

**Challenging Occupational Norms: An Ethnographic  
Study of Female Prison Officers in a Women's  
Prison**

A thesis presented

by

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# Abstract

Female prison officers have an important role to play in the lives of the imprisoned women they are charged with 'looking after'. This thesis draws upon 64 days of research, over 35 weeks, over a 12-month period to produce a unique ethnographic study of female frontline officers responsible for female prisoners in a public sector prison in England. This thesis offers a snapshot of prison life during a particularly tumultuous period in contemporary British penology, whilst providing an important counter-narrative to previous gendered studies of prison occupational culture. Staff-prisoner relationships are central to the running of prisons (Sparks et al, 1996) and this thesis argues these relationships are becoming less robust due to the lack of face-to-face contact, reducing personal interactions and ultimately the quality of the prison regime. This thesis also argues mental illness is a key challenge for the prison officers, and will highlight the officer's knowledge of this issue is limited due to a lack of sufficient training being available. This thesis will also address the impact of the occupation on female officers, and how personal issues such as childbirth can create unique emotional burdens for some of the female officers. Relatedly, this thesis argues prison is an emotional milieu where the officers are forced to manage their emotions under pressure, and how the mis-management of these emotions can lead to the job spilling-over into the private lives of the prison officers. Finally, this thesis will provide critical engagement with the theoretical aspects of prison occupational culture; spill-over and contamination, and the sociology of emotions

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# Part One: Introduction

To many people prisons are hidden worlds behind high walls, with those that reside there and those that work there being the only people to witness the inner workings of this *total institution* on a daily basis; making it an interesting environment to study through an ethnographic lens. Significantly, prison studies illustrate behind the walls lies a community where the cycle of crime and deprivation is at its most concentrated as some men and women exhibit chaotic behaviour, in theory, in what should be a place of safety for them (Carlen, 1983; Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Williams *et al*, 2012; Prison Reform Trust, 2014). Others are visibly withdrawing from drugs and look tired, unkempt and underweight. Some prisoners seem overjoyed at being ‘back’ amongst ‘friends’ and yet all of these individuals have one thing in common; they are known as criminals and are behind these walls to be punished. Significantly, these hidden worlds are places of employment, making them ordinary places of work for many men and women (Crawley, 2004a). Those who elect the career path of a uniformed officer are themselves imprisoned and physically confined to this hidden environment, although when their working day has finished they can walk out of the prison gates. Importantly, with the Prison Service affected by continuing government cuts and the pressure on prison staff increasing due to changes, reduced staffing levels, rising prison populations and continuing prison closures, alongside the recent announcement of a ‘super prison’ (expected capacity of 2000 adult male prisoners) being built in Wrexham UK, it is an increasingly significant time to observe and speak to female uniformed officers in the workplace.

It is a tense time for all the staff who work for the Prison Service, but none more so than those who work on the frontline, the uniformed prison officers who work in areas of the

prison where prisoners are present, for instance, the wing and residential area. Under the coalition government, the Prison Service has undertaken many changes and cuts have been made across the prison estate. Frontline staffing levels have been drastically cut, with many officers taking early retirement in the form of the Voluntary Early Departure Scheme (VEDS) package, being offered to long serving prison officers. With far less officers on the landings and an ever-growing prison population, staff fear their personal safety is increasingly at risk (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014). Alongside the ‘cuts’ inside prison, the current government has begun the process of closing many of the old Victorian prisons, creating issues of over crowding across the country. To many people prisons are hidden environments, institutions that most people know very little about. For those who have never entered a prison, be that as an offender, visitor or member of staff, the general consensus is that of a public or media constructed notion of an ‘easy life’ in prison (Edwards, 2008; Doyle and Slack, 2012; Barrett, 2015). However, numerous people spend much of their time in the prison setting, whether that be as a prisoner serving a sentence or as a member of staff ‘looking after’ those who have been sentenced. Put quite bluntly, we have all these strangers under one roof; prisoners adjusting to a *life* inside and the uniformed officers who have them under twenty four-hour surveillance. As this thesis will go on to illustrate, in many ways these strangers are very similar.

We know a great deal about prisoners and how they cope with life inside, how they adjust to prison life and how they deal with their pains of imprisonment (Clemmer, 1940; Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Boyle 1977, 1984; James 2003, 2005; Parker, 1995, 1997; Sykes 1958). On the flip side, much less is known about those who elect to work in these environments; individuals who choose to become uniformed prison officers. It is well documented that some prisoners have complex needs and when introduced into the prison environment are

put through a series of degrading processes, such as strip searches (Scraton and Moore, 2004; Moore and Scraton, 2013; Wahidin, 2014). However, this type of undignified process is also something that uniformed officers have to deal with, not something to look forward to for either participant, and when dealing with female prisoners it is the female officers who undertake this unpleasant task.

This thesis will critically explore the challenges faced by, and coping mechanisms of uniformed officers, and more specifically, female officers. How do these women enter an occupational environment that at times is unpredictable and can also be quite hostile? The study involved twelve months undertaking field work in one public women's prison to find out why women take on what has traditionally been construed as a predominantly masculine role. The aim of the research was to explore whether the women have different working styles to the male colleagues they work alongside, what type of relationships are formed/built with those they 'look after' and those they work alongside. The work also explored the question of what motivates the women to enter a career path that is predominantly male and whether their expectations of the job, change over time. Alongside this the research examined whether their self-perceptions changed when they finished their shift and went home, to family and friends. Female prison officers working in a women's prison in England are researched for the first time in this thesis.

This thesis utilises qualitative, ethnographic research methods employing observations alongside interviews with female prison officers who made up the research respondents. These respondents were sourced once access to the prison had been granted and the research cohort grew predominantly through word-of-mouth, culminating in a snowball sample. The main benefit for this type of research is that it enables the research to present itself through

the voices of the female officers observed and spoken to and not through the words of the researcher.

## **Part Two: Thesis Structure**

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter one sets the context for the empirical work undertaken highlighting the literature on prison officers and more specifically, the lack of literature concentrating on female officers. The chapter covers topics such as; a history of prison officers, occupational culture, female uniformed officers, women in prison, recruitment and working conditions, relationships and work related stress.

Chapter two provides an overview of the methodology utilised for this study. As an ethnographic study it is important to *set the scene* and therefore this section includes a detailed account of the research site. A key theme of the methodology for this project confirms the views of established ethnographic researchers such as Jewkes (2013) who comments on the emotional investment required of ethnographic fieldworkers studying people confined to prison. According to Jewkes (2013: 15), 'It is as if fear of exposure as an emotional human being, capable of compassion and empathy with respondents or, indeed, excitement about the research process will undermine our findings or create what appears as soft research'. This chapter will also include a reflexive account of the research project, this honest approach has assisted in producing interesting, authentic and orthodox knowledge.

Chapter three takes on the form of empirical analysis and addresses the issue of relationships in a prison setting. Predominantly, these are the relationships between female prison officers and their colleagues and also the relationships they build with the female prisoners in their care. The relationships with prisoners are imperative to the smooth running of the prison and the significance of getting staff-prisoner relationships 'right' and what

constitutes a 'right' relationship in this setting has been well documented (Kauffman, 1988; Hay and Sparks, 1991; Liebling and Price, 1999; Crawley, 2004). The conflicting relationships the frontline officers have with management and how this affects morale and job motivation will also be addressed.

As illustrated in chapter four the mental ill health of the prisoners is a challenge for the officers. The officers are expected to deal with these complex illnesses in a difficult environment without any formal training. Issues around self-harm and suicide have been well documented in the women's prison population (Birmingham, 2003; Corston, 2007; Bradley, 2009; Durcan et al, 2014; Coles et al, 2015) and it is a growing concern for the state. Beyond this, the chapter will also address the more complex issue of learning disabilities as more people enter the prison system with formerly recognised conditions. As a growing concern it was important to understand how the officers addressed and engaged with learning disabilities on a daily basis. There will also be a brief discussion around the growing elderly prison population.

Chapter five, the final analysis section will concentrate on gendered empathy; issues directly related to female officers in this type of occupation, when significantly they are working with other women. Pregnancy and miscarriage were strong themes and showed a cross-over between the working and private lives of these officers, also known as the spill-over effect (Crawley, 2002, 2004a). The hours prison officers work are long and some officers struggle to create a work life balance that suits the Prison Service, themselves and their families. The thesis intends to show how female prison officers convey that problematic issues with childcare have been exacerbated by on-going prison budget cuts, and how life at home can be difficult when a partner or husband does not fully understand the working role of a prison officer.

Chapter six will address each of the main thematic areas through a brief discussion and draw the thesis to a conclusion. This chapter will also include a section on future projects.

Conceptually, this thesis:

- a) will draw upon Ervin Goffman's (1959) *dramaturgical analysis* and the structures of social encounters to explore the role of prison officers and importantly, their performance during interactions with both prisoners and other uniformed staff.
- b) will apply Hochschild's (1983) concept of *emotional labour* to the analysis of prison officers' work and how they manage or mis-manage the many different emotions in their workplace. The later work of Fineman (1993, 2000, 2003) and his focus on emotions in organisations will also be applied.
- c) will utilise the concept of gender in the workplace through a number of pieces of work, and will consider the dual roles women play both within the workplace and outside it.
- d) will also address how the sociology of occupations is relevant to female prison officers by drawing on the early work of the influential police sociologist Egon Bittner (1965, 1967). The work of Skolnick (1975) and his concept of a *working personality* will also be utilised.

The following section engages with the key sociological theories informing the study, most notably the work of Erving Goffman, showing the relevance of dramaturgy and his work *Presentation of Self* to that of a prison officer. This section also analyses the work of Arlie Hochschild and her concept of *emotional labour* and how the officers manage or mis-manage their emotions whilst at work. The section will go on to discuss the theoretical framework that guided me through the research; this will include gender in the workplace,

dramaturgy, the sociology of emotions and the sociology of occupations. Theoretically the concepts of *dramaturgy*, *gender in the workplace*, the *sociology of occupations* and the *sociology of emotions* are given particular importance in this thesis given their relevance to the role of female prison officers.

### **Part Three: The Conceptual/Theoretical Framework**

This section of the thesis will briefly introduce the development of the *Interactionist* perspective. In general, Interactionist perspectives tend to concentrate on relatively small-scale levels of *social interaction* (between individuals, small social groups and so forth) and, for this reason, they are sometimes referred-to as a '*micro* level of sociological analysis'. The basic ideas that Interactionist sociologists have in common (and which make them different in many respects to *macro* perspectives like Functionalism and Marxist Conflict theories) can be summarised as follows:

1. They focus on the way in which individuals (or 'social actors' as Interactionists like to call them) *act* (that is, make conscious choices about their behaviour based upon the way they interpret situations) - rather than simply *react* to social stimulation. As we know, positivist sociology adopts an opposite viewpoint, whereby people's behaviour is viewed in terms of the way 'forces external to the individual' (whether this be 'society' in the case of Functionalists, or biology / genes (in the case of non-sociological perspectives).
2. The way in which different social actors *interpret* the behaviour of others is significant as a means of *understanding* the way in which the world is *socially constructed*. This 'social construction' of the world is focused upon the *meanings* people give to behaviour and the way in which they *interpret* the meaning of behaviour.

## **Symbolic Interactionism: the roots of Erving Goffman's work**

Erving Goffman will be remembered as one of the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century, he was an exceptionally perceptive observer of the *micro world* of social interaction, and his work shows an interest in the quirks of human behaviour. During his academic career Goffman (1959, 1961, 1967, 1968) created a number of terms and phrases to describe the activity in the *micro world*; such as, *impression management*, the *interaction order*, *alienation from interaction* and *facework* to name a few, all of which are now frequently quoted terms. His work could be seen as a reaction to the three intellectual traditions that dominated social sciences during this era; those being, the grand theory approach of Talcott Parsons, the psychoanalytical approach of Sigmund Freud along with the quantitative, positivistic approach of many other social scientists at this time. It was Goffman (1959) who suggested that social interaction could be divided into the front and back regions, that is, front regions where people can influence how they are perceived by putting their best character out there for people to see. This front region is where the performance takes place, and the set, costumes, props and manner of the person all have a role to play. The back regions are where there is no audience present; Goffman (1959) claims this is where we are our *authentic self* and we can return here when there is no longer a need to be in the front region environment. Subsequently, the back region is where people can relax and let their guard down and Goffman (1959) also adds people act differently when alone than in social settings; quite simply meaning all of us are social charlatans.

To put this into context, prison officers are, in one sense, no different than those who work in many other face-to-face occupations. For example, when considering the hospitality industry, those who work behind a bar or front of house in a restaurant will have an 'on stage performance' when working, and Goffman (1959) goes on to highlight how this front

region interaction involves teamwork. The way these employees act whilst serving/dealing with customers is by no means a reflection on their personality. For instance, the employees will exhibit smiles and politeness for the customers, people they often talk to as if they were friends. However, once they retreat to the 'back region', in this case the area behind the bar where staff can take a break, the employees may be discourteous about the customers, or disrespectful and rude about other members of staff. As we shall see when considering the uniformed staff who work on the prison wings and landings; they invariably show a united front when working with prisoners and colleagues, and put on a 'tough' stance so as to look both calm and in control. Using Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, the performance of the uniformed officers involves 'the set' (the prison), 'props' (officers keys, whistle and radio), a 'costume' (prison officers uniform) and their 'manner' (tone of voice used and language). The back region for the uniformed officers may not be reached until they are in the car leaving work or at home. Inside the prison, wing offices, staff smoking areas and other communal areas are usually busy places and staff would find it difficult to retreat into the back region whilst surrounded by colleagues; making these 'presentations of self' quite exhausting at times. Erving Goffman's development of how we 'act a role' in front of others is eloquently discussed in his highly acclaimed work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959)

### **Dramaturgy: the presentation of self**

In essence, Goffman (1959) sees all human interaction as a 'play', and the world as an enormous stage. A key strand of Goffman's analysis of social life and social encounters is that we all change our identities from day-to-day and from minute to minute. Goffman's study of the *presentation of self* in social encounters demonstrates how we are able to maintain the identity (and characteristics) of, say, a nurturing wife and mother, and the next

we can present ourselves as an individual more than capable of dealing with the behaviour of a violent prisoner. In other words, to Goffman, the 'self' is a sense of who one is - a dramatic *effect* emerging from the immediate scene being presented. Goffman goes on to form a *theatrical metaphor* in defining the method in which one human being presents itself to another. That term is *dramaturgy*.

When considering prison officers at work, their observers, i.e. the prisoners, would of course be one of the audiences described in his dramaturgical model. The other audience, of course, would be other prison officers. One of the *dramaturgical* issues to be considered in this study is the necessity for a prison officer to be a social chameleon – to make one's body language, tone of voice, demeanour and mannerisms 'fit' with the appropriate and expected role of the prison officer. This process becomes rather more complex when one considers the expectations surrounding women in our society. Women are expected to have a primary domesticated role in the home (Oakley, 1974) and are generally seen as individuals who quite naturally show empathy, sympathy and compassion. Women are often viewed as more caring and emotive, so therefore may be required to change this persona when presented with a working environment that is heavily masculine. This change may not be as necessary or noticeable when considering their male colleagues.

One must also remember that we do not live in a homogenous society and therefore we must all act differently in different settings. Erving Goffman's ideas could have been derived from the works of William Shakespeare; it was Shakespeare who inscribed the Latin motto *Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem* (All the World Is a Playhouse) above the entrance at the famous Globe Theatre in London. It was also Shakespeare who wrote *As You Like It* and more specifically, echoed whilst slightly re-wording the above motto with the line, 'All the

world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players' (Act II Scene VII) (Absolute Shakespeare, 2013). Similarly, as Park (1950 cited in Goffman 1961: 30) claimed,

'... It is probable no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role ...It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves'

When we present ourselves in everyday situations, individuals consciously and unconsciously convey information to others. When placing this in context with uniformed prison officers we can look at the individual's performance; this includes 'dress' (officers uniform), any objects they carry along (keys) and the tone of voice and manner (orders). It is also understood that people craft their performance according to the setting (the prison landings and wings) and (the staff canteen, gym and office areas). Highlighting the performance changes when both in front of prisoners and away from them. Goffman (1959) also discusses deception and non-verbal communication, he claims the key to spotting deception is knowing the other person well and when we consider prison officers, many of them have spent years working with other members of staff, and with certain prisoners and are therefore able to spot whether they are being deceived or 'had over' as they may term it in the prison.

There are certain elements to consider when looking at gender and performance, women are generally socialised to be less assertive than men and they tend to be more sensitive to non-verbal communication, and according to Henley *et al* (1992), gender is a central element in personal performances. When considering demeanour, women are known to craft their personal performances more carefully than men, and display a greater degree of deference in everyday interaction (Henley *et al*, 1992). In everyday life, and according to Henley *et al*

(1992) men typically command more space than women and hold more power in everyday interaction. Does this apply to female officers in the prison? It is also apparent that women smile more than men (LaFrance *et al*, 2003) – however, it is probably unknown when faced with this whether the smile is due to happiness or a certain level of nervousness. We smile and are polite to people we have a dislike for and when we are aware of people ‘performing’ or ‘putting on an act’, rarely do we challenge this. Individuals who do challenge these ‘performances’, could be wrongly perceived as being confrontational. In reality, it is a no win situation. This takes us back to Goffman (1956, 1967) and the fear of embarrassment, something he also describes as ‘losing face’ and he argued that negative emotions like embarrassment resulted from the inability to support one’s desired self-presentation. Most of Goffman’s descriptions of interactions implied that emotions as well as actions and thoughts were involved; and he greatly expanded the understanding of the place of *emotion* in social control.

### **Sociology of Emotions and Emotional labour**

‘The reality for many workers in this new millennium can involve being sworn at, spat upon, insulted on racial grounds or being physically attacked in the course of their work’ (Paterson and Leadbetter, 2002: 132)

It was during the nineteen seventies that both psychology and sociology started to focus on the central roles of emotion (Collins, 1975; Kemper, 1978; Heise, 1979 and Hochschild, 1983) and from a sociological perspective this area of interest continued into the nineteen nineties (Scheff, 1988 and Gordon, 1990). Emotions are feelings that people experience, interpret, reflect on, express and manage (Thoits, 1989). There are numerous definitions of emotion ranging from, for instance, Arnold and Gasson’s (1954: 294) definition of it as ‘an emotion or an effect can be considered as the felt tendency towards an object judged suitable or away from an object judged unsuitable, reinforced by specific bodily changes’.

For the purpose of prison officers and their emotions whilst in the workplace the definition by Oatley et al (2006: 29), seems more appropriate, ‘...multi-component responses to challenges or opportunities which are important to the individual’s goals, particularly social ones’. A key strand of the theoretical approach in this research will be the concept of *emotional labour*, which I shall come to in a moment. The roots of the sociology of emotion are also embedded in the work of Erving Goffman and his concept of *dramaturgy* and will therefore be a crucial component of this theoretical framework. As mentioned earlier, another component of the framework will be the concept of ‘emotional labour’, which can be found in an invaluable book by Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. This intriguing book demonstrates beyond doubt how employees – especially certain kinds of employees - must *manage their emotions to fit with their role and job function*. Later work from Fineman (1993: 19) suggests the expression, the suppression and management of emotions are governed by organisational norms,

‘many professional workers are paid for their skill in emotion management. They are to look serious, understanding, controlled, cool, empathetic and so forth with clients or patients. Benign detachment disguises and defends against, any private feelings of pain, despair, fear, attraction, revulsion or love; feelings which would otherwise interfere with the professional relationship’

In the first edition of *Emotion in Organization* Fineman (1993) characterised organisations as *emotional arenas* and focused on emotion as being lived within organisational life. He discussed how different emotions and roles play a vital organisational role. He goes on to claim that power is exercised by organisations, along with trust held, commitment formed and decisions made, quite simply he is claiming, emotions are invaluable to the inner workings of an organisation (Fineman, 2000); even more so, it could be argued, if these work environments are at times emotionally chaotic. One must not forget that prison is an emotionally painful place for prisoners (see for example, Sykes 1958; Toch 1977b; Cohen

and Taylor 1972; Boyle 1984; James 2003), with Nils Christie (1981) questioning whether there limits to this pain. Prisoners are generally held against their will and are forced to live in close proximity with those they cannot abide. The prisoners suffer feelings of anxiety, regret, sadness, hopelessness and depression and it is the prison officers who have to deal with these emotions (of others) whilst keeping their own emotions under wraps (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b).

Considering prison work is a 'people' job, there will always be a need for prison officers to engage in emotional labour at work. It is Hochschild (1983:7) who writes, 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' when defining emotional labour, she also defines it as, 'this labour requires one to induce or suppress emotions in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 1983: 7). Due to the sustained period of time the prison officers and prisoners spend with each other it is inevitable that these relationships are, at times, emotionally charged. As indicated above, police officers are unlikely to perform emotional labour to quite the same degree. This could be due to the fact that their relationships with offenders are relatively fleeting, while prison officers' relationships with prisoners are not. Unfortunately, the emotions of prison officers only tends to be debated outside academia when a disturbance occurs in the prison, (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b) or when officers have been found to be acting unprofessionally ( (Rawlinson, 2009; Milligan, 2013; O'Carroll, 2013)).

At some point in their career, prison officers may be fearful of certain prisoners in their charge, and it would be inappropriate in this masculine environment to display such emotions to either colleagues or prisoners (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b). Indeed, prison officers have no choice over the individuals they are in charge of and therefore, feelings of anger;

disgust, anxiety, pity, fear and sadness may surface. Prison officers will have to be aware that s(he) does not express the wrong emotion, with Goffman (1959) acknowledging that the anticipation of embarrassment is at the heart of all social interaction. For the prison officer, this is where a convincing 'performance' of the prison officer role and the management of emotion comes into play. Emotion is something we feel within, it is private and personal and this flags up questions like, Should we show them? Should we talk about them? Should we conceal them? There are significant moments in our lives when we are permitted to cry, for instance, when sad attending a funeral or when happy attending a wedding, however, we also know there are moments when we want to cry but know it is inappropriate at that time or place. This could definitely apply to uniformed prison officers, when either there has been an incident on the landings that has frightened them, or maybe when a prisoner has committed suicide and they feel the loss of someone they had become to know quite well. Later work by Goffman (1967) discussed the emotional deviant; by utilising his concept of *facework* he analysed the ritualised procedures for pointing out and correcting deviant acts. Goffman (1967: 5) defines the term face as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact'. The more recent work of Arlie Hochschild's centres around the work of air hostesses and primarily how they are paid to smile, and fundamentally, how these skills have become a 'saleable commodity' (Hochschild, 1983). However, it is accepted that prison officers will also smile and more importantly, understand the importance of smiling during certain communication with both prisoners and colleagues.

Hochschild (1983) has a deep concern with the management and how their employees have to alter one's self to 'put on' a sincere performance whilst working. According to Hochschild (1983: 198) '...either way, feelings become 'transmuted' by the organisation

and the smile, mood, feeling or relationship, comes to belong more to the organisation and less to the self". However, Bolton and Boyd (2003) offer an evolved analysis of emotional labour; by analysing the data from nearly one thousand surveys, they argue cabin crews are skilled *emotion managers* who can 'juggle and synthesize different types of emotional work dependent on situational demands' (Bolton and Boyd, 2003: 289). They further contradict Arlie Hochschild's claim regarding the transmutation of feelings, by claiming the staff 'resist and modify the demands of management and customers', showing they have some level of control over this emotional outlet.

Later work on the emotional demands of 'people work' and developing the work from Hochschild (1983), and relevant to that of prison officers because of the time spent with people, is that of Bolton and Chain (2000) and their work around emotional organisations, and Henderson (2001) who explored this context in relation to nurses. Henderson (2001) interviewed a new nurse who described how she felt when she saw the first child die in hospital. After starting to cry, other staff members enforced this was not the way to behave, thus she was being emotionally socialised by her colleagues. The nurse went on to tell Henderson (2001:134), '...externally I spent a lot of time covering up emotions'. Alongside this, the work of Stenross and Kleinman (1989) who explored the emotional demands on police officers bears some relevance, though is not directly linked to the work of prison officers as explained earlier.

Another area important to prison officers is *emotion management*, and how you manage these emotions day to day can have an impact on job-related stress and as Fegen (1988: 85) argues, 'putting on an act regularly can be exhausting'. Whilst the work of Rutter and Fielding (1988) around the study of police officers found suppressing emotions in the workplace was linked with overall stress of the officers. Although it is evident that

emotional labour may not always be due to organisational pressure there could be links with the prison officer role and *burnout*. According to Maslach and Jackson (1981) burnout is related to issues around deterioration in the quality of service, job turnover and low morale, they go on to claim this can be increased by personal distress, physical exhaustion, increase in the use of drugs and alcohol and marital problems. All of which can be placed directly with frontline prison officers, and is therefore helpful in understanding the management of emotions on the wings and landings of a prison.

### **The Sociology of Occupations**

The sociology of criminal justice occupations is an important sub-field of criminological research, examining how the occupational structure and particular occupations associate with other segments of society like the family, education, and politics. This theoretical perspective concentrates on themes such as; the study of specific occupations of the people, like the prostitute (Armstrong, 1981), miners (Fitzpatrick, 1980) nurses (Abbott and Meerabeau (1998) and the steelworkers (Haas, 1977) and the relationship between personality and occupation, and importantly for prison officers, the public image of occupations, as well as the distribution of power and prestige within the occupation. Quite simply, how people are at work, how they behave and interact and how people present themselves in the workplace. Hall (1983: 5) has suggested, ‘that even for sociologists who do not identify themselves as specialists in occupations, the occupational variable remains a dominant one in sociological analyses’. Hall (1983) conducted a content analysis of journal articles on work and occupations to examine how the field has developed theoretically over recent years. His work highlighted how political shifts in sociology along with events in the world surrounding work are reflected in the findings. According to Hall (1983) the ‘women’s movement’ enforced an increase in papers on women and sex roles in the

workplace. Predominantly this research is quantitative and does not concentrate on thoughts, feelings and interactions. When considering the current economic climate it would be appropriate to concentrate empirical interests on ‘what is important to workers’. With high levels of unemployment in the UK, rising redundancy figures and the fear of future unemployment this is an area where research should be up-and-coming with an aim to develop the theory in other directions.

More recently the field of work and occupations research has broadened and essentially it now reflects the economic and social realities of workers. As Gorman and Sandefur (2011: 277) state, ‘the world of work is increasingly divided into two hemispheres: one which requires expert knowledge accessible only through higher education, and one which does not’ (more on prison officers and educational attainment/requirements in the recruitment section in the next chapter). Whereas previous research had chosen to exclude the latter group of occupations, the more current research includes them.

Exploring varied literature in the sociology of occupations, books and articles on the work culture of ‘high steelworkers’ (Hass, 1977) and medical staff (Fineman, 1993, 2000) have been accessed. While completely different occupations, both require certain *strategies of coping* – steel-workers must learn how to acknowledge the danger of falling, but never to think about it (and certainly not verbalise it) whilst walking the irons. To do so would encourage self-doubt and produce, or almost certainly influence the atmosphere of the team. Such an individual in this team environment would be regarded as bringing bad luck (Hass, 1997). For medical staff, personal detachment tends to be the coping strategy of choice: it is much less difficult to cope with dying and distressed patients when a personal attachment has not been allowed to form (Fineman 1993, 2000).

A useful strand of the sociology of occupations that is important here is that around occupational communities and the relationship between occupational membership and individual behaviour. More importantly, this includes the types of work that have emerged more recently, such as, service work and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). The early work of Bittner (1967) and Skolnick (1975) was ground-breaking because they turned a previously unresearched organisation into an arena of academic interest. Bittner (1967) described how uniformed police officers kept the peace on 'skid-row' he noted how officers would not enforce the law for the sake of it but for it to lead to a more peaceful community. Bittner also noted how police powers were used strategically by the police officers in getting to know not only the area they patrolled but the people who lived in the area. Alongside this, Bittner (1970) analysed the organization of the police, focusing on how the different police departments were structured. He wrote about a quasi-military organisation where there is a code of secrecy, similar to that of prison officers, and how this impacts on a police officers use of force. Furthermore, Skolnick (1975) proposed the notion of a police *working personality*. This working personality was a combination of different elements of police work; these elements were danger, authority and efficiency. Skolnick also adds there is pressure on the police officers to appear efficient, again, similar to that of prison officers. This piece of work is relevant and important because Skolnick's focus was on the rank and file police officers who were on the frontline, the officers who walked the beat.

Police officers, similar to prison officers are part of a traditional occupational culture and a culture that accepts that deception is acceptable. According to later work by Skolnick (2001) police back up stories colleagues tell them and then in return they become aware and confident that colleagues would back them up. Skolnick (2001) refers to this process as the *blue wall of silence*, a concept not too dissimilar from the work of Clemmer (1940) and his

notion of an *inmate code*. Skolnick (2001) went on to claim this wall of silence could cover up police incidents of abuse and violence. For an officer to report a colleague to a senior officer for misconduct would generally result in the officer being ostracised and called a rat or a grass as this goes against the values of police occupational culture. Therefore, the *blue wall of silence* acts as a cover up for the misconduct and there is a possibility it could encourage further behaviour.

The changes taking place in the Prison Service have been briefly examined and this type of organisation is defined by certain fundamentals, such as communication and autonomy and importantly, the process of how those changes are executed autonomously by such an organisation. A break down in communication could lead to a loss of interaction, thus creating negative energy for the organization; in the prison this could amount to prisoners resisting the confining constraints in the result of a riot (Scruton *et al*, 1991). However, the main interest here is the occupations in the criminal justice system. In comparison with the police force, there is much less academic research that centres on the uniformed staff who work in the Prison Service.

### **Gender in the workplace**

The area of gender is wide and complex and therefore this thesis will focus on gender in the workplace. According to Alsop et al (2002: 67) ‘...on one level gender can be used as a lens through which to analyse theory; employed as a means to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of various theoretical positions and to consider the ways in which the analysis of gender may serve to re-evaluate or rewrite theoretical ideas’. Gender offers up such large open questions such as, What is it to be a woman? and What is it to be a man? Moreover, there are a number of factors to consider when looking at the different ways in which

women's lives are constructed, for instance, age, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, geographical location and historically (Alsop et al, 2002).

To place into context the different worlds men and women inhabit it is useful to access some work from the journalist, Jan Morris. As The Times correspondent who accompanied the British Mount Everest expedition team led by Sir Edmund Hilary, 'Jan' had been what was deemed a typical man, but had felt uncomfortable in this body, so underwent a sex-change operation so she could live as a woman. Morris wrote a book entitled *Connundrum* describing the experiences she encountered whilst going through the sex-change:

'We are told that the social gap between the sexes is narrowing, but I can only report that having, in the second half of the twentieth century, experienced life in both roles [male and female], there seems to me no aspect of existence, no moment of the day, no contact, no arrangement, no response, which is not different for men and for women. The very tone of voice in which I was now addressed, the very posture of the person next in [line], the very feel in the air when I entered a room or sat at a restaurant table, constantly emphasized my change of status' (Morris, 1974: 165)

Although this piece of literature is quite dated, this passage from Jan's book gives a perceptive insight into the different lives that men and women lead on a daily basis and this piece of literature will go a long way in helping us understand both how men and women are perceived generally in society, and how they would like to be perceived. Alsop et al (2002) also state these contributions from transsexuals have helped to inform the approach to theorising gender.

When considering gender and the workforce the primary area of labour for women remains the 'home'. Historically, the following functions were the women's main work areas; to bear children, to feed and clothe family members and care for the young and elderly, those family members who are sick. Whilst taking care of the home, women were also expected to take full responsibility for the education of the children (Alvesson and Due Billing, 1997).

The literature around gender and the workplace covers a vast area of topics. There is an abundance of academic work around women in traditionally male occupations (Bradley, 1989) plus a special issue of *Work and Occupations* (18: 4, 1992) also covers this area albeit with a focus on occupational choice. In other studies of women and work, Acker (1992) suggests that all organisations are structured by men for men. And a large amount of the literature covers the relation of family and work along with the employer preference for single women (Peterson, 1989). When comparing the attitudes of men and women at work in the Criminal Justice System, Martin (1990) documents the differences between men and women judges, whilst Rosenburg et al (1990) compared women with women and subsequently found there are several types of women lawyers. This collection of literature shows how culture, tradition, economy, class and social organization (Abbott, 1993) illustrates how women change both their working roles and roles at home.

Historically, it could be said that criminology was gender-blind and Frances Heidensohn (1968) drew attention to the early theorists who failed to acknowledge the female offender, for instance the work of Cohen (1955) or Sutherland (1949). Later criminological theory such as labelling and subcultural theory still had little to say about female crime, their focus being white, working class, male culture. It is the period since the nineteen seventies that saw the emergence of new feminist criminologies. In part feminist criminology was a reaction to pre-existing 'male' ways of doing criminology, as Heidensohn (1996: 161) explains, '*the reaction was against an old, established male chauvinism in the academic discipline. Women were either invisible to conventional criminologists or present only as prostitutes or marginal or contingent figures*'. An important contribution to the feminist literature around this time was the work of Carol Smart (1976), her book *Women, Crime and*

*Criminology a Feminist Critique* stimulated debate within feminism; for instance, the work of Heidensohn (1985) Rafter (1985) and, Young (1996).

Contemporary feminist criminology in the UK has concentrated on understanding women's involvement in crime, the nature of women's imprisonment along with the criminalisation of women. They also tend to focus on women as victims and although this is important to the field of criminology and penology, in the context of female prison officers it has no real bearing. The work of Heidensohn (1985) and her discussion around legal and gender rules of conduct, and the work of Carlen (1983) where she outlined the pains of imprisonment for women are pioneering pieces of work. However, when studying the working lives of female prison officers other theoretical discussions have more impact, and this study therefore identifies the shortcomings, and challenges the feminist literature on this topic.

Predominantly, the feminist criminological literature on female prison officers comes from the United States and on the whole the findings are negative towards the women in this male dominated occupation. The work of Jurik and Halemba (1984), Zimmer (1986, 1987) and Martin and Jurik (2007) highlights the challenges faced by the women who want to be accepted in this male dominated working role, and the negative responses to accepting the women onto the landings and wings of male prisons. Similarly the work of Farnworth (1992) addresses the attitudes towards and perceptions of the female officers working on the wings and landings of male prisons in Australia. Whilst all of this literature has been important to this thesis, none of it addresses female prison officers who work alongside women prisoners.

More recent additions to the literature and more importantly those specifically relating to prison officers, have covered areas of gender differences and workplace bullying. Vartia and Hyyti (2010: 122) found, 'the long-standing traditions and power-based culture prevailing in

prisons' to be connected with bullying amongst staff in prisons. However, some of these cultural traditions such as initiation ceremonies involving new recruits seem to be a thing of the past. With growing prison populations becoming increasingly difficult to manage and a collective awareness of occupational risks, this type of traditional 'bullying' could now be deemed too unsafe. This thesis will go on to illustrate that the female officers researched for this study have resisted the traditional masculine traits and are a counter to the dominant masculine occupational culture, which has been a feature of many prison ethnographies.

# Chapter One: Literature Review

This first chapter will set the scene for the discussion that follows; a discussion where female prison officers are given a voice to *speak* about their workplace, the challenges they face and the working styles they adopt to form working relationships; and how they achieve this in the closed world of a prison, during a period of budget cuts, changes and new policies being implemented. Due to the limited amount of literature on female prison officers, it has been necessary to draw on a range of relevant literature from other areas of sociology to develop the analysis.

## Introduction

Academic research inside the prison is by no means a new phenomenon. On the contrary, it can be traced back to the 1940s and the work of Donald Clemmer. Clemmer (1940) a prison sociologist collected data throughout the 1930s documenting his observations and interactions inside the maximum and medium security prison. This early ethnographic research culminated in the publication of *The Prison Community*, and is regarded as the first comprehensive, sociological study of prison culture. It is fair to say that most academic research to date has tended to focus on prisoners. More specifically, it has examined how they cope with imprisonment (Sykes, 1958; Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Boyle, 1984; Toch, 1992). Sykes (1958) introduced us to the concept of *pains of imprisonment*, with his observations of both prisoners and prison officers. Sykes's (1958) gave a detailed analysis of various structural deprivations, such as the loss of liberty, autonomy, security, goods and services and heterosexual relationships. His book, *The Society of Captives* will continue both to contribute to the understanding of prisons and (will continue) to influence the way

researchers conceptualize the inner workings of this hidden world. It would be widely agreed that the work of both Donald Clemmer and Gresham Sykes was the founding of prison sociology. Much later (and) in the UK, Cohen and Taylor (1972) published another classic text, *Psychological Survival*. The British sociologists considered how adult male prisoners dealt with stress when it has been brought on by massive disruption to their normal lives – in this case, long-term imprisonment. It is important to understand how prisoners cope when serving a sentence and (that) how they cope, or more importantly, do not cope, significantly impacts on the ‘subjects’ of this research project – female uniformed prison officers. It is well documented that high numbers of female prisoners exhibit mental health problems and there are high levels of depression and self harm (Singleton *et al*, 1998; Birmingham *et al*, 2004; Corston, 2007; Scott and Codd, 2010; Prison Reform Trust, 2014; Durcan *et al*, 2014); dealing with these issues day in day out will inevitably impact on the officers charged with handling this. Alongside this, there are some detailed accounts of prison life written by those who know prisons from an insider perspective, that is, prisoners and ex-prisoners (Boyle, 1977, 1984; James, 2003, 2005, Parker 1995, 1997). More recently there has been a contribution from the women’s estate by the high profile ex-prisoner and formally respected economist, Vicky Pryce. Unlike previous accounts of time spent in prison, Pryce (2013) taps into her economic expertise to give an account of the cost of keeping women in prison. Alongside this, Pryce (2013) explores the areas of education and employment and the issues female offenders face along with offering suggestions for alternatives to prison, though some may argue none of this information is new (Carlen, 1983; Carlen *et al*, 1985; Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Corston, 2007). However, fewer accounts have been written about prison officers (for an early English account see Thomas, 1972). More recently in the UK – and arguably long overdue - there is a growing body of research concerned with prison officers (see for example, Hay and Sparks, 1991; Sparks *et*

*al*, 1996; Liebling and Price, 1999; Crawley 2002, 2004a, Crawley and Crawley, 2008; Scott, 2008, 2012; Arnold 2005; Arnold *et al*, 2007 and Liebling *et al*, 2010). However the majority of 'subjects' in both the earlier and more recent studies have been male; this is, in part, due to the higher ratio of male prison officers to female officers (Crawley, 2004a). Arguably, this could also be due to the fact the profession has traditionally been recognised as a male occupation, and therefore the prison officer literature has been dominated by the thoughts and actions of the men.

In contrast, academic research involving female officers as interviewees is easier to locate in the United States (see especially Martin and Jurik, 2007; Zimmer, 1986, 1987), despite the fact that in the US the body of research on female prison officers as an occupational group is also relatively small. The literature on female officers largely addresses the challenges the women face when taking on a traditionally male occupation (Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Martin and Jurik, 2007; Zimmer, 1986, 1987). Interestingly, Martin and Jurik (2007) take their questions about women's work equality and solidarity into the courts and the police as well as into the prisons, making it a particularly useful text for those seeking an analysis of women's work and position throughout the criminal justice system of the United States. Whilst fundamentally, it has been recognised that some of this work has contributed to a general theory of women's occupational and organizational behaviour (Zimmer, 1986).

It is also worth acknowledging there has been a small body of research conducted with female officers working in male prisons in Australia. Most notably Farnworth (1991, 1992), whose work explored the integration difficulties of women working in a traditionally male prison environment. Farnworth (1992) found the male colleagues of female officers to be resentful of certain issues, such as the women not being allowed to strip search the male prisoners and not physically being able to manage violent prisoners. Male officers would

generally see themselves as being a staff member down if there was a female on their shift, especially when there was the need to use physical restraint as it was assumed the women were not physically up to the job (Farnworth, 1992; Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Martin and Jurik, 2007; Zimmer, 1987). However, there is evidence to show that whilst female officers did not have the physical build of their male colleagues, they showed that verbal de-escalation skills during heightened violent and aggressive incidents had a calming effect on the prisoner being dealt with (Zimmer, 1986; Lambert *et al*, 2007). Moreover, through the longitudinal study of sex and occupational socialisation among prison officers, Farnworth (1992) found the female officers in Australia were harassed by their male colleagues with many respondents commenting on personal difficulty with *occupational socialisation*. Furthermore, Crouch and Alpert (1982) explored the changes in punitive and aggressive attitudes of male and female prison guards. Over a six-month period they found female officers became *less* punitive and aggressive whereas their male colleagues became *more* punitive and aggressive. It should be noted, however, that most of these studies were conducted almost three decades ago, and as I stated, all were conducted outside the United Kingdom. There is little evidence of literature concentrating on the working lives of female prison officers in English prisons. The women in this occupation have been mentioned by more recent academics, though not fully explored. Liebling *et al* (2010) dedicate around five pages to female prison officers whilst Crawley (2004a) dedicates a little more of her book at around eight pages. Moreover, the studies from the United States and Australia were generally quantitative in nature (Hemmens *et al*, 2002) leaving little explanation as to the thoughts, feelings, emotions and interactions of female officers working in a women's prison.

An example of early qualitative work comes from Zimmer (1986) and her comprehensive study of sexual equality in the workplace. Lynn Zimmer conducted around 200 interviews with staff and prisoners at Rhode Island in New York documenting the experiences of the men and women involved in the major process of transition from a segregated<sup>1</sup> to an integrated<sup>2</sup> prison environment. Her work powerfully highlights the many difficulties female prison officers have faced working in men's prisons - not with prisoners, however, but with their male colleagues. Zimmer (1986) described three typologies women adopt when taking on the masculine role of a prison officer. The *institutional role* relates to the women who closely adhere to prison rules enabling them to perform the job on an equal basis with men. Whereas the *modified role* is taken by the women who want to avoid certain parts of the job such as, inmate contact, and therefore rely heavily on their male colleagues for protection. The final typology is the *inventive role* and this is taken by women who believe their communication skills put them at an advantage over male colleagues; by relying on such female traits as intuition, understanding and compassion (Zimmer, 1986); a role that is important when considering prison can be an unpredictable and sometimes volatile environment. Lynn Zimmer's book *Women Guarding Men* is an important contribution to the literature on women in traditionally male occupations because this piece of work on female prison officers focuses on male-female differences, unlike other literature from the same era on say, the study of women in construction (Westley, 1982) or women joining the armed forces (Rustad, 1982).

Much more recently and in the UK, Tait (2008) has undertaken research with female prison officers and explored their approaches to the *care* of prisoners. Apart from this and the

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<sup>1</sup> Segregated in this context means a prison environment that is solely male (male prisoners and staff) or solely female (female prisoners and staff)

<sup>2</sup> Integrated in this context means a prison environment that has both male and female staff members working in either the male or female prison estate

important historical perspective from Johnson (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2014), research involving female prison officers in the UK has had little attention paid to it when compared with other Western countries, such as the U.S (Jurik, 1985; Zimmer, 1986; Zupan, 1986, 1992; Cheeseman, 2010, 2011), Australia (Farnworth, 1991, 1992) and Canada (Cadwaladr, 1993). Following extensive enquiry there are virtually no known studies which have examined female prison officers in a female prison. The research from the mid nineteen eighties was an essential addition to academic prison literature as this was an important time for change, highlighting the work was conducted to address the change when cross-posting of staff in the prison service was implemented. Cross-posting was the period during the mid nineteen eighties when women began working on the landings of male prisons and men were allowed to work inside the women's prisons (Enterkin, 1996a, 1996b) Therefore, these studies are quite dated and not necessarily illustrative of the female prison officers in the UK, and more importantly, female officers working in a women's prison. Arguably, these studies emphasise the need not only for a *contemporary* study of female prison officers, but of female officers' experiences of prison work in a women's prison in England and Wales. This study proposes to fill that gap in the literature.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Modern Prison – where some people live and others work**

It is the period between 1895 to 1914 that David Garland (1985) identifies as the beginning of the modern penal system; a period of change when policies were developed in areas such as probation. Garland (1985) argued this change reflected positivist influences on the penal system. However, it should be noted that Garland's argument has been disputed by the historians Forsythe (1995) and Bailey (1997), as both claim there was little change to prison conditions until the 1920's. Furthermore, Coyle (2005) has argued the development of the

modern prison had more to do with the work of the renowned prison reformers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; John Howard, Elizabeth Fry and Sir Thomas Buxton. Buxton provided the financial support so that Elizabeth Fry could undertake her prison reform work (Coyle, 2005). In contrast to this, both Ignatieff (1978) and Foucault (1979) interpreted the rise and development of the prison as representing a subtle development of social control.

It is important to introduce the prison, as an architectural environment and more importantly to discuss the purpose of the modern prison. There is an abundance of literature that discusses how centuries ago the prison emerged in society (Cavadino and Dignan, 2001, 2007; Mathews, 1999, 2009; Garland, 2001; King and Elliot, 1977; Freeman, 1978; Southill, 2007). From the public spectacle of punishment that Michel Foucault wrote about in his renowned book *Discipline and Punish*, to the institution we know of today. Foucault (1979) described the period of The Great Confinement marking an era where the main form of punishment began to shift from public executions and flogging, and widespread use of public shaming in the stocks, to, the use of institutions such as the bridewells, workhouses and jails. When writing about this shift in punishment, Foucault (1979) uses the phrase from *the corporal to the carceral* when explaining how punishment of the body shifted to punishment of the soul, something in effect taken by the prison. There are few books charting the complete history of imprisonment and those that are available tend to present the prison as a natural evolving institution that had developed from the jails of medieval times (Foucault, 1979). These medieval jails were primarily places where people were held whilst they waited to be either executed or deported. The modern day prison which is of concern here, is more about the deprivation of liberty for prisoners and how this has become

the dominant mode of punishment (Mathews, 2009). Removing someone's freedom is a fundamental part of the punishment when you are sentenced to prison (Sykes, 1958).

Around 1918 after the First World War had ended the prison population was approximately, 9000. The population fluctuated between 9000 and 12,000 in the years between the First and Second World Wars. After the Second World War had ended in 1945 the prison population started to expand (Jewkes and Johnson, 2011), leading much later to Cavadino and Dignan (2001, 2007) writing about the 'crises in prison numbers'. It was during the 1950's when issues around miscarriage of justice were highlighted; creating a much broader discussion around the abolition of the death penalty (Mathews, 2009). Moving on chronologically, the 1960's flagged up issues around security after a number of high profile prisoners escaped (memorably the Great Train Robbers Charles Wilson and Ronnie Biggs) and with a general increase in prison escapes during this decade (Home Office, 1994). It was due to these security issues that Lord Mountbatten carried out an enquiry in 1966 into Prison Service security and consequently made a number of recommendations to improve this (Mountbatten, 1966). There were a number of policies implemented during this period and there were marked changes afoot with 'prisoners rights' having an impact. It is during this period of the 1960's and 1970's that several important developments occurred for prison officers with a 'growing politicisation of both prisoners and prison officers' (Jewkes and Johnston, 2011: 51).

Currently in England and Wales there are around 133 prisons for men, women and children. Although this number is steadily reducing due to the prison closures initiated by the current coalition government; since the coalition government have been in power, and at the time of writing they have closed, or partially closed thirteen prisons, with further closures being proposed (MoJ, 2013; NOMS, 2013; ITV Report, 2015). The adult prison population is

divided into male and female prison estates and it is an important time for prison research due to these changes being implemented. The government has also begun the process of privatising more prisons, and it was in March 2013 when the Justice Secretary Chris Grayling announced the closure of seven more public prisons. Alongside this, Grayling announced the build of the ‘warehouse prison’; a prison that will hold approximately 2000 adult male inmates. The new privately run prisons are different environments than the old austere Victorian public buildings, and more importantly, the ‘officers’ who work there are thought of and trained differently (see recruitment section for more on training).

### **History of prison officers**

It is in fact remarkable how little serious attention has been paid to prison officers in the quite extensive literature on prison life. It is almost as though they were, like the postman in GK Chesterton’s celebrated detective story, so commonplace and routine a feature of the scene as to be invisible. Yet their role is of critical importance (Hawkins 1976: 85).

Importantly, since this time there have been a number of detailed narratives concerning the work of prison officers, although they remain small in number when considering the amount of published work around the prisoners themselves (see Kauffman, 1988; Lombardo, 1989; Liebling and Price, 2001; Liebling, Price and Shefer, 2011; and Crawley, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, Crawley and Crawley, 2008). However, it is worth taking a look at prison officers historically and how their role has changed to accommodate the modern prison.

Historically, there have not been many detailed accounts of the role of the English prison officer. However, an important text, *The English Prison Officer since 1850* written by J.E Thomas in 1972, highlights the conflicting role of the prison officer was evident over 150 years ago. Thomas (1972) argued that this conflict of care and control, and, rehabilitation and security formed what he described as a top-down occupation where the training on offer was limited. He goes on to chart the struggles of prison officers in this organisation where

discipline and custody were primary, and importantly, a struggle to become more involved in welfare. Thomas (1972) goes on to discuss how up until 1965 the prison service was fairly small and this reflected in the clarity of roles for the officers. The introduction of The Gladstone Report which culminated in The Mountbatten Report saw the introduction of the governor grades and Thomas (1972: 218) commented, 'The variation of the governor's role to that of a reformer, led the officers to believe that they were now second in importance to the prisoners'.

The BBC television sitcom *Porridge* ran during the mid to late seventies, and highlighted that stereotypical views of prison officers had entered the public domain. The two main prison officers Barrowclough and MacKay, took on the opposing roles of an officer during this period, the kind-hearted role (Barrowclough) and the harsher more suspicious role (MacKay). Although this show was not created to inform the public with regards to the role of the prison officer, it has ultimately informed a public perception of both prison officers and prisoners (Jewkes, 2002) It also highlighted the juxtaposition of the officers role, one concerning the power of control over prisoners and the other, caring for prisoners (for more on prison officers and 'care' see Tait, 2008b). It is also the programme that prisoners themselves resonate with the most (Irwin, 2014; Honeywell, 2014).

Importantly, Jewkes and Johnston (2011) highlighted the lack of academic interest in prisons and prison officers in England during the World Wars. Their research documented how prison staff were 'adversely affected by the war in numerous ways' and how increasing numbers of officers were diagnosed with alcoholism, shell-shock or both. One of the aims of their research was to explore the impact the effects of war had on the 'lives and careers of prison officers and governors' (Jewkes and Johnston, 2011: 51).

Traditionally, prison officers came from a military background, prison is a structured and disciplined environment and therefore not too dissimilar from their time spent in the military. According to Liebling and Price (2001: 15) a 'typical prison officer' 'is male, is white, is between 30 and 40, and has around ten years experience'. Further academic literature portrays prison officers in various ways, for instance, as insensitive figures lurking in the background (Cohen and Taylor, 1972) and, as brutes prone to use violence at a moments notice (Kauffman, 1988) or more positively as, noble people struggling to get the job done as best they can (Thomas, 1972).

It is more difficult to locate literature on female prison officers with the two main books in England (Crawley, 2004; Liebling et al, 2011) dedicating only a few pages to female officers, they therefore receive a mention but there is no in-depth analysis on the women who undertake this male dominated occupation.

### **Women Working in the Criminal Justice System**

It is after 1972 that the number of women working in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) started to increase. Martin and Jurik (2007: 1) note that during this period those women who were employed in the 'justice system' as police officers, lawyers, judges and correctional officers worked only as specialists, 'drawing on qualities and skills associated with their gender'. For example, policewomen supervised women and juvenile arrestees and performed secretarial work. Female lawyers tended to deal with the 'domestic' cases and women correctional officers worked in prisons for women or juvenile centres, where their female demeanour was considered beneficial (Martin and Jurik, 2007). This key text by Martin and Jurik (2007) explains the numerous obstacles women encounter when they enter a male dominated occupation within the criminal justice system. They go on to explain how women employed in the different occupations were excluded from the jobs where they

would have to exercise authority over men. Martin and Jurik (2007) explain that in the United States the number of women working in the system is growing, though they go on to state that there is still a resistance to the women and therefore they are not fully integrated. They provide evidence that women in these work roles that are dominated by men face barriers, such as exclusion from informal work cultures, hostility, organisational policies that promote gender separation, differential assignments, and sexual harassment. In relation to women working as prison officers the authors claim that although there has been a definite advancement within this occupation for women in the United States, there still remains a resistance to them. When discussing women working in justice related occupations in Canada, Mahoney (2013) claims there has been a substantial growth in this area over the past two decades. She found in 2006 that thirty two per cent of correctional officers were women, a growth of ten per cent over the previous fifteen years.

In the UK Heidensohn (1992) is known for her examination of women's role in social control. Importantly, after the implementation of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 women in the police moved from the specialist jobs and joined their male colleagues in the general police force (Heidensohn, 1992). However, this was over forty years ago and it is now commonplace for women working in the CJS to work with men that have been arrested and imprisoned. It is now deemed the norm that women are promoted more and some hold 'visible leadership positions' (Martin and Jurik, 2007: 1) similar to the position in the United States. According to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), in 2012 there were over 36,000 female police officers in England and Wales and seven of these women lead police forces. Only 23 per cent of the judiciary in England and Wales are women and only one of these women – Lady Justice Hale - holds one of the top posts as Deputy President of The Supreme Court (Bowcott, 2012). Importantly, the statistics published by

the Judicial Appointments Commission in June 2012 showed an overall increase in female appointments (Hopkins, 2012). This trend was also initially mirrored in the Prison Service although more recent patterns indicate an overall decrease in female prison staff. As mentioned earlier, women officers only worked in female prisons until cross-posting was introduced during the mid nineteen eighties and since then England and Wales have a number of women in both Assistant Governor and Governing Governor posts; although this number is decreasing. During 2008 there were 16,756 women working in the Prison Service; this number has steadily been declining and according to NOMS this figure now stands at 15,160.

A 2009 Report published by the Fawcett Society's Commission on *Women and the Criminal Justice System* found widespread discrimination in practices and attitudes towards women across the criminal justice system; both women who work in the criminal justice system and those who become embroiled in the system through offending. Commenting on the Report, and more specifically on the women who work in these male dominated roles, Baroness Jean Corston, Chair of Fawcett's Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System, remarked,

‘Workplace practices and attitudes in the justice system are frequently failing to take into account the different needs of women. The police uniform in some forces is a telling example – designed for men by men, just like the criminal justice system’ (Fawcett Society, 2009)

Though Baroness Corston's focus here is on women working in the police force, there are similarities with the women who work as prison officers. The Report by the Fawcett Society (2009) reveals that institutional sexism has an impact on women in these occupations and has resulted in the creation of a glass ceiling for women working within the system so that higher positions across the sector remain male dominated.

## **Women Working as Prison Officers**

There is only a small body of British literature concerning female officers that has been written from a historical perspective (Johnston, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2014). Johnston (2014) contributes a historical understanding of prison work with a focus on gender and class in the working lives of female prison officers. At a time when deterrence was prominent; the regime implemented after the Gladstone Committee and its move towards a more rehabilitative model, there was confusion over the prison officer role. Johnston (2008a) discusses the onset of prison officer training schools along with the prison officer role in general, whilst acknowledging the early concerns of officers and the complex issue of care and control. More to the point, Crawley (2004a) and Coyle (2005) highlight the conflict caused between ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘security’. Importantly, Johnston (2014) discusses the history of female staff in the prison system, and the introduction of these female staff onto the prison wings, including the wings of male prisons.

In the United States during the early nineteenth century and after the passing of Peels’s Gaol Act in 1823 only female officers could work in the women’s prison. Instead of male Governors, it was insisted upon that a matron ran the women’s prison with the American’s stating ‘she alone can enforce the order of this system’ (Zedner, 1998: 308). It was felt their female demureness, good temper, and compassion would rub off on the female inmates and that the prisoners would want to emulate this behaviour (Zedner, 1991). This was quite an undertaking for the women during this time as most institutions of this size were quite obviously run by men (Zedner, 1998). Zupan (1992) describes this traditional feminine position in more detail and includes the term ‘pink-collar’ for those women who worked in the prison offices. The introduction of female officers onto the landings of male prisons came much later, and like the introduction of male officers into the women’s prisons, this

was appropriately in-line with the cultural changes in society. According to Zimmer (1986), women, more used to waiting tables to earn a wage became pioneers in their new occupation as a prison officer; transforming the working roles of women in America. Zimmer (1986) acknowledges the women did not shout from the rooftops about sexual equality, but remained humble and respectful of their male colleagues, it was quite simply, a better way of life for the women, a possible career.

During this early period female officers had no role in reform of the prisoners as this was instilled by socially superior matrons and lady visitors (Johnston, 2014). For more on this early reform work see Rogers (2014) for an informative blog on the work of Sarah Martin and the young boys at Great Yarmouth gaol. Staff – prisoner relationships during this period would have been quite difficult to nurture due to the rule of silence that omitted any officers speaking to the prisoners.

It is important to note that women had worked in male prisons for many years; however, they were only ever employed for administrative duties or on the prison hospital wing (Enterkin, 1999). Following the introduction of the Prison Service Cross-posting Policy in 1982, the once male dominated, segregated environment of the prison allowed women to integrate and work on the prison landings of adult male prisons; thus creating a more normalised environment (Liebling et al, 2010). See (Crouch and Alpert, 1982 and Pogrebin and Poole, 1997) for further studies that have investigated early perceived difficulties of female staff integration. During 2008, cross-posting broadened to include most duties except for strip searching (Enterkin, 1996). Female officers working in male prisons have met most resistance from male colleagues, not the prisoners (McMahon, 1999; Jurik, 1985). Alongside this, Carlen (1996) supports the concerns of other academics (Chesney-Lind and Pollock, 1995: 166) regarding vulnerable women with histories of abuse and being open to

sexual victimisation. However, Carlen (1996) also found women prisoners benefited from having male staff around, and portrayed male staff as less punitive than the female staff. Whereas, Jurik and Halemba (1984), Zimmer (1986), Farkas (1999) and Carlson et al (2004) all describe women as having a more personalised and 'human service' approach to prisoners. However, Tait (2008a) disagrees, by arguing there are few differences in the way male and female officers work by claiming, the influence of occupational culture is more important. Britton (2003) found women took on a more maternal role and Pollock (1995:113 emphasis in original) agreed when describing the differences in male and female prison officers as a, '*masculine authoritarian approach* and a *feminine personal or caring approach*'. Again, Fry and Glaser (1987) agree with this analysis by suggesting women officers have higher standards for service for prisoners. However, it should be noted this research has been conducted in male prisons (Zupan, 1992; Pollock, 1995, 1996; Bosworth, 1999). When considering these natural traits of women, caring, maternal etcetera it is no great shock to find that Tait (2008a) found female officers felt excluded from the more physical roles such as the control and restraint procedures, and at the same time felt under pressure to prove the ability to control prisoners, especially the new recruits. This is something Britton (2003:143) concluded from research on men working in women's prisons; that traditionally, the men have taken on more of the control and restraint work, whilst the female officers took on more of a maternal role. Although this tends to highlight that gender can empower, it also highlights constraints. The research documented above all tends to show the women in maternal, caring, motherly roles and the men in the expected macho role, however this has been disputed by a number of studies, showing that female officers can take the more punitive role inside the prison (Farkas, 1999).

The sexual harassment of female prison officers is a reoccurring theme running through the literature. For many male officers, sexual banter is seen as the norm, and Tait (2008a: 75) found most female officers did not deem this as a negative factor of the job. The women suggested the sexist and sexual banter was part of the job and unlikely to change and therefore it was easier to adapt to it rather than resist it. With a number of women claiming they 'give as good as they get' (Tait, 2008a: 75). Male officers continue to talk about their female colleagues in a derogatory way, suggesting they feel threatened by their presence on the wings. One of the main issues is their physical stature with men claiming they would be unable to assist during violent incidents. However, research has shown that female officers do not tend to be the target of violent prisoner assaults (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). This could be due to the fact that the women are less threatening and more likely to de-escalate a violent incident by talking to a prisoner. They are less impulsive when it comes to 'putting hands on' and restraining. Another insecurity of the male officers is that female officers could become a sexual target for some of the male prisoners, with some staff believing they could be dragged into a cell and raped. Again, this could be down to the insecurity of the male officers and their enjoyment of making female officers feel uncomfortable. Fundamentally, the research on gender in both policing and prisons indicates 'that women were not, and are still not, always accepted by their colleagues' (Hemmens et al, 2002: 474), also, for further research on this (see Jurik, 1985; Martin, 1984; Pogrebin and Poole, 1998; Zimmer, 1986; Zupan, 1992).

Female officers who work in women's prisons have been noted to be more punitive than their male colleagues, although the literature around this is contradictory. For instance, Farkas (1999) suggested female officers studied in two medium secure prisons were more like their male colleagues than they assumed. She found that females chose a more

aggressive response in their role. In contrast, Crouch and Alpert (1982) had found in earlier research that during the first six months of being in the job male officers were more punitive than the females. This literature is informative and important to this thesis, although it must be remembered that it is predominantly from the United States and all centres around female officers working in men's prisons, not in women's prisons.

### **Women in Prison**

According to Lombroso and Ferrero (1893/2004) female offending was influenced by biology. Their work argued the reason women committed less crime than men was because they were less developed. Heidensohn (2002) argued the work of these two early theorists had a significant influence on women's penal treatment. Other feminist writers have prudently argued the work of both Lombroso and Ferrero is sexualised and misogynistic (Smart, 1976). In contemporary terms, the work of Lombroso and Ferrero is clearly outdated, though it has left its legacy in contemporary society, when we consider gender and biological issues around sentencing and chivalry. Historically, it was 'fallen women'; those who were prostitutes or women in need of moral reform, who were imprisoned. The women imprisoned had committed such offences as drunkenness, theft and sexual promiscuity (Zedner, 1994). Such offences that broke the accepted norms of femininity; of being a woman. These women were classed as 'doubly deviant' (Smart, 1976; Carlen, 1983; Heidensohn, 1985) not only had they broken the law, they had also gone against the accepted societal feminine behaviour. Carlen (1985: 1) explains this as '*the failure of individual women to adapt themselves to their supposedly natural biological and/or socio-sexual destinies*'. It was determined these women would be rehabilitated both spiritually through religious education and morally, and trained in domestic tasks so on release they could find respective jobs as servants (Rafter, 1985); a model of '*discipline through*

*feminisation and domesticisation*' as termed by Carlen and Worrall (2004: 7). This would be achieved with the assistance of feminine role models working in the prison; women they should look up to. There is a greater sense of what Goffman (1968) termed *spoiled identity* among female offenders. The sensational treatment by the media and other public authorities can produce a sense of stigmatisation for the women.

During their incarceration all women went through a process of dehumanisation; a process where their hair was cropped and they were physically and sexually humiliated and made to work long hours in the laundry rooms. Removal of identity and agency were part of this process; the women were re-named making the removal of identity complete (Dobash et al, 1986). In 1902, Holloway prison became a women only institution and came to the attention of the general public during 1905- 1914 when the prison held many female suffragists. The women imprisoned for suffrage activities carried on their political stance when imprisoned and they continued to protest in the form of refusing to eat, resulting in many being force-fed. This meant a number of educated, influential women gained direct personal experience of prison life. Once released these articulate women generated publicity to the controversial issues such as the humiliating and degrading process of women having their hair cut off and the degrading abuse of being force-fed (Purvis, 2009; Scott and Codd, 2010). Through her research in the early nineteen eighties, Pat Carlen interviewed a number of magistrates and judges and found women embroiled in the criminal justice system were deemed unworthy mothers. Carlen (1983) concluded, women who were single, battered women and women whose children had been in the care system were more likely to be sent to prison than women who were married or deemed good mothers. Also during the nineteen eighties the control of women through prescription of psychiatric drugs became a main concern of Women in Prison (Carlen, 1983) and this medicalisation of the women caused concern from

other academics in the field (Sim, 1990). Ultimately, it was the idea that criminal women were either sick, mad or disturbed that led to the medicalisation of women (Carlen, 1983; Sim, 1990). After having such drugs enforced upon them, Carlen and Worrall (2004) found the women turned to other drugs to alleviate the pains of imprisonment, and they went on to claim this further drug use could ultimately lead to bullying and sexual assault in the form of decrotching.

There are currently thirteen women's prisons in England, and none in Wales, this is soon to be reduced to eleven. It should be noted here, these are women only prisons, there are no mixed prisons similar to those in Northern Ireland where the women have been exposed to abuse and intimidation from male prisoners (Scruton and Moore, 2004; Moore and Scruton, 2013; Wahidin, 2014). Unlike adult male prisons, the women's prisons are not categorised and therefore, women who have committed all different types of crimes are housed under the same roof. Geographically, the women are imprisoned far from home, and on average family members and friends have to travel a distance of sixty miles from home (Corston, 2007). This can have a negative impact on dependents and keeping family ties strong can become much more difficult when the parent imprisoned is female. According to the Prison Reform Trust (2014) there are currently around 800 women serving sentences more than 100 miles from home.

On the whole, women who receive custodial sentences share similar characteristics and share similar lives on the outside. They are predominantly, mothers, single parents, substance abusers and unemployed. Many of the women are uneducated, just over a third have been excluded from school and nearly three quarters of them have no qualifications (Prison Reform Trust, 2014; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). The majority of the women are sentenced for non-violent offences and although they only account for around fifty per cent

in the general population of England and Wales, they account for five per cent in the female prison estate. This figure has more than doubled in a little less than twenty years. In 1995 the female prison population stood at 1979 and by 2010 it was 4267. This means there was an increase of 80% and the population of women in prison currently stands at 3924 (Howard League for Penal Reform, 24/10/14). This increase can be explained by tougher sentencing laws, along with more serious offence groups being presented in courts. Offence groups such as Violence Against the Person (VATP), drug offences and sexual offences have had a 'particular impact' on prison populations (Ministry of Justice, 2013: 2)

Another characteristic familiar in the women's prison is mental illness, 70 per cent of women in prison have two or more mental disorders, whereas in the general population it is less than 5 per cent and 30 per cent of these women will have had a psychiatric admission before arriving in prison (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002; Prison Reform Trust, 2014). During a twelve month period there were 6004 incidents of women self-harming whilst in prison, and during this same period six women died from 'apparent' self-harm (Prison Reform Trust, 2014, Bromley Briefings, 2014, Coles *et al*, 2015). Following a number of suicides in Styal women's prison, Baroness Corston was commissioned by the Home Office in 2003 to investigate the level of vulnerability in the women's prison estate of England and Wales; illustrating a growing concern about the number of self-inflicted deaths in women's prisons. The review was published in 2007 with forty-three recommendations. The emphasis of the recommendations concentrated on creating smaller establishments around the country, so those women who had to be imprisoned could stay closer to home. There was also an emphasis in this review on encouraging the women to access early support and intervention (Corston, 2007). Baroness Corston's review resulted in improvements being made, though her radical vision and primary recommendation of small units housing twenty to thirty

women was not accepted by the government. Another concern was around the children of imprisoned women.

During a twelve-month period, approximately 18,000 children are taken in to state care due to their mother being imprisoned (Bromley Briefings, 2014). Women are the primary carers of dependents and when they are handed a custodial sentence it can add chaos to an already dysfunctional family life, creating rifts in family networks.

In relation to women in prison, feminist writers focus on its purpose, why it takes the forms it does and how appropriate the prison setting is for female offenders. Many of these academics claim prison is a masculine environment built around the needs of masculinity and it was not built for women and their needs (Rafter, 1985; Zedner, 1991). There is scarce media reporting about the women's prison estate, and the little the general population read about is primarily about high profile cases or deaths in custody. We do not tend to hear about women escaping or rioting, wings are not normally wrecked in a disorderly manner and women do not tend to become aggressive in groups. Therefore levels of violence and assault are much lower than in the male estate, and it is one reason why women were not considered in the Woolf Report because no serious disturbances have taken place in women's prisons.

### **The prison as a community**

The prison community is best understood through an ethnographic lens, and a classic piece of work still relevant today is Donald Clemmers *The Prison Community*. The book was the result of nine years study of 2,400 convicts in the maximum security Illinois State Penitentiary where he worked as a clinical sociologist; although it should be noted, the book only covers three of these years (Clemmer, 1940). Clemmer (1940) discusses the notion of

a 'distinct inmate culture and society', one with values and norms that are hostile to the prison authority. Clemmer (1940) established these *values* as the *inmate code*, and claimed prisoners acquired these values whilst adapting to prison life. Clemmer (1940) termed this process that prisoners went through whilst adapting to time in prison *prisonization*, and claimed that all prisoners experience some degree of *prisonization*. Although this study was conducted over seventy years ago, it most definitely highlighted that prison was a culture and social organisation to be studied in its own right, and this study paved the way for further ethnographic studies to be able to provide deeper interpretations, new questions and the development of new theory. In his review of *The Prison Community* Sykes (1959: 576) puts Clemmer's study into perspective, 'It taught us, to see the prison not simply as a grab bag of problems such as discipline, industry, sanitation and so on, but as a culture which could be fruitfully studied in its own right'. Alongside the work of Clemmer (1940), other early ethnographic research came from Professor Norman Hayner and his research assistant Ellis Ash in the same year, 1940. Ash spent four months at a State Reformatory and then made short visits over a twelve-month period. Again, Hayner and Ash (1940) found the 'prison community' to be rather distinct from the official organization of the prison. Haynes (1948: 435) claimed this sub-organisation of prisoners provided 'daily training in a code of deception'. This was a time when there was hostility between the prison guards and the prisoners, so it is ironic to think these guards were the most important link to the outside world, whilst Hayner and Ash (1940: 578) claimed this hostility is, 'one of the major obstacles in the reformation of prisoners'. Beyond this, the acclaimed work of Gresham Sykes and his well cited book, *The Society of Captives* has also given us a clear insight into the prison community.

This classic ethnographic study took place in a maximum-security prison in New Jersey. Sykes (1958) collected his data from a variety of sources over a period of three years. Sykes (1958) used; official publications and reports, monthly prison reports, individual prisoner reports, case studies, tape recorded interviews with prisoners, questionnaires that were submitted to a random sample of 200 prisoners, personal observation and informal interviews were conducted with both prison staff and inmates (Sykes, 1958: Appendix A). If this study was to be replicated it is questionable whether the choice of research methods would be appropriate, considering the size of the current US prison population. It must be noted that mass incarceration as it is known today in the United States of America, had not made its mark on American prison history, and the prison population was therefore much smaller than it is today.

These sociological studies will remain invaluable to learning about prison and prisoners, however, their general theories have been opposed by more recent European academics (see Mathiesen 1965 and Guilbaud, 2010). This contemporary work has highlighted that inmates were often fragmented, and their links with the outside were often stronger than the links built inside. Moreover, Guilbaud (2010) suggests this is particularly relevant through the action of work and the perception of time. It should be noted that whilst the renowned works of Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958) are important pieces of work to acknowledge when researching in the prison, they concentrate on the male prisoner community. Women in prison have different needs than men, they form different relationships with their fellow prisoners and the officers tasked with looking after them.

### **Space and Time**

The prison was designed to segregate offenders as a form of punishment. By separating these individuals from the rest of society, it clearly represented that physical and social

exclusion was the price to pay for not conforming to the norms of society (Foucault, 1979). Thick, high walls surround the perimeter of the prison, creating an environment where what goes on inside, stays inside and is quite simply hidden from the rest of society. The buildings themselves are a mixture of grey concrete walls and steel bars and the space inside the prison is designed to segregate certain prisoners – (vulnerable, high profile or sex offenders), allowing for the differentiation of prisoners and their offences. Whether prisoners are held in segregation units, general population or on hospital wings, all will be governed by a set of rules and a certain amount of control (Matthews, 1999, 2009). The space encompasses the juxtaposition of both public and private. The prison is public in that it is habitually owned by the state, however, it is also invariably private as it is hidden from the public domain (Crawley, 2004a). This in itself causes problems for those individuals who spend time ‘inside’. Once sentenced to prison, those who inhabit the environment are not entitled to privacy and therefore natural acts that are accepted on the outside will not be acceptable inside. For instance, homosexuality, one of Gresham Sykes’s identified ‘pains of imprisonment’. Any homosexual acts carried out with consenting adults on the prison site is illegal as this is an act that is only allowed to be conducted in private, and there is no privacy in a public institution owned by the state. For each individual person, the space in prison is limited. There are hundreds of people who are forced to share the same space everyday – and this includes the prison officers. For those prisoners who are serving long sentences this shared space becomes the norm. There are no longer hills to walk up and down, or traffic and roads to navigate (James, 2013). Prisoners know how long it takes them to get to the shower block and the exercise yard, because little by little all prisoners get to know every bit of space inside the prison walls (Boyle, 1977, 1984; Parker, 1998, 1999; James, 2003, 2005). Whilst we absorb the logistics of ‘living’ in prison let us take a moment to consider the people who work there. The uniformed staff who work on the prison

landings likewise have to navigate this same space on a daily basis (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price, 2001; Liebling et al, 2011). Whilst Piacentini (2004) adds that because the prison space is divided between the officers and prisoners it will inevitably produce conflicting emotions.

According to Giddens (1981) time is one of the most significant developments associated with the emergence of capitalism. He goes on to argue, ‘ the commodification of time, and its differentiation from further processes of the commodification of space, hold the key to the deepest transformations of day-to-day social life that are brought about by the emergence of capitalism’ (Giddens, 1981: 131). When considering the prison, this is an institution that enforces the deprivation of liberty for a designated period of time (Sykes, 1958; Ignatieff, 1978; Matthews, 2009). This time-centred mode of punishment appeared universal and independent of each individual. Time is also one of the attributes that individuals have in equal measure, whether they be rich or poor. The length of the sentence meted out was relevant in time to the seriousness of the offence and time can also be traded off, gained or lost and can therefore be adjusted if necessary depending on the prisoners behaviour (Matthews, 2009). For instance, good behaviour and remorse for the crime committed, can, in principle, be traded off – making a long sentence shorter. However, one must not forget that in reality, time spent inside a prison is very different from the ‘free’ time spent on the outside; as Matthews (2009: 38) points out, ‘time served in prison is not so much ‘spent’ as ‘wasted’. Although serving a prison term is about time, in essence it is more about ‘timelessness’, and many prisoners use slang terms such as ‘doing time’ or ‘killing time’ when talking about coping with imprisonment (Boyle, 1977, 1984; Parker, 1998, 1999; James, 2003, 2005). In prison, a watch is more useful for trading because as an instrument to tell the time it is pretty useless. In prison the regime governs time and you are

told when to do everything, therefore decisions about time are not your own (Carrillo Leal and Mond, 2001). As a political prisoner in Columbia, Willian Carrillo Leal wrote an ethnographic account about his time in prison and stated, ‘when you first arrive, you count the days, scratching a little mark on the wall at the end of each one, until there are so many you go crazy...’ (2001: 156). However, this is not the case for all prisoners. Erwin James spent twenty years in prisons in England and at the start of his sentence he found marking the days as therapeutic; it was one of his many survival techniques (James, 2003, 2013). Although both of these diversely different prisoners agree that counting your prison sentence away is similar to counting the age of a child. As Carrillo Leal and Mond, (2001: 157) state, ‘ first of all you count in days, then in months, and later in years. The beginning and the end of a sentence go very slowly, with the middle section running at ‘normal’ speed, and the prison routine becomes the prisoner’s pattern of time. What is known as ‘inner time’ was once hailed by the nineteenth century prison reformers as it was seen as a time to reflect on the ‘self’ (Matthews, 2009). However, research focusing on prisoners in solitary confinement has shown that too much time to reflect on one’s crimes can lead to mental health problems such as, depression and self harm (Fellner, 2006; Grassian, 2006). This preoccupation with ‘introspection’ can therefore be detrimental to the rehabilitation of prisoners.

When women are considered as prisoners, time can have different meanings. The women suffer gendered pains around their biological clock, losing children and other issues around motherhood – deprivations of a maternal nature (Carlen, 1983). Therefore in this sense, time can mean everything to the women. Alongside this, when considering the prison officers, they too discuss ‘time’ spent working in the service similarly to that of a prison sentence. Officers talk about time left in the service in a similar way that prisoners talk about serving

a sentence, for instance, officers with five years left to serve would state they have a 'five stretch' left to do (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price 2001; Liebling, Price and Shefer, 2011).

### **Legitimacy, Authority and Order**

The scholarly work of Sparks (1994), Sparks et al (1996), Sparks and Bottoms (1995) and Bottoms (1999), around legitimacy is theoretically engaging in the field of prisons. In broad terms, Sparks and Bottoms (1995: 59) define legitimacy as 'considerations of fairness and respect' and the term rightly has a place when undertaking prison research. Sparks and Bottoms (1995, 1996, 1999) also use the term to explain different events in the prison, such as, disorder, penal unrest, prison riots and institutional brutality meted out by *agents of the state* (Mitford, 1973). Evidence of this level of brutality has been documented by Cavadino and Dignan and by the fact six prison officers from Wormwood Scrubs were sentenced to prison in 2000 and 2001 for 'planned and sustained attacks on inmates' (2007: 11). However, the work of Sparks and Bottoms (1995, 1996, 1999) fails to address a topic of great importance to this thesis, emotion and distress. Levels of distress coincide with the levels of self-harm and suicide in the prison and it therefore has an important role to play when firstly considering the well-being of prison officers and secondly the legitimate treatment meted out to those who are unwell. Prison increases the needs of the individuals who reside there and it is inevitable that vulnerable individuals could seek more security and order than others (Liebling et al, 2005). The question of whether prison is legitimate will continue to be debated, none more so than when we are looking at prisoners who are vulnerable. Mentally unwell prisoners could resist penal authority due to their psychological/psychiatric needs. This type of illness fundamentally puts this vulnerable group of prisoners in conflict with the prison. When we consider *legitimate treatment* and

the levels of treatment and fairness on the prison landings, vulnerable prisoners such as those who are mentally unwell may seek more security and order than other prisoners (Liebling and Price, 2001). The prison discourse around legitimacy, authority and order remains high on the academic agenda and when Fitzgerald and Sim (1982) gave us the term *legitimacy crisis* they were ultimately calling for the abolition of imprisonment.

### **Power and Relationships**

‘ A reading of recent congressional hearings on prison conditions reveals, not unexpectedly, that beyond those men and women who become guards because they have no alternative, this occupation appeals to those who like to wield power over the powerless and to persons of sadistic bent’ (Mitford, 1973: 10 cited in Kauffman, 1988: 166).

It was Foucault (1979) who charted the historical changes in the penal system from the seventeenth century through to the nineteenth century, where the issue of power and punishment shifted from a purely corporal (of the body) to corporal and mental (of the body and mind) and he argued that ultimately power is only possible through the use of knowledge. In his ground-breaking work *Asylums*, Goffman (1961: 18) stated that in any total institution, ‘each group tends to conceive of members of the other in terms of hostile stereotypes, staff often seeing inmates as bitter, secretive and intrinsically evil, while inmates often see staff as condescending, high handed and mean’. In the context of the prison, Feilzer (2008) comments that prison governors and prison officers not only have to exercise power by imposing the rules of the state, but they also have the power to punish when prisoners break the rules. Therefore the hierarchy of power in the prison is a complex one when we consider the top of the hierarchy is the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Inside the prison, the governing governor holds the power and as a result, is in charge of handing down legitimate levels of power to colleagues lower down the ranks, although at times this power could be open to abuse (Crewe, 2009, 2011a).

An American study conducted by Hepburn (1985) found the areas of legitimate and expert power were seen by prison guards as the most important when asked about prisoner compliance. Whilst claiming that reward power was at the bottom end of importance. Hepburn (1985) employed the use of self-administered questionnaires in five different prisons. Liebling et al (2001: 134) claim that 'much of the work of prison officers involves the use of power: seeking to influence the behaviour of others', and the work of Hepburn (1985) highlights how prison officers utilise different types of power to achieve this. The following common bases of power that Hepburn discusses are taken from the much earlier work by French and Raven (1959:146-149, cited in Hepburn 1985).

Firstly there is *legitimate power* where by virtue of the structural relationship between prison officers and prisoners; the officer has a right to exercise control and therefore has a legitimate right to be obeyed. It is worth noting here that Sykes (1958) pointed out that more often than not, prisoners feel no sense of obligation to obey. Secondly there is *coercive power* where repeated, unannounced cell searches, the use of segregation blocks and the availability for officers to use the physical force of control and restraint; all adds to the perceptions of prisoners that the officers have the ability to punish disobedience. However, the intimidating and violent coercive tactics of officers sixty or seventy years ago will not be as prominent on today's prison landings. If nothing else, the introduction of prisoner's rights will have impacted on the type of coercive power used by the more modern prison officer. Thirdly comes *reward power* where there is an obvious absence of formal rewards in prison and as Sykes (1958) remarked, this encouraged a more informal rewards system to emerge. This could include, the officer's distribution of privileges or their recommendations that favoured prisoners are allocated the 'best' jobs and that reports are written in favour of some prisoners. Fourth comes *expert power* and this is when prisoners perceive the officers have a

special skill, knowledge base or expertise then compliance will be attained in a more easy – going manner, and conflicts will be resolved with a more tranquil approach. Finally, Hepburn (1985) discusses *referent power* to include those officers who are fair and consistent with their personal approach and manner, show respect to and fulfil their promises to prisoners are the ones who are respected by the prisoners. This area highlights the leadership skills of the officers and to bring it up to date, and it is worth noting here that Liebling *et al* (2011: 135) have re-named this power base – *respect* or *personal authority*. Importantly, prisoners may not comply with the above power bases and are more likely to prefer some over others (see Sparks *et al*, 1996 for more on this).

An area of real contention and therefore power between the officers and prisoners is the prisoner's personal mail. The power of being able to open the prisoners mail and read personal letters meant only for the recipients eyes is a cause for unrest for many prisoners (Irwin, 2014; Honeywell, 2014). To highlight this unrest and in some eyes, abuse of power, the following poem puts this into context. The following poem was written by prisoner Michael Irwin in HMP Magilligan in Northern Ireland. Michael served the majority of his twelve-year sentence in English prisons, moving back to Ireland to serve the remainder of his sentence, and be closer to his family. Michael has written prolifically throughout his sentence and is currently finishing a Masters degree under the supervision of Professor Shadd Maruna. Here, in his honest poetic writing style, is what he has to say about prison officers reading inmates mail

### **The Royal Mail**

By Michael Irwin

Why do you read my mail,

Why do you tear the stamps off,

Do you believe you assist – national security,

Is it not against the law, to interfere.  
With the Royal Mail, but then  
Aren't you above the law – the law of here.

Bollocks to the law, what law,  
You're in jail, prison law  
All you do is scoff all you do is yelp,  
I block out the idea of you,  
Reading my Royal Mail.  
Does the Queen know,  
'bout her mail,  
Read going out and going in,  
Letters of love betwixt kith and kin,  
Seriously though what harm therein.

The staff get to know you,  
By reading the Royal Mail  
Your heart felt, personal mode of communication,  
What of communication,  
Would you not know me,  
Via a two-way conversation.

I care but I block it out,  
Blocked it out for five years now,  
Still it makes my stomach turn,  
You rape me every time you read my mail,  
You rape me, you soil me, you invade me,  
You have it licked coz we've been nicked,  
Tell me a difference between you and Herr Flick.

Makes me fuckin' sick, I aint no lunatic,  
Why oh why do you have so much doubt,  
What can I say about you, what you do,  
What are you trying to hide,  
You defile my freedom of thought,

My mind lives beyond these walls,  
You rape my speech, my words my world my heart,  
My heart is not for you, why do you force me to...  
To watch you reading me, my mail,  
You Mail rape me. (Irwin, 2013 personal communication)

One of the main points being made in the above poem, is that even though the policies around opening prisoner mail are out of the hands of the uniformed officers working the prison landings; these officers do have individual choices to make regarding how they go about this. Michael has spoken at the 2014 European Group conference at John Moores University in Liverpool, and written about how violated he felt when an officer started laughing whilst reading his mail and then proceeded to show three other officers in the wing office, who themselves started to laugh (Wood and Irwin, 2014). The privacy of these letters is dramatically reduced when it is felt some officers reduce the letter content to a matter of ridicule, whereas some officers can use their discretion. This is ultimately an issue that prisoners themselves have no power over.

An interesting piece of work that focused on the nature of authority, power, and inmate involvement in prison management in a South American prison comes from Sasha Darke. Darke (2013) undertook an intensive three week fieldwork study in an overcrowded jail in Rio de Janeiro and in stark contrast to the English system of gaining access to prison for

research, Darke (2013: 18) had to seek permission from an ‘inmate leader’ to study prisoner organisation. During the early days of his project Darke (2013) documents how he had not realised the individuals opening and locking the doors for him were also prisoners, and he went on to discover ‘there were no clear divisions between the roles of prisoners and staff’. Darke (2013: 19) goes on to discuss numerous examples of power exercised by the prisoners, and states, ‘by the end of my research, I was fully accustomed to the fact that the institution was run by its inmates’. This is by no means a generalisation of the way prisons are run in South America; more so, an interesting insight into the organisation of the prison and the distribution of power within that organisation.

Moreover, Crewe (2011: 1) agrees with both official and academic discourse, ‘that at the heart of any prison is the relationship between staff and prisoners’. Whilst Sparks *et al* (1996) recognised that staff-prisoner relationships were central to the running of prisons. Moreover, sustained periods of interaction inevitably take place within the prison, and there is a large amount of research concerning the working relationships between male and female prison officers (Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Martin and Jurik, 2007). The term relationship can, of course, mean many things to many people, and fundamentally, in the prison it can be difficult to clarify what type of relationship is the ‘right’ relationship (CRC 1984; Liebling *et al*, 2010). It would be right to assume that in this environment, relationships can be influenced by the amount of power held. Liebling *et al*, (2010), noted that prison staff and prisoners can become uncomfortable with the word relationship, knowing full well this type of relationship does not evolve into friendship. Friendships between prisoners and the officers are not formed or nurtured, friends open up too much and indulge in telling secrets that are personal; in prison the women need to keep hold of their identity and will consciously be aware that the officers are a visible barrier to freedom. There are issues of

boundaries to consider, along with staff continuity or lack of continuity, all of which go some way to forming relationships inside the prison.

Historically, it has been documented that staff – prisoner relationships were more about fear and loathing, with McDermott and King (1988: 361) describing the hostility and mutual contempt of this relationship, ‘ Staff are [seen by prisoners as] callous zoo keepers and ... prisoners are [seen by staff] as no better than animals who don’t deserve proper sanitation’. Importantly, more recent academics (McHugh *et al*, 2008) have argued that changes in staff recruitment along with the regulation of staff power have eroded many of these aspects of prison officer culture; with Crawley (2004a) claiming these changes had reduced some of the ‘heat’ off the prison landings. Indeed, Drake (2006) claims staff and prisoners often exhibit comfortable relationships however, Crewe (2005, 2006) states these relationships are forced from both sides and therefore tainted by presence of both power and authority. More positively, Crewe (2009) claims prisoners no longer see the staff as the enemy, highlighting considerable improvements in the last decade or two. In later work, Crewe (2011a) discusses the term ‘soft power’, and the effects this has on the relationships between prisoners and uniformed staff. Physical, brute force as a form of imposing power seems a thing of the past in prisons, however the use of ‘soft power’ could be on the increase. As mentioned above, prison officers are now required to write numerous prisoner reports, and Crewe (2011a: 11) claims these can be tarnished or neglected. He goes on to state that prisoners’ complaints about officers generally relates to, ‘their use of paperwork: negative and petty comments and incomplete files that delay parole proceedings’. From the prisoners point of view, a candid response comes from long term prisoner Stephen, in Crewe and Bennett (2012), ‘I’ve learnt in the last few years...staff can smile and talk, call you by your first name...and then go in the office and kill you off on your file...write something bad

about you'. Stephen goes on to describe the *pen* as though it is some kind of weapon stating, 'In the old days, they could fuck you up with their fists. Now they can fuck you up with their pen. The power of the pen is really mighty nowadays' (for more of Stephen's interview see, Crewe and Bennett, 2012: 27).

Understandably, positive staff and prisoner relationships are crucial to the smooth running of the prison (Sparks *et al*, 1996; Crawley, 2004a; Liebling *et al*, 2010). With the Prison Rule 6(2) emphasising, 'In control of prisoners, officers shall seek to influence them through their own example and leadership, and to enlist their willing co-operation'. However, the POA website claims, 'The training in relationship building needs to be enhanced rather than being left to chance and classed as on the job development' (Moses, 2013). There is a small amount of research that has been conducted around the nature of the staff/prisoner relationships; for a comprehensive, sociological analysis of this type of relationship see the work of Liebling, assisted by Arnold (2004).

There is an important aspect to forming working relationships with colleagues, and many comments in the older literature from male prison officers about their female colleagues are negative, with many not even counting the female staff in the numbers (Jurik, 1984). The dangerousness of isolation of female officers on the prison landings, could lead the women to gravitate their need for a relationship towards male prisoners to gain some emotional support, this in itself could jeopardize prison security along with highlighting issues of discrimination in employment (Hemmens *et al*, 2002). Over the past few years breaches of security have been highlighted in the national press, as a number of female officers have themselves been sentenced to prison for sexual relationships formed with male prisoners whilst working in the prison. A quick search on Google flags up numerous articles where prison officers have been sentenced for forming relationships and breaching prison security,

and it should be noted that within England and Wales these prison officers are primarily female (see Alleyne, 2012; Milligan, 2013; Rawlinson, 2009, Leech, 2013). Other officers have breached security by forming close relationships with prisoners, bringing contraband items into the prison for prisoners to either utilise themselves or sell to keep the prison currency flowing (Podmore, 2012). Other officers (not necessarily female) have been caught selling information about high profile prisoners to the press (O'Carroll, 2013; Podmore, 2012). Recent conversations with a prisoner on home leave have also verified that prison officers often breach prison security by bringing in mobile phones, sim cards and drugs (Irwin, 2013). In another conversation on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2013 M. Irwin claimed newly recruited officers are targeted by prisoners who 'run' the landings, they are be-friended and surprisingly he claims many officers open up to the prisoners about their private life. Once the prisoners know details of their home and private life and more importantly their financial state – they move in on their unsuspecting and vulnerable prey. It sounds like the art of 'using' prison officers to bring in contraband is on the increase, and worryingly with more private prisons taking control of the prison estate this could increase even more due to the low levels of pay awarded and poorly trained, inexperienced staff. For recent media on inappropriate officer/prisoner relationships see, (Alleyne, 2012; Rawlinson, 2009; O'Carroll, 2013; Leech, 2013 and previous years in archive section).

More recently, during the 2013 CCJS annual lecture at Leeds University Prof. Alison Liebling commented on the changing staff – prisoner relationships at a high security prison HMP Whitemore she had recently revisited to undertake research. Liebling (2013) claimed prison officers were no longer allowed to speak to prisoners on the landings for more than ten minutes, without having to fill in a security form, as these types of relationship were now regarded as a risk.

The relationship between staff and prisoners needs to be a respectful one. These relationships will not turn into friendships, friends open up to each other and this would not only breach security but also remove the prisoners identity, something they must keep hold of. However, it would not be inconceivable for the staff and prisoners to be friends as some of the officers will have come from similar backgrounds to the prisoners (Devlin, 1998). Crawley, (2004a: 6) comments on how these relationships are 'emotionally charged' due to the sustained periods of time staff spend with prisoners. To explore more fully the nature of social relationships, the wider literature in this field has been consulted, comprising the work of psychologists and the research around relationship forming, including the contribution of social psychologist Erving Goffman.

### **Occupational Culture**

Writing over two decades ago Stern (1987: 67) portrayed prison officers as,

'...a close knit group of mainly men – looking to each other for social life and support, feeling misunderstood, unappreciated and looking at life with semi-humorous, semi bitter, cynical pessimism – a group where breaking ranks in any way is very difficult, because the bonds are strong professionally, socially and culturally...'

Williams *et al* (1993: 12) have defined occupational culture as, 'the commonly shared beliefs, values and characteristic patterns of behaviour that exist within an organisation'.

Whilst Ravasi and Schultz (2006) state that organisational culture is a set of shared mental assumptions that guide interpretation and action in organisations by defining appropriate behaviour for various situations. When writing about her research on the role of women in law enforcement, Frances Heidensohn (1992: 75) argued that 'all occupations develop some kind of lasting culture' and this is based around their shared values, meanings and traditions. Heidensohn (1992) goes on to argue that gender is central to the occupational culture of

policing because it is predominantly known as a masculine profession just like the prison service.

When considering the occupational culture of prison officers, it is again an area where little research has been conducted. There are one or two texts which focus on the complexity of the prison officer role and how this impacts on the officers lives (see especially Crawley, 2004a). For this reason it will be useful, for the present study, to look at work cultures in other criminal justice occupations, for example the culture of the police on which much more research has been conducted. Indeed, as Holdaway (1989: 55) points out, 'the occupational culture of the police has found reference points in virtually every publication about policing', highlighting the sheer volume of academic research out there. When considering female police officers, Young (1991: 193) argues that women cannot be embraced within this culture, by claiming, 'women who do breach the boundary to penetrate this masculine world can only ever be partially successful and will often have to subsume "male characteristics" to achieve even a limited social acceptability'. During her research with the police, Heidensohn (1989: 153) found no female 'network or subculture comparable to the traditional male one'; although she did find that younger officers and new recruits 'shared' problems with other female police officers. An exploration of the work of Chan (1997), for example, Waddington (1999) and Kirschman (2007), has highlighted other similarities with these work cultures in prisons.

However, it is worth noting that police officer culture is more visible than that of the prison officer, and this will be taken into consideration. For instance, the uniformed police officer is visible walking down the street, and any one of us can walk into a police station and speak with an officer on request. In contrast, the prison officer is hidden away, only visible to those they work alongside; other staff and the prisoners themselves. The public generally

undervalues the complex role of the prison officer – their work is seen as an occupation carried out by men and women who are too stupid and sensitive to do anything else (Crawley, 2004a). This is largely because the invisibility of their role means the public do not actually see what they do. Fundamentally, from an occupation point of view it will be necessary to touch on the wider literature from the profession of nursing; this is because as you will see, the prison officer role is closer to that of nursing than it is to that of a police officer. The role of the nurse will inevitably involve certain strategies for coping and here are other similarities to the role of the prison officer when we consider issues prisoners present to them; self-harm, volatile, aggressive, unpredictable behaviour, and depression to name a few. Alongside this, Gresham Sykes's pains of imprisonment are also relevant to those individuals sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983/2000; serving time in a National Health institution rather than Her Majesty's Prison.

Historically, prison officers were forced into the culture of the occupation due to almost total segregation from the wider community. They were duty-bound to live inside the prison grounds in Prison Service 'quarters'; resulting in isolation from the wider community along with the norms, values and behaviours held by that community. Fortunately, the arrangement to live inside the prison grounds no longer exists, however, the occupational culture created during this time still has resonance. This type of culture and community is similar to that of psychiatric nurses who worked in the special hospitals in England.

The occupation of a nurse in a special hospital can be as varied and unpredictable as that of the prison officer and these cultures were obviously difficult to escape from and ignore. It is important to note that many prison officers have families and are therefore required to deal with the strain and stress of the prison day (and the cultural practices and attitudes that enable them to do it); unsurprisingly these practices and attitudes, while being an essential

part of the prison officer role, do not sit well outside of it, either in run-of-the mill environments (for example shops and the pub) or, and this is much more significant, in the private world of the officer's family home. Here, rules and regulations and the need for order and control are antithetical to a relaxed, loving and child-friendly home (Crawley, 2002, 2004a, 2004b).

### **Recruitment, retention and working conditions**

The working conditions for prison staff have changed significantly over the past fifty years, and it has been noted that for the officers working during the 1960s and 1970s, it was quite a depressing experience (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price, 2001). During these times, technology was largely absent; personal alarms were not in use and neither were the two-way radios that are now a common feature on the prison landings. Some prisons in England and Wales were at this time still utilising what was called the silent regime; whereby prisoners and prison officers were not allowed to speak to each other whilst on the prison landings. Officers were not allowed to sit down, smoke or stand in conversation with other officers whilst on duty (Crawley, 2004a). The prison officers serving during these years were commonly ex-service men and generally those with little educational attainment, along with those who had been turned away from joining the police (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling *et al*, 2010). The recruits of this era tended to be labelled with negative stereotypes such as; insensitive, uncaring, unintelligent and sometimes brutal (Thomas, 1972; Kauffman, 1988; Crawley, 2004a; Liebling *et al*, 2010).

The current Prison Service recruitment literature describes the role of the prison officer as 'a complex challenge, balancing authority with a large amount of understanding and compassion' (MoJ, 2012). The literature goes on to say that officers will:

- Carry out security duties as required, contributing effectively to the safe and secure custody of Prisoners.
- Ensure that all incidents are reported and dealt with effectively, including bullying, assaults, substance misuse and self-harm.
- Prepare reports as required in a timely manner.
- Follow set procedures for dealing with Prisoner applications.
- Encourage Prisoners to deal with personal challenges through offending behaviour programmes.
- Complete searching in adherence to local and national policy Encourage Prisoners to follow regime activities.
- Comply with audit requirements.
- Upholding respect for Prisoners, their property, rights and dignity.
- Apply authorised control and restraint procedures where appropriate.
- Ensure Control and Restraint training (C & R) is completed each year as required.
- Complete observation book entries.
- Monitor vulnerable Prisoners appropriately.
- Act as Personal Officer to a group of Prisoners.
- Ensure standards of hygiene and cleanliness are maintained.
- Ensure Suicide and Self Harm processes are complied with.
- Ensure information system for Prisoners is effective.
- Contribute to own development through the Staff Performance & Development Record.
- Ensure all work is carried out to a high professional standard.

This last bullet point illustrates the Ministry of Justice expect the prison officers to act professionally and carry out duties to a professional standard. However, this section will engage with the challenges to the professionalism of prison officers as compared to other public sector roles.

The prison system of today has made significant changes to the recruitment criteria. Post 1990 better employment conditions were introduced; incorporating a more diverse workforce; along with those who were better educated there was an increase of female staff (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price, 2001; Liebling *et al*, 2010). More recently, there has been a shift away from recruiting ex-military staff with many new recruits moving into prison work from jobs such as estate agents, milkmen, builders and students (Crawley, 2004a; Arnold *et al*, 2007). When considering the state of employment in the UK, this could have more to do with the number of redundancies and not necessarily the want to change career path. According to the findings of Arnold *et al* (2007: 472) most of those recruited

during 2005 'fell into' the job and most had no prior knowledge of prison. Changes were made so new recruits would have better observational, analytical and written communication skills (Crawley, 2004a). The fact that new recruits are now expected to have five GCSE's, including both English and Mathematics, highlights how much more administration work they are expected to do. There are a range of prisoner reports that officers have to write, and those with educational qualifications are more likely to write them correctly and in an articulated professional manner. Although, McHugh et al (2008), claim the 5 GCSE rule has now been rescinded due to poor recruitment numbers; and in the past it has been argued that better educated prison officers do not necessarily guarantee better prisons (Jurik and Musheno, 1986).

However, the fact remains that prison officer training or Prison Officer Entry Level Training (POELT) as it is more widely known in England and Wales, is relatively short. New recruits spend eight weeks in training, with the first week spent at the establishment where the recruit will eventually work. This initial week is for the new recruits to familiarise themselves with the workplace, and to meet colleagues (Arnold, 2008). Weeks two to seven are spent at the training college where the trainee officers undertake a combination of classroom based learning, to include control and restraint training, other practical assessments and two exams. The final week of training is spent back in the prison; this is the first opportunity new recruits have to reflect on their training and ultimately contextualise their learning in the workplace (Arnold, 2008). New recruits are required to complete the Custodial Care NVQ level 3 and according to the Ministry of Justice this increases the new recruits confidence to carry out their role effectively (MoJ, 2012). More recently in 2011 it has been documented that a small number of prison officers at the privately run prison HMP Dovegate, have attended Staffordshire University on a two year offender management

degree course. All fees are paid by Serco – the private operator of custodial services (Tobin, 2011). This degree course has now taken prison officers from the nearby Serco run prison HMP Lowdham Grange (Stafford University, 2012) and only time will tell whether this shift towards a more professional training approach is effective. When we consider that in a House of Commons statement in July 2010, the MP Crispin Blunt as the Parliamentary Under Secretary for the Ministry of Justice and therefore responsible for prisons stated the approximate cost for training a new entrant prison officer was £4,423 per person (this figure is disputed by the POA who claim on their website that it costs £20,000 to train a prison officer), and we compare this with the training nurses undertake – 3 year degree, no tuition fees and a monthly bursary – this maybe goes on to highlight that by many the role of a prison officer is not seen as ‘professional’, as that of either nursing, the police, fire service or probation. To emphasise how little training the prison officers get in England and Wales it is necessary to look further afield and make general comparisons with other countries.

For instance, in Norway, they have a more innovative approach towards the training and prison officers are ‘recognised as the core of the penal response to offending behaviour’ (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2009) and spend two years training before they work with prisoners on a one year work placement (James, 2013). During this two year period, recruits cover six themed areas of training; case criminal proceedings and related law subjects, ethics and professionalism, practical prison work and safety, criminology and criminal politics, milieu therapy work in institutions along with the role of the prison officer. This Norwegian model of training is based on theoretical, moral and practical education (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2009). In Western Australia, new recruits undertake nine months of intensive training both on and off the job, and this training is paid. If then offered a permanent position, the prospective officers are required to do another thirteen

weeks training at the Department's Training Academy (Government of Western Australia, 2010). In America, a country renowned for its high levels of incarceration recruits are required to have a high school diploma to work in most state prisons. Alongside this, at least a bachelors degree and three years experience of either counselling or supervision of individuals, to be able to work in one of the Federal Bureau correctional units (Hanson, 2011). Training varies across the American states, although all provide on-the-job training after completion of 200 hours of formal training and 120 hours of specialised training at a residential training centre. Beyond this, experienced officers receive annual in-service training to keep up with new developments and procedures (Hanson, 2011). Closer to home it is worth looking at the training in The Republic of Ireland, here, Recruit Prison Officers (RPOs) spend the majority of their training programme on work placement in prisons, where they undertake training developed by the Irish Prison Service and a third level institution, leading to a recognised educational award – The Higher Certificate in Custodial Care. The certificate takes two years to complete and encompasses modules such as social psychology, human rights law, criminology and health and society to name a few (Hanson, 2011). By highlighting the training in other countries it only emphasises how poor the training remains in this country; where the state seem to concentrate on security and control training – counting heads, locking and unlocking gates and cells, as it does not equal the high level of training given to colleagues around the world. Importantly, these other countries concentrate on people skills and how to deal with human beings, some of whom have known nothing other than chaos in their lives. This goes some way to show how little this occupation is respected and puts into question the Prison Officers Association (POA) mantra of 'professionalism'. The above examples of prison officer training from other parts of the world provides by way of contrast how little is offered in England and Wales. Reading the POA website under the heading 'The Role of a Prison Officer' their National Chairman,

Colin Moses writes, 'staff should be given an individual training plan which is tailored to their needs and ambitions... to actively encourage development and promotion' (Moses, 2013).

It is worth mentioning here the training offered to new recruits of the police and nursing; again, this will highlight how their occupations are considered professional, in direct contrast to prison officers. When we consider other public occupations such as policing and nursing in England and Wales, the training they receive is much more in-depth, and therefore valued by society at a much higher level. New police recruits in England and Wales are required to undergo two years training through the Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP). The training is split into four phases and involves both written and practical assessments (Home Office, 2013). Similarly, professional nursing staff are required to undertake a three year degree course, comprising of fifty per cent theory and fifty per cent practice (NHS, 2013). They then go on to undertake training in specialised areas. When absorbing this information, it is not surprising that prison officers continue to be known more generally as 'screws' and 'turnkeys' and not so much as the professionals they should be given credit for.

It should be considered that there are many specialised areas within the prison and as we have discovered, prisoners are individuals and therefore have individual needs. Adult male prisoners have different needs than the adult women prisoners, likewise with both male and female juveniles. In contrast, nurse training is specifically centred around whether they want to work on a general hospital ward with adults, a mental health ward or a paediatric ward or maternity ward and for all these very different areas of nursing the students would be provided with specific and specialised training. So why is there no provision for training in these different areas for prison officers, before the new recruits are placed onto the prison

landings? As Coyle (2005: 95) confirms, ‘No specialized training is given to staff before they are sent to these very different working environments’. The new recruits should be armed with this knowledge to assist their working style and to assist with the forming of relationships.

As well as being prepared to work in the prison environment, new recruits should also be warned about their personal health and wellbeing when starting work on the prison landings. In these concentrated environments, illness and disease can spread quickly, and there is evidence of this from academic researchers who frequent these prison spaces at regular intervals (Drake, 2012). Academics in this field of research have documented how they suffered from regular colds and chest infections whilst ‘in the field’; whilst those who have left the profession have also documented their personal health issues. Ava Vidal, a comedian and ex-prison officer who had previously worked at HMP Pentonville claimed she ‘felt sick for the first three months’ due to her ‘immune system and the amount of germs in prison’ (Vidal, 2013). According to A National Audit Commission (NAC) Report in 2004, the Prison Service had higher staff sickness levels than ‘other parts of government’ (Braggins and Talbot, 2005: 14). The Report also highlighted that many officers leave within two years of joining the prison service, with the figures showing a drop-out rate of 60 per cent (Braggins and Talbot, 2005; NAC, 2004).

### **On the job stress**

*Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people-work’ (Maslach and Jackson, 1981: 99)*

Work related stress could be defined as when an individual has to deal with too many demands whilst having a lack of control over anything, it is also important, how the situation is perceived by the individual. No matter where you work in the Western society,

whether it be as a nurse, teacher, shop worker or barman, work related stress is a real experience. Psychologists have conducted research around this topic for many years and one of the countries leading experts on *stress* Professor Cooper (1997) and his team from Manchester University conducted research assessing 104 jobs. They found prison officers topped the list when it comes to stressful workplaces. With all the current changes taking place in the Criminal Justice System and more importantly in the prison service, it would be safe to say this profession remains high risk. Cooper (1997) explains, ‘a prison officer has the pressure of working for the government, of crowded working conditions and role conflict within the prison’. Although it should be noted that due to the on going pressure to privatise more and more of the Prison Service, that it is not just the pressure of working for the government, but also for managers running prisons for profit. Prisons are becoming pressure cookers for work related stress when taking into consideration it is a very unnerving time for prison staff. Brough and Biggs (2010: 2) classified the antecedents of occupational stress into eight categories:

1. Work relationships: interactions with people at work.
2. The job itself: nature of the work performed.
3. Overload: workload and time pressures.
4. Control: lack of control over work processes and timing.
5. Job security: uncertainty about the future of one’s job.
6. Resources and communication: inadequate or malfunctioning technological and other resources; ineffective communication processes in the workplace.
7. Work-life balance: interference or conflict between the job and both family and personal life.

8. Pay and benefits: perceived or objective inadequacy of remuneration and other important tangible benefits (Johnson *et al*, 2005).

These categories could not be more pertinent than they are today when we consider the ongoing changes to the profession, and more worryingly, the cuts to frontline prison officers. With exposure to major incidents ‘involving death, violence, personal attacks and harassment’ (Brough and Biggs, 2010) it is no real surprise that high numbers of officers leave the prison service within the first two years of employment (Finn, 2000; Cheeseman, 2010, 2011). There are numerous academic studies on work related stress in the prison; however, these are predominantly quantitative in method and American origin (Finn, 2000; Cheeseman, 2010; Lambert *et al*, 2006; Lambert and Hogan, 2009). Liebling *et al* (2010) acknowledge there are many differences regards working in prisons in America compared with the prisons in England and Wales, although they claim the findings in the work stress literature has much in common across these jurisdictions.

In research conducted twenty years ago, Alison Liebling found ninety five per cent of the two hundred officers she interviewed ‘suffered unreasonable levels of stress in the job’ (1998: 78). It would be easy to believe that high levels of stress are related to feelings of anxiety due to working with vulnerable, high-risk individuals. The reality is, most prison officers who have been interviewed for academic research put their stress down to issues concerning role conflict, and more specifically, the juxtaposition of custody and care (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price, 1999; Liebling *et al*, 2010). The officers are torn between maintaining security and control and trying to support, help and encourage the prisoners. These conflicting issues highlight stress is primarily caused by organisational problems, and not necessarily trouble caused by prisoners. In earlier work Liebling (1998), discussed past interview data where prison officers had committed suicide due to work stress and there were others who had either contemplated it or attempted it; with most

talking of feeling isolated and, importantly, unsupported by management. According to Crawley (2004a), most prison officers find it difficult to admit feeling 'stressed'; and this, in part, could be due to the masculine culture they work in.

Other stress relating factors for female officers is harassment by their male colleagues, who have been known to see the women as sex objects and inferior to themselves (Zimmer, 1986). Consequently these challenges have resulted in a tendency to report more harassment and stress than the male officers (Martin, 1984; Peterson, 1989; Stohr *et al*, 1996). Recent media articles show this is an on-going issue when the national media covered a story regarding a young prison officer who was apparently 'bullied' out of her job for allegedly being 'too nice' to the prisoners, and for being too attractive. (Britton, 2009). Consequently, an employment tribunal found HM Prison Service guilty of unfair dismissal, age and sex discrimination against the young female officer. Importantly, since the nineteen nineties, the prison system has provided more support for their staff, and it is worth noting here that all prisons in England and Wales now have a Staff Care and Welfare Service (SCWS) team based in the prison. Unfortunately, Crawley (2004a) found the service was undervalued by staff and not used to its full potential, due to a lack of trust and confidence in the 'in house' service. When considering trust, it remains thought provoking to note that Liebling (2004) claimed staff had reported trusting the prisoners more than their own managers.

# Chapter 2: Methodological Considerations

## Introduction

This chapter will outline the research design and methods I have employed to conduct the research study. The first stage for any academic researcher is identifying and formulating the research question and this in itself can be a lengthy process. The research question for this study is documented later in this chapter, and addresses the under researched area of female prison officers. The questions posed in this study relate to the working styles of female prison officers, the daily challenges they face, along with the relationships formed with those they look after and those they work alongside. This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach utilising observations, interviews and less formal conversations. Beyond the outline, this chapter will consider issues such as securing access to the field, sample selection, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations along with the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen research methods, there is also a section on the emotional impact of this type of qualitative research and the emotionality of leaving the field. Alongside this, there is a detailed reflexive account of my time in the field. First though, it is important to understand the researchers background and where the interest stems from to conduct this type of study.

## Researcher biography

Before returning to Higher Education to study criminology I had spent over ten years working in mental health nursing in both local and regional secure environments. I therefore have first hand knowledge and experience of treating mentally unwell adults in a locked environment. I also have an awareness of the type of occupational culture and community discussed in this thesis. For example, whilst working in secure psychiatric services, I took

on the role of control and restraint instructor, a role that was primarily taken on by male nurses. However, with a higher ratio of female to male nursing staff I thought it appropriate that at least one of the instructors should be female. Consequently, the more intense training such as 'riot negotiation' and 'shield work' took place at Broadmoor special hospital situated in Berkshire. Broadmoor is a high-security psychiatric hospital treating those convicted of serious crimes or those who are deemed unfit to plead. My first visit here was also my first introduction to the intensity of this type of occupational culture. I would stay for a week at a time in student accommodation (in the hospital grounds), and most people who worked there lived in houses within the hospital grounds. Also within the grounds were sports clubs for the employees, most notably, cricket and rugby pitches and a bowling club. There was a nursery for the hospital employee's children and a social club where, as I soon found out, most of the staff drank and socialised (every day). The culture became more apparent the more I spoke to colleagues at Broadmoor. Most staff of a similar age to myself worked there because their mother and/or father did, their uncle and/or aunt did, and their brother and/or sister did. This was a close-knit community who worked and played together. This culture is similarly highlighted in another special hospital I visited in England and shows how this culture was deemed the norm for staff working in such an institution. Rampton Hospital opened in 1912 as an overflow facility for Broadmoor Hospital in Berkshire. Within the grounds, and exactly like that at Broadmoor, housing for staff was built during the 1920s and 30s. Alongside the housing there were several football fields, a rugby pitch, a cricket field, shop, staff social club/pub, disco, library, tennis courts, free indoor heated swimming pool, bowls club. All built for staff use; the housing was rented and only available for the staff, consequently staff had to vacate the houses when they retired. Traditionally, like the Prison Service, this may have seemed like a good idea, and

although this was during the early to mid nineteen nineties it appeared an unhealthy environment both for working in and living in.

### **HMPYOI Prison**

For an ethnographic piece of research it is important to set the scene and give the reader a full description of the research setting (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, 2007). Formerly an orphanage built in the 1890's, HMPYOI Prison opened as a women's prison in the early 1960's when female prisoners were transferred from the local men's prison; and from the early 1980's onwards Young Offenders were admitted. In 1999 a separate wing was added to accommodate women on remand following the closure of the local Remand Centre. HMPYOI Prison now houses approximately 450 adult and young offending females in closed conditions.

Admittedly, I have only been inside a small number of prisons, but the architecture of the buildings has generally taken on the same format; bleak, intimidating and harsh looking buildings surrounded by high brick or metal perimeter walls. Once inside the prison gates, you are usually met with one main building encompassing numerous wings and landings, from a central area. HMPYOI Prison is quite different, and at times, a surreal environment. Once through the main gate (no finger print scanners, no photos taken, no 'pat downs', no dogs as I have experienced in other prisons) and passed the grey portacabin offices and security buildings you are met with a vast space dominated by three rows of Victorian red brick large detached houses; fourteen in total housing around nineteen women in each. The beauty and elegance of these houses is marred not only by the bars on the windows but also by the profusion of the dull looking, portacabins slotted in between, giving any observer a stark reminder this is a prison environment. Beyond this is what many would describe as a general prison estate. There is one main wing split into two sides that are predominantly

single cell occupancy for approximately 130 women, and both sides of the wing have one upper landing. There is a recently appointed mental health unit for up to ten women, along with a first night unit close to the reception area, the first night unit comprises of four bed rooms, two rooms are single occupancy and the other rooms accommodate up to four women. At the bottom of what is referred to as the front row is a circular building recently named the Care, Separation and Support Unit (CSSU) and more traditionally known as the segregation block and still termed *the seg* by most of the prison officers I spoke to. There is room here for eleven prisoners all in single cells; although I have been informed that only nine cells are ever in use. Most of the women in the CSSU have extreme mental health issues and are placed there for safety as they can be closely monitored; a smaller number of prisoners are there for personal protection, and the rest for violent conduct.

One of the most surreal sightings for me as a researcher in the prison was the sight of babies in both pushchairs and car seats. At HMPYOI Prison, there is a Mother and Baby unit where nine prisoners can care for their children until they are 18 months old. One comment from the manager of this particular unit brought a lump to my throat; *there are occasionally prisoners in HMP Prison who have been born here themselves*. The reality of this comment highlights the cycle of crime and deprivation concentrated to the marginalised women who frequent this type of environment. The more humorous sightings include women wandering around with rollers in their hair and women driving past on golf buggies collecting garden waste and other refuse, or delivering clean laundry.

There is a large working garden area where around 50 women work to produce a range of vegetables, fruit and flowers. With the help and advice from local college tutors, vegetables and fruit are grown and sold to an outside company whilst the flowers are grown to decorate

the annual garden the prisoners and staff design each year. There are also a number of bee hives situated at the back of the garden area where the women produce their own honey.

## **Ethnography**

*[Ethnography] involves the ethnographer participating overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 1)*

Ethnographers are keen to observe people's behaviour in their natural setting (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, 2007) and when exploring the culture of prison officers, that setting is prison. Due to the fact I am studying a culture it is felt an ethnographic process is necessary to allow a comprehensive view of the working lives of female prison officers. As a postgraduate student I have adopted the perspective of critical criminology, and therefore looked to the scholarly work of those who are most passionate and critical of prisons (see for instance, Scraton *et al*, 1991; Sim, 1990, 2008, 2009 and Scott, 2006, 2009). It is therefore interesting to read, that Jewkes (2012: 14-15) argues ethnographers go further than critical criminologists by claiming that penal institutions constitute one of the places where the powerful construct and exercise their power. Whereas critical criminologists tend to emphasize the most tragic aspects of prison such as suicide and self harm (see Liebling, 1992 for more on self harm and suicide in the prison).

The ethnographic approach to social science research was first developed by anthropologists; scholars who immersed themselves within the society of interest enabling them to study different cultures around the world (Bowen, 1954). More recently, anthropologists have taken an interest in the prison environment (see Rhodes, 2004). Importantly, the skills used by the anthropologists to study tribes and their cultures are now

being employed by other social scientists (Fielding, 1981; Holdaway, 1982, 1983; Hobbs, 1988; Hobbs *et al*, 2003; Winlow, 2001). This method of research is far removed from the large-scale quantitative methods and respected interpretive sociologists such as Max Weber would argue that human beings are reflexive and are therefore capable of giving meaning to their actions, thus assisting us to understand the social world. This methodological shift from quantitative studies to the qualitative urban ethnographies developed during the nineteen fifties and sixties at the Chicago School; and showed evidence of sociologists becoming interested in viewing the world through the eyes of the people. Both criminology and penology as respected disciplines were late developers, and the prison as a research arena was generally seen as intellectually uninteresting. Consequently, some criminologists did not see the prison as an independent site of inquiry and prison ethnography emerged slowly.

Before looking at the ethnographic studies conducted in prison it is important I acknowledge the work of the renowned sociologist Erving Goffman; a scholar who became known for his studies of human interaction. Goffman (1968) utilised the ethnographic approach by taking a job in a mental hospital; so he could participate in the lives of the patients and collect data by both observing and interviewing. Goffman (1968) was aware that all research within that area had been previously conducted by psychiatrists and he therefore sought the view of the institution through those who inhabited it and not those who were employed by it. Erving Goffman coined the term *total institutions*, and his work suggested certain institutions such as prisons, mental hospitals and monasteries emotionally overwhelmed and controlled the lives of those who lived within them. The feelings of emotion and control are also relevant to the uniformed staff working in these institutions (see chapter 1 for more on emotion).

Early prison research was dominated by the American social scientists (see Clemmer, 1940 and Sykes, 1958). The work of these renowned sociologists showed ambition and enthusiasm for a more humane prison system and according to Simon (2000) sociological researchers were commonplace in the prison by the mid twentieth century. Unfortunately due to the political shift in America towards *warehousing* prisoners there was less of a need to comprehend the values and feelings of prisoners; and the current decline in prison research in the U.S seems ironic considering the prison population has, in recent years risen greatly. Wacquant (2002: 385) acknowledges the decline by arguing the political shift has made it difficult for researchers to gain access to the prison, he states, 'prison ethnography has become not merely an endangered species but a virtually extinct one'. With this notion that academic researchers are being refused access for research, it could be argued that intellectual accounts of prison will be left solely to journalists, prisoners themselves, along with accounts made by prison staff. Whilst in the UK, prison research and more importantly, prison ethnography seems to be developing and advancing in the right direction (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay, 1996; Crawley, 2004a; Liebling, 2001, 2011., Crewe, 2009; Phillips, 2012) the access into prison for researchers is tightly controlled. The only way to study this closed institution is by applying for access to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). If we think about this rationally, it would be extremely difficult to conduct a covert study in prison. Common sense will tell you for this to happen, the researcher would have to commit a crime, and then continue through the arduous path of the criminal justice system of England and Wales to finally end up serving a prison sentence as an offender. It is worth noting that prisoners who have written about their prison experiences have tended to take the form of a diary to document their lived experience, thus applying no specific type of research methods, or making reference to relevant academic research (Boyle, 1984; James 2003, 2005; Parker, 1995, 1997). The only other way to conduct covert research

would be for the researcher to become employed as a prison officer or other member of permanent staff, for any possibility of ethnographic research to take place without having to be granted access (see Arnold 2008 for a detailed account of her experience on the prison officer training course).

Ethnography thrives on the built relationships of respondents and trust is a major factor in the ethnographic process when researching these hidden worlds. Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996) wrote about being the *ignorant spy* and Crewe (2006: 347) argues that through the commitment of *time* researcher's are able to, 'become less conspicuous, more knowledgeable and, perhaps, a temporary if marginal part of the prison community'. Importantly, once trust has been earned, Jewkes (2002) comments about personal, and more to the point, potentially dangerous information given out with ease, highlighting the rich ethnographic data collected from the prison setting.

### **The research question**

Formulation of a clear and concise research question is the first step of qualitative research. It is formulated with the 'aim of clarifying what the field contacts are supposed to reveal' (Flick, 2009: 98). The importance of keeping research questions open with an awareness they may change became something I had to deal with after NOMS had refused my first request for access to the prison. I had initially requested access to two prisons and my first research question reflected this,

*To understand the workplace experiences, reflections and working styles of female prison officers working in two distinctly different prisons, and with distinctly different prisoner populations.*

When I became aware I would only be allowed to undertake my research in the women's prison my re-formulated research question mirrored this change in focus,

*To understand the workplace experiences, reflections and working styles of female prison officers working in a women's prison.*

These ideas around research questions informed the methods chosen and as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) state when conducting this type of qualitative research the question emerges through the ethnographic process. As I was exploring a culture it was important to utilise both observations and interviews in the form of an ethnographic project.

### **Orientation to the research site and piloting**

Before embarking on the ethnographic study I had emailed details of my research project with a photograph of myself and contact details to one of the senior officers I had been introduced to, the officer then emailed the information to all uniformed officers working at the prison. I then spent one week orientating myself to the prison site. During this period I was escorted by a male principal officer to all areas of the prison; at this stage I had not received my key tally to collect keys, and therefore relied on the officer to escort me to different parts of the prison. Each day I spent three or four hours in different areas of the prison such as, the main wing, reception area, first night centre, segregation block, residential housing blocks and the visiting area (although due to ethical concerns I did not observe visits as informed consent had not been sanctioned for this). I also spent time around the garden and recycling area, and the mother and baby unit talking to various members of staff. During this time I spoke to as many officers as possible and explained whom I was, where I was from and gave them details of my research project in the form of a short document. A number of officers had read the email that had been sent to all officers and work areas prior to me coming to the prison, and a small number of officers showed interest in participating. Though most of the interest was conveyed verbally face-to-face and as I realised over the time I spent in the prison, it can take a while for prison staff emails to

be read and answered. The orientation week became a stark lesson in the negotiation and re-negotiation of access. For instance, I was introduced to officers on the wing first and initially relied on a few key individuals to then introduce me to officers in other areas of the prison, primarily, those officers who were quite willing to speak. This was an important stage for me and I thanked these officers on different occasions for assisting in getting my project off the ground.

Throughout this orientation week I collected anything and everything I could that I thought would give me further insight into the working lives of the female officers. I picked up a number of different copies of *Gatelodge the Prison Officer Association* magazine, along with leaflets on healthcare services, and information handed out to the women as they enter the prison. The *Gatelodge* magazine was in the most part unhelpful, predominantly the articles written were biased and a number of pages are taken up with advertisements for personal insurance or advertisements from solicitors to assist those officers who 'blow the whistle'. However, there were a number of interesting letters from serving officers in the postbag section, for instance, observations on retirement and one edition dedicated most of its pages to the prison closures that were being proposed at that time (February, 2013). I was also given a security information report form and instructed by security staff to fill it in if I saw any untoward behaviour whilst in the prison. I was also grateful for the map of the estate given to me by the manager of the gardening department, and used this regularly to find my way round during this early stage. This was also the stage where I piloted my interview questions with frontline officers in different areas of the prison.

A feature of good research is piloting and it is deemed sensible to try out any questions prior to main interviews taking place (Silverman, 2010). As a novice researcher this process allowed me to practice interviewing skills whilst enabling me to develop a more refined and

confident interviewing style. As Bryman (2008: 247) states, 'piloting an interview schedule can provide interviewers with some experience of using it and can infuse them with a greater sense of confidence'. Qualitative interviewing is like walking into the unknown – you are never too sure of what you will find out. On the one hand, I was aware that confusion during the interview process may not be entirely down to the way I had worded the questions, but maybe the way I had asked them. On the other hand, I was concerned that if the prison officers participating in the pilot study responded to the questions with similar answers the data could be uninteresting and limited in richness. Therefore, the process of piloting allowed me to identify this and re-think the wording of certain questions to generate the richest data possible, whilst also allowing me to add or remove questions when necessary.

The pilot interviews took place after I had gained access and during my orientation week, as it was necessary to pilot the questions with uniformed officers. I would have preferred to conduct a focus group at this stage but unfortunately due to the on-going changes and cuts to the numbers of frontline prison staff it was proving difficult to arrange. For this reason I informally went through my interview questions with four female officers. This piloting process proved useful as each officer I spoke to queried whether I was interested in what happened when prison officers left work and returned to their domestic spheres; their homes. It was at this point I devised questions around the private lives of the officers; an area I had not considered and it highlighted the importance of the piloting process.

## **Sampling**

I spent one week in the prison orientating myself to the environment and during this time posters (a photograph of myself and a contact number/email) were displayed in areas such as the key collection area and staff offices. The poster, along with the research information

sheet had also been emailed to all departments in the prison, to ensure maximum coverage of as many uniformed staff as possible. I envisaged this would enable all uniformed staff to read for themselves, what the research entailed. I utilised an *opportunistic sample* in the first stages of research to recruit interview participants, and luckily, this snowballed once I became more familiar with both the research site and the officers who worked there. By employing opportunistic sampling I made sampling decisions whilst in the field, and as Brady (2006: 206) states, this form of sampling is useful when studying ‘hard to access groups of people’. After the first few days in the prison, officers I spoke to escorted me to areas of the prison and introduced me to other female uniformed officers. As previously mentioned, a small number of officers emailed expressing their interest and seeking reassurance regarding confidentiality. I was extremely grateful as I was conscious this sample selection process could have taken much longer.

As very little is known about female prison officers in the workplace it was useful to employ this more flexible form of sampling. This was not a random sample and there was no control group; the officers had to be willing to be part of this research. Collecting data from the officers who are conveniently available, at the same time it made it convenient for myself. It is acknowledged this method of convenience is useful when sampling hard-to-access groups (Hobbs, 1988; Winlow, 2001; Brady, 2006). Snowball sampling is another convenient way to sample, and after initial contact had been made with a small number of female prison officers, I used the relationships formed to establish contact with other willing participants. Howard Becker’s study of marijuana users during the early 1960’s began with him interviewing people he already knew from the music business, he then asked them to introduce him to marijuana users who would be willing to discuss their experiences; and there began his generation of a snowball sample of people who smoked marijuana. I am

aware the sample of uniformed officers will not be representative of the female prison officer population across England and Wales; however, this was not something I set out to do. I was undertaking a relatively small qualitative piece of work and considered this the most appropriate way to sample the prison officers.

As researchers on small independent projects I believe we have to ask the question about what we would do if the chosen form of sampling creates an opening for ‘too many’ willing participants. How will I ‘choose’ who to interview? Is it a first come first to be interviewed scenario? Do I try and interview all who show an interest? Is this the stage where I begin to think about future research projects with these willing participants? However, these were not questions I had to address and the final sample of interviewees was smaller than initially anticipated, primarily due to a shortage of frontline staff. It is worth noting here that in the year before I entered the prison and during my nine months in the prison, nearly 70 frontline officers had left the prison due to budget cuts imposed on the prison service by the coalition government, and finding time to interview became more difficult, as there was no-one to cover the other officer’s workload.

Over a period of nine months I spent sixty-four days over thirty five weeks researching in the prison. Some weeks I spent three days in the prison, others I spent one day and each month I took a week out to i) rest and ii) go over the data I had collected that month and briefly analyse to assess whether there were new areas/topics to explore. In total, I interviewed twenty seven prison officers; twenty prison officers, six senior officers and one officer at governor level, all female. An abundance of data was captured during more informal conversations as this was possible to achieve whilst the officers went about their daily duties. All the officers I spoke to were experienced and had worked at the prison for between 8 years and 25+ years. The female officers were primarily middle aged; due to the

amount of changes taking place frontline staffing numbers were depleting and the prison had not taken on any new recruits since 2012.

### **Analysing the data**

I opted to manually code the data, this type of coding is common for ethnographic work and other qualitative methods (Rivas, 2012). I also believe the analysis of people's emotions, feelings and concerns can be dealt with more sensitively, when approached manually. By reducing the volume of data, it became more meaningful to myself and therefore easier to process. This method has allowed me to deduce themes from the data that maybe the prison officers had not directly spoken about. Analysis began during the early stages of my fieldwork. This enabled me to assess whether the research questions were being answered correctly, and subsequently, whether the interview questions would have to be changed. Once this was established, the bulk of analysis was completed when I disengaged from the field, giving myself time to reflect on the ethnographic process, field notes I had written and interview data I had collected. This process allowed for any early emerging themes to inform further reading of new literature. I had anticipated themes would emerge that had not been identified during the early explorations of literature.

After each day spent in the prison I returned home to type up both my field notes and interview data, thus making it easier to begin analysis. Once the data had been typed up I colour coded main themes with highlighter pens and with each of the themes I created individual mind maps using *Inspiration 9* software making the analysis more visual. The individual mind maps allowed me to explore a central theme by expanding it into more in-depth sub-themes. This form of organizing helped transform the central and sub-themes into a coherent and structured outline I could use as a basis for my findings sections of this thesis.

## **Ethical considerations – Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity**

Ethical clearance began once I had taken up my postgraduate position at The University of Salford. Before I could begin my doctoral research I had to apply to the university for ethical approval of the project. The application was submitted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2012 and I had received a reply by the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012. This process was quick and presented no issues to address.

Prior to fieldwork taking place, it was imperative to gain informed consent from the prison officers. According to Ali and Kelly (2012: 66), ‘...gaining informed consent is a procedure that aims to support the principle of individual autonomy and is widely agreed to be a safeguard for the rights of people participating knowingly and voluntarily in research’. With regards to consent, each participant was given sufficient information concerning the study, this information explained the project in detail and was delivered in terminology the participants could comprehend, ensuring an informed and free decision on their possible involvement (Robson, 2002; Bryman, 2008; Silverman, 2010). However, as the research study progressed I felt more comfortable and less formal by asking the officers for verbal consent. This prevented me from having to take paperwork into the prison without looking official. Alongside this, during the days when it rained and not being able to take a bag inside the prison, the consent forms would have ended up crumpled in my coat pocket. All participants were informed of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study; whenever, and for whatever reason they wished. However, I stated that withdrawal from the project after the research finished would be limited to one month; this was to allow me the time to analyse the data collected and write up the findings for submission of this thesis.

## **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Due to the context of the research project there may be times when I am told something that is of a sensitive nature. Confidentiality and anonymity are paramount and therefore during the data collection process, data analysis and the writing up of findings all names have been changed appropriately and pseudonyms have been used. For the purpose of this study and to lighten the mood during intense and emotional analysis sessions, the pseudonyms I chose were based around the characters [prisoners] from Orange is the New Black. Orange is the New Black is a Netflix television series about women in an American prison and is based on the memoirs of Piper Kerman and her experiences in prison.

The British Society of Criminology (2013: 4iii) states, 'research participants should be informed about how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality'. This process of anonymity minimized the risk of any participants being identified before, during or after the research (King and Liebling, 2008; Davies, 2011). When presented with information of a sensitive nature, I gave thought to establishing parameters of confidentiality (Noaks and Wincup, 2004: 48). Therefore, the confidentiality agreement will be breached if information is received regarding risk to the participant or risk to others; or if the prison officer presented a security risk (see information sheet for informed consent and section on confidentiality). For instance, the participant may offer information with regards to self-harm, or thoughts about harming others, or about the possibility of bringing contraband items into the prison for prisoners. The officer may also disclose they have an alcohol or drug problem when talking about personal coping strategies for the occupation. Had any officer disclosed this type of information to myself I would have left the field to seek advice from my supervisor for the best way to deal with it. Fortunately, this never happened.

Liebling (1992) discussed the sensitivity of information and issues surrounding confidentiality during her research on suicide in prison. Through this work, Liebling (1992) highlighted the ethical choices researchers are sometimes faced with when handling sensitive information. When conducting research into suicide in prisons Liebling (1992) was presented with a prisoner who disclosed they kept a sharp implement on their person in case they felt the need to self-harm. For prolific self-harmers this is like a safety blanket of control, and not something they may use at all, though a difficult scenario for a social researcher to assess. Whilst King (2000:307) argues confidentiality can never be 'absolute'. Throughout the research process I dealt with any confidentiality concerns if/when they arose by regular debriefing sessions with both my academic supervisor and peers.

Punch (1986, 1998) highlighted that research ethics are concerned with the notions of harm, consent and privacy along with, participant and data confidentiality, alongside this there are important moral and ethical aspects to consider when undertaking an ethnographic project. One has to consider obtaining informed consent whilst ensuring anonymity for all research participants (as previously mentioned, pseudonyms have been used for each individual participant in this study). At times throughout my fieldwork officers would reassure themselves regarding anonymity and confidentiality by asking questions such as '*This is in confidence, isn't it?*' Other officers seemed keen to be recognised for what they had told me with comments such as '*You can use my real name, I don't care who finds out what I have said*'. When conducting ethnographic fieldwork it is not always possible to gain consent to observe from every serving prison officer without disrupting the prison routine or importantly, my research. Some officers may have objected to my presence in certain areas of the prison, however, as Punch (1986: 36) comments when discussing consent in large organizations, '...seeking consent from everyone (even if it were possible) would ... kill

many a research project stone dead'. I am conscious I need to acknowledge there is a problem in terms of all participants (and prisoners) giving consent when it comes to observations in an institution of this size (It would have been near impossible to speak to every officer working in the prison regarding consent). However, taking this into account, the researcher abided by the ethical guidelines throughout all stages of the research. Alongside this, ethical procedures in accordance with the British Society of Criminology (BSC) were adhered to.

### **The politics of gaining access to the prison for research**

Gaining access into the prison system of England and Wales for research purposes is fraught with internal and external political hurdles. The prison is a closed setting, and as Van Maanen and Kolb (1985: 11) state, 'gaining access to most organizations is not a matter to be taken lightly but one that involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work and dumb luck'. The complex process, along with the length of time it takes to secure researcher access has been well documented (see King and Liebling, 2008; Laverick, 2010; Jewkes, 2013). Scholars who are well established and recognised for their work in this research area may have a mutual, long-standing, professional respect with a number of prison governors, making access for research a much smoother process. Those academics that research inside the prison for the State will also find the process of gaining access a smooth one. For PhD researchers like myself, this process can be a mind field and this is where the choice of supervisor can make a difference. The Governing Governor at HMP Styal was clearly aware of my first supervisors publications and related work in the area of male prison officers, and this, I believe, had an impact on me securing access.

However, for the apprentice researcher or those embarking on their PhD journey this is not always the case, and each stage of the process can be a prolonged and time consuming

experience; highlighting the status of the researcher as an important cog in this wheel. Waquant (2002: 387) acknowledges the complications in accessing this closed environment in the U.S and how it has changed by claiming it is,

*Becoming simultaneously more bureaucratic and more porous to the influences of the political, juridical and media fields, jails and penitentiaries have turned into opaque organizations that can be difficult and sometimes near impossible to penetrate*

It is questionable whether this process is prolonged to deter academics from entering these institutions; environments that are generally closed and hidden to those on the 'outside'. This poses questions such as: What have they got to hide? How will we continue to gain new knowledge about the prison environment, prisoners and prison officers? Is this closed research environment only open to those with an accomplished track record of research; those who can give prisons the publicity they require? If the prison system continues to only allow those who are deemed proficient and capable into the institution, then how do we continue to gain new knowledge? For those of us who are just starting out on the research ladder, there are forms to fill, boxes to tick, meetings to set up (sometimes with those who are busiest), using the persona of a confident people's person, just to get a foot through the door. As Robson (2002) acknowledges, this process could also be down to the art of persuasion and persuading people to let you in. There are issues of power, time and security to consider, all of which are completely out of the hands of the researcher.

### **Gatekeepers**

*Gatekeeper ...those individuals in an organisation that have the power to grant or withhold access to people or situation for the purposes of research* (Burgess, 1984: 48)

It is imperative to identify gatekeepers and when looking at the prison it is a necessity to identify both formal and informal gatekeepers. These range from the executive agency of the Ministry of Justice - NOMS, to the governing governor, assistant governors, wing

managers, education staff and the Chaplaincy to name a few. The governing governor being the most important gatekeeper inside the prison, but also the busiest member of the team and therefore generally the most difficult to contact. Complications can arise when gatekeepers have been identified as members of the management team, as they can often be transferred to other prisons (Crawley, 2004a) leaving the research proposal languishing on someone's desk. This can result in a re-write of the research proposal thus re-starting the communication process, all of which takes a vast amount of research time.

Once the governing governor at HMPYOI Prison had agreed to the research taking place, I applied for access through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) to be granted access from NOMS. This *access* procedure was put in place to ensure individual prisons would not become over-researched (King and Liebling, 2008). For the purpose of this project, I had to initially gain access to the institution, and then gain access to the prison staff. This process of gaining access at different levels is acknowledged by Brewer (1990) when discussing his research with the police. Brewer (1990) identified *two gates* when accessing this type of institution as he had to gain the support of senior managers and when that had been approved he had to also gain the support of the regular members of the police force. This was something I had to do myself and I expand on my experience in the following reflexive section.

It is fundamental that researchers are prison literate enough to understand the daily routine of the prisoners and staff, and to acknowledge that research demands can also cause disruption to the prison routine. There can be unexpected changes to the daily prison routine, with security concerns and lockdowns without warning. This is why, once access has been granted, it continues to be a process of negotiation and re-negotiation throughout.

Lee (1999: 122) aptly describes gaining access as ‘an often implicit process, in which the researcher’s right to be present is continually renegotiated’.

Security clearance can also be time consuming; and time is something the researcher does not always have. As a ‘visitor’ to the prison there is a necessity to have photographs and fingerprints taken, forms to fill in and sign, along with the presentation of a letter to confirm who you are and where you are from. After clearance, researchers are required to go through a series of security checks before being allowed to enter the prison, although this does vary depending on the type of prison chosen to study. Generally, photograph and fingerprint checks are enough, however, in some high security prisons, the researcher could be asked to remove, shoes, belts and watches before being asked to walk through a series security detectors, including HMP sniffer dogs (something I experienced as an undergraduate when interviewing in HMP Manchester a Category A prison).

Access to how much movement inside the prison is allowed is another area that requires negotiation. Some prison governors prefer the researcher to be escorted everywhere, however, this in itself can be time consuming for prison staff and problematic for the researcher (Quraishi, 2007; Laverick, 2010). Whilst carrying out interviews in a women’s prison, Laverick (2010: 78) encountered the experience of being ‘accidentally locked in an area of the female institution and then subsequently mistaken as an inmate by an officer who treated me, in, shall we say, a less than hospitable manner’. More researcher friendly prisons allow keys to be issued, affording the researcher free movement within certain areas of the prison. There are several advantages and disadvantages to the researcher carrying keys and some academics are open to this possibility (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling, 1992), whereas others have been more cautious (King, 2000). I have shared my own experience of receiving and accepting a set of prison keys later in this section.

Access can be denied for a number of reasons; politically, the research topic could be considered as controversial, and therefore damaging to the prison system on a whole. However, King and Liebling (2008: 436) acknowledge reasons for denying access, 'do not always involve 'big' politics. As often as not, the problems may derive from the micro politics of institutions'. This could be due to the research being classed as disruptive, or maybe wariness regarding the nature of the project and future publications. There could also be suspicions regarding how else the collected research data could be used. For instance, the data could be used to expose practices to the public that in turn could be detrimental to the institution. Another consideration when trying to secure access to the prison is the over riding power of the psychologists. Jewkes (2012: 5) claims prison psychologists are, 'awarded an unprecedented level of power, including power over access to prisons by academic researchers'. This conflict of interests is no surprise when we consider psychology as a discipline is known for measuring and predicting, and the more they can measure the better – they utilize quantitative methods and prefer macro-analysis, whereas my interests lie in micro-analysis. Psychologists will also question why there is no control group.

Gaining access to the prison is similar to gaining access to a police force for research purposes, and can be a time consuming process; one where gatekeepers may have to be identified outside of the research environment. In order to gain access to police detectives Hobbs (1988) frequented a local pub, and at the same time was approached to coach a junior football team, where one of the parents was a police detective. Dick Hobbs gave up his weekends to coach the team whilst ultimately building a relationship with the detective. Hobbs (1988) talks of a *trading relationship* in the early months – Hobbs had the coaching skills to teach the policeman's son and the detective had knowledge of and contacts in the

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the local police force. This led to Hobbs being granted access to both formal and informal interviews along with access gained to documents, that would have otherwise been inaccessible.

### **Two strikes and you're out: my experience of gaining access to the field**

When access to the research field is governed by an institution, the process and timescale are out of the researcher's hands. This section is an honest and open account of my personal journey of gaining access to the prison. I have listened to lead professors in this field talk about reflexive accounts of prison research and how 'our' emotions count too (Liebling, 2013; Jewkes, 2012). As ethnographers, I believe it is important we are honest about our own feelings and emotions in the field. During the early stages I kept a research journal of my PhD journey and feel it is important to embed some of what I have documented here.

The process of gaining access to the field began in November 2011, with an initial meeting set up with the assistant governor of a local privately run prison. The security checks I went through on arrival were a stark reminder of where I was. Mobile phone, memory stick, university ID card were all taken off me and kept in a secure locker of the prison reception area. My photograph and fingerprints were taken and I was issued with a visitors pass (It was at this point I made a mental note to leave everything in the car every time I visited a prison). I felt uncomfortable during the meeting and continued to feel uncomfortable during the 'walkabout'. I should add here that this had little to do with the environment and more to do with the assistant governor I was dealing with; I was starting to sense a power battle, and felt as a researcher I was being manipulated by a dominant gatekeeper. It also became evident my discomfort was more to do with my inexperience of dealing with management at this level, rather than the prison environment the meeting was conducted in. I struggled to get the message across that as a PhD student and independent researcher I had no power,

and I wrongly assumed the assistant governor would be research literate enough [as he repeatedly talked about his criminology expertise and qualifications] to understand that more importantly I had no power to make change. Was it because I was a novice? Was it because I was female? Would the research have been better received if I had been established in the field? My supervisor was on sabbatical and looking back in hindsight, I believe this was the link that was missing at the time. Would I have been given the all encompassed yes, had she been there to guide me through the meeting? It is possible, however, it is something to learn from but not dwell on. A supervisor is there to support and guide you, not hold your hand all the way through. Was it a clash of personalities? I needed him, more than he needed me and he most definitely held the power in that sense. I felt I lacked in confidence and responded inadequately to certain questions and ultimately felt under prepared. The way I (The Outsider) was treated is revealed in the organisational power structure of the prison. The arrival of myself (The Outsider) into the closed total institution of the prison staff had clearly upset the power-relations that currently existed. I felt it was less Becker's Outsider and more Simmel's The Stranger. This was a huge learning curve, and one that could only be achieved by being in the field. For the first time I was also starting to realise my initial PhD topic of mental illness in the prison would not be accepted by either NOMS or prison governors. I had over ten years experience of working in mental health institutions, though this level of knowledge was too low to be accepted into the environment to research it. I was slowly discovering that to pursue this topic I would have had to be a qualified medic or psychologist. All of this has been important to my research journey as it led to a re-focus and re-design of the project.

It was seven months after that first meeting when I received an answer; after numerous emails and telephone conversations, access was denied. This is when you appreciate how

time consuming this process is; it had taken the prison eight months to say no! It is at this point as a researcher you are temporarily side-lined and the process of access starts all over again. There is a marked difference when as an accomplished prison researcher you can pick up the phone to the prison, state who you are and speak directly with the individual who has the authority to say yes. This also prompted a meeting with my supervisors to discuss further topics I could explore, regrettably moving away from mental health.

The second meeting (4 months later) with a governor of a public prison could not have been more different. An experienced governor of a women's prison more concerned with the care and rehabilitation of prisoners than the security and control of them, he was keen for the research to take place. He agreed to an orientation week, where I would shadow a member of staff; an important process when considering the ethnographic process. I wanted to get a feel for the officers working environment, as noted at the beginning of this section, the prison architecture and layout was quite different to other prisons. At this stage I also approached a governing governor from a local adult men's prison and the plan was to explore the working lives of female prison officers in two distinctly different prisons; one women's prison and one from the male estate.

At this stage I felt the process was smooth, and after vetting clearance and security training, I received an email from the prison stating I had been issued a set of keys and to go and pick up a belt and key pouch from security. This created a personal psychological battle as I associate these symbolic items with prison officers and I did not want any prisoners assuming I was a member of staff, or an official from the Prison Service. However, as noted earlier I also understand the importance of carrying keys when wanting free movement around the prison. My hesitance over carrying keys was turned around by Michael Irwin in one of his personal letters to me from prison. This is what he had to say, *just take the fecking*

*keys, no-one is armed, we get used to seeing strangers in the prison with key chains on and we can suss out who is connected to the prison and who isn't.* Considering the shortage of frontline staff had I not accepted keys I would have had difficulty moving from one area to another as there was no surplus of staff to escort me. This had all been sanctioned in the women's prison before my NOMS application had been submitted.

It was three months later in November 2012 when the process of applying for access to NOMS began. This 84 page document is completed online and submitted electronically. Early January 2013 I received an email from NOMS stating access had been denied. The psychologists at NOMS who make the decisions regarding access to prison for researchers claimed they had spoken to the number one governor in the women's prison and he had stated my resource demands for the research were too great. Emotionally, this was one of my lowest points, I was aware the governing governor was on long term sick leave and that NOMS could not have spoken to him personally, only to the acting governor (this was confirmed once the governing governor returned to work). The governor from the local male prison stated I would not be able to go ahead with research in his prison having also had a phone call from NOMS. This governor had only been in post six months, so I understood his trepidation and concerns. My project had started to morph once again and it was decided with my supervisors I would go ahead with access to just one prison. Although there would be no comparison with the male estate, the topic was unique enough on its own as there is currently no academic literature specifically relating to the working lives of female prison officers in England and Wales.

I was fortunate enough to express my feelings regarding this online process to a leading Professor in the field who quite openly told me she has similar problems when trying to gain access approval from the psychologists at NOMS for sociological research. Surely, this

process would be much easier if once the form is submitted to NOMS, the researcher had the opportunity to address a panel face-to-face to argue their case. The obstacles navigated during this process to gain access led me to present on this issue at the annual British Society of Criminology conference at The University of Liverpool (Wood, 2014).

It was not until August 2013 that I was finally able to enter the prison as a researcher. I was introduced to a principal officer, who proceeded to show me around the prison and introduce me to a number of uniformed officers. It was at this point I realised the importance of re-negotiating access. I had gained access to the prison as a research site however, another hurdle was gaining access to the uniformed officers who worked there. The principal officer was initially overly helpful and when he introduced me to other officers he would casually say 'they would be good to interview'. It was at this point I politely explained that it was not his job to recruit officers for interview due to confidentiality and that I would introduce myself and therefore recruit without any influence from the prison, though I was extremely grateful for his initial introductions.

After spending three months in the prison I was instructed to withdraw by my first supervisor. I had an assessment due at the university and a lengthy report to submit and was advised this should be my sole focus. Having taken so long to gain access, I was fairly demoralised to have to withdraw. I did not return to the prison until the beginning of January 2014 and due to the amount of changes that had taken place I had to start negotiations of access all over again. Staff I had met previously had moved to different areas in the prison, some had been removed from frontline duties to take up roles in the offices. Other staff had left or were in the process of leaving the Service. There were less visible officers and the officers I spoke to had no time for an hour long interview as there were now even less staff to cover. It was at this point I decided it would be useful to document the

conversations I had with officers as I could ask the questions I wanted answering but in a less formal manner. I was also grateful to the key respondents I had identified before I had to withdraw and I gravitated towards these officers to assist with i) explaining the changes that had taken place whilst I was away and ii) introducing me to other officers. More on my key respondents in chapter 3 of this thesis.

## **Data**

My observation and interview data was collected using hand written notes – pen and notebook. This was primarily due to recording equipment not being allowed in the prison. Crawley (2004a) noted that during the times when she had a tape recorder about her person in the prison, many officers behaved differently, and she has documented the times when she took a recorder into the prison and never took it out of her bag. This uncertainty of using recording equipment has been identified in other ethnographic research. Whilst undertaking a PhD study of heroin and crack dealers and users, Wakeman (2013) stated the minute he brought out his dictaphone, everyone in the room put their heads down, and the research arena became uncomfortable for both the researcher and the researched. Wakeman (2013) removed the dictaphone from sight and spent the next six months of his research hand writing field notes and interview data. Personally, I wanted the prison officers to answer my questions in a relaxed and informal manner and considered a notebook and pen to be less intrusive. I was aware that some officers appeared suspicious about my notebook and although no officers directly asked what I was writing, I became used to comments such as *here she is with her little black book again and will you be turning the notes your writing into a book about us*. I felt comments such as these should not concern me, though it became clear during moments such as these that my presence in the prison could influence the setting I was researching. I was also aware that this occupation has suspicion as one of

its central characteristics; the officers are taught to be suspicious during their training, in the interests of security as suspicion is a key component of their occupational culture. This form of data collection has allowed me to manage the data more effectively and I am confident the analysis process has been less time consuming without having to transcribe what would amount to approximately thirty hours of recorded interviews. By accepting the information given by Bryman (2008), each hour long interview would take between five and six hours to transcribe, this would equate to roughly, two hundred hours of transcription.

In relation to the security of data, Deakin and Spencer (2011:153) assert, 'It is imperative that respondents enter into the research process with the knowledge that the data gathered will be collected, handled and stored without fear of leakage or loss'. All my data has been inputted onto a computer hard drive and has subsequently been saved and password locked on external hard drive software. This is only accessible to myself and my academic supervisor if necessary, as the memory stick was then stored in a cabinet at my home address. Being locked in a secure cabinet or office lessens the risk of loss, or theft, as these external appliances are portable and therefore open to being lost, damaged or stolen (Robson, 2002). The data was also stored on the university computer hard drive as a backup procedure. Hand written notes contained pseudonyms to protect the identities of the prison officers, and were stored in a filing cabinet at my home address. I prefer the use of pseudonyms instead of a numerical based system of anonymising as I was dealing with human beings.

All data collection and analysis was in line with the eight principles of good practice from the Data Protection Act 1998, along with legislation of the Human Rights Act 1998.

## **Prison as a Research Location**

Firstly, when considering the prison as a research location, there are not many choices to be made about where the interviews will take place, and Douglas (1985), claims the location has an effect on both emotions and expectations. For the purpose of this project, I was offered the use of an office where the door could be closed to ensure privacy (Silverman, 2010). Secondly, my research subjects could have a perception that I am part of the institution, I have therefore emphasized I am a postgraduate university student who does not work for the Prison Service in any capacity. I have accepted a set of keys from the prison and therefore disagree with King and Liebling (2000: 305) when they argue, ‘possession of keys is so symbolic of the differences between freedom and captivity that it would place the researcher too close to staff’. I have to agree with Crawley (2004a) that some prison researchers take this issue too far and when considering movement around the prison I have not had to rely on staff to escort me to different parts of the prison. As briefly mentioned earlier, other researchers (see Quraishi, 2007 and Laverick, 2010) have been left in parts of the prison for lengthy periods of time whilst awaiting an officer to escort them somewhere. Finally, the officers may assume I have the power to make change and implement policy. It should be noted that all participants have been assured I have no such powers, although all analysed data will allow for further research in areas of concern, and may assist in informing future policy concerning prison officers.

Something else to consider here is how the researcher dresses when conducting prison research. I was conscious not to dress too formal, I did not want to be seen as an official person in the prison setting, though I was conscious of creating the right impression. I disagree with the thoughts of Crawley (2004a) here as she claims that prison researchers should look smart and professional; each time she went in a prison Elaine Crawley wore a

dark suit and carried a brief case at all times. I was aware that the way I presented myself was important from the outset. Would I be mistaken for a prisoner as past researchers had? (Laverick, 2010). I was conscious not to wear perfume as this would be a distinct smell in a prison, and one that may not be too helpful to some of the prisoners. I do not wear make up but similarly, I believe heavy make-up, red lips and nails would not be appropriate attire in the prison setting. How you present in the field as a researcher was brought to my attention many years ago whilst reading *Bouncers* by Hobbs *et al* (2003) about their research on *Violence and Governance in the night-time economy*. Hobbs *et al* (2003) commented that very early on in the fieldwork they realised they 'had to dress the part' to 'fit in', and the more formal shirts these male academics were used to wearing made way for the less formal polo shirt and popular attire of the younger generation who inhabited the arenas they covertly observed. During earlier ethnographic research with police officers, Hobbs (1989) had been told he dressed like a social worker and therefore did not blend in with those he was studying, prompting him to change his attire to suit the setting.

### **Talking, listening, watching and taking notes**

*Participant observation is about engaging in a social scene, experiencing it and seeking to understand and explain it* (May, 1997: 155)

*Participant observation: central and defining feature of ethnography* (Burgess, 1984; Delamont, 1992; Wolcott, 1995)

This method of observing has its roots embedded in the theoretical background of the more developed versions of symbolic interactionism (Flick, 2009), and generally represents the understanding of theory and method from early American sociologists such as, Robert Park and George Herbert Mead. A method that was primarily honed by anthropologists; participant observation was borrowed, to an extent, by the sociologists from the Chicago

School in the nineteen twenties and thirties. These sociologists studied the lives of the homeless (Anderson, 1923) and those of gang members (Thrasher, 1927) to name a few; viewing the world through the eyes of those they were studying.

Denzin's definition of participant observation sums it up succinctly for me, and more importantly for those researchers who choose to employ an ethnographic method utilizing the use of more than one method:

Participant observation will be defined as a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection (1989b: 157-158).

The usefulness of participant observation as a research method was documented by Whyte (1955:303) in his honest account of research when he remarked, '...as I sat and listened, I learned the answers to the questions I would not have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interview basis'. This highlights how Whyte (1955) used interviews to supplement the data collected through observing the participants in their natural setting in society – street corners. In reality, the use of observation as a research technique was instigated by the *Corner Boys*, the group he was researching as they became frustrated with the amount of questions William Foote-Whyte was asking, and they expressed this dislike of intrusion in their lives. This is one of the reasons I class Whyte (1955) as a pioneer of participant observation as a research method in social sciences.

For this method to prove effective it was paramount that I could strike up a rapport with the prison officers, enabling me to gradually gain their trust. Academically, the use of this method offers the chance to generate new understandings and to subsequently build on theories. However, alongside the positive aspects of participant observation come the negative, and it is commonly known that this method takes time and commitment. Hours of observing may bring nothing new to the data, although there is also the chance that a couple

of minutes could bring vital data. As Goffman (1959) noted through his dramaturgical analysis, people behave differently from minute-to-minute, day-to-day, and it was important I captured this. Researchers also record in diverse ways, see different things and will therefore record different observations and interpret the data in a different fashion (Robson, 2002).

I have documented my observations in field notebooks using four different coloured pens enabling me to highlight themes, areas to re-visit along with new areas to explore whilst in the field. Before leaving the prison each day I retreated to the privacy of the office space I had been provided with in the prison drop in centre to expand on any notes taken; this has also taken place in my car before leaving the prison. Throughout this early stage of observation and note taking, no member of staff commented on my note taking so at this point I do not see my notebook and pen as a threat. On the contrary, when officers are talking to me I feel they are expecting me to take notes showing that I am listening to what they are telling me. Due to the layout of the prison, and weather permitting, I am able to take myself off to the gardens where I can sit and go through the field notes I have taken that day. This allowed me to expand on certain notes and highlight areas of interest. If the weather is not on my side, I go through the same process, albeit behind closed doors, in the office area provided at the prison. Having these areas in the prison where I could retreat to alone was something I was grateful for. I was conscious not to write everything down all the time whilst observing, as I wanted to observe. I also realised quite early on that by writing copious amounts of notes quickly was of no benefit to myself because when I revisited the notes later in the day some of it was indecipherable due to scruffy handwriting. Again, this was another learning curve.

I observed prison officers and senior officers on the wing during the hours of 9am and 6pm. I had requested to come in during the night shift however this proved difficult to organise due to staff shortages. I would have also required a different set of keys if I was in the prison after 6pm. I observed the officers during association times, meal times, lock up periods, cell searches and also spent time with them during break times when officers seemed to lower their guard and speak more openly. I also spent time in the staff areas and talked to officers during their coffee or cigarette breaks. During the same hours during the day I observed staff in the reception area booking new arrivals, in the segregation area I spent hours observing in the staff office and also shadowed officers as they escorted women to the showers and secure exercise yard. I was conscious the staff in segregation appeared more suspicious of why I was there and what I was doing and I wondered at times that if I had not had my own set of prison keys whether I would have been welcomed onto the unit. I spent time in the visits area although not during visiting time as I was aware that visiting families with children had not consented to my research and I did not want to impose on the little time they had to visit. During the warm sunny days I spent time sat outside in different areas of the prison observing officers as they escorted the women, or supervised the women unloading stores, delivering laundry and collecting refuse. I spent time in the small bistro/café area where some staff members took their lunch break, however, this was frequented more by education staff and offender management staff and staff from other outside agencies rather than the uniformed prison officers. When the bell sounds for meal times the outside area is a hive of activity with the women walking back to their areas to eat. Staff members eat at the same time and those that are not on meal duties either meet friends to eat or go to the gym, no officers leave the prison during this time. The outside area goes very quiet very quickly and the hustle and bustle of movement gravitates towards the residential and wing areas. Similarly, when the bell sounds at the end of meal times it is like

watching cockroaches emerge from all areas possible and the movement continues whilst the women go back to their places of work or education.

I also spent time talking to staff and observing in the Mother and Baby Unit (MBU). The unit is staffed by an outside agency and the staff were more than willing to speak to me and show me what their day involves. The manager had fought for prison officers to stay away from the unit as the babies were repeating words the officers used as their first words spoken. For instance, officers used to come round and shout meds [medication] and a number of the babies had said meds as their first word, I acknowledged how highly inappropriate this was alongside the positive work they were trying to do. The only time prison officers enter this unit is if there has been a prisoner misbehaving (their words not mine), though I was assured this was not a frequent occurrence.

With the staff shortages came higher levels of risk and personal safety and this resonated with the Mother and Baby unit. The manager had said that a number of times she had to phone security as the women were wandering around the unit, looking into the windows when unescorted. This had been a knock on effect of the officers being taken off the residential side and prisoners wandering around unsupervised. A positive piece of news came as I was wrapping up my fieldwork, the management at the unit had been in meetings with the governing governor to have the bars removed from the windows of the unit and this had been sanctioned. Alongside these observations I spent time talking to the female officers initially in the form of an interview and then during less formal conversations.

### **Asking questions and listening to the answers**

I employed the use of semi-structured interviews alongside the observations I have discussed above; and the interviews play an integral part in the application of my

ethnographic fieldwork. It is evident that opportunities for interviews may arise ‘spontaneously and surprisingly’ (Flick, 2009:169) instead of exclusively arranged interviews, and this is how most of my interviews have panned out to date. Suggestions for conducting ethnographic interviews come from Spradley:

*It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants... (1979: 58-59).*

I have taken this more informal approach to interviewing, as I did not want the interview process to become what could seem like an interrogation for the officers. Again, due to the amount of staff changes taking place during this period it was also proving difficult to arrange staff cover for interviews. However, as a large number of officers who were interviewed worked on the residential side (the houses) this process has run smoothly and has been less time consuming for both the officers and myself (I have not had to deal with interviews being cancelled and re-arranged). The prisoners in these houses are out all day at work or education, and all of the houses have a staff office situated on the ground floor. This meant I could interview quite easily without having to arrange a definite time and more importantly, it was a private environment for the process to go ahead. This process became more difficult once changes had been implemented and the staff on the houses were removed and situated in a central hub area. Interviewing staff on the prison wing became easier over the final weeks of fieldwork, and since the changes in routine were implemented. The women were now locked up during the morning period if they did not have a job or attend education due to the shortages of frontline staff; they are also locked in their cells during what used to be association period. I acknowledge this is not a positive move for the prisoners, however, as a researcher I had time to interview and converse without being disturbed or overheard. The more senior staff I interviewed all had personal office spaces.

As stated earlier in this chapter, no recording equipment has been allowed into the prison (although I had emailed the head of security to see if this would be allowed) so all interview data has been recorded using handwritten notes. To make this process a little easier for myself, I would set out the questions in my notebook and write probing questions at the top of each page. I utilised these probes each time I thought the answers given were too general, or too short, or when the interviewee had missed the point I was intending to make. The repetitive procedure of interviewing meant that after the first six or seven interviews I was familiar with my research questions; allowing the informal process to flow, more on a conversational level. Similar to my process of taking observation notes, I would retreat to the gardens or private office space I had been allocated after each interview and go through the notes I had taken expanding sections where necessary. I have to agree with Dilulio (1987: 273) and his discussion around participants feeling intimidated by the presence of a tape recorder when he says, ‘...people will tell you more if you take notes rather than use a recorder’. There has been only one occasion when I felt it necessary to close my notebook and give the interviewee my undivided attention. A female officer was re-counting an uncomfortable experience she had witnessed regarding the heavy-handed restraint tactics employed by three senior male officers on the wing (this story has been written in more detail in the final analysis chapter of this thesis). The officer was talking quite openly about feeling ostracized on the wing by other members of staff after she had aired her views and it was obvious this time had been both stressful and upsetting for the officer. It should be noted, I documented this conversation later in the day and I believe it goes a long way to highlighting the current literature on male prison officers (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price, 2001; Liebling *et al*, 2011) and the reality of the prison officer role in the workplace; along with the traditional norms and values that are an integral part of their occupational culture.

Interestingly, before each interview or conversation I had with the officers I asked them for three words that would best describe their occupation. Some officers gave three words straight away, others had to think about it. Not only was I using this as an ice breaker but I collated the words to create word clouds at different points of the research analysis. It was interesting that these three words became more negative and unprofessional towards the end of my research when both staffing levels and morale were low. The word that was most used by the officers throughout when describing their occupation was ‘rewarding’ and I will comment on this further in my conclusion of this thesis.

### **Conversations as a research tool**

As previously noted, it became increasingly difficult to interview the officers in private locations due to staff shortages. Therefore, when relationships had been established and there was a level of familiarity and trust between myself and the officers, it felt right to not pressure the officers for interview time but to document the many conversations I had. Some of these conversations were one-to-one based and others were conversations I had with multiple officers at any one time. Some of the conversations were quite ordinary in the sense that they did not start off concerning matters relevant to my research and to illustrate my interest in the officers as a workforce I would regularly refer back to previous conversations or comments purely to demonstrate I had listened to them and had remembered what they had told me. This more informal way of collating qualitative data was useful due to the diminishing numbers of frontline staff available to give me their time to be interviewed. It allowed for a less structured format and I believe the officers spoke more openly when they felt it was not a structured interview where I asked direct questions. However, it should be noted that I was always aware I may not be able to capture everything that was said to me and I accepted this as part of the process as continuous note-taking during conversations

would have been inappropriate, so at times I had to rely on my memory and as with the observations, write the notes after the conversations had taken place. I was also aware that I did not ask every officer I spoke to during these conversations their name, some officers just offered their opinions or comments, though I have used some of what was said in my analysis chapters.

### **Awareness of negative impacts generated through the research process**

With any qualitative research there is potential for negative impacts to be generated (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). For the purpose of this research project and due to the nature of questions, and the environment the interviews were conducted in, the potential was fairly low. When considering the stress and demands of the project on myself as a researcher a support network of academic supervisors along with other student researchers was always in place so debriefing sessions took place on a regular basis. These peer support sessions, 'contribute to guarding against researcher bias through debriefing sessions after periods in the research setting' (Robson, 2002: 175). Under no circumstances did I aim to cause distress or harm to any participants, for the sole purpose of collecting rich qualitative data (BSC, 2006; ESRC, 2015).

### **Leaving the field**

PhD prison researchers regularly discuss the obstacles to gaining access to prison as a field of research, however, much less is written about disengaging from the research and leaving the field. Here, I would like to discuss my experience of wrapping my fieldwork up, handing back my belt and key tally, and saying goodbye to the prison.

I finished conducting observations and interviews at the beginning of October 2014, though I did not hand my keys back until March 2015. This is something I have thought about in

detail, and spoke to my supervisor, academic colleagues and the peer support I had at length. My research was over and yet I realised this was because it had to be due to deadlines and time regarding this thesis, and not because I wanted it to be. With less resources and less staff the prison was changing most days, making it as it was at the beginning, an interesting environment to study through an ethnographic lens. I wanted to speak to more officers and I had already started to think about future research projects, I had also started to question whether I had become *institutionalised*. Had the prison started to affect my personal well-being?

Alongside this, I had also thought a lot about the amount of time it took me to gain access to the prison and was aware I was already thinking ahead to the next project and how I would gain access. There had been no agreed timescale with the prison, and no one asked when I was leaving, I had started to feel part of the prison and wanted to stay to learn more and explore more. When the day came that I decided to hand the keys in I realised how far my relationship with some of the officers had come. When I first arrived at the prison and was introduced to people I shook hands with them. When I located some of the staff I had spoken to over the months to say I would not be coming back, they hugged me and thanked me with genuine emotion.

Here I feel it is appropriate to discuss the notion of *going native*, and the difficulties surrounding this as a prison ethnographer. Academic textbooks remind us that under no circumstances should we go native and we must therefore retain some emotional distance. However, we are also advised to form close attachments to our subjects as this is the only way to understand them. Personally, I do not feel I got too close to my research respondents, and some qualitative researchers believe a certain level of interaction with the subjects of the study is the sole purpose of ethnography. For instance, Law (1994:39) remarks, 'I am

not a detached observer... You could argue that I have gone native. And I would respond: we all go native; we all interact with what we study'. I agree with this comment, though I do not believe in total surrender and remained conscious throughout the research that the prison had to remain in some way, strange as an environment to myself.

### **Looking back: a reflexive discussion**

Firstly, there were obstacles to this research that I could not have anticipated. For instance, the on-going reduction of frontline officers – those I wanted to speak to. This caused problems in relation to officers being moved to work in different areas of the prison and for me they became difficult to keep track of. I had also wanted to interview the officers in an isolated area for reasons of confidentiality and this area had been granted by the governing governor, though this became near impossible to accommodate when there were not enough staff to cover those I had arranged to interview.

Alongside this, it has been acknowledged that prison research is emotive and at times affective, though Jewkes (2012) acknowledges there are only a small number of prison researchers who consider the emotional content of prison studies. For instance, after a tense and emotional day researching in prison, Liebling (1999a: 150) writes about researchers 'resorting to stress-related behaviours, emotional turbulence and researcher's letting off steam'. Quite differently, during her analysis of prison conditions in Russia, Piacentini (2004: 21) comments on a Russian governor when he asked her to wear make-up when she went to the prison because 'he liked that'. As prison ethnographers we are required to give a certain amount of emotional investment.

During the early stages of the research I suffered with anxiety dreams on the nights before I was going into the prison. The dreams were always about not finding the prison, not being able to open the main gate, not being able to find the front door and I became aware I was

anxious about not being allowed into the prison, and the length of time it had taken to secure research access was playing on my mind. These subsided after the first month so I believe it had more to do with the past stress of trying to gain access. I also discussed this with a Professor in my department at university and he made me realise this anxiety was more to do with research on a whole than it was solely to do with prison research. I also suffered minor headaches each time I left the prison and still do not know whether this was due to the noise level at times or the fact I was thinking deeply about everything I had seen and heard. There were also sensitive personal issues I had to deal with and I comment on one of these situations below.

The emotional turmoil I endured the day after my close friend had hung himself made me see death in the prison from different perspectives. I acknowledge the pain the prisoners must feel when they lose a friend in the prison to suicide. I also acknowledged the emotional struggle of the officers as I was acutely aware I wanted to get out of the prison and I could, the officers have no choice, they must stay and complete their shift, then return the next day to work. The way they manage their emotions and present themselves in front of the prisoners and other work colleagues is integral to this job. Knowing how I felt, and having the choice not to return to the prison until after my friends funeral I knew I was in control of my own emotions, I could grieve at home with loved ones and it was ok to show this emotion. My concern here is that some officers do not release these emotions and by becoming de-sensitised to deaths in custody it could have an impact on their own mental well-being. This could be something that does not surface for years after these horrific events, and could surface in the form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Personally I suffered another health problem although this was just prior to me gaining access to the prison. I feel it is important to mention this however as it made me think quite

deeply about a story relayed to me about a prisoner who subsequently died of the same health issue. I re count the story of the prisoner in more detail in the next chapter. I had been taken to hospital with pneumonia and pleurisy, I struggled to breathe, something that was noticeable to myself and to family members close to me. After tests at the hospital I was discharged with two types of medication and signed on the sick for three weeks, I spent most of those three weeks in bed either resting or sleeping and I have no lasting effects of the illness.

# Introduction to Key Respondents

I was aware from the onset that I would require the support of a few female officers to assist me in gaining some form of social acceptance from the wider population of prison officers. The research methods literature I engaged with made it clear that qualitative researchers require the support of a few key individuals within the research setting (Flick, 2009; Robson, 2002; Silverman, 2010).

Here I will briefly describe seven of my key respondents. Women I met early during the research process and it was these officers that introduced me to other female officers. They also offered a wealth of information on different occasions when I wanted to confirm prison regimes, prison numbers, staff numbers and so on. These officers were invaluable during the early stages of research as they were both willing and able to introduce me to other officers and other areas of the prison. These key respondents were also fundamental in the process of me understanding the many abbreviations used by prison officers along with the 'prison slang' that admittedly I was unfamiliar with. I owe them for their interest, time, honesty and openness.

**Claudette** – Claudette has worked in the Prison Service for nearly thirty years and was an interesting interviewee in the sense she was one of the few officers who had worked in both men's and women's prisons pre cross-posting and was therefore one of the first women to be posted to an adult male prison. Working through the ranks has given Claudette a wealth of experience and her enthusiasm for the job remains at a high level. During the course of my research a high number of officers commented on how competent she was in her senior role.

**Gloria** – Gloria has worked for the Prison Service for twenty-three years and is a prison officer with no senior duties. She has only worked with women prisoners, and was one of the first officers I was introduced to and has since remained a key informant. Her relationships with the prisoners are well established and she speaks to them all with the same friendly manner.

**Gina** – Gina had previously worked as a registered nurse before changing profession and starting employment with the Prison Service. Gina had worked in adult male prisons before working in the women's estate. After 24 years service she had decided to take the VEDS package on offer. Considering she was leaving the service, Gina spoke highly of the job and her colleagues. Gina was extremely grateful to me after being interviewed and said it had really made her think about why she had taken the job in the first place and ultimately why she had chosen to leave.

**Suzanne** – Suzanne is a senior officer and has spent over 20 years in the Prison Service working in the women's prison estate. She had joined the service to work with Young Offenders (YO's), however, when the YO's were integrated into the main population of the prison she moved onto the wing area. Suzanne was always enthusiastic and polite when we met and very obviously came to trust me.

**Maria** – Maria has worked for the Prison Service for nearly 18 years and has worked in the same prison for the whole time. Maria had had a difficult time at the prison during the years she gave birth to her children, where she had claimed senior staff were inconsiderate when she returned to part time duties. Maria had never wanted to climb the promotion ladder and appeared to isolate herself from most staff during working hours.

**Piper** – Piper had worked at the women’s prison for over 10 years, and had come through the traditional military route. Piper enjoyed the quick change around of prisoners on the prison wing and worked closely with the young offenders. An obvious mother figure on the wing, Piper had great concern for the YO’s on the wing and those who were first time inmates.

**Natalie** – Natalie had entered the profession from a military background and has worked at the women’s prison for 10 years. Natalie was a trained prison negotiator and openly spoke of the times she had prevented prisoners from serious self-harm and suicide. Always friendly with prisoners who came into the office. There were a number of points she brought up in the interview and during further conversations that I felt needed confirmation. Her figures on self-harm seemed exaggerated and I felt this was more to do with massaging her ego than the truth.

### **Why join the Prison Service?**

Before I move on to the main thematic areas of analysis, I would like to include data relating to why the women had chosen this predominantly masculine occupation, a career that carries much stigma and little respect from the general public, and one that courts bad press/publicity. I feel the data offers a sense of the characteristics of the female officers and I cannot say I am surprised that most of the officers ‘fell into’ the job rather than it being a planned career. There were also a number of officers who were clear they had joined for the ‘decent’ wage and ‘decent’ pension. This type of prison officer fits into two of the working personalities described by David Scott (2008, 2012); the *careerist* and the *mortgage payer*.

Some of the officers had joined simply because the wages were good and saw it as a means to an end, a way of paying the household bills whilst others saw joining the prison service as

a good career move; an occupation where there was room for promotion. The prison officers role is a disciplined one and officers spoke about being interested in the occupation as there were similarities to being in the army. The discipline of the occupation and the uniform were important but unlike being in the military, they would be based at home with family and friends. There are similarities with both these occupations as family members know very little about the environment they work in, they cannot contact them at work during working hours, there is an element of uncertainty when they leave for work because they are going into an environment that can be volatile carrying a high level of risk of coming home, harmed or injured.

Here is what the female officers said about why they had joined the Prison Service,

*I was only twenty when I started, the wages were good and I thought it was a good career*  
(Gloria, PO)

*Wages were good, I thought it was a well respected career* (Natalie, PO)

Along with,

*Money was good, with a decent pension, it pays the bills, simple as that* (PO)

And,

*My dad was in the service and it's decent pay* (Tasha, PO)

Another told me,

*I joined the service after working as a civil servant, I was bored doing a desk job and saw an advert for the prison so thought I'd give it a go because I was only young and the money was good* (Vee, SO)

Other officers had come through the more traditional route and had joined the Prison Service after serving in the army, and it is a clear indication of what the literature tells us about the traditional prison officer,

*I used to be in the army and this seemed like a decent career when I left (Piper, PO)*

And,

*I was in the military before I came here, I've always worked in male dominated areas, I'm used to the banter (Suzanne, SO)*

Along with,

*I was in the army but I wanted a family and wanted to be based in the same area so I joined the Prison Service (Tasha, PO)*

Another expressed the similarities of the army,

*I liked the thought of the discipline without being in the army (Gloria, PO)*

For others it was definitely not their first choice career,

*I couldn't get a job in the police, my eyesight was not good enough so this was the next best thing (Maria, PO)*

Along with,

*I wanted to join the police, but didn't get through some of the tests so I decided to join the Prison Service (PO)*

Whilst other officers had moved into the occupation from other employment that had no relation to the role of a prison officer,

*I used to work in catering but the money was rubbish. There was a big prison recruitment drive at the time and they wanted people with life experiences, so I applied (Tiffany, PO)*

And,

*I used to work in a supermarket but I was bored and wanted a challenge, so I applied here and have been here ever since (PO)*

Some of the female officers had joined the service because their partners or husbands already worked there, making it a convenient place of employment,

*I used to be a nurse and then for 4 years I worked for an agency in a male prison where my husband worked, I enjoyed the work so I joined up to the service (Gina, PO)*

And,

*My husband was in the service, that's why I joined (Sam, PO)*

And,

*My husband is quite high up in the service so I knew it was a good career move (Wanda, SO)*

Whilst another told me,

*My husband had worked here for a few years and said I should join because the money was good... we go on some lovely holidays (PO)*

The above quotes concerning why the female officers had joined the Service tie in with the current literature we have on prison officers in England and Wales (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling *et al*, 2011). It highlights the women join the service for similar reasons as the men, for instance through the traditional route after having a career in the military or because of the similarities of the discipline involved for those who had not been in the army. These prison officers could also come under the bracket of Scott's (2008) *disciplinarian* working personality. Others are in line with the groups formed by David Scott (2008) as those who joined because the job paid well would go under the *mortgage payer* bracket and the few who saw the job as a good career move would be placed under the working personality of the *careerists*. After the women had joined the Service, none of them spoke about problems they had encountered with *occupational socialisation* as Farnworth (1991, 1992) had suggested in earlier literature.

# Chapter Three: Changing Relationships

## Introduction

*A well ordered and safe environment is still characterised by open, relaxed relationships of mutual respect between staff and prisoners* (Pilling, 1992: 3 cited in Liebling *et al*, 2011: 92)

The academic literature clearly states the importance and centrality of staff-prisoner relationships to the smooth running of a prison (Sparks *et al*, 1996; Crawley, 2004a) whilst more recently Liebling *et al* (2011) argued for clearer thinking about what constitutes ‘a right relationship’ when we consider these two groups of individuals. According to Pilling (1992: 2) the basic tenets of good relationships are about *knowing, respecting and caring for prisoners as individuals*. The term relationship can mean a number of things, for instance, connection, association, alliance and bond (Crawley, 2004a). Relationships require a flow of interaction and dependence and in an environment such as prison, it has been claimed ‘relationships are invested with an unusual amount of power’ (Liebling *et al*, 2011: 85). According to Drake (2007) and Crewe (2006) staff and prisoners exhibit comfortable relationships but these relationships are forced from both sides and are contaminated by the presence of power and authority.

This chapter is concerned with the relationships formed between female prison officers and the female prisoners in their care. Although the concept of relationships was discussed earlier in the literature review, it is important to state here why positive and trusting staff-prisoner relationships are essential to the inner workings of a prison environment.

The trusting relationship is a necessary one for prison officers and prisoners. When we consider some women enter the prison system in crisis (struggling with addiction, detoxing from drugs or alcohol, anxious about their children, anxious about losing their home), it is this type of relationship that will assist in alleviating the pains of imprisonment for women.

Relationships in this sense could offer support to the women, building their self-esteem and empowering them to lead *better* lives when they leave the prison.

It is worth remembering here that one third of female prisoners have been sexually abused and over half are victims/survivors of domestic abuse (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). Alongside this, high numbers of female prisoners have no sustained support network outside of the prison walls, they are generally the primary carer and lone parent of dependent children and have no family members they can rely on (Prison Reform Trust, 2013). Therefore the relationships formed in prison are important ones and require nurturing until they reach the point of trust. The first stage of relationship building between prison officers and prisoners is quite simply a process of talking and listening.

This chapter will address the observation that relationship building in the prison is being hampered by budget cuts and reduced prison staff numbers. With the reduction of frontline staff, those officers who work face-to-face with the prisoners on a daily basis in areas of the prison such as the wing, segregation, reception and residential houses, and the unfortunate but inevitable move to have to lock-up prisoners for longer hours during the day. Through conversations and observations the study revealed the fluidity of relationship building inside the prison was slowly becoming more rigid as the cuts and policy demands of neo-liberal politics have a direct impact to the frontline of the prison estate. As one officer stated, *we have got to have good relationships in here, and respect for each other* (PO).

The coalition government came to power in May 2010 and since this time the number of frontline officers in the prisons in England and Wales has fallen 30 - 40 per cent nationally (Howard League, 2014). At the same time the prison population rose to an all time high in 2011 to 88,179 and has remained at a significantly high level since (Howard League, 2014). This has left prison estates poorly staffed yet overcrowded and some would claim, unsafe

environments to either live or work in (The Economist, 2014; Howard League, 2014; Laville and Taylor, 2014). When this project started in September 2013 there were officially 16,680 serving prison officers in England and Wales, by the time it concluded this number had reduced to 14,530 (NOMS, 2013; 2014). During the research period HMPYOI Prison lost approximately 35 per cent of frontline officers, this equates to 42 prison officers (correct at the time of leaving fieldwork October 2014). With less staff available to participate in personal interactions and prisoners spending more time locked behind their cell doors; the *time* required to build trusting relationships is at an all time low. This was evident during conversations with frontline officers, with officer's expressing they were over-worked being a dominant rhetoric.

### **Female officers relationships with the prisoners**

When we consider the complex lives many female prisoners live when not imprisoned (Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Prison Reform Trust, 2013), the relationships these women build inside the prison are a vital part of coping with the *pains of imprisonment*. Many, though not all, of the women are deemed vulnerable, have suffered sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse at the hands of either partners, family members or strangers (Boswell and Wedge, 2002; Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Corston, 2007). Other women may have been cared for in their early years by a parent who was an alcoholic or drug addict (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). Whilst others will have spent some of their childhood in children's homes or in the care of the local authority. Caddle and Crisp (1997) found in their sample of female prisoners that 15 per cent had grown up in children's homes and 20 per cent overall had been taken into care at some point during their childhood. These familial circumstances and relationships in childhood may have a strong influence on an individual's future and behaviour (Williams et al, 2012) and as Farrington (2000) suggested, these adverse

childhood experiences may then lead to future criminality. It is worth noting here that in 1993 came the introduction of prison officers wearing name badges, primarily so prisoners could address the officers in a civil manner using names and not Miss or Boss, a move that was important in terms of building positive staff-prisoner relationships.

Observations and conversations during fieldwork highlighted some of the women are well known to the officers as they unfortunately inhabit Her Majesties Prisons on a regular basis. The officers who have worked there for long periods of time are now familiar with different generations of family members, as one officer remarked,

*You haven't got time to forge relationships now. I have young girls coming in here now who have been told by their mum or aunty to look out for me when they arrive on the wing...coz [sic] I'm alright and I have looked after other members of their family when they have been on here [wing] The girl knows straight away that I can be trusted and will sort out what I can for her...things like inductions for courses, work or maybe the gym or even just a pair of hair straighteners for her to use in the morning (Alex, PO)*

This type of comment from a long serving officer illustrates the relationships formed over time are important to the wellbeing of the prisoners and can also have an impact on prisoners who have been sentenced for the first time. It also became aware this type of relationship bond would mainly come from the more experienced officers, faces that are known within the institution.

### **The prison wing**

This section will consider the women imprisoned on the main wing of the prison. Through conversations held with female officers on the wing, it was brought to my attention these women are some of the most chaotic and vulnerable in the prison. There is a toxic mixture of women, from those on remand, those in prison for the first time, women detoxing from

drugs and alcohol, prolific self-harmers, chronic and acute levels of mental illness and women who are returned to the wing on basic conditions after an episode of ‘bad’ behaviour, and possibly time spent in segregation. All prisoners begin their sentence on the basic level of the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme. This involves twenty-three hour lock-up, limited phone calls, no access to private cash and no gym access. Prisoners move up to the standard level of the scheme when they show a level of engagement with the prison regime or treatment. Similarly, the prisoners are moved back down to basic level regime if they fail to engage with the regime or for poor behaviour. The prison wing is a hive of activity, noisy and busy, and association time is an opportunity for the women to chase up appointments and courses with the officers, and to catch up and gossip with each other. Included here is an extract from the first day spent researching on the wing,

*As I walk through the gate for the first time I approach the officers who are stood around a desk, as I turn around to face the wing area I am met with a number of prisoners who were just stood still, staring at me. I wish I could’ve taken a photograph of their faces and that someone could’ve taken a picture of mine. It is something I will never forget. I explain to the women I am not a prison official and that I am not taking any form of notes on them but am here to observe and talk to the prison officers. This seems to satisfy their suspicions, they wander off and the noise level rises to almost deafening, there are 74 women on this side of the wing and women can talk! One of the officers takes me up to the first landing, and observing the dynamics of the wing from here highlights certain characteristics of the female prisoner community. The women are affectionate with each other, some hold hands and cuddle, others are brushing and straightening other women’s hair, some of the women bicker about stolen/lost items of clothing. The way the women interact with each other highlights intimate and friendly relationships, and it is obvious to an observer that some of them know each other quite well. The officers are jovial with the women, there is a lot of friendly banter (5/8/13)*

The observations noted in the above extract illustrates the women’s prisoner community is quite different from the one Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958) informed us about. The

women's friendships and relationships are overt, they do not appear shy when showing feelings towards each other.

Over the course of the study the prisoner association time was reduced from one hour in the morning (10-11am) and one and a half hours in the early evening (5.30-7pm) to nothing. The women on the wing were now being locked up for twenty-three hours a day. This was due to the diminishing numbers of frontline officers (as stated above, nationally the Prison Service had reduced frontline numbers by 2,150 with a loss of 42 frontline officers at HMPYOI Prison), and on-going concerns around the personal safety of the prison officers. The impact of this on both the prisoners and officers was visible to see and hear, through observations, interviews and conversations. The prisoner community and the frontline workforce was changing and this was having an impact on building and sustaining relationship.

The study noted a quiet and calmer environment during morning association whilst all prisoners were locked behind their cell doors. Noise levels rose when the women started communicating with each other through the walls. The change in environment was a result of budget cuts to the Prison Service as according to staff. Here is an extract from the field notes that day,

*It's 10.30 in the morning and I head over to the wing as I have arranged an interview. The wing is quiet and the girls are locked in their cells and this is normally a noisy, busy time in this area of the prison. After locating my interviewee she informs me she can't leave the main wing area as there are no staff to cover her. She goes on to tell me the women have no association time at present due to the low numbers of staff. It is obvious by her facial expression and tone of voice that she is uncomfortable with this situation. The officer is eager to be interviewed and suggests we do it in the main communal area of the wing as no one will be able to hear what she is saying. I agree and we take a seat on the sofa. Throughout the interview women shouted and banged on their doors and I get a sense this is*

*out of frustration. I realise how important association time is for the women and how much frustration this situation causes for both officers and prisoners. Staff morale is low and I don't hang around after the interview...the officers don't want to talk much, I feel as though they want to be left alone (Field notes, 30/9/13).*

The extract above highlights the cuts to the prison budget were having a direct effect on the prisoners. Association time is when the women can phone home and speak to their families, socialize with each other or talk to officers about appointments they need to make, or work roles to apply for. It became visible this change in the prison regime had not been a good one for either the officers or prisoners, and there was limited face-to-face contact time, and some of the officers complained the lack of time and resources were reducing the personalised care they could offer the women. For instance,

*There's not enough of us on here [wing] now they have reduced the numbers so much so the women lose out as they are locked up more during the day.... these women are vulnerable and when they can't talk to us or their mates [other prisoners], many of them self-harm when feeling isolated (Piper, PO)*

Along with,

*We used to have at least 7 or 8 staff on here...sometimes now there are just two of us, we can't do anything with the women (PO)*

Officers commented on how these changes were effecting the relationships with the women in their care,

*We used to have great relationships with the women, we had time to talk to them and listen to them...now we don't have that time...no-one is benefiting from these changes and the management just don't understand the impact (Alex, PO)*

Along with,

*We don't have time to maintain relationships anymore, the women are locked up more and there are days when they should be on association but there are not enough staff on here to*

*unlock them...you get a call from management telling you to unlock them, but it's unsafe with the staff numbers we are working on (Alex, PO)*

And,

*It's alright for them sat in their offices dishing out orders, but they don't come down here anymore so they don't know what it is like.... Who is benefitting from this Toni? Someone must be, but it's not us and it's not the prisoners (Suzanne, SO)*

Along with,

*We haven't got time to form relationships on here [wing] anymore. If the girls were upset we used to take them outside, have a fag if they smoked, have a coffee and a chat...but not now, we don't have the time (Piper, PO)*

The above comment highlights the relationships formed in this environment are not visible to all who work there, management do not witness this type of personal and informal interaction. It is relationships such as this that can have a positive effect on the prisoners and it may prevent someone from self-harming. This type of comment and behaviour from a prison officer is far removed from the current literature (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price, 2001; Liebling *et al*, 2011) we have on prison officer occupational culture.

Another officer stated, quite simply,

*We maintain the women, we don't rehabilitate, we don't have time, we just maintain them (Alex, PO)*

A senior officer who had been moved to an office-based job in the prison commented on previous relationships she had had with prisoners when working on the frontline,

*I have spent most of my time here on the houses, we had great banter, we knew the girls and had a great relationship with them (Vee, SO).*

The same officer went on to say,

*The bullies hated me because I never let them get away with anything. If I knew someone was being bullied or intimidated I would call for the girl to go and pick up, say, a parcel because then none of the other women would become suspicious and then when the girl came over I would talk to her (Vee, SO)*

Along with,

*Other times I would ask the chaplain to call certain girls over and I would sit at the back and they would talk to me in confidence there. This doesn't happen anymore, I can't imagine what goes on in those houses now, the girls are literally running them.... there is no staff on there anymore (Vee, SO)*

These comments illustrate how vital these relationships are between prison officers and prisoners, especially when identifying and managing vulnerable prisoners. The evidence above highlights that the government changes to the prison budget and subsequent loss of frontline staff members is having an impact on officers working on the wing. It is clear from these quotes the female officers feel they are limited in what they can do with the women on the wing. It also illustrates the officers feel there is less time to form relationships with the women due to a lack of staff, and how important these relationships are to both the staff and women. The importance of these staff-prisoner relationships has been highlighted in the prison literature and as noted in the literature review, staff-prisoner relationships are central to the smooth running of any prison (Sparks *et al*, 1996; Crewe, 2011)

### **No time to talk**

The impact of the changes to staffing levels was evident when officers discussed the lack of 'talk' time they now have with the women,

*There was a girl assaulted last week, slashed right across her chest by another prisoner. I felt dead sorry for her and told her that when everyone was locked up I would come back*

*and chat to her, and I did, she needed me and I wanted to be there for her, but we don't really have time for that anymore (Piper, PO).*

Along with,

*These girls need us, they don't come to prison to be hurt and scared and now when something happens they have no-one to talk to (Alex, PO)*

These comments show a level of empathy and care from the officers, words not usually associated with the behaviour of prison officers, and again, quite different from the current UK literature we have on their occupational culture (Crawley, 2004; Liebling et al, 2011)

During a conversation when officers were on a cigarette break, other female officers had this to say,

*We just don't have the time anymore to talk to the women, I find myself saying... just give me five minutes, just give me two minutes (PO)*

And,

*We spend our time filling in forms and ticking boxes now, it's not like it used to be, we don't have the time to talk to them [prisoners] anymore. Talking to the women one on one is a vital part of this job and now we don't have the time (PO)*

Whilst another stated,

*They are locked up more and become frustrated, there are less staff now to spend time with them (Piper, PO)*

And,

*Talking to their mates [other prisoners] is a big part of their day, you sense their frustration but there is nothing we can do, we need more staff (SO)*

One of the officers told me, during her coffee break she would go outside at the back of the wing, light a cigarette and wander down to some of the cell windows. She went on to say 'I feel sorry for some of the girls when we can't unlock them, they are on their own with no-

*one to talk to, some of them have never been here before, so I wander up to their cell window, pass them a cigarette and have a chat...it makes me feel better, makes me feel like I am doing something positive in a hopeless situation' (PO)*

It is this type of observation and conversation that highlights the humanitarian side of some of these female officers, it shows a conscience and an element of caring towards the female prisoners. It is also another part of their working role that is not visible to management.

The changes to staffing levels was also having a direct effect on the women residing in the residential housing blocks. The women on here have to take more responsibility for themselves, all of them either work or are in education and the regime is not as strict as on the wing. However, staff were being moved from this area of work and the houses were becoming more self sufficient, and predominantly being run by the prisoners.

The issue of not having enough *time* came up at different points throughout my research, the lack of time to talk to the women has had an impact on the working styles of some of the female officers. There is also evidence here to show the lack of time to talk can create workplace stress as some officers regularly worried that some of the women may harm themselves if they have no one to talk to. The eight categories classified by Brough and Biggs (2010) in relation to occupational stress are important here, even more so when we consider the current changes to the frontline work force. Especially of interest is their consideration of workload and time pressures, something they termed as *overload*.

### **Residential – the housing blocks**

The importance of strong relationships between the officers and prisoners was brought to my attention after a prisoner had died (of natural causes) whilst drawing the fieldwork to a close. The reduction of frontline staff has been documented in the field notes, as I observed

for myself what these changes have meant to those on the ground. The residential area houses approximately 140 prisoners and when this project started, the residential areas were manned and patrolled by ten officers during the day and four officers through the night. Towards the end of data collection and a reduction of frontline staff the officers were taken off the residential area and situated in a central hub, leaving no officers supervising the women during either the day or night. This change in regime was visible during the research and documented in the field notes,

*As I entered through the prison gate one morning I heard a Beyoncé song playing loudly out of one of the residential blocks, the reason I highlight this is because at this time of the day, all women housed in this area should be at work or education, the only women who do not go to work are those on X side of the wing. Alongside this, having entered one of the blocks I was met with four prisoners sat across the tables with their feet up in the reception area, smoking. Again, this behaviour was in stark contrast to what it had been previously, the women should have been at work or education and this was a no smoking area. After locating staff in another area of the prison it was evident numerous changes had taken place with direct effect to the frontline officers. Staff were visibly uneasy about the recent changes, they felt their level of personal risk had risen and also acknowledged the more vulnerable prisoners would be at risk of bullying, manipulation and violence (field notes 4/9/13)*

Later that same day whilst writing up notes in the garden area of the prison grounds, researcher safety became apparent whilst walking around the prison grounds unsupervised.

Here is another extract from the field notes,

*I have spent most of today with officers who worked on the houses and would normally at this time of the day be serving lunch. This no longer happens and serving meals is now the responsibility of the prisoners. Two officers now patrol the three avenues during meal times and today I patrol with them. The officers meet each other at the top of the 'back avenue' and discuss how they would always meet another officer now before patrolling, and would never patrol these areas alone. I evaluate my own safety as a researcher in this*

*unpredictable environment as up until this stage I have tended to walk around these areas alone. No-one has directly warned me of the potential insecurities and level of risk to myself, but I have decided that from now on I will be mindful of where I am in the prison when I am on my own (Field notes, 4/9/13)*

The following section discusses the discovery of a prisoner who died of natural causes. The woman was known to a number of officers and it was not the first prison sentence she had served. The officers knew nothing of her illness until she was admitted to the local hospital where she died the next day. The ‘natural cause’ in question was pneumonia and this is the part that is understandably frustrating for the officers. England is a well developed country and medical treatment is available for pneumonia, in fact very few people are hospitalized for it in this country as diagnoses generally leads to a course of antibiotics and recommended rest (NICE, 2014). Symptoms for this illness include difficulty breathing, chest pain, sweating and shivering and loss of appetite to name a few, all symptoms that would be noticeable to someone who knew you well and spent regular periods of time with you. So, why did a woman in prison die from an illness that is treatable? Some of the officers blamed themselves and felt that if they had still been based on the residential houses they would have noticed a difference in the woman’s health, mood and loss of appetite. With officers no longer being in charge of meal times (prisoners are now in charge of organising this) they have no way of knowing who is and is not eating regularly. The officers spoken to regarding this death in custody felt the incident was preventable,

*We had built strong relationships with those girls, we knew the ones on our houses well, we knew the vulnerable ones and also those capable of bullying. This would not have happened if we still had staff on there, we would’ve noticed the physical change in the poor girl, noticed if her appetite had gone down.... Do you know what I mean? (Alex, PO)*

Whilst another officer added,

*We don't live in a bloody third world country do we? She could've seen the doctor and got some tablets and she would still be here now. All this just gets hush hushed and the poor girl becomes another person who has died of natural causes in prison, another statistic (Piper, PO)*

And,

*This should be a place of safety, yet our duty of care is taken away from us.... we're still expected to do the same job...but with much less staff. How do you get sent here for minor offences and end up dead? I reckon a member of staff would have to be killed in here for someone to sit up and take notice of what we are saying. It's unsafe for the prisoners and unsafe for the staff (Alex, PO)*

This conversation illustrates the importance of building relationships with the women, although the officers feel this is not taken into consideration by the management. The relationships built over time may well have saved someone's life in this instance. Events such as this above highlight the work of Liebling et al (2010) and how they argue that stress is primarily caused by organisational problems and not necessarily the job role itself.

*There is pressure at meds [medication] time on the houses, there are not enough staff. Some of the girls want to talk and we haven't got the time. It's a worry coz [sic] if anything happened on the frontline we would get it in the neck. I spend most of my shift thinking please not on my shift. It becomes stressful for all of us (Tiffany, PO)*

Comments such as this highlight how the reduced frontline staff numbers can have an impact on the well being of the prison officers. Unable to carry out their duties without the added pressure of something happening to one of the prisoners some of the officers felt stressed and uncomfortable with the current situation. Other officers commented on 'good' relationships they felt they had built up with the women,

*I used to work with the 15-18 year olds. They used to be kept separate from the other prisoners in one of the houses. There always used to be trouble on there and they put me on there to sort it out. I loved it and I built up some good relationships on there and saw a lot*

*of the girls change in a positive way. I made a sign and put it on the door of the house....Swiss Finishing School (Vee, SO)*

Along with,

*I had really good relationships with the girls in the houses, we had built up trust, but now we just won't be there for them. I remember the days when there was an officer on each house plus night staff walking round...now we have no staff on there and no night staff (Tiffany, PO)*

The female officers openly discussed their concerns about the lack of quality of care for the prisoners and their concerns regarding this. *'How are we supposed to do one-to-one? We just spend our time saying give me a minute and just fob them off'* (Field notes, general conversation on the wing)

Other staff spoke of making a difference to some of the prisoners and how this centred around the relationships they had built up, illustrating that comfortable relationships between staff and prisoners do exist in the prison environment (Drake, 2007),

*We had a young girl with ADHD and she wanted to assault the child killers in here, she was a very angry prisoner and she used to approach me when angry and I taught her how to manage it and cope, she thanked me, that's what I like, she was really grateful...that is what relationship building is all about (Suzanne, SO)*

Along with,

*We had an 80 year old in for arson, she should never have been in here, she was too vulnerable, so I spent time with her, built a relationship with her and helped her through the sentence...when she left she said thanks, I'd have been dead without you (Natalie, PO)*

Another officer spoke of how the changes were impacting on the women themselves and how certain prisoners were feeling scared and unsafe,

*It's getting worse Toni, with all the staff changes. Now there are no officers on the residential side the girls from here [wing] don't want to move. They don't want to go on the houses coz of the bullying. They hear all the stories from other women around the prison and they are scared. I have girls crying they are that scared to move, they feel safe on here but we have no room to keep them, we have women moving over from the first night centre every day so we have to make room (Alex, PO).*

And,

*The officers on here [wing] know the girls who will purposefully self-harm so they can move back to the wing. It's sad when you think some of these girls will self harm because they are frightened of the area they are sent to in here, it upsets us and frustrates us but no-one listens we are just told what to do. Our experience on the ground and the relationships we form with some of these women counts for nothing; violence is on the increase and so is self harm (Alex, PO)*

The extracts above from Natalie and Alex are a powerful indictment against the recent changes and there is a sense that what was once helpful in terms of staff/prisoner relations has more recently been undermined by cost-cutting.

*I am more relaxed working on the houses, I know the girls well, I've built up relationships with them. You have to have your wits about you on the wing coz you never know what could happen (Maria, PO)*

The comments above show the necessity for strong staff and prisoner relationships and it is here that the research findings are in contrast with those of Crewe (2005, 2006) when he claims this type of relationship is uncomfortable and forced from both sides.

### **Segregation**

When speaking to officers working in the segregation block their response regarding relationships was more blunt,

*They [women] are not on the seg[segregation] to build relationships (Tiffany, PO)*

And,

*The women are on here for punishment or personal safety, we don't build relationships on here (PO)*

Along with,

*It's not our job on here to build relationships, this is a punishment block (male officer)*

Comments such as this from a male officer are the type of comment expected from the traditional prison officer culture we read about in the current academic literature. It is also more disconcerting when we consider some of the women are on this unit because their mental illness is unmanageable in the main population of the prison. This example illustrates the conflict between the punitive and welfare aims of contemporary imprisonment.

Here it is important to include interview data regarding the crimes the women have committed. Some of the officers felt by knowing the crime committed it would effect the process of relationship building, for instance,

*I won't look at the offences, I'm not bothered what they are in here for I just treat them all the same (PO)*

*I never read their files anymore, they are just individuals to me (PO)*

Along with,

*We can't pick and choose, I don't care what the crime is, in here, they are all the same (PO)*

*It might change me if I read the files so I don't bother (PO)*

The residential area of the prison witnessed most change over the period of the ethnography. There was obvious concern from some of the prison officers about the vulnerability of some of the women housed in these areas. With no staff to observe the women and no staff for the women to talk to, the officers spoken to were concerned bullying was on the rise.

## **Prison officers and relationships with colleagues**

*There is a strong bond between colleagues. Most of the girls that work here are strong girls (Gloria, PO)*

It was evident that many of the female officers consulted had both a solid working relationship inside the prison, and a strong social relationship outside of the prison. Some of the officers on the wing have worked together for over twenty years and class themselves as *family* and not merely colleagues, for instance, *they are my family and I trust them coz I know they have my back (PO)*. The officers openly discussed social days out and some had recently come back from a team building camping weekend (though this was ridiculed by most officers present and became evident it centred around the occupational drinking culture). This strong relationship bond is central to the occupational culture of the prison officer, and with fewer staff on the ground these officers need to be able to rely on their colleagues for support and to *watch their backs* (this term was used by most staff, on a number of occasions during interviews and less formal conversations). It was evident the officers on the wing knew each others family members and on numerous occasions officers were overheard asking colleagues how their wife or husband was, how their children were doing at school or asking about unwell family members. Officers in other areas of the prison similarly had close working and social relationships, however, these relationships did not particularly cross over from the wing to other areas of the prison, for example the office based area known as the detail. This is where prison officers work alongside administration staff to work out the daily movements of prisoners, and also staff rotas, staff cover (for instance, when an officer is required to stay overnight in a hospital with a prisoner) and other prisoner escorts outside of the prison; and none of the frontline officers consulted ever socialised with managers on any level. Fineman (2000) is unsure whether co-workers can

also be friends and whilst acknowledging that this could be explored in more detail, the present study showed that some officers were definitely friends, and had been for a number of years.

Officers spoke of a divide between the day and night staff not supporting each other in the work place, or socialising with each other outside of work. However, this divide has more recently been eradicated due to the officers being rotated from days to nights on a regular basis. Officers who find it difficult to work night shifts due to family commitments seem to have no problem swapping shifts with those who have no such obligations.

A long serving senior officer explained, the changing dynamics between day and night staff,

*It used to be an us and them issue with the night staff, they were never included in anything so when I went on nights I created a happier environment and there was camaraderie (Vee, SO)*

Along with,

*I never had anything to do with the night staff, they kept themselves to themselves, I never really knew any of them (PO)*

These robust working relationships are necessary when we consider the amount of time prison officers spend with each other at work; most shifts are twelve hours long. And historically to the present day it has been well documented that socialising together has always been a central part of their occupational culture (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling *et al*, 2011; BBC 2, 2015). During the course of the research it also became apparent that a number of senior officers only associated with other senior officers and appeared quite aghast when asked if they participated in the arranged fun days or nights out from the wing as suggested by colleagues.

There were a smaller number of officers who did not socialise due to family and childcare commitments. For instance,

*I don't socialise with anyone from work now, I used to but my kids are too young but I do talk on the phone with colleagues, the ones I class as friends (Maria, PO)*

Along with,

*I used to socialise a lot with colleagues but I am just back off maternity leave and my husband doesn't really deal with the kids at home...In this job, children can be an issue (Tasha, PO)*

Tasha was encouraged to expand on what she meant by children can be an 'issue',

*Well, you try and create this ideal work – life balance, so I work set days every week and it doesn't fit in with the social life here. The [prison] service is good whilst you are pregnant, you know, good with risk assessments and all that but once you are on maternity leave you become an inconvenience... and when you return you are overlooked for promotion. I've got all the exams but they won't accommodate me as a senior officer because I have young children...the job isn't what it used to be (Tasha, PO)*

It is comments such as these above that illustrate how *being* a women in this type of occupation can have an effect on work life relationships and also on whether you are suitable for promotion, something that does not appear to effect their male colleagues. It was clear the officers who had young children felt they were penalised for this and a number of officers consulted felt they were being penalised for being a woman and giving birth.

### **Prison officers, relationships with management and conflict**

The data from interviews and the more frequent informal conversations highlighted issues around the female officers feeling disempowered in their role and their voices not being heard by management. One of the issues that officers agreed on was regarding the illicit drug testing in prison. The officers felt their on the job experience regarding some of the

women and regular episodes of drug dealing or using behaviour, that was known about because of the relationships they had with the women in their care was not acknowledged by management.

Here are extracts of a conversation with officers whilst they were on a cigarette break, two of the officers were based on the houses and one officer worked on the wing,

*Management manipulate the drug testing. We send a girl over to be tested, she'll be known for getting it in and using, and they send her back all clear (PO, wing)*

Similarly,

*Yeah, we send a girl over for testing who is known to use and they send her back with an all clear (PO, houses)*

Along with,

*It's all so the prison keeps the budget...plays on your mind though (PO, wing)*

And again, with direct reference to the management,

*Management manipulate the drug test results, they manipulate the numbers (PO, houses)*

The officers seemed exacerbated by the lack of direct action from management regarding positive drug tests. The officers went on to explain the reason management dealt with drug testing this way was because if there are too many positive drug tests documented the prison loses part of its annual budget.

The relationships between frontline female officers and management appeared at an all time low. Officers felt they had no respect from the management and had little face-to-face contact with them. Comments around drug testing show the officers are limited in their working role and issues such as this are governed by budget cuts and prison budgets. There are numerous notes about the look on the officer's faces when speaking about management, along with the often rude hand gestures they use in the field notebooks.

## **Conflict with management**

The reduced staff numbers and continuing changes to the Prison Service had created a bit of a 'us and them' work environment. The officers consulted never spoke politely about the management and felt disempowered by changes they had no say in. The officers felt their voices were not being heard and their frontline experience counted for nothing, even though they spent the most time with the women. It was clear the officers felt disappointed with their management team, they felt they were not being heard and the officers claimed management did not listen to them. For instance,

*They have stripped us bare, we can't use our own initiative and experience, everything goes through the management, my 23 years count for nothing (Sam, PO)*

And,

*Communication levels are crap, I found out my line manager by default they didn't come and introduce themselves, there are too many changes and no-one knows what is going on (Tasha, PO)*

There were comments offered through interviewing and also from more general conversations about the lack of frontline experience managers now had. Traditionally, prison officers were promoted through the ranks until they reached governor grades and were therefore aware of the role of the modern prison officer. However, management are now brought into the prison service from other routes. Here is what one officer had to say,

*Civil service admin staff move into these positions [management] and they don't know the job (Maria, PO)*

Along with,

*Governors should come through the ranks (Maria, PO)*

Whilst other officers stated,

*Management are under the impression that older staff can't cope with the changes. We can cope with the changes, we've had loads over the years, it's how the changes are made from the top, that's the problem (Gina, PO)*

*There is continuous change here, new managers bring change, we adapt and then we go back to the old way (Gloria, PO)*

And,

*Management have stripped us bare, we can't use our own initiative and experience, everything has to go through seniors now (Piper, PO)*

Other officers commented on the lack of visibility of governors and managers,

*We used to have a morning meeting with management, but not anymore, we have no handover now (Maria, PO)*

*We never see the governors or managers, they used to walk round everyday, but we don't see them now (Natalie, PO)*

Along with,

*The only time you see all the governors down here [wing] is when there has been a hanging (PO male officer)*

Whilst other officers spoke to me about the lack of support they thought they were receiving from management,

*No use raising concerns with management, they do nothing, it's not worth saying anything (PO)*

And,

*We have no staff and no support from management (PO)*

There were other concerns about the reduced staff numbers,

*The number one's on self destruct, we are losing more staff (Alex, PO)*

Along with,

*They will put ten staff on the wing in November when the inspection is due, it's just bullshit (Sam, PO)*

Whilst others voiced their opinion on the management,

*It's frustrating, we can all carry a couple of staff, but lazy staff, the managerial staff who can't manage, you notice it more in this prison, you notice lazy staff (Gina, PO)*

Along with,

*I'm never in staff meetings now, they're [management] not stupid, they arrange them around people's shifts so no one with anything to say is in attendance (Gloria, PO)*

These comments highlight a workforce who appear demoralised with their management team. Their comments about the lack of support they feel they receive was also having an impact on some officer's decision to stay in or leave the Prison Service. Such as,

*I won't stay, they will force us out. It used to be a job for life, they used to look after us but not anymore, they want a new generation of staff so they can mould and manage them (Tasha, PO)*

And,

*My name is on the list for the VEDS package now and if I had spoken to you last year it would have been the furthest thing from my mind, I never thought I would leave the service (Gloria, PO)*

*Along with,*

*It's my last day today, I don't know what I am going to do but the package they offered was too good to refuse... I will probably get a job in Tesco until I decide what I want to do (PO)*

And,

*I applied for a job outside of the service last week and I never thought I would leave here, but the job has changed, and not for the better (Suzanne, SO)*

## **Humour**

There were officers who talked about the humour required for this job and the banter they had and it was evident humour was something that cemented the working relationship, it is also a topic documented at length in the prison literature. Noticeable with the officers on the wing as the following extract from the field notes illustrates,

*It's 11am and the noise level on the wing is settling down. The women are locked behind their cell doors...bells ringing continuously. I am keen to observe certain parts of prison*

*officer culture, more specifically, how the working relationships of the female officer are sustained. I sit with the officers around a small desk and two of them start filling in the ACCT documents. Assessment Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) documents are opened when there is a concern an individual in prison is at risk of self-harm or suicide. Prison officers document observations of the prisoners behaviour and mood throughout the day and night. One officer goes off to make tea/coffee and another supervises the women preparing the servery for lunch. The servery is a large hatch type area at the front end of the wing, this is where the prisoners collect their meals, one person at a time, served by other prisoners and supervised by one officer who sits by the hatch opening and calls out the women's names for service. It's a similar routine to that observed on other visits during the same time of day. One of the mental health nurses approaches the desk and places two large pieces of cream cake on the officers desk. Rapport is good and there is friendly banter between the officers and nurse. A bell sounds and the nurse is called to a cell. One of the officers produces a packet of popping candy from her trouser pocket and sprinkles all over the cream cakes; to rapturous laughter from the other officers present. Nurse returns, collects the cake and her face tells me she knows they are up to something, all in good humour. The bell sounds again, it's time to open the cell doors, the noise level rises and the daily routine on the wing continues. Laughter is not out of place in this environment however, it is not a word I usually associate with prison... (Field notes 5/8/13)*

Officers spoke about team camaraderie; having a laugh whilst being safe and in control,

*I love it on here [wing] today, it's the team, we have worked together for years and you know you will be able to have a laugh and also your back is covered. I know the whole day will be fine coz [sic] my girls are on, they are my family and I trust them coz [sic] I know they have my back (Gloria, PO)*

Along with,

*Yeah, we can have a laugh on here, we banter with each other (Wanda, SO)*

And,

*You've got to have a laugh when you're here [work] it's the only way you get through the day (male officer on the wing)*

Whilst another officer added,

*We giggle a lot on here [wing] (Suzanne, SO)*

The humour sometimes included the prisoners and here is a short extract from the field notes,

*One of the women [prisoner] walks back down the wing towards her cell door with a bar of soap in her hand shouting, 'I'm going to clean my knickers' to which one of the officers present shouted back, 'make sure you take them off first' (Field notes, 24/7/14)*

And here highlighting an element of control the prison officers have over the relationships, whilst still having an element of humour,

*We have a laugh with each other and with the girls [prisoners] but they [prisoners] know they can't go too far; they don't over step the mark (Piper, PO)*

However, other officers had a different view,

*The humour has gone in this job (PO)*

Whilst another said,

*The humour has gone now, management have made sure of that (PO)*

And,

*Everyone is too stressed to have a laugh now, there are not enough of us [frontline officers] and we are too busy (Alex, PO)*

And this from an officer who had taken early retirement and was due to leave the Service,

*I will miss the banter at work, and it will be different at home when I have left. I do like the humour here [work] (Gloria, PO)*

It is evident humour is used for different reasons, at different times, during different events, and at times officers use humour to hide real feelings and emotions. It is also evident that humour plays a significant role in the working lives of prison officers (Crawley, 2011).

Humour tends to be used during the bleakest times, particularly when there is vomit or blood to be cleaned (conversations with various staff). This dark humour similar to the '*dead body stories*' told by nurses (Lawler, 1994: 190) helps to neutralise and make bearable, situations that most of us would see as heart wrenching. The one difference here being this type of dark humour aligns with the norms of prison officer culture and the stereotype of the insensitive officer, however it goes against the stereotypical view of a nurse as more caring and compassionate. Fineman (1993, 2000) acknowledges that personal detachment is used as a coping strategy for medical staff making it easier to cope with dying or distressed patients. The use of *black*, *sick* and *toilet humour* (all terms used by the officers) can be used as a coping strategy and a way of managing emotions (Hochschild, 1983) and is a way of masking 'real' emotions and feelings. The female officers perform emotion in line with the occupational norms of the prison and whilst doing this they keep what Fineman (1993) refers to as their own 'real time' emotions in check. For instance, it can be employed during tragic events in the prison, such as a suicide or self-harm incidents, as illustrated in more detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

### **Working relationships with male colleagues**

Officers on the wing socialise with each other regularly, they often talked about fun runs, nights in the pub, visiting each others houses, attending each others family celebrations and as mentioned earlier, a recent camping trip that had been organized by the prison. They are familiar with each others families and celebrate their birthdays and their children's birthdays together. When female officers were observed talking to male colleagues about family members I found the conversation focused on topics such as children's schooling or maybe a wife or partners illness. Or sometimes, quite simply about what they were having for dinner that evening.

When the officers were probed about their male colleagues and how or if their role differed in the workplace, there was a mixed response,

*Some of us were here before the men, so we have always kind of had the upper hand* (Gloria, PO)

Along with,

*The men couldn't do this job here [women's prison] without us, and they know that* (Tiffany, PO)

And,

*I've worked in men's prisons and the male prison officers can be awful to work with, some think your useless, and talk as though you don't exist* (Lorna, SO)

Others also spoke of a bullying mentality with some male colleagues, again, this aligns with the literature around the occupational culture of prison officers, and the literature from the United States around the views of male prison officers on their female colleagues (Jurik and Halemba, 1984). The brutish and bullying stereotype of the traditional male prison officer is something the more modern female officers both agrees and disagrees with,

*I've not enjoyed working with some, they use bully tactics* (Natalie, PO)

And,

*Some of them are just bullies* (Tasha, PO)

One officer relayed a particularly concerning story during a lengthy conversation ,

*Not so long ago on here four men got kitted up in riot gear and walked to the end of the wing, with one of them saying clearly, 'let's have some fun'. The senior in charge was aware of it, all in all there were about eight of them [male colleagues] involved, but not all of them went in the cell. They went in the cell and physically hurt the girl, they said they were restraining her... How can they be proud of that behaviour? I was really upset and reported it* (Piper, PO)

When asked what came of her reporting it the officer gave a reply that supports the occupational culture norms and values of not grassing (informing on another officers behaviour or conduct) on your work colleagues, and is a similar reaction to that Skolnick (2001) noted in his work around the *blue wall of silence*,

*I was ostracised, it was awful, I went on the sick [sick leave] for a few months* (Piper, PO)

Other officers commented on male colleagues they had worked with in other prisons,

*The young male officers at XXX were awful to work with, it was the 1990's, you know, this is a man's world and all that. There used to be a lot of smart comments, it is easier working with male prisoners than male colleagues* (Gina, PO)

And others spoke of similarities with prisoners and being treated the same as them by male colleagues,

*If they treat us [female officers] like second-class citizens, how do you think they treat the women [prisoners]?* (PO)

And,

*Some of the men have no respect for us, but I have been here too long for it to bother me now* (Sam, PO)

Whilst others spoke more positively about male colleagues for instance,

*The men do care, I suppose they just hide it better* (Natalie, SO)

Along with,

*The men here are good, I've worked with much worse in the men's estate* (PO)

And,

*There are some good male officers here and the girls [prisoners] need them, they need some good male role models in their lives* (Wanda, SO)

As well as,

*I prefer working with the men, the women are bitches (Maria, PO)*

And,

*I've always worked in male dominated environments; the men are easier to work with (female officer in reception area)*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter illustrates that the modern day female prison officers at times have to adapt their working styles and step away from the traditional norms of the prison officer role. There is evidence here to show that female prison officers show a level of empathy and care regardless of the documented norms and traditions of the occupation (Stern, 1987; Kauffman, 1988; Crawley, 2004a). It is also evident that these interpersonal skills are being used less due to the officers having more work to do with less staff and very little time to spend on a one-to-one basis with the women in their care. This research also highlights the importance of strong relationships in relation to the wellbeing of the prisoners. Officers are regularly feeling disempowered by the lack of time available to initiate one-to-one sessions with the women, reducing the personalised care they feel they can offer. The theme 'change' runs through this chapter highlighting how neo-liberal policies have impacted on staff-prisoner relationships and how these organisational changes have subsequently had an impact on the work-life balance of female officers. However, a positive theme is humour and it is evident the officers use this during sensitive times with the women and with colleagues to help them be professional during this difficult working period. The evidence here illustrates humour is used for different reasons at different times and plays a significant role in the working lives of female prison officers (Crawley, 2011). Importantly, there is evidence to highlight relationships in the prison are fundamental when identifying and managing vulnerable prisoners. With changes being made in residential areas of the prison

the officers show their concern that with less supervision, the more vulnerable prisoners may be exposed to higher levels of bullying that could result in higher levels of self-harm incidents. The next chapter illustrates the ways in which relationships formed inside the prison could help the vulnerable women at risk of self-harm and suicide.

It is important to address here the issue of the prison officers calling the women girls, as it is a common theme through the analysis chapters of the thesis. As a sociological researcher it is acknowledged that by calling the women girls, the prison officers could come across as patronising since it is a way of depersonalising and infantilizing the women; they become the criminal 'other'. However, it is the word most of the officers used all the time and it is used in this thesis only when using the voices of the prison officers.

# Chapter Four: Occupational Challenges

## Introduction

*In some few gaols are confined idiots and lunatics - many of the bridewells are crowded and offensive, because the rooms which were designed for prisoners are occupied by lunatics. The insane, when they are not kept separate, disturb and terrify other prisoners. No care is taken of them, although it is probable that by medicines, and proper regiment, some of them might be restored to their senses, and usefulness in life (Howard, 1780)*

Taken from his published survey of prisons in England, the above quote from the early penal reformer John Howard highlights mental ill health in prison is not a new problem.

As noted in the literature review in Chapter 1 of this thesis, there is a wealth of sociological prison literature informing us about the *pains of imprisonment* (Sykes, 1958; Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Crewe, 2011) however, this important body of literature fails to address the topics of mental health, self-harm or suicide in prison. Theoretically we are drawn to the importation and deprivation models. The importation model explains how prison subcultures are formed from what inmates bring into the prison, such as their values and customs and for primary concern here, their mental ill health. When considering suicide, it is the risk of suicide they bring with them (Zamble and Porporino, 1988). In contrast to this the deprivation model explains how suicide is caused by prison induced stress (Backett, 1988). Prison subcultures therefore develop as a response to a number of deprivations that prison offers, and the inmate suicidal tendencies could be a product of the prison environment.

This chapter is concerned with one of the main challenges the female prison officers are faced with and how they deal with this on a day-to-day basis. The following will discuss the

officers views on how they deal with one of the most complex challenges to their working role; the mental health of prisoners.

Around 70 per cent of women imprisoned in the female estate in England and Wales suffer with two or more mental disorders. 30 per cent of the women will have had a psychiatric admission before prison and 37 per cent have previously attempted suicide (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). When we consider the 6004 self-harm incidents recorded in 2014 and the six deaths that same year, from ‘apparent’ suicide (Prison Reform, 2014) it can be argued that mental health in the women’s prison estate is a current concern that requires attention and ultimately, workable solutions.

Following the deaths in HMPYOI Styal during 2002-2003 the Corston Report was commissioned by the Home Office, this review highlighted a concern about the number of self-inflicted deaths in women’s prisons in England and Wales. These tragic deaths in custody also became the focus of a 2006 BBC documentary, *Women on the Edge: The Truth about Styal Prison*. The documentary recognized the plight of some of these women, many of them with multiple diagnosis of mental illness and did nothing more than highlight how inexperienced prison officers are in dealing with this type of illness. To the critically observant viewer, the officer of focus on the Care, Support and Reintegration Unit (CSRU) tended to speak down to the women and showed no constructive way of finding the root of the problem or to offer any solution for coping methods to the women who are predominantly isolated because of their mental ill health. She spoke to one woman who repeatedly tried to take her own life calling her behaviour *lousy* and *childlike*; a women who spent most of her six months on remand, isolated and under observation until she was transferred to a secure psychiatric environment. It is interesting to note this female officer won the award for the Suicide Prevention category and was also awarded officer of the year

award in the 2006 Prison Officer awards (Corrections, 2006). These awards were handed out in June after the BBC2 documentary had aired in February; and the officer concerned was the first woman ever to win the main award.

Mental illness is a 'real' problem in the female prison estate, the prison officers of England and Wales have no formal training during their eight week basic training programme and yet are expected to deal with people who should by all accounts be treated in secure psychiatric settings and not prisons. Recently, the issues around overcrowded and understaffed prisons have been well documented (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014; Rough Justice, 2014; Laville and Taylor, 2014) highlighting there is little scope for officers to be released from frontline training to attend any day courses. This lack of training and support creates challenges for the officers, and challenges that no-one seems to have an answer to. People with mental illness may come across as confrontational to prison officers who are trained to control and punish; these officers are not trained to assess, diagnose and treat.

In this chapter, the effects on the officers who work alongside prisoners with mental illness on a regular basis will be discussed. The self-harming and suicide of a prisoner can be distressing for officers who work alongside them (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b; Liebling *et al*, 2011). The experience of cutting someone down who is hanging by a ligature and then dealing with the body of a dead woman who through the ordeal would have lost control of her bodily functions, can be a traumatic one. This is a painful and emotional part of working in prison and officers must simply deal with a situation they have no specific training for, whilst presenting themselves as professional individuals. For this reason it is clearly evident that prisons are emotional spaces where the officers have no choice but to engage in emotion-work, even when they have a dislike for some of the prisoners in their care. Hochschild's (1983) concepts of *emotional labour* and *emotion management* in relation to

the working styles of the female officers are also very relevant to this issue.

### **It's a new problem!**

As noted above, the quote from John Howard highlights that mental illness has been recognised in prisoners and institutions for many years, this has also been documented much more recently than Howard (Scruton and Chadwick, 1987) however, it is evident through the voices of the prison officers that this is something that was not directly recognised by frontline prison officers twenty or thirty years ago,

*When I did basic training it was for 10 weeks, we had no mental health training then but we didn't need it. The prison did not have major issues with mental health back then, but they need it now, we are not trained nurses, but now we all need it there is no staff to release you to go on a course so we just have to deal with it best we can (Alex, PO)*

This comment from Alex with nearly 20 years experience addresses the point that mental health training was not important when she did her basic training. This clearly shows a lack of insight and knowledge around mental illness. It has been documented from as early as 1780 that mental illness has been endemic in the prison system and yet officers did not notice these individuals in their care.

When encouraged to expand on her point the officer replied; *we just deal with it best we can,*

So how do you personally deal with the women who suffer with mental illness?

*Common sense and on the job experience, that's how most of us deal with it, there is no other way (Alex, PO)*

Dealing with other people's mental illness using *common sense* is in itself problematic due to the different definitions and interpretations of what common sense actually means. It also

shows the officers deal with it as they are presented with it, although no consistency will be applied to the approach taken.

Other officers echoed the voice of Alex by agreeing there has never been an issue with mental illness in prison until more recent times,

*We didn't need mental health training when I started, but we do now* (Gloria, PO)

And,

*It was never an issue in the early days, but it seems to be everywhere now, and loads of them end up in prison* (Sam, PO)

Whilst another stated,

*When I did my basic training over 15 years ago the word mental illness was never mentioned, it wasn't acknowledged that prisoners could also be ill people* (Tiffany, PO)

These comments highlight ignorance and a lack of knowledge around the topic of mental illness, reinforcing the need for training in this specialist area. Academically the literature on prisons has told us for some time that prisons have been populated with mentally unwell people (Carlen, 1983; Sim, 1990; Seddon, 2007).

Other officers commented on the lack of specific mental health training,

*Mental health is our main challenge; we have no training, not even an hour* (Piper, PO)

Piper continued to discuss how she has been affected by prisoners with mental health problems,

*I have been assaulted 3 times this year and one of the prisoners had really bad mental health problems, she was very upset after she had hurt me and to this day she still writes to me in here from her home* (Piper, PO)

The comment above is interesting in the sense the officer talks about ‘bad’ mental health problems, and this was resonated in a number of further comments from officers. Again it highlights a lack of education and knowledge around the subject, as the officers could not appear to differentiate between the different types of mental illness. The officers never spoke about depressive illnesses, or bi-polar, schizophrenia, psychosis, or the more common issue of dual diagnosis to name a few, and at times the term personality disorder was overused. The illnesses were subconsciously grouped together and primarily labelled by the officers as a *bad* or *serious* illness, or by referring to the women as being *too ill*.

For instance,

*Some of the women have really serious mental health problems and we can't deal with them in here* (Wanda, SO)

Along with,

*Most of the women on this wing should not even be here [in prison] they are too ill and should be in a hospital* (Sam, PO)

And,

*We are dealing with women with serious mental health illnesses and we are not trained to deal with them* (Gina, PO)

*Most of the women in our care have a serious mental health problem* (Tasha, PO)

Whilst another stated,

*There is not enough support in the community for those with mental health problems so we end up taking women who should not be in prison* (Piper, PO)

It has been recently documented that 70 per cent of women in prison suffer from two or more mental illnesses whilst around 50 per cent are known to have a severe and enduring mental illness (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). These statistics explain the extent of mental

illness, however, they give no explanation as to what types of illness. Different diagnosis of mental illness are treated in different ways and this is something the officers do not acknowledge as they subconsciously group them together and manage them all in the same way.

The concern over a lack of mental health training was echoed by a number of officers and brought up during interviews and individual and group conversations,

*There are more mental health problems now and we don't have the tools to deal with it.... There are more prisoners with disabilities and this environment is not right for them...we have outside carers that come in and take care of them (Gloria, PO)*

Other officers stated,

*There are no mental health courses for us here. We get told to go on courses and then get told you can't attend because there are not enough staff to cover the shift (Maria, PO)*

And,

*We used to have mental health trainers based here [prison] but they are both on long-term sick (Maria, PO)*

Along with,

*The mental health staff respect our knowledge but prison officer training will have to change to deal with mental health and learning disabilities (Claudette)*

All the officers who passed comment about the lack of training available to them, were subsequently asked how this could be improved to benefit the officers and ultimately the women in their care. The responses were negative and problematic in the sense that they could see no workable solutions, and did not feel supported by their management team. With on-going budget cuts to the Prison Service, it was evident that this had effected the role of the prison officer. For instance,

*Budgets are being cut, we have less staff and even less opportunity for training (Suzanne, SO)*

Another officer told me,

*Management aren't interested in the training side, they don't really understand the extent of the problem. They just sit in their offices ticking the boxes they need to tick (Piper, PO)*

Along with,

*What's the point in training now, it's too late. No-one has taught me how to deal with mental illness in the past 15 years or so, it's not a concern to management (Natalie, PO)*

Worryingly, some officers appeared detached from the sensitivity surrounding mental illness and the women in their care,

*We have no mental health training but none of that bothers me anymore, I have become desensitised, I have no feelings and it is my way of coping (Vee, SO).*

This comment from Vee, a long serving senior officer shows how complacency can set in as a coping mechanism, rendering mental illness the norm in this type of institution.

As noted above and in the literature review of this thesis, mental illness in the prison estate is a concern. The comments from officers highlight the need for specific training in this area as officers deal with these situations using *jail craft* – also known as on the job experience and knowledge. It is evident this area of concern needs addressing for the staff in this prison, both for their own safety and that of the women in their care. The issue of emotions and being desensitised to situations in the prison can also be seen in the work of Arnold (2005).

### **Self-harm**

As noted above, self-harm is a primary problematic area within the prison system and yet without any formal training the prison officers remain uneducated, leaving prisoners in their

care at risk of harming themselves. As Gloria comments below, many of them do not even know what the word means,

*Self harm, I had never even heard of the word never mind know how to deal with it (Gloria, PO)*

Prison officers deal with self-harm in different ways, however, with their lack of *training* and the use of *work experience* and *common* sense does not qualify them to assess whether the women self-harm purely for manipulation and to gain something. This lack of understanding and basic knowledge around self-harm renders the prisoners as time wasters who are completely in control of their actions and could simply stop if they wanted to, as though the actions are personally directed at the officers on duty.

As the officers explained,

*Self-harmers do it to gain something, they can be manipulative because they want a phone call or some baccy [tobacco] (Vee, SO)*

Similarly,

*The self-harmers are just manipulative and it takes up loads of our time just cleaning up after them (PO)*

Along with,

*The buzzers ring most of the day on here (wing) the women cut themselves for attention and it takes up most of our working day (male officer)*

And,

*Cutters, they do it to disrupt the regime on here (wing) (Sam, PO)*

And,

*You can tell the difference between those that want something off you and those who are serious (Piper, PO)*

The discourse used around self-harm by the officers could be a coping mechanism, using language such as *cutters* or *slashers* may be a way of easing the pain of witnessing the horror of self-harm on a regular basis. These comments emphasise a lack of awareness and knowledge around mental illness and predominantly around why individuals self harm. When these women, cut, bite, burn, hit themselves or swallow something it is a way of relieving emotional pain and it is one way these women can hold an element of control over their lives. It is also known as a form of internal punishment (RC Psych, 2014). To the medically unqualified prison officers these actions may appear selfish or cynical and this goes some way to explaining their comments. It is commonly known that when men are angry they express this emotion externally by hurting other people or objects such as doors and walls (Ellis, forthcoming)), whereas women are known to internalize the upset and anger and direct the punishment onto themselves. The prisoners who self-harm are generally in a high emotional state of distress and inner turmoil and feel it is their only way of releasing guilt and anger (Hawton *et al*, 2013).

Other staff commented about self-harm in the prison,

*These women are vulnerable and when they can't talk to us or their mates [other prisoners] ... many of them self-harm when feeling isolated* (Piper, PO)

And,

*Mental illness is a big issue...I am cuffed to girls who are being stitched up and it's not nice* (Natalie, PO)

Along with,

*I have dealt with self-harmers for over 20 years so you kind of get used to it...they are generally small cuts with lots of blood. It can be a challenge but you just learn on the job* (Gina, PO)

And here, female officers comment on the lasting effects of self-harm,

*Have you seen the state of some of the girls arms Toni? They are a mess. Why would you want to look like that? (Natalie, PO)*

Along with,

*Some of the women's arms are badly scarred, they are a mess and the scars will last forever (PO)*

Having spent a lot of time at the prison conducting fieldwork during the summer months, the scars from self-harming are visible as the women wander round in vest style tops. However, arguably the main concern here should be the underlying issues that result in the women's skin being scarred, not how unsightly the scars are.

Officers who have changed occupation to undertake the role of a prison officer appeared shocked with the level and extent of self-harm,

*I was working the first night centre once and a girl cut her arm all the way down there [fore arm] and I was dealing with it thinking, how do you do that to yourself, why do you hurt yourself? I know nothing about mental health so I have read about it in my own time to try and understand it (Tiffany, PO)*

The above comment encompasses areas of concern as it again emphasises the need for training, and the lack of training available. During the interview, the officer spoke of the number of times she had left work after a self harm incident she had been involved in and got home and Googled topics around mental illness and self-harm. This is both comforting to hear as it shows the humanitarian caring side of the officer that Scott (2008) discusses in his work; and alarming to hear when we consider the amount of un-credible websites now at our disposal. When the officer was asked whether she used reputable sites for information she replied,

*Yes, Wikipedia*

This reply only added to concerns identified by this study, around this widely ignored topic.

It was evident when self-harm incidents occurred the prison did not always have the correct resources and tools at hand. It was also evident that self-harmers in the prison were restrained by a team of officers if necessary whilst treatment was administered.

For instance,

*One night a girl ripped her arm open, there was blood everywhere and we used sanitary towels to stop the blood because there was nothing else to use, we were restraining her and trying to keep these towels on at the same time whilst I was giving instructions out to other officers (Vee, SO).*

It is situations such as these above where the female officers have to present themselves as a professional being, in control of the situation (Goffman, 1959). No matter how horrific this type of event is at the time the officers are tasked to contain their real emotions about self-harm and deal with the situation the best they can under the circumstances. Vee had to remain in her senior officer role and present as a confident person, so the team could assist with the woman's cuts whilst also keeping an eye on the rest of the prison wing. Vee was quite animated when she relayed this event and it was obvious by her tone of voice that it was stressful at the time. The work of Fineman (1993, 2000) is relevant here when he characterised organisations as emotional arenas, whilst also claiming that high emotions such as these are invaluable to the inner workings of an organisation that involves face-to-face people work (Fineman, 2000). Though it is clear the female officers are not being told how to behave emotionally, it is generally expected as part of the organisational culture.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the officers dealt with mental illness in different ways,

*With mental health you have to learn to read people, we had one girl who each time I cut the ligature off she did it again, the bed sheet ended up the size of a hanky after cutting the ligature about 10 times (Vee, SO)*

And,

*You just deal with it [mental illness] ...but I have been off the frontline now for 6 months and I don't know if I could deal with it now (PO)*

Another officer saw mental illness as something that is learnt,

*Mental illness is learnt behaviour, girls see other girls talking to one of us [officers] and want that one-to-one time so some of them create an illness (female officer in segregation)*

## **Humour**

The humour used by prison officers and previously mentioned in this thesis is well documented in the occupational culture literature (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling *et al*, 2011). It is possible this type of humour is used as a cover for their 'real' emotions; a way of managing their emotions in the work place. The traditional masculine occupational culture does not allow for inappropriate emotions to be shown and it is known that male officers do not tend to talk to colleagues about how they are really feeling (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b, 2011).

The female officers also keep their true feelings and emotions under wraps whilst in the workplace illustrating the work of both Hochschild (1983) and Goffman (1959). Though they continue to use humour as a form of emotional management; as a superficial way of coping with an event that would quite naturally cause upset,

*Well I don't think I will be drinking red tonight (Natalie, PO)*

And ,

*Definitely white for me later, I've seen enough red liquid today (Maria, PO)*

Similarly,

*I call them [self-harmers] coppers not cutters because they can fill cups full with blood (PO)*

The above comments were made when the officers were talking about self-harm incidents they have dealt with and shows a level of desensitization that ultimately assists the officers to cope. Here again, the subject of humour comes up, this time as a form of coping with situations they are not trained to deal with and have no expert knowledge about.

The female officers are more open than their male colleagues about how they really feel during these intense situations, exhibiting emotions not usually linked to the voices from this masculine occupation (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b, 2011).

*I feel really sorry for them when they cut up, I want to give them a hug and say everything will be ok (Sam, PO)*

Along with,

*It's sad when you think some of these girls will self-harm because they are frightened of being on the houses, it upsets us and frustrates us but no-one listens (Alex, PO)*

And,

*Our experience on the ground and the relationships we form with the women counts for nothing, violence is on the increase and so is self-harm (PO)*

*I often go home and cry to my husband when there has been a bad case of self-harm (Tiffany, PO)*

And,

*I get really upset over witnessing a serious self-harm incident, I hold it together at work and then break down when I get home (PO)*

This type of comment highlights how officers act differently in both the front and back regions of the work place when presenting themselves during difficult situations (Goffman,

1959). It is evident here these officers were conscious they could not show their true feelings and emotions until they retreated to the back region, in this case their home. If the officers were to show their true emotions whilst in the front stage area they may become embarrassed, something Goffman (1967) describes as *losing face*. This facial and bodily display noted by Hochschild (1983) is similar to the earlier work of Goffman (1959) and his dramaturgical analysis.

Along with,

*The atmosphere changes on here [wing] if a women has to go to hospital to be stitched up, the women [prisoners] feel it and we [officers] feel it (Suzanne, SO)*

As previously discussed, humour is a large part of both prison officer culture and the prisoner community and there were times when prisoners were observed exhibiting acute mental illness that was dealt with by care and humour by the female officers. Here is an extract from the field notes from the first day of the orientation week,

*At 11am the tannoy sounds (similar to Butlins) and the women are ushered back to their cells for lock up, I learn that this is whilst the staff and prisoners working the servery prepare for lunch. One of the more elderly prisoners had convinced herself she was going home and had given away all her possessions including tobacco. This I am informed is a regular occurrence. The woman was asked to return to her cell a number of times though she appeared paranoid and scared and repeatedly said 'I can't go in there [cell]'. The staff on the wing showed brilliant humour when dealing with this and it was evident this happened on a regular basis. One of the female officers finally cajoled the woman into her cell by pretending to shadow the woman from the sight of others saying, 'come on, we'll go undercover'. Amusing and sad to observe at the same time, the officers had not made light of the situation but had dealt with the woman's behaviour with humour (Field notes, 5/8/13).*

Officers were keen to pass comment on the specialist mental health unit that had recently opened to deal with the most severe or acute incidents of mental illness,

*Our mental health unit is a joke; it's a tick box for our number one [governing governor] to secure funding (Alex, PO)*

And,

*You should go on that unit and see for yourself Toni, all the women on there should be in a hospital, we can't deal with them (Lorna, PO)*

Along with,

*Women get sent here because they are too ill to manage in the community, they are not criminals, they need help but no-one knows what to do with them (Wanda, SO)*

The changes to staffing levels were having an impact on most areas of the prison and it was having a direct impact on the mental health unit where the most vulnerable women are housed,

*It's like the specialist units he has just opened like the mental health unit (Dove) but it's not working because he continues to take staff off us. Yesterday an officer shouted on the radio for help on the unit, she had a girl hanging in a cell, you could tell by her voice she was worried and concerned. You see, we can't enter a cell alone, even if someone is hanging, in case they are trying it on and then smack you when you enter alone. I could hear her on the radio calling for assistance and finally a senior [officer] got on the radio and just told her to deal with it, he had no staff to send over (Alex, PO).*

Me - Did the officer go into the cell?

*The officer did go in and cut the ligature off, on her own, and the girl was ok, but we should not be put in that position. Can you imagine how new recruits would handle something like that Toni? (Alex, PO)*

This story was re-told by another officer who also overheard the radio conversation,

*I was stood there thinking please go in [officer go in the cell where woman was hanging] please go in. I wanted to run over and help the officer. If it had been me on my own over there I would've gone in and cut her down. It is hard when you hear an officer in distress*

*and you know you can't do anything to help. What comes first, our [officers] safety or their [prisoners] lives? It's a no win situation sometimes and no-one has the answers (Piper, PO)*

The officers believe issues such as these are becoming more regular due to the decreasing numbers of frontline staff. This has been reported about at a national level across the wider prison estate (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014) and there is a general census from the female officers that situations such as this would be preventable if frontline staff numbers went back to a safe level.

Not all the officers interviewed showed empathy around the problems they encounter with self-harm. This type of officer takes on a more disciplinarian role documented by Scott (2008), and generally it is the type of comment you would associate with prison officer mentality, and showing a lack of empathy,

*I get sick of the women who are always cutting themselves, you clean it up and then they do it again (Sam, PO)*

Similarly,

*She always does it [cuts herself] when I'm on duty, I give her a cloth and tell her to clean it [the blood] up (PO)*

Along with,

*It's frustrating when you have to go on an escort to hospital so the woman can get stitched up and before the shift is over she has un-picked the stitches and made the cuts worse (Tasha, PO)*

Officers holding this unsympathetic view show a complete lack of awareness of why the women are cutting themselves, and some discuss it as though the women do it as a form of manipulation or to waste the officer's time. The following extract from the field notes goes some way to explaining this,

*Hanging around the wing area of the prison I wander through to the back where four officers are discussing some of the self-harmers on ACCT forms. It is hard to believe they are discussing women in their care who have a number of needs. They talk about the women in derogatory terms with comments such as 'well next time she might do it properly'. Although the conversations I am overhearing are uncomfortable listening, I make myself a coffee and continue to listen. It is difficult not to make my presence known and join in the conversation, however, I remain quiet and listen. None of the officers change the focus of conversation or terminology used because I am there. Out of the four officers talking, I find it interesting that three of them are male officers (Field notes, 13/11/13)*

Whilst on a smoking break outside at the back of the wing a couple of officers discussed self-harm and more directly about the women who insert implements and liquids into self-harm wounds,

*Some of the women shove anything they can in their wounds like bits off a lighter or bits of plastic, they just make a mess of their arms (Maria, PO)*

*Yeah, and some rub soap or shampoo in the wound because then it will get infected and they will have to have it re-dressed by the nurse (PO)*

Along with,

*Sometimes, they push things in so deep they have to go to hospital, then they come back and undo the stiches, prison is the wrong place for them we can't do anything for them (PO)*

The officers sounded helpless and are aware they have limited knowledge and resources to help the women who self-harm repeatedly at this level. Again illustrating the need for awareness training around the topic of mental illness in custody.

Self-harm in the women's prison is a frequent event and the comments above illustrate that self-harm comes in different forms, though none of these situations are necessarily easy to deal with. Goffman's *dramaturgical analysis* and his work around *presentation of self* are prominent here as with many areas of how the officers deal with mental health problems.

Whether the officers are deemed caring or not, emotions will be suppressed in some way as to witness someone slicing their skin, or trying to tie a ligature round themselves or set fire to themselves is uncomfortable to observe and as a number of officers stated, the adrenaline kicks in and takes over, real emotions will come through once the adrenaline subsides and the officer has time to reflect on the incident. Again, this illustrates that this type of face-to-face 'people' occupation enforces engagement with *emotional labour* (Hochschild, 1983).

## **Suicide**

As noted at the beginning of this section and in the literature review in chapter one, suicide in prison is an on-going problem and one that prison officers unfortunately have to deal with. When we consider the prison officers, the concepts of distress and well-being are important here. Distress to vulnerable women in the prison can be exacerbated by negative, low moods and attitudes of the prison officers. Whilst the well-being of the women can flourish by them learning coping skills for their illness and ultimately reduce their *pains of imprisonment* with confident staff with a high morale who work closely alongside mental health specialists.

Suicide can have a significant impact on the emotions of female officers, and probably more so with the frontline officers who are tasked with dealing with it directly. The way the officers present themselves in these situations is important, they must appear in control and calm whilst at the same time keeping their real feelings and emotions under wraps. Emotion management is at primary use here. The early period after the act is when emotions run high, however, feelings of shock, sadness, guilt and disappointment are overridden with excerpts of humour, albeit quite black humour, as though this is an easier way of dealing with the death in the company of colleagues, whilst being in the front region as termed by Goffman (1959) in his dramaturgical analysis.

For instance,

*Oh well, one less to count at roll call* (male officer on wing)

Or,

*One less for dinner* (PO)

And,

*One less smack head to rob your house* (male officer on segregation)

However, during interviews when probing around true feelings of the female officers and the effects of suicide of women in the prison, the humour and jokes are left behind and true emotions start to unveil,

### **Feelings and emotions after a death in custody**

Some of the female officers opened up about how they feel when there has been a serious incident in the prison. Although these officers do not tend to show their true feelings whilst at work they were willing to talk to me about their feelings and emotions during these times,

*I've been on shift when a girl has taken her own life, the adrenaline kicks in and you don't really think about it until you get home* (Alex, PO)

And,

*We carry on as usual, we have to, the regime doesn't stop because someone has died* (Wanda, SO)

Along with,

*You run off adrenaline and then come crashing down, emotions are all over the place but you can't show that here* (Natalie, PO)

A number of officers spoke about the six women who killed themselves in the prison during a twelve month period in 2002/2003, again, this has been documented in the literature review of this thesis,

*I was a senior on Keller before it was shut down and was there when the girls killed themselves (Vee, SO)*

Along with,

*I was on shift when 5 out of the 6 girls killed themselves in here. Loads of it was bullying and that is getting worse out there (houses) and if I'm honest, I think it could happen again. It worries me; it worries a lot of the staff here (Alex, PO)*

Worryingly,

*I was never debriefed and when someone has died like that you see every fucking governor in the prison, it's wrong, it should never get to that (Alex, PO)*

The same officer went on to say,

*The police wanted to interview me straight after the fifth hanging and I was adamant it would happen the next day. No one is arsed about you, just what they have to write in the reports. I had a lunchtime football match and I just wanted to get out of the prison and sort my head out, it was awful.*

The deaths made some of the officers address how they approach their working role,

*For the next few weeks [after the sixth woman in short succession had committed suicide] I was scared of opening the hatches [officer shows me how she used to do it cautiously] incase someone was there hanging (Alex, PO)*

And feelings of hopelessness crept in,

*One of them was a 19yr old, never been in trouble before and she should never have been in prison, I knew she had been bullied because the day it happened she had collected baccy [tobacco] and papers [cigarette papers for rolling] and when we cleared her cell she had nothing, it had all been taken, she must have been so scared.*

Other prison officers appeared exacerbated and held fatalistic views such as,

*If they want to do it they will (PO)*

And,

*If one of them really wants to kill themselves, there is nothing we can do, no amount of observations will stop them doing it (SO)*

It is here where the work of Arlie Hochschild (1983) and her concept of *emotional labour* is important as the prison officers must manage their emotions to fit with their role and job function. Feelings of shock, guilt, disappointment and anxiety will come to the officers at a time of death. Along with the work of Fineman (1993) when he suggests the suppression and management of emotions are governed by organizational norms. The prison officers are not being told by their employers how to behave emotionally as the work of Hochschild (1983) suggests, suppressing certain emotions in this role under emotionally charged situations is expected as part of the organisational culture. This type of occupational culture behaviour is similar to that of police officers, it also acknowledges police officers perform emotional labour, though maybe not to the same degree as prison officers due to the different working environments. A convincing performance of the prison officer role and the management of emotions is paramount at times such as these as suggested by Goffman (1959).

### **Minimising the risk of self-harm and suicide**

Prisoners identified as 'at risk' of self-harm or suicide are assessed and monitored using the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) procedures. The care-planning system introduced by NOMS, is prisoner-centred, flexible in its approach and if used effectively should reduce the risk of harm. On average, there were thirty women on the wing, on ACCT plans each week during my time in the prison. However, these plans always

seemed to be a topic of conversation whether on the wing or spending time with officers on the residential houses, though it is unclear why women requiring an ACCT plan were situated in housing blocks that now, have no uniformed staff on them. Here is an extract from the field notes,

*During lock-up the wing is like a different place, it is calm and quiet and the staff congregate round a table to fill in ACCT forms. These are used for prisoners who self harm or are at risk of self-harm and are on regular timed observations. Staff talked about corporate manslaughter and that officers are being charged with this when ACCT plans are completed and a prisoner is found dead in the time between observations (Field notes 5/8/13)*

Referring to observations above an officer commented,

*I call it the blame game, management take no responsibility (PO)*

This officer had refused to fill in ACCT forms for those prisoners she had not seen or spoken to that day.

Though this was only a fleeting conversation it highlights the officers are under pressure to tick the boxes required by management and the Prison Service on a whole. When the officer disclosed she would not fill in documents for women she had not seen or spoken to the look on her face said otherwise and it was assumed she was talking about others officers sat at the table, as though other officers would fill the documents in without having seen or spent time with the woman.

### **Making a difference**

Some officers spoke about negative events turning into positive situations and how this made them feel,

*It's a challenge but I do think we make a difference....we had a young prisoner recently and we got her sectioned here, she was very ill and her parents were very grateful, they had no help in the community and they knew their daughter was ill so when she was sectioned it made them feel better (Claudette, Gov level)*

Along with,

*We had a young girl with ADHD and she wanted to assault the child killers in here, she was a very angry prisoner and she used to approach me when angry and I taught her how to manage it and cope, she thanked me, that's what I like, she was really grateful...that is what relationship building is all about (Suzanne, SO)*

Whilst another stated,

*We had an 80 year old in for arson, she should never have been in here, she was too vulnerable, so I spent time with her and helped her through the sentence...when she left she said, thanks I'd have been dead without you (Natalie, PO)*

And,

*I used to spend a lot of time talking to one prisoner who repeatedly self-harmed and together we figured out a way to help her cope. Towards the end of her sentence she used to approach me to talk instead of cutting herself. But we don't have the time to talk to them anymore (PO)*

The above evidence highlights there are positives to be had during difficult times and situations in the prison. This also acknowledges the female officers showed a level of empathy towards the women in their care and ultimately felt rewarded at times during their service. It is worth remembering here about the icebreaker utilised at the start of the interviews when the officers were asked for three words that best described their occupation; the prominent word was *rewarding*.

## **Growing Areas of Concern**

Two growing areas of concern that are problematic to the prison officers are prisoners with learning disabilities and the elderly population.

### **Learning disabilities**

Research in the UK and internationally follows a strict definition of learning disability based on IQ measures of 70 or below. The Prison Reform Trust (2014) state 5 to 10 per cent of adult prisoners have a learning disability. Up to seven per cent of adult prisoners have an IQ under seventy, and another 25 per cent have an IQ under eighty, whilst it is also known that 60 per cent of prisoners have problems with communication. Dealing with prisoners with learning disabilities brings new areas that are challenging and problematic for the prison officers, as noted by Claudette here,

*Learning disabilities are quite new to us here but they are becoming more common...we have one woman who is naughty like a 14 year old...we have to draw her pictures because she doesn't understand when we talk to her...prison is not the right place for her.*  
(Claudette, Gov level)

And,

*I draw things on paper to communicate with one girl and guide her to different areas of the prison using hand gestures* (Sam, PO)

Whilst another stated,

*We have nothing here to occupy the women who present with learning disabilities, they are women but with a child's mentality* (Suzanne, SO)

And,

*How can prison be the right place for a woman with the mental age of a seven year old?*  
(PO)

Along with,

*Not being able to talk and get your point across in here [prison] must be frustrating and scary* (Tiffany, PO)

*One girl used to lash out all the time, but I don't think she was really violent, she should have been in hospital, not here, I felt sorry for her* (Piper, PO)

During a conversation in the wing office, Suzanne the senior officer in charge brought out a bag of children's colouring books, quiz books and reading books, similar to types of literature suitable for young children. Suzanne had purchased these out of her own money and used them to try and communicate with two women on the wing with learning disabilities. She went on to state how she used diagrams and simple pictures to explain to the women it was mealtime, association time or time to go back in their cell. Conversations such as this with concerned and caring officers goes a long way in rejecting the negative academic literature we currently have on female prison officers from the United States (Jurik and Halemba, 1984; Zimmer, 1986, 1987). These women are extremely vulnerable on the wing and are not mentally capable of either going to work or education; however, these women spend time during the day in the Safer Custody area where they receive support (predominantly from other prisoners).. Here the women are tasked with packing pairs of disposable gloves into a plastic pouch that will eventually end up in first aid boxes.

### **A rising elderly population**

The elderly population in prison is also an area of a growing concern. There are more people in prison over the age of sixty in England and Wales than there has ever been (Age UK, 2011; Travis, 2014). This is due to changes in sentencing and people generally being given longer prison sentences, rather than an elderly crime wave. However, prison was not built for the elderly, just like it was not built for women, and elderly prisoners bring with them a

new set of health issues that require attention. Elderly women could have a number of health issues that require either medication or regular attention from medical staff. As you will see in the final analysis chapter some of these health issues are those suffered by some of the mature female officers.

For instance,

*They have to walk up 2 flights of stairs, but they have less mobility, their hearing is bad, they are cold...prison is not warm enough for the elderly, there are ladders up to the top bunks in cells and some houses...thankfully the younger girls take the top bunks (Claudette, Gov level)*

Along with,

*Some of the elderly prisoners have bladder problems and are incontinent at night so they need an understanding cell mate (Wanda, SO)*

And,

*We get some women who are quite old and frail. What is the point of sending them here [prison]? They are no trouble but they would be better off in a nursing home (PO)*

A number of officers spoke about the menopause and you will find some of the comments from here cross over into chapter 5 where issues specifically related to female officers are discussed.

*A major challenge to the prison now is age...they come in older now and we have to deal with the menopause (SO)*

Similarly,

*It's not just periods [menstrual cycle] we are dealing with, now we have older women in here [prison] who are going through the menopause (PO)*

And,

*It must be awful for them in here [prison] going through the menopause,*

## **Physical and Psychological effects of the job - Mental illness, stress and officers**

Here are comments made during a discussion when officers were relaying a story about an officer in distress. It highlights the impact of the Prison Service budget cuts and how with reduced numbers of frontline officers, the remaining officers are tasked with continuing their role with very little support from the management team,

*There are too many different categories of prisoner and many of the women do not fit the criteria for open conditions, but it looks good on paper. It's like the specialist units he (Gov) has just opened like the mental health unit in Dove but it's not working because he continues to take staff off us. Yesterday an officer shouted on the radio for help on the Dove unit, she had a girl hanging in a cell, you could tell by her voice she was worried and concerned. You see, we can't enter a cell alone, even if someone is hanging, in case they are trying it on and then attack you when you enter alone.*

*Along with,*

*I could hear her on the radio calling for assistance and finally a senior got on the radio and just told her to deal with it, he had no staff to send over.*

Whilst another officer added,

*I was stood on the wing listening, thinking, go in, please go in the cell and cut her down. The officer did go in and cut the ligature off on her own and the girl was ok, but we should not be put in that position. Can you imagine how new recruits would handle something like that?*

*The job effects me psychologically at home, I have become very paranoid at home and am more security conscious, I check the doors and windows and put knives away at night (Suzanne, SO)*

She added,

*I am very conscious of my daughters safety; at home and going to school and I check everything she does online (Suzanne, SO)*

Other officers commented on staff sickness,

*There have been lots of staff payouts over the years because staff have gone loopy with stress and anxiety (Alex, PO)*

Along with,

*There are loads of staff on long term sick (SO)*

And,

*I've been assaulted a few times, I've always worked in volatile areas, you just get used to it. I've had time off on the sick recently (PO)*

Others spoke specifically about being injured at work during assaults from prisoners,

*I was on crutches once for 3 and a half months after being attacked here [prison] another time I got punched in the face and the management told me I had to stay and finish my shift, she said 'fucking hell Lorna, it's only a black eye' (Lorna, PO)*

And,

*I've been assaulted three times this year, one girl fractured my thumb (Piper, PO)*

### **Work related stress**

*There are times when I feel stressed at work...the stony faced prisoners are the ones I worry about...you wonder what they are thinking (Natalie, PO)*

During the early stages of fieldwork three officers on the wing relayed a story that sounded more like a Hollywood movie script, something so fictional it could never happen in 'real' life. This story highlights both the effects of the occupation and the lack of support for officers who struggle to cope with the stresses of the job when they have personal problems to deal with too. Here that story is re-told using the information received from the officers,

*A couple of years ago we had to deal with something on here I never thought possible. The senior officer in question had worked at the prison for over 20 years and was obviously*

*respected by the colleagues she worked alongside. During her last twelve months of service the officer had discussed how stressed she was both at home and work. Her role on the wing became more intense as she had a depleting workforce to rely on. Staff numbers were being reduced due to government cut backs and the prison population remained high. The officers talking to me disclosed they knew she was drinking too much when she left work, yet this was never addressed by more senior staff members. Most serving officers drink heavily when they finish a shift and on their days off, so to many colleagues this behaviour was the norm. Whilst under mounting pressure at work she discovered her husband had been having an affair – he apparently blamed this on the amount of time she spent at the prison. Intoxicated and stressed the officer went round to the mistress's house and physically assaulted her. She had never been in trouble with the police in her life and this act of violence landed her in the courtroom. She was subsequently sentenced to two years in prison and was sent to the prison she had spent twenty years working in; to the wing she had managed for over half of those twenty years. The shame, guilt and embarrassment must have been an incredible burden, however, it was the emotions and feelings of the officers who had to care for and control her during her twelve-month incarceration,*

Along with,

*No one gives a fuck Toni. How does that happen? She was a brilliant officer and should have received help from management (PO)*

And,

*I hated working on here [wing] when she was a prisoner here, I really felt for her (PO)*

*All the officers on here thought she was great, but the stress of the job made her lose sight of what was going on at home (Wanda, SO)*

Whilst one officer expressed,

*It proves anyone can end up in here [prison] (female officer on the wing)*

And,

*I think about her all the time, she was one of the senior staff you could trust, she was really good at her job (PO)*

Here an extract is included from the fieldnotes that links with the work of Crawley (2004a) and how prison officers do not trust the Prison Service support services,

*During the lunch time lock up on the wing the officers talked about their drinking culture, with most officers present stating they have a drink every night. They went on to discuss work related stress and how it is 'not' dealt with very well by the Prison Service. It was evident from the conversation that high numbers of serving officers were on long term sick leave (Field notes, October, 2013)*

The above evidence illustrates the role of a prison officer can be a stressful one. As noted in the literature review of this thesis, there is evidence from psychologists that the working role of a prison officer always appears at the top of the list of most stressful occupations (Cooper, 1997). The officers have no trust in the support offered by the Service and tend to deal with it through alcohol consumption. The levels of staff sickness in the Service are regularly high and this could have something to do with the reduced staffing numbers and rising levels of violence.

### **Concluding comments**

This chapter has highlighted one of the main challenges to the female prison officers working day. Mental illness is a concern with officers commenting about their lack of knowledge, and the lack of training available to them regarding this topic. It has shown how witnessing self-harm incidents or a death in prison, forces the prison officers to present themselves in a professional manner without being allowed to show real emotions whilst in the work place, and that they can sometimes deal with this using humour, albeit black humour though that is accepted as the norm for this occupational culture. The frontline officers require education for the discourse used around self-harm and suicide, instilling

them with coping mechanisms when met with these highly charged situations. This chapter highlights the impressive work done by the female officers when presented with issues of self-harm or suicide, though it also illustrates the officers deal with these events using *jailcraft* as they have no formal education or training regarding these topics. There is also evidence here regarding a lack of concern from management. Staff felt disempowered by the on-going changes enforced by neo-liberal politics, and lines of communication between frontline officers and management appeared to be breaking down. This was having an impact on staff safety and decision making, and at times it became clear the officers felt helpless. Other challenges that came through the voices of the female officers were those around learning disabilities along with the health concerns for a growing elderly population, again, these are areas the female officers have no formal training in yet they are expected to deal with women who present in these categories using ‘common sense’ and their on the job experience.

# Chapter Five: Gendered Empathy

## Introduction

This final analysis section addresses everyday issues concerning the women prisoners and how these everyday events can have a direct effect on the female officers who look after them. It is acknowledged that some of these issues could have an effect on a male officer, however, evidence is presented here that they can have a more significant effect on some of the female officers who work on the frontline in a women's prison.

It is difficult to locate academic literature specific to women working solely with other women, and more specifically, women looking after or caring for imprisoned women and importantly, women who have a certain level of control over the lives of the women. As noted in the literature review, it is more difficult to locate sociological literature relating to female prison officers who work in the women's prison estate. Previous pieces of academic work have concentrated on the introduction of women to a predominantly male workforce thus creating a more normalised working environment where women work alongside men in adult male prisons. Literature concerning modern English female prison officers working in women's prisons is near non-existent.

Currently in the prison researched there is a female to male staff ratio of 60:40. When we consider the needs of female prisoners there are certain problems and situations that can only be dealt with by female officers. For instance, matters relating to the menstrual cycle or the menopause, along with sensitive issues around miscarriage and pregnancy. These personal matters can also have a bearing on the female officers as they too may have encountered problems or concerns in these areas themselves.

This is another part of the prison officers role that can be both painful and emotional for them to deal with. As previously stated prisons are emotional spaces where the officers have no choice but to engage in emotion-work, even when they are personally uncomfortable with the situation they are tasked to deal with. The discussion illustrates how issues such as childbirth create a unique emotional burden that only women can relate to. The ideas of Hochschild's (1983) and her concept of *emotional labour* along with Fineman's (2003) ideas around *emotions in the workplace* will be applied to the everyday work of the female officers during tough and emotional situations.

Firstly, it is worth considering why the female officers believe their approach to the role is quite different from that of their male colleagues. Elaine Crawley (2004a) along with other academics (Liebling and Price, 2001) documented how prison officers can take on the role of a mother or father figure, from the women's perspective female officers take on multifaceted roles throughout a single working day. Fundamentally, female prison officers function as *surrogate providers* (Crewe, 2008) offering different types of support for the women. As previously mentioned in the literature review in chapter one; the female officers can be a counsellor, social worker and carer to name a few, whilst continually fulfilling the role of a custodian. Emotionally, the officers have the potential to show compassion and kindness when needed, however, they are not 'allowed' to show emotions of weakness or vulnerability (Crawley, 2004b); this show of emotion would go against the core values of the stereotypical prison officer occupational culture.

### **Multifaceted roles of female officers**

According to Josi and Sechrest (1998) prison officers are required to assess, monitor and assist prisoners in issues of health, welfare and safety, they are also required to liaise with other professionals who work inside the prison, such as teachers in the education department

and nurses. The prison officers have a duty of care to the prisoners and they must provide for them at the same time as managing them. The work of Kauffman (1988) Lombardo (1989) and Josi and Sechrest (1998) highlights the conflicting roles and responsibilities that prison officers have to navigate on a daily basis whilst in the workplace.

Here is an extract from the field notes,

*It is interesting to observe the different roles the officers take on during the 12 hours or more of a working day. This morning I have observed female officers in an agony aunt role, counselling role, mother and sisterly roles, housing and finance officer roles with the overriding juxtaposition of a custodian role and a nursing role. They are also a friend, albeit one with definite boundaries. The more I observe the more I realize these are not roles you can necessarily be taught, these roles have a lot to do with personality and character, it is something you bring with you to the job. I doubt that it is gained via the officer training programme as the officers are primarily trained in control and security (Field notes 11/4/14)*

Some officers discussed the role of 'being' a mother whilst at work,

*I'm a mother figure... Aren't we all? (Suzanne, SO)*

Similarly,

*I'm a mother here [work] just like I am at home (Piper, PO)*

Other officers saw themselves as role models though thought it more complex than simply being a mother figure,

*Sometimes I feel like I'm a mum, sister and aunty rolled into one person, I suppose it depends what the women need me to be (Lorna, SO)*

And,

*I'm whatever they need me to be...some of them wish I was a hairdresser, but that's a step too far, even for me (Alex, PO)*

Other officers assumed being a mother at home assisted them in understanding the needs of the female prisoners,

*I'm a mum and I think that helps to understand some of the women [prisoners] in here (Natalie, PO)*

*I've got daughters at home the same age as some of them in here [prison] and I think it helps me understand the young ones more, I get their moods (Tiffany, PO)*

Along with,

*If you've got kids it makes a difference, surely it does, we are more compassionate than men (PO)*

Other officers thought they took on a more caring role, because they are women themselves,

*As a woman I think we are more caring, we have more time for the prisoners. I think naturally we have more understanding of how to deal with women (PO)*

Similarly,

*I'm probably more caring towards the women because I am a woman and I understand their needs (Sam, PO)*

And,

*I don't judge their needs, I'm a woman myself and we all go through similar issues (PO)*

Whilst others directly linked their role as a custodian to that of a nurse, a professional widely known to be caring in its approach,

*I feel like a nurse most of the time, not a qualified one, but that's how I feel (Piper, PO)*

And,

*I'm just like a nurse but I wear a different uniform (PO)*

Along with,

*I used to be a nurse, and this job is no different except I don't give out medication here (Gina, PO)*

At times this caring, humanitarian role includes forms of physical contact,

*I change throughout the day, I am here to keep the women secure, but sometimes these women need a hug and I don't mind doing that even though we were told not to do it on our training (PO)*

And,

*Some officers have an issue with personal space. I don't mind touching the girls, nor them me if there is trust there between us. I often give them a hug...the men [male officers] would never do this and I understand that (Suzanne, SO)*

Highlighting the characteristics of many women in prison, another officer stated,

*Some of these women have no love and affection in their lives, a hug from me can make a difference (Gloria, PO)*

The multi-faceted roles of the female officers noted in the above quotes show a working personality in line with Scott's (2008) *humanitarian*. It is this caring humanitarian side of the female officers that strongly rejects much of the current literature around prison officers. The female officers wanted to physically show the women they cared by touching and hugging them. This did not take away the disciplinarian side of the occupation though it does show a side that is not a regular feature in the prison literature. The work of Zimmer (1986) and the recognised traits of women is also relevant here as it illustrates a primary characteristic most women naturally possess and utilise when necessary.

### **Women understanding women**

At some point during the interviews or less formal conversations most of the female officers talked about how they felt *being* a woman was beneficial when working in the prison

environment with female prisoners. At different times officers spoke about sexual relationships between the women and how in the women's prison estate this type of relationship causes more problems than drugs in any part of the prison. When considering sexual relationships amongst prisoners in the prison, officers stated that female prisoners would feel more comfortable talking to a female prison officer about these issues, than a male officer.

For instance,

*I think because I'm female I have more understanding...women understand women (SO)*

This notion of a 'women's instinct' came through a number of the conversations documented,

*We have women's instinct don't we, we know what the women need (PO)*

Similarly,

*We all have women's instinct, we are more switched on. It's like personal space, I don't mind touching them [prisoners] nor them me, but the men [officers] wouldn't allow it (Suzanne, SO)*

Along with,

*Women understand other women better than men don't they? I mean, we have that women's instinct about each other, we can sense when things aren't right (PO)*

Some of the officers openly discussed more personal women's issues,

*Female officers bring something different, like when the girls have bad period pains...men don't understand that do they? (Natalie, PO)*

And,

*Men don't understand period pains and things like that (Tasha, PO)*

And,

*It's not just periods [menstrual cycle] we are dealing with, now we have older women in here [prison] who are going through the menopause (Alex, PO)*

Again, the female officers personally linked these issues to themselves,

*I'm going through the menopause so I know what it's like (SO)*

And,

*It must be awful for them in here [prison] going through the menopause, especially at night, you get night sweats and can't sleep... I'm tired all the time but I can't sleep at night, I get irritable and moody (Gina, PO)*

*I'm going through the menopause, I get hot flushes all the time here [work] so I understand how some of the women feel (PO)*

Again, Zimmer's work from 1986 is important here highlighting that women's instinct is a characteristic specifically related to the gender of the prison officers. Due to the fact some of the female prison officers have themselves suffered similar health problems to the women in their care, it allows them a level of understanding that would be unavailable to their male colleagues. However, the fact that some of their male colleagues would fully understand these gender specific health issues is not discounted here as they may have had similar encounters with wives or female family members in the domestic sphere.

### **Pregnancy and Miscarriage**

It is important to note here the work of Gresham Sykes (1958), his work on the *pains of imprisonment* has been documented in detail in the literature review of this thesis. However, it is commonly accepted that his ground breaking piece of work was in relation to long term adult male offenders. Indeed, the *pains of imprisonment* are similar in many ways for female prisoners although an important *pain* we could add to the list would be one around *maternal deprivations* as noted by Carlen (1983).

Reporting on women's health issues in the prison estate, Edge (2006) claims there is little research on pregnant women in prison, with the majority of this being undertaken in the United States. Pregnancy and birth rates in prisons in England and Wales are not readily available, whilst miscarriage rates appear to be non-existent (Edge, 2006); this is mainly due to Public Health England not collecting any statistics on miscarriages across the country. Edge (2006) also concludes that little is known about how many women in prison miscarry, or the conditions that cause them to do so, giving scope to further research in this area.

When women receive a custodial sentence they have a mandatory drug test and pregnancy test on arrival at the prison (North, 2005). Many of the women are not aware they are pregnant when they arrive at prison and therefore any concerns around the pregnancy will be discussed with the prison officers, predominantly the female officers (most of the officers spoken to claimed this). Many of the women opt to have their baby looked after by a relative whilst others have no such choice as their baby is taken into care by social services with the mother deemed unfit because of either violent behaviour, drug abuse or neglect of older siblings in the past (Edge, 2006).

It is estimated that two babies are born to women prisoners in England and Wales every week (North, 2005), and currently there are six Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) in women's prisons in England. In most MBUs, babies may stay with their mothers for 18 months, however some of the units only allow the baby to stay in the prison with the mother for nine months (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). Yet this minority group of women inside the prison had no mention in the most prominent report to date on vulnerable women in the prison system, the Corston Report (2007).

In the week ending 24 June 2012 there were 46 mothers serving prison sentences in England and Wales who had babies with them (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). No one routinely

monitors the parental status of prisoners in the UK. However, research from the Prison Reform Trust shows that about 200,000 children in England and Wales had a parent in prison at some point in 2009. This is over three times the number of children in care (64,400). In 2006, more children were affected by a parent's imprisonment than by divorce (Prison Reform Trust, 2014)

Pregnancy in prison can be quite dangerous due to the environment. The women need to be cautious about becoming embroiled in violent incidents and there is limited immediate medical care 'on site' for the women who are pregnant. Naturally, there is also a tendency for the women to become more anxious around their due date, when simple things like getting to the hospital become more complex as they worry about transport being ready on time, security checks to get them out of the main gate taking time and the extra worry of not knowing whether their mother, partner or husband will be there due to limited contact. Once the women return to the prison after birth there can be a range of health issues to monitor, some women give birth by caesarean section and will therefore require different support than a woman who has given birth naturally. (information taken from a conversation with the manager of the mother and baby unit, 8/10/13)

When we consider women in prison who are pregnant it flags up a range of sensitive concerns. Some of the prisoners will want to keep their baby, others will not, some may lose the baby during childbirth and others may lose their baby without carrying full term, in the form of a miscarriage. On reflection these are also problems female officers may have had to deal with personally. Again, this is where Arlie Hochschild's theoretical concepts of *emotional labour* and *emotion management* are useful in understanding how these officers suppress their real emotions, an integral part of their occupational culture (Crawley, 2004a, 2004b) when dealing with sensitive issues in the prison environment that they may have had

to deal with personally in their domestic sphere. Goffman's (1959) *presentation of self* is also a valuable concept to use here, and it will be highlighted how the female officers present themselves as a professional individual even though they could be suffering inner turmoil. Their true feelings remain hidden whilst they are in the *front stage* area of the process, and in certain situations the *back stage* may be home, a safe place to express real emotions and feelings of the day's circumstances.

For instance,

*You don't know what goes on at home do you? Some things are personal and you don't speak about them here, but an officer asked to escort a prisoner who has miscarried could've miscarried themselves or could be trying and struggling to get pregnant themselves (Natalie, PO)*

Similarly,

*We are cuffed to the women when they miscarry a baby and it is always the female officers that go, even though it has directly effected some of the female staff in the past (Marie, PO).*

Pregnancy and miscarriage are two areas unique to the women's prison estate and even more so when the prison officers looking after the prisoners are also women. This acknowledges there are further gender specific issues that are unique to the working life of a female officer.

### **Giving birth**

Some of the officers openly expressed their feelings regarding women prisoners giving birth, with some occasions having a lasting effect on the female officers,

*There are things I will never forget like, taking a baby out of a prisoners arms when she had given birth because the mother was going to kill it (SO)*

*It infuriates me that most prisoners are mums...being a drug user is not responsible...it can be difficult when you are the officer on escort to hospital when they are giving birth (Suzanne, SO)*

The same officer went on to add,

*One time I kept sticking the photo up of the baby on the notice board for the prisoner to see...she wasn't arsed...she just wanted tea and toast. I was so angry knowing she would never be there for that child...you do get very angry with the girls about their children (Suzanne, SO)*

Comments such as these go on to highlight the need for the prison officers to mask their real feelings whilst in Goffman's front stage area of communication. It is acknowledged that these are not one off events but incidents that can happen weekly for some female officers working in a women's prison.

One senior officer was more direct with her thoughts on prisoners giving birth,

*You want them all sterilised (SO)*

Whilst a small number of officers talked about how their own personal issues around pregnancy and miscarriage had had an effect on them whilst being in the workplace,

*It's like miscarriage, it doesn't affect the men [officers] like it does us...I had to deal with a girl miscarrying on the wing, there was blood everywhere and she was screaming. I had only been back at work 4 months after my own miscarriage...It wouldn't happen to a male officer...we are not allowed to show our emotions are we? (Suzanne, SO)*

As Fineman (1993, 2000) pointed out, this face-to-face 'people' occupation enforces engagement with emotional labour. *Emotional labour* and *emotion management* (Hochschild, 1983) are important concepts here when considering the feelings and emotions of the female officer, and how those feelings and emotions are either displayed or contained. Significant events such as a miscarriage that you have been through personally are events

where you would feel it acceptable to cry. Goffman (1967) and his concept of *facework* is also relevant here as it is situations such as these where the officers will try and smile through them so as not to show how they really feel. Again, their true feelings will be revealed when they reach the back stage area of their organisation, although as explained earlier, in the case of prison officers this may not be until they return home.

Whilst another officer stated,

*I struggled to get pregnant with my second child, but it is not something I wanted to talk about at work, maybe I should have said something because escorts to hospital with pregnant women were always difficult days for me (Tasha, PO)*

It was explored further how the officer managed this emotionally,

*Well, you can't get upset here can you? We hide our emotions until we get home (Tasha, PO)*

Not all the conversations about births were negative,

*I remember one woman who had pictures of her 14 year old daughter on the cell wall and each time I went in her cell she used to remind me 'you were with me when I gave birth to her' (Vee, SO)*

The interview quotes above all involve the emotion management of the prison officers. It also illustrates how emotions are suppressed because of the situation and the occupational culture. Childbirth is again an area unique to women in prison and it effects female officers distinctly differently from their male colleagues. The facial and bodily display during emotion management and the work of Hochschild (1983) is evident here and is similar to the earlier work of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis.

## Separation and the effects on the female officer

The process of separating mothers from their babies is emotionally challenging for the mother and the officers working closely with them. As noted recently by the Chief Inspector of Prisons Nick Hardwick, this process is by no means a private one. Whilst on an inspection in 2014, Hardwick noted the distress and described the uncomfortableness of witnessing a *separation visit* in the visiting room. The baby was removed from the mother by a social worker in a busy visiting room, full of other visitors and prisoners. It was only the woman's distress that highlighted what was going on. There was no privacy or real thought for the woman's feelings, no thought to how other visitors would feel, a moment that stirs up many feelings and emotions for the prisoner involved, other prisoners on visits with family members and importantly here, the emotions and feelings of the prison officers involved.

Some of the officers said,

*It's usually the female officers who escort a woman to a separation visit, they [management] probably think we understand more (Gloria, PO)*

Along with,

*We understand about women's issues more than the men but it is tough on the officers who are struggling to get pregnant having to watch a baby being taken away by social services (Vee, PO)*

Whilst other officers spoke of the aftermath of this type of formal visit,

*It doesn't end in the visiting room, we have to take the woman back to her cell and lock her up, it's really hard on them and us, you can hear them crying and there is nothing you can do (Alex, PO)*

And, again, highlighting the impact of reduced staffing levels,

*There are no spare staff to spend time with these women. I know I shouldn't but I let them spend some time with a friend [prisoner] the women need comfort and I understand that (Piper, PO)*

The issue of separation visits arose towards the end of the fieldwork period. Hence, although this area needed to be explored further, the research was able to engage with a few officers to discuss their emotions and feelings whilst supervising prisoners having their baby removed by Social Services.

### **Strong female staff groups**

Similar to the male prison estate, traditionally, the workforce mirrored the sex of the prison population. Therefore, when HMPYOI Prison first opened it was staffed by an all female work force. In the early days the all female workforce had a distinct culture and some officers found this difficult to relate to and fit in with, or construed it in a stereotypical or derogatory sense

For instance,

*It was very different when I started here, if you were straight you were in the minority and the prison was run by the lesbian mafia. Little empires they were, staff groups in numbers (Tiffany, PO)*

And,

*When I first started working here I was one of only a few straight (heterosexual) female officers, I felt isolated, they didn't include me in anything socially (Gloria, PO)*

Along with,

*I felt intimidated, and if I'm honest I felt bullied at times (Suzanne, SO)*

*You had to be a strong character in the early days here, lesbian groups ran the place, they thought they were men and behaved like men...brutal at times (Gina, PO)*

The introduction of male officers came in the late nineteen eighties and altered the gendered environment to one emulating that of the male estate. Some of the female officers acknowledged the noticeable change when men started to work alongside them on the prison frontline,

*It was tough being straight and the senior officers were wicked. It started to change when the men [male officers] were posted here, they wouldn't put up with the bullying lesbians and it started to get better (Tiffany, PO)*

Along with,

*The male officers changed this place for the better when they started working here, the lesbian clicks were split up (Sam, PO)*

And,

*We need the men here. Where else do you know of where it is women working with other women? (PO)*

### **Homosexuality and the perceived problems of promotion**

There were a few officers who openly spoke about their sexuality and how they believed it had hampered their chances of promotion. These officers believed that although they were qualified for certain roles and had the experience to take the more senior roles on, they were overlooked and seemingly it appeared the men got promoted more than their female colleagues. For instance,

*It's a man's world and you'll never get rid of the old boys network in any prison (Suzanne, SO)*

Along with,

*I have gone for many promotions over the years and never got any of them...my face doesn't fit because of my sexuality. I have been in positions of acting up in more senior roles and then when it comes to the interview a less experienced male officer gets the role (Lorna, SO)*

Here, a senior officer discusses confronting a male colleague who had gained promotion over herself recently,

*I asked one why he thought he deserved the role over me and he said he didn't but he played golf with other managers so that is basically why he got the job and not me. There is this golf clique and all the men get the senior roles (Vee, SO)*

The same officer went on to say,

*A male officer came from another prison and I was asked to train him up for a role they wouldn't give me. I still go for the interviews even though I know I will not get it (Vee, SO)*

Whilst other officers appeared convinced their sexual identity had hampered their career progress through the prison service,

*I'm a lesbian; I will always get overlooked for promotion (PO)*

And,

*I'm gay, so I can't shag my way to the top (SO)*

Along with,

*The interview process is unfair, It's who you know, not what you know (Vee, SO)*

Homosexuality and being a female prison officer only came up in conversation once or twice during the research and was not a line of questioning pursued, though certain officers wanted to speak about this issue, it was felt, in the most part to 'get things off their chest'.

## Spill-over

When the public working life of a prison officer crosses over to their private life at home it can affect the stability of domestic life. There has been very little research regarding the private lives of prison officers, with the focus being on the officers role at work, inside the prison. However, Crawley (2004a) interviewed a number of wives and a smaller number of children of prison officers to understand the effects of this occupation on those at home. Importantly, Heidensohn (1992) also documented how women and the traditional domestic sphere of the home can play a significant role in ordering the behaviour of others when away from the home.

As noted in the thesis literature review, the evidence suggests uniforms worn due to requirements of the occupation can have a marked effect on personality. An effect that maybe only close family members notice and the person wearing the uniform only realizes when it is pointed out to them (Crawley, 2002, Calvey, 2008). The symbolic power of this occupational uniform was made explicit in Zimbardo's controversial *Stanford Prison Experiment* in 1973, where it was evident the students chosen to 'play' prison officers changed quite dramatically through the process of the experiment.

The female officers spoken to could relate to 'feeling different' when they had their work uniform on,

*Sometimes my husband says, you're not at work now, take your uniform off and what he really means is...change your attitude (Tiffany, PO)*

And,

*My husband is not in the service and there are times at home when he will say...take your uniform off (Gloria, PO)*

Along with,

*I know I change when I put my uniform on, you have to (Piper, PO)*

And,

*It's a uniform, I'm still human underneath (Natalie, PO)*

Crawley (2002, 2004a) noted that officers commented on how the job has 'changed' them and how they feel they have become 'harder' since joining the service – there is a cultural expectation to be 'hard'. When discussing this spill-over effect of the job, Crawley (2002, 2004a) found the officers she spoke to had become desensitised to the distress and suffering of others. This, she found could have detrimental effects in their private lives. Goffman (1959) also acknowledged that the occupational uniform is symbolic when people present themselves in the workplace. As mentioned previously in the methodology chapter of this thesis, questions around the private lives of officers were developed after piloting the research questions. Here is what the officers initially had to say,

*Are you interested in our private lives? This job effects lots of people and it would be interesting to know how officers cope when they get home (Alex, PO)*

Along with,

*The private lives of prison officers would be interesting...I think it would be really interesting to find out how staff feel when they leave here...there is a big drinking culture and high levels of alcohol use...you can smell it on loads of officers in the morning (Suzanne, SO).*

And,

*Yeah, I agree. A lot of officers drink alcohol when they get home and I often wonder how their wives or husbands deal with it (PO)*

Whilst one officer talked about her father being a prison officer,

*My dad was a prison officer years ago and if I'm honest I used to dread him coming home...he never spoke to us, just barked orders, he was an alcoholic (Lorna, SO)*

Traditionally, prison officers drank at times during their working hours. It was common for the officers to go to the social club during lunch hours and it was also common for officers to go back to work on the landings intoxicated (BBC 2, 2015). However, this is no longer part of the culture and officers are not allowed to drink alcohol during their working hours. However, it was evident that this drinking culture outside of the work place has lived on, albeit at a more micro level. The female officers commented on the drinking culture that seems to go hand in hand with this occupation, in accordance with the values and norms of this type of occupational culture,

*There is a big drinking culture and high levels of alcohol use...you can smell it on loads of officers in the morning (Suzanne, SO)*

And,

*There are loads of staff that drink heavily here...and I mean loads (Natalie, PO)*

Other officers had this to say,

*Yeah, I find it difficult to switch off when I get home because I am often on call....so when I get home, I walk the dog, eat and then pour myself a drink...I have a drink most nights (Gov level)*

Along with,

*I drink more when I am working than on my days off (Sam, PO)*

And,

*I find it difficult to switch off when I get home, my partner is a prison officer and we talk about work all the time. We never used to drink, not even when we were younger, now we both have a couple of glasses of wine every night, and we both discuss the drinking because it is the job that started us off (Gina, PO).*

Here are selected extracts from the field notes,

*The officers have come back from a weekend camping trip that was meant to be a team building exercise. They are talking about how much alcohol they had taken with them and thus, consumed; bottles of wine, bottles of spirits and beer. The conversation stays around the topic of alcohol, and that 'getting pissed' was the only fun part of the trip. (Field notes 14/9/13)*

Along with,

*The officers are discussing who is going to the pub after work, from the banter, I suspect those who volunteered a yes, are the usual pub-frequenting suspects (Field notes 8/10/14)*

Officers freely discussed the amount of alcohol consumption amongst colleagues both during interviews and informal conversations,

*Some officers smell of stale alcohol when they speak, I am unsure whether this is from a one off drink the night before or whether it is a result of topping up (Conversation documented in field notes 8/10/14)*

On the other hand there were officers who never consumed alcohol, ultimately distancing themselves from the traditional occupational culture of the service,

*I don't drink because of the long drive in the next day and I don't like drinking on my own at home and my husband works on the rigs (Natalie, PO)*

And,

*I don't drink alcohol, I never have and I don't go out socially with any colleagues (Maria, SO)*

Along with,

*There are staff searches but no drug or alcohol tests and you can smell alcohol on lots of staff (PO)*

With the main literature we already have on prison officers in England (Crawley, 2004a; Liebling and Price, 1999; Liebling *et al*, 2011) it is evident this consistent drinking culture bears no difference with the female officers. It is evident that they too indulge in this after work activity as their male colleagues do and that it is possible this continued norm of the occupational culture will never change.

### **Marriage and relationships**

As previously noted, the role of a prison officer is hidden behind the prison walls, with only those embedded in the occupation really knowing what goes on during each shift. The environment and its inhabitants can be described and stories told, however, the picture most people have of prison is from pictures in the tabloid newspapers and as is commonly known, this is not a true depiction of prison life. Some officers may tell their loved ones how they are feeling, others may keep things from them as a form of protection. Some officers try and ‘switch off’ on their way home, others may not be able to contain their real emotions. All of this could have effects on family life and personal relationships.

Some of the female officers had only ever been in a relationship with or married to another serving officer. Some of these officers worked at the same prison and others spoke about their husbands who worked in other prisons. This close working relationship with shared experiences both at home and work can have an impact.

As one officer stated,

*Its difficult when you work at the same prison as your husband, everyone gets to know your troubles but at least they understand the job you do (Tiffany, PO)*

Other officers spoke about break-ups and divorces,

*Work has cost me my marriage, my ex husband gave me an ultimatum and I chose the job, not him. I am in another relationship with another prison officer but he doesn't work at this prison, which I'm glad about. But he does understand the job I do because he does it and that helps some days (Piper, PO)*

Similarly,

*I'm in a new relationship with another officer now but he doesn't work here, he works in a male prison (Maria, PO)*

*I used to be married to an officer who worked here, but not anymore we divorced, I'm in a different relationship now (Tasha, PO)*

Not all of the officers who had divorced had remarried someone in the Service,

*I used to be married to a prison officer but after the divorce I always said I would never have another partner in the service, my new partner has nothing to do with the prison and it is much better (Piper, PO)*

Along with,

*I would never have another relationship with an officer, everyone knows your business here [prison] (Sam, PO)*

And,

*I am now married to someone who has never worked in the service...best move I ever made. When you are married to someone in the service it can be difficult to maintain a healthy relationship... everyone knows your business (Tiffany, PO)*

### **Maintaining relationships with those outside of the service**

Officers discussed how difficult it was to maintain a healthy, loving relationship at home. The comments all had a similar theme around not being able to contact people outside of the prison during working hours, or partners not being allowed to contact them inside the prison. Prison officers are like everyone else who enters the prison environment and they

are not allowed to have a mobile phone on their person. It is also forbidden for prison officers to make or receive personal phone calls whilst on duty, unless it is deemed an emergency. For instance,

*My ex could never call me at work...we can't have personal calls here and he could never understand that (Piper, PO)*

And,

*We can't bring our mobile phones in here [prison] so I can't text my husband or phone him. It's not like working in an office or a shop (Gina, PO)*

Along with,

*If you have had a row at home, you are then in here [prison] for 12 ½ hours without contact to the outside world. No-one can phone and you can't read texts until you hand your keys in and leave to go home (Alex, SO)*

Whilst other officers discussed the difficulties in trying to maintain a relationship outside of the workplace with someone who has never worked for the Prison Service,

*My ex husband wasn't in the service and he used to talk about how cushy prison was, it used to get on my nerves (Alex, PO)*

And,

*He [ex-husband] was never interested in my job, my ex thought we used to sit around all day drinking coffee whilst the prisoners were locked up (Tiffany, PO)*

Another officer told me,

*My ex-husband could never understand why I wanted to be a prison officer, he always said it was a job without respect from anyone and that people generally looked down on prison officers...it's part of the reason he is now an ex (Piper, PO)*

Many officers openly spoke about their relationships at home. They were not asked about marriage and divorce though officers freely spoke about it. Again, this was an area where

humour was used and many of the female officers made sarcastic comments towards their ex partners, some of which was said during conversations with other officers present and the officers collectively would make dry, sometimes rude, comments about their ex spouses. It is interesting to note here that Kirschman (2007) found the divorce rate amongst female police officers was twice as high than that of their male colleagues.

### **Leaving work in the workplace**

As noted above, prison officers deal with a variety of issues during their working day. For example, observations and informal conversations highlighted they can go from organizing fun run's in the prison grounds with the women, to raising money for charity, to congratulating a prisoner on passing an education exam, to telling prisoners of a family bereavement, to the sad but real matter of cutting a prisoner down who has hung herself. All these issues carry a varied range of emotions.

The officers talked about taking their work home with them and how this effected their work life balance and it was evident some longer-serving officers had found ways to manage their work life balance. For instance,

*I don't take work home with me, I live 40 miles away so by the time I get home I am usually fine. I don't drink because of the long drive in the next day and I don't like drinking on my own at home and my husband works on the rigs (Natalie, PO)*

Along with,

*I don't talk about my job outside of work, no-one understands what we do. The school mums didn't know what I did and were shocked when I turned up in my uniform one day, which I don't usually do (Gloria, PO)*

*I don't take work home with me, I try not to let it effect my home life and if I am stressed I take the dog out for a long walk and them I'm ok (Tiffany, PO)*

And,

*I don't take work home, I have been in the job too long and I think there is something wrong if you can't leave your work here. I don't socialize with work colleagues, I used to but not now (Maria, PO)*

Whilst others stated,

*I try not to take work home with me, but sometimes it's difficult, especially when one of the women has attempted to take her own life (Alex, PO)*

Along with,

*Some days I leave work here [prison] but other days I have gone home in floods of tears... you can't cry here, you can't be emotional (Wanda, SO)*

And,

*I've got teenage daughters at home and when something serious has happened to one of the younger ones [prisoners] here, I always get upset when I get home and give my daughters a hug...I'm only human (Piper, PO)*

### **Home life, partners and dependents understanding the job**

As noted above, some of the officers spoken to had ended marriages and put relationships behind them due to partners not really understanding their role as a prison officer. It will be recognised here that there are other family members who play a vital role in their mother's occupation. It was evident some officers used the prison environment as a scare tactic even though there is academic evidence stating this process can have the reverse effect (see literature around Scared Straight programmes). It was also evident that some of the officers just wanted their family members to see where they worked, so they could better understand the environment they worked in.

## **Dependents**

For instance,

*I was going through a bad stage at home with my teenage daughter so I brought her in here to show her where she could end up (Alex, PO)*

More positively,

*I brought my own kids in one day so they could see where I worked and to help them understand the job I do (Tasha, PO)*

And,

*I have brought my kids in on family days, I want them to understand where I work...my son had his haircut here and he couldn't wait to get home and tell his mates (Piper, PO)*

## **Husbands and partners**

Some husbands and partners have worked for the Prison Service, others have not and those who did not had little understanding of the role of a prison officer,

*My partner who has nothing to do with the prison service worries about me when I am at work but at first he didn't really respect it. He used to say...you only work three days a week, so I brought him in here when we had an open day and that soon changed his mind (Tiffany, PO)*

And,

*My husband worries about me when I am at work so I don't usually tell him if we've had an incident on here [wing] (Gloria, PO)*

*My husband worries about me when I am here so I don't tell him if there have been any incidents (PO)*

Other prison officers commented on the symbolisms of their work uniforms

*My husband says I have become more affirmative, I know I change when I put my uniform on, you have to (Natalie, PO)*

Officers spoke about how they changed when they came to work, leaving their domesticated norms at home and entering the occupational culture norms and how you are expected to act and behave whilst at work in the prison. For instance,

*I change when I go home, I change the way I speak at work, I fit in with them here, at home I speak much better (Gloria, PO).*

And,

*I swear a lot here, I don't do that at home (Tasha, PO)*

Along with,

*Your family notice things, we become cynical (SO)*

The work of Kirschman (2007) is useful here even though it is based around the families of police officers. Kirschman (2007) claims that being a member of this type of occupational culture is a source of pride for both officers and family members. However, she goes on to state that the long hours and unpredictable shifts in a profession that has a crisis driven nature has an ultimate impact on home life, she goes on to describe this as an emotional rollercoaster. Importantly for this thesis, Kirschman (2007) covers specific topics for women in the force.

### **Husbands working in the Prison Service**

As noted at the beginning of the methodology chapter, there were female officers who had joined the Service because their partner or husband already worked as a prison officer,

*My husband works in the service so he understands the job, it's good to be able to get things off my chest when I get home (Suzanne, SO)*

Another told me,

*My husband works here, but we try not to talk about the prison when we go home (PO)*

### **Pregnancy, maternity leave and childcare**

The female officers spoke about their shift patterns and how this had been worked around childcare, so a number of the officers worked set days each week making this easier to arrange any childcare whilst they are at work. Though as the field work was coming to a close shift patterns were changing and staff would not be allowed to work the same days each week as some of them had done for years. This is what the officers had to say,

*I'm a mum and I had many stressful, sleepless nights worrying about childcare. Management weren't bothered and I was told 'it's your life choice to have children' (Maria, PO)*

And,

*They are changing our hours and I have worked this pattern for years because my childcare is the same each week (Tasha, PO)*

Along with,

*I have got young children and I'm the main carer for my partner at home, I have always worked set days but not anymore, due to staff shortages management said we can't rely on those set days... they don't give a shit about us (Gloria, PO)*

### **Concluding comments**

This chapter focuses on what it is like to be a woman working in a male dominated occupation, and how the role of a prison officer can have an impact on life away from the prison environment. It has highlighted how some of the pains suffered by those serving a prison sentence can have an impact on the personal well being of some of the female officers, by illustrating the unique similarities between the female officers and women in

their care. It has shown how the female officers have a level of understanding when faced with everyday women's problems such as the menstrual cycle and menopause. It has also highlighted how certain events such as pregnancy and miscarriage can have a unique effect on some of the female prison officers, as these are personal events they may have struggled to deal with themselves privately away from the workplace.

The female officers must also cope with their change in occupational circumstances, most notably when they have given birth or have young children to care for at home. The female officers expressed their concerns around the lack of promotional opportunities and feel they are overlooked due to having children at home. The impact of neo-liberal politics was also having an impact on changes to their working lives, with changes to working regimes and patterns impacting on their lives at home. Again, this was mainly due to the fact women are the primary carers at home and it was causing an imbalance in their work and home lives.

# Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to develop a greater understanding of the working lives of female prison officers in an English women's prison, and to further understand whether their occupation had an impact on their personal lives outside of the workplace. The current academic literature on female prison officers focuses on the period during the mid nineteen eighties when cross-posting first came into place and as we have learnt, this literature was mainly from the United States and negative when considering the woman's role in this predominantly masculine occupation and unhelpful when exploring the relationships, working styles and challenges faced by these female employees of HMPS. The aim of this research was to explore whether female prison officers have different working styles to the male colleagues they work alongside, the type of relationships they form with those they look after and those they work alongside and to explore the challenges they face on a daily basis. My intention was also to theorise the role of the female prison officers utilising Erving Goffman's *dramaturgical analysis* (1959) Arlie Hochschild's *emotional labour* (1983) and a branch of the sociology of occupations, that centres around police occupational culture namely, the work of Bittner (1965, 1970, 1974) and Skolnick's *working personality* (1975).

To achieve the specified aims set out in the introduction of this thesis and to answer the primary research question discussed in the methodology chapter, I employed a qualitative, ethnographic approach to the research. One to one interviews were conducted with female officers in the workplace and to supplement this data I also employed observations and both one to one and group conversations. The chosen method of data collection allowed the research subjects to talk about their working roles through their voices and not through the

voice of the researcher. This methodological approach has allowed me to produce rich and orthodox data around the daily working lives of female prison officers in a women's prison.

As noted, prisons are emotional environments and prison officers are required to give the impression of being calm and in control when dealing with prisoners on a day-to-day basis. Alongside this, the officers are expected to deal with highly emotional situations and their thoughts, feelings and emotions around these situations have been illustrated throughout the thesis. It is also evident feelings and emotions play a part in the working lives of an officer when they also have to contend with on-going changes to the Prison Service under current neo-liberal politics. With staff shortages an everyday part of prison life, the officers are increasingly under pressure to deliver a professional service with depleting resources to hand, whilst continuously presenting themselves as confident and professional. As we have seen, this has an impact on the private lives of the officers. When they return home from work they must present as a different character, one that is not always centred around discipline and control. How the officers 'switch off' when they return home has been imperative to understanding their working personalities and how they present themselves both at work and at home. The gendered roles of the officers have been important to understand how female prison officers differ from their male colleagues and how this occupation can de-sensitise the officers to situations many of us would struggle to comprehend. Importantly, it is evident the officers use common female traits or 'gendered empathy' to assist with how they approach certain challenges in the prison, and how this also helps them deal with personal issues the prisoners are concerned about. However, this leads us to the personal issues of female prison officers and how the occupation can affect them quite differently from their male colleagues. The emotions and feelings around certain

situations they are faced with when dealing with the prisoners can only surface when women are working alongside other women in this type of total institution.

During the writing up of this thesis a coalition government was in power. The Justice Secretary Chris Grayling had implemented changes to the Prison Service, none of which appeared to have a positive impact on staff moral and motivation. Staff were leaving the Service having lost confidence in an occupation that was once deemed a worthwhile career. Staff sickness remains at a high level and the frontline workforce continues to reduce, all of which has an impact on the officers themselves and the women in their care. The prison population on a whole continues to increase with no signs of this reducing to manageable levels and resources remain stretched. Consequently this has an impact on staff – prisoner relationships. As discussed in chapter three of this thesis, the prison officers are struggling to form and maintain relationships with the women in their care. This is having an impact on the women as there are less staff to attend to their needs and there is less time to spend talking. No time to talk to the women prisoners on a one-to-one basis was also a dominant theme highlighting that relationships in this environment are vital when dealing with vulnerable women. The evidence shows that relationships with management are poor, resulting at times in conflict illustrating the impact of neo-liberal prison policies being implemented. Another dominant theme was humour, something that is mentioned in much of the current prison officer literature (Crawley, 2004a) and this research has shown how humour is used to both appease prisoners assisting in the smooth running of the prison and as part of the occupational culture to assist the officers with their everyday emotions and feelings.

As discussed in chapter four, mental health in prison is an on-going concern and a concern no one seems to have a workable solution to; arguably it could be said that mental illness is

one of the layers of the perpetual prison crisis in this country. The evidence from this research backs up the notion of reformed prison officer training, where the topic of mental illness should be incorporated into the Prison Officer Entry Level Training programme. The impact of a reduced workforce means the officers have no time to be released for further training and yet it is imperative the officers are taught how to deal with mental illness, to understand why women self-harm so frequently in prison and why some of this results in a death in custody. With rising numbers of mentally ill prisoners, the officers should be taught how to enhance their existing understanding of mental health issues, to increase the officers' awareness of signs and symptoms of mental illness and so the officers can learn how to communicate more effectively with prisoners who exhibit signs of mental illness. This will allow for further knowledge to be gained by the officers and could offer some way in providing a safer prison environment for those who have to spend time there. Mental illness in the prison is not going away and we need to have confident, educated prison officers for them to be able to cope with the situations they are presented with.

Earlier this year police inspector Michael Brown was seconded from the West Midlands police force to the national police training college to review the training and guidance that supports police officers who deal with vulnerable adults with a mental illness (College of Policing, 2015). Inspector Brown has been widely acknowledged for his knowledge on mental illness, policing and its relationship with the criminal justice system (Brown, 2015). This is a move the Prison Service could follow. The study engaged with a number of officers who wanted to learn much more about this issue, meaning, nationally, there must be many more officers who would be willing to be educated who could futuristically follow a similar role to that of Inspector Brown. This would allow for mental health training to become a part of the prison officer training course content.

There is further concern around the training. The current prison officer training programme is not gendered and no matter where the officers are going to be established the training is based around working with male prisoners. Therefore the new recruits will have to learn ‘on the job’ how to deal with female prisoners and to learn why and how their needs are different and therefore requires a different approach than when working with male prisoners. Fundamentally, the Prison Service requires specific training in the areas of women and mental illness.

As discussed in chapter five, there are unique similarities between the female officers and the women prisoners when events such as childbirth, miscarriage, the female menstrual cycle along with something that all women go through at later stages of life, the menopause, present themselves in a prison setting. These female related issues acknowledge again that there is a need for gendered training for prison officers allowing both male and female officers to gain awareness of these female related health issues.

An area that was consistent through this chapter was that around the promotion of female staff. Some of the female officers felt they were overlooked for promotion because they had young children to care for at home, whereas others felt they were overlooked for promotion due to their sexuality. The officers spoken to agreed this was not an obstacle that male colleagues had to navigate, and therefore this thesis illustrates that gender plays an important role in this occupation.

Theoretically, the concept of *emotional labour* has been helpful throughout this research; in understanding the, sometimes, deep-seated emotions and feelings of female prison officers in the workplace. The theoretical literature has allowed for a deeper understanding of how these officers manage their feelings whilst at work and at home, and how certain situations, unique to women’s prisons, can have an emotional impact on female prison officers. As

Fineman (2000) noted, emotions are invaluable to the inner workings of this type of organisation. The work of both Hochschild (1983) and Fineman (1993, 2000) illustrated how face-to-face occupations enforce engagement with emotional labour. It is clear from the evidence in this thesis that the prison officers manage the emotions of prisoners and perform emotion in line with their occupational norms, whilst as Fineman (1993) states, keeping their own 'real time' emotions in check. More importantly, when considering gender and emotional labour Hochschild (1983) explains how the world turns to women for mothering and how this fact attaches itself to job descriptions. For the female prison officers who engage in emotional labour on a regular basis, this literature emphasises how they must be aware of their own emotions to be able to recognise the emotions of prisoners. This thesis highlights that when performed at its best, emotional labour goes relatively unnoticed.

Erving Goffman's work has been important to this thesis, mainly because of the applicability of his theories such as *facework* and *presentation of self*. Through observing and talking to the female officers it has been illustrated how they have to present themselves in certain ways during certain situations whilst on the *front stage* to abide by the masculine occupational norms of the prison officers role. There is evidence in this thesis to show how dramaturgical issues such as being a social chameleon are utilised daily by the officers. For instance, the officers make their body language, tone of voice, demeanour and mannerisms fit appropriately with each situation they are presented with. The officers performance includes their uniform, objects they carry such as keys and radios, along with their tone of voice and manner, and this performance is part of their everyday working life, and as Henley et al (1992) stated, gender is a central element in these personal performances, and these performances are ultimately crafted (Goffman, 1959). Alongside this, cultural values are important and should therefore be considered in the analysis of everyday interaction.

The work of Bittner (1965, 1970, 1974) around police occupational culture along with Skolnick's concept of a *working personality* was relevant to the present study. This was primarily due to a lack of literature around prison officers and due to the fact both police and prison officers deliver a public service, are blue-collar workers and both are deemed as working class occupational groups. At the beginning of this research study it had been assumed the working lives of a prison officer could be understood through the literature around the working lives of police officers, since this is often deemed the only comparable occupation in the criminal justice system. This proved unhelpful as the research got under way and only highlighted how very different the roles of police and prison officers are. Police officers spend much less time dealing with people on a one-to-one basis. They may arrest someone in the street or their home but once the offender is taken to the police station they will be handed to other officers for interviewing. Whereas, prison officers can spend near enough their whole working life in the Service working with the same prisoners. There are similarities with the two professions in the sense they both have to present as professionals whilst in the working role and there are similarities with their occupational culture traditions, norms and values. However, police officers do not have the time to form relationships with the offenders they come into contact with, whereas this is a necessary part of the prison officers role. In hindsight, it would have been more useful to engage more thoroughly with the medical literature and importantly the literature around nurses and their occupational culture.

This thesis took on a similar methodology to that of Erving Goffman, by concentrating on the micro-sociological it revealed significant and important things about the macro level of this hidden environment. Importantly, everything evidenced in this thesis has an impact on the lives of the prisoners. Low staff morale and poor working conditions effects

relationships with prisoners. Reduced numbers of frontline staff means purposeful activities are not always available to keep prisoners occupied and ultimately adds to the risk of their personal safety. This will only ensure future re-offending rates for women will remain high when there is no time to assist the women with their needs on the inside and their requirements on the outside.

The Prison Service, as an occupation will continue to be dominated by men though this thesis clearly illustrates that if women do the job in the way they have been observed it is safe to state that it is no longer a resource for constructing masculinity. When we consider women in prison, the female officers do this role as well if not better than their male colleagues.

### **Future Projects – looking forward**

This research shows the working lives of female prison officers is an interesting area to further explore. The research could be expanded to include the voices of other female officers working in both the women's and mens prisons in England and Wales. The research has opened an avenue for new areas of exploration concerning female prison officers, for instance, the thoughts and feelings of new recruits to the Service are significant, and similarly, exploring the ethnicity of female officers and whether this has an impact on the working styles of a female prison officer.

Although there is a great deal of literature around staff – prisoner relationships, this is another area that is changing in different ways. With a depleting number of frontline uniformed officers, prisoners are being tasked with the work roles previously taken by officers and therefore the role reversal of prisoners would be worth exploring to help with understanding how working alongside prisoners will ultimately change the type of

relationships formed inside the prison, whilst also flagging up issues around prisoner confidentiality.

The evidence around the lack of professional training on offer to new recruits in the Service could have an impact on future prison policy. It is evident the officers require new training opportunities to assist them in their everyday dealings with prisoners who suffer with a mental illness, alongside this the prison officer training should be gendered.

# Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

**ACCT** – Assessment and Care in Custody Teamwork documents filled in by prison officers for prisoners who are deemed vulnerable and at risk of self-harm

**ACPO** – Association of Chief Police Officers – develops policing practice in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

**CCJS** – Centre for Crime and Justice Studies

**CJS** – Criminal Justice Service

**CSSU** – Care, Separation and Support Unit – more commonly known as the segregation

**Cross-posting** – the era when women were allowed to work on the landings of men’s prisons and men were allowed to work on the wings and landings of women’s prisons

**Frontline Officers** – Prison officers who work face-to-face with prisoners on a regular basis; officers who work on the wings and other residential areas

**HLPR** – Howard League for Penal Reform – oldest penal reform charity in the UK

**HMPYOI** – Her Majesty’s Prison and Young Offenders’ Institution

**IEP** – Incentives and Earned Privileges – introduced to encourage responsible behaviour and to create a more disciplined, better controlled and safer environment for prisoners and staff

**IRAS** – Integrated Research Application System - a single system for applying for the permissions and approvals for health and social care / community care research in the UK

**Jail Craft** – Prison officer knowledge gained through experience in the role

**MBU** – Mother and Baby Unit – units established inside women’s prisons

**MoJ** – Ministry of Justice

**NHS** – National Health Service

**NOMS** – National Offender Management Service - an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice responsible for the correctional services in England and Wales (separate arrangements exist in Scotland and Northern Ireland). It was created by combining parts of both of the headquarters of the National Probation Service and Her Majesty's Prison Service

**Number One** – Governing governor of the prison

**PO** – Prison Officer

**POA** – Prison Officers Association – professional Trades Union for prison, correctional and secure psychiatric workers

**POELT** – Prison Officer Entry Level Training - 8 week training course providing new officers with the skills and knowledge they need to begin their Prison Service careers

**PRT** – Prison Reform Trust – a charity working to ensure prisons are humane and effective

**PTSD** – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – anxiety disorder caused by stressful, frightening or distressing events

**ROTL** – Released on Temporary Licence – a prisoner can leave the prison for a short time, possibly for work purposes

**RPO** – Recruit Prison Officer from the Irish Prison Service

**SCWS** – Staff Care and Welfare Service

**SEU** – Social Exclusion Unit - set up by the Prime Minister in December 1997; initially part of the Cabinet Office and moved over to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in May 2002. Their aim is to help improve government action to reduce social exclusion

**SO** – Senior Officer

**VEDS** – Voluntary Early Departure Scheme – taken by long-serving officers so they can leave the Service before the age of retirement

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