [...] And taken off the Social Work Register. So I have five years next year I could apply to go back on. So the status of [husband] also... Enveloped itself onto me. […] I had to lose my career because I chose to have a relationship with

> someone on the Register[12]. […] It was – 'how can you possibly have tempted yourself into having a relationship with you know, a paedophile?'. […] The public would not have confidence in the profession because I have a relationship with [husband]. And I must have impaired judgement, if not now, then I must have it in the future at some time. Surely. None of which is true.

Relatedly, the perceived dangerousness of the prisoner also seemed to play a role in stigmatising the women they were linked to. In other words, the women may have been publicly stigmatised not only because they were partnered with someone who was seen as having violated an important social norm, but also because he was seen as being a dangerous individual. This could explain why partners of sex offenders often lost their jobs if their employers found out about their situation. Sex offenders are stereotypically presented as dangerous and at very high risk of reoffending (*e.g.* Quinn, Forsyth and Mullen-Quinn 2004). The comments about disclosure Alice makes on the previous page seem to indicate she felt her employer feared that her husband might access potential victims through her. These perceptions of dangerousness interrelated with the already negative views of long-term prisoners as evil individuals who violated important social norms.

The length of the sentence also, for some women, prolonged the duration of public stigmatisation. A long sentence creates a long-term, ongoing stigmatisatory state. Imprisonment becomes a lengthy, semi-permanent state within which the prisoner's partner has to operate. This means that stigmatisation may occur at any point. Isabella, for instance, spoke about nothing happening for weeks on end, and then there would be nails in her driveway again. Relationships with people may also be lost not in the immediate aftermath of the arrest and sentencing, but deteriorate over a number of years, as happened with Elly.

> **Elly**: I mean, as the years have gone on, I have to say, my youngest sister moves further and further away from me actually. She doesn't really want to be associated

[12]Sexual Offenders' Register

> with it. As she gets older, she becomes more like my father actually in her outlook on things. But no, she doesn't refuse to speak to me or anything like that but yeah, she's less keen on it all, let's put it that way.

7.3 SELF-STIGMA

Even though not all the participants experienced public stigmatisation, almost all the women described experiencing self-stigma. Self-stigma, or felt stigma, is the realisation that oneself possesses a stigmatising characteristic, and is rooted in the social views of this characteristic. For instance, in a study of stigma experienced by people diagnosed with epilepsy, Jacoby (1994: 269-270) found that the patients' 'perceptions of epilepsy as stigmatising were clearly anchored in what they understood to be the commonly held view of epilepsy among the lay community and constituted a major source of anguish among them', even though few participants could recall any enacted stigma. Similarly, many of the women in this study felt that society would look down on them because they were partnered to a prisoner. They felt that because their partners had been convicted of crimes and thus were seen as having broken social norms, they must, by virtue of their association with the prisoner, be publicly seen as morally deficient. Consider, for example, Iris – an elderly lady who ceased playing golf with her friends after her husband was imprisoned. Although she said her friends had been welcoming, she felt unable to socialise with them because she was afraid they would not want to be in her company and yet were too civil to tell her so outright.

> **Iris**: I used to play a lot of golf. That was a hobby when we retired. But I don't do that... I still play myself. But I wouldn't put my name down to play with any ladies because I wouldn't want them to feel they had to take their name off if they didn't want to play with me. Make things awkward, you know?

Feeling stigmatised – feeling like you are, in the eyes of society, a "bad person" – was perhaps so common because most of the women described themselves as coming from normal law-abiding backgrounds. They had internalised social norms and were acutely aware that being partnered to someone convicted of a serious offence made them morally deficient in the eyes of law-abiding society. For them, imprisonment was not a normal state of existence, but rather it was something

shameful and alien. Perhaps due to this they felt stigmatised in the eyes of society even when nothing had been done or said to publicly stigmatise them. What may have been exacerbating these feelings is the seriousness of the offence, since the women were mostly very much aware that society deemed the offences in question to be especially heinous.

Self-stigma made many participants feel as though all of society saw them as morally deficient. This manifested itself in a suspicion towards society (acquaintances, co-workers, neighbours and friends), in that the participants often spoke about fearing what people might think if they found out that their partners/husbands were serving a long sentence. Statements such as 'I don't advertise it' (Mary), 'you get very-very wary of people' (Elizabeth) and 'I don't know what their [acquaintances'] reaction would be' (Susan) were very common. Elsa's fear of being publicly stigmatised, in the early days after the sentencing, was crippling, even though nothing had been done to publicly stigmatise her:

> **Elsa**: I was frightened as well of vigilantes, you know, I was lying awake at night. I was scared that somebody would torch the house, I was scared of finding graffiti all over the place, you know. I was scared that my car would be vandalised.

For a significant minority, the self-stigma was transformative, in that their very way of life was changed by it. Sarah spoke about wanting to live a 'minimalist' life, away from people who could cause trouble for her and her husband, who had served a sentence for a sex offence. Estelle described wearing 'a mask 24/7' out of fear of how people would react if they found out about her husband. Rachel moved her children to a private school some distance from where she lived, out of fear that they might be bullied in a school where people knew their father had been convicted of murder. Jane also described wanting to leave the country with her husband, get away from people and 'do [their] own thing'. For these women, the fear of stigma was so strong that they were willing to make long-term, significant changes to their lives.

A long sentence also meant that felt stigma continued for a long time. As the quotes below show, this fear could be ever-present, simmering in the background and feeding a sense in which one feels unable to trust and open up to others. This was the case even where people – friends, family, and acquaintances – were on the whole supportive and no public stigmatisation had occurred. Yet the participants, regardless of how long ago their partner was sentenced, continued to fear a negative social reaction and being wary of revealing their situations to others. As Isabella and Cara indicate in the passages below, this fear did not necessarily go away with time but continued to be an ever-present concern well into the sentence. In other words, the women did not feel less stigmatised as the sentence drew on.

> **Isabella**: And even if people are kind to you, you think they're probably talking behind your back. It's very difficult.
>
> **Cara**: So I've been very lucky in that sense [that she had not experienced any public stigma] but the longer it goes, the more it's gonna happen by numbers, statistically, that someone is gonna have a bad reaction. I'm sure it's gonna happen. So every time it comes up and you're just a bit like – someone [will react badly]…

Although most of the women feared stigma, none actually indicated they had internalised the label of "bad person". They themselves maintained they were good, law-abiding individuals who did not deserve to be stigmatised. They stressed, during the interviews, that they had committed no offence themselves. Moreover, many described themselves as good employees, valuable assets to their communities, and good parents. Some, as discussed in Chapter 5, set themselves aside from other prison visitors, whom they saw as troublesome and of lower social standing. At the same time, they felt that society did not see things in this way and still perceived them to be "bad people" because of their link to a long-term prisoner.

7.4 THE MEDIA

Many of the offences the participants' partners were convicted for were quite high-profile; this is not surprising, considering the sentences in all the cases were long. Rebecca, for example, said that she had Google-searched her husband's case, and the search yielded more half a million hits. About half of the cases received media attention of various degrees, and this attention was overwhelmingly experienced as unpleasant by the participants. It is also possible that since many of the cases involved sex offences, the recent increase in media attention to historic sex abuse cases meant that a large proportion of the participants had to cope with the media.

One practitioner who worked with prisoners' families for years stressed that reporters could be very 'devious' indeed, especially when the case in question is a high-profile one. She described, by way of example, reporters rummaging through families' garbage cans in order to find some information about them. Confirming this, thirteen of the women themselves were directly affected by media reporting about their partner's case, in the sense that they were either mentioned in the media or came into contact with reporters. Isabella had to use the back entrance to the court due to media presence, Sally saw people from newspapers outside her house, Marina was contacted by magazines, and her photograph was published. Receiving media attention was often experienced as very frightening indeed, as Lisa and Alice point out in the passages below. Being marked out by the media meant that there was a sort of limelight on the partner who was already going through a difficult time, and meant that it was more difficult for her to “hide”, to mask her status as the partner of a prisoner (Tsui 2010 describes this happening in one of his case-studies). This relates to Goffman's (1963) discussion of how it may be easy to hide an invisible marker of stigma, unlike a visible marker, such as a physical disability. Although being partnered to a prisoner is an invisible marker, media attention may strip the prisoner's partner of her invisibility and anonymity. The women below described how media attention was experienced as upsetting and intrusive, exposing them to actual or potential public scrutiny –

Lisa: And the following day, so it was actually after he was given the life sentence, I was going to see him at the prison and I walked through [city] station and I turned round and the front page of the [newspaper] said 'Killer to wed prison support worker. The bride is the daughter of a teacher'. Because the barrister had also said that we'd planned to get married. And it was just like – urgh, my god, that's me... Luckily it didn't have my name. But then there was this terrifying period where I didn't know if they would try to come after me, whether it was gonna get in the nationals. Whether they would try to get a picture of me, I had to go stay with some friends. It was really, really frightening.

Alice: Yeah, had News of the World on my doorstep day of the trial. My neighbours had to chase them off, but what was awful my neighbours read...heard about...on the local TV news that he'd been sentenced to life before I could actually get back to the house to tell some good friends that lived locally. And I had no chance of telling them. But my next-door neighbour chased them away, threw water on them and said get out of here. 'Cos they were trying to get anybody's address they could in my family, my mum's address or anybody else related to me, they wanted my daughters' addresses, sister's address, but they were chased away by neighbours. So... We didn't get home for a few weeks. Because it was just horrendous.

Even when there was no direct contact with the media, reporting could still have the effect of making it much harder for the participant to hide her stigmatising status (Tsui 2010). Publishing the name of an offender and/or his address could very easily identify his family, too – especially his partner, as most had lived together prior to imprisonment. This makes partners outside more vulnerable to negative effects of media reports, as they and any children are likely to share both the prisoner's address and his family name. Consider Sandra's and Alice's statements:

Sandra: ...they published full-colour pictures of him and in the end our address. And in the end I got so fed up I rang the paper and pointed out to them that I fully appreciated their right to publish whatever they like about him, because he's been found guilty and it's a big story, for a regional paper, but please could they stop publishing his address because as far as I was concerned, that was tantamount to child abuse. Because of the effect it was having on my teenage daughter. And they didn't reply, but I noticed the next time they printed an article about him, they did omit the address.

Alice: They weren't allowed to mention my children, obviously, by law, thank goodness. But they didn't need to. Because once they'd identified my husband, everybody locally knew who he was and where he lived. Who his stepdaughters were. And who I was.

Furthermore, it is well-known that the media tends to sensationalise criminal justice stories (*e.g.* Jewkes 2015), especially when reporting on a cause *du jour* such as historic sex abuse or otherwise high-profile cases. This sensationalisation was experienced as distressing by the participants, about one-half of whom said that their partner's case had been embellished upon by the media. It is possible that because such a big proportion of the participants maintained their partner was innocent, they were especially sensitised to media reporting and sensationalism, however. Moreover, the very fact of the media stating or implying the prisoner was guilty gave rise to feelings of distress. However, in some cases the participants described media outlets printing outright lies in order to sensationalise the story:

> **Elizabeth**: And yes, it was reported in the press and that's quite difficult. Particularly when you're reading and you think actually, that's complete and utter...lie. Some of what was in there you think – no, that didn't happen! No, they didn't take that from my house! They put... I have to tell you this one. Might even make you smile. It was reported in the press that they'd taken a sex manual from my wardrobe. No, from his wardrobe. The only manual that was in my husband's wardrobe was a manual for our car! That's it. And they referred to that as a sex manual.

> **Fiona**: They embellished it, they really embellished it. They said that when he was convicted he was a blithering wreck, and he was crying his eyes out. He wasn't. He wasn't crying his eyes out in the stand, he wasn't doing anything, he was... He just shook his head and said – 'mate, you've got it wrong. You got it wrong'. That's what he said. When they took him down, that's what he said – 'mate, you've got it wrong'. Paper's saying he was crying his eyes out, he was screaming, he was shouting. No, he wasn't. He wasn't doing anything like that at all.

On the whole, media attention was painful but tended to go away with time after the initial interest in the story decreased. Yet sometimes, the story would re-emerge time and again. In cases of long sentences, appeals and re-trials are very likely, which too could garner renewed media attention. This happened with Lisa's partner, well after a decade after the original conviction. In fact, it was this renewed attention that resulted in her being mentioned on the front page of a newspaper. Louise was followed by reporters after she was dismissed from her job due to her

relationship with her husband – after his release. Although this was not media attention focusing on him, it was a direct result of Louise being married to someone convicted of a serious sex offence. Sandra's husband's case – also a serious allegation of sex abuse – attracted media attention again and again as more complainants revealed themselves, years down the line. This, too, in not unusual in cases of historic sexual abuse allegations. For instance, the number of complainants in the Bill Cosby case in the US and Jimmy Savile in the UK meant that witnesses were coming forward months and sometimes years after initial allegations were made (Crookes 2016 for BBC).

Overall, media reporting served to intensify fears of stigmatisation, even when this reporting had only occurred in the early stages (arrest, sentencing). This is understandable, since the media could directly or indirectly identify the participant and any children she had, which, coupled with the fear of societal stigmatisation, exacerbated the sense in which she felt exposed to gossip and verbal or physical attacks. It was unsurprising that a significant minority of women admitted to either researching who I was to ensure that I was not myself a media person or expressed concerns that I might go to the media and "sell their story".

7.5 MANAGING STIGMA (OVER TIME)

A further theme I wished to explore was how the women managed public stigma and self-stigma. We know that prisoners' families manage information about their situation in order to cope with public stigma. The different ways of managing information are 1. selective concealment, 2. therapeutic disclosure, and 3. preventative disclosure (Condry 2007, Herman 1994). Others engage in political activism. May (2000) found that some participants in her study of murderers' relatives managed space, by avoiding certain places and people for example. Others yet, as Codd (2008) found in her study, use the criminal justice system to their own advantage, using complaints procedures and legal claims against prisons to resists unjust and derogatory treatment.

By far the most common coping mechanism utilised by this sample was managing information by selective concealment. This was when women did not reveal the full details of their situation – such as their partner's crime – and/or chose whom they told that they were partnered to a prisoner (Condry 2007). In other words, they concealed some information from some people in order to decrease the risk of being stigmatised. This did not mean, of course, that no-one in their social circle was aware of their situation. Rather, the women spoke about what Esther called 'an instinct', 'where you know whether to say it or not'. Esther, for example, told one neighbour about her husband but not another:

> **Esther**: Where I live now, on my own, [partner] and I used to live there together, I'm close to two of my neighbours. And isn't it strange, I told one what happened to [partner] but I didn't tell the other. I let her assume we'd split up. How I'm gonna explain when he's coming back, I don't know. But I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

Selective concealment sometimes brought with it feelings of guilt and shame. The women spoke about not wanting to lie or conceal the truth and often felt a sense of unease about not being completely open with friends and acquaintances. Condry (2007) described similar feelings amongst relatives of serious offenders. Note that Louise, in the excerpt below, says that concealment was a 'way of being' for her, which highlights the semi-permanent nature of the strategies used to manage stigma over a long sentence.

> **Rachel**: Yeah, 'cos I have made quite a good bond with one girl there [in the village]. And having to stop yourself from saying things all the time, you know? She'll say – 'oh, come for a drink'. If I drink I'll blag – 'oh, guess what?!'. Yeah, I haven't told anybody [in the village].

> **Rebecca**: You see, what it was, I didn't want to hoodwink people, I didn't want them to not know who I was, because I'd rather have the cards on the table and let them know who I am and take that chance whether they like me or not. But I didn't want to deceive people. It didn't rest well with me.
> **Anna**: So it's not actively lying to people, but just leaving things out? I don't mean lying in a nasty way...
> **Louise**: It's not my preferred way of being, really. No. You wouldn't survive [if

> people knew]. We already had The Sun newspaper knocking on our door. We would lose the house.

A significant proportion of the women openly lied about their partners' whereabouts – another type of information management. Sally said her partner was working away, as did Esther, for example. Yet lying or otherwise managing information over a long period of time also has its perils, as it may be difficult to remember which lies were told to whom, as Jane and Esther point out in the quotes below.

> **Jane**: It is difficult to remember who you told what. I know who I've told. But remembering what I've said to various people when I've told them this has happened or that, is difficult.
>
> **Esther**: So you tell lies. And then you have to remember who you've told the lies to, and what the lie is.

A significant minority of women in the sample also used what May (2000) called space management – that is, they avoided certain places or moved away from where they used to live in order to remove themselves from people who knew about their situation and would thus be in a position to stigmatise them. It was likely such a common coping technique because the offences in question were very serious and thus the women felt a need to resort to space management and remove themselves from certain places and situations. It was a common coping strategy amongst partners of men convicted of sex offences, especially – this perhaps is not surprising because sex offences can result in greater stigma (Condry 2007).

Although the degree of spatial isolation varied, it tended to be more serious than simply avoiding one or two places. One woman, in particular, admitted she had not been in any pub for years because she did not want to interact with people. Another had removed herself from her community to the extent that we could not find a place to meet – she did not want to go anywhere local. Jane did not want to mix in her village at all. This was notably different from the short-term

space management May (2000) described. A high level of semi-permanent isolation, avoiding almost all social interactions and moving to a different city/town is not short-term. The offences in May's (2000) study were also serious – murder – so the difference may be due to a larger sample (May only interviewed eight relatives) and a higher proportion of sex offences represented in this sample. Sex offences may be more taboo than murder and may have resulted in the women feeling a greater need to isolate themselves. Overall, women's social contact with friends and acquaintances tended to worsen (Merriman 1965).

Space management, on the whole, could be maladaptive in the long run because it could result in the participant being very socially isolated. Sarah describes this sense of isolation below. Louise's case was also a good illustration of this. After her husband's release, both feared the stigma attached to having served a sentence for a sex offence against children so much that they became very socially isolated, as the following passage demonstrates.

> **Sarah**: People in the village didn't really know him. So they don't know what's happened. One or two people know. And they say – 'oh, why don't you go to the pub?'. I don't want to. I find out if I go to the pub, the blokes buy me drinks, and then they start thinking – 'oooh, she's on her own'. 'Cos I can't say: 'oh, my fiancé is in prison'. And they start... I don't like it, so I don't go. I don't mix in the village much – they know who I am, I go to the doctor's, I go to the post office. I know a few people. But that's it. I'm quite isolated there.
>
> **Louise**: I can honestly say that when we moved there we made a conscious decision, me as well, that we will have nothing to do with children. I like kids. I have nothing against kids. To safeguard ourselves, rightly or wrongly, probably wrongly... I couldn't tell you what the kids who live next door look like because I consciously... And they must think – oh, she's such a miserable old bag, and so is he. But that's just to safeguard ourselves. If there are any questions asked, the neighbours can honestly say – 'they've never spoken to our kids, they don't look at our kids'. And that's the way we've had to become. We only relate and make eye contact with the adults around us, never their kids. And that's me as well. And I'm not... I'm as falsely accused as [husband].

The use of therapeutic disclosure was not often mentioned in the sample. This is when information is disclosed to trusted people in order to re-negotiate perceptions of stigma (Condry

2007). A small number of women mentioned, briefly, sharing their stories with support groups and, generally, with people in the same situation as them, and would often say they found talking to myself very therapeutic because they were able to speak to someone who would not judge them. Only one woman described using preventative disclosure, which is when information is disclosed upfront in order to minimise chances of stigmatisation by revealing the information on one's own terms. Rebecca's partner was convicted of a fraud offence, and she described herself as being very upfront with 'nothing to hide' when it came to her situation. It may be that since the offence was neither a homicide nor a sex offence, it was easier for Rebecca to be upfront and open.

> **Rebecca**: My sister says to me – 'oh, you shouldn't say things to everyone'. I say – 'but I've got nothing to hide. If you've got nothing to hide...'. She says – 'oh, you should keep your cards close to your chest'. But I've never been like that.

Only a small number of women engaged in political activism as a coping strategy, and these women tended to be those whose partners were maintaining innocence. This meant they had a political agenda because they were campaigning for their partners' innocence. Sarah was a part of a group campaigning against IPP sentences, and Martha was a very outspoken woman who campaigned heavily as part of an organisation seeking to increase awareness of the experiences of prisoners' families. She was also a volunteer with the organisation, and helped run awareness seminars. Some of these women also used the media to raise awareness of criminal justice issues such as false accusations of sexual offences. This indicates that the media is not always a stigmatising force in these women's lives. It can be used by partners outside to make their stories heard. Nonetheless, even if media coverage was positive, there was still at times a fear of the social reaction that might follow:

> **Martha**: I mean, I've been kind of waiting this week for something to happen, because we were in the local press. But again, in a very positive way. But anytime anything's mentioned, something seems to happen.
> **Anna**: Even three years down the line?

> **Martha**: Yeah. I mean, I'm still waiting for some windows to be repaired, because we can't get... It's only a side porch... It'd been taped over, from back in...last spring. Because I just think – what's the point in getting it fixed, they're the ones that will go again, if anyone does do anything.

7.6 MAKING SENSE OF THE OFFENCE

In this section, I draw directly on Condry's (2007) findings to show how the women in this sample made sense of the serious offence. My findings largely support those of Condry, in that the women in this study used very similar techniques to make sense of the offence. However, this study focused on female partners only, whereas Condry's included a range of relatives (mothers, sisters, partners, *etc.*). As such, there are some differences in the origins of public stigma. Secondly, many of the women in this study maintained that their partner was innocent, which is a further difference to Condry's sample. This allowed to me explore whether and how these women made sense of the offence their partners were accused of. Notably, the fact that these women still felt the need to make sense of the alleged offence showed that they too believed that there was a need to contextualise and explain what had happened. It was not enough to simply state that their partners were innocent.

Condry (2007) has discussed at length how families of serious offenders make sense of a serious offence. The process of making sense of the offence was important for the partners since the accounts they constructed helped them in coping with the stigmatisation experienced when they interacted with others and in managing their own emotional responses to the conviction (Condry 2007). There is a large body of work that focuses on offenders' accounts of their own crimes. Mills's (1940: 905) work on 'vocabularies of motives' and Sykes and Matza's analysis of 'techniques of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza 1957) are amongst the most cited of these works. These works describe how offenders rationalise and contextualise their offending. For example, one of Sykes' and Matza's techniques of neutralisation is denial of responsibility. This is when the offender argues that he was not fully responsible for the offence, but rather shifts some of the responsibility onto mental illness, addiction, or other issue. This research has been applied to how prisoners' families

account for serious crimes in Condry's (2007) study of relatives of serious offenders. In her study, Condry found that the accounts offered by relatives were often tentative, searching, and far more partial than simply “it was not his fault”.

Explaining and rationalising bad behaviour – such as crimes – is something we all do, and there is nothing untoward or pathological about prisoners' partners attempting to rationalise their partners' (alleged) crimes (Condry 2007). Making sense of acts and contextualising them is something we do as part of our everyday life (Condry 2007), and making sense of a partner's offence and imprisonment is a part of this larger exercise.

Like Condry's participants, the women in this study were not attempting to wholly excuse or justify the offence. Instead, their rationalisations were partial. An excuse or justification tends to be aimed at eliminating or limiting culpability – such as “It was not my fault” – which is not what these women sought to do. Those women who were not maintaining their partners' innocence tended to use partial rationalisations, such as “it was not wholly his fault”. In order to explore these partial rationalisations further, this study draws on the findings of Condry (2007) as to the use of act and actor adjustment (Cohen 2001). Actor adjustment focuses on the actor, seeking to diminish his blameworthiness. Act adjustment focuses on the criminal act and seeks to minimise the harm caused or normalise it (Condry 2007).

Type of (alleged) offence	Number of participants who used actor adjustment	Number of participants who used act adjustment	Number of participants who used both	Number of participants who used none
Sexual offence (n = 5)	5	3	2	0
Homicide offence (n = 7)	5	4	3	0
Other (property offences, drug offences, firearms, unknown) (n = 6)	5	1	1	1

FIGURE 1: Act and actor adjustment used by participants not maintaining their partners' innocence

Those women – just over half of the sample - who were not maintaining their partners' innocence certainly utilised both techniques to mitigate the stigma, and the findings generally support what Condry (2007) found in her sample of serious offenders' relatives. Firstly, Condry (2007) found that act adjustment was very difficult when a very serious offence had been committed because it is difficult to minimise a serious harm caused. This was especially true in cases of sexual offences against children. Figure 1 shows how many participants used act and actor adjustments, out of the 18 participants who were not maintaining their partners were innocent. It is evident that these women primarily used actor adjustment, and where act adjustment was used it was used in conjecture with actor adjustment. There were various forms of actor adjustment used, but primarily these fell within two main types – one was 'denial of full responsibility', and the other was 'balance' (Condry 2007: 106 and 114).

Denial of full responsibility (Condry 2007) tended to focus on the prisoner's personal circumstances that could be presented as partially diminishing his culpability for the offence. Addiction and mental illness were used by some to contextualise the offending and present partial rationalisations for the crime that was committed. In the excerpt below, Alice explicitly describes

the person committing the offences as almost a different person to her husband due to mental health problems.

> **Alice**: With [husband], he had a problem, he had a psychological problem, and he dealt with it, I suppose he couldn't... He felt trapped. You see, he felt like he was on the outside looking in, that someone else is doing this. But using him. So he clearly had issues, mental health issues, but they wouldn't acknowledge them. […] And [at a young age he] got six months in borstal, where he got physically and sexually abused. So, quickly, his life went from being an only child, a middle-class home, grammar school education, everything ahead of him, to being thrown in the borstal. You can imagine how that must have been really a horrendous experience for him. And he came out... It just messed his head up totally, you can imagine. That's when things started... That's when he came out and started having real problems, you know, behavioural problems. And then later that year, after he was home, there was a male cousin and he [the cousin] sexually abused him. So I think it just went from there, really, that gradually, you know, he started developed sorted of all these different behavioural issues as a result of that because he couldn't talk to his parents, and his dad... His dad was very-very physically abusive towards him.

Alice's interview also illustrates the use of another type of denial of responsibility – 'sad tales' (Goffman 1963: 21). Sad tales were things that happened to the prisoner that could be offered as rationalisations for the crime and included histories of sexual and physical abuse. Alice's description, above, of her husband's history of abuse as a child would be one example of the use of sad tales. Another example, below, is of Rachel describing what was done to her children's father by the gang he had a conflict with, which ultimately culminated in him killing one of the rival gang members.

> **Rachel**: They did a lot of things to him – he's a got a crack here, in his skull, where they'd smacked him. He'd had shrapnel removed from his leg where they'd shot him. He's got stab wounds. Done all sorts to him. Sounds like I'm defending him, doesn't it? But I'm not. Yeah, just... It was very gang-related, it wasn't just an innocent [victim]...

'Balance' refers to the attempt by the participants to introduce balance to how the prisoner was perceived (Condry 2007). In practice, this means using good acts and/or characteristics of the prisoner to show that they are not a wholly bad person. This is focused on the actor rather than the

act – Condry (2007) argues that when an offence is very serious, it may be too weighty to be adjusted and actor adjustment may be easier. The two kinds of balancing are 'backwards balance' – focusing on the prisoners' past – and 'horizontal balance', which refers to the prisoners' present (Condry 2007).

Similarly to Condry's (2007) study, the women in my sample often used both types of balancing to show their partner was not a wholly bad person with no positive characteristics. Mary, for instance, like other women in the sample, discussed her partner's positive, noble behaviour in prison. Others discussed their partners not getting into trouble, doing courses and being respectful to officers.

> **Mary**: He's not...he can look after himself but he wouldn't walk into violence, he's not a fighter. D'you know what I mean? He's a joker. That's what he is. He will talk his way out of any situation. I don't know if he's come across violence in there. I suspect he has. He's a big bloke, he can take care of himself, but he's also probably...he's very loyal, he'd have people's backs.

Backwards balancing was also utilised, with many women describing their partners' past in a very positive light, showing them to be good, supportive partners prior to imprisonment. Alice's husband was serving a sentence for a sex offence, but she described him as having helped her change her life around after a long-term abusive relationship and as being a good step-parent to her children.

> **Alice**: He was good for me because he sort of helped me to believe in myself again and rebuild my confidence. Which seems odd when you look at he had his own problems, and yet he was ever only thinking about me, a lot of the time. Until this other part of him took over and he ended up doing things that even now, I don't think there's a day goes by that he doesn't hate himself for what he did. He still beats himself up a lot. […] 'Cos he was like their [children's] real dad, 'cos he was their stepdad. And their real dad had never been really, sort of, devoted father sort of figure and he never had time for them. And was quite selfish, really, but [husband] was always the opposite.

Act adjustment usually took the form of explaining that the offence was not as serious as it may have been perceived. This was done by drawing attention to a lack of premeditation or by referring to a kind of offence hierarchy (similar to Condry's 2007 findings). Sexual offences, for example, were amongst the worst offences, but not as bad as sexual offences against children (Alice stressed that 'nothing inappropriate ever happened with children'). This confirms the point Condry (2007) made about sexual offences against minors being harder to act-adjust. As such, the women were able to point out that the sexual offences in question were not the most serious on the scale of severity. Similarly, murder was perceived as very serious, but murdering vulnerable people was especially heinous. Participants were thus able to act-adjust by drawing attention to offences higher up in the hierarchy of seriousness. Consider, for example, Anne's comments below. Her husband was convicted of murder, a very serious offence, and yet she was able to adjust the act in her description and focus on the lack of premeditation, describing the act as one of panic. Rachel said the murder in question was committed in the context of a gang conflict, and argued that the father of her children had to choose between killing or being killed. She explicitly said the crime was different to cold-blooded murder. Similarly, Elly mentioned that even though her husband was serving a sentence for murder, which she recognised was a very serious offence, the murder was not of an especially aggravated kind because the victim was not elderly or young.

> **Anne**: You would understand this, being from a criminal law background, there was no question of it being premeditated, he did not go there with an intention to kill her, but he didn't stop there. He brought her into the living room, she'd collapsed, he brought her into the living room, and stuffed a cloth down her throat. So that was the act of murder. Even though there was that few seconds between... On the spur moment of panic, putting his hands over her mouth, you know, keep quiet, don't talk on the phone, but maybe at that stage, it might have been manslaughter. But he finished her off, actually.
>
> **Rachel**: It was basically a gang-related thing. So at the end of the day, the good thing is that he... It was either him [the victim], or my kids' dad. That's how it was going. With this gang-related war they had going on. So if he wasn't in prison, he'd be dead. That's just as black-and-white as it is. […] It was very gang-related, it wasn't just an innocent... I think... I'd often thought if it was, I probably wouldn't have gone to visit him. Like if he'd robbed an old lady or something. I don't think I'd have gone.

> **Elly**: He's not hurt children or old ladies. I mean, he is in prison for murder, but... Yeah, it wasn't anything anyone could get particularly... Being a convicted murderer is one thing, but there are some people who are particularly notorious. And no, he's not particularly notorious.

This type of act adjustment is comparative – that is, the act is adjusted by comparing it to other, more serious offences. This may be because adjusting the act in and of itself is exceedingly difficult when an offence is serious. For instance, it is difficult to adjust a sexual offence, but not impossible to adjust it by comparing it to a sexual offence against a child.

It is interesting that more women did not use act adjustment where the offences were non-violent and non-sexual. It appears at first that it ought to be easier to adjust such acts because they do not involve death, serious injury or sexual interference. It may be that, in fact, that when a crime is one to do with drugs or firearms, it is, in fact, harder to act-adjust because the offence is less ambiguous. Importing drugs or large-scale burglary is a clearly intentional, premeditated act; there is little scope there for moral ambiguity.

About half of the prisoners maintained their innocence and were supported by their partners, who were thereby outright denying that the alleged offence has been committed. There was, it appears, no act to adjust because the participants also maintained that the act did not happen. Yet some women did use act adjustment, though far more still used actor adjustment to contextualise the alleged offence. This is represented in Figure 2, below. It seems that it was simply not enough to maintain that a partner was innocent of the crime he was convicted of, and that the mere fact of conviction and subsequent imprisonment gave rise to a need to adjust and thus cope with experiences of stigmatisation and contextualise their decision to maintain the relationship with someone convicted of a very serious offence.

Type of (alleged) offence	Number of participants who used actor adjustment	Number of participants who used act adjustment	Number of participants who used both	Number of participants who used none
Homicide offence (n = 2)	2	0	0	0
Sexual offence (n = 10)	6	2	1	3
Other (n = 3)	3	1	1	0

FIGURE 2: Act and actor adjustment used by participants maintaining their partners' innocence

Very few women used act adjustment to adjust the crime their partner was accused of. It is possible that even though these women appeared confident that their partner was falsely accused, they still felt the need to show that the alleged offence was not as serious as others of its kind. Jane, for instance, mentioned her fiancé was accused of 'inappropriate touching. Nothing... No actual rape or anything'. Rebecca's husband was convicted of a fraud offence and both of them maintained that there were issues with the way the case was handled – she seemed to think there was a very good chance he was innocent but was less categorical than some of the other participants. Perhaps because her belief in his innocence was less categorical, she felt the need to act-adjust by arguing that being accused and convicted of a drugs offence would have been much worse:

> **Rebecca**: This was not morally right or wrong, when you've got a stabbing or a murder. That's... This involves... There was a lot more doubt here. Was this a determined fraud. I think the case has a lot to do with what happens with a relationship, like, this woman said to me, 'oh, my husband was driving a van that was imported that was full of drugs'. You know, it's different. I could not live knowing that my husband's driving drugs. It would have... You know, the [inaudible] would affect the relationship. I think if... If my husband said – 'oh, I've been found guilty of driving a truck full of drugs', I would have thought – those drugs would go to my children.

Only one woman who said she was categorically certain that her partner was innocent used some act adjustment. Iris' husband was convicted of a historic sexual offence and was at the time of the

interview, with her support, maintaining he was falsely accused. She went on to discuss changing sexual norms, arguing that in the past, they were very different. This appeared to be an attempt to normalise acts which might have amounted to sexual assault today, even though she was not talking specifically about anything her husband was accused of. She was putting the types of acts her husband was accused of doing within the historical context and attempting to normalise them by arguing that at the time, these types of acts were seen as normal.

> **Iris**: You see, in our day, I mean... I worked in a hospital, on night shifts, for a while. You got to know people. And it was nothing for some man to come up behind and smack you on the bottom and say – 'how are you tonight?'. Now, as I say, 9 out of 10, it was friendly. Nothing was meant sexually. It was just their way. And if you didn't like the chap and you didn't like what he did, you kicked him off...

More commonly, the women who were maintaining their partners were falsely accused or framed still engaged in actor adjustment. They discussed the positive characteristics their partners possessed both in the past and at the present. Again, it is possible that the mere fact of imprisonment was enough to make them feel as though they needed to justify their decision to maintain the relationship. This indicates that they felt stigmatised despite their belief that their partner was innocent.

Finally, it is also worth noting that almost all of the women in this sample engaged in actor adjustment vis-a-vis themselves. They engaged in impression management (Goffman 1963), describing themselves as law-abiding, morally upright individuals. Again, this is interesting because almost none of the women had ever been convicted of any offences. Yet the fact of being associated with a long-term prisoner appeared to make them feel as though their identities were tainted and thus there was a need to engage in impression management. Susan said she did not want to be 'lumped' with other prison visitors, whom she described as rude. Elly, a lawyer, felt she needed to be seen as completely 'straight' because her association with a prisoner cast a shadow on her identity:

> **Elly**: I was honest about it, I didn't try to conceal my relationship. And I know of other women who do my job [are in the legal profession] who have. And the other thing is I'm really, really straight. I mean, some people in my profession, to be honest, are a little bit dodgy. And I'm not. I've always gone out of my way to make sure... Because people, if they know about me, they'll always assume, they do, they will assume you're a bit dodgy. So I've always been really careful not to be remotely dodgy.

7.7 CONCLUSION

It is perhaps unsurprising that most of the women were and/or felt stigmatised. After all, the sentence lengths meant that the offences were all high on the scale of seriousness – most were either homicide offences, sex offences or very serious property/firearms offences. As such, the women often experienced a negative reaction from friends and family and feared that even when nothing was said or done to stigmatise them, society was still silently judging them to be (morally) wanting. Stigma was also at time long-lasting, as Jenkins (2013) supposed it might be when long sentences are handed down.

The media often exacerbated feelings of being stigmatised, with some women being directly written about or hounded at a time when they were most vulnerable. Moreover, media reporting made it difficult for the women to be anonymous since the publication of the prisoners' names and addresses meant that their partners and other relatives were often easily identifiable. Neither was the media attention limited to the period of arrest and original trial – as often happens when a long sentence is given, appeals and re-trials meant that media attention could be renewed years down the line.

In order to cope with being and feeling stigmatised, the women exercised information management. They were highly selective about who they shared information about their partner with, and what they said. As a result, some became very socially isolated. Others lied about their

partners' whereabouts, a coping strategy that came with feeling guilty about being dishonest. Another important set of strategies used to cope with stigma were the techniques partners used to make sense of and contextualise the offence. Here, my findings were very similar to those of Condry (2007), which is interesting given that the interviews for each study were conducted over 15 years apart. The women found it easier to actor-adjust rather than act-adjust, though some act adjustment was used to highlight that the offence was not the most serious within the offence hierarchy.

Overall, this chapter confirms that stigma is a serious pain of imprisonment for partners of prisoners. In this sense too, they experience imprisonment alongside the prisoner. They receive negative societal reactions despite not having been convicted of any offence and often feel deeply shamed for being partnered to a prisoner. In some sense, stigma for them is even worse than for prisoners. The prisoners are sheltered from the societal reaction and do not have to endure vandalised property, gossip, and the glare of the media.

In the next chapter, I turn to 'family practices', and consider how the partners in this study 'did family' across prison walls. I show that 'doing family' was far from straightforward in both practical and emotional terms, and that the participants often had to engage in temporal and emotional "juggling" as both partners and mothers.

CHAPTER 8
'My husband, the governor, and I'.
Doing Family across Prison Walls

In this final empirical chapter, I move away from analysing the experiences of the participants as *prisoners'* partners and consider how imprisonment affected them as prisoners' *partners*. The concept of 'family practices' (Morgan 2013) will be used to explore how partners 'did family' across prison walls; how family events occurred, financial and practical decisions made, and emotions managed.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how women managed family life and made family decisions after their partners were arrested and convicted. I show that this was difficult for women who had previously enacted traditional gender roles and were not used to making decisions on their own. Secondly, I move on to discuss how family time was practised, and how creating family time was made difficult by imprisonment. Secondly, I will explore the concept of family space and how 'third space' became important for families separated by imprisonment. This develops the concept of 'third space' to include prisoners' families rather than focusing on prisoners alone, as in earlier research.

The second section focuses on emotional management, and how women managed prisoners' and their own emotions. Again, this is a novel way of looking at the experiences of prisoners' partners and highlights the emotionally complex nature of maintaining a relationship with someone in prison. Finally, I conclude by drawing the threads of the thesis together under the theme of intimacy – emotional and physical, and intimate knowledge. I show that the various themes discussed earlier in this thesis – such as lack of privacy and deprivation of heterosexual relations – all feed into making it difficult indeed to enact the different types of intimacy.

8.1 FAMILY DECISIONS

When a man was first sentenced to a long term in prison, his partner outside had to keep the family going. Households had to be kept running, decisions about family finances made, and children looked after. Some women found it especially difficult to make these decisions in the early stages of the sentence since it was a traumatic, stressful time (see Chapter 5). And yet as partners and as mothers, they had to keep the family afloat with little to no help from the prisoner. Elizabeth summarised this in the excerpt below:

> **Elizabeth**: Those first few days were completely... I didn't sleep, at all, for, I think, it was four or five days. That was horrendous. It's a bit like the feeling when you first have a newborn, and you're on your own, and there isn't a difference between day and night and it's just a continuous time, if you like. And you're actually thinking, oh god, all I want to do is to sleep. But there is so much going on, so many people coming and going, so many questions. Just so many – everything. And the one person I couldn't talk to is him. Didn't actually get to speak to him, properly, until about a week later.
> **Anna**: What sort of problems... In those immediate first days, the first few weeks, did you experience?
> **Elizabeth**: Um... The practical issues were quite significant because my husband had his own business, and if you can imagine, one minute he's busy running a business, the next minute it's just like – well, he might as well have been abducted by aliens. You know. And the trying to... Trying to work out what the hell I was meant to do with the business, you know, I knew there were things that needed to be paid, but I didn't know what.

As Elizabeth indicates, making these family decisions on her own could be more challenging for women who were not used to making financial and business decisions. These women were thus not only trying to make sense of a partner's conviction but also had to make decisions about things they had little previous experience of. Upon arrest and conviction, the women were left to manage everything from practicalities to deciding what the rest of the family were to be told –

> **Anna**: And in those few days, weeks, what was the hardest thing for you?
> **Elsa**: Thinking various people are going to have to know, various people are going to have to be told. And... Making a little mental list of who's got to be told, and realising that sooner or later people who didn't need to know will find out anyway, because of the newspaper reports. Um... Telling my parents was awful. They just didn't want to

> believe it at first. My husband's parents are dead, thank god, but his family still had to be told.

As discussed in Chapter 3, family practices can be diffuse (Morgan 2013). This means that although many family decisions are made collectively – that is, by all or most of the family member concerned – some are made by one individual, but with the family in mind. In Chapter 3, I suggested that imprisonment of a partner may make the practices of the family concerned even more diffuse since the partner outside is left to make family decisions largely on her own. This was supported by the women who participated in this study – they described family practices as being very much diffuse because they were left to run the family without the everyday presence of a partner. Rebecca, below, poignantly describes dealing with the mundane everyday business of raising a family on her own, even though previously her husband had been a large part of the family's everyday life. The comparison she makes with being a divorced woman is illuminating since it drives home exactly how alone she felt.

> **Rebecca**: I remember a friend of mine got divorced, and she said what became hard for her was going to the parents' evenings. [...] But if you're used to having someone there, and you want someone there... You then haven't got that choice. So you're dealing with every little thing there. You know, there's the sports days, the parents' evening, you know, what choice they're [the children] taking for GCSE, and you're doing it all on your own.

The women were not only dealing with the everyday business of childcare and maintaining a household on their own but also described wanting to keep their imprisoned partner a part of these mundane everyday affairs as much as possible In other words, they did not want to make all the decisions on their own and leave their partner completely isolated from the family practices. Keeping the prisoner involved was difficult because there are very few opportunities for instantaneous communication between the prisoner and his family. Lucy, below, describes the effort that went into trying to keep her partner aware of their young daughter's development. Simple everyday family occurrences, like potty training a small child, were transformed into events that

needed careful management, planning and communication. As Esther discusses below, practical household decisions required what appeared to be lengthy communication because it was not possible to make them quickly due to being separated by prison walls.

> **Lucy**: Yeah, well, even if he is involved, yeah, he is missing it [daughter growing up]. Like sometimes if [daughter] will do something... Especially when she was younger. Like potty training and stuff like that. And I'll be like – 'oh my god!' down the phone, and I'll be dead excited – 'you won't believe what she's done!' And he'll be like – 'yay!'. And then you leave it and he'll be like – 'aww, wish I'd seen it'. You know, like, things like that. And then I voice-record her on a lot of things now. And I play it down the phone for him.
>
> **Esther**: I'd say – 'oh, I have to have some re-wiring done, apparently I need to have a new box because my box is unsafe'. And he'd be able to say to me, still, like anyone's husband would – 'well, that's gonna be about a three-day thing, and you're gonna have no electric, you know, and this and that will happen'. I find he likes to know things like that. He likes to... A few weeks ago, when all the energy bill thing was on the news, he said to me – 'well how much is your energy bills? What do you pay?'. So I told him. He said – 'what was that last year?'. So he said – 'it really has gone up a lot, then'. I said – 'it has gone up a lot'.

The lack of immediacy in communication was highlighted by many participants, including Sandra. She discussed how making everyday family decisions together with her imprisoned partner was difficult because the partner outside could not contact the prisoner if a need arose, and letters took a long time to come and go. It was far from being in the same room, talking through various options, and reaching a conclusion everyone in the family would be content with. This lack of immediacy contributed to family practices becoming more diffuse. Even though the partner outside could attempt to keep the prisoner an active member of the family, she would still have to make immediate everyday decisions on her own because it was not always possible to consult the prisoner when the decision had to be made. This complex nature of diffuse family practices occurring against a backdrop of wanting to keep the prisoner involved in them was made clear by Sandra:

> **Sandra**: Sort of, you've got a situation at home, you go through a number of things, sort it through, talk it through, go through a number of options. Reach a conclusion. And that's it, done and dusted. By the time you've got a chance to talk about it with a

> prisoner, they come up with something new and you're like... So it's quite hard for them that you're sort of batting them away, but on the other hand, you don't want to go through it all again.

8.2 FAMILY TIME AND SPACE

Family can be enacted outside the home (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001), and when a partner is imprisoned, it can only be enacted inside the prison. Outside, family time and space usually intersect, in that family time is often spent in the same physical space (Morgan 2013). In a prison context, this space was limited to the prison visiting room, where all the family time was spent and where important decisions like whether the family home should be sold to everyday mundane decisions about childcare and households were made. Geographically, therefore, the prison visiting room became the physical space where family was done – physical intimacy was engaged in, children played with during Family Days and family affairs discussed.

In practical terms, trying to juggle different temporalities to create some family time was difficult, as discussed in Chapter 5. Many of the women were employed or otherwise occupied by childcare, volunteering and other commitments, so finding time to visit was not often easy. Likewise, being at home to receive phone calls from prison was also not always straightforward, even if it was made easier by call-divert (for those who could afford it). The participants thus had to juggle their household schedules not only with their work and social schedules but also with the rigid prison schedule. Rachel, for instance, said her children had to miss school to accommodate visits. Family time, therefore, was largely shaped by the prison schedule. Susan said that she could not simply go out of town on a holiday since that would mean she would not be able to have family time with her partner. Again, she had to decide whether to go on holiday or spend family time with her partner. Time, thus, had to be carefully managed, with the prisoner in mind.

> **Rachel**: It's a long day, and the kids are tired the next day, they're going to school. They have to have a day off school for it.

> **Susan**: I think I lost a lot of my freedom. I think, even though it's my choice, I have to consider [partner] before I consider myself a lot of the time. Like, I can't just up and go on a holiday, because I have to consider he can't go with me. I'd miss a visit for that week, what if he needed me, what if anything happened...

Since it was not possible for the women and their partners to share a physical space frequently, they often used what has been called a 'third space' (Wilson 2004) to enact family life. This third space has been defined as a 'space between inside and outside worlds where [prisoners] can “occupy their minds”' (Wilson 2004: 74). This concept has usually been applied to prisoners' education, and how education and other activities can help prisoners' minds reach beyond the prison. However, it is also useful in understanding how prisoners and their partners do family. In fact, Wilson (2004) gave the example of a prisoner teaching his child to swim via telephone as that of third space being used by the prisoner. In this way, the prisoner is able to share something with a person outside despite not being physically present. The child and the prisoner, instead, share an emotional connection through the medium of the telephone. The concept of third space, therefore, need not be seen as being purely individualistic. It is not just about the prisoner creating a space between the prison and the outside world. It can also be about the prisoner and his partner sharing this space, together, to enact family.

Consider, for example, women who watch the same television program as their partners, with the purpose of discussing the program later. This creates a third space, enabling the couple to share something common despite not being physically in the same room. It creates a common third space. Below are two examples:

> **Lucy**: We do a date night. On a Sunday. We read the TV mag and we'd tell... He, what he wants to watch, and I'll tell him what I want to watch. And then we'll watch the same things at the same time. And that's it, our date night. And then on a Sunday afternoon we'll see what... Film's on. And me and [daughter] will watch that and he'll watch that. And then when he phones – 'oh, Willy Wonka, did you watch Willy Wonka?'. Stuff like that.

> **Anne**: But yes, we do watch the same television programs. [...] Yes, we definitely do that. Talk about that and films like, he would say, ‘there's a film on Channel 5 on Sunday afternoon, now, watch it, don't forget to watch it now. Are you watching it?’. He nearly phoned me to make sure I was watching it! Oh dear. That's funny, yes.

Phone calls and letters were also used to create a third space in which family was enacted. Since family conversations could not often be conducted within a shared physical space – apart from visits – phone calls and letters became, over time, crucial media for doing family. Thus decisions that are usually made by a family when they are together were made by writing or during a telephone conversation. Mary, for example, discussed using the post to decide, with her partner, what to call her new pets:

> **Mary**: I sent him in, once I got my two cats, we, me and my friends had an e-mail conversation about the names of the cats, and I had a list of about ten names. So I sent him the list of names in and I told him to choose names, and I think he went round the guys and got them... That was quite funny.

Using third spaces created by post and telephones was not without problems since the post was not an immediate means of communication and phone communication was one-way, in the sense that participants could not call their partners during emergencies or when a family decision needed to be made on the spot. Thus family could still be enacted in third spaces, but the physical separation meant there was often a delay when it came to communication:

> **Esther**: Because people go – 'is it a relationship, he's in prison?'. But it is. It's vital in the sense that anything that happens that's important to me I'd discuss with him. And still make my own decision. But I'd do that anyway. But it's just harder because he's not there in the next room... Yeah. And if something happens you can't just come in and say... Yeah. So... For example, you think, oh, I need to talk to [partner] about that. [...] So it like what you'd anyway, isn't it, you know, you come home, you'd made your decision during the day, at work or whatever, and then you come home and you discuss it with your partner, having already made your decision. And it would talk some sort of, um, revelation, for you to change that. So you still... You operate in the same way, you know. Your relationship, the dynamics of it, are exactly the same as if he was here. It's just that we have this delay at all time. I have to wait. I can never contact him. Never.

Spending quality family time together was also a challenge when a partner was imprisoned. As discussed in Chapter 5, there was little privacy, with everything said and done being subjected to the gaze of prison authority. The lack of privacy and the prison visiting conditions meant that what was intended to be a family space was not wholly so. Visits were short, there were officers and numerous other visitors present, and the facilities were often lacking. There are similarities here to what Comfort (2008: 125) describes as 'prisonisation of intimate relationships'. Intimacy becomes entwined with the prison; relationships are conducted entirely in the shadow of the prison. The ways in which intimacy was prisonised in the UK was somewhat different, however. Whereas Comfort (2008) described prisonisation of physical intimacy through conjugal visits, as well as familial emotional intimacy enacted through cooking meals together or spending family time together during weekend family visits, none of this was possible in the UK. Yet intimacy was still prisonised in the sense that the visits provided the only opportunity for the family to spend time together, even if the conditions were not conducive to a warm, positive, familial atmosphere. In other words, everything the women did to enact family life was done under the scrutiny of the prison – visits, phone calls, and letters included, and all the emotionally intimate information exchanged using these media. Moreover, there was a very practical sense in which the quality of family time was diminished, since prison rules limited the numbers of visitors. Rebecca, for instance, had three daughters and this meant that her husband could not see them all together in one visit due to only three visitors being allowed at a time.

> **Rebecca**: So that's another thing as well – I've got three daughters. There are four of us. And he can't see us all as a family. So he can see me and two of the girls, or he can see the three girls on their own. So he's never seen as a family. He doesn't see us in a family.

With long sentences, it becomes more likely that the prisoner will also not be present to partake in important family occasions. These could be deaths, weddings, births, and other occasions

when families tend to spend family time together. The link with an interrupted life-course is clear (Jewkes 2005), but what ought to be discussed in this chapter is how the participants experienced these family occasions without their partners and what they did to make the prisoner a part of such events. Firstly, when something important happened, the women often found themselves being the ones communicating the news to the prisoner. Very often, these were news of someone in the family dying – unsurprising, since most of the prisoners were older. A very significant proportion of participants described having to be the ones telling the prisoner that a parent or other close relative had passed away, and this was almost always done in the comparatively public visiting hall or over the phone, with a high chance of the call being overheard by prison staff. Telling someone such personal and tragic news over the phone was also far from ideal:

> **Esther**: Probably the worst thing was when my dad died last year, that was quite, although he was old, that was sudden. And I could do absolutely nothing about it until he phoned me. I just had to wait, which was tough. And equally when his mum, his mum, although she was in hospital, she had a fall and really she died and none of us expected it, we thought she'd just recover, I mean, she died within 24 hours of going into hospital. So when I got the phone call from his dad, 'cos remember, they are in a different part of the country to me, saying she's not gonna make it – I went: 'what do you mean she's not gonna make it?!'. I did sort of sit there and think – 'do I phone the jail?'. I thought – 'yeah, I do'.

> **Elizabeth**: I had to go in and tell him his sister had died, and I had to go in and tell him that his dad had died and deal with all that. That was not something that was particularly easy. And you try to do it how they would want you to do it type thing. Like I picked up the order of service from both funerals and I sent them to him. Do you know what I mean? And I took, I took pictures of the flowers that I bought.

Other family occasions could, to an extent, still be shared across prison walls. Birthdays and anniversaries, for example, could be celebrated during visits.

> **Anna**: And what about things like birthdays, anniversaries?
> **Lucy**: We tend to spend them together. If it's visit day, we spend them together. Apart from, obviously, his birthday [this year], 'cos I can't go, because I went to see the chaplain. But yeah, things like that we spent together. We do little special things.
> **Anna**: [Daughter's] birthday as well?

> **Lucy**: Yeah, we visit on [daughter's] birthday as well. 'Cos we don't get to spend Christmas or that together, so we make up on the birthdays and, like... We celebrate every year our anniversary when we got together.

At the same time, it was not the same as celebrating these events outside – the lack of privacy and the visiting conditions made these occasions less happy, intimate familial occasions. The quality of such time was, thus, far from satisfactory. For example, Martha described the last wedding anniversary she spent with her imprisoned husband in these terms:

> **Martha**: But I was lucky enough this year to be able to afford to... Well, I scrimped together the money to go and spend two hours with him, you know, to go and sit and just have a couple of hours together. Yeah, have a romantic cup of tea and sausage roll. [laughs]. Not your typical anniversary meal, but you know...

Overall, family had to be done across prison walls. Decisions had to be made with few opportunities for spontaneous communication, and family time was both limited and often lacking in quality. Every family event occurred under the scrutiny of the prison, which prompted one participant to state that if she wrote a book about her experiences, she would call it 'My husband, the governor, and I'. This highlights that even though in practical terms intimacy was not as institutionalised as Comfort (2008) found to happen in the US, on an emotional level the women were very aware they had to do family across prison walls and within the shadow of the prison.

8.3 EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT

Emotional work is an important part of 'doing family' (Morgan 2013). It refers to the work one does in managing their own and others' emotions, and is often associated with the care-work women do (such as nursing). This was discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. In this section, I explore the challenges women faced when managing emotions across prison walls. I also highlight the unique challenges imprisonment gave rise to when it came to managing emotions.

Most of the women spoke about managing their own and their partners' emotions so as to ensure their partners did not get distressed or worried. Earlier research has found that conversations between prisoners and their partners tended to be positive and superficial (*e.g.* Comfort 2008). This was certainly true in this study, and ought to be analysed through the lens of managing emotions. With the partner being physically absent and sentenced to a long term in prison, the women had to face problems on their own – the partner was not able to do much to help them. This meant that some women abstained from telling their partners about the problems they were facing, because there was little the prisoner could do to help and/or because they did not want to worry the prisoner.

> **Anna**: And what's your relationship like now?
> **Elsa**: Um... I'm just trying to be there for him, be as supportive as I can. Try and keen from him when I'm depressed, you know, just try and keep cheerful.
>
> **Elly**: A lot of what goes in prison you don't want to know about anyway. Not if you're gonna stay reasonably sane. I mean, I don't do it, but I'm sure a lot of women keep things from their husbands not to send them into a jealous... You don't tell them things. I've done that. I tell him less these days, because I think – what's the point of telling him, he can't do anything about it. You're the one who's gonna have to deal with it.

Often, the desire to avoid upsetting the prisoner was made even stronger by the fact of the long sentence. The women were conscious of the prisoner being deprived of his freedom and thus did not wish to cause him further stress. The length of the sentence, to them, meant that they saw the prisoner as being in a uniquely distressing situation. Thus, some women discussed feeling that they needed to take extra care to manage his emotions. Mary was worried about what will happen when her partner was released and whether their relationship would endure, and yet felt unable to express these concerns to her partner:

> **Mary**: It's weird, it's really weird. I can't really tell him that because then it's a bit of a downer, d'you know what I mean? And it's clingy, and you don't wanna be, like, clingy when a bloke's been *banged up for 5 years*, then the last thing you want is to tell him what to do. You can't... you can't order him around, you can't make him do anything... [emphasis added]

A few women were also very careful not to upset their partners by doing things like going out and staying out when the prisoner would be expected to call her. Casey, below, describes feeling bad if she told her partner about going out, which she, at the time of the interview, did very rarely. This was not because the partner expressly forbade her from going out, but because she felt he might be upset she was enjoying freedom when he could not. It is possible that these feelings were prevalent amongst partners of long-term prisoners because long sentences meant that the prisoner was removed from his family for a very long period of time. The partner thus could feel guilty about enjoying her freedom knowing that the prisoner's freedom was removed for a lengthy period of time indeed. These feelings of guilt could also be exacerbated if the prisoner was maintaining innocence – it meant that the partner outside felt even more guilty about enjoying her life (as Casey also describes below).

> **Casey**: It feels like I'm rubbing it in his face because he's in prison and I'm not, so I don't like saying things like, oh, you know, I was gonna go here, and you know, see... [inaudible]. I don't like saying things like that, so I kind of sort of just try to keep his hopes up as much as I can and just assure him that I love him. […] I don't like doing anything in case I upset him somehow, or.. Like usually, if he tries... He wouldn't be like that [forbidding her from doing things], but if he tried, wouldn't want me going in there [a pub], I'd tell him to get lost. You know? But with the situation that he's in, but it's not his fault [he is in prison], so I sort of try me best not to do anything at all to, you know, get him stressed out or upset with anything.

There is certainly a risk that this type of emotional management could be manipulated by the prisoner and could be turned into emotional control, and this ought to be recognised, especially in light of coercive control having been recently criminalised in the UK (Home Office 2015). If a woman willingly, for instance, avoids going out to the local pub so as not to upset her partner, this is not necessarily coercive control. It could be the caring reaction of a woman who does not want to cause further anxiety to a partner already in a difficult situation. Yet if a prisoner subtly monitors her location via phone-calls, emotionally blackmails her into not seeing friends or family, then this

could well be coercive control and fall within the definition of the new criminal offence.

Stark (2007: 228) defines coercive control as 'the use of force of threats to compel or dispel a particular response'. As opposed to physical abuse, coercive control is subtle, long-term, and cumulative, often relying on mind games and signals rather than overt threats. It is, of course, difficult, if not impossible, for a prisoner to physically abuse his partner from behind prison walls, but it is certainly possible to exercise coercive control. The majority of the women who said they avoided going out or seeing certain people appeared to do so willingly, in order to avoid upsetting a partner whom they saw as already under a lot of stress and who was deprived of his liberty. There was no evidence that they feared violence or were caused serious alarm or distress, which are needed to fulfil the requirements of the new offence. It is, of course, difficult to conclude whether these women were actually experiencing coercive control. As Stark (2007) discussed in his study of coercive control, some victims can appear to be confident, successful in their jobs, and assertive. Some victims of domestic violence and coercive control also minimise the abuse and control, and may be far from willing to accept – even to themselves – that they are being subtly controlled by their partners (Stark 2007).

Yet, as the following quote indicates, prisoners could easily use their partners' desire to avoid upsetting them in controlling their actions. Sally described having been quite rambunctious when she was younger and said, as a result, her partner wanted to keep her and the children safe. Even though she did not appear to see herself as being a victim of abusive emotional control and described a generally positive relationship, the fact that she was being emotionally controlled from within prison was clear, even to her. She did not allow people to come to her house, had her partner's friends checking on her, and so on. She claimed this was for her own good, but some victims of coercive control in Stark's (2007) study also rationalised some controlling behaviour as being protective. There is certainly evidence of coercive control in Sally's story, even if she did not

see herself as an abuse victim and did not appear to fear violence or feel distressed.

> **Sally**: But I don't have no-one around my house, my house is not available to anyone except like my mum and my sisters. No-one is allowed [by her, rather than forbidden by her partner] round.
> **Anna**: And why is that, you want to keep it to you and the kids?
> **Sally**: Yeah, and because of him as well, because he's paranoid that if I had people round I'd be drinking all the time and having parties and stuff. Which I'm not. But it just plays on his mind in there, and we argued about stuff like that. So it's easier for me just to not have anyone around. It's easier for me just visit people. And plus it's my kids' house as well, and I don't really want all that around them. So that's it.
> **Anna**: Does he ever check on your, what you're doing today?
> **Sally**: Yeah, yeah. He likes to know who I've been with and what time I got in, but he knows what time I come in because he can ring me any time he wants to. Sometimes, like, his friends will come and check up on me. They won't be nasty or anything like that, they'll just be like – 'oh, you alright?'. You know? 'What you doin'?'. I say – 'come have a look'. [...] He's possessive. I don't know... He's got me in a way where I now decide not to do stuff to not upset him. So he has, like, controlled me. He's turned me into, like, making sure I behave kind of thing. Like, before, I'd be leaving all the time. He is a bit possessive. Because he's got me now where I don't want to upset him. So... Where before, I didn't care. It's not like I didn't care, it's like I wanted a life. Now I just don't really... Well, I can if I wanted to, I just don't want to upset him.

Physically or verbally abusive relationships did not feature often in this study, with most of controlling behaviour being more subtle, as in Sally's case. Yet if a relationship was abusive before imprisonment, the abusive behaviour could continue from behind prison walls. One participant had a tumultuous relationship with the father of her children, and he had, shortly before the interview, sent her a verbally abusive letter. She also said that her partner was trying to convert her children to Islam, against her will, and emotionally manipulated her into making small-talk during visits by threatening to cut the visit short.

> **Rachel**: Because he'd say then 'if you don't talk to me, I'll go back in my cell'. And I'm thinking, well, my girls would then be upset. So then I did stay and make small-talk but I was furious. He's not that bad, though. He sounds horrible, doesn't he? But you know, we've all... I'm not perfect. But he is very controlling. Very powerful, he's got really... That's one of the things that attracted me in the first place, was the strong aura. And how he could get people to do things. Without even being aggressive or talking loud, even. Real soft-talker, actually. He's just got a powerful persona.

Relatedly, many of the women also described managing their own emotions – a practice that was often closely linked to their managing the prisoners' emotions. They would hold back their anger or anxiety, reining it in and waiting for themselves to be in a calmer state of mind before talking to the prisoner. Often this would happen after an argument with the prisoner, or when something else had upset the participant. Managing their own emotions played a dual role – it meant not upsetting the prisoner but also not wasting the few opportunities for communication the couple did have on arguments and negativity. Two good examples of own emotion-management can be taken from Mary's and Lisa's interviews:

> **Mary**: I think I recognise much more about how I come across and how I behave and now I step back a lot more and think about things. Because I can't pick the phone up and talk to him, I've got to save everything up for when I do talk to him. And if you have...if you're hacked off with somebody, on the outside world, it's easier to go 'Oh, for god's sake, you do this, you do that'. But if you've saved all of those [frustrations] up and that's all you gave him in your phone call, it's kind of a wasted phone call. So you have to step back and think is this important, do I really need to make this point. Does it matter that he's done this or done that. […] Sometimes I've like an e-mail out, when I've been upset with him, or I've been angry with him for whatever reason, and I've saved it. And I haven't sent it because it was the E-mail-a-prisoner thing. And I haven't sent it, and I thought I'm gonna sleep on it and I'll wait until tomorrow and then a couple of hours later he rings me, and he kind of answers what I wanted to know without asking him. D'you know what I mean? And I'm so glad I've not sent the e-mail. And this is what I mean about how I deal with things, I step back more and realise that, actually, it's not always what I think is right. And I have to give him a chance to explain or to put something right even when he doesn't know he's done wrong. If that makes sense.

> **Lisa**: If he's just moved prisons he can be pretty difficult to deal with. So you might think, okay, so I'm not gonna share a whole load of stuff about [problems]... And to be honest, most of the time I would tell him pretty much everything. That's how it is. There are times when he's particularly pissing me off when I'm struggling with this situation which I might not tell him at the time. I might leave it until I've calmed down, and then I'll say, you know... Like recently I've got to the point where I thought, really fed up with this, just this whole thing. Really-really want to go out and have a really good time. And he said – 'yeah, that's understandable'.

Both Mary and Lisa describe controlling their own emotions and holding back anger, frustration and other negative feelings from their partners. This is not to say they did not express such emotions at

all, but rather waited until a time that was, to them, more opportune. They were doing this in order to keep the relationship positive and not waste the few opportunities for communication on negativity, but also to spare the prisoner's' feelings, as Lisa implies when she discusses not offloading negativity on her partner when he had just moved prisons.

8.4 PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL INTIMACY, AND INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE

Intimacy in its various forms is a key part of all family relationships, but especially crucial to partnerships and marriages. In order to understand how intimacy is affected by long-term imprisonment, it is important to draw on Morgan's (2013) three types of intimacy: physical and emotional intimacy, and intimate knowledge. It is also useful to conclude the empirical chapters with this discussion because there are many links to be drawn with earlier chapters.

Firstly, let us start by discussing physical intimacy. As already noted in Chapter 5, opportunities for physical intimacy were few, with, usually, only one hug and kiss allowed at the beginning and end of the visit. There was very little privacy, as also discussed in Chapter 5, with all physical contact supervised and regimented. The women were often very conscious of this and felt constrained – as such, the intimacy aspect of physical contact was diminished by the lack of privacy. This was likely exacerbated by the fact that prison had not been a normal part of these women's lives, and displaying intimacy in a public space was no something they were used to.

> **Jenny**: The visit room itself is very comfortable, but very restricting when it comes to the visit. They don't expect you to kiss during the visit. When he was in [prison], they'd turn a blind eye, you see. But... Only allowed to kiss and cuddle at the beginning and kiss and cuddle at the end. And hold hands during the visit, that's it.

> **Judy**: You can have a hug when you're in, and a hug when you're out. If you're seen holding [hands] you're put on closed visits. You know, any sort of intimacy, closed visits. Which, it is very unfair, because I think they don't take into account the... People need that emotional and physical bonding. And I know these guys are inside, sometimes for quite heinous crimes, but they're still people that we love. They still

> need to feel that love and intimacy as well as what we do. And when it's [the visit] so cold and barren...

As time went on, some women got used to displaying intimacy in the visiting hall. This did not mean they were no longer self-conscious, but rather they pushed the lack of privacy to the back of their minds. Like the other pains of imprisonment discussed in Chapter 5, the lack of privacy became a normal part of their lives, and they learned to adopt a “sod it” attitude to displaying physical intimacy. Esther, for example, still felt ambivalent about kissing her husband and talking about sex in the visiting hall, but did it anyway because she felt it meant a lot to her husband. She claimed she no longer cared about the presence of staff and other visitors, but it was clear that she was still very much aware of the lack of privacy.

> **Esther**: And now, you get to the stage when you think – I just don't care. Because unless... And you d'you know something, I do it [engage in intimate talk and physical intimacy] for him more than for me. It means more for him because I still, I feel more, a little, not inhibited, but I suppose it is inhibited really... It's not something I'm comfortable with.

As Judy and Esther (above) indicate, the lack of physical intimacy also affected the levels of emotional intimacy. Physical contact, of course, helps maintain an emotionally intimate relationship because physical intimacy can be about expressing one's affection for a partner – a kiss, for example, can be a sexual act but can also be used to express warmth and affection. Over time, it is possible that the lack of physically intimacy contact can diminish emotional intimacy, as was, in fact, happening with Elly:

> **Elly**: And what we were touching on with prison furniture thing when we were walking over here [to the interview venue], what's happened in prison visiting rooms, is the furniture has been put in such a way that actually you're sitting further and further away from the person you're visiting. I've noticed that. And that has two consequences – the first is, actually, a lot of the time, you can't hear what they're saying. You literally can't hear what they're saying. If you're sitting next to a really noisy family, you can't really tell them to shut up because that won't really go down well. And the other things is physically, you can't touch one another. And that creates

quite a lot of distance in your relationship. And that's happened to us.

Third spaces could also be used to create a surrogate kind of physical intimacy. Some women and their partners shared 'naughty letters' and engaged in phone sex, thereby creating a semblance of physical intimacy. Lucy, in the excerpt below, highlights that phone sex has helped her and her partner keep the intimate aspect of their relationship alive, but also shows how complex displaying intimacy in a public sphere is. She is acutely aware of their conversations not being private, even though she had learned, over time, to not pay it much heed.

> **Lucy**: Well, we don't really say a lot on the phone. There have been times when, like, he's been on the phone and you know, like, phone sex. I've done that. And I've heard them [officers] listening. But oh well. [laughs] But it's just something that we do. It's the only way that we can do it. So, yeah...
> **Anna**: Do you kind of just think – just don't care that they're listening?
> **Lucy**: Well if they are, they're just getting an earful!
> **Anna**: But it doesn't kind of make you embarrassed?
> **Lucy**: It used to. It doesn't now. I'm just not bothered now. I just think – d'you know what, he's my partner, I've got to do what I need to do. That sort of thing. And I know that he loves it. It's not all the time... I'm not sat there every week. Every now and again maybe he's like – on his birthday or something, if it's not visiting. It'll be something like that. I'm not saying we do it... It's just, like, special times. It's not very often. But that also, like, that keeps it... Even for me, I know it's like... It's phone sex, but it's with [partner], so it's different. And that kept the little thing between us.

As the above interview indicates, once again, engaging in this type of quasi-physically intimate behaviour was also partially about sustaining emotional intimacy. It was about showing the prisoner that his wife still cared about him and loved him – it was not simply to engage in phone sex for the sake of having phone sex.

Emotional intimacy could be enacted in other ways, however. Both prisoners and their partners outside found ways of expressing affection for each other, where relationships were close and loving. Letters could be used to express care and affection, as could phone calls. Elsa, for instance, said that she and her partner would reassure each other of their love in letters. Gifts were

sent to express affection to one another. Again, because time spent together was so limited, third spaces became crucially important for engaging in emotionally intimate behaviour, but as discussed in Chapter 5, this was difficult for some women due to the lack of privacy. Letters, after all, could – and often were – read, and telephone calls listened to. Family Days and other “special” visits were also a chance to engage in emotionally intimate behaviour. During my observations, I witnessed prisoners bringing their families food and drinks, which was one way of them showing affection. I was also witness to many warm exchanges, with prisoners and their relatives assuring each other that they were loved and greatly missed.

Intimate knowledge refers to the interconnectedness of personal lives and sharing common histories over time (Morgan 2013). It was difficult to enact this type of intimacy because, as discussed earlier in this thesis, the participant and her partner were living separate lives for a long time. As one practitioner interviewed said, families of long-term prisoners had 'no shared experiences' with the prisoners, since 'life moves on so quickly'. What this means is that there are very few opportunities to build up a shared family history, since they cannot spend significant amounts of time together and engage in meaningful activities like family dinners, date nights, and going on holidays. Significant family events like births, deaths and weddings were missed by the prisoner. As time went on, the lives of the prisoner and his partner and children increasingly diverged, with changes building up. These included new jobs, children growing up, and so forth – the prisoner was not interconnected with the family and was not a part of these changes. By way of example, Elsa said that she struggled to talk to her husband about her relatively new jobs because he had never had the opportunity to meet her colleagues.

> **Elsa**: I mean mostly, in previous work, he's known who I've worked with. Whereas if I tell him so-and-so said so-and-so today, he would think – who is so-and-so? D'you know what I mean? It just wouldn't have any significance to him.

This was an even more pronounced problem for women who met their partners in prison and thus had never had any personal time with them. They had minimal opportunities to build a relational history, but also had little to no pre-existing common history to draw upon. This was made acutely clear by Elly, who had been married to her imprisoned partner for over a decade:

> **Elly**: But yeah, you feel different from other people. Because you look... You look at the life other people have had who've been married, say, same time as we have. They all talk about going on holiday, having their kids moving house... And you think – we haven't done any of that. And it does hit you, actually. It took a while. I don't know how it happens with other people but... It hit me quite hard a few years ago. It, was – oh... Again, I'm gonna swear. It was – oh f..., what have I done?

Some women and their partners were very creative indeed and used every opportunity they could to build some common history over the long sentence through the use of third space. Watching the same movies is one example; another is sending of gifts. Sending gifts helped express affection, and gifts also were physical symbols of the relationship and its value to the prisoner and his partner.

> **Elizabeth**: Honestly, I've got a house full off... He's made me this matchstick, it's about this big, jewellery box. And there is so much thought gone into the patterning, I've got little drawers that pull out that got bits of sponge in them, you know, you can almost imagine him making... They have to be quite resourceful in there because you know, they can't just go to a shop and buy what they want if they wanted to make a box. And things like that, again, it's the thought... I mean, he made me the most, I absolutely love it, and everybody looks at it and probably thinks – 'I don't get it...'. A love heart made out of matches. And he actually wrote on it 'I love you'. And he managed to send it to me and it got to me in one piece!

8.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has allowed us to consider how prisoners' partners operate as partners. I have endeavoured to show how long-term imprisonment alters the family dynamics and the ways in which family is done. Firstly, it shifts the everyday family decisions to the partner outside – and if she is a woman who had previously enacted traditional gender roles, this may be very difficult for

her. Family practices, thus, become more diffuse, with the partner shouldering the burdens of everyday family decisions. Even though women wanted to keep the prisoner a part of family practices, this was often difficult in practical terms. There was little immediacy in communication, and thus on a day-to-day basis the women had to make decisions on their own. As a practitioner put it eloquently:

> **Practitioner 5**: They [prisoners' families] are forced into living a particular lifestyle. That might be once a month finding money for visits. Being available for phone-calls. Almost the family becoming institutionalised.

In terms of family space and time, the only family space available to the family was the prison visiting room, and time was limited to a few visiting hours a week. As such, there were few opportunities to spend time together as a family, and this meant that third spaces were often used to do family across prison walls. These included telephone calls, letters, but also other techniques – such as sharing common activities. Family time also had to be juggled with other schedules – work and school schedules, for example – and was often practically difficult. Emotions, too, had to be managed across prison walls. The women I interviewed often spoke about trying to avoid upsetting their partners, as most were acutely aware of the men being in difficult, distressing situations. Some did this by not going out and seeing friends and acquaintances, and in a few cases, there was a distinct possibility of coercive control being exercised by the prisoner. Moreover, the women also learned to manage their own emotions and wanted to avoid lashing out at the prisoner in anger or frustration.

Christian (2005), in her US study of relatives visiting prisoners, illustrated the financial, emotional and temporal costs of maintaining a relationship with a prisoner. Family connections, she argued, is costly for these relatives, especially in the US, where, as she shows, it can take up to 12 hours to reach a prison by bus. In this chapter, I discussed some of the unique challenges that arise

for partners doing family across prison walls. Doing family in such a context can be difficult, practically, financially, and emotionally. It is even more so when a sentence is long. The prisoner, over time, becomes increasingly detached from the family, unable to partake in both everyday and milestone family events. And yet the women, as wives/partners and mothers, wanted to keep the prisoners a part of the family. This burden imprisonment places on the partners outside ought to be recognised, and this chapter has highlighted how it can be a heavy burden indeed. Even though society rarely recognises the family work women do, the effort some of the women in this study went to in order to maintain the family was considerable. Yet it was the long-term imprisonment that made doing family all the more difficult for women who already were facing financial, health-related, emotional and social problems.

CHAPTER 9
Conclusion

> **Lisa**: And you change because of it, and you become someone who, that's part of your identity, the fact that you've done this, the fact that you've survived this.

This thesis has sought to develop prisoners' families research by drawing on prison sociology and highlighting the many ways in which long-term prisoners' partners experience imprisonment alongside their husbands/boyfriends. In doing so, I aim to show that prisoners' families have a place within prison sociology and that their experiences can help us learn much about the broader sociological impact of imprisonment. This thesis further contributes to the excellent body of recent research that explores how prisoners experience long sentences (*e.g.* Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015, Liebling 2011).

In this chapter, I provide some methodological reflections on the research conducted. I go on to discuss some ideas for future research, and conclude by describing the theoretical and empirical contributions this research makes. I also outline some ideas for future research in this area.

9.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The women who participated in this study provided rich, detailed accounts of their experiences and helped uncover many previously undiscussed themes. As far as it is possible to tell, most were extremely candid and honest in their accounts, and the interviews addressed the themes and issues I expected to arise. Overall, many of the themes that prison sociology research explores were relevant to understanding the experiences of the partners outside. These range from the pains of imprisonment becoming normalised over time (Hulley, Crewe and Wright 2015) to the women experiencing lost time similarly to prisoners (Wahidin 2006).

The composition of the sample of women interviewed had a number of strengths. They were living all across the UK, and their partners were spread across many different prisons. As such, the women represented a wide range of experiences, since they were not recruited via a single prison or support organisation. There was a variety of participants: those who visited and those who did not, or those who visited rarely. Some belonged to support organisations, and some did not. Although this meant that recruitment was a long and difficult process, it meant that the experiences shared were those of women visiting different prisons, interacting with different prison officers, and living in different communities.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the methodological limitations of this study. The sample consisted primarily of older, White-British, educated and middle-class women (see Appendix 1). Their experiences were likely shaped by these socioeconomic features. For example, the shock and emotional trauma they went through might have been particularly severe because imprisonment was so alien to them. This is not to imply that a woman who is used to her husband being in and out of prison would be untroubled when he receives a long sentence. However, she would likely be well aware of the practicalities of visiting. This could mitigate the emotional trauma she goes through. This was somewhat evident in Sally's interview – imprisonment was so normal to her that she did not need to adjust and was quite used to her boyfriend being away (in fact, she said that despite them being a couple for many years, they had actually spent only very little time together as a couple). It is likely that White, middle-class, educated women were more likely to participate in this kind of research because they had the time and the degree of confidence needed to talk face-to-face to a researcher. Women who lead more chaotic lives might not be willing or able to participate, and may also be mistrustful of a stranger conducting academic research.

Moreover, it was not possible to follow the women's experiences over time. This was not a longitudinal study, and therefore provided only a snapshot of participants' lives at one point in time.

Nonetheless, women at different stages of their partners' sentences were interviewed, which made it possible to explore participants' concerns at the early, middle, and later stages of a long sentence. I also included a small number of women whose partners had been released after a long sentence.

9.2 FUTURE RESEARCH

There is still much we can learn about prisoners' families. It is an emerging area of criminology, and has yet much to teach us, as criminologists, about the broader reach of punishment in general, and imprisonment specifically. As Christian and Kennedy (2011: 380) have argued:

> The primary narrative, then, is only one of a competing set of stories that get told [...], and in the content of the secondary narratives we find important clues about how others manage and influence the offender's actions and their aftermath. […] If we see narratives as both accounts but also prescriptions for how individuals manage their environments, we can see the usefulness of looking for competing storylines in explaining the offender's experiences and others' descriptions of how they are coping with this experience.

Christian and Kennedy (2011) were writing specifically about how family members make sense of and interpret their relatives' offending. However, their argument can also be extended into a broader one. The second narrative of prisoners' families about imprisonment can also tell us much about imprisonment as a method of punishment. This is made clear in the quotation above, where Christian and Kennedy (2011) note that families can inform us about the 'aftermath' of offending – imprisonment is of course an important consequence of offending. We therefore need more research that includes the voices of different family members of prisoners: long-term prisoners' partners, but also biological relatives, same-sex partners of prisoners, and male partners of female prisoners.

What, then, are the possible avenues for future research? This study has shown that long-term imprisonment can, and often does, affect partners outside in profound and profoundly negative ways. What it was not possible to do within the temporal and financial constraints of this study was

explore the ongoing, longitudinal impact of imprisonment. Future studies could conduct a number of interviews with the same women at different stages of the long sentences. For example, participants could be interviewed shortly after their partners' sentencing, then at the midway stage of the sentence, and then at the end of a long sentence. Realistically, any sample in such a study would likely be small due to the difficulty of accessing such participants, but the data would be useful indeed.

Secondly, it would be useful to explore the experiences of other family members. It is possible that some experiences of biological families may be similar to those describe in this thesis. For example, it is likely that parents especially may fear dying before their son is released. Yet the gendered aspect of time passing, and the types of opportunities lost to the partner outside, may be very different for non-partners. Likewise, we know little about male partners of female long-term prisoners. Although there are few women serving long sentences in the UK, the way in which their male partners are affected may be somewhat different too – for instance, they would be less likely to be caring for children and their experiences are likely to be less gendered or gendered in a different way.

Prisoners' families as a topic has not yet firmly embedded itself in prison sociology, despite some excellent sociological work developing in this area. Yet as Christian and Kennedy (2011) have argued, prisoners' families provide a valuable 'second narrative' about imprisonment and its impact. The impetus for more prisoners' families research is certainly there. Much remains to be done and, undoubtedly, future researchers will find further topics to explore in this area. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to the existing literature and provide some groundwork for research to come.

9.3 THE THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS THESIS

Firstly, I will discuss the theoretical contributions this thesis has made. Megan Comfort (2008,

2009) suggested that punishment extends beyond the individual being legally punished. More specifically, she showed, in rich sociological detail, how imprisonment reached into the lives of female relatives of prisoners in the US. The explicit link she drew between the pains of imprisonment and prisoners' families provided a critical connection between prisoners' families research and the sociology of imprisonment. She demonstrated that researching the experiences of families can tell us much about the prison as a social institution, but also that the prison has a dramatic and at times very negative impact on the lives of those outside, as can be seen in Lisa's quote at the beginning of this chapter. In other words, her work has shown that relatives who maintain a relationship with the prisoner are, to an extent, punished alongside the prisoner. As discussed in Chapter 3, the punishment and society literature has recently began to discuss the broader impact of punishment, considering how it affects communities and families, and often includes effects on prisoners that are not directly intended. It has also been accepted that the boundaries of punishment are nebulous and complex. Punishment reaches beyond the criminal law, permeating civil and administrative law. The connection between these debates and the conclusion of this thesis is that the unclear and nebulous boundaries of punishment extend to the partner outside. Punishment in the form of imprisonment shapes her life, not only in practical and financial terms, but also affecting her as a partner and re-aligning her plans and expectations dramatically.

Comfort's (2008) work certainly fits neatly into the more recent sociological debates surrounding the boundaries of punishment and imprisonment. These debates recognise that punishment has the potential to reach into families, communities, and civil law institutions (*e.g.* Hannah-Moffat and Lynch 2012). Concepts such as the 'shadow carceral state' (Beckett and Murakawa 2012) are being discussed in the context of the criminal justice system spreading beyond formally criminal justice subjects, objects and institutions. The critical issue to recognise here is that the impetus for a broader conception of punishment is coming from prison sociologists, not from researchers whose interest is specifically in prisoners' families. Time is therefore ripe for prisoners'

families research to draw on prison sociology and build on Comfort's (2008) work. In fact, a starkly similar metaphor to 'shadow carceral state' is used in the context of prisoners' families. Codd's (2008) and Comfort's (2008) book titles both describe prisoners' families as living ‘in the shadow of the prison’.

This thesis has developed the work on the pains of imprisonment by exploring how they are experienced, over time, by prisoners' partners. I showed that partners outside experience the five pains of imprisonment set out by Sykes (1958), an idea that was first explored by Comfort (2008). I go on to develop this further by showing that the women also experienced the tightness of the pains of imprisonment (Crewe 2009, 2011, 2015), in that they, like prisoners, often became tangled up in prison bureaucracy and the many rules and regulations which characterise the modern prison. This happened not only because they themselves were often subjected to these rules when they interacted with the prison, but also because they were very much invested in their partners' day-to-day lives. Importantly, I also demonstrate that the recent work of Hulley, Crewe and Wright (2015) can help us understand the experiences of prisoners' partners. Like the long-term prisoners who participated in that study, the women also, over time, became used to the pains of imprisonment and learned to live with them, even if these pains did not, objectively, become any less painful to bear.

Turning to long-term imprisonment specifically, I have shown that the women in my study also felt the pains associated with long-term imprisonment. They had to make sense of a long sentence, which was sometimes difficult. They coped with the length of the sentences in remarkably similar ways to long-term prisoners: by segmenting the sentences into shorter blocks of time and living day-by-day. This is not to say that they never thought about the future, but when they did, they thought of a vaguely positive future and did not usually make concrete plans for it. None were blindly idealistic and they realised that there may be a number of difficulties to face once their partners were released. The women also became, to a degree, institutionalised – their daily lives

were shaped by the prison schedule and they got to know prison languages and prison rules in great detail. When the usual routine was interrupted, some became anxious or distressed. These pains of long-term imprisonment had not previously been considered in the context of prisoners' families.

Furthermore, I made the link between the impact long-term imprisonment sometimes has on prisoners and the impact on their partners outside. There is a rich body of research on the psychosocial changes prisoners go through, and this thesis has shown that the partners outside are very much aware of these changes and are troubled by them. Moreover, these changes, such as intense reliance on the prison schedule, sometimes caused tension and misunderstandings within the relationship.

I also showed that the women experienced the temporal problems associated with long-term imprisonment. Like prisoners, they needed to make sense of a long sentence, and cope with its length. They also experienced lost time because they were separated from their partners and thus could not engage in a shared life with them. Their everyday routines were changed, and, more importantly, their life-courses were interrupted. Some older women realised they would never be able to conceive children with their partners, and others had to delay weddings. The passage of time was also experienced in both a corporeal and a very gendered manner. These findings have developed the sociological work on time, helping us understand how the passage of time is experienced by partners outside and enriching our knowledge about interrupted life courses and everyday routines.

Finally, the findings discussed in Chapter 8 sought to enrich the sociological work on family practices. Despite being separated by imprisonment for a long time, these women and their partners (and any children they had) were a family unit. The work on family practices has explored non-traditional families, but prisoners' families have not yet been discussed within this work. This thesis

shows the work that went into doing family across prison walls, and the difficulties associated with trying to be a family. Creating family time and space demanded time, money, effort and creativity on the part of the women and the prisoners. Even so, sustaining emotional and physical intimacy, as well as intimate knowledge, was difficult. This was both in practical terms, since privacy and time together was limited, but also due to the disconnect the prisoners experienced from their partners as time went on. Their link to the outside world – including their families – became increasingly tenuous.

Empirically, this thesis researched a group of prisoners' families that had not, previously, received any explicit attention in the UK. It has thus shed some empirical light on long-term prisoners' partners and helped enrich prisoners' families research. Moreover, it has developed sociological work on time and family practices to include a group of people whose experiences have remained hidden in this body of work.

9.4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Although this study was comprised of a small sample, it showed that long-term imprisonment has a dramatic effect on those outside and that their needs and concerns ought to be given some recognition at a policy level. At the moment, prisoners' families do not receive much attention at this level. Despite an ever-growing body of scholarly work on prisoners' families (see Chapter 2 for an overview), they have thus far garnered little attention at a state level in the UK. There is no government agency or minister with overall responsibility for engaging with their needs (Codd 2007), and no systematic collection of statistical data about prisoners' families undertaken, which is indicative of their invisibility. As a result, Barnardo's, a children's charity, has recently recommended that a minister be appointed who would act as a central figure in addressing the needs of prisoners' children (Walsh 2014 for The Guardian). Though government bodies (such as the National Offenders Management Service) have a diffuse range of responsibilities related to

prisoners' families, there is very little official recognition of the challenges and difficulties prisoners' families face, which include financial, emotional and other difficulties. Illustratively, the National Offenders Management Service's Commissioning Intentions 2014 only mentions families briefly, and rather than noting the challenges they endure, it focuses on families as useful tools for reducing recidivism (NOMS 2013: 23):

> It is important to continue to meet existing core delivery requirements to support offenders' families as we recognise that supporting and maintaining links between offenders and their families can help reduce reoffending. Doing so can contribute to tackling intergenerational offending by addressing the poor outcomes faced by children of offenders. Prisons should make contact with local authorities, share data where appropriate and use the opportunity to share good practice and develop effective interventions.

This instrumental view of families is prevalent in government rhetoric, and the responsibility various bodies have to engage with these families is vague. What does 'make contact with local authorities' mean, for example? A key paper on families of people who offend (Ministry of Justice 2009) also primarily focuses on prevention of reoffending and puts much emphasis on vulnerable and/or excluded families and early intervention for offenders' children who are deemed to be at risk of offending. In both the aforementioned papers, much emphasis is placed on the Troubled Families program, which seeks to address the needs of the most disadvantaged families at risk of offending. Again, this demonstrates that the focus is on prevention of reoffending rather than addressing the needs of families *per se*. This focus also means that families who are not seriously socio-economically disadvantaged and/or at risk of offending remain hidden.

On a more practical level, it is unusual for families' needs to be taken into account in making prison policy. Yet changes in the prison regime can, and often do, affect these families. For example, in 2013, when former Justice Secretary Chris Grayling introduced a tightening of the

Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme[13], reducing the amounts of personal money available to prisoners, at no point did he discuss how this might impact families outside (BBC 2013). It is, however, clear that less personal money means less money that can be spent on phone calls and letters to families. One prisoner's mother highlighted the impact prison policy can have on families when she commented on Chris Grayling disallowing families from sending books to prisoners[14]:

> We have heard a lot about the ban on books in recent weeks. But this is the one tangible link you can have with your family... 'I thought you might enjoy this – I did', or 'a few crosswords to keep you busy'. This prohibition isn't only about reducing opportunities for learning. It also removes the last possibility of a gift, a tangible piece of human warmth.
> (Mother speaking at the All-Party Parliamentary Penal Affair Group 2014).

Moreover, the movement away from a rehabilitative to a punitive stance within the criminal justice system (*e.g*. Loader 2006, Newburn 2007) has impacted upon imprisonment in practical terms, but the consequent effects upon families have not been fully considered by the state. For example, in 2012, the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales (2012) indicated that in terms of meaningful activity, the outcomes for prisoners were 'not good' in over 1/3 prisons. The report also states that prisons rarely spent the expected 10 hours out of cells (in fact, only 5% of young adults did), and many prisoners were unemployed despite wanting to work. Although the report gives examples of some good practice, it appears that many prisoners experience imprisonment as nothing more than 'humane containment' (Scott 2007: 54) – a containment characterised by minimal rules of legality and safety but with little real engagement with the prisoner or his needs. All this can have an effect on families outside. For example, less free time out of cells could result in less time for phone calls to relatives. Less meaningful activity could mean

[13]Under this scheme, prisoners can earn benefits in exchange for good behaviour. It is one of the tools of prison management in the UK.

[14]This policy was later overturned by Michael Gove, who replaced Chris Grayling as Justice Secretary.

that the prisoner will have little to discuss and share with his relatives. Yet as with prison policy, these indirect effects of the punitive turn are rarely recognised.

There are also no national prison programs that seek to support family relationships. Some examples of good practice exist locally in individual prisons – such as the Storybook Dad scheme which allows imprisoned fathers to read stories to their children. PACT, a charitable organisation that works with prisoners' families, runs a Building Stronger Families course (amongst other prison-based courses) aimed at helping prisoners and their partners strengthen their relationships. This was originally run only in one male prison and was subsequently extended to some female and young offenders' prisons, but it is not a widespread national program (Pellew 2011). Most of these programs are run by charities and are not championed by any government agency, which is a possible reason for them being localised rather than national in scale. Recently, the company Prison Voicemail has introduced a service that allows prisoners and their families to exchange voice messages, which adds an element of immediacy to communication. However, this too has yet to spread to all prisons in England and Wales, and it remains to be seen how many prisons will take this up. Once again, the initiative comes from non-government individuals rather than a central government drive for better communication between prisoners and their families.

Looking beyond the criminal justice system, there is also little government support for charitable organisations that support prisoners' families. Most of the organisations are small and local, with little funding. In fact, some organisations have had to close down to funding ending, such as SHARP, which closed down after the budget cuts that occurred in 2012-2013 (Shropshire Star 2013). AFFECT, the only UK organisation that supports families of serious offenders, is small and is run out of the members' homes (AFFECT 2012), with scant funding, none of which comes from the government. The organisation's entire budget, over the last 13 years, amounted to only £16,000 in total (AFFECT 2014). Even Action For Prisoners' Families, the largest organisation in

the UK that campaigns on behalf of prisoners' families, only employed around 10 staff members in 2012-2013 and had to downsize further in 2013 (Action for Prisoners Families 2013).

More recently, legislation was introduced in England and Wales establishing that charities which receive government funding should not be permitted to engage in political lobbying. One of the reasons cited for this was that charities were using the funding to campaign for 'unpopular' causes (Weakley 2015). The problems faced by prisoners' families are not an especially popular social issue (Breen 2008) – as indicated by the negative social reaction actress Catherine Tyledesley received when she donated her game-show winnings to a prisoners' families charity (York Press 2013). This proposed policy change could therefore further hamper the work these charities do, since it could demotivate them from applying for government funding or make it much more difficult to receive such funding. The situation appears to be better in Scotland, where the government has recently awarded £1.8 million to extend support given via prison visitors' centres (The Scottish Government 2015).

Despite increased academic attention, prisoners' families remain hidden when it comes to the criminal justice system and prison policy. When they do receive government attention, they are more often than not seen as useful tools for the reduction of recidivism, rather than as families facing a range of issues and problems in their own right. This is not to say that families are not, at times, important sources of help and support for the prisoner – in fact, numerous studies have confirmed that family contact helps reduce chances of reoffending upon release (*e.g.* Holt and Miller 1972, Martinez and Christian 2009, Markson *et al.* 2015).

Yet prisoners' families face problems of their own that ought to be recognised in and of themselves (Codd 2007). The government, by focusing on the family's role in reducing reoffending, might be taken to imply that the family has some responsibility for ensuring the prisoner does not

reoffend. In effect, the government can be seen as giving some of its responsibility to help reduce reoffending to families of prisoners (Codd 2007). Yet it is unjust for the government to imply this without recognising the many difficulties prisoners' families face in their own right and the financial, emotional and social costs associated with maintaining a relationship with a prisoner. As I discussed in Chapter 3, it is also usually women who provide the care and support for prisoners, and thus by stating that families have a role in reducing recidivism the state is actually implying it is mothers, wives and girlfriends who have that responsibility. Moreover, focusing on resettlement and reducing reoffending also isolates families of prisoners serving long sentences. This is because long-term prisoners would not be released for a long time, and thus resettlement is not a pressing issue (Codd 2007). Yet their families may be going through an especially difficult time.

More recently, David Cameron has announced an overhaul of the prison system. He argued that England and Wales is a 'compassionate country', that we should offer hope to prisoners who wish to reform, and that prisons would become more decentralised, with governors having more say in how they are run (BBC 2016). However, it remains to be seen whether the focus on modernisation and rehabilitation will do anything to change the invisibility of prisoners' families. As The Guardian's (2016) editorial on David Cameron's speech concludes, 'there is so far only talk'. It remains to be seen whether there will indeed be an overhaul now that there is a new Prime Minister, Theresa May, what shape this will take, and what implications there will be for prisoners' families.

This thesis has shown the dramatic impact long-term imprisonment has on partners outside. This means that the government ought to give more recognition to this broader reach of imprisonment. For example, when prison policies are made, their potential impact on families of prisoners ought to be considered. Policy papers should not focus on families simply as rehabilitative tools, and there needs to be greater clarity as to which authorities are responsible when it comes to

these families. Moreover, the fact that, over time, the participants' perceptions of the criminal justice system became very negative is concerning. These women said they had been brought up to respect the authorities and to trust them, and yet said they could not bring up their children to trust and respect the police and other criminal justice bodies. This is indeed worrying because it implies that long-term imprisonment can damage families' perceptions of the legitimacy of the prison as an institution. Better officer training may be needed to address how officers interact with families of prisoners.

9.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis has endeavoured to shed light on a very under-researched group of prisoners' families. The findings of my study confirm that long-term imprisonment often has a dramatic and highly negative impact on the partners outside, in many different ways. What struck me most about these women's experiences is the deeply transformative impact long-term imprisonment had on them. It was not a simply difficult, traumatic period in their lives. Imprisonment changed them. It became a part of their identities, woven into the fabric of their lives, and changed them as people and as women. Some stated that the spectre of imprisonment would always haunt them. They felt that the stigma associated with imprisonment would always remain, and some became extremely isolated. Their health often deteriorated, and years of visiting and otherwise interacting with the prison meant that the institution became a part of their lives. The frustrations associated with these interactions also changed, fundamentally, how these women viewed the criminal justice system. They no longer trusted the system and saw it as unfair, ineffective, harsh and judgemental. It is perhaps best to conclude this thesis by, once again, making the voices of the participants heard. As Anne highlights in the following quotation, long-term prisoners' partners experience the duration of imprisonment alongside their partners:

> **Anne**: He's got a life sentence, but I have a life sentence to cope with as well.

APPENDIX 1
Table of Partner-Participants

NAME	AGE	ETHNICITY	SENTENCE OF PARTNER	ESTIMATED TIME SERVED AT THE TIME OF INTERVIEW	(ALLEGED) OFFENCE	MARITAL STATUS	WHETHER PRISONER IS MAINTAINING INNOCENCE	Notes
Gemma	70s	White British			Sex offence	Married		
Louise	50s	White British			Sex offence	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Cara	20s	White British			Sex offence	Unmarried	Maintaining innocence	
Jenny	30s	White British			Sex offence	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Elsa	40s	White British			Sex offence	Married		
Helen		White British			Sex offence	Married	Prisoner pled guilty but partner maintains he is innocent	
Estelle	40s/50s	White British			Murder	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Sally	30s	Mixed-Race British			Robbery	Unmarried		
Amanda	50s	White British			Firearms	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Martha	40s	White British			Drugs	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Sandra	50s	White British			Sex offence	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Casey	20s	White British			Murder	Unmarried		
Bella	40s	White British			UNKNOWN	Unmarried		
Iris	70s	White British			Sex offence	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Lucy	30s	White British			Murder	Engaged		
Marina	40s	Black Mixed			Attempted Murder	Unmarried	Maintaining innocence	
Tina	60s	White British			Sex offence	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Fiona	50s	White British			Sex offence	Unmarried	Maintaining innocence	

NAME	AGE	ETHNICITY	SENTENCE OF PARTNER	ESTIMATED TIME SERVED AT THE TIME OF INTERVIEW	(ALLEGED) OFFENCE	MARITAL STATUS	WHETHER PRISONER IS MAINTAINING INNOCENCE	Notes
Holly	40s	White British			ASKED NOT TO REVEAL	Unmarried		
Mary	40s	White British			UNKNOWN	Unmarried		
Esther	50s	White British			Murder	Unmarried		
Isabella	40s/50s	White British			Sex offence	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Elizabeth	40s/50s	White British			Sex offence	Married		
Sarah	50s	White British			Sex offence	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Anne	50s	White British			Murder	Married		
Lisa	40s	White British			Murder	Unmarried		
Rebecca	40s/50s	White British			Fraud	Married	Maintaining innocence	
Judy	50s	White British			UNKNOWN	Unmarried		
Alice	60s	White British			Sex offence	Married		
Rachel	40s	White British			Murder	Unmarried		
Susan	20s	White British			Importation	Unmarried		
Elly	50s	White British			Murder	Married		
Jane	60s (?)	White British			Sex offence	Engaged	Maintaining innocence	

APPENDIX 2
Interview Schedule for Partners

Introduction	Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed Explanation of study Informed consent & forms Anonymity & confidentiality, reminder of limits if harm disclosed Recording of interview – can ask for handwritten notes to be taken instead Reminder – the interview can be stopped at any time or we can take a break if you need one
1. Can you tell me about your family? Who lives in your household?	Children? Other relatives?
2. When did you and your husband (boyfriend/fiancé) meet?	What was he like when you met him?
3. [If met before imprisonment] Can you tell me about the first time your husband (boyfriend/fiancé) was arrested?	How did you feel? What did you do in the first few days? What kind of problems did you experience? How did you feel about your relationship with your partner? [If the current prison sentence is not the first] What about the most recent arrest?
4. [If met before current imprisonment] How long has it been since your husband's (boyfriend's, fiancé's) most recent arrest?	How do you feel about this period of time?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your husband (boyfriend, fiancé) now?	Has it changed in any way since you first met? [If met before current imprisonment] Has it changed since the arrest?

6. Describe how you keep in contact with your husband (boyfriend, fiancé).	Letters? Phone calls? Parcels?
7. [If visits] What are your visits like? Describe a typical visitation day.	How long does it take to get to the prison? How do you travel? What are the facilities like? What kind of things do you and your husband talk about during visits? What else do you do? Are visits important for your relationship? Why? Have your visiting patterns changes since the first weeks/months of your husband's (boyfriend's/fiancé's) imprisonment? Have you experienced any problems before/during/after visits?
8. [If writes letters] Describe your letters.	What are the letters like? How do you write them – in one go or in stages? How often do you write them? What sort of things to do you write about? What do these letters look like? Have you experienced any problems with sending or receiving letters?
9. [If writes letters] What are your husband's (boyfriend's/fiancé's) letters like?	What sort of things does he write about? How often does he write you letters? What do his letters look like? Are letters important to your relationship? Why?
10. [If calls] Can you describe the phone calls?	How often does he call? How long do you talk for? What are these phone calls like? What sort of things do you talk about? Are phone calls important to your relationship? Why?
11. What else do you do to maintain your relationship with your husband (boyfriend, fiancé)?	Is there anything else you do (in addition to visiting/sending letters/calling)? Is there anything you think about?
12. Is there anything that would make it easier for you to maintain your relationship?	In what ways would these things help you?
13. What would you say	

are the most difficult aspects of maintaining your relationship?	In what way do these things make it difficult to maintain your relationship?
14. Do you have any sources of support – friends, family, a support organisation?	What are they like? How do they help you?
15. [If children] Can you tell me a little about your children?	Do they know your husband (boyfriend/fiancé) is in prison? If they do, how do they feel about it? Has the imprisonment affected them? How?
16. How do you see your future? Do you see your relationship with your husband (boyfriend/fiancé) changing in any way?	In the next few months? Years? Institutionalised?
17. As we've discussed, this study is about partners of long-term prisoners. I'm trying to understand how these partners maintain their relationship with their husband (boyfriend/fiancé) and what problems they face. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think might be important for me to know?	
18. Close interview	

	Thank you very much for your time Reminder about anonymity Details of support organisations Reminder of contact details of researcher for any future questions or clarification

APPENDIX 3
Interview Schedule for Practitioners

Introduction	
1. How long have you been working with prisoners' families?	In what capacity? What were your roles?
2. What are, in your experience, the key issues prisoners' families face?	Financial? Practical? Emotional?
3. Can you tell me if you've supported any long-term prisoners' families specifically?	If yes, what would you say are the difficulties raised by long sentenced? Institutionalisation? Time passing?
4. How long did you support long-term prisoners' families for?	How were, do you think, these difficulties experienced over a long sentence?
5. What do you think are the social and political views of prisoners' families and their needs are?	
Concluding statements	

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