Probing Probation:

Issues of Gender and Organisation Within the Probation Service

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Sociology
Faculty of Human Sciences

June 1998

ABSTRACT

PROBING PROBATION:

ISSUES OF GENDER AND ORGANISATION
WITHIN THE PROBATION SERVICE

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This study focuses on the probation service and the changes that are impacting on this part of the criminal justice system. It develops a theoretically distinctive approach, drawing on the literature of gender and organisations, in order to investigate issues relating to the organisational structures and processes experienced by male and female probation officers in three disparate probation areas in England.

The opening two chapters examine the development of the organisation in terms of the hierarchical roles within the service and the gendered distribution of probation officer staff across the various grades. This review provides a unique understanding of the changing composition of the probation service and enables a gendered perspective to be applied to its history. Within this context issues of professional identity and autonomy, the value base and working practices of probation officers, and the shift from local to centralised control are scrutinised from an analytic position which identifies the embeddedness of gender within this organisational setting.

The framework of a reflexive approach interweaves gendered issues from the quantitative findings with qualitative responses from interviews with male and female probation officers and participant observation within different working environments. New perspectives are gained on the shift from local to Home Office direction of the service, and into the abandonment of the social work qualification and ethos. Moreover, the complexities of working relationships and professional identities are opened up from a gendered viewpoint. In this respect the study addresses the absence of gender within other research in this area and concludes that a gendered analysis is of critical importance in understanding the extent of organisational change within the probation service.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

This study was financed with the aid of a research studentship from the University of Plymouth.

A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Research Methods. Relevant conferences were attended and papers were presented as outlined below.

Publications: May, T. and Annison, J. (forthcoming).
'The De-professionalisation of Probation Officers',
in Abbott, P. and Meerabau, L. (eds) (forthcoming).
The Sociology of the Caring Professions
(Second Edition). London: Taylor & Francis.

Conference Papers: Annison, J. and May, T. (1997). 'Power,
De-professionalisation and the State'.
Paper presented at the British Sociological Association
Annual Conference April 1997.

Annison, J. (1995). 'All Change or No Change?'
A Study from a Feminist Perspective of Gender and
Organisational Issues within the Probation Service'.
Paper presented at The Women's Studies Network (UK)
Association Annual Conference June 1995.

Signed...................................

Date...15/10/98.....................

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the probation service at a time of change and uncertainty. The increasingly hard-line law and order rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s has impacted on the probation service, with legislation bringing about significant changes in the working practices of probation officers. While the literature in this area has included detailed histories of the service (King 1969, Jarvis 1972, Bochel 1976, Haxby 1978), studies investigating probation officers and their work (see, for example, Boswell 1989), and an exploration of organisational change within one area of the probation service (May 1991a), there has been an absence of a gendered analysis within this academic field. This research revisits past and present developments relating to the probation service from a perspective that challenges the androcentricity of previous approaches. It also demonstrates the embeddedness of gender within this organisational setting and thus extends the descriptive and analytical understanding of this part of the criminal justice system.

In addressing the extent and nature of changes affecting the probation service the thesis starts by re-examining the development of the organisation. Chapter 1 presents an in-depth account of the growth and more recent contraction of the service and uncovers organisational patterns that have not previously been subjected to detailed scrutiny. This review provides a contextual framework to investigate issues of autonomy, power and discretion in terms of the professional aspirations of probation officers. In this way it informs the analysis of the complexity of the changing situation, and of the unresolved tensions and uncertainties relating to the future structure of the organisation, lines of accountability, managerial functions and everyday working practices.

In Chapter 2, through secondary analysis of data concerning changes in personnel over time, the gender distribution across the grades is examined, taking into account both the national position and local variations. This provides a unique insight into the gendered development of the service, illustrating in a graphic way the increasing feminisation at maingrade level, alongside the continuing predominance of men at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. This gendered approach enables a broader social context to underpin the review of the cultural, structural and political factors considered within this chapter.

In this way, the wide-ranging accounts of the historical background and more recent developments relating to the probation service within Chapters 1 and 2 provide an analytic foundation for the following chapters. In extending the investigation of the current situation, Chapter 3 includes findings from documentary research into local annual reports and Equal Opportunities policies. This critique indicates gaps between local and national policy implementation and suggests areas which are explored further at grassroots level.

Central to this research is the challenging of the ungendered notion of a 'probation officer'. In developing the research study the pivotal importance of this gendered perspective led to the adoption of qualitative research methods to enquire into the positions and views of male and female probation officers, drawing on feminist approaches which also acknowledged the interactive positioning of myself as researcher. Chapter 3 thus outlines the development of the research project and the negotiations required to conduct individual interviews and group meetings in three different probation areas, as well as carrying out participant observation within these various environments. In reviewing the process of gaining information and access, the

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'insider-outsider' concept (Merton 1972) links the researcher and the research interests with gendered responses within the organisation itself.

The range of issues identified in the earlier chapters are explored from the viewpoints of the male and female respondents in the study (see Appendix). In Chapters 4 and 5 the gendering of official and unofficial discourses within the organisation are interwoven with the responses from these probation officers. Chapter 4 considers aspects relating to the professional and personal identities of the various probation officers, looking at differences and similarities between the men and women with varying lengths of service, and across the hierarchical positionings of these respondents. The focus shifts in Chapter 5 to view the gendered relations within contrasting probation settings, investigating gendered structures and processes as experienced by the probation officers. The personal reactions of probation officers working in different probation offices are examined and compared, followed by a critical case study which considers the positions of seconded probation officers within several prison locations. The range of responses conveys the richly textured nature of gender relations, probing into stereotypes, and exploring the gendered complexities of these disparate situations.

The final chapter draws together the strands of this research study, re-emphasising the centrality of gender in this analysis of the probation service from a viewpoint that encompasses the inter-relationship between gender and power within this organisational setting. First, the re-positioning of the probation service within the criminal justice system is evaluated in terms of the current political background and draws on the findings from this study. The case is made for the inclusion of a gendered analysis in reaching an understanding of the multi-faceted elements of change in this area. Second, the 'gendered lens' is refocused onto internal organisational issues and

social relations, pointing to the varying reactions and resistances to change, illustrated by responses from probation officers. Against this scenario of internal uncertainty regarding the future roles of probation officers and of the service itself, this research study demonstrates the crucial necessity of incorporating a gendered perspective in the analysis of organisational change impacting on, and reverberating within, the probation service.

Chapter 1

An Exploration of Change in the Probation Service: From Social Work Within the Criminal Justice System to An Agency of Community Corrections?

Probation workers base their work on the assumptions that offenders can change, that recidivism is not inevitable, and that the nature of professional relationships with clients is influential.

(Williams 1995: 18)

Prison is an expensive way of making bad people worse... People didn't like the stark alternative between prison and people being let off on probation. They can now be punished without being sent to prison.

(David Waddington, Home Secretary, 15th June, 1990, cited in *The Guardian*, 13th October 1993)

Introduction

The probation service is situated at an interstice in the criminal justice system, buffeted by wider societal concerns in the field of law and order. Over the period of uninterrupted Conservative rule between 1979 and 1997, the many changes concerning penal policy tended to be "from a modestly tough line to an even tougher one" (Smith 1996: 6). During the mid-1990s this trend was reflected in reactive responses on a political level, which resulted in the concurrent extension and development of community penalties, alongside a high prison population (Vass 1996). Within a highly-charged climate concerning the response to crime, the probation service has been in the position of experiencing the impact of increasingly punitive legislative and sentencing

changes, as well as facing closer scrutiny of probation area practice and tighter allocation of resources by central Government.

Within the context of political rhetoric emphasising the punishment of offenders, the probation service has encountered a convergence of issues on different fronts: a heightened demand from the centre for organisational accountability has brought into force procedural regulation of practice, with the Home Office establishing and monitoring national performance indicators[1]. This increasingly rigorous oversight of probation practice, linked to cash-limited budgets and resource allocation, comes up against issues of professional discretion and autonomy, and highlights inherent tensions between local area decision-making and the implementation of central government control.

In presenting issues in relation to the probation service, this chapter outlines the organisational context for this research and highlights areas which are subsequently explored within the gendered perspective of the thesis. This investigation of the development of the probation service explores the twists and turns of policy and practice within the wider context of the criminal justice system, and identifies changing strands within the organisation that continue to be of relevance in the current situation. At this point the historical review is intended to inform the analysis of the more recent changes, examining change and continuity at both local and national levels and providing a backcloth to more specific aspects and developments affecting the service during the period of this study.

This investigation does not follow the detailed descriptive approach of earlier accounts of the development of the probation service, (e.g. King 1969; Jarvis 1972;

Bochel 1976; Haxby 1978), but explores the changing nature of the service from a perspective that takes account of

> the outcomes of policy in relation to changes in political, social, and economic circumstances and the rising professionalism of groups within the criminal justice system.

(May 1994b: 862)

This approach opens up the probation service to analysis, addressing changes that have affected the expectations, purpose and role of the organisation and its personnel within the criminal justice system throughout this century. In this respect, aspects relating to power, discretion and organisational change are explored within the wider political context, highlighting the connections - and also the discontinuities - between national developments and local implementation of policies within everyday practice. Issues impacting on professional autonomy and occupational status reverberate throughout this analysis, at times running as an undercurrent, while at other times appearing as explicit areas of concern both internally and externally.

'Reclaiming' Offenders

The probation service has had a chequered development throughout this century, its early roots coming from the role of the police court missionaries working under the auspices of the Church of England Temperance Society and other missions and voluntary bodies. The recruitment of court missionaries took place against a background of Victorian philanthropy in many spheres, with the Christian ethos of the work encompassing the temperance movement (Harrison 1971). This intervention focused on 'reclaiming' offenders appearing in court, with the enabling legislation of the Probation of First Offenders Act 1887 providing for release on recognisance (Jarvis 1972). Evangelical beliefs underpinned the reformative approach of such intervention

(May 1991a), with the personal qualities of the worker being seen as fundamental requirements for appointment. The London Police Court Mission identified the necessary attributes for such a post as being present in:

> a man of God, a man with a vocation, a man of character, "a man with experience and tact and full of the milk of human kindness".

(Jarvis 1972: 8)

From this early start there was a piecemeal development of work with offenders: funding was only available through charitable sources, the geographic spread was patchy, and many were paid on a part-time, 'case' basis. By 1907, the Church of England Police Court Mission had established itself as the main employing body, with 124 male missionaries and 19 female 'rescue agents', together with "a small number of agents from other missions and voluntary bodies" (Jarvis 1972: 5). However, although the police court missionaries can be viewed as the forerunners of probation officers serving as 'officers of the court', the legislation that paved the way for the embryonic probation service and established the supervision of offenders in the community, drew on procedures from America established in the Massachusetts Act of 1878 (May 1991a: 5). This approach was encapsulated within the Probation of Offenders (No. 2) Bill 1907, which listed the duties of probation officers as:

> To visit or receive reports from the person under supervision at such reasonable intervals as the probation officer may think fit;

> To see that he observes the condition of his recognisance;

> To report to the Court on his behaviour;

> To advise, assist and befriend him and, when necessary, to endeavour to find him suitable employment.

(Jarvis 1972: 16)

This legislation marked a turning-point in terms of envisaging a public, rather than a voluntary, service, with a "statutory responsibility for social work with offenders outside penal institutions" (King 1969: 1). It also introduced the clarion call "to advise, assist and befriend", that epitomised the ethos of the probation service until well into the 1980s. However, there were two major constraints in the 1907 Act: first, the service was set up on a local basis, centred on petty sessional divisions, and, second, the legislation was only permissive, limiting the impact and implementation of the changes.

The 1907 Departmental Committee viewed the magistrates as "the most potent means of developing and sustaining the probation system" (Jarvis 1972: 24), and authority for the appointment of probation officers and oversight of probation work was placed at this local level. Although this initiated a mechanism to facilitate the growth of the Service, (and established an on-going inter-relationship between the probation officers and the local judiciary), this approach did not address the gap between central Government policy and local implementation:

> Hopes that the Act would be quickly and uniformly brought into operation were not in fact realised. In many petty sessional divisions the justices made no move to appoint an officer. In a good number probation was never tried. Many indeed appear to have ignored both Act and Memorandum.

> (Bochel 1976: 45)

Thus, although the legislative framework was in place, the fragmentation of administrative functions, and disparity of practice was not addressed. The implementation of probation supervision remained subject to the vagaries of the approach of the local lay magistracy and, in turn, the individual practice of probation officers: "the pay, appointment and workloads of officers were locally determined and this autonomy meant a variability in workloads and salaries" (May 1991a: 8).

The developing probation system in the early twentieth century therefore remained subject to dual control (by the voluntary societies and by the courts), and was staffed by a variety of full-time and part-time probation officers, some of whom were salaried, some of whom received payment by fees, and yet others who were volunteers. The role and identity of a 'probation officer' was ill-defined and depended on local circumstances and individual attributes. This position was summarised in the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Probation of Offenders Act 1907:

> the value of probation must necessarily depend on the efficiency of the probation officer. It is a system in which rules are comparatively unimportant, and personality is everything. The probation officer must be a picked man or woman, endowed not only with intelligence and zeal, but, in a higher degree, with sympathy and tact and firmness. On his or her individuality the success or failure of the system depends. Probation is what the officer makes it.

(King 1969: 26)

The probation service continued to develop on a fragmentary basis, with an emphasis on the vocational propensity of its officers. While the 1907 Act outlined a framework for the supervision of offenders within the community, backed up by circulars issued by the Home Office, (May 1991a), the execution and oversight of practice remained subject to the individual interpretation of probation officers, and local control by magistrates, with the resultant disparity between official directives and grassroots execution.

Professional Aspirations

Despite this patchy implementation of the legislative and central government directives, a national association of probation officers (NAPO) was formed in 1912, promoting "the advancement of probation work" (Jarvis 1972: 29). This development brought to the fore underlying tensions in the development of the probation service, in

particular resistance from the evangelical value-base of the missions to the increasing secularisation of probation work (May 1991a).

The move by NAPO to promote "a bond of union amongst probation officers" (Bochel 1976: 61), made a push towards a unified organisation with professional aspirations, but this was weakened by the isolation and apathy of poorly paid officers, with a membership in 1916 of less than 300 out of a total of 700-800 probation officers working in England and Wales (Jarvis 1972: 29). The disparities in practice remained unresolved over this period and the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Training, Appointment and Payment of Probation Officers 1922, stated that "it did not regard probation as in any sense... a profession in which persons can expect to earn large salaries" (cited in Bochel 1976: 84). Notwithstanding these reservations about the status of probation officers, the Report emphatically endorsed their role and point of intervention within the courts:

> the (probation) system has long passed the experimental stage and has, we venture to think, taken a prominent and permanent place in our judicial system.

(Jarvis 1972: 34)

The publication of the findings of the 1922 Departmental Committee, although limited in scope, did address key aspects that have reverberated throughout the development of the probation service. In particular it anticipated the legislative changes in the Criminal Justice Act 1925, foreseeing a move from

> amateurism, isolation and poverty towards some semblance of common standards and organisation, and towards a salaried service with professional aspiration. It spoke out clearly against the system of paying by fees. It recommended that all regular officers should be paid by salary of a fixed annual sum.

(Jarvis 1972: 35)

The 1925 Criminal Justice Act thus marked a key transition in making it mandatory, rather than discretionary, for each area to have a probation officer attached to it, and in designating each petty sessional division as a probation area (May 1991a). This approach left administrative control at a local level through probation committees drawn from local magistrates, but introduced for the first time financial grants from the Home Office for the provision of the service, accompanied by oversight of the appointment of permanent probation officers. This shift in the balance of power established central government's involvement in the service, a change which foreshadowed contested issues in more recent years. At this point the intervention focused on the suitability of personnel:

> Although the initial selection of probation officers remained firmly with the local probation committees, the Home Office now had to be given notice of every new appointment and details of the age, qualifications, experience and salary of the new entrant. What was more, the continuance of any such appointment for more than one year was made dependant upon the approval of the Home Secretary.

(Bochel 1976: 101)

This legislation was followed in 1926 by the publication of a more detailed set of Probation Rules, that made provision for the appointment and salary scale of principal and senior probation officers. However, this was again a permissive, rather than a mandatory measure and by 1935 only six areas had a principal probation officer in post - Beacontree, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Surrey (Jarvis 1972: 41-42). This development instituted an hierarchical ordering within the probation service, but adoption of this organisational structuring was carried out on an ad hoc basis, with implementation being left to local discretion.

These changes were further reinforced by the introduction in 1930 of an experimental, but official, training scheme whereby trainees studied for a social science

qualification at a university or college, that incorporated an attachment to a probation office (Jarvis 1972). These developments can be seen to be following stages pursued by many occupations seeking professional status, namely the establishment of a state monopoly over the particular task, controlled entry via training, and negotiation of terms and conditions of work (Wilding 1982). This aspiration to move towards a professional identity was reflected concurrently within the proceedings of the National Association of Probation Officers and in the early editions of the publication 'Probation' (Jarvis 1972 and Bochel 1976).

Over this period the incipient organisational structures of a public probation organisation were set in place, but were not implemented uniformly. By 1935 there were 858 probation officers, but 559 were employed part-time (Bochel 1976); the Department Committee that reported on the probation service in 1936 noted that

> the part-time officers followed 'a great variety of other occupations', and usually 'lacked the necessary qualifications for probation work'. Some of them were in other forms of social work, but others were engaged in work quite unrelated to probation, such as greengrocery or undertaking.

> (Minutes of Evidence, Departmental Committee on the Social Services in Courts of Summary Jurisdiction, 1936, cited in Bochel 1976: 126)

In highlighting these issues, the Departmental Committee, for the first time, put in place two central principles: "firstly, the need for the courts for trained social workers to undertake the social work of the courts and secondly, the necessity for the Probation Service to be a wholly public service" (Jarvis 1972: 55). These principles were underpinned by a growing incorporation of a therapeutic and diagnostic approach within everyday practice (McWilliams 1985), that further enhanced the calls for probation work to be viewed as a profession.

In organisational terms the balance was slowly shifting and the evangelical and charitable ethos became increasingly challenged by developments pointing towards the implementation of a national, salaried framework for the service. The transfer from voluntary agencies was finally enacted, after lengthy negotiations in 1941, when the combined area of Middlesex was handed over by the London Police Court Mission. This ended the long-standing direct connection of the voluntary bodies, although various Missions continued their involvement with aspects of work that linked with the probation service: for example, the Police Court Missions agreed to "assist the Home Office to increase the number of probation homes and hostels" (Bochel 1976: 155).

Organisational Consolidation

The recommendations of the 1936 Departmental Committee were implemented in part in the updated Probation Rules 1937, but full legislative change was delayed by the outbreak of war and did not take place until 1948. The Criminal Justice Act 1948 consolidated and expanded the duties of probation officers, adding provision for the after-care of prisoners. In terms of organisational responsibility, the legislation "provided for an increase in Home Office control of local administration and an Exchequer grant to be paid at a rate not exceeding 50%" (May 1991a: 14).

These developments marked a distinct shift in placing responsibility for the supervision of offenders, including prison after-care, within a state-sponsored agency. An immediate consequence was that the range of offenders who came within the orbit of the probation service was increased, both in numerical terms and in extending

supervision to those who had committed more serious crimes, serving to "widen the net of surveillance and control" (Vass 1996: 168).

These legislative changes also secured central government's involvement and oversight in the operation of the probation service, albeit in a guiding, rather than directive way at this stage, via the inspectors within the Home Office Probation Division. Some concern was expressed about potential tensions between these different levels of responsibility, and the pull between central and local control (Bochel 1976); this was not followed up at that time, but did presage areas of conflict between the different power bases.

Central government intervention was demonstrated most immediately by the Home Secretary who utilised powers of combination to reduce the number of smaller probation areas: between 1947 and 1959 the number of probation areas in England and Wales were reduced from 292 to 104 (Bochel 1976: 175). Alongside the formation of larger probation areas, the 1949 Probation Rules addressed the development of a promotional ladder within the organisation, outlining the roles of principal and senior probation officers. In this respect

> practitioners were to implement on behalf of the courts, while a more hierarchical administrative structure was to enhance and facilitate their work, providing a career ladder where none existed before.

(May 1991a: 14)

The formal outline of the roles at each level of the service further emphasised the move from the ad hoc local implementation of probation, to a structured organisation, with clear lines of responsibility, charged with delivering government

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policy. The duties of the principal probation officer, as set out in Rule 50, clearly demonstrated the functional nature of this role, positioned between probation officers in each area and the magistrates who comprised the local probation committee:

> A principal probation officer shall have the duties of a senior probation officer, and without prejudice to the generality of this provision shall undertake the general organisation and supervision of the Probation Service in the area for which he is responsible, and shall advise the probation committee upon technical matters relating to the Service.

(Home Office 1962: 84).

The duties of the senior probation officer also reflected the move towards a hierarchical ordering within the probation service, but incorporated a framework that underpinned the developing therapeutic rationale for the work, with the role of 'primus inter pares' being adopted (Haxby 1978). The duties included:

> the supervision of and advice upon the work of probation officers, and in particular a senior probation officer shall organise the office work and the distribution of work between probation officers, and examine and advise upon the manner in which they keep their records and the manner in which their working time is used.

(Home Office 1962: 84)

The official endorsement of these grades within the service led to an increase of such posts throughout England and Wales, alongside overall expansion of the organisation. Home Office figures covering the years 1950 to 1961 show the steady growth in the probation service, from 1030 to 1789 whole-time officers, (these figures include temporary officers). Contemporaneously, there was a reduction in the number of part-time officers, contracting from 118 in 1950 to 49 in 1961 (Home Office 1966b). The growth across the grades is shown in Figure 1.1. overleaf:

Figure 1.1   Growth of principal, deputy and assistant principal, senior and probation officer grades 1950-1961[2]
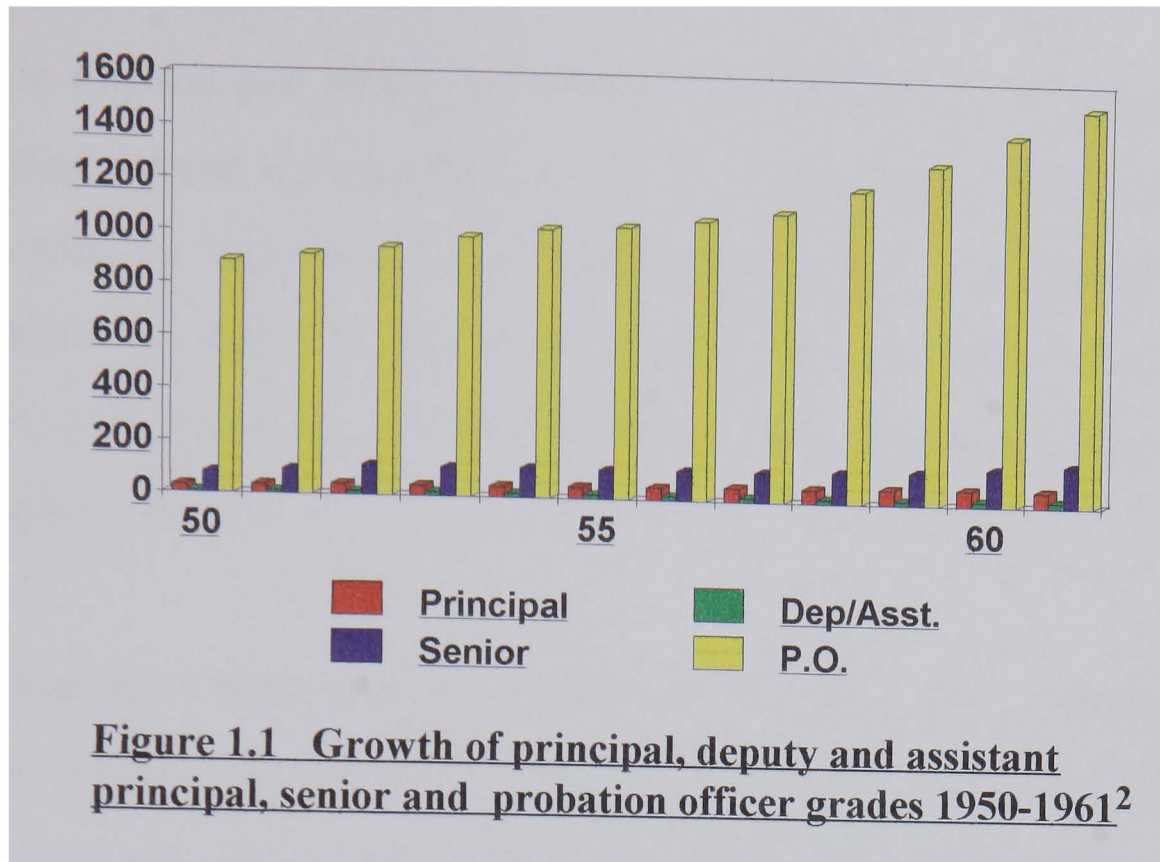
Turning the spotlight more directly onto the development of management grades within the Service, the strength of each level is indicated in Figure 1.2:

Figure 1.2   Growth of principal, deputy and assistant principal and senior probation officer grades 1950-1961[3]
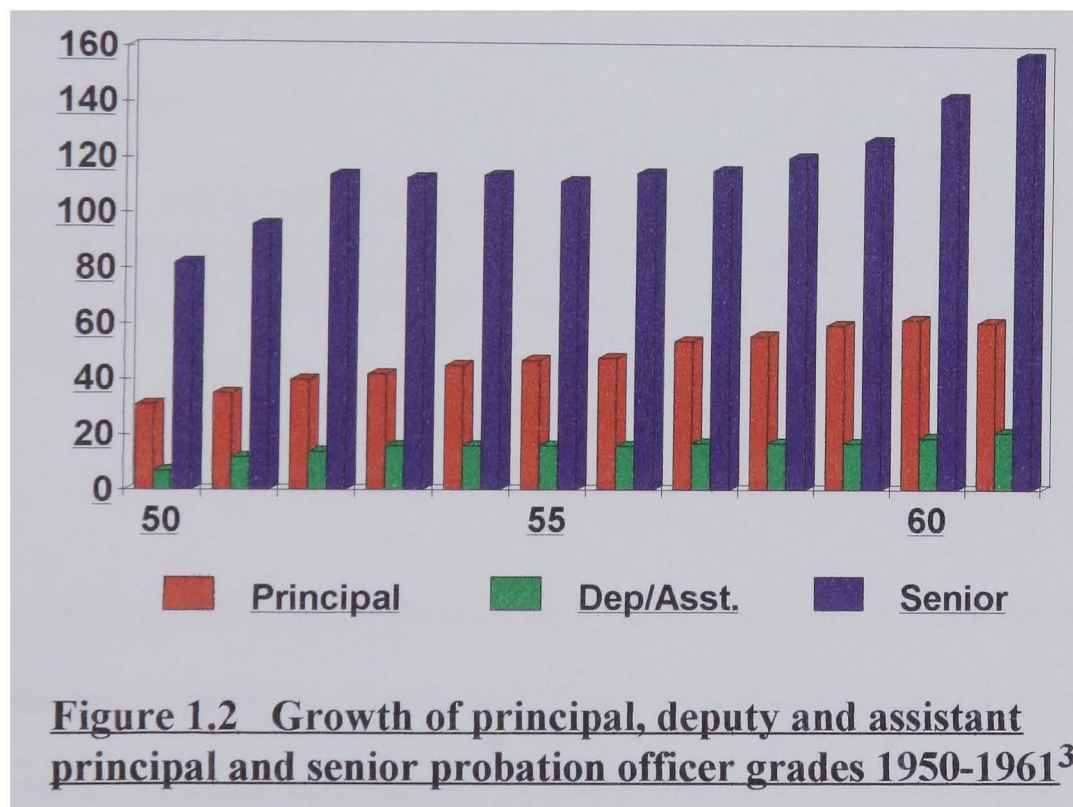
These graphs indicate the size and shape of the organisation at the time of the publication of the influential Morison Committee Report in 1962. The Committee, under the chairmanship of a QC, Ronald Morison, enquired into "all aspects of [1]

probation in England and Wales and Scotland" and "the approved probation hostel system in England and Wales and Scotland". This wide-ranging report described the probation officer as "a professional caseworker, employing, in a specialised field, skill which he holds in common with other social workers" (Home Office 1962: para.54), giving official endorsement to the role and duties of the probation officer within the criminal justice system.

The acknowledgement of the centrality of 'social casework' in probation practice marked the shift from the 'saving of sinners', to the scientific assessment of offenders, seeking to 'treat' behavioural and psychological maladjustment (May 1991a: 15). This claim to a knowledge base underpinning work with offenders reinforced the claim for professional status by probation officers, but also embodied inherent tensions between such an individualised approach and the move to implement a more concordant probation system nation-wide. This tension is indicated, (albeit unwittingly), in Joan King's comments that

> one of the attractive features of probation work is the degree of discretion and responsibility allowed to the individual officer not only in his casework but in organising his duties to suit his own personality and methods.

(King 1969: 235)

The growth of the higher grades in the probation service was viewed favourably within the Morison Report, but again wide variations in local structures and roles were identified: many principal and senior officers were carrying out both administrative functions and supervising a caseload, particularly in the smaller areas. However, the Committee noted potential tensions in terms of workload, rather than addressing the inherent conflict between organisational directives from the centre and the individualised nature of the casework approach, and adopted an equivocal stance in their recommendations:

We think that it must be for each probation committee to judge what, if any, case-load each principal should carry but that he should have a case-load only if it is clear that his duties as a principal will not suffer.

(Home Office 1962: 85)

The Morison Report thus endorsed the move to institutionalise the relative positioning of each grade within the organisational structure of each area, building on the 'first among equals' model and viewing the acquisition and practice of casework skills as a necessary attribute for promotion within the service. This requirement was reinforced in the Probation Rules that were "so worded that only a person who was already a probation officer could be approved for appointment to a higher rank", (Haxby 1978: 48), introducing occupational closure by demanding a social work background at all levels within the service. However, this step towards professional status proved to be somewhat illusory: the condition was rescinded in the 1967 Probation Rules, and although in practice there was little immediate change (Brown and Foren 1970, cited in Haxby 1978), the removal of official endorsement left in abeyance a potent challenge to the entrenchment of a defined professional knowledge and value base, and social work training, as requirements for entry to the probation service.

While acknowledging the desirability for initial entry to be underpinned by professional training, the Morison Committee did not press for all probation officers to hold a recognised qualification, recommending only that "from the earliest possible date every officer should receive at least two years' training before appointment" (Bochel 1976: 218). This left in place the continuing recruitment of direct entrants, although increasing numbers of probation officers were appointed from university-based social work courses, and from the Home Office training course in London. The lack of an established route into the probation service at this time is reflected in the fluctuations in

the numbers of qualified and unqualified officers coming into the probation service in the years immediately following the Morison Report, as shown in Figure 1.3:

Figure 1.3 Persons appointed for the first time as established probation officers 1966-74[4]
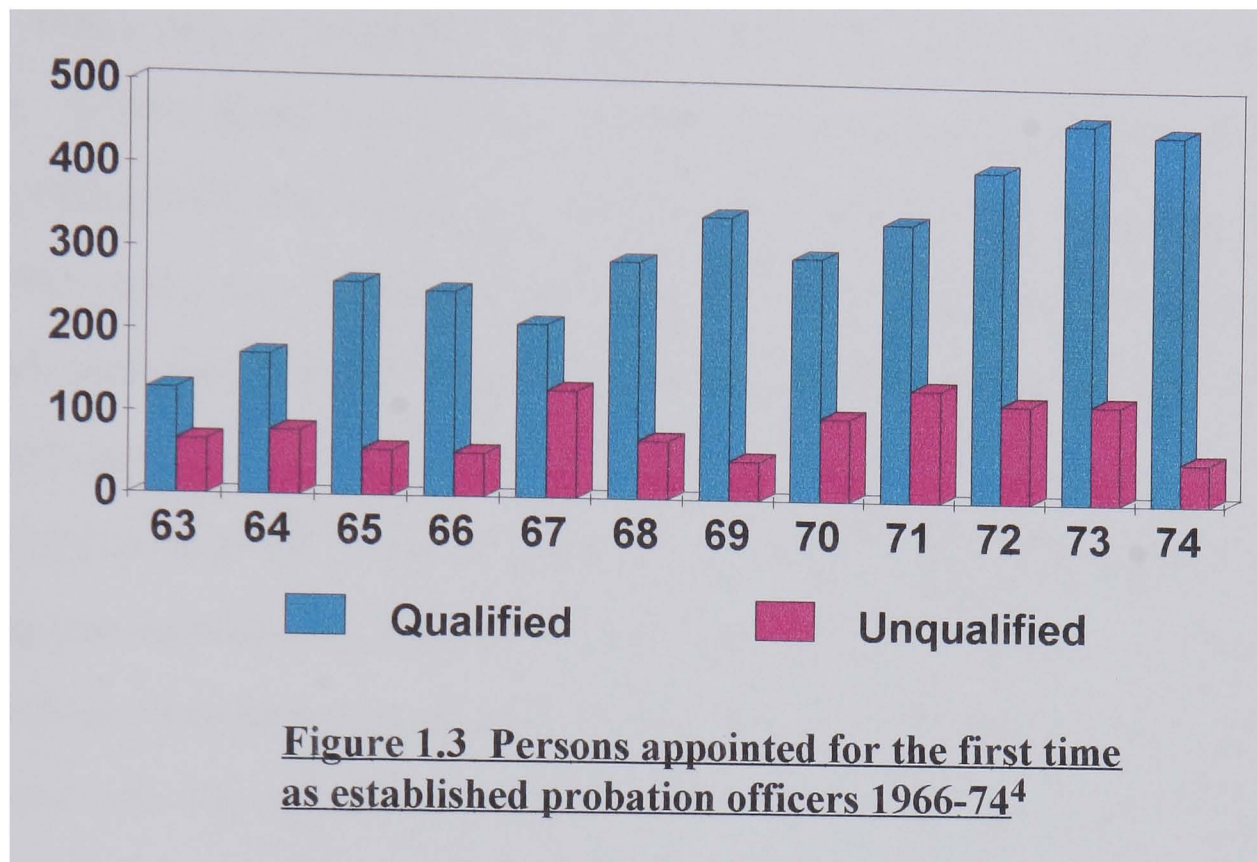
Although the Morison Report did not uphold the requirement for a social work qualification to be a pre-entry to the service, the tenor of the findings accorded with wider developments within social work education. Probation training was integrated as part of social work courses developed under the auspices of CCETSW (the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work) in the mid-1970s, with the Home Office relinquishing its active part in this process, (through the Probation and After-Care Training Centre in London), by the end of the 1970s. The acknowledgement of the Certificate of Social Work (CQSW) as a pre-requisite to entry as a maingrade probation officer was finally formalised in the 1984 Probation Rules, being seen within the service as marking a further stage in the drive towards professionalism (Johnson 1972).

From Diagnosis and Treatment to Supervision in the Community

The period following the publication of the Morison Report in 1962 (Home Office 1962), saw an expansion both of the duties and of the size of the probation service. Following the Report of the Advisory Council on the Treatment of Offenders (Home Office 1963), the service developed through-care work within prisons and from 1964-1966 took over responsibility for all voluntary after-care functions, incorporating the work previously carried out by the local prisoners' aid societies (Haxby 1978: 17). This institutionalised the links between prison and supervision in the community within a state-sponsored penal system and can be seen as the bridge that started to blur the dividing line between custodial and non-custodial disposals, increasing "the intensity of control directed at former deviants" (Cohen 1985: 38). This development was further reinforced with the introduction of parole in Section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act 1967, with the continuation of liberty for the remaining part of a custodial sentence being conditional upon satisfactory response to supervision.

The scope of these changes had implications on many levels for the probation service: in terms of the value base of their work, probation officers placed considerable stress on the consensual nature of a probation order underpinning the client-probation officer relationship, in contrast with this new form of supervision that was predicated upon a more directive and controlling set of conditions, underpinned by the threat of recall. In organisational terms there was also a fundamental shift in the implementation of this supervision:

> the officer acts not as an officer of the court but as a servant of the probation committee in whom responsibility for after-care is vested; the committee can discharge its responsibility only through its principal officer.

(Haxby 1978: 36)

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This framework shifted the balance of professional authority within the service and necessitated oversight and authorisation of the judgements made by individual probation officers, (particularly concerning recall and discharge of licences), by principal officers. This introduced for the first time a formal set of procedures into an area of probation practice, marking a significant challenge to the professional autonomy of the maingrade probation officer. Despite the significance of these changes there was surprisingly little dissension from within the service: David Haxby (1978: 39), suggests that the individualism of probation officers militated against a concerted challenge, and that any overview of the nature of the change was masked by the gradual pace of change on an operational level. The difficulties that did surface concerned the allocation of cases as the growth in the numbers of probation officers failed to keep pace with increasing caseloads (Bochel 1976).

The expansion of community-based sentences supervised by the probation service continued into the 1970s: Community Service orders were implemented following the 1972 Criminal Justice Act, while the Powers of the Criminal Courts Act 1973

> expanded the duties and functions of the service. These were designed to make better use of probation resources and reduce the prison population. They included empowering probation committees to set up and fund bail and probation hostels, day training centres and other establishments for use in connection with the rehabilitation of offenders.

> (May 1991a: 18)

These developments extended the range of work of the probation service, emphasising the importance of the diagnostic skills of probation officers in the assessment process, when, after conviction, the court indicated a willingness to consider

an 'alternative to custody'. This re-affirmed the power of sentencing as the province of the magistrates or judge, but identified an increasing professional role for probation officers both within the judicial process, and in the provision and supervision of such sentences. However, the implementation of Community Service in particular raised disquiet and conflict internally concerning the ethos and value-base of probation practice:

> Within the service criticism of community service reflected concerns about the erosion of social work values and brought complaints about coercion... Equally, supporters of the scheme believed that potential for rehabilitation and reformation existed alongside reparation.

(Statham 1992: 32)

The introduction of Community Service proved to be a watershed in bringing such tensions to the surface, although local implementation of such sentences encompassed discretionary practices and different emphasises within schemes (Vass 1990), that dissipated some of the criticism within the service. The concern surrounding this new sentencing option highlighted a growing point of pressure: claims for professional status by probation officers were founded on the bedrock of specialised knowledge and expert practice, that were applied most clearly in the individualised casework form of intervention. This was increasingly buttressed by pre-entry training and in-service courses, but the insularity of this traditional one-to-one form of supervision concomitantly developed

> a whole discourse which takes on a life of its own, defining the task, its object and the method. It becomes self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating: 'needs', 'objective assessment', 'diagnosis', 'therapy', 'rehabilitation' and 'reform' (of the individual). Adherents then only need to refine their methods and therefore, by default, not question the underlying philosophy.

(May 1991b: 168)

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This approach sat uneasily within the 'law and order' climate, with the growing emphasis on the development of 'alternatives to custody'. Although responsibility for these new sentences was located within the probation service, these disposals rested upon a more supervisory approach, (usually carried out on a day-to-day basis by non-probation officer grade staff), encompassing a 'disposal of discipline' within the community by "means of control and more discipline" (Vass 1996: 167). Notwithstanding these tensions, these developments led to a continuing expansion of the service and a further entrenchment of its position within the criminal justice system. This enhanced career opportunities within the organisation and a differing stance was adopted by some, who viewed the changing situation as heralding a period of inventiveness for individual probation officers and for the probation service as a whole (Statham 1992).

The different reactions to change over this period indicate the various discourses that criss-crossed each other within the service: the moves to establish a professional base at times came up against the ambivalent responses to the growing range and nature of functions, but drew together in respect of the opportunities held out by the expansion of the organisation. Within probation culture this strain tended to be contrasted with an idealised portrayal of the probation officer in the recent (unspecified) past, operating as an independent practitioner, supported and supervised in terms of professional practice by the probation service hierarchy. However, closer inspection makes it difficult to pin-point these halcyon days. Indeed, from the 1960s onwards

> as probation areas expanded, officers began to work in teams. They were no longer working alone but were part of larger organisations which assumed responsibilities for the work undertaken by its staff. During the 1970s the growth in specialisms, such as court welfare, after-care and prison secondment, meant that some posts were unpopular, requiring chief officers to direct staff accordingly.

(Finkelstein 1996: 81)

This representation fits more directly onto the changing composition of the probation service, within an overall picture of continuing expansion during the 1960s and 1970s, and with moves towards a more standardised organisational framework. The amalgamation of areas continued, with the number being reduced from 104 in 1962 to 79 in 1969 (Bochel 1976: 230), and following local government re-organisation in 1974, to fifty-six areas. (The City of London area differed from the others in being a geographically and numerically small size, and not having a hierarchical structure). The 1974 modifications also heralded a change in the title of the principal officers, with all of these grades being redesignated 'chiefs'.

Over this period the number of chief probation officers came down because of the area re-organisation, but the hierarchical framework at middle and senior management levels of the service continued to expand. Figure 1.4 below indicates the growth from 1964 to 1975, covering the period from the Morison Report to the position after the local government re-alignment:

Figure 1.4   Growth of principal (chief from 1974), deputy and assistant principal (chief), and senior probation officer grades 1964-1975[5]
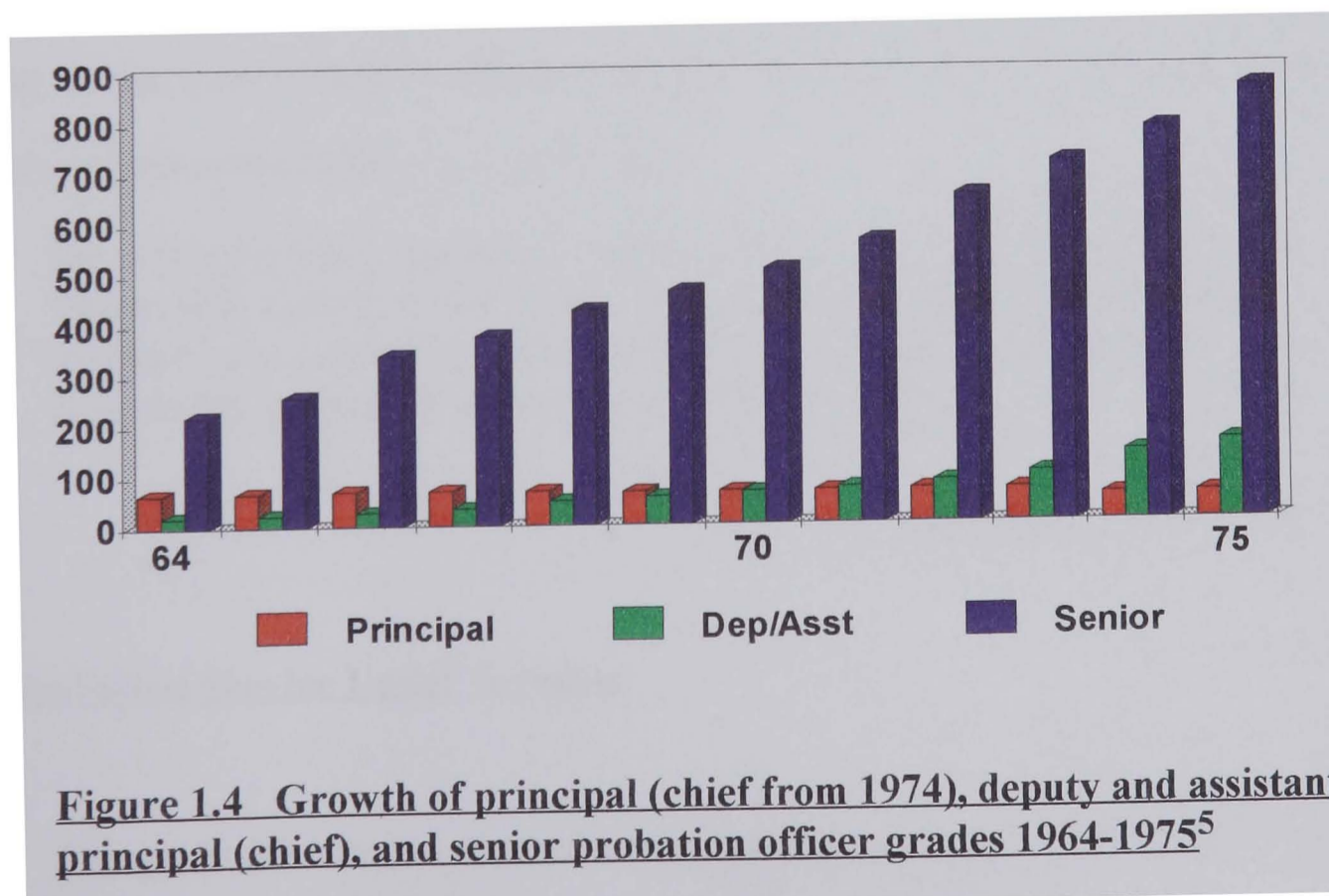
The rehabilitative and therapeutic ethos thus provided a rationale for the developing professional base of the probation service in the post-war period and in the period of consolidation in the 1960s and early 1970s, but it came under attack on different fronts as the 1970s progressed. Internally, the increasing implementation of bureaucratic oversight clashed with the legacy of the 'laissez faire' culture of the service (Statham 1992), with these tensions being played out at team level in "the outspoken expression of opinion and genuine differences in attitude (that) has always been a feature of the service" (Fellowes 1992: 89).

Within this scenario of cultural and organisational change, the established supervisory relationship between senior and maingrade probation officers acted as the conduit for policy directives and administrative oversight to be implemented by probation service management. The most direct challenge to this functional transformation found expression in the policy of 'seniorless teams', which was propounded by "an increasingly iconoclastic NAPO" in the early 1980s (Statham 1992: 36). More generally, tensions came to the fore over the perception of supervision serving to constrain probation officer autonomy and discretion at maingrade level (May 1991a), encapsulated in the observation that

> the self-motivating probation officer, bound by rules of conduct and answerable mainly to the courts was gradually (being) replaced by the managerially controlled officer bound by a hierarchy of authority and answerable, through that hierarchy, to the executive.

(McWilliams 1992: 10)

The Probation Service Under Scrutiny

Alongside this internal unease, the philosophical practice base of the service was subjected to critical empirical appraisal and was found wanting: the publication of

articles that appeared to show that 'nothing works' (e.g. Martinson 1974), brought into usage a catch-phrase that was consonant with the political and public debate surrounding crime in the late 1970s. In addition an increasingly punitive mood had turned attention away from the criminal and onto the crime, with rhetoric focusing on punishment, rather treatment and welfare (Hudson 1993). With the formation of the Conservative Government in 1979, the 'law and order' arena moved centre-stage, with an emphasis on punishment "as a core component of alternatives to custody" (May 1991a: 22).

In these circumstances the probation service found itself experiencing the sharp-end of swings in penal policy, where the agenda was "essentially ideological and the solutions doctrinal" (Beaumont 1995: 21). This rather unhappy coincidence for the probation service provided the context for the 'macro' changes impacting on the organisation, with a climate of 'new realism' putting in place an evalutatory framework of 'economy, efficiency and effectiveness' (May 1991b). The service found itself responding in a largely reactive way to the Government onslaughts, struggling to bridge the gap between practice and policy, and grappling with the Government's refusal to acknowledge any linkage between social problems and crime, contained within the switch to a "simple-minded sense of right and wrong; there are wicked people rather than complex issues" (Brake and Hale 1992: 33).

The ideological shift in central Government policy turned away from an individualised welfare approach to offenders and drew instead on a 'justice model', as mediated through a conservative criminological approach. The perceived 'softness' of the therapeutic framework of probation was challenged by the 'hardness' of the 'law and order' rhetoric, underpinned by demands for schemes with an emphasis upon "the

monitoring, punishment, and training of offenders within an 'administrative-technical' framework" (May 1994b: 881).

The continuing disconnection at a political level between crime and social policy issues posed particular problems for the probation service; it was difficult for a coherent and united response to be forged across the various grades and different areas of the organisation, leading to the perception of the service "as simply reacting to the agendas of others and... drifting towards a future manufactured by the Home Office" (Statham 1992: 51). Moreover, the lack of effective engagement on the macro political level failed to tackle the far-ranging implications of these ideological changes and their impact on the professional standing of probation officers:

> A system which deals with deviance simply by punishment has no need of experts - except in the rather narrowly specialised field of technology and techniques of punishment. Punishment is according to desert and that is a matter of judgement requiring little technical expertise.

> (Wilding 1982: 69)

The process of change continued unabated, with the 1980s proving to be an era of uncertainty for the service and for individual officers, and with the publication of the 1984 Statement of National Objectives (SNOP) standing out as a watershed in three respects: first, it marked a "language shift - the people with whom the service worked were no longer clients... but uniformly offenders" (Beaumont 1995: 53). While the previous term had not been particularly satisfactory because of its euphemistic overtones, the change in terminology reinforced the dehumanising approach to the 'crime problem', referring to "abstract classes of behaviour as targets for action, rather than the problems of whole human beings" (Hudson 1987: 166). Moreover, this change was a further step away from the traditional essence and value base of probation work, with its emphasis on

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respect for the individual without discrimination, a commitment to providing choices and opportunities and a consequent belief that, with proper support, people are capable of growth, responsibility and change.

(Mathieson 1992: 146)

The second shift marked by SNOP was the establishment of the centrality of 'objective setting' as an organisational strategy, with an emphasis on national as well as local planning and evaluation (May 1991a). While its immediate impact on actual practice can be questioned (Statham 1992), this Home Office directive was a key turning-point in establishing central government direction of, and oversight over, local probation areas - intervention that had been signalled, but not enacted in the 1948 Criminal Justice Act, and which now became an integral part of government policy, marking the end of "benign neglect towards the probation service" (Smith 1996: 16).

The third area of change signalled by SNOP was the move by the Home Office to outline in an explicit way "the role and function of the service in the context of the criminal justice system as a whole rather than in relation to the needs of individual offenders" (Raynor 1984: 43). This policy shift reinforced the intention of central Government to impose on-going direction over the probation service and marked an important repositioning in terms of demanding "a fuller awareness of collective responsibilities beyond the individual workload of individual (probation) officers" (Raynor 1984: 46).

The Statement of National Objectives was circulated for discussion and response within the probation service, but implementation was incontestable, making "even minimalist consultation tokenistic" (Beaumont 1995: 53). While assimilating these changes, the probation service faced challenges on several other fronts: it became clear that the Government's near monopoly in the field of criminal justice was

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increasingly open to review, with privatisation of parts of the criminal justice system, particularly within the prison service, becoming a reality:

> the belief that 'it could not happen here' has been dispelled - or at least moderated - by two basic realisations. The first is that there already exists a significant degree of 'privatisation' within the criminal justice system... The second major shift in thinking which has occurred involves the recognition that there exists an important distinction between the *provision* and the *administration* of goods and services.

> (Matthews 1989: 1-2, italics in original)

The probation service therefore found itself in a position that was both ironic and contradictory: the organisational set-up and its role as a statutory state agency was under threat and yet central Government was imposing more direct control via the Home Office. Alongside these changes, discretionary practices within the criminal justice system were being taken away from probation officers in their day-to-day work, and "reconcentrated in the hands of the central organs of the state" (Hudson 1987: 169). The rationale underpinning the implementation of supervision by the probation service was now being operated from a 'punishment-administrative', rather than 'professional-therapeutic' perspective (May 1994b: 881), with a rule-based approach increasingly removing discretion in individual cases.

This movement towards increased direction from the centre was reinforced still further in 1988/1989 by the "accounting 'double whammy'" (Beaumont 1995: 55) of evaluation of local services by the Audit Commission, and of Home Office performance by the National Audit Office. These developments entrenched still further Home Office scrutiny of probation practice, putting in place

> a regulatory culture in the probation service which imprisons practitioners, and indeed managers themselves, in a hierarchy of policies,

guidelines and monitoring arrangements which rob lower level staff of the last remnants of discretion.

<div align="right">(Nellis 1995a: 28)</div>

Within this volatile period of political change, the probation service found itself responding in a largely reactive way to the shift from a rehabilitative goal that took account of issues of social inequality and deprivation, (Downes and Morgan 1994), and moving towards an approach that focused on the idea of punishment "predicated upon individual responsibility in the undertaking of criminal acts" (May 1991b: 158). Over the period of continuous Conservative rule from 1979 to 1997, and into the formation of the Labour Government in May 1997, the 'law and order' lobby has maintained a high profile, developing from a baseline that espoused a rigorous stance towards offenders, towards the adoption of still more punitive political rhetoric and policies (Smith 1996). Again, the probation service found itself constricted by a constellation of political developments:

> where liberal policies are off limits, it is particularly useful to depict the criminal subject as radically different from the respectable subject; it raises the possibility of more precisely focused and cost-effective crime prevention and control policies.

<div align="right">(Stenson 1991: 22)</div>

A Time of Vicissitudes for the Probation Service

The changes in the 1980s not only created a framework of managerial control operating internally within the probation service, but set in place a structure for direct and on-going intervention by the Home Office. This "centre-periphery management model" (May 1991b: 179) exposed the organisation to increased scrutiny and control and at the same time, continued the reining in of decision-making and practice relating

to the traditional professional discretion and autonomy so prized by probation officers (Raine and Wilson 1993). The strands of these developments were brought together with the publication of the Green Paper, *Punishment, Custody and the Community* (1988), that contained

> a thinly veiled threat that if the probation service proved recalcitrant the government would find other, more tractable agencies to do what was required...

(Smith 1996: 14)

The momentum towards legislative change was maintained with the publication of the White Paper, *Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public* (1990a), that put in place the key theme of 'just deserts' and installed proportionality as the primary aim of sentencing (Ashworth 1991). The diagnostic and supervisory roles for probation officers in this process centred on a bifurcatory approach (Bottoms 1977), with a distinction being drawn between custodial sentences for serious violent offenders, and other non-violent offenders who would be dealt with by means of community sentences. These proposals were subjected to the same criticisms as had been applied in the 1970s to community service:

> alternatives to custody suffer from a lack of clarity with regard to their role and tasks in the criminal justice system. They appear to be all things to all people, trying to satisfy all kinds of penal philosophies. They punish, rehabilitate, reform, save money for the taxpayer, are humane, and give something back to the community by requiring offenders to make reparation to the community.

(Vass 1990: 45)

However, despite these reservations, policy relating to 'law and order' was now firmly located within a climate of 'punishment', and local probation services found themselves exhorted by central government to develop and implement 'alternatives to custody', or face an unknown future. This was compounded by the added complication

of the government upholding the traditional independence of the judiciary, leaving the probation service sandwiched between official pronouncements concerning appropriate disposals for offenders, and the variability of local sentencing:

> The judiciary can be encouraged, exhorted, informed, reasoned with, but it can never be instructed... The nearest the Government came to bringing the judges and magistrates 'within the disciplines of efficiency and cost effectiveness' (*Guardian* 1.10.90), was to circulate to all courts details of the full costs of their sentencing decisions.

(Brake and Hale 1992: 152)

This onslaught on the probation service was further stepped up in the wide-ranging options contained in the accompanying Green Paper, *Supervision and Punishment in the Community; A Framework for Action* (Home Office 1990b), that considered:

> options for reorganisation, including amalgamating smaller services; greater use of Home Office powers to enforce change; moving to 100 per cent central government funding; moving to a national service under direct Home Office control or as a separate agency; and, of course, various forms of contracting with the voluntary or private sectors.

(Beaumont 1995: 60)

In the event this offensive served as a 'softening up' of the probation service, and the organisation was placed centre-stage in the planned implementation of the legislative changes, with only minor changes being made to the structure of the service (Raine and Wilson 1993). The Criminal Justice Act 1991 was heralded as a major landmark in penal legislation, marking the introduction of sentencing based on 'just deserts' and drawing on a 'justice' model of proportionality of punishment fitting the crime (Hudson 1987). The role of the probation service was crucial in the implementation of a twin-tract approach, imposing

tough, retributive and deterrent sentences for serious, particularly violent, criminals, and as far as possible, lighter and preferably non-custodial sentences for the mass of trivial offenders.

(Stenson 1991: 24)

This approach placed increased demands on the probation service for the assessment of offenders in pre-sentence reports and in terms of supervising the anticipated rise in the numbers sentenced to "community corrections" (Williams 1995: 3). However, alongside this expected change in workload, the value base of the supervisory relationship between probation officers and offenders was further tilted away from its original framework: Section 8 of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act made a probation order a sentence of the court, instead of an order made in lieu of sentencing the offender. Further, in respect of remission for custodial sentences, Section 33 of the 1991 Act[6] introduced a new mandatory system of automatic conditional release for prisoners, imposing a continuum of statutory supervision that further blurred the boundary between custodial and non-custodial sentences (Home Office 1991b).

Implementation of these community penalties was accompanied by the development of National Standards by the Home Office, as a means of evaluating and overseeing the work undertaken by the probation service (Mair 1996), and with the intention of reducing discretion and disparity in the application of sentences by probation staff. This was carried out on a procedural level through prescribed objectives drawn up by the Home Office, measured against specified outcomes at local level, and monitored and reported on by probation management, probation committees[7] (redesignated shadow boards in some areas), and the probation inspectorate.

For the first time in the history of the probation service, a line of accountability, overseen and directed from the Home Office, scrutinising the organisation from the

bottom to the top, and from the local areas to the centre, was now in place. Concern within the organisation concentrated on the dehumanising quality of the emphasis on 'addressing offending behaviour', within an evaluatory framework of 'efficiency and effectiveness' (Holdaway 1996: 121), that was moving ever further away from the traditional focus on the individual client:

> Nowadays we know much more about *what* is happening in the probation service, thanks largely to the development of crude performance indicators and the availability of information technology but we still know relatively little about *why*.

(Shaw 1992: 130, original italics)

The probation service responded to these external demands, not least because of the potential for the growth of the organisation and the hopes of integrating effective probation practice within the 1991 Criminal Justice Act legislative framework (Raynor, Smith and Vanstone 1994). However, this sense of positive challenge was short-lived as the service was again buffeted by the vagaries of political will as "the government's enchantment with its own creation proved remarkably fragile" (Beaumont 1995: 61). The reality of the limitations on judicial discretion within the 1991 Act brought about a turn-around in the 1993 Criminal Justice Act, with serious ramifications for the service:

> The Criminal Justice Act 1993 modified the sentencing framework by allowing the court to look at all offences before it, not just the offence and one other associated with it as in the 1991 Act; unit fines were also abolished... Probation officers are having to modify yet again the way in which they work - particularly in assessing seriousness. A harsher penal climate generally means that probation is no longer seen as occupying centre stage, and cut-backs in expenditure are now planned.

(Mair 1996: 35)

The probation service therefore found itself reacting to a further about-turn in the criminal justice system, but at this point with the prospect of a contraction of the service, rather than the proposed growth embodied in the 1991 Criminal Justice Act.

Moreover, within an increasingly punitive response to crime, the service was still being directed to deliver 'punishment in the community', but now "as an adjunct to, rather than a replacement for, the central role of imprisonment" (Beaumont 1995: 61).

Issues of Professionalism and Organisation

Although the probation service had been facing the uncertainties inherent in the volatile 'law and order' political agenda of the 1980s and early 1990s, the organisation had continued to grow and to set in place a professional base underpinning a hierarchical structure. As noted earlier, from the mid-1970s all maingrade probation officer applicants were expected to hold the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) which the Home Office then viewed as "the basic professional qualification for all fields of social work including the probation and after-care service" (Home Office 1976b: 23). However, while this appeared to reinforce the professional standing of probation officers, the official position was less clear-cut:

> The Home Secretary has power to make rules regulating the qualifications of probation officers..., but he has not exercised this power. No form of training is mandatory. The confirmation procedure..., however, has over the years established certain nationally acceptable standards of competence.

(Jarvis 1980: 294).

Thus, while the professional background and status of probation officers appeared to be standardised during the late 1970s, and became an established and integral part of entry into the service in the 1980s, this was not legally enshrined as a statutory requirement - a situation that left this accepted practice open to challenge.

In spite of the twists and turns in policy towards the probation service, the period through the 1980s, leading up to the 1991 Criminal Justice Act, saw a consistently upward movement in the numbers of staff at maingrade level. This position is outlined in Figure 1.5:

Figure 1.5 Growth of maingrade probation officers 1980-1990[8]
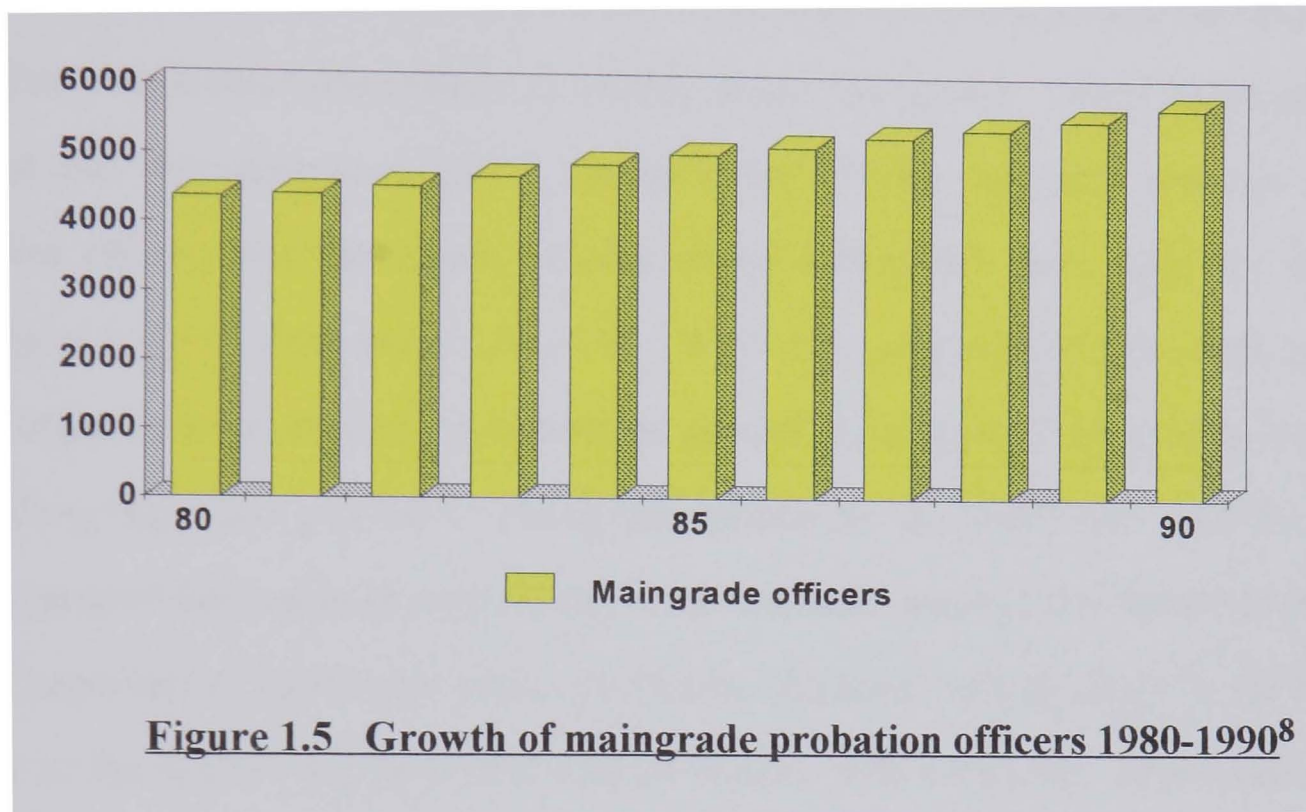
Within the context of the increasingly defined tasks and responsibilities of the management grades, the grades of senior probation officer, and assistant and deputy chief officer, also manifested an upward movement, as shown in Figure 1.6. (The number of chief probation officers had been fixed in 1974):

Figure 1.6 Outline of management grades in the probation service 1980-90[9]
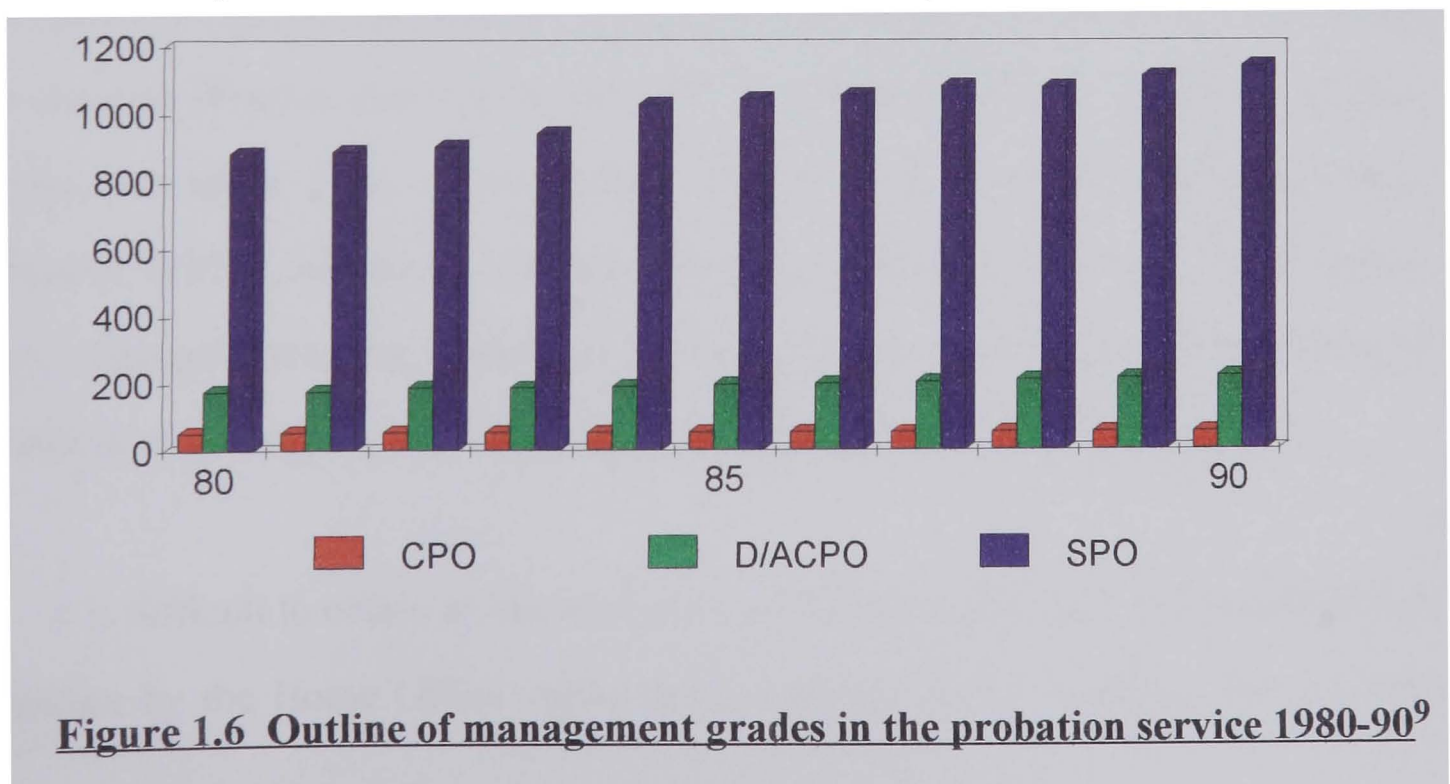
Over this period there was a ratio between the managerial grades of 1:3:16 in 1980, changing to 1:4:21 in 1990 (chief to deputy and assistant chiefs, to senior probation officers). This maintained the pyramid-shaped hierarchy of the organisation, with one chief in each area and the increase in management numbers coming below this level, but with similar proportions remaining across the grades. More surprisingly in view of the 'management-obsessed' climate (May 1994b), the ratio between senior probation officers and maingrade officers stayed almost the same over this period, standing at 1:4.9 in 1980 and 1:5 in 1990. While this portrayal indicates little change in the organisational structure at a time of growth, these figures do convey the high level of oversight and scrutiny of maingrade officers by senior officers, with the usual arrangement of one senior overseeing the work of a small team of probation officers. It is also important to locate this senior-maingrade probation officer structure within the context of the shift in the functional role of seniors from casework supervision in the 1980s, to the 1990s role of middle managers ensuring 'service delivery' (Statham 1992), with the implications this entailed in organisational and interpersonal terms.

A further development within the organisation over this period was the growth of ancillary and administrative staff: while the introduction of these posts had originally come about to enhance and support the work of probation officers, expansion of these positions had taken place in an ad hoc way, without an overall staffing strategy (Mathieson 1992). Moreover, the inclusion of ancillary staff within 'alternative to custody' schemes, including community service, led to uncertainty concerning areas of professional responsibility and a blurring of role boundaries (May 1991a).

It is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of change over time as the collation of information by the Home Office varied until a standardised procedure, that included

non-probation grade staff in approved probation and bail hostels, was instigated in 1991[10]. Figures 1.7 and 1.8 below outline the position in that year:
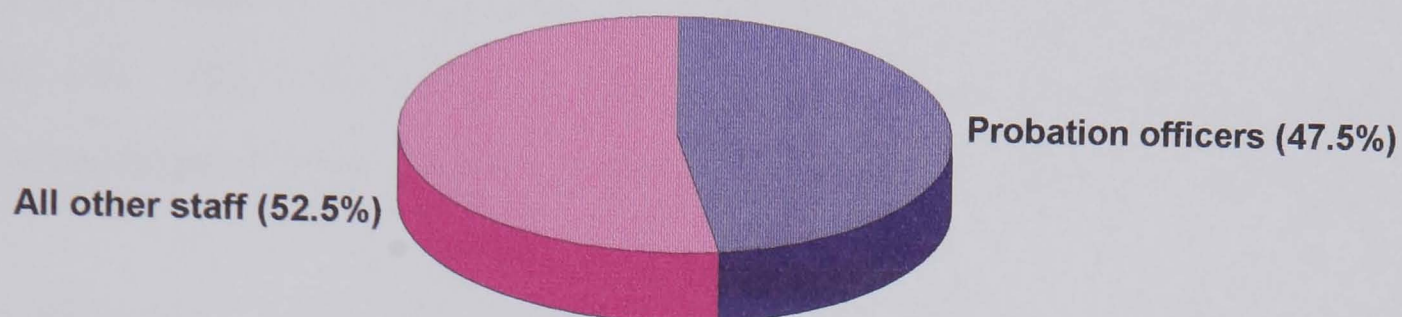
**Figure 1.7   Composition of the probation service 1991
Total of all probation officers compared with all other staff[11]**
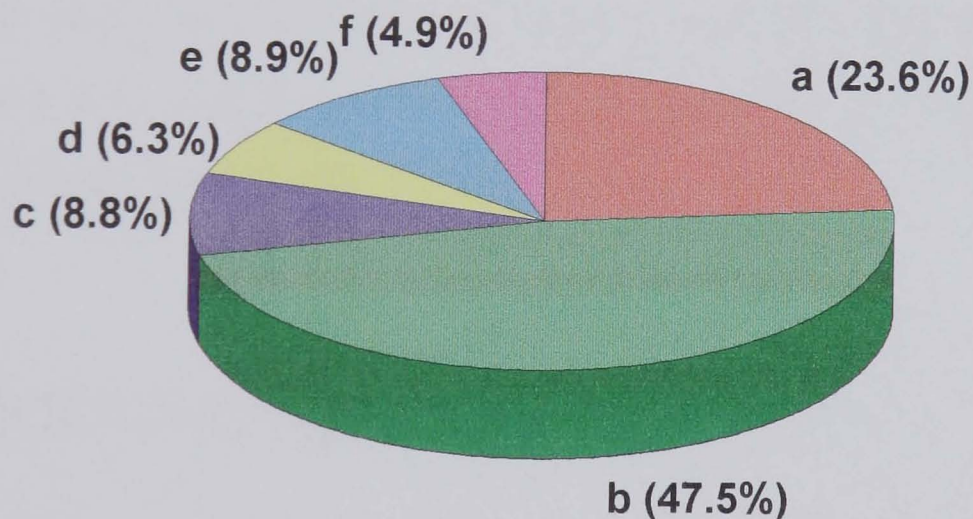
**Figure 1.8   Breakdown of non-probation officer grade staff 1991:
a - probation services' officers;   b - clerical/secretarial;
c - administrative; d - sessional supervisors;   e - hostel staff;
f - others.[12]**

These charts indicate the shape of the organisation as a whole, that is concealed by focusing solely on probation officer grades, and point to the need to take into

account the implications of the wider composition of the service, particularly in relation to the professional standing and positioning within the organisation of probation officers. This perspective opens up aspects for further consideration: within a state-sponsored agency implementing 'alternatives to custody', the professional function of the probation officer is shifting towards a "managerial role in supervising punishment" (Brake and Hale 1992: 157), with ancillary staff (now entitled probation service/community service officers), undertaking elements of the face-to-face contact.

With the then Conservative government's emphasis on "efficiency and parsimony" (Raine and Wilson 1993: 212), these concerns coalesced in the areas of the application of cash-limited budgets for probation services from 1992 (Raine and Wilson 1993), and the requirement for each probation area to utilise approximately 5% of its revenue budget on partnership activities with other (statutory and voluntary) agencies (Home Office 1993 onwards)[13]. In this respect the role of the 'professional' probation officer has become even more uncertain, with the result that "boundaries between core and peripheral skills and knowledge related to the work of specific staff are now blurred" (Holdaway 1996: 126).

Attack on the Professional Base

These issues have come sharply to the fore in the area of probation officer pre-entry training, with central government encompassing this element within its scrutiny of the probation service. The changes that took place within the 1970s located probation training within higher education, taking the form of a specialism within generic social work courses. The content of the CQSW (Certificate of Qualification in Social Work) courses was overseen by CCETSW (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work), rather than the Home Office, although local probation areas retained

some involvement and control at key points in this process: local officers supervised students on placement; appointments were made at area level to permanent posts; and management teams carried out a confirmation process at the end of the first year.

Given the prevailing ideology of the Conservative Government, a clash was inevitable, with generic training embodying social work values and acting as "a corrective against the more punitive extremes of the 'just deserts' philosophy" (Williams 1995: 5). This position first came under attack in the late 1980s in two government sponsored reports: the Coleman Review of probation training in 1989 (Home Office 1989a), and *A Consumer Evaluation of Probation Training: The Courses Compared*, undertaken by Martin Davies in 1989 (Norwich: University of East Anglia). Coleman, in particular, foreshadowed the move by government to bring this aspect of probation within a framework where definitions of competence would "reflect both the increasing ascendancy of employer interests in education and training institutions, and the more managerially defined forms of practice". (Nellis 1996: 13). Nevertheless, while there was some redistribution of sponsorships reducing the number of approved courses, links were strengthened between local probation areas and training institutions, and the probation service remained committed to this system of training, with the staggered introduction of the Diploma of Social Work in the early 1990s.

Notwithstanding this integrated arrangement, scrutiny of pre-entry training reappeared as a key issue within the Probation Training Unit, which was established in 1992, and "it made an early commitment to a competence-based approach, candidly acknowledging that whatever benefits such an approach may have for individuals, its primary justification was managerial" (Nellis 1996: 19). The force of the attack and the unrelenting push for change came across most keenly in the findings of the *Review*

of Probation Officer Recruitment and Qualifying Training (The Dews Report) that was published in September 1994. The review focused on concern that

> the present system contains few mechanisms to ensure that the funds spent on qualifying training provide value for money and produce people ready to be probation officers in the right numbers, at the right place and the right time.

(Home Office 1994a: 2)

Proposals for future training in *The Dews Report* included, inter alia, devolvement of funds to local areas to establish competence based routes to obtain a Diploma in Probation Studies (Home Office 1994a). The changes (and indeed the tenor of the report), were attacked on a wide front, with "a strong coalition of probation, social work, educational and sentencers' interests formed to combat these proposals" (Nellis 1996: 21). Notwithstanding these responses, and following the failure of a judicial review, the far-reaching recommendations of *The Dews Report* were accepted by the Home Office and the probation sponsored intake of students ceased from the commencement of the academic year in 1996.

Concern about the implications of this severing of the links with the social work training base and with higher education were strongly voiced, and raised key issues relating to the de-professionalisation of probation officers. The responses from the academic institutions were unequivocal in this respect:

> The Home Office's proposals for change are characterised by a disturbing anti-intellectualism that echoes the populism of recent criminal justice policy... In recent years, the service lived with direct entry. The untrained probation officers concerned generally demonstrated high levels of commitment and ability, but there was a consensus that proper training was essential, and a long and ultimately successful campaign ensured that all officers received an adequate professional training...

The probation service now faces a gradual decline back into the kind of semi-amateur ethos that was found wanting several decades ago.

(Ford and Sleeman 1996: 20)

Progress with the development of an NVQ framework for probation training promises to be slow, with NAPO stressing both the "size, sensitivity and complexity of this task" and the importance of ensuring that "the training of the future properly reflects the demands made on the probation service for the 21st Century" (*NAPO News* December/January 1997: 10). However, the entrenchment of the move towards change in this area was incontrovertible: following the change in Government in mid-1997, the new Labour Home Secretary confirmed the proposed changes, announcing the integration of the NVQ qualification with a Diploma in Probation Studies, with the intention that they should be located in higher education but "employment-led and delivered by a consortia of probation services" (Jack Straw, Home Secretary, 29th July, 1997, reported in ACOP [Association of Chief Officers of Probation] press release).

Despite the ideological importance of these developments, it is likely to be some considerable time before the effects of the withdrawal of the linkage with social work training becomes evident: the time-scale for the implementation of the new framework is lengthy and the contraction in the size of the service brought about by the imposition of cash limiting and the more punitive sentencing climate, has in any case served to reduce the number of vacancies nation-wide. While the argument to keep probation officer training within higher education appears to have been fought successfully, a rear-guard action is still being undertaken to maintain the professional status and positioning of probation officers within the organisation, with the Association of Chief Officers of Probation Officers stressing that

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maintaining public protection, making accurate risk assessments and understanding the criminal law is now a far more complex business than even a few years ago. In order to remain an effective service these changes need to be reflected in how we select and train our new staff.

(ACOP News Release, 29th July, 1997)

In this respect the rhetoric relating to the knowledge base and areas of expertise demonstrated by probation officers has shifted to address the concerns within the political and public arenas in respect of crime and crime control, but the claims for the professionalisation of the organisation and occupational control continue to face external scrutiny and challenge.

Tensions in the Current Situation

Within the unstable political climate concerning 'law and order', the probation service has experienced an inexorable movement from a 'rehabilitation' phase, through a 'policy' phase, and now onto a '(more) punishment' phase (Broad 1991). This sense of chaotic change, lack of coherent policy and inconsistency of approach has become particularly apparent in recent years: the probation service has experienced swings from the anticipated 'centre-stage' position within the criminal justice system as propounded in the 1991 Criminal Justice Act, to a position where it feels "more like a disregarded extra, a spear-carrier at best" (Smith 1996: 21). This sentiment underlines concern within the service at the downward turn in the total number of probation officer staff, with the 1995 figures showing a contraction of 5%, and a further 2% reduction (to a total of 7,300) in the 1996 figures. This rise and fall in the number of probation officers during the 1990s is shown overleaf in Figure 1.9:

Figure 1.9 National figures of all probation officer staff 1990-1996[14]
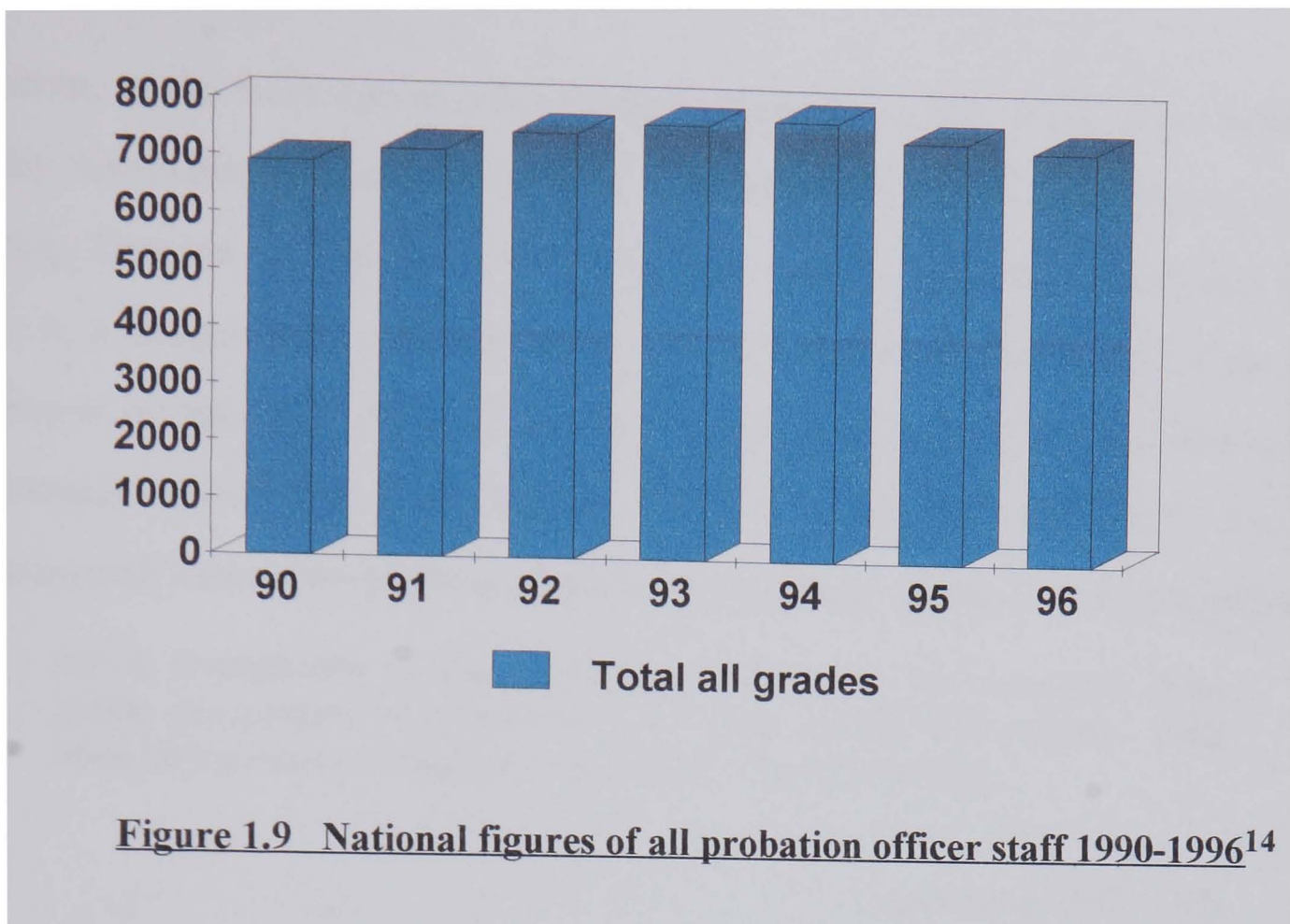
Despite the legislative changes in the 1993 Criminal Justice Act, and in contrast to the downturn in probation officer numbers, the workload of the probation service reached a peak in 1994, stabilised in 1995 and then rose again in 1996 with the highest level ever of court orders (Home Office 1997b:1)[15]. However, this period was also characterised by increasingly hard-line political rhetoric by the Conservative Government in respect of 'law and order', combined with an increasing use of custody by the courts: over the period from May 1993 to October 1996 the prison population showed a 31% rise, increasing from 43,585 to 57,263 (*The Guardian* 16th October 1996). Despite the entrenchment of 'punishment' and the ousting of 'reform' from the criminal justice system agenda, the logistical and financial implications of the ever-growing prison population may yet challenge the ideological diatribes concerning penal policy (Raynor 1996).

The current situation highlights the recurring tension for the probation service between holding onto the values inherent in its traditional social work value base and the demands stemming from government directed penal policy (Arnold and Jordan 1995). In organisational terms there has been a move to reframe the 'nothing works'

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aphorism, to the more upbeat 'what works?' (Mathieson 1992: 147), with empirical studies researching the effectiveness of probation intervention (see, for example, Deering, Thurston and Vanstone 1996). However, this in turn presents dilemmas: first, there is a danger that in concentrating on effectiveness as demonstrated through evaluation of outcomes, this may lead to "a preoccupation with measurement which dehumanises probation activity" (Raynor, Smith and Vanstone 1994: 151). Second, probation still encounters public perception of community sentences as a 'soft option':

> public perceptions of the probation service may be imprecise, (but) public perceptions of crime are quite clear and usually hostile. And often this hostility is displaced on to the Probation Service...

(Mathieson 1992: 154)

Summary

Within the probation service, the twists and turns of penal policy over the past decade, together with the more recent organisational changes, have impacted directly on the day-to-day work[16] and experiences of probation officers. The pressures on the probation service in the current political climate are manifest and it has been suggested that "working for a local probation service is much harder, tougher and bleaker than in the past" (Raine and Wilson 1993: 30). And yet, this can be contrasted by positive soundings that emanate from those working with, and within the organisation:

> The challenge is around the issue of how that creativity can be harnessed to produce a confident service, not bedevilled by the care versus control dilemma, and clear about its intent and its effectiveness. The problems are inter-related and multiple, but resolvable...

(Raynor, Smith and Vanstone 1994: 35)

These differing reactions point to the complexity of the current situation and to the different discourses that cut across each other within and outside the organisation. The historical review in this chapter has highlighted the strands of the unresolved tensions at the interface between the structure of the organisation, administrative and managerial functions, and working practices. This has taken account of the internal concerns of the probation service and wider aspects in relation to its role as part of the criminal justice system, and focused on aspects of change that have brought these interconnecting pressures to the surface.

The current literature on the probation service has engaged with these issues, but from a viewpoint that has not taken into consideration the gendered implications of these changes. Issues relating to challenges to the value base and the professional practice of probation officers have been the focus of recently published work (see, for example, May and Vass (eds) (1996); McIvor (ed) [1996]), but the analyses have not investigated the way these aspects have impacted on individual probation officers and on the organisation from a gendered viewpoint. Within this research the focus is extended beyond the 'law and order' arena, by adopting a wider gendered perspective that locates the probation service as part of the criminal justice system at "a nodal point of power relations within society which both reflects and perpetuates society's dominant assumptions" (May 1994b: 868). This study therefore now turns to investigate and open up this previously neglected area by exploring aspects of power, professional discretion and change from a perspective which incorporates gender within an analysis of the probation service at both organisational and individual levels.

Notes

[1] Since 1993 the Home Office have published rolling three year national plans for the probation service - 1993-96; 1994-97; 1995-98; 1996-99; 1997-2000. Within the 1994-97 Plan a set of Key Performance Indicators were outlined "to be used at national level to inform Ministers' decisions on the provision and use of resources for probation programmes, and on the development of policies relating to the supervision of offenders in the community... The indicators are designed too to be of use at local level and to support good practice and the effective and efficient use of resources" (Home Office 1993b).

[2] Source: Home Office 1966b.

[3] Source: Home Office 1966b.

[4] Source: Home Office 1972a: Table 6 and Home Office 1976a: Appendix H.

[5] Source: Haxby 1978: 31 and Home Office 1972a: Table 1 and Home Office 1976a: Appendix D.

[6] Section 33 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 made provision for short-term and long-term prisoners to be released under supervision and to be subject to recall up to the end of the sentence.

[7] The role of probation committees is summarised in *Three Year Plan for the Probation Service* 1996-99 (Home Office 1995b). This outlines, inter alia, the responsibilities to provide an area probation service and aspects of direct accountability to the Home Secretary.

[8] Figures obtained from Probation Statistics England and Wales 1986 and 1994 (Home Office 1987 and 1995c).

[9] Figures obtained from Probation Statistics England and Wales 1986 and 1994 (Home Office 1987 and 1995c).

[10] See Probation Statistics 1994, page 78 (Home Office 1995c) for detailed outline.

[11] Figures obtained from Probation Statistics 1995, Table 8.4, page 66 (Home Office 1997a).

[12] Staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

[13] This is laid out in the Home Office *Three Year Plan for the Probation Service* 1993-1996, Section J. Partnership, page 28 (Home Office 1992).

[14] Figures obtained from statistics provided by HM Inspectorate of Probation and Summary Probation Statistics, England and Wales 1996 (Home Office 1997b).

[15] Court orders grew by 24% in 1992 and 1993, remained at the same level in 1994 and 1995 and then rose by 2% in 1996. Figures obtained from Probation Statistics England and Wales 1995 and Summary Probation Statistics 1996 (Home Office 1997a and b).

[16] The work of the probation service is outlined in terms of 'outputs' within the Home Office *Three Year Plan for the Probation Service* 1996-1999 (Home Office 1995b).

Chapter 2

A Change of Perspective: Gender and Organisational Issues Within the Probation Service

The abstract, bodiless worker, who occupies the abstract, gender-neutral job has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate. The absence of sexuality, emotionality, and procreation in organisational logic and organisational theory is an additional element that both obscures and helps to reproduce the underlying gender relations.

(Acker 1991: 172)

Gender: The Forgotten Dimension

The research upon which this thesis is based took place over a turbulent period for the probation service, with the shifting focus of legislative change and increased control by central government propelling probation officers away from the long-standing individualised approach of working with offenders, towards a preoccupation with "technique, function and utilitarian ends" (McWilliams 1990: 61). The previous chapter focused on key areas of power and discretion and highlighted factors that were impacting on the probation service at national and local levels. This exploration of organisational and structural processes indicated that

> while it is important to emphasise that probation has not been an unchanging, monolithic entity since its inception at the beginning of the century, there can be little doubt that the past ten years or so have been a time of unprecedented change - and this process is by no means complete and may even just be beginning.

(Mair 1996: 36)

Notwithstanding the analysis of issues on many fronts, a gap in the published literature on the probation service became increasingly apparent in the early stages of this research: in particular, there was no investigation of the gendered implications of change within the probation service. The study carried out by Tim May (May 1991a) had focused on the impact of change on the organisation and on individual probation officers, but had not looked at the dynamic relationship between gender and policy shifts. Similarly, the exploration of the views of experienced probation officers reported by Gwyneth Boswell (Boswell 1989), investigating the perceptions of the skills needed to carry out the role of a probation officer had included both men and women officers (30 male and 32 female staff), but the individual responses were not reported or analysed from a gendered perspective, with the 'probation officer' taking on a rather disembodied persona.

The integration of gender issues did come to the fore in respect of developments in the supervision of women offenders, with concern being expressed about the "marginalisation of service delivery to women" and the need to "deconstruct and rebuild the theoretical base of probation practice which is essentially masculinist in orientation" (Wright and Kemshall 1994: 79). The Probation Inspectorate Report on *Women Offenders and Probation Service Provision* (Home Office 1991a) directed local probation committees to formulate policy and develop provision for women offenders, a move which was reinforced in Section 95 of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act (Home Office 1991b) and within National Standards (original and revised, see Home Office 1995a). However, while there were some innovative developments such as the Merseyside Women's Group (Hirst 1996), the sense of marginalisation and the lack of structural and organisational change were noted repeatedly, with many approaches relying upon the "energy, enthusiasm, commitment, and determination of a few interested individuals" (Wright and Kemshall 1994: 78).

From academic and practice perspectives, issues of gender and organisation within the probation service were subjected to critique: for example, these aspects were considered within a 'Gender, Crime and Probation Practice' forum where Karen Buckley suggested that

> the neglect, if not outright opposition to the issues arising from a male, heterosexual culture seriously affects the capacity of individual probation officers to deliver a gender-conscious service delivery to clients or even more fundamentally survive and prosper as workers in the organisation.

(Buckley 1992: 57)

These concerns echoed key aspects raised in the previous chapter: issues of power, control and professionalism were impacting on policy and practice in a way which had gendered implications for the work and identity of probation officers. From this perspective it seemed that a focus on gender issues was struggling to remain within the mainstream of probation practice (Bensted, Wall and Forbes 1994) and such issues were often side-tracked off into 'gender' meaning 'women' (Gelsthorpe 1992). Furthermore, it seemed that this response was covering up and obscuring "the underlying gender structure, allowing practices that perpetuate it to continue even as efforts to reduce gender inequality are also under way" (Acker 1992: 258).

This gap concerning the dynamic nature of gender issues, was particularly pertinent in respect of Equal Opportunities developments within the service, where the move by central Government to oversee and monitor all aspects of probation work had paradoxically facilitated a coming-together of "managerialism and the ostensibly radical anti-discriminatory/equal opportunity discourse" (Nellis 1995a: 28). There had been some exploration within the service into issues relating to women probation officers and promotion, (see studies by Wells 1983, Hayles 1989, Kay 1993), but on an organisational level the emphasis lay on the implementation, monitoring and review of

equal opportunities policies in each area, set in place as an organisational goal within the national, (and in turn the local), three year plans (Home Office 1993 onwards). In this respect the increasingly 'macho' culture of managerialism of the early 1990s had coincided with the pressure, particularly from NAPO (National Association of Probation Officers), to oversee and regulate Equal Opportunities measures in terms of organisational structures and probation practice, with the result that "initiatives from below mesh more seamlessly with initiatives from above than might at first appear to be the case" (Nellis 1995a: 29). This analysis offers some insight into the shifting allegiances and changing resistances that seemed to be operating within the organisation as outlined in the previous chapter. Moreover, this inclusion of a gendered analysis serves to emphasise that

> organisational roles and statuses have traditionally been gendered... This gendered aspect is located within a larger patriarchal social world which is hierarchically based, with men occupying positions of dominance over women, men, young people and minority group members. The taken-for-granted assumptions about this gender-based power structure start to be confronted by the growing presence of women in what have traditionally been male positions.

(Sheppard 1989: 140)

The review of the probation service in Chapter 1 explores the varying and ambivalent reactions to increasing pressures, acknowledging "the state of flux that the service finds itself in" (May 1991a: 182); while this approach facilitates an analysis of organisational change, it does not address aspects of gender or gender relations, thereby identifying key areas, but nevertheless reiterating the gap in the literature in this area. By developing and integrating a gendered perspective this study endeavours to counter the absence of gender within the organisational studies into the probation service and draws on the potential offered by this pivotal explanatory approach by developing an investigation of internal reorganisation against the backdrop of external changes in relation to gendered issues.

A Gendered Overview

The siting of the probation service alongside the police, courts, the Prison Service and the Crown Prosecution Service, positions the organisation within the legal and criminal justice systems, which are viewed as having "a body of knowledge and a system which are rooted in neutrality" (Walklate 1995: 140). However, while the rational-legal framework encompassing each of these agencies presents as gender-neutral (Pringle 1989), it is striking that all of these elements are staffed predominantly by men:

> in 1981 policewomen accounted for 8.6 per cent of the total police force in England and Wales. By 1989 this had only risen marginally to 10.6 per cent (*Social Trends*, 1991). In 1994 three policewomen held the rank of Deputy Chief Constable and all Chief Constables were male. As far as the courts are concerned, in 1993, 80 per cent of barristers were men (*NACRO Criminal Justice Digest*, July 1994) and of 83 High Court Judges in 1991 only two were women (*The Observer*, 15 September, 1991). In 1992 there were 29,440 lay magistrates, of whom 45 per cent were women. There were also 79 stipendiary magistrates, of whom 10 were women... During 1991-2 2,470 new prison officers started their training; of these 2,081 were men and 389 were women (Report on the Work of the Prison Service, 1991-2).

(Walklate 1995: 11)

The point at issue in these findings is not only the gendered structure of each part of the criminal justice system, but also the power differentials that these figures reveal: women have made inroads at the lower echelons of each organisation, but the higher positions remain strongly male dominated.

Research conducted in the USA by Susan Ehrich Martin and Nancy C. Jurik investigating the position of women in law and criminal justice occupations, also confirms the gendered divisions with regard to labour, power and culture, and highlights the institutional arenas of these struggles (Martin and Jurik 1996). They concluded that

the resistance met by women entering these professions centred not only on men's concern about losing jobs and promotion prospects, but also

> with concerns that women will change the nature and organisation of the work itself. Justice occupations focus on exercising formal social control through making, interpreting, and enforcing society's rules. Men's resistance to women in justice occupations is related to their reluctance to share control over the definitions of illegal behaviour and imposition of social order, in particular, the exercise of authority over men's wrongdoings... Furthermore, policing, corrections, and law traditionally have been so closely associated with men that the jobs have offered a resource for doing masculinity. Women's presence in these fields threatens this close association between work and manhood.

(Martin and Jurik 1996: 211).

The relevance and importance of such issues echo similar areas of concern raised in Frances Heidensohn's study of police officers (Heidensohn 1992), suggesting a further complication: women working with a role relating to social control can be viewed as conducting an "oppressive 'protection' of their own sex", and indeed, be "seen as 'tainted' because they have accepted the aims of a patriarchal repressive system and possibly given it legitimacy" (Heidensohn 1992: 26). Parallels can be drawn with probation officers in view of the 'netwidening' aspects of the social control aspects of their work, (Cohen 1985), associated with the implementation of 'supervision and punishment in the community' (Home Office 1990b).

In viewing female staff within organisations of social control as subject to male control, and in turn imposing control over other women, it is possible to look upon both men and women as "prisoners of gender, although in highly differentiated but interrelated ways" (Flax 1990: 45). This points to an area of complexity in analysing the position of probation officers, and the probation service as a gendered organisation, vis-à-vis the state. In identifying the state as "male jurisprudentially" (MacKinnon 1989:

163), the 'neutrality' of the law can be seen as underpinning the power men wield over women:

> When it is most ruthlessly neutral, it is most male; when it is most sex blind, it is most blind to the sex of the standard being applied. When it most closely conforms to precedent, to "facts", to legislative intent, it most closely enforces socially male norms and most thoroughly precludes questioning their content as having a point of view at all.

(MacKinnon 1989: 248)

The force of MacKinnon's work lies in drawing attention to the invisibility of the gendered nature of the legal system, but presents problems in terms of identifying 'men' and 'women' as distinct and unified categories, and in leaving it unclear "how the patriarchal state might be effectively challenged or from what quarters" (Pringle and Watson 1992: 62). It is possible to move on from this position by viewing the state, not as a unified structure, but as being

> a by-product of political struggles. If we accept that power resides in all social relations this opens up the possibility of a multiplicity of forms of resistance. Interests are also constructed discursively and constituted in their intersection with the state arenas.

(Pringle and Watson 1992: 67)

This overview locates the probation service within a wider context, examining its position in relation to the other parts of the criminal justice system and opening up areas for further consideration in the later chapters. In this respect, it is possible to consider the dynamic nature of both formal and informal interactions from a gendered perspective, within the different areas and levels of the organisation, and, more widely, in the contact with other state-sponsored agencies and with those who come within the orbit of the probation service.

Applying a Gendered Perspective

The focus in this chapter thus turns to an analysis of the probation service as a gendered organisation, centred on the body of literature that has developed over the last twenty years, investigating issues of gender within the workplace from a combination of theoretical and empirical perspectives. This approach opens up to scrutiny aspects relating to professionalism, discretion and autonomy through a gendered 'looking-glass', investigating the development of the service in a way that takes account of the complexities of the changing situation. The grounding of this research in an agency of social control draws particular attention to issues of power and wider social structures, and raises questions of whether, and how, jobs within the organisation are gendered (Davies and Rosser 1986).

This exploration of the probation service as a gendered organisation, draws on a definition of 'gender' as a "multifaceted phenomenon manifest through a net of social and institutional relationships linked across different areas of social life" (Crompton and Sanderson 1990a: 171). This is underpinned by a social constructionist perspective - acknowledging the dynamic and constantly changing aspects of gender, and investigating the diversity, ambiguity and contradictions of this area (Harlow, Hearn and Parkin 1995). This in turn avoids an 'adding in' interpretation of gender (Sheppard 1989), and facilitates a research agenda that aligns with the gender paradigm advocated by Anne Witz and Mike Savage:

> The centrepiece of this perspective is the relationship between gender and power within organisational settings. We have argued that this involves moving away from formalist analyses of bureaucracies towards a recognition of both how they are shaped by specific struggles and how they in turn lead to specific types of gender configurations.

(Witz and Savage 1992: 56)

At this time of uncertainty and change, internal debates have come to the fore within the probation service, centred on concern about "its present identity and image (and) its future functions and prospects" (Faulkner 1995: 36). In developing a gendered analysis, these aspects can be explored within a framework that takes account of discourses both inside and outside the organisation, and of the ways in which they intersect with each other and impact on the personal histories and experiences of male and female probation officers. This approach opens up levels of enquiry that are often hidden by androcentric work relations (Bradley 1994), and makes explicit the

> structural, relational, and symbolic differentiation between women and men. From asking about how the subordination of women is produced, maintained, and changed we move to questions about how gender is involved in processes and structures that have been conceived as having nothing to do with gender.

(Acker 1989: 238)

By adopting this gendered approach, the traditionally dichotomous separation of 'public/private' is questioned and it is possible to propose instead a fluidity and permeability between the 'public' and 'private' spheres, which are straddled professionally and personally by probation officers. This acknowledges the overlay and interaction of different strands relating to gender, but from a viewpoint that avoids the overdetermination of gender as a factor:

> Gender shifts in and out of focus. Often it dissolves into other potential issues, most of which are to do in some way with power... Focusing on gender alone can detract from appreciating the interactions between inequalities.

(Marshall 1995: 99)

This research into the positions of both male and female probation officers is therefore carried out against the backdrop of organisational change and uncertainty, where the expectations concerning the function of the service itself, and the roles and

tasks of its workers are facing increasing scrutiny and challenge from both internal and external quarters. This puts in place the wider structural and social context within which this investigation into aspects of the professional and personal identities and the day-to-day practices of probation officers are located, with a gendered perspective providing a dynamic framework of analysis.

The application of such a gendered framework demands a 'revisiting' of the changing situation in the probation service, looking again at the hierarchical development of the organisation, and at the contested areas in relation to professional and practice issues. In this respect the exploration of change in the probation service in the previous chapter serves to underpin this shift in focus, informing an analysis that views organisational processes as central to an understanding of gender relations within the probation service, and concomitantly, encompasses an understanding that the organisation itself is gendered (Witz and Savage 1992).

Revisiting the Development of the Probation Service

This section thus moves on to investigate the previously unexamined development of the probation service in terms of the gendered distribution of male and female probation officers. This exploration applies both a 'broad-brush' and a more in-depth approach, intending to avoid two potential pitfalls: first, it considers change as a complex and dynamic phenomenon, rather than simply cataloguing the 'progress' of women into the service and into higher management positions, and thus implicitly accepting 'success' in terms of traditional male career patterns (Marshall 1984). Second, in considering the changes as they have impacted on both men and women, it moves away from the implication in some of the literature (particularly that relating to 'women in management'), that "gender = sex = women = problem" (Wilson 1995: 3).

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In centring the research within a perspective that explores the probation service as a gendered organisation, the analysis focuses not only on normative and cultural aspects, but also encompasses an historical perspective looking at "patterns of development and change" (Crompton and Sanderson 1990a: 45). This in turn develops

a more dynamic and fluid conception of power relations between men and women. 'Male power' is not simply and unilaterally imposed on women - gender relations are a process involving strategies and counter-strategies of power.

(Pringle 1989: 92)

This emphasis on issues of power and control within the organisational matrix turns a gendered 'spotlight' onto the professional aspirations of probation officers and incorporates aspects relating to gender roles and identity. The focus therefore returns to the early development of the service, looking at the "patterned, socially produced, distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker 1992: 250). The histories of the probation service (e.g. King 1969, Jarvis 1972, Bochel 1976) state that in the early stages male officers supervised both men and women, while the female officers worked mainly with women and children. On an official level this arrangement was questioned in the Report of the Departmental Committee on the Training, Appointment and Payment of Probation Officers, 1922 (Bochel 1976: 101), when it was proposed that women offenders should be supervised only by women probation officers. This restriction was subsequently provided by statute (King 1969: 28), and was not removed until the Criminal Justice Act 1967, with reverberations of this ruling continuing into the 1970s.

Thus, the ideology of the official legislation imposed a gender split that reinforced the 'public/private' divide, with, (by implication), male officers supervising male offenders, and (by directive) female officers supervising women and children.

This can be seen as underpinning a male/female gender separation that entailed a hierarchical gender order. It should be noted, however, that there was not

> any corresponding legal requirement that boys and men should be supervised by men, and supervision at least of the younger boys by women has been customary almost everywhere. In London, especially, women have been increasingly involved in the supervision of adult men on probation, and they also deal with men in prison welfare and after-care.

(King 1969: 28)

In practice there seems to have been an uneven implementation of policy: "at the beginning of 1929, 480 of the country's 1,028 Petty Sessional Divisions were still without the services of a woman officer" (Bochel 1976: 111). The continuing concern of these gendered issues, with the undertones of sexuality, were however, clearly spelt out in the 1936 Report of the Departmental Committee on the Social Services in Courts of Summary Jurisdiction:

> The Committee was adamant that it was necessary to have a woman probation officer in every area. Apart from the risk incurred in putting a woman on probation to a male officer, a woman, the Committee thought, could deal more effectively and with more freedom with the case of another woman or girl than could a man.

(Bochel 1976: 127-128)

This explicit official concern about the appropriateness of male probation officers supervising women offenders points to the gendered aspects of the state's development of this facet of social policy, with its undertones of biological determinism in the inference of untrammelled sexual 'danger' in such relationships. These pronouncements reinforced 'natural' views of men and women, where the women, (in this context the women offenders), could be seen as embodying

> a source of disorder because their being, or their nature, is such that it necessarily leads them to exert a disruptive influence in social and

political life. Women have a disorder at their very centres - in their morality - which can bring about the destruction of the state.

<div align="right">(Pateman 1994: 109)</div>

In turning the focus more directly to the probation service itself, it is interesting to explore the implications of such a 'natural' view of gender roles and divisions in terms of women probation officers. In his history of the probation service Jarvis notes that the 1936 Departmental Committee commented on the relatively low educational standards of probation officers, but adds that "a few officers, mainly women, had had a university education" (Jarvis 1972: 54). It is open to conjecture that in these cases, the 'rationality' of higher education and training was seen to overcome and transcend the 'disorder' arising from their gender in respect of these women probation officers.

Gender and the Growth of the Organisation from 1950-1980

These observations on the staffing of the organisation provide a background to review the gendered changes in the growing organisation. The literature on semi-professions (e.g. Etzioni 1969) leads to the expectation that there would be a gender division across the various positions within the probation service as it developed, with a hierarchical separation occurring between men and women. Furthermore, organisational structures in other semi-professions displayed a highly discriminating pattern to the relative positions of male and female staff, with organisations segmented "by status, by specialisation (and) by stereotype" (Hearn 1982: 194).

Such a distinction did indeed take place in the development of the probation service in respect of the division between probation officers and administrative staff, with most clerical posts being filled by women. However, in terms of probation officers coming into the service, men predominated at all grades, including maingrade level,

until the end of the 1980s. This contrasts sharply with the allied semi-profession of social work (Grimwood and Popplestone 1993), with women constituting "around two-thirds of all social workers in most industrialised capitalist societies" (Roach Anleu 1992: 25). The charts below depict the particular situation within the probation service, outlining the relative number of men and women probation officers in post at ten year intervals between 1950 and 1980:

1950 Distribution[1]

Female (34.8%)

Male (65.2%)

1960 Distribution[2]

Female (31.0%)

Male (69.0%)

63

1970 Distribution[3]

Female (31.0%)

Male (69.0%)
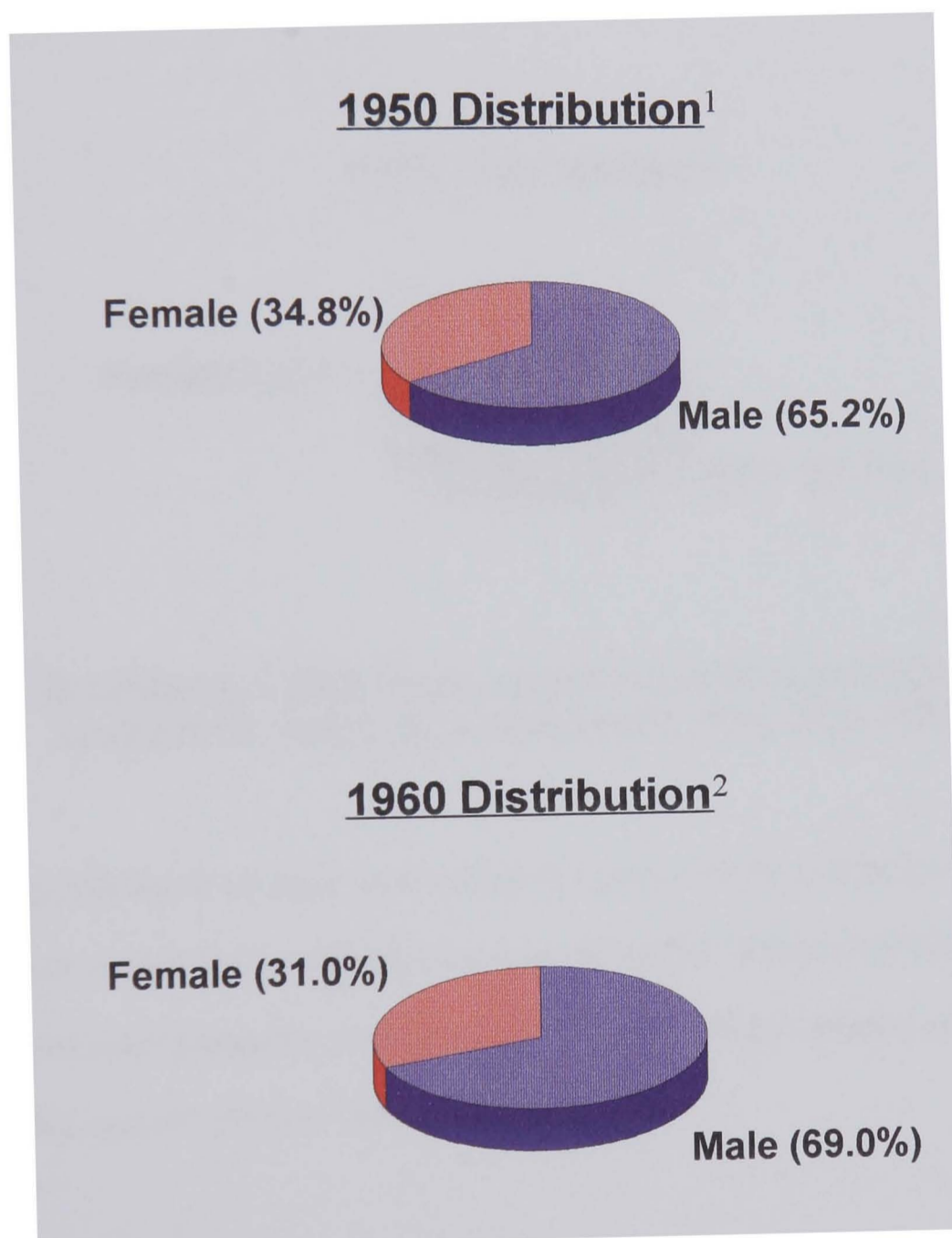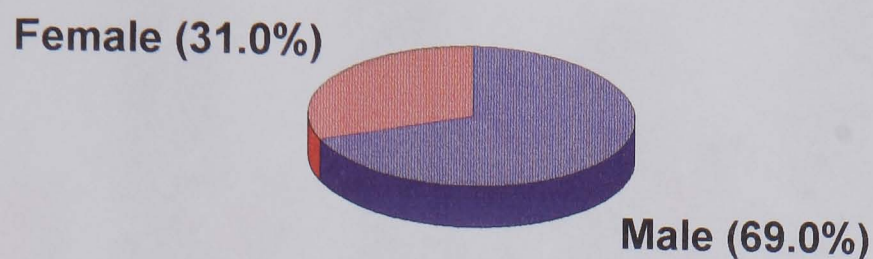
1980 Distribution[4]

Female (36.3%)

Male (63.7%)
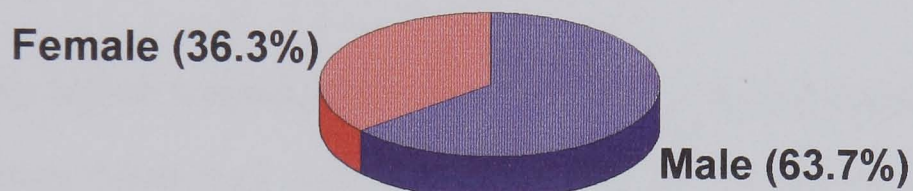
Figure 2.1 Breakdown of distribution of men and women probation officers at all grades within the service (1950, 1960, 1970, 1980)

The preponderance of male staff across all grades in the probation service at this time has been accounted for by Jeff Hearn in terms of the "better conditions of service, a flatter organisational hierarchy and arguably a more reliable source of finance from the 'law and order sector'" (Hearn 1982: 194).

Further investigation of the overall position indicates that there were differences in the male/female distribution of probation officers in different areas. The Home Office study, *Trends and Regional Comparisons in Probation (England and Wales)*, published in 1966, provides more detailed insight into the position on a regional basis, with Figure 2.2 outlining the situation in 1961:

**Figure 2.2 Regional comparisons 1961
(male/female probation officers, all grades)**
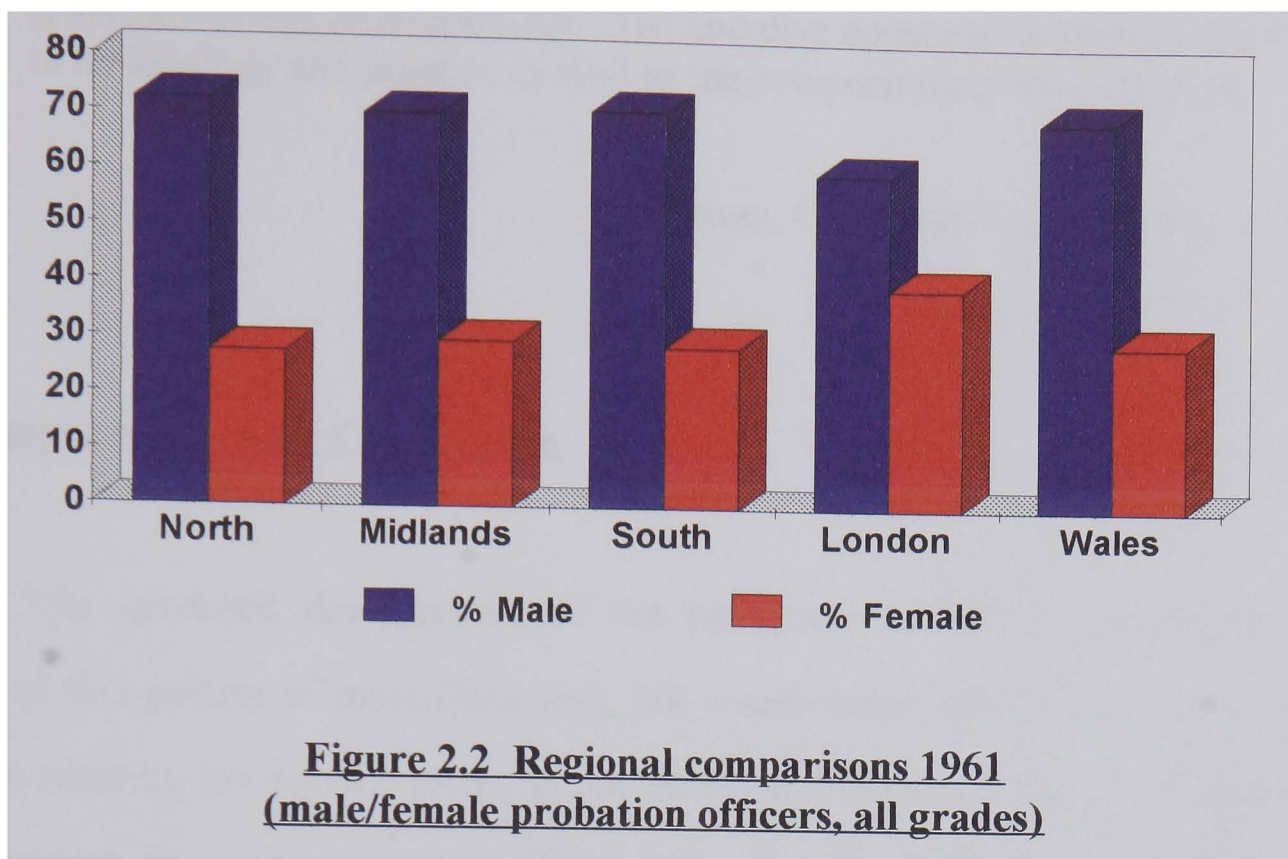
The relatively higher proportion of women officers in the London area,[5] (and in turn the relatively lower number of men officers), stands out in contrast to the other four areas which have a ratio of approximately 70:30 male to female officers. However, even in the London area, the majority of probation officers were male (a ratio of 60:40).

The gender split indicated by these descriptive 'snapshots' can be accounted for by contrasting the gendered divisions between "the coercive apparatus" (and indeed "the central directorate"), with "the welfare apparatuses": this counterpoises agencies such as the armed forces, police, courts and prisons, which have high concentrations of male staff, with sectors such as social services, health, education and social security, which have much higher levels of women staff (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 42). This key distinction reverberates throughout the development of the probation service and can be seen to be of particular significance in its relationship vis-à-vis the state. The positioning of the probation service within the constellation of agencies of the criminal justice system displaying a masculine staffing ethos, rather than within the grouping of welfare agencies, has far-reaching implications which are:

not only a matter of the statistics of the sexual division of labour. There is also a cultural differentiation. The coercive apparatus is 'masculinised' in its ideology and practice as well as the composition of its workforce.

(Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 42)

Changes in the Gender Composition

The gendered development of the probation service up until 1980 clearly followed this pattern of masculinisation, but recent trends have shown an increase of women entering the service to the point where in 1993 there was a switchover with more women than men probation officers in post, (as a whole-time equivalent total of all grades), employed in England and Wales. Figure 2.3 below outlines the changes between 1980 and 1995:
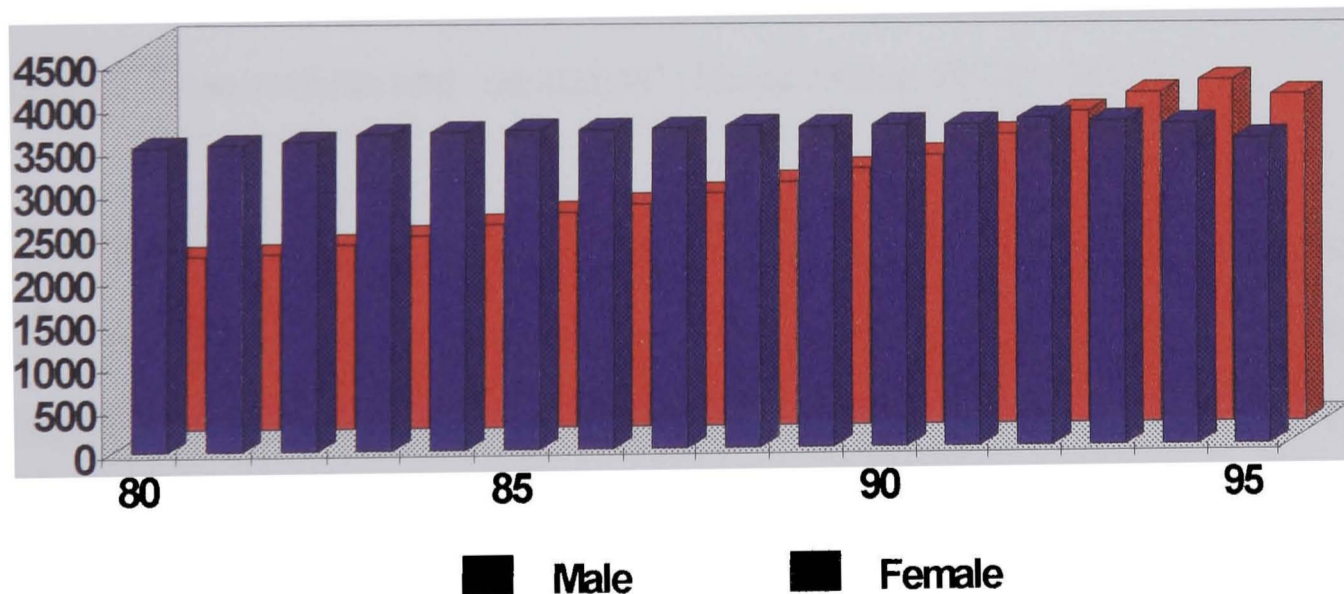
Figure 2.3 Male/female probation officers (all grades) 1980-95

The growth in (all-inclusive) probation officer numbers rose from the 1980 total of 5,536 to a largest total of 7,776 in 1994, dropping back to 7,431 in 1995. It can be seen from this chart that the increase in staff came mainly from women probation officers, (2,007 in 1980 to a high point of 4,015 in 1994), with male staff numbers hovering between the 1980 figure of 3,529 and the highest number in 1992 of 3,835[6].

After the period of growth in the 1980s and early 1990s, the downturn of both male and female officers in the 1995 figures (3,589 men and 3,842 women) is conspicuous: the downward trend links with the discussion in Chapter 1 which located this contraction within the context of changes in legislation and cash-limited budgets, alongside political pressures to restrict professional autonomy within probation practice in the move to readjust the balance away from discretion towards a rule-based operation (Adler and Asquith 1981). These changes augur a period of uncertainty and contraction for the probation service at both national and local levels, with an explicit emphasis on organisational efficiency and accountability within the *Three Year Plans for the Probation Service*, and with the foreseeable period outlined in terms of "challenges, opportunities and constraints" (Home Office 1994b: 21).

Within this national framework of planning for the probation service the strategic policy adopts a gender-neutral tone and 'gender issues' are addressed specifically through monitoring of equal opportunity procedures within the "List of Supporting Management Information Needs" (Home Office 1995b: 49). It is this 'shield' of gender neutrality that is now pushed aside within this study, in order to investigate the way this portrayal obscures gendered structures and processes within the probation service. In this way the contradictory scenario of growth and contraction of the organisation within the relatively short period in the early 1990s is further opened up to inspection, taking into account aspects that give the appearance of being separate,

ungendered areas of operational concern, and which involve intersecting, and at times, conflicting discourses.

Gender Differences - Maingrade Level

The 'broad brush' picture of the gender distribution in the relative numbers of probation officers on a national basis (on a whole time equivalent total of all grades) explores change over time at national and regional levels, but masks the differences across grades in the service and within different probation areas. While the increased number of female probation officers has been highlighted, further deconstruction of the situation investigates the structure of gender relations within the hierarchical organisation of the service and informs an analysis of the changing patterning of the organisational set-up. This approach provides the detail of change but, more importantly, sets in place a framework within which to explore the "politics of access, representation and gender construction" within the probation service (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 51).

The Home Office statistics that enable detailed scrutiny of the shifting composition of the probation service cover the period 1987 to 1995, outlining the gender distribution by area and by grade (source: HM Inspectorate of Probation). The stratum within the service that accounts for the noticeable shift in the male/female gender balance is at maingrade level, with the gradual trend towards more women than men producing a switch-over in 1989 and becoming pronounced in the wake of the growth in the organisation arising from the implementation of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act. The position regarding maingrade officers is outlined in Figure 2.4 overleaf:
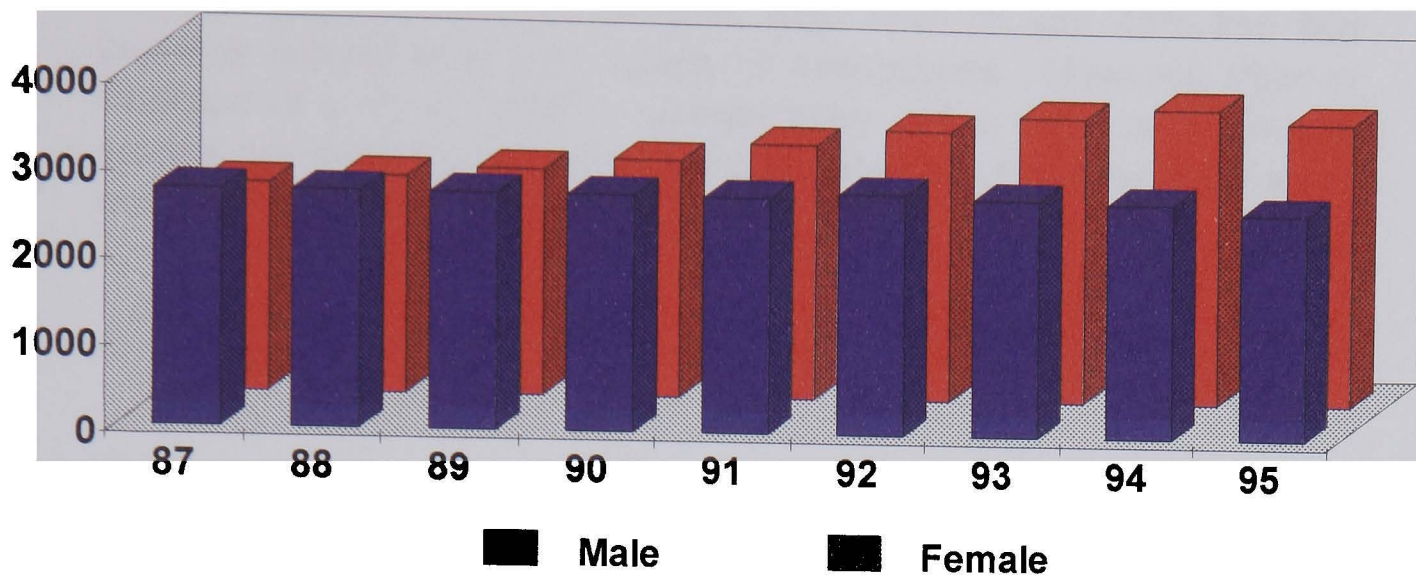
Figure 2.4 Maingrade probation officers 1987-95

This change-over to a clear majority of women being employed at maingrade level within the probation service can be seen as marking a significant cultural change which moved beyond

> the state's solution strategies aimed at balancing demands for equality with the patriarchal gender order... It follows that the battle becomes one about where in a process of change to draw the line.

> (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 159)

The actions taken by the Conservative Government did not directly address the shifting gender balance but the review of training that considered the mode of entry to the service targeted this 'breaching' of the organisation by women. *The Review of Probation Officer Recruitment and Qualifying Training*, more commonly referred to as *The Dews Report*, (Home Office 1994a), addressed the dual elements of the shift towards a feminised and social work based probation service at maingrade level. In this respect the Report observed that:

Because of the nature of the work the Probation Service particularly needs to recruit mature people with a breadth of experience. We found that the majority of 1993 entrants were over 30 and 42% had had previous careers in a wide variety of occupations. However, there is evidence of a recent trend to younger entry and in some other respects entry is not representative of the adult population; in particular far fewer men than women are joining the Service.

(Home Office 1994a: 1)

This reporting of statistical information, followed up by unattributed observations is indicative of the style of the written review, with a similar tone applied to the social work base of probation training:

We also heard much of the importance of "social work values" but nothing to suggest these were different from the values of many professions and we noted that this was not a concept embraced by the Home Office... We found this whole sensitive area troubling as we wondered if "social work values" actually meant that probation officers were expected to think similarly on a range of social and criminal justice issues where a diversity of view would be healthy.

(Home Office 1994a: 26)

The concentration on such issues within a government sponsored report could thus be seen as placing a 'marker' in terms of state intervention, responding to a change in the staffing composition of the service that could be perceived to be moving too far and too fast from a realm that had been "culturally marked as masculine" (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 7). Furthermore, the need to consider change was made explicit within *The Dews Report*, but was framed in organisational terminology citing Home Office concerns that

the present arrangements for training and recruiting probation officers did not meet the needs of the modern Probation Service and did not offer value for money.

(Home Office 1994a: 1)

The main recommendations advocated, inter alia, the removal of the requirement for probation officers to have a social work qualification (Certificate of Qualification in Social Work or, more recently, the Diploma in Social Work), and for the training and funding to be devolved to local probation services to establish competence based training leading to a Diploma in Probation Studies (Home Office 1994a: 3-6). However, the framing of these recommendations concealed the different levels of discourses that can be identified as running throughout *The Dews Report*: on one level the current arrangements are questioned in a seemingly gender-neutral, non-judgmental way, stating that

> access to training must be as open as possible to ensure that people with a breadth of experience and the potential to be probation officers are not barred by irrelevant factors.

(Home Office 1994a: 3)

The tone of this statement belies the themes of gender expectations and implied 'appropriateness' of personal backgrounds that reverberate through the language within the report and reiterate the normative expectation of a hierarchical male order. Within one section, the increasing number of young women entrants is noted, alongside the comments that:

> Our informal meetings with probation staff also led us to wonder if newly qualified probation officers included a higher proportion who were unmarried, separated or divorced than the general population... These profiles are unimportant in themselves - there is no suggestion that sex or marital status is relevant to ability to be a probation officer. They are, however, noteworthy as an indication that in some respects the Probation Service recruits a different profile from that of the adult population as a whole.

(Home Office 1994a: 15)

These comments seem indicative of a backlash by the state with regard to the gendered changes within the probation service in the 1990s, situated within the 'family

values' ideology of the Conservative Government, and with the patriarchal overtones that this conveys. The interplay of different discourses was further indicated by the attack on the social work value base of training within *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a: 26), which was reinforced in a statement by Baroness Blatch, at that time Home Office Minister of State responsible for the probation service:

> Although the work of probation officers includes a social work dimension, it is very distinct from that of social workers. The probation service is an important part of the criminal justice system and plays a critical role in the corrective punishment of offenders.

(The Guardian, 18th October 1995)

The force of these attacks and proposed pace of change attest to a move to intensify the embodiment and institutionalisation of male interests within this part of the state apparatus (Witz 1992). A further element was added by the pronouncement in a Home Office memorandum, reported in *The Guardian* (27th June, 1994), that future recruitment from ex-police and armed forces personnel was to be encouraged - a development that took place alongside Home Office rhetoric concerning crime and offenders, that framed the work of the probation service in terms of:

> confronting, challenging, enforcing, tackling, targeting. This is the language of contact sports and war. It is male language and its objective is to impress, to impress with a demonstration of power.

(Cordery and Whitehead 1992: 30)

Although the terms of reference of *The Dews Report* did not explicitly set an agenda that sought to re-align the gender balance of the probation service at maingrade level, the publication of the report and the implementation of the recommendations brought about changes in respect of recruitment and training which demonstrate forcibly that

the gender order is not static and the state, as a regulatory force, has complex calculations to make about the allowable pace and change of direction... The result is, inevitably, a complex patchwork of strategies, and compromises and trade-offs between strategies, on both sides of the interaction.

(Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 55)

The discourses emanating from the gendered implications of *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a) impacted on the probation service that was already facing the abrupt turnaround in Government policy from the relative coherence of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act, to the changes in the amending legislation in 1993 (Nellis 1995a). Within this scenario of change and challenge to established practices, these aspects coalesce in respect of issues concerning the deprofessionalisation of probation officers, portending a period of profound uncertainty for the probation service and for those working within the organisation. In this respect, the application of a gendered perspective extends the analysis of the impact of these measures, opening up and reflecting the multifaceted and multi-layered implications of this shifting situation.

Gender Differences - Middle Management Level

Exploration of the gendered structure of maingrade probation officers vis-à-vis management grade levels throughout England and Wales reveals a differentiated picture of 'gender pyramids', where "a small number of males dominate the apex and a large number of women constitute the base" (Lupton 1992: 98). The discussion in Chapter 1 details the growth of management grades in the service, but further deconstruction of the gendered divisions of the different grades again opens up apparently gender-neutral structural aspects and staffing compositions for investigation, within the relationship of gender and power in this organisational setting:

Organisations are the embodiment of different forms of patriarchal power relations, which themselves set the stage for further conflicts, so that organisations are constantly changing in a fluid way.

(Witz and Savage 1992: 57)

The probation service follows the traditional pyramid structure of most organisations: senior probation officers are placed at middle-manager level, with the chief grades comprising assistant chief and, in a minority of areas, deputy chief probation officers forming the next levels, surmounted by one chief probation officer in each of the 54 probation areas (amalgamation of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in 1996 reduced the number from 55).

The post of senior probation officer represents a move into management for probation officers seeking promotion, and it is at this level of the organisation that the proportion of men to women starts to diverge, with more men than women situated on the management steps of the pyramid-shaped job ladder (Reskin and Padavic 1994), in sharp contrast to the relative numbers of male and female probation officers at maingrade level. The position relating to this rung of middle-management within the probation service, (England and Wales), is illustrated in Figure 2.5 below:
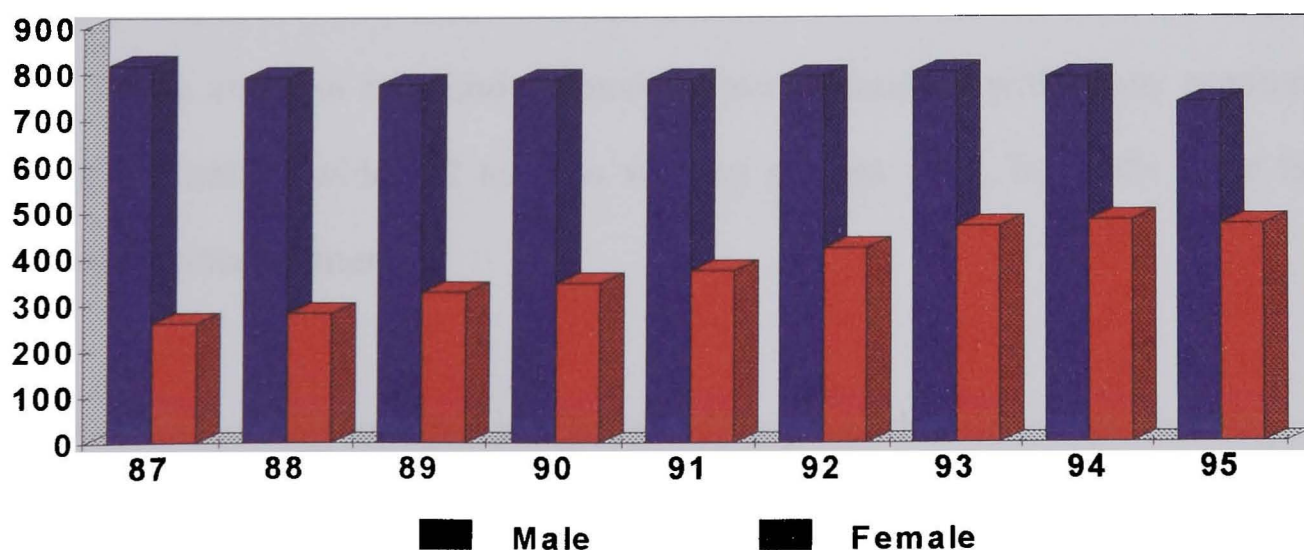
Figure 2.5 Senior probation officers 1987-95

This graph displays an increase in the numbers of women senior probation officers, (as at maingrade level, the growth at senior level has come mainly from women), with the proportion of women to men changing from approximately 1:3 in 1987 to 2:3 in 1995. This indicates some progress in terms of equal opportunities for women, but a sizeable gap still remains and, in addition, the 1995 figures show a downturn in the total number of senior probation officer positions, demonstrating a contraction of this level in the service, (1274 seniors in 1994 as compared to 1208 in 1995)[7]. The overall reduction is shown most noticeably in the number of male seniors, while the number of women seniors seems to have reached a plateau at the 1993 level.

This overview of the national position conveys a changing scenario in terms of the gender distribution at this level throughout the service over this period, but overlooks differences between local areas. A more detailed evaluation of the 1995 figures shows that out the 55 areas in England and Wales, there were wide variations in the relative gender balance at senior probation officer level. In particular, these figures were skewed by the unique situation in the numerically and geographically large Inner London area, where there were 44 men and 58 women seniors. Of the remaining 54 areas, wide differences were displayed both in the numbers of staff at this level and in the gender balances: six areas had slightly more women seniors than men[8], five had equal numbers[9], while the other 43 areas had more men than women senior probation officers. These areas in turn show considerable variations, with many approximately replicating the nation-wide 3:2 men to women seniors ratio, but with some having a high preponderance of men[10].

The unravelling of the statistics relating to this level of the organisation indicates differing situations throughout the various probation areas, and reveals a more complex scenario than that which was conveyed by the national picture. This again

draws attention to the gendered social and cultural implications arising from the distributions for women and men at middle-management level and highlights that in most areas women seniors move to a position where they have a much reduced female peer grouping. In her study of a large corporation Rosabeth Moss Kanter drew attention to the dynamics that could ensue from these different group compositions:

> Those women who were few in number among male peers and often had "only women" status became tokens: symbols of how-women-can-do, stands-ins for all women. Sometimes they had the advantage of those who are "different" and thus were highly visible in a system where success is tied to becoming known. Sometimes they faced the loneliness of the outsider, of the stranger who intrudes upon an alien culture and may become self-estranged in the process of assimilation.... As proportions begin to shift, so do social experiences.

(Kanter 1977: 207)

The changes in the gender compositions at senior level within the probation service therefore raise pertinent issues from a gendered perspective relating to role expectations and middle management culture, and point to the need to explore beyond "the level of simple arithmetic" (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 159). In particular, the positioning of seniors between maingrade staff and higher management serves as a key mediating layer in the service:

> they are expected to be both the specialist, who maintains the team's performance, as well as the individual who collects information on that performance... The dilemma in these roles is that the audience has changed. It is not the team, but the Home Office via probation management. Divisions may then occur between the team's needs and the organisation's administrative criteria represented, increasingly, by the SPO.

(May 1991a: 107)

These organisational issues point to changing social interactions and expectations impacting on senior probation officers from both from internal and

external sources, but overlook the analytical insights that can be gained from a gendered perspective. The inclusion of a gendered approach reveals previously unaddressed complexities in interactions, providing new insights into the conflicts that may ensue:

> Women in the role of senior probation officer will be under pressure from all grades to adapt to agentic modes - by superordinates, by colleagues, by main grade probation officers, male and female, who may openly derogate the agentic style of male management figures but fail to give acknowledgement and support to women, and indeed, men, who attempt to adopt alternative strategies, frequently labelling a more communal approach as weakness or incompetence.

(Hayles 1989: 16-17)

By placing such an exploratory framework at the centre of this research, issues relating to gender configurations and power relations can be investigated from a position that extends and reconceptualises the analysis of the changing situation at the different levels of this gendered organisation.

A Gendered Examination of the Chief Grades

In moving the gendered spotlight onto higher management, (assistant chief, deputy chief and chief probation officer grades), the focus shifts to the part of the probation service where the hierarchical ordering between men and women becomes more striking as the 'pyramid' narrows. Figure 2.6 overleaf outlines the changing male/female distributions at assistant chief officer level in England and Wales:
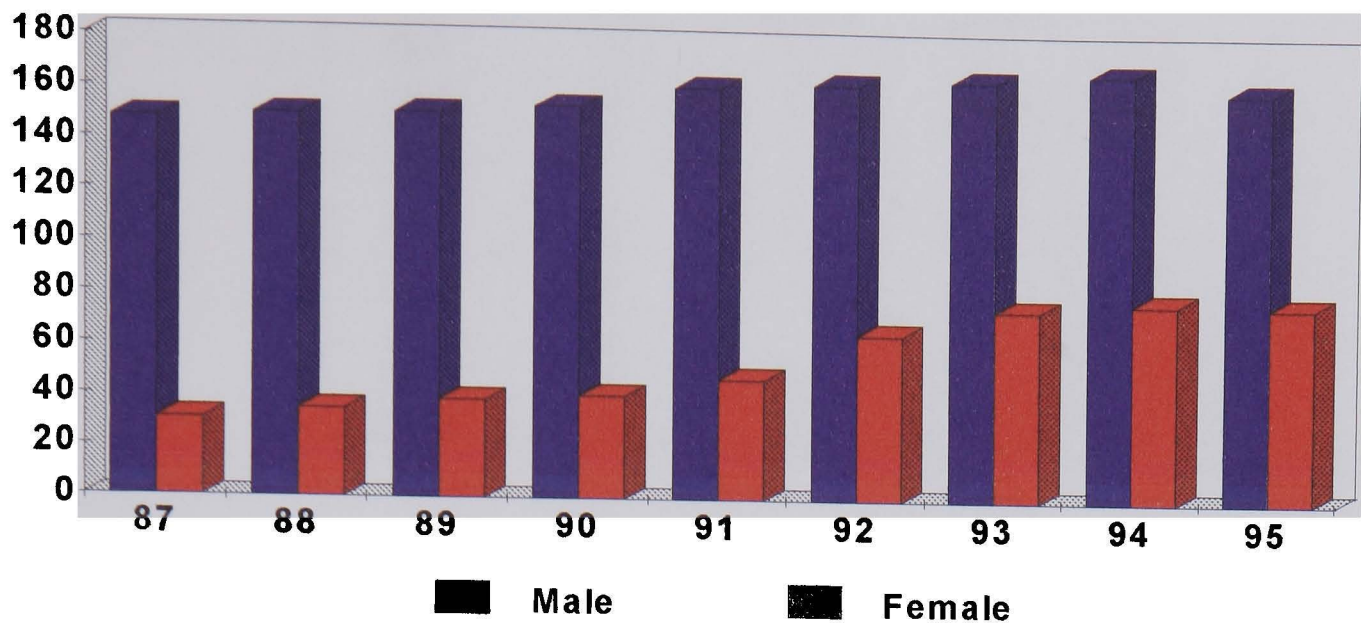
Figure 2.6 Assistant chief probation officers 1987-95

This graph portrays the growth in the assistant chief probation officer grade between 1987 and 1995, with a slight increase (and then tailing off) in the overall numbers of men, and more than a doubling of women assistant chiefs. However, there remains a proportion of 2:1 men to women, (1995 figures), and, after a marked upward movement in the numbers of women in 1991-1993, as at senior probation officer level, the relative positions now seem to be levelling out.

The level of deputy chief probation officer is only present in 16 probation areas in England, (none in Wales), and is therefore not a direct rung on the promotion ladder in most parts of the country. The total number of filled posts have varied between 22 (in 1994) and 26 (in 1993), with a consistently higher proportion of men to women. The table on the next page details the position between 1987 and 1995:

Year	Male	Female	Total
1987	19	5	24
1988	18	6	24
1989	17	6	23
1990	19	6	25
1991	19	5	24
1992	18	5	23
1993	19	7	26
1994	17	5	22
1995	20	5	25

Figure 2.7 Deputy chief probation officers 1987-95

In terms of equal opportunities, the gender differentials at these higher management levels in the probation service were identified as being cause for concern by the Association of Chief Officers of Probation (ACOP) in 1992-93, leading to the support of research conducted in this area by Felicity Collier, (at that time an assistant chief probation officer), that focused specifically on 'Women's Progression to Senior Management in the Probation Service' (Collier 1994). In adopting a liberal feminist approach she points to, but does not develop, three key areas for action: structural changes to take account of women's family responsibilities, professional support for women, and changes in organisational culture. Her stance has resonance with the pioneering approach of Rosabeth Moss Kanter in her book 'Men and Women of the Corporation' (1977), and she identifies some of the same problematics: the dilemmas of the 'token' woman and the divisions between the 'public' and the 'private' imposing unequal demands on women.

The recommendations in the Report (Collier 1994: 103-104), endorse the full implementation of equal opportunities policies, but focus on women's needs within a framework of gendered stereotypes, rather than questioning wider social and cultural structures. The inherent problems and limitations of such an approach are apparent:

> current equal-opportunities legislation represents a self-defeating
> paradox to the extent that it ignores... powerful stereotyping effects.

Legislation officially gives women the opportunity to be equal to men on men's standards. It does not allow questioning of current norms, or foster growth towards a jointly meaningful, mixed-sex public world. As a result a part of the total social system - women's place - is meant to change without significant accommodations and transformations of that system as a whole. This is a logical, practical and existential impossibility.

(Marshall 1984: 37)

These constraints would seem to dampen the inherent optimism of Felicity Collier's conclusions concerning the potential pool of female chief probation officer candidates in the future (Collier 1994). Instead the individual standing of each woman in these posts in the hierarchy has become more noticeable, singled out because of her exceptional position, rather than foreshadowing the acceptance of a more balanced male/female grouping at higher management levels (Mackie and Pattullo 1977).

This interpretation seems to be borne out in a re-examination of the information presented above in relation to the women assistant chief probation officers. Although there was a total of 78 women assistant chief probation officers in 1995, out of the 55 areas, 13 did not have a women ACPO and 23 had only one woman at this level. Of the remaining 19 areas, six areas had more women than men at this level in 1995. It is important to bear in mind that the numbers at this grade were small in most areas, with only 11 probation areas having six or more staff at this level: of these, only five of the relatively large areas had a grouping of four or more women at this rung of management[11].

This review indicates the variations in the gender distributions from one area to another, and also shows that the majority of the management groupings at assistant and deputy chief probation officer level were 'skewed' or 'tilted' with more men than women, with few areas achieving a 'balanced' gender group composition at these positions of the

organisational 'pyramid' (Kanter 1977: 209). Thus many women assistant and deputy chief probation officers find themselves working within a setting with little or no female peer support and moving into an environment that provides few role models of women in senior positions (Davidson and Cooper 1992). In this respect the situation may present a self-fulfilling paradox - a 'Gordian knot' - for, as Nancy Nichols has pointed out, "if the only way to get more women to the top of corporations is to have more women at the top of corporations, we are left with a riddle, not a breakthrough" (Nichols 1994: 11).

Surveys investigating women's attitudes towards promotion within the probation service (Wells 1983, Kay 1993) have pointed towards reservations expressed by experienced maingrade women in considering career advancement solely in terms of moving up through the hierarchy of the organisation. Another report suggested that "women are suspicious of promotion, conscientious objectors to an organisational role which is incompatible with their values and behaviour" (Hayles 1989: 16). While highlighting structural and interpersonal difficulties, this viewpoint does run the risk of unintentionally reinforcing the status quo within an essentialist stereotyping of differences in male and female managerial and leadership styles, rather than considering the potential of characterising management profiles in terms of similarity and interpreting any differences as advantages (Marshall 1984). Ironically, this approach also compounds

> a recurring paradox. The categories of men and masculinity are frequently central to analyses, yet they remain taken for granted, hidden and unexamined. Men are both talked about and ignored, rendered simultaneously explicit and implicit. They are frequently at the centre of discourse but they are rarely the focus of interrogation.

(Collinson and Hearn 1994: 3)

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The approach within this study is therefore intended to direct a gendered focus onto the issues of power and professional identities at these different levels in the probation service, exploring the 'boundaries' in order to reflect on how "women and men delineate their relations at any given time or place" (Davis 1991: 80).

This analysis of the gendered distribution of probation officer staff within the service is completed with a review of the male/female distribution of chief probation officers. Against the backdrop of change in the probation service, the hierarchical structure of the individual areas has remained unaltered, with chief probation officers surmounting the organisational pyramid in each of the 54 areas (situation as from April 1996). In organisational terms this position has been subjected to critique: Bill McWilliams considered that the chief probation officer should embody "the probation ideal in propria persona" and put forward the proposal of a 'management ideal', drawing on "the language of administration and professional leadership" (McWilliams 1990: 66-67). In contrast to this stance, Malcolm Lacey propounded a more instrumental view, of the chief probation officer holding the top post in a "hierarchy of decision-makers" and heading up a management team whose major responsibility was to:

> make itself 'fit' a changing task as closely and productively as possible. To do that, we require a clear sense of purpose articulated through a public 'mission statement', itself the outcome of discussion amongst the various 'stakeholders' who each have distinct responsibilities and decision-making powers in its implementation.

(Lacey 1991: 116)

These perspectives on the probation service engage with issues concerning the professional positioning and power base of chief probation officers within the local areas in response to a changing situation, but do not encompass or even acknowledge issues of gender. This gap replicates the approach within many organisational studies for

while management, and particularly top management, remains dominated by men, this fact continues to avoid critical attention in most of the research on management.

(Hearn 1994: 192)

In order to address this absence, this study now turns to look at the apex of the probation 'pyramid', at the chief probation officer grade, where the patterning of a gender imbalance is most forcibly established, and shows the most marked differential between the relative numbers of men and women. (It should be noted that the year end figures may contain vacancies that have not been filled at that point).
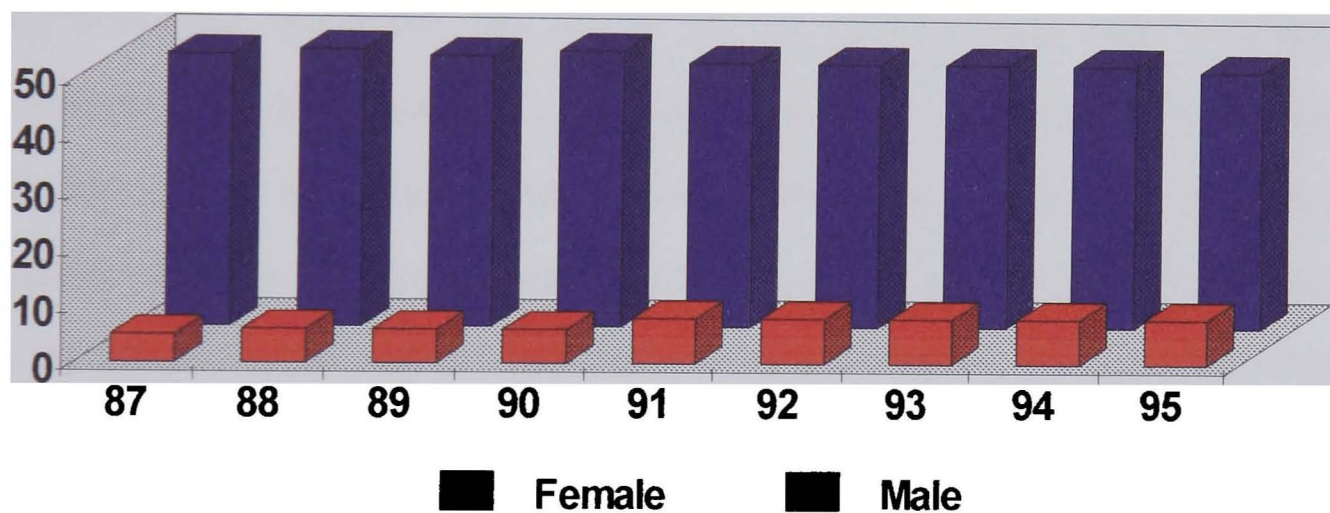
Figure 2.8 Chief probation officers 1987-95

This presentation demonstrates the entrenched and continuing preponderance of men at chief probation officer level and the on-going minority position of women chief probation officers: the number of male chief probation officers remained within a range of 46 and 49, while the total number of female chiefs varied between 5 and 8 at different points over this period.

This graph (Figure 2.8) clearly indicates the relative totals of men and women in these posts, but does not portray the changes from year to year in a dynamic way. More detailed analysis of this nine year period shows that there has been a continuing turn-over of chief probation officers, with 39 areas having a new appointment at this level.[12] Of the total number of women chief officers over this period, only two have remained throughout, three in post in 1987 have retired and the remaining six were appointed intermittently over this time.[13] This has meant that there has not been an on-going caucus for women chiefs of any size, and, in addition, those who have been appointed have been geographically very far-flung, thus reinforcing the 'visibility' and sense of uniqueness of each appointment (Kanter 1977).

This structural ordering links with the literature relating to women and management that highlights the legacy of the asymmetrical gender relations in organisations, emanating from a male power base (e.g. Marshall 1984, 1995), and that entails that men are not only represented in larger numbers, but in terms of power, hold the highest positions. In the probation service, as in most organisations, women have made the greatest gains only at lower-level managerial positions (Parker and Fagenson 1994), accounted for by the much-cited phenomenon of the 'glass ceiling':

> This glass ceiling is invisible but women experience it as a very real barrier when they vie for promotion to top jobs... Promotion may look like a mysterious upward drift, but in many organisations it is influenced by quite complex processes, often formalised as personnel procedures. The processes are hoops that employees have to jump through to gain access to management jobs.

(Davidson and Cooper 1992: 15-16)

Whilst acknowledging the constraints and institutionalised nature of the 'glass ceiling', it seems important not to interpret this notion as a deterministic, self-fulfilling factor in women's employment prospects: the barriers confronting women may be more

fluid and plastic than this imagery implies (Newman 1995a). However, although a few women have reached the ruling elite within the service, it would seem that for most women within the organisation the 'glass ceiling' is quite low and the situation could be re-interpreted in terms of a 'sticky floor' (Reskin and Padavic 1994: 82). Moreover, the gendered composition at chief probation officer grade, with its clear differentiation in the numbers of men and women, reinforces the undertone of the myriad of images of the organisation that have reverberated throughout this chapter, to the effect that "'it's a man's world' and that within that world it is men who are the leaders, the managers, the executives; it is men who are the professionals" (Mills and Murgatroyd 1991: 76).

The analysis of the situation at chief probation officer grade completes the detailed review of the different levels of the probation service from a gendered perspective. Having viewed the position at each stratum of the organisation, the overall picture is now considered, putting in place the contextual background to the development of the research project.

Summary

This review of the probation service as a gendered organisation has applied an historical perspective to the gendered patterns of development of the organisational structure and to the change in the professional aspirations and practices of probation officers. The adoption of this approach has opened up the probation service to inspection, illustrating the absence of gender in the literature, particularly with respect to the internal and external changes that have impacted on this organisation. In addressing this lack of coverage this chapter has placed cultural, structural and political factors within a broader social context (Marshall 1995), which in turn has facilitated the development of a gendered analysis which is both descriptive and explanatory.

The issues of professional identity and the challenges to the traditional social work value base of the service were traced most strikingly in this chapter through the examination of the changing gender balance at maingrade level, with the ideological responses from central government demonstrating a move to reinforce a male majority in terms of the ethos and functioning at this layer of the service (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989). In this respect, the discussion in Chapter 1 highlighted the attack on the knowledge base and the curtailment of discretion in the work of probation officers; this has been extended in this chapter, within the examination of the gendered implications of recent changes and the exploration of the tensions that have arisen from the changing gender composition of the probation service, particularly at maingrade level.

In moving the focus onto the managerial grades within the probation service, a differentiation in terms of professional identity and roles was pointed to, with changes linked with the 'new managerialism' being seen to embody and to reinforce 'male' characteristics and functions:

> It is as if the unlocking of the shackles of bureaucratic constraints has at last allowed managers to be come 'real men', released from the second-class status of public sector functionaries through exposure to the 'real world' of the market place... This is a heterosexual culture in which, as in modern marriage, there is a notional equivalence between male and female roles. But this equivalence depends on women taking on roles in which they compete with men (and with other women) in the battle for resources and jobs.

(Newman 1995a: 16-17)

While the detailed analysis of the changing situation suggests variable cultural and social relations at this level, the existence and symbolism of a male hierarchical organisational pyramid within the service as a whole, (and within most, but not all areas), comes over in a forceful way. The inherent tensions arising from this

organisational set-up at this time of complex and contradictory change reverberate throughout the exploration within this chapter, again highlighting the gaps in the literature on the probation service and confirming the relevance of this investigation into the relations between the male and female probation officers working within this gendered organisation. This detailed examination puts in place a framework within which the dynamics of change (and immutability) can be further explored, utilising the analysis of the quantitative data within a qualitative research approach.

The thesis therefore now moves on to present the development of this unique investigation into the changing nature of the probation service and its probation officer staff, providing insights into the ways that interactions between individuals, the organisation itself and everyday work become "saturated with gendered meanings" (Reskin and Padavic 1994: 1). In extending the area of enquiry to encompass the inter-relationship between 'public' and 'private' issues, challenges and tensions within this setting are brought to the surface, with the result that

> questions, then of which jobs are gendered, how they are gendered, whether indeed, all jobs are gendered, remain open. Next, there is a further, and most important implication..., namely that men's jobs are gendered too, and hence the same analytical strategies should apply to both sexes.

(Davies and Rosser 1986: 110)

In drawing on feminist literature in this chapter there has been a strong emphasis on the changing circumstances as they have impacted on women probation officers' positions within the probation service. However, by placing the research within a wider framework of analysis of gender and of the probation service as a gendered organisation, the dynamics of change and the multiplicity of reactions and resistances are opened up for investigation. In addition, in moving beyond the androcentricity of the existing organisational analyses of the probation service and its role within the

criminal justice system, this approach encompasses an exploration of the unities and differences between the probation areas and between male and female probation officers within those areas.

The focus now turns to an examination of the development and implementation of the research agenda against this gendered background and analysis of the development and current situation of the probation service. The issues raised within Chapters 1 and 2 inform and serve as the backdrop for the following chapter, where the approach shifts yet again to incorporate and reflect on my position as a (female) researcher and (ex) probation officer. In this way Chapter 3 sets in place an exploration of the analytical concerns that underpinned the decision to conduct in-depth interviews with individual and groupings of probation officers (across different grades and in different areas). This then leads into the investigation within Chapters 4 and 5 of personal perceptions of, and reactions by probation officers to the shifting situation within the probation service.

Notes

[1] Figures from the Report on the work of the Probation and After-Care Department 1962-1965 (Home Office 1966a).

[2] Figures taken from the Report on the work of the Probation and After-Care Department 1969-1971 (Home Office 1972a).

[3] Figures taken from the Report on the work of the Probation and After-Care Department 1969-1971 (Home Office 1972a).

[4] Figures taken from Probation and After-Care Statistics, England and Wales, 1991 (Home Office 1993).

[5] The definition of London refers to the London probation area which covered almost the whole of the administrative county of London, prior to the reorganisation of London probation areas which took effect on 1st April, 1965.

[6] 1980-86 figures taken from Probation statistics England and Wales 1986 (Home Office 1987). 1987-95 figures taken from HM Inspectorate of Probation statistics.

[7] Figures obtained from HM Inspectorate of Probation statistics.

[8] These areas are (number of male/female seniors): Hertfordshire (8:9); Oxford (7:9); Surrey (5:7); Dyfed (2:3); N.E. London (11:13); S.E. London (7:8).

[9] These areas are (number of male/female seniors): Lincolnshire (7:7); Nottinghamshire (12:12); W. Sussex (4:4); Gwent (4:4); W. Glamorgan (5:5).

[10] Wiltshire has the highest proportion of men to women senior probation officers, with 10 male seniors and only 1 female senior officer (1995 figures).

[11] These areas were (number of male/female assistant chief probation officers): Greater Manchester (7:4); West Midlands (9:4); Inner London (11:6); Middlesex (5:6).

[12] The rate of change was as follows: 1987 - 4 areas; 1988 - 2 areas; 1989 - 6 areas; 1990 - 6 areas; 1991 - 1 area; 1992 - 5 areas; 1993 - 3 areas; 1994 - 6 areas; 1995 - 6 areas. Source: NAPO Directories, Ilkey: Owen Wells.

[13] Female Chief Probation Officers were appointed as follows: 1 in 1988, 2 in 1991, 1 in 1992, 1 in 1994 and 1 in 1995. Figures taken from HM Inspectorate of Probation statistics (1987-1995).

Chapter 3

Exploring Gender and Probation - Moving Into the Organisation

Today, then, we are presented with a situation in which human features such as love and comfort are not seen as part of the organisational world. In popular ideology, rightly or wrongly, they are associated with the home and the family... The desexualisation of labour, for this is what is entailed, involves the repulsion and expulsion of many human feelings out of the organisation and out of its sight. It is a process which has come to shape all our lives to a greater or lesser extent.

(Burrell 1992: 73-74)

Bringing Gender and Organisation into the Research Process

The previous two chapters highlighted the processes of change and development within the probation service and, from their different perspectives, explored key issues relating to power and discretion within the context of the professional identity of the service and of probation officers at different levels of the organisation. These reviews indicated points of uncertainty over this century as the service took shape, but above all emphasised the unprecedented impact and nature of change on the probation service in the 1990s as it reverberated throughout the organisation, in turn affecting area and team structures and the individual working practices of probation staff (May and Vass 1996).

In developing the research project, the application of a gendered perspective opened up the issues of power and discretion from a previously unexplored viewpoint: the examination of the organisation within Chapter 2 indicates that gender can be seen as being woven through the discourses concerning change and the probation service,

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although this had been concealed to some extent by the variety and scattering of relevant material coming from widespread and multi-disciplinary sources (Hearn and Parkin 1992). In the early stages of this study the concentration on a gendered analysis of the probation service thus provided a unifying and coherent approach to the research, while the adoption of a flexible and enquiring process ensured a broad focus which nevertheless remained attuned to the underlying issues (Blumer 1969).

The collation and analysis of the information within the first two chapters provided not only a detailed overview of a changing situation, but brought to attention areas that had remained unexplored within earlier studies of the probation service and elements of organisational change that had not previously been considered from a gendered perspective. It is to the development of a research approach which encompassed and facilitated an investigation into these aspects that this chapter now turns.

Reflexivity in the Research Process

In engaging with these issues I became absorbed in a period of intensive reading and questioning (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983), reflecting on my position as an "empirically literate" researcher, while at the same time making "the familiar strange" (Roseneil 1993: 192). I had trained as a probation officer in the 1970s, joining a "loosely framed organisation" (Statham 1992: 30), and over the following ten years experienced the conflicting pull of challenges offered by an expanding service, set alongside the critical external and internal scrutiny of the knowledge and value base of probation practice. On entering the organisation I had undergone the traditional 'rites of passage': my start as a trainee probation officer in 1975 was marked by the presentation of a copy of Jarvis's Probation Officers' Manual (Jarvis 1974) that promulgated the

position of the individual probation officer motivated by the traditional call to "advise, assist and befriend". The sense of apprenticeship and socialisation into a professional setting (Shaw 1987) was further reinforced in my first year by attendance at a new officers' group and by an official visit by the chief probation officer at the end of this period to sanction my 'confirmation in post'. This process of becoming a fully-fledged probation officer emphasised a shared sense of individual and organisational professional identity (Johnson 1972), drawing on terminology that conveyed overtones of the religious and vocational legacy of the early years of the probation service.

During the period from 1978-1985 I undertook both generic and specialist work as a probation officer and was also employed as a liaison social worker within a closed remand and assessment centre for girls. My final probation appointment in 1982 was to a post which entailed the co-leadership of an 'alternative to custody' project, alongside the provision of individual supervision and groupwork within a generic team; this split within my professional duties in itself incorporated a gendered division, with the more innovative, high profile project dealing mainly with young male offenders, while my individual caseload comprised mostly female clients. This conjunction highlighted the growing tensions over probation intervention within the community, with the range of tasks reflecting the shifting position within the service away from rehabilitation, with an increasing emphasis on policy and a focus on punishment (Broad 1991). Placed within the context of the publication in 1984 of the Statement of National Objectives, my own situation could be seen as mirroring the tensions for practitioners at that time:

> it was feared that its emphasis on intensive work with high-risk offenders, and its downgrading of the more voluntarist, helping-oriented aspects of practice would continue the trend towards control and away from help.

(Smith 1996: 15)

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This location of my position vis-à-vis the probation service serves as a personal marker against which to gauge reflections about the changing organisation within the early development of this study (Statham 1992) and an acknowledgement of my role within the social process of undertaking the research (Cassell and Symon 1994). In this respect this approach offered a synthesis that had the potential to draw on "elements of autobiography and biography, both intellectual *and* personal" (Cotterill and Letherby 1993: 68).

The application of an approach that would take into account gendered aspects in relation to the probation service was further informed by the 'public/private' divide I had experienced in terminating my direct contact with the probation service in 1985 after the birth of my first child. I had taken maternity leave and considered returning to my employing probation area on a job-share or part-time basis. However, notwithstanding an Equal Opportunities policy, this option was not available at that time and I considered that the alternative of returning to full-time work was unfeasible, given the workplace culture of long working hours, a rigid working week with occasional Saturday court duties, and the requirement to carry out long-distance institutional visits (McFarlane 1993).

I was fully aware that my decision to resign placed me in the position of stepping off the 'career ladder', a position appositely summarised by Cynthia Cockburn in her comments that "maternity and domesticity are undeniably a hazard dashing women's hopes of equal chances in the hierarchy" (Cockburn 1991: 97). This choice was particularly ironic given that part of the wider decision-making process was informed by my wish to support my partner in his applications for promotion within the probation service, thus reinforcing a gendered 'public/private' divide in my personal circumstances and encompassing inherent conflicts as manifested at a structural level:

Despite the rising career consciousness of newer cohorts of employed women, there still exists a conflict between the demands of work and the demands of family, and there is evidence that women in their thirties begin to lose their career ambitions when they express a desire for children. The careers they have been educated to want, however, do not accommodate less than fully committed - and overburdened - people.

(Kanter 1989: 292)

My connections with the probation service were thus severed on a working level, but were maintained through informal contacts, with a more analytical interest being developed through my undergraduate social sciences studies with the Open University. In this way the genesis of this research project drew on my academic interests and my personal experience within the organisation itself, in order to open up and elucidate the gendered organisational dynamics of change within the probation service.

Developing the Research Approach

The research process was therefore designed to retain links between my "personal, professional and political priorities" (Wilkins 1993: 98), enabling me to draw on the energy derived from the autobiographical roots of the developing research project (Seidman 1991). The application of this approach does not subscribe to a self-indulgent examination of self, but to the adoption of a stance whereby

the sociologist's investigation of our directly experienced world as a problem is a mode of discovering or re-discovering the society from within. She begins from her own original but tacit knowledge and from within the acts by which she brings it into her grasp in making it observable and in understanding how it works. She aims not at a

reiteration of what she already (tacitly) knows, but at an exploration through that of what passes beyond it and is deeply implicated in how it is.

(Smith in Humm 1992: 310)

During the early stages of the research process I contacted the Home Office, HM Inspectorate of Probation and various probation areas to obtain official reports, local policies and statistical information, as well as immersing myself in the bodies of literature relevant to the research study . These initial enquiries were intended to enable me to "count the countable" and to utilise insights gained from this approach to "look beyond these data for explanations of the behaviours surrounding this differential distribution of 'facts'" (Cassell and Symon 1994: 4). I had anticipated that this would be a period of information gathering but the differing reactions to my requests turned out to be notable in their own right: these ranged from immediate responses and offers of further help, through formal acknowledgements of my inquiry accompanying the required documents, to rebuffs or delays.

At the national level my requests for statistical information were met with courtesy and interest but anticipated deadlines for the forwarding of this data were repeatedly postponed, with the result that the detailed breakdown of the service structure for each current year was not made available until well into the second half of the following year. This was somewhat discordant with the Government's stated priority within the first Three Year Plan for the Probation Service, to build on the principles of the Citizen's Charter by being "open about how services are run", and providing "clear and accessible information" (Home Office 1992).

At area level, I decided to contact 25 probation areas in England and Wales, selecting a cross-section in terms of location across the regions, size and gendered composition, drawn from the analysis in the earlier chapters. In this respect I sent out a

standardised letter[1] on university notepaper, outlining my position as a Ph.D. researcher and asking for copies of annual reports and Equal Opportunities policies. Most of these requests were dealt with in a functional way, with the information requested sent to me by return and accompanied by a brief covering letter or compliments slip. In terms of tone, most responses were businesslike but concluded with phrases such as "I hope these will be helpful in your research" (from a relatively small area in the south of England), and "Good wishes for your research" (from an area in central England).

The information that was sent to me from these areas covered the area reports for 1993-94 and current Equal Opportunities policies. There was a consistency in style with most - but certainly not all - of the annual reports presented with glossy covers, with catchy slogans,[2] and following the format required from that date onwards by the Home Office[3]. The over-riding impression from the introductory sections within these reports was of an endeavour to keep to a professional standpoint within a hostile political climate. Beyond these ubiquitous responses, the traditional individuality of the different areas came through clearly, with two areas in particular pointing to, and challenging, inherent contradictions of the changing demands. The first of these areas noted that:

> The Probation Service in (probation area), in common with all other Services, produced a Three Year Plan in line with that prepared by the Home Office for the Service nationally. There were 99 different strategic and operational objectives set for the period 1993-1996 in (probation area) which, whilst they have been reviewed internally, cannot form the basis of an Annual Report of manageable proportions.

(Annual report 1993-94 of a probation area in central England)

On a more pragmatic level the second area commented that "at this time of financial constraint in the public sector, we have deliberately refrained from producing

an expensive report, believing that public money should more properly be spent on the service's crime prevention work". This particular area went on to state a commitment to openness and dialogue within the community that was another feature of most reports: "the Chief Probation Officer and his staff welcome personal dialogue with interested people, whether as individuals or as representative of public interest bodies" (annual report 1993-94 of a probation area in Wales).

This sense of public accountability contrasted sharply with the response from an area in the south of England where my request for a copy of the annual report was met with a personal letter from the chief probation officer which stated that "The Probation Service is inundated with requests for information, and it is the policy of this Service only to provide information for projects approved by the National ACOP Committee". This rebuttal seemed indicative of the sense of siege identified by Tim May in his research into the probation service (May 1991b: 180), and was certainly at odds with the emphasis in the first national Three Year Plan which commented that:

> The Citizen's Charter has brought very much to the fore what the public can legitimately expect from public services in terms of explicit standards, openness, readily available information, equality of opportunity and so on.

> (Home Office 1992: 11)

Moreover, the 'public face' of these probation areas as portrayed within many of these annual reports seemed to present a rather bewildered and out-manoeuvred response to the turn-abouts of the 1990s. For example, one chief probation officer wrote:

> The legislative framework of the Service's work, for which so much training and preparation had been undertaken during 1992, was changed by a new Criminal Justice Act in 1993, quickly followed by the announcement of another major Bill which has subsequently been making its haphazard way through the parliamentary process. The

consequence has been some loss of coherence and an unhelpful amount of confusion and uncertainty...

(Annual Report 1993-94 of a large probation area
in the north of England)

In responding to the demand from the centre for public accountability within a framework of quantifiable outcomes many areas were publishing a detailed annual report for the first time and openly indicated a sense of wariness in anticipation of a clash of ideologies, as expressed by Peter Raynor:

> the demand for more centralised, accountable and effective probation services sometimes sits uneasily with an almost wilful misunderstanding of what they are for and what they can do.

(Raynor 1996: 254)

The sense of struggling to keep up with the pace of change was also reflected in the Equal Opportunities policies that were forwarded: some of the documents were comprehensive in scope and presented in a clear, detailed and coherent manner. However, others provided only an outline of a general statement of intent or pages from a staff manual. In addition, an awareness of possible gaps between policy and practice were acknowledged in several reports, and the impact of the state of flux that was so prevalent in the annual reports was also conveyed with respect to the compilation and implementation of Equal Opportunities policies. The response within one annual report from an area in the west of England serves as an exemplar:

> Objective: To develop an equal opportunity strategy operative from 1.4.94 in relation to both Service delivery and staff. This will include the development of an anti-discrimination strategy and the revision of the anti-racism strategy.

> Result: As with some other objectives, this objective has been pursued somewhat differently than was originally envisaged, because of the impact of the Strategic Review and management restructuring on the life of the organisation.

It is central to the Strategic Issues and lies at the very heart of the value statements. Responsibility for the development of equal opportunities is written into the job description of the ACPO (Resource Management) in respect of staff and of the ACPO (Specialist Operations)[4] in respect of Service delivery. Both will require time to consider new developments.

(Equal opportunities section in 1993-94 annual report
of a probation area in the west of England)

This response was indicative of the sense of change and uncertainty impacting on the grass-roots of the organisation and resonated with the difficulties outlined by Mike Nellis in his paper *Probation Values for the 1990s*, where he highlighted that it is "one thing to show that new values are necessary, but quite another to set them in place" (Nellis 1995a: 35).

The review of these official documents thus underpinned a multi-layered analytic approach: the statistical details were scrutinised to inform the discussion and analysis within the previous two chapters and to allow for a reflective consideration of the interplay of penal and political discourses, and of organisational change as part of the development of the research project. In turn the 1993-94 annual reports and Equal Opportunities policies, together with the responses to my requests for information, provided quantitative data and facilitated insight from a qualitative perspective into "not only the ways in which meaning is constructed, but also the ways in which new meanings are developed and employed" (May 1993a: 147). This period of information gathering therefore functioned within the research project to link "past and present, 'data-gathering' and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks" (Reinharz 1992: 197). In this way the social processes and the cultural context of organisational change were opened up to scrutiny, suggesting aspects which merited further investigation at local area level and with individual probation officers working within those areas.

Reflections on the Research Methods

In pursuing this approach, I saw these early explorations as part of the application of multiple methods where the material obtained would in turn underpin, and lead to a questioning of, the organisational dynamics and changing gendered situation within the probation service. By drawing on the information collected in this way, (and indeed in reflecting on the process and outcomes of obtaining this information), I made the decision to adopt an ethnographic approach as the major focus of this study. This was intended to facilitate both an empathic understanding of the social setting of the organisation itself and of probation officers working within different areas and different levels of the service (May 1993a). The application of such a qualitative framework encompassed both a commitment to thoroughness and also the incorporation of an awareness that was sensitive enough to allow for a detailed analysis of change (Reinharz 1992).

In adopting this triangulation of methods and data my aim was to address and explore the complexity of the gendered organisational changes within the probation service. In this respect my approach facilitated a multi-faceted means of investigation, following the wide-ranging definition of participant observation as "a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, respondent and informant interviewing, direct participation and observation, and introspection" (Denzin 1970: 185-86). This description outlines the various component parts of the research but does not imply a linear development of stages in the research:

> the field researcher has to cope with a variety of social situations,
> perspectives and problems. Doing field research is, therefore, not merely
> the use of a set of uniform techniques but depends on a complex
> interaction between the research problem, the researcher and those who
> are researched. It is on this basis that the researcher is an active

decision-maker who decides on the most appropriate conceptual and methodological tools that can be used to collect and analyse data.

(Burgess 1993: 6)

The selection of a methodological approach for the research project that adhered to such a dynamic and reflexive approach was guided by three of the 'basic epistemological principles' as outlined by Judith Cook and Mary Margaret Fonow in their writings on 'Knowledge and Women's Interests'. These were:

> the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research...;

> the need to challenge the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from one another and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific...;

> concern for the ethical implications of feminist research and recognition of the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge.

(Cook and Fonow 1990: 72-73)

This grounding in a critical, feminist stance located my position as a female researcher and placed the research within a framework that challenged and moved on from the androcentricity of the previous studies into the probation service. This was intended to address and respond to the claim that

> feminist theory will...remain nebulous until women can themselves research organisations, effectively involving the moving from observing and accepting their position in the hierarchical structures to examining and understanding the power, both overt and subtle, which excludes them from creating theory and change...

(Parkin 1992: 65)

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Although this position encompassed some tensions (particularly in respect of the political dimension of change within the probation service vis-à-vis the radical agenda of a feminist approach), this reflexivity in itself situated me within the social structure of both the research and the research process (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1991). I found myself rejecting the evaluation of the study of 'gender' as "a poor second" within feminist research (Stanley and Wise 1990: 45), and instead viewed gender "as a crucial influence on the network of relations encompassing the research act" (Cook and Fonow 1990: 72). In terms of my own feminist stance, this approach enabled me to call on a 'double consciousness', drawing on my position as "observer and observed, subject and object, knower and known" (Du Bois 1983: 112). In this way the research was thus underpinned by a two-way reflexivity which incorporated an awareness of my position as a gendered researcher, with the acknowledgement that

> the identity of the researcher matters. She is unavoidably present in the research process, and her work is shaped by her social location and personal experiences.

(Roseneil 1993: 180)

Finding a 'Way In' - The Negotiation of Access to the Probation Service

As the research outline became clearer the necessity of negotiating access to different probation areas became the crucial next step to be taken. From my discussions with probation officers who were interested in my research, and the negative response from one of the areas to my request for an annual report, I was aware that gaining permission to carry out observational visits and individual interviews could prove problematic: ACOP (the Association of Chief Officers of Probation) was increasingly subjecting research proposals to scrutiny and retaining the right to withhold permission for access to all probation areas if this was so decided. In view of the critical edge of

my research focus and approach, together with the wish to maintain - and be seen to maintain - an independent position, I decided to approach chief officers of local areas directly and not through the aegis of ACOP.

In considering how best to make the initial contacts I was aware that the increasing pressures on the probation service made the allocation of time a precious commodity. I therefore decided to place an emphasis on my flexibility, suggesting that it would be possible to make a fixed appointment, or alternatively stressing my willingness to 'hang around' for a convenient space to meet with probation officers if it was difficult to arrange a definite time. In terms of a research strategy the latter option presented the potential spin-off of being able to carry out participant observation within different probation teams in the spaces between interviews with individual officers. While feeling anxious about possible difficulties in gaining access, I held to the view that these negotiations were a key part of the research study, having the potential to reveal "the pattern of social relationships at a research site" (Burgess 1993: 40).

The next consideration concerned the breadth of sampling that I would endeavour to carry out. This was clearly constrained by my position as a sole researcher, with "practical exigencies of time, money and other resources" playing a part: in this respect two key criteria guided the approaches I made, the first being sufficiency, and the second being saturation of information (Seidman 1991: 45). Given the exploration of the probation service from a gendered perspective within Chapter 2, it was my intention to challenge the ungendered presentation of a 'probation officer' in the previous studies of the organisation for, as Joan Acker points out:

> the gender-neutral status of a "job" and of the organisational theories of which it is a part depend on the assumption that the worker is abstract,

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disembodied, although in actuality both the concept of a "job" and real workers are deeply gendered and "bodied".

(Acker 1991: 171)

I therefore decided to focus my research on men and women probation officers at maingrade, senior and chief grades across different areas, endeavouring to look for a variety of personal situations and experiences that would "make certain that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data" (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 61), and would enable me to explore the perceptions of the various probation officers from their respective viewpoints. The positioning of my research across these different grades and widespread geographical locations also had the advantage of being able to guarantee anonymity - a situation that would be more difficult to sustain within one area or at one particular level of the organisation[5].

Having made these decisions, associated issues relating to the number of areas to approach and the means of contact were considered: I was not intending to "generalise from a small number to the characteristics of a larger population" (Smith 1988: 187), but was rather looking to explore the experiences and viewpoints of male and female probation officers working within different local areas of the probation service. From this position of inquiry and questioning (Marshall 1995) I considered it important to try to respond in a reflexive and open way as the research unfolded:

> Every action in the field provides new definitions, suggests new strategies, and leads to continuous modifications of initial research designs. Like other forms of interaction, sociological research reflects the emergent, novel, and unpredictable features on ongoing activity.

(Denzin 1970: 310)

This commitment to adhere to a dynamic and interactive approach led me to choose a research strategy where the methods would be chosen to fit the research

problem, rather than the other way around (Cook and Fonow 1990). The negotiation of access therefore followed a form of 'snowballing', with prospective contacts followed up and tentative enquiries made to establish the formal and informal 'gatekeepers' (Seidman 1991).

From this early feedback, and taking into account the practicalities of my position, I decided to try to obtain permission to carry out my research within two disparate probation areas in different parts of England: one (anonymised as Area 1) was a large geographical area comprising both urban and rural locations, while the other (Area 2) was more compact and covered a densely populated area. By this stage of the research I had an awareness of the range of probation areas and saw the opportunity to explore "slices of organisational life" from different work settings within these two contrasting areas (Fineman and Gabriel 1996: 1). I had contacts with probation officers in many areas from my previous work situations and from my partner's on-going employment within the probation service, but these particular areas were chosen over and above others that I could have approached in view of their contrasting organisational size and geographical locations. In both situations my initial soundings were followed up by formal, written requests at chief grade level for permission to approach probation officers within these areas, together with an outline of my research interests. I was conscious that I would have to 'sell' my intervention to 'gatekeepers' and in the early negotiations stressed both the relevance of my research to the probation service in view of the changing situation and my academic and professional credentials to carry out this task.

At this preliminary stage I was mindful of conflicting dynamics in the presentation of the outline of my research: my approach was underpinned by the ethical principles of the University of Plymouth Research Committee (1994) and the 'Statement

of Ethical Practice' issued by the British Sociological Association (BSA 1993), both of which stressed the need for 'informed consent' and 'openness and honesty'. While subscribing fully to these values, I was concerned to ensure that the process of negotiating entry into the organisation did not restrict the scope of the research at an early stage, nor circumscribe too closely those probation officers whom I could approach as the study developed. Thus the official negotiations for permission to carry out the research within these areas necessitated a response that addressed the concerns expressed by the (male) chief officer 'gatekeepers' to account for my role in a goal-directed way, while also holding open the potential to apply an open-ended, 'funnel' approach that would incorporate the potential for progressive focusing:

> over time the research problem is developed or transformed, and eventually its scope is clarified and delimited and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently only over the course of the research that one discovers what the research is really 'about'.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 175)

Negotiations and Entry: Area 1

Within Area 1 official sanction to carry out my research study lay with the chief probation officer, but all negotiations concerning the operation and extent of my research contact were conducted with a male assistant chief officer. Fortuitously, this person had himself completed a higher research degree and was both supportive and interested in my work, authorising open access to all teams within the area and gaining formal approval on my behalf from the chief probation officer. In this respect, this positive attitude towards my research intervention led me to view this assistant chief officer more as a 'sponsor' than a 'gatekeeper', although this distinction was not clear-cut and in turn was complicated by his portrayal and interpretation of my role (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983).

On a substantive level my entry into Area 1 was facilitated by the preparation of a non-directive, but permissive note from this assistant chief officer in the area bulletin, which advised staff that I would be making contact in different settings over the forthcoming months. While this overcame the initial hurdle of entry into the organisation, it also raised other issues: the inclusion of a description of my background and current situation brought into play the process whereby "people who meet, or hear about, the researcher will cast him or her into certain identities on the basis of 'ascribed characteristics'" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 88). My position as a former probation officer was emphasised, alongside the observation that, as it was some time since I had practised, I would be "keen to obtain some first hand understanding of the contemporary world" (extract from briefing prepared by assistant chief probation officer in Area 1).

This presentation seemed to convey an ambivalence about my role in terms of being an 'insider/outsider': the phrasing strongly implied that I was being 'let in' because of my earlier role as a probation officer - "you have to be one in order to understand one" (Merton 1972: 15). The limitations of this 'insider' identification were, however, apparent in the rather disparaging overtones that deprofessionalised my subsequent work experiences and academic qualifications, a response which seemed to tally with the observation that "chauvinism finds its fullest ideological expression when groups are subject to the stress of acute conflict" (Merton 1972: 18).

Within the outline, there were also details of my personal circumstances, situating my current position in terms of my partner's career and thus defining my identity as the 'domestic wife' (Delphy and Leonard 1994). This conflation of the 'public/private' divide within this situation again called to attention "the contradiction of

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women's belonging and not belonging" and falling back on the recourse of defining a woman "in terms of her relationship to men" (Westkott in Nielsen 1990). Thus, while on a personal level there had been a welcoming response from this 'gatekeeper'/'sponsor', unpacking this written introduction revealed more complex aspects which indicated that:

> Despite equal opportunities legislation and the feminist critique, men's power and 'masculine' values continue to be pervasive and persistent in contemporary organisation, often permeating all aspects of employment, but frequently in taken-for-granted ways. Within organisations, many men do not seem to recognise their actions as expressions of men's power and male identity.

(Collinson and Hearn 1994: 3)

Negotiations and Entry: Area 2

In contrast to my dealings with Area 1, the negotiations with Area 2 proved to be bureaucratic and lengthy, with formal correspondence with the chief probation officer being followed by telephone contact with assistant chief officers responsible for different functional areas, and then further discussions at senior level. At every stage time constraints were stressed, with a rather foreboding tone to the official letters: "I expect you know that heavy demands are being made on probation officer time at the moment..." (extract from a letter from chief probation officer, Area 2). These early negotiations with management 'gatekeepers' in Area 2 amply demonstrated that

> the process of achieving access is not merely a practical matter. Not only does its achievement depend upon theoretical understanding, often disguised as 'native wit', but the discovery of obstacles to access, and perhaps an effective means of overcoming them, themselves provide insights into the social organisation of the setting.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 54)

In this respect the responses from the chief probation officer in his role as formal 'gatekeeper' (conducted only through written communications despite my offer to make myself available to present my research outline) provoked anxieties concerning the possibility of refusal of access. However, this form of engagement also offered some insight into the operation of the agency and internal relations at that time, presenting an organisational model that was "precise, behavioural, controlled and instrumental" (Hearn and Parkin 1987: 19). Eventually, permission was granted, once more drawing on my previous position as a probation officer and stressing that my request had only been considered in the first place in view of my standing as "an ex (and valued) member of this Service" (extract from a letter from the chief probation officer, in Area 2). Again this perception of my role as an 'insider' had facilitated access, aligning with and appearing to reinforce Robert Merton's structural interpretation that "Insiders are the members of specified groups and collectivities or occupants of specified social statuses; Outsiders are the nonmembers" (Merton 1972: 21).

This analysis is not to imply that my own approach was underpinned by a view of my position of researcher as an 'insider'; the distance in time since working as a probation officer meant that I identified with the more marginal position of simultaneously being the 'insider-outside' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 100). However, in terms of gaining admission to the organisation in order to carry out my research, the undoubted importance of being viewed as an 'insider' made this an important area to investigate:

> Sociological understanding involves much more than acquaintance with. It includes an empirically confirmable comprehension of the conditions and often complex processes in which people are caught up without much awareness of what is going on. To analyse and understand these requires a theoretical and technical competence which, as such, transcends one's status as Insider or Outsider.

(Merton 1972: 41)

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This official granting of access in Area 2 also set in motion a series of more informal contacts with 'gatekeepers' at assistant chief officer and senior grade within the organisation. There was a sharp contrast between the tenor of the earlier written contact and responses over the telephone - reactions that were to be replicated in most of the one-to-one interviews. Given the guardedness of the initial contact, the openness of most subsequent responses made a strong impression on me and my first reaction was to interpret these differences in terms of gender. In returning to the feminist literature I reflected on whether there was a particular empathy between myself and female respondents, as found, for example, by Janet Finch in her interviewing of clergy wives and mothers involved in playgroups, which she attributed to the woman-to-woman interviewing relationship (Finch 1984).

Closer inspection of my experience within this study revealed that this did not seem to be a male/female distinction, but seemed to stem from an initial checking of my position as an 'insider'. A further twist came into some of these interactions, with common networks being checked out and past links being resurrected by those with whom I came into contact: on several occasions I was aware that these connections served to "cut across the formal organisational structure, and so reduce the potency of organisation rules and regulations" (Fineman and Gabriel 1996: 132). This is not to imply that this characterised all of my relationships as a researcher with all respondents, nor was it necessarily the defining feature of these contacts when it did occur. My perception was that this 'insider' identification 'opened doors' and that from this point relationships generally took on a more dynamic, more multi-faceted quality than this characterisation implies. Most importantly, in conducting these discussions and the research interviews I endeavoured to stay attuned to the nuances of each relationship, subscribing to the view that perceptions and responses may change over the course of the fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983).

Negotiations and Entry: The Inclusion of Area 3

By this stage in the research project I had gained authorisation to make contact with staff across all teams in Area 1 and permission to approach one team and a First Year Officers' Group in Area 2. In addition to these negotiations, I had also been following up other openings that came to my attention, stemming mainly from developments within probation in connection with gendered organisational and practice issues. This approach had brought me into contact (usually over the telephone) with a wide range of (mainly women) probation officers, through a rather serendipitous use of networking and 'snowballing'.

Most of these contacts were followed up to inform my wider analysis of change within the probation service, but I decided to extend my range of interviews to include a meeting with two female assistant chief probation officers from a third probation area, the only area in the country at that time that had an all female representation at assistant chief probation officer level. My enquiries regarding an article by one of the women assistant chief probation officers had led directly to an arrangement to meet with her and her female assistant chief probation officer colleague - a sense of engagement that contrasted sharply with the cautionary tone I had noted within many methodology texts in terms of anticipating potential difficulties in this early stage of the research project (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1983).

My analysis of this positive reaction at the time, and indeed after the interview took place, was to see this in terms of the political and personal commitment of these women in supporting organisational research being carried out by a female researcher. This motivation seemed to mirror the findings of Judi Marshall in her study on women managers where she posited that

speaking out is partly to break through the isolation that many women managers feel. But it is also done in a spirit of exploration, wanting to create a different world, to encourage new ways of managing, organising and being by opening to critique current organisational practices revealed through some women's eyes.

<div align="right">(Marshall 1995: 20)</div>

It seemed to me that exploration of this unique situation had the potential to extend my understanding of gendered issues within the probation service, in this instance by "putting special emphasis on studying women rather than men, in order to start redressing the current imbalance" (Eichler 1988: 45).

Reviewing the Research Study

In reviewing the potential range of respondents at this stage I was keen to be able to explore different probation settings and to include male and female probation officers from diverse backgrounds in terms of personal and professional experiences, length of time in the service and at different grades within each area. From my own experience I was aware that, certainly in the past, probation "has sometimes appeared to take a rather pervasive pride in the recruitment of highly individualistic people" (Fellowes 1992: 89), and it seemed likely that by interviewing all members of several teams that I would meet a disparate range of people. In this respect my approach differed from any form of sampling in terms of a statistical survey:

> In field research informants are selected for their knowledge of a particular setting which may complement the researcher's observations and point towards further investigation that needs to be done in order to understand social settings, social structures and social processes.

<div align="right">(Burgess 1993: 75)</div>

In terms of identifying such diversity the extent of my contacts varied across grades and across specialisms within the probation service. My main focus remained within Area 1 where the size of this probation area and the granting of open access provided a range of different settings. Time and travelling constraints placed limitations on extending my intervention to this extent within Area 2, but the points of contact within this area allowed for aspects of similarity and difference to be explored. In Area 3 a similar process of decision making led me to decide to remain within the defined focus of my contact with the two women assistant chief probation officers, seeing this as an opportunity to expand my contact with staff at managerial level within the service as a whole, rather than across the various organisational layers within this particular area. In this way the overall range of interviewees within each area ensured that I came into contact with both 'mainstream' and specialist officers at maingrade level, while the respondents in the management grades held a variety of organisational responsibilities and covered an assortment of duties.

In reviewing the approach at this stage the range of situations and respondents within each area were reflected upon, both in their own terms and as forming a component of the overall research. This was facilitated by portraying in diagrammatic form the gendered organisational structure of each area, alongside a re-examination of the points of intervention within the three areas. This overview of the situation is now outlined, indicating the gendered composition of each organisational structure and variety of respondents within each area:

Area 1

Key: Male ▨   Female ▨
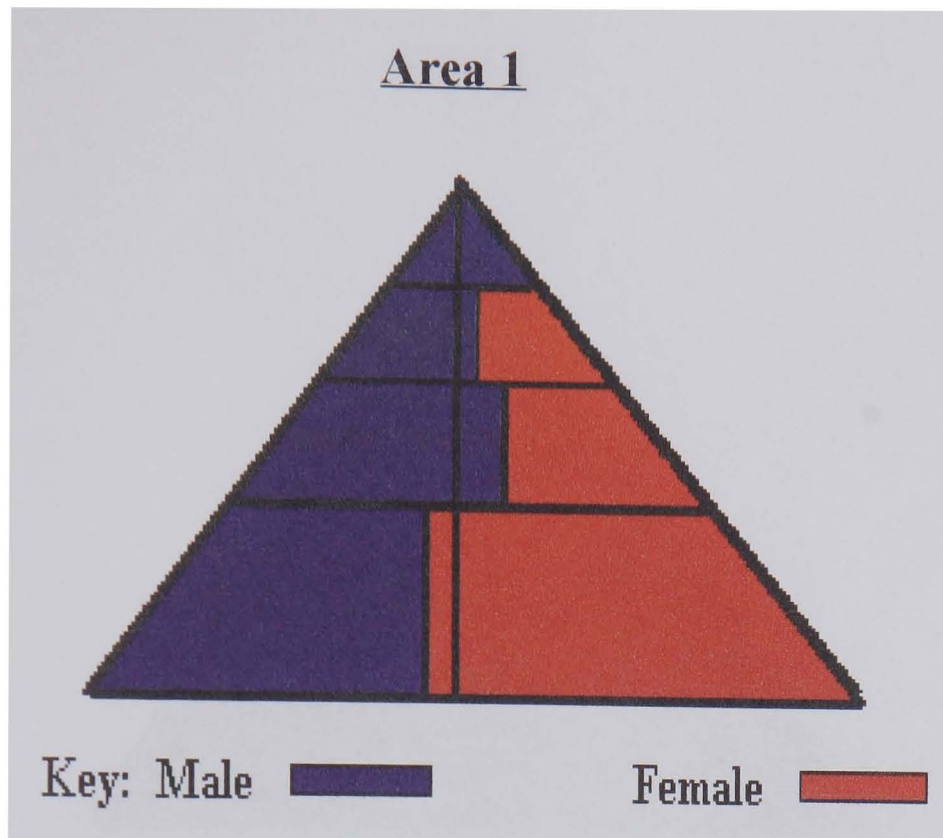
Figure 3.1 Organisational Structure (December 1994)[6]

Male chief probation officer
3 male/2 female assistant chief probation officers
18 male/7 female senior probation officers
55 male/68 female maingrade probation officers

Research Interviews

Chief Officer Grades:

Male chief probation officer
1 male assistant chief probation officer
2 female assistant chief probation officers

Generic Team

Male senior probation officer
2 male probation officers
2 female probation officers

Family Court Welfare Team

Female senior probation officer
3 male probation officers
3 female probation officers

Others:

1 female Community Service senior probation officer
1 male student training senior probation officer
1 male programmes senior probation officer
Prison probation staff: 1 female senior probation officer
3 male senior probation officers
1 female probation officer

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Area 2

Key: Male ▮   **Female** ▮
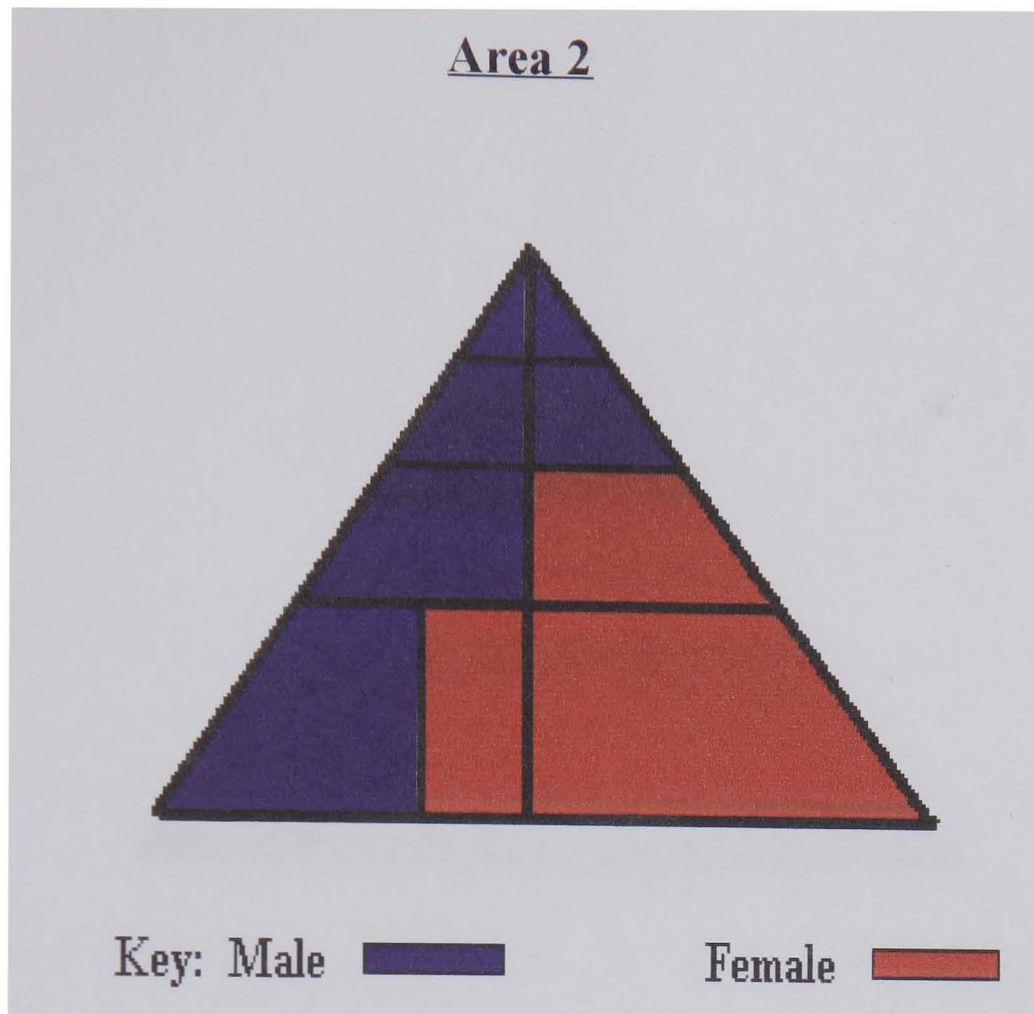
Figure 3.2 Organisational Structure (December 1994)[7]

Male chief probation officer
3 male assistant chief probation officers
8 male/8 female senior probation officers
24 male/49 female maingrade probation officers

Research Interviews

Generic, community based team

1 female senior probation officer
3 female probation officers
1 male probation officer

1st Year Officers' Group

Female group convenor (ex-senior
probation officer)
2 female probation officers
1 male probation officer

Others: Male senior research/information officer

Female probation court assistant in generic team

Area 3

Key: Male ▬▬▬ Female ▬▬▬
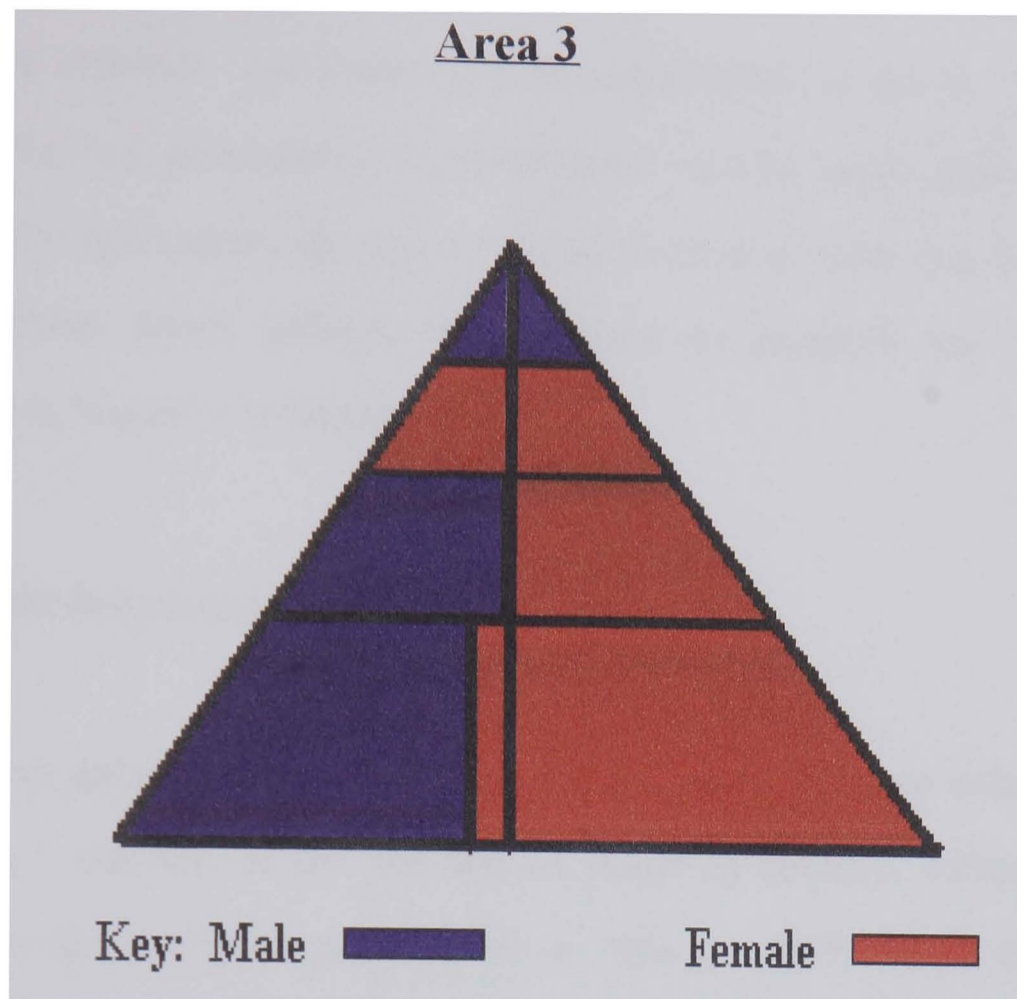
Figure 3.3 Organisational Structure (December 1994)[8]

Male chief probation officer
2 female assistant chief probation officers
5 male/5 female senior probation officers
24 male/29 female maingrade probation officers

Research Interviews:

2 female assistant chief probation officers

These pyramids graphically illustrate the position at that point in time within the areas I had selected: each follows the hierarchical organisational structure that was outlined and explored within Chapter 1, and this portrayal also enables a gendered breakdown to be presented across the grades, thus linking with the perspective adopted in Chapter 2. This cross-section of settings and respondents therefore provided opportunities to explore and contextualise qualitative accounts of issues that were raised

in the earlier chapters: the differing roles and lengths of service gave a 'way in' to examine individual perceptions of professional identity, organisational and personal histories and contemporary change, while the mixture of male and female respondents at the different levels offered the potential to consider the implications and embeddedness of gender within the service.

Setting up the Interviewing Process

Having gained admission via the official 'gatekeepers' to different parts of the organisation I was left in the position of initiating contacts within Area 1 and of negotiating with 'unofficial gatekeepers' in Area 2. Within both these areas I had obtained access from the 'top-down' and I was aware that alongside the official presentation of the research, it was also necessary to be open to elaboration or explanation within the different settings. Within Area 3 the position was more straightforward on a practical level as the direct contact with one of the respondents had facilitated the arrangement of a mutually convenient time for an interview to take place. However, this procedure in itself linked into issues of relevance to the research for, as Robert Burgess points out:

> researchers need to monitor their own activities not only to understand the research process but to deepen their own understanding of the relationship between research questions and analyses, for data are derived and shaped in all these initial encounters.

(Burgess 1993: 51)

In this respect the sense of engagement and positive response to my enquiries pointed to the relative autonomy and organisational standing of this female assistant chief probation officer who acted both as self-appointed 'gatekeeper' to my contact with

this probation area and as 'sponsor' to the inclusion of her female peer. Thus, while the practicalities of setting up this contact were comparatively uncomplicated, this should not lead to overlooking the implications of this process, nor the potential for comparison with what took place in my contacts within the other two areas. It is these responses and outcomes that I now consider.

Approaching Staff at Grassroots Level in Area 1

The formal authorisation by the chief probation officer within Area 1 was followed up with a pre-arranged meeting with a senior probation officer with a responsibility for programmes, to provide me with an overview of the different team structures and functions within the area. I was then left to my own devices to initiate contact with the particular teams I wished to research in more detail. Within the framework of this background information and in looking for a range of interviewees, I decided to approach a generic team and then two more specialised sites of work, namely a family court welfare team and staff working within a local prison setting.

In terms of the generic team and the family court welfare team it was agreed that my initial contact would be carried out by attending a team meeting at each setting in order to present my research and to negotiate contact with each team member. While interviewing relationships were part of our shared professional backgrounds, I acknowledged during these introductory sessions that I was asking for my respondents to share with me their personal and work experiences - a situation that demanded their trust in my approach to the research and my adherence to confidentiality. This explicit response endeavoured to recognise the shift in power relations from their usual day-to-day practices and to convey my ethical position not to "adopt a purely exploitative attitude to interviewees as sources of data" (Oakley 1993: 234). Moreover, this

reflexivity acknowledged the interactive nature of this interviewing process and the potential on both sides to

> think about things they have never thought about before or indeed think about things in a different way... This process of reflection acts as a checking mechanism for both the researcher and the researched and provides some safeguard against the notion of the 'fixed person' in the completed project.

(Cotterill and Letherby 1993: 77)

In this respect I was keen to stress my interest in each person's 'story' and of my wish to try to come to some understanding of their "lived realities" (Fineman and Gabriel 1996: 2). This approach in turn generated further enquiries and discussion about both my position as researcher and of the research project; at the end of these sessions all of the probation officers present arranged to meet with me on a one-to-one basis.

Turning to the prison setting, this presented more difficulties: the senior probation officer agreed to an interview with herself and possibly other probation staff, but foresaw difficulties in gaining permission for more open access to the team because of institutional restrictions. I followed up this opening, but problems quickly became apparent in terms of extending my contact any further within this setting as the team was under stress having experienced staff changes. There was also a sense of vulnerability following the negotiations with the prison governor concerning the continuation of the probation service presence within the prison. Moreover, once inside this setting I became acutely aware of the implications of being located within this closed institution and of the nature of the 'inner world' operating within these boundaries (Goffman 1961: 15).

The identification and acknowledgement of the difficulties in obtaining access were of particular interest to me in terms of exploring the perceptions and sense of identity of the probation staff working within these conditions, but it seemed likely that pursuing additional contact would prove unduly time-consuming, without any guarantee of a successful outcome, particularly given the ambivalence already displayed by the senior to my on-going presence. Thus, I made the decision to draw on these difficulties as a resource for further analysis (Burgess 1993), and to interview on a one-to-one basis as many of the staff within this team as possible by arranging planned visits (in the event the senior and a woman probation officer), but not to be drawn into negotiations with the prison hierarchy to spend any further time within this setting.

These difficulties did however provide the impetus to take up the opportunity to attend an all-day meeting at another prison within the area where it was agreed I could be present as an observer of the morning 'business' session and could then open up a discussion in the afternoon on probation issues within the prison settings from a gendered perspective. This contact gave me insight into the positioning of the prison probation teams and their members, both in terms of the various prison settings and also vis-à-vis each other, with the gendering of relationships between probation, prison staff and inmates within the institutions being a key feature of the discussions. These aspects are explored in more depth within later chapters, but are of relevance here in terms of situating my research approach:

> the research process is conceptualised as a social process which is heavily influenced by the choices made by the researcher as the research progresses. Consequently, the researcher is seen as a craftsperson - skilled not just in the nuts and bolts of research but in his or her ability to interact with others.

(Cassell and Symon 1994: 6)

By including opportunities to meet in formal and informal ways with staff as individuals and within groups as part of the research process, I was thus able to observe both 'frontstage' and 'backstage' behaviour (Goffman 1959), as the individuals moved between different situations and interacted in different ways within these settings.

Extending Contact Within Area 1

In reviewing the extent of my contacts within Area 1, I was keen to leave myself open to the potential of 'snowballing' in following up contact with probation staff in other settings. While this took place only to a limited degree, it again offered further insight into the organisational set-up and connections within this probation area. I found that some senior probation officers were sharing rooms because of shortage of office space and it was this arrangement that led to me being introduced to the female Community Service senior, (while meeting with another senior probation officer), when I seized the opportunity to capitalise on her questions about my research by arranging a follow-up interview.

In contrast to these sharing arrangements at senior level I was forcibly struck by the general practice of individual maingrade probation officers of working behind closed doors, regardless of whether interviews were taking place or not. This conveyed an impression of unavailability and a retreat from public view and scrutiny; within my research project I too experienced a sense of reluctance to 'disturb' probation officers, as reported in Tim May's study of 'Treen' probation service, and ironically found it easier to establish contact over the telephone than personally within the office. I was particularly struck by the contrast between this sense of disengagement and the welcoming responses that I received when conducting the one-to-one research

interviews, leading me to reflect on the interactions within the organisation, and "the types of power relations which operated in these settings" (May 1993b: 91).

This informal 'snowballing' in turn led me to follow up contact with the male student training senior, that also occurred through a circuitous route. My 'sponsor' assistant chief probation officer had suggested that this person would be an interesting informant, being at the 'sharp edge' of developments in terms of probation qualifying routes and had mentioned the possibility that I might get in touch. Again, a chance contact with this senior secured an agreement in principle to meet up. However, trying to arrange an interview date and time proved to be an illuminating experience in itself: this senior had separate bases within the probation service and a local university, but with no clear lines of communication within or between any of these sites. This sense of movement between locations differed sharply with the bureaucratic arrangements that seemed to be in place in all of the other settings I came into contact with. Within all the other office settings a form of Taylorism seemed to be in existence where the focus was on "visible and effective behaviours" (Hearn and Parkin 1987: 18). This sense of contrasting situations and my observations of these differences again informed the wider framework of analysis developed within the later chapters, and added yet a further twist on the 'public/private' issues in relation to work practices and professional identities.

Contact with Senior Management Team Members

The arrangements that were made to visit probation teams and the follow-ups afforded by the 'snowballing' contacts ensured that I was interviewing a range of senior and maingrade probation officers within Area 1, but I was keen to extend these contacts to include several members of the senior management team. In this respect I was

looking to explore the relationship between gender and power within this particular organisational setting, investigating how the historical development and more recent processes of change had led to "specific types of gender configurations" (Witz and Savage 1992: 56).

A follow-up session had been arranged with the male assistant chief probation officer who had supported my entry into the organisation and I re-negotiated this to encompass an additional one-to-one interview as part of my research study. This added yet another dimension to the 'gatekeeper'/'sponsor' positioning of this person in respect of my role as a researcher, with this shift demonstrating clearly that

> social research is not just a question of neat procedures but a social process whereby interaction between researcher and researched will directly influence the course which a research programme takes.

(Burgess 1993: 31)

Within the context of this on-going link I found myself in the position of agreeing to meet with the chief probation officer in response to his expressed interest in my study, via this assistant chief probation officer. It was not clear to me at the time (or subsequently) whether this was a further re-negotiation - and possibly oversight of - my position as a researcher, or whether it was a response that was intended to be viewed as engaging with my research area. Whatever the underlying motivation on the part of the chief officer in engineering this meeting, the subsequent interview seemed to me to have quite a different quality to it to all of the others: this interview and the relationship dynamics within the session brought into sharp focus issues concerning status and the way this crosscut with gender (Scott 1984). While feeling discomforted by this experience, on reflection it did make me realise that

interviews do not always have to work well as social encounters; they don't have to run smoothly and involve strong 'rapport', in order to provide useful data.

(Roseneil 1993: 200)

Most of all, without this encounter I would not have questioned my position as an 'insider/outsider' to such an extent, as it was this experience alone which drew to my attention a barely concealed challenging of my position as a 'peer', and which in turn called to attention issues of power and gender in both the research process and the focus of the project itself.

With the recognition of the pertinence of these issues within my investigation of this area as a gendered organisation my complement of respondents within Area 1 was made up by approaching two women assistant chief probation officers. In interviewing both male and female officers at chief levels within this part of the service I was mindful of the different and changing patterns of gender construction within the organisation, taking into consideration that "all such patterns are historically constructed and are the objects of social struggle" (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 51).

By this stage in my contact with Area 1 I had gained entry to a variety of probation settings and negotiated individual and group contact with probation officers at different positions within this particular service. This engagement in the investigation of the social life and social order of this part of the organisation brought together qualitative research methods and theoretical perspectives that encompassed inquiries into how these probation officers were experiencing and perceiving their situations - and how they were presenting and accounting for their positions. This interpretative

stance supported a flexible and wide-ranging approach that also addressed the concerns raised in the earlier chapters that

> the mobilisation of politics and power is an inextricable part of these processes, and the particulars of each organisation - its history, culture, rules and technologies - further shape work meanings and personal experiences.

(Fineman and Gabriel 1996: 4)

These unifying theoretical and methodological approaches were developed during my negotiations and subsequent interactions within Area 1, but underpinned my contacts in the other two areas, and indeed all of the enquiries that formed part of the research project.

Approaching Staff at Grassroots Level in Area 2

The process of selecting a team within Area 2 was initiated by the chief probation officer as part of the initial 'gatekeeping' procedure, insofar as all senior probation officers in the area were appraised of my request and asked to report back to Headquarters if their team was interested in participating in my research. I was then sent notification of the generic, community based team that had responded, together with a request to telephone the senior probation officer to arrange a meeting.

Within this process of negotiation, both with the senior probation officer (the official 'gatekeeper' at this level) and in my contact with the various team members, it became apparent that acceptance of my research intervention had hinged largely on the willingness of one particular probation officer to argue my case. This person was a long-standing and well-respected probation officer, who had worked alongside me at various points in my probation career and who had taken a pro-active stance in

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supporting my request. This response gave some insight into his position within the team and also indicated his role in facilitating my research at this stage:

> In small groups, there is usually at least one person who, without having formal authority, nevertheless holds moral suasion. If that person participates in a project, then it must be OK.

(Seidman 1991: 36)

I was not informed whether any other teams had expressed an interest nor, given the rather tortuous experience of getting this far, did it seem appropriate to try to obtain this information. Overall though, my firm impression was that without these representations on my behalf, my research was likely to have stalled at this point in terms of gaining access to a probation team within Area 2, with all the implications this would have entailed for the research project.

Contacting New Officers Within The Service

The remaining area of interest within my overall research plan was the decision to investigate the position of recently trained probation officers coming into the organisation and fortunately this was the other level of contact that was authorised by the chief probation officer within Area 2. (Area 1 was cutting down on recruitment and it was difficult to locate any newly qualified officers). I was again given details of the official 'gatekeeper' (a female, ex-senior probation officer), and established contact by telephone. My research outline was met with interest and a sense of commitment: not only did the group leader offer to negotiate my intervention with the group members, she also offered to meet with me on a one-to-one basis to talk over her position in undertaking contract work with this, and other, probation areas. My subsequent reflections concerning the thrust of her comments within this telephone conversation, particularly in relation to her decision to undertake consultancy work within the

probation service rather than continue working for one area, made explicit within this early stage of the research issues that were often left implicit within other discussions. In particular her response called to attention concerns that

> the gendered substructure lies in the spatial and temporal arrangements of work, and in the relations linking workplaces to living places. These practices and relations, encoded in arrangements and rules, are supported by assumptions that work is separate from the rest of life and that it has first claim on the worker. Many people, particularly women, have difficulty making their daily lives fit these expectations and assumptions.

(Acker 1992: 255)

I therefore took up the offer of this contact, seeing an opportunity to explore yet another perspective on probation work in a way that would extend my understanding of different facets of the current situation within the organisation. In addition, this connection also offered the scope to develop my analysis and to prevent me from generalising exclusively from my own experiences (Reinharz 1992).

The Interview Outline

The main focus of my research approach concerned the individual interviews, within this wider ethnographic approach. Of the 37 respondents who formed the central part of my study, I carried out 27 individual interviews, with the other contacts being paired or group interviews. All of these sessions drew on an interviewing outline, apart from the interviews with the programmes senior in Area 1 and the session with the senior research/information officer in Area 2, that were information and fact finding sessions.

During the period of interviewing in Areas 1 and 2 I took every opportunity to arrive early, 'hang around' the offices in between interviews and watch the ways in which

> the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself (sic) and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.

(Goffman 1959: preface)

In this respect I was able to observe probation officers in both 'official' and 'unofficial' mode, enabling me to gain awareness of the different organisational settings, levels of interaction between the staff members and responses by individuals. My status as an 'insider' again seemed to play a part in my acceptance within the more informal situations, with questions being asked of my own past experiences within different work settings. These encounters provided material for reflection into both my research approach and research findings: for example, a discussion with several of the probation officers over lunch at the generic team office in Area 2 led me to an awareness that I was being cast in the role of 'expert', a position that was in conflict with my wish to open up an emancipated dialogue within my relationships with these probation officers (see May 1993b). While this gave me some insight into areas of change and uncertainty that were of concern to these probation officers, I nevertheless became more conscious of the need to present my interests in a way that stressed my wish to learn from and to validate their individual experiences (Cotterill and Letherby 1993). I also endeavoured to retain this ethos within the one-to-one interviews, placing importance on the interactive nature of the discussions: in this way the scope and direction of each interview adopted a dynamic course, allowing for introspective responses on both sides (Oakley 1993).

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Utilising a Semi-Structured Approach

When planning the interview sessions with the different probation officers I decided to draw up an interviewing schedule that covered a range of different aspects concerning organisational and individual issues (and the inter-relationship between the two), but that did not to impose too rigid an approach. Within all of the sessions I opened the discussion by emphasising confidentiality and anonymity and by locating my position as a researcher undertaking postgraduate studies, rather than conducting research for the organisation. This provided a framework within which to locate the areas of interest as outlined below:

- an exploration of the current situation as experienced by the probation officer within that setting;

- the personal and professional background of the officer, picking up on decisions about training and entry into the service and enquiring about career progression and future plans/ambitions;

- an investigation into aspects of recent legislation and organisational change in relation to professional roles and identity;

- impressions from a personal standpoint about changes in the structure of service, including the growth of the organisation and changes at each level, including any observations in terms of gendered experiences;

- links between the personal and professional, encompassing any formal/informal support networks, union affiliations, working patterns, relationships at work, the work/home split;

- an opportunity to ask questions of me and/or to raise any other points not covered above.

This framework of issues ensured that I raised the same areas of interest during each interview, but provided a flexible 'agenda' (Burgess 1993) that could flow with the conversation and that often served as a check-list towards the end of the interview. On most occasions I negotiated an hour's interviewing time with each person and this

format also enabled me to keep a mental check on the time by monitoring the progression from one set of concerns to another. Although time constraints had been noted repeatedly by the 'official gatekeepers', I found that many respondents suggested that we continued our session beyond this time, often raising sensitive or particularly personal issues or experiences at this point in the interview. The timing of these responses struck me forcibly and caused me to reflect on both the significance of what was being raised in this way and the manner in which they were being brought into the conversation: there seemed to be many parallels with the psycho-therapeutic analysis of these responses as a form of 'doorknob communication' where

> the concern is raised at the time when it surely cannot be fully discussed. It may be a taboo area or one experienced as too painful to talk about. Whatever the reason, the desire to deal with the concern finally overwhelms the forces of resistance. Time has its impact on the interview, and the urgency of the concern, coupled with the pressures created by the lack of time, finally result in the expression of the issue.

(Shulman 1992: 168)

Of these interviews most, but not all, were taped: in the early stages I wanted to contrast the experience of taping or not taping interviews and thus did not tape-record my discussions with, for instance, the Community Service senior probation officer or one of the female assistant chief probation officers in Area 1. I was also not allowed to take a tape recorder into the prisons when I met with probation staff.

In analysing the information obtained from my early interviews, I felt that I was able to extend the interviews more if I knew I could return to a taped transcription, rather than depend on interview notes and my memory alone. In addition, most of the people I interviewed were familiar with using tape recorders as part of practice training and thus, far from seeing this method as an intrusion, seemed at ease with such a technique. (For information, only one woman probation officer in Area 2 requested that

the interview should not be taped and her wishes were respected. In contrast, the only person to stipulate that the interview *should* be recorded was the male chief probation officer in Area 1). The negotiation of this approach therefore seemed to me to underpin a view of these interviews as

> both a research methodology and a social relationship that must be nurtured, sustained, and then ended gracefully... In part, each interviewing relationship is individually crafted. It is a reflection of the personalities of the participant and the interviewer and the ways they interact. The relationship is also a reflection of the purpose, structure, and method of in-depth interviewing.

(Seidman 1991: 72)

This underlines the ethos of these interviews but does not address the specific technique of this approach and, in particular the vagaries of using audio equipment. Fortunately I also took notes as the interview progressed on all occasions - a strategy that enabled 'active listening' (Seidman 1991: 57), but which also proved to be invaluable when the tape recorder failed to operate properly on two occasions, leaving me with blank tapes. My sense of chagrin at this set-back was nevertheless tempered by a simultaneous sense of relief that I would not have to transcribe this material. While coming to agree with Seidman (1991) that all in-depth interviews should be tape recorded and then transcribed by the researcher in order to extend the depth of knowledge and analysis obtained from the material, I also identified strongly with Sasha Roseneil's observations that this approach was not only inordinately time-consuming but also a threat to sanity! (Roseneil 1993).

In all I transcribed in full 21 interviews, that represented a larger number of tapes as some sessions had lasted for longer than 90 minutes. This provided material not only for further analysis, but also a learning tool in the research process, facilitating on-going feedback in terms of interviewing skills, making sure that my approach

incorporated "restraint and listening" in addition to being "verbal and reflective" (Reinharz 1992: 21).

Linking the Approach with Analysis

By this stage of the research I had gathered together both quantitative and qualitative material in this exploration into the gendered organisational world of probation and probation officers. In considering analysis of this data I was faced with the dual challenge of understanding "what's *there*" and to present it in a way that portrayed both the "complexity and richness" of the various situations (Marshall 1981: 395). Having explored the historical background of the service and the aspects relating to organisational change from the varying perspectives within Chapters 1 and 2, the focus within this chapter on methodological concerns highlights the importance of grounding the research: the approach adopted here moves from the wider perspective to enable account to be taken of the specific biographies and responses from the different probation officer respondents and of myself as researcher, while providing a framework that holds onto the contextual background of the changing organisation structures and practices. This builds on the approach propounded by C. Wright Mills in taking into account the "terminologies of motive", but locating them as "vocabularies of motive in historic epochs and specified situations" - a shift from the "'why' into a 'how' that is answerable in terms of a situation and its typical vocabulary of motives" (Mills 1972: 452, 442).

In this way the theoretical concerns in the early chapters regarding the shifting power relations within the probation service and, in particular, issues relating to professional practice and discretion have been put under a gendered spotlight and applied to the process of undertaking the research itself. The on-going collection and

analysis of the interview material and other data thus became "a continuous, iterative enterprise" (Miles and Huberman 1994: 12), with this process making it possible to open up the interviews and social settings of the various probation officers, pulling out the strands that in turn illuminated and informed my investigation into the changing scene of the probation service.

In terms of the developing research project and structure, these experiences pushed me towards an acknowledgement of the "need for methodology itself to be opened up to a process of critique and reconstruction" (Hearn and Parkin 1987: 46). In this respect I came to conceptualise my approach as a developing and interacting process between the research methodologies, the issues of theoretical interest, my position as researcher and my relationships with the interviewees, the aspects raised within the discussions, and finally, my engagement with and reflection on these experiences.

The various dimensions of my approach as outlined above indicate the dynamic and inter-relating aspects of the research study as it progressed. As part of this process I increasingly began to draw on myself as a resource, both to test out my sense of validity of the various points under consideration, and to maintain the awareness of issues of gender within this exploration of the probation service as an organisation. The pertinence of such an approach became apparent from the very early stages of the research when I was reminded anew of the gender 'minefield' of perceptions concerning 'appropriate' dress within the everyday work of probation officers:

> Even such commonplace matters of dress, presentation and appearance (implying gender-specific imageries) acquire a significance of their own, especially in inter-agency work which involves contact with powerful institutions such as the courts; it is still commonplace for women

student probation officers to be told that they must wear a skirt when attending court.

(Sampson, Smith, Pearson, Blagg and Stubbs 1991: 119)

During the course of my research project I found myself considering how I too should present myself within the different settings, with the observations noted above linking into my awareness of being scrutinised by 'gatekeepers'. This terminology took on a literal meaning in gaining access to the local prison within Area 1 where my admittance had been secured via a verbal agreement between the female probation officer and the 'gate-officer'. In view of this informal arrangement I consciously decided to dress smartly on this occasion, but in gaining entry to the prison still found myself subjected to 'banter' over the entry in the Day Book - was I to be noted down as 'Miss', 'Ms' or 'Mrs'? This was countered by the (female) probation officer who later assured me that this kind of sexist response was an everyday occurrence within this setting (which also concurred with some of my previous encounters at other prison institutions). This serves to illustrate the interaction of my own experiences within the research process, with the issues of gender, power and organisation that were central to the research project, making it clear that "real jobs and real workers are, of course, deeply gendered and embodied" (Acker 1992: 257).

This awareness of these different levels of professional and personal presentation and their gendered implications led to further reflections on my own position and self-identity: I was concurrently a (female) researcher, an (ex) probation officer, a 'listening ear', a wife, mother, friend and, of course, a woman. This was both a resource for analysis within this area of research and a practical reality:

> The relation between ourselves as practising sociologists and ourselves as working women is continually visible to us, a central feature of experience of the work, so that the bifurcation of consciousness becomes

for us a daily chasm which is to be crossed, on the one side of which is this special conceptual activity of thought, research, teaching, administration, and on the other the world of concrete practical activities.

(Smith in Humm 1992: 306)

In turn there were different cycles of interaction with each interviewee, which evolved and developed in the course of my contact. In this respect the permutations of interaction were constantly extended, drawing on parallels with transactional analysis (Pringle 1989). This put a further twist on the 'insider/outsider' perceptions, with connections being explored as part of my research interests that crossed and challenged boundaries between the 'public/private' divide. The elements brought into the interviews differed with each respondent, with awareness of these different responses and my own reactions making me attentive to the "sensitising, cognitive function which alerts us to the meanings and behaviours of others" (Wilkins 1993: 96).

Summary

These reflections on the linkage between the research concerns of gender and organisation within the probation service and the methods used to investigate these issues, open up to consideration not only the research findings that are explored within the subsequent chapters, but also point up the interactions between myself as researcher and those I came into contact with (Westkott in Nielsen 1990). In this way the intricacies and dynamic interactions on both personal and structural levels are brought into the frame, with the ethnographic approach and triangulated methodology underpinning an interpretative analysis of the probation service and of probation officers working within that organisation at a time of change.

The study now moves on to look in detail at the responses by the probation officers themselves: in the context of organisational change key areas of power, discretion and professional identity are explored, set within the wider structural issues and social processes. Within this framework the gendered perspective reveals the different cultural patterns and relations, looking at both personal responses and the dynamic interactions within these different areas of the probation service. Having presented a detailed overview of the differing gender balances within the national and local probation areas and at the different levels of the service, the focus now shifts directly onto the individual respondents within the three areas selected for this research, providing a more detailed investigation into the directly related experiences of these probation officers. The application of this prismatic 'gendered lens' (Newman 1995b), extends over the following two chapters, with Chapter 4 focusing on issues of gender and professional identity, and with Chapter 5 delving into the complexities and contradictions of gender and organisational change within different probation environments.

Notes

[1] Using information from the current NAPO Directory I wrote to each area's Research and Information Officer, to an Assistant Chief Officer if their title indicated a public relations function, or to the Chief Probation Officer.

[2] Examples of the slogans included: "The Probation Service, The Courts and the Community. Forward Together"; "Probation Works and Everyone Benefits"; "Working to Reduce Crime"; "Responsibilities, Resources and Results".

[3] The 1993-96 Plan stated that "In time, as the three year plan evolves, and as areas' own plans come to be revised, there is likely to be a strong case for moving towards a common format". This was enforced in the 1994-1997 Plan (see Home Office (1993b).

[4] These job descriptions relate to Assistant Chief Probation Officer (Resource Management) and Assistant Chief Probation Officer (Specialist Operations)

[5] The names of all of the respondents in this research have been changed to ensure anonymity - see Appendix.

[6] Figures obtained from HM Inspectorate of Probation.

[7] Figures obtained from HM Inspectorate of Probation.

[8] Figures obtained from HM Inspectorate of Probation.

Chapter 4

The Gendering Of Professional Identities

It is a notable feature of the themes of social control and of gender that they relate so closely to the everyday world as well as to formal social-science discourse.

(Heidensohn 1992: 3)

'Gender' cannot be reduced to the status of a single variable... Rather, gender is a multi-faceted phenomenon manifest through a net of social and institutional relationships linked across different areas of social life.

(Crompton and Sanderson 1990a: 171)

Changing the Focus to Grassroots Level

At this point the focus moves to explore the responses of the probation officers who were interviewed during the fieldwork part of the research. Having charted and analysed the development and changing situation of the service in Chapter 1, and turned a 'gendered lens' onto the organisation in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 reviewed my engagement with, and inquiry into, these issues within the different probation areas. This chapter, and the subsequent one, shift away from the wider perspective in order to investigate in depth some of the situations of the individual male and female probation officers, enquiring into their personal and professional backgrounds and their past and present experiences within their various work settings.

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Having highlighted the changes and conflicts relating to the professional status of probation officers and to the value base and operation of working practices in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter revisits these aspects from the viewpoints of some of the maingrade, senior and assistant chief probation officers from the three probation areas. In this way this approach delves into individual perceptions, enquiring into their "situated actions and vocabularies of motive" (Mills 1972) in becoming and working as probation officers at these different levels within the service. The interviews conducted for this research thus move behind and beyond the organisational 'face' of the probation service and bring to view the self conceptions and the lived realities of the male and female probation officers working within this gendered organisation. In this respect the approach considers not only how these respondents presented their accounts of themselves as probation officers but also how they regarded their positions within the organisation both locally and nationally.

In drawing on extracts from the interviews with these various probation officers, it is intended that their reflections on their personal and professional identities should come through as grounded in their everyday lives, and that their situations should be conveyed in an holistic, rather than an entirely work-centred way. This enables the gendered discourses running through the organisational structures and practices to be opened up to view from a perspective that considers both the similarities and differences in the responses by the men and women probation officers and addresses the dynamic nature of the interactions against the wider context of the changes impacting on the probation service.

It is from the viewpoint of acknowledging both the richness of the material I gathered from these various sources, and the need to place it within an interpretative framework that I now move forward, seeing myself as researcher as being "an open and

receptive medium through which this order comes out" (Marshall 1981: 395). Chapters 1, 2 and 3 have provided insights and analyses into the changing world of the probation service but the thesis so far remains devoid of personalities. It is to the individual probation officers that I now turn.

Becoming and Being a Maingrade Probation Officer

In approaching the different probation teams within the three areas I was concerned to ensure that I interviewed both male and female officers, with varying lengths of service. In view of the chequered development of training and qualifications over the past thirty years, and with the findings of *The Dews Report* reverberating around the service (the Report was finally published in September 1994), the backgrounds and motivations of probation officers from different cohorts of entrants seemed a pertinent area to explore. Given the rhetoric within *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a) that seemed to be pushing towards the establishment of a certain category of (masculine) probation officer I was interested to pursue the reactions of probation officers themselves, to take into account "the dynamism of the relationships in which gender is constituted" (Connell 1995: 38).

Within the context of these gendered concerns it seemed that the social construction of what it was to be a 'probation officer' was facing an ideological challenge from central government, but it remained unclear to what extent this had permeated through to local areas. My intention was therefore to explore this at grassroots level, checking out within the interviews the responses of those who were current organisational members, and being alert to any gendered nuances in the responses.

Long-Serving Male Probation Officers

Of all of the probation officers that I interviewed, two stood out as embodying the 'vocational' ethos stemming from the traditions of the service. These were both male maingrade officers, working within probation since the mid-1970s, although now situated in very different parts of the organisation: Sean was working in Area 1 as part of the family court welfare team, while William was the long-standing probation officer referred to in Chapter 3, working within the generic community-based team in Area 2 (see Appendix). Both had embarked on long-term careers prior to their probation training - Sean within the Royal Navy and William within a bank, but were drawn to probation feeling "misplaced" (Sean's comment) in their original jobs. However, each of them outlined this move in terms of fitting the male model of full-time, continuous employment (Hewitt 1993) - Sean described it as a "second career", while William went to great lengths to explain to me that his first appointment had commenced on 29th December:

> an odd time to appoint someone between Christmas and New Year and in fact I started with a week's leave. But they wanted to make sure - which was a concern - they didn't want me to have a gap in service and in pay.

> (William, generic community-based team, Area 1)

In this respect both were indicating that while retraining and changing 'jobs', their 'careers' were not interruptible (Cockburn 1990). Sean for his part described a sense of continuity in the foundations of his own personal career plan:

> I was always attracted by probation... There used to be national advertisements along the lines of, 'want a challenge and all that sort of stuff', and yes, I was fairly convinced that I wanted to work with people. I was fairly focused on probation... I set my sights... All along I was convinced that the probation focus was right for me...

> (Sean, family court welfare team, Area 1)

These responses seemed to be buttressed by their regard for individuals from a previous generation of probation officers. Both Sean and William had come into the service at the time of area reorganisation in the 1970s and had memories of contacts with male figures who had 'passed on the mantle' of probation work to them. For William this stretched from his father who had been a prison through and after-care worker, through to colleagues of his father's whom he had subsequently worked with: one had been his supervisor on his training course, while another had been a senior probation officer in Area 2. Although he felt that any encouragement to become a probation officer had been indirect, he commented that his father had been "both surprised, but at the same time quite pleased, I think" (William, generic community-based team, Area 2).

For Sean his role model had been the last principal probation officer of the relatively small area where he trained who he described as "an absolute character". He reminisced about this local service, which he subsequently joined, as an organisation where

> you could actually identify, if you like, the founder kind of members of
> the probation service... There was much more a kind of pastoral sort of
> feel about things then.

(Sean, family court welfare team, Area 1)

This comment epitomises the nostalgia expressed by both of these respondents for times past when there were closer relationships across the hierarchical levels (Kanter 1977). William similarly described his colleagues in his first post as being

> very, very supportive. Although in a sense they were all these sort of
> independent and autonomous officers, at the same time I thought I was
> very well cared for.

(William, generic community-based team, Area 2)

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Their views of the probation service and of their places within it conveyed a strong sense of continuity in their feelings of allegiance to their work. Neither of these two probation officers had sought promotion and both stated that they were not ambitious, seemingly accepting (and wanting) a paternalistic approach from management (and, in particular, their male chief probation officers), within a discourse of masculinity that allowed power to be "exercised in positive ways which enhance subordinates' self-interests" (Collinson and Hearn 1994: 13). Thus, while both acknowledged the changing scenario of the current situation, this early value base continued to underpin their personal positions within the probation service. Sean stressed his "basic probation orientation" throughout the different specialisms he had experienced within the probation service and even within his current position as a family court welfare officer, (part of the probation service), confirming that "I've always seen myself at heart to be probation".

Summary

The perceptions of the probation service in the terms expressed by Sean and William had a rather anachronistic feel given the changes outlined in the earlier chapters. However, they did tally with my experiences in entering the probation service in the mid-1970s where the legacy of 'appropriate' areas of women's work within the organisation still prevailed (cf. Chapter 2), with the positioning of men and the gendered hierarchical structure of the organisation establishing something of a 'Gentleman's Club' culture (Maddock and Parkin 1994: 31).

This interpretation accounts for William's and Sean's motivation in wishing to enter the service and their positioning of themselves within the organisation, but does not probe into the explicit and implied gendered stratification that they portray. In this

respect it presents an organisational ethos from a standpoint that embodies implicit gender connotations, leaving a gap relating to the experiences of the women probation officers who entered the service during that period. Having considered the viewpoints of these two long-serving male officers, I therefore move on to explore the counter-positioning of the male and female staff and explore the situation from the perspective of three women probation officers who entered the probation service in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Long-Serving Female Probation Officers

In turning the focus onto the viewpoints of women probation officers, the responses of three maingrade officers with over fifteen years' experience each are opened up to view: Lesley and Eileen were both colleagues of Sean in the family court welfare team, while Nancy worked within the generic community-based team alongside William (see Appendix). Given the sense of 'life long careers' (Hewitt 1993) that Sean and William had displayed, I was interested to compare the perceptions of these female officers, all of whom had similarly experienced a range of work placements within different parts of the probation service.

In the discussions with these probation officers concerning their decisions to apply for training and to enter the probation service, I was struck by the 'complex trajectory' of these women's employment within this setting (Witz 1992: 34). It was salient that none of these women had identified probation as a chosen career in their early working lives and each had come to the service following experiences in other settings. Lesley, like Sean, had been attracted by the national advertising for the probation service (in the mid-1970s), and had impulsively applied for training. As she described it:

I was interested in those sorts of areas but didn't know - and then basically I saw an advert for the probation service and thought 'oh yeh, that's a good idea!'... I applied and for some foolish reason they accepted me. I mean I had never done any voluntary work and I'd never walked into a probation office in my life before, but I went.

(Lesley, family court welfare officer, Area 1)

Having completed her social work training Lesley was appointed to a permanent full-time job as a probation officer within the same geographical area, working in a team that she "liked very much as individuals" and feeling that she "admired their practice and learnt a lot from them". However, from this point onwards her job moves were all driven by family circumstances and commitments: after 18 months in this position her partner obtained a job in another part of the country and, after several months of her commuting to meet up with him at weekends, she decided to look for another post nearer to him.

This relocation necessitated a sideways move into Social Services, utilising her generic social work qualification and probation experience to work within a community setting. However, following the birth of twins she was unable to negotiate a more flexible working schedule and she did not return after taking maternity leave. From then on - and through the birth of another child and the breakdown of her marriage - she had taken on sessional and part-time work within the social work field (including probation), devising for herself a work timetable that was more 'family friendly'. In this respect Lesley seemed to be trying to balance conflicting priorities: the first was to maintain a sense of 'career', albeit in terms of a 'work history' that was following a rather circuitous route (Goffee and Nicholson 1994: 80). The second was to carry out her responsibilities as a mother and main carer of her children. She found it difficult to summarise her decision-making over this period and in response to my questioning about this aspect put forward multi-faceted reasoning of her position:

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What I thought I was doing at the time was basically keeping my hand in as it were. Because it seemed to me it was the sort of job, you spend any time out of it, and you know, it changes so fast, you'll just lose it. So, I always had intentions of going back to work, I'm not sure I'd say full-time, but on a reasonably full-time basis at some point, and I just wanted to keep involved. And I just thought that I would go mad if I stayed at home with the children all day!

(Lesley, family court welfare team, Area 1)

In reviewing the series of jobs she had held over a period of more than ten years Lesley conveyed the impression that the current arrangement of two part-time positions - one within probation in the family court welfare team and one within an allied child care field - suited her own professional needs and her domestic duties. She pointed out though that she had had to fight to gain acknowledgement of the relevance of her previous experience on appointment to her current posts, particularly with regard to her placement on the salary spinal scales, which left her feeling that her cumulative practice skills were implicitly down-graded.

Eileen had had a similarly roundabout way of entering the probation service, having originally trained and worked as a nursery nurse. After a short period at home when her children were small, she had obtained a position within a Day Nursery and following promotion within this setting, (which then became a Family Centre within a Social Services Department), she had taken up the opportunity of secondment to undertake a social work qualification (CQSW). It was through her experience of court work while studying that Eileen had gained an interest in probation and she specifically asked for a placement within her local probation area. She was committed to returning to the Family Centre for two years on completion of her course but left on the exact day this requirement was fulfilled, taking up a post within the probation area where she had gained experience during her training. While she had been keen to make this move she had encountered problems in making this transition:

It was very different. I mean it did take me a long time to settle down... I felt very de-skilled, I felt absolutely at a loss... I'd been a manager in a very large Family Centre, with an awful lot of responsibility and quite a large staff team... My senior, I think he was, well, we admitted it halfway through my first six months, that he was very wary of me because he knew my background, and I felt he was teaching me... I felt like I was a schoolkid, you know, that he was slapping my wrists at every opportunity.

(Eileen, family court welfare team, Area 1)

The situation had been resolved to some extent by a change of senior to supervise her work but was compounded still further by her position of being the oldest entrant among six first year officers in the team. She commented that this had also been problematic on her social work course, feeling that 'difficulties' connected with her age, (she was 41 when she completed her training), together with the range of experience she brought with her "had been reinforced throughout". While these comments indicated some uneasiness on her part about adapting to change, this seemed to have been exacerbated by the problems she felt she had encountered as a woman in bringing relevant professional experience to a mid-life change of career.

Nancy had had a smoother transition in becoming a probation officer, but like the other two women had not held any clearly defined plans about a 'career'. She had initially worked within the community service specialism of the probation service as a unqualified worker and it was only while there that she had considered applying for training. Alongside her plans for professional development she stressed that she had always considered her son's needs of her:

I actually went from full-time to part-time because of my son and then eventually went into training, and worked it that way... I had the two years out at college at what was a crucial stage for him, so I had the

summer holidays and so forth. Then as he got older, then I went back into full-time work.

This process of gaining relevant experience and then undertaking a vocational training course when it fitted into her family life had worked in a practical way for Nancy, but she stressed that this progression had also brought its own problems:

> You never get rid of the pressure points, you are crucified on them. But yes, I think they were undoubtedly there and I think the job doesn't help. I talked to a friend who was pregnant not so long ago and, you know, you know too much and you read too much in this job, to be mothering at the same time.

In these statements Nancy summed up a theme that was often repeated by the women probation officers I interviewed who had children: there was an ever-present sense of guilt in trying to meet competing demands and of carrying out a 'double shift' of duties at work and at home (Apter 1985). For these three women discussions concerning their entry into the probation service engendered responses that linked their own personal and professional development with their family situations and life stages as mothers. This inter-relationship of work and family stands in sharp contrast to the focused conversations concerning the career plans of William and Sean and highlights the connotations of the description 'working mother' and the lack of a corresponding term 'working father' (Gherardi 1995: 168).

This public/private divide had impacted on these women in different ways, with each of them maintaining a separation between these areas of their lives as they became organisational members. This had perpetuated the traditional divide, but none of these women saw themselves as 'trail-blazers', and each had tackled problems in their own way as they had arisen, continuing to seek individual solutions to these structural and

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social problems (Coward 1993). Eileen had tolerated a 5.30 a.m. start to her day when working at the Family Centre so that the family home would be near to her husband's work. Nancy, for her part, kept a strict separation between work and home, even though she lived nearby to the probation office, and she described how disconcerted she had been when she

> opened the door one night and somebody was there for Tupperware. I thought 'I know this face' and realised 'oh god, it's an ex-client'. I mean it's that sort of pressure - it's like I don't want to come down here at all at the weekends, or go shopping locally at the weekends. I really like to get away.

(Nancy, generic community-based team, Area 2)

Lesley had adopted a more pro-active stance regarding the work-home interface in response to the organisation's expectations of her availability when she had been enrolled on a three-day residential training course. This had necessitated making arrangements for her children's grandmother to come to stay to look after them and she had requested some financial assistance from the probation service in meeting this extra outlay. She had received a one-off contribution towards the travel costs involved, but described this as "absolute peanuts". With hindsight she felt that her actions in bringing her primary responsibility for her children to the attention of her superiors within the organisation had placed her in an invidious position and she still nursed a grievance that being a conscientious worker and a conscientious parent had been interpreted as competing options (Wilson 1995). She had made her point and protested from within the organisational set-up but had been faced with the reality that "the resistance that can go on within a bureaucratic setting is a very limited form of opposition" (Ferguson 1984: 208).

This juggling of career development and childcare responsibilities was displayed and vocalised by all of these women, although it is important to stress their individual

personal and professional backgrounds and the different stances each had taken in their decisions about the boundaries between work and family life. However, in all of these cases it became apparent that the model of full-time, life-time employment was not a pattern that was applicable to their situations, emphasising the impact of day-to-day family concerns on their overall working lifestyles.

The experiences of these women highlight the twists and turns of their working and personal lives and the compromises that had been made in terms of seeking professional challenges while meeting family responsibilities. Lesley spoke about these dilemmas, contrasting her position with contemporaries from her social work course in the 1970s, some of whom now held high positions within various Social Services departments. She stated rather ruefully: "I've made particular choices on the way through about where my priorities lay and that's the price you pay for those I suppose". In this respect her ties to her children - the 'mother knot' - had indeed proved an impediment to her progression within her chosen field (Apter 1985: 2).

<u>Summary</u>

These women probation officers had all been connected with the probation service for a considerable length of time, carrying with them some of the history of the service in reflecting on their current situations and on more recent developments. Their responses echoed those of William and Sean in emphasising their commitment to their work and the importance to each of them of their pre-appointment training and professional standing. However, beyond these shared perceptions, their interpretations of the organisational settings and of their position within the local areas seemed to divide along gendered lines, with the men viewing the traditionally paternalistic

structures and relationships as providing an enabling environment, while the women expressed the limitations imposed by this type of work sphere.

While acknowledging these gendered differences, the responses from both the male and female long-standing probation officers conveyed a sense of placing considerable value on the autonomy they felt able to demonstrate in their roles as part of the wider criminal justice system. Given the nature and pace of change that has been outlined in the earlier chapters and, in particular, the move towards a more prescriptive style of working, I was interested to contrast these reactions with those from probation officers who had been in the service for shorter periods of time. I now direct the gendered spotlight onto more recent entrants, both male and female, to explore both their perceptions of the organisation and of themselves as probation officers.

Maingrade Probation Officers in the 1980s and into the 1990s

The focus therefore turns to three maingrade probation officers who had undertaken their training in the late 1980s and early 1990s and had been working in the service continuously since then. All were based in Area 1 where Beth was a colleague of both Sean and Eileen in the family court welfare team, while Pete and Louise worked in different locations within a split-site generic team covering a wide geographical area (see Appendix). Each of them had undertaken their qualifying training at different educational institutions and had experienced very different teaching styles in their studies. Pete had attended a local university course as a Home Office sponsored student and saw this period of training as linking his pre-qualifying work as a court ancillary (probation service officer) with his subsequent probation officer posts within the

organisation. Beth had also obtained Home Office funding, but was more critical of her course at a then polytechnic:

> I can't remember any particular thrust. I mean, I felt there was a sort of life/social work emphasis in the content. I wasn't terribly impressed with my training at the Poly. For instance, I didn't think issues of discrimination were addressed and there was tokenism towards that kind of course, and they weren't well attended.

> (Beth, family court welfare team, Area 1)

In contrast to both Pete's and Beth's memories of their courses, Louise spoke of this period as a transformative and facilitative experience in terms of her own personal development and her work as a probation officer. She had been working as an unqualified worker within a probation hostel and had been encouraged by her female manager to "look to see which windows could be opened for you if you wanted to go in that direction". She had taken up this challenge and had gained a university place with her first application. On finishing the course she had been keen to return to her original probation area and after several attempts obtained a post within a generic team, working primarily with young offenders. It was at this point that a sense of disillusionment had set in when she was placed in a team with two female senior job-share probation officers and found an increasing gap between her personal support of such provision and the operational reality:

> I've always hoped that I would promote the right for job-sharing, but I really found it difficult to work for two people who were so different and led so differently. Like when I used to moan about it or grumble about it, or even think 'grumble thoughts' to myself, I used to think I shouldn't be doing this, I should be sticking up for them. But it was really putting a lot of pressure on people's work.

> (Louise, generic community-based team, Area 1)

Although she went on to describe this experience as "a bit of a hiccup", the problems associated with this arrangement had caused Louise difficulties in her first year as a probation officer and had led her to question her future choices should she decide to have children. Thus, while she continued to support an equal opportunities approach in terms of organisational policy, she was well aware of potential problems in implementing more flexible working practices and styles.

This sensitivity to the nature of the work setting and of being alert to the "prevailing 'style' and value system of the organisation" (Coleman 1991: 41), were issues that also came up in Beth's responses. I was struck by her wariness in talking about her professional sense of identity: this seemed to stem partly from a late start into probation, (as in Eileen's case, Beth had been over 40 when she completed her training course), and partly from some uncertainty on her part about the transferability of skills following her appointment to this particular specialism within the service. Beth had started to explore the possibilities of working outside the home as her children had grown older and had initially considered other options such as teaching. As she described it, her decision-making at this time had followed a rather ad hoc course in her endeavour to manoeuvre the work/home divide, closely mirroring the findings in Rosalind Coward's study where many of the women had described their careers as "unfolding accidentally" (Coward 1993: 25).

In terms of her most recent move within the probation service to her current post within the family court welfare team, Beth stressed that a major consideration for her had been whether she felt she would fit into the team and work well alongside her colleagues. She described this as adopting a more "holistic approach" to her position, but had subsequently been disappointed to experience the office setting as being

almost like in monastic terms, little cells you go into and close the door. We have team meetings but I think we should have more things - more away-days and sharing of ideas as a team, and be supportive to each other and give each other ideas. I don't think supervision always caters for that.

(Beth, family court welfare team, Area 1)

In endeavouring to bring about a more cohesive set of relationships within the team, Beth could be seen as utilising the "soft skills of communicating" often considered 'natural' to women, but ironically risked perpetuating this stereotyped gender role as she sought to bring about change (Nichols 1994: 8). Moreover, her attempts had been marginalised - not through any overt rejection, but through a lack of response and commitment to developing such an approach, both in terms of day-to-day contact and support with colleagues, and in exploring the potential for shared work with clients. From a gendered perspective her endeavour to bring about any progress in these areas could be viewed as taking place "on the margins, in the interstices, and around the edges of male-controlled public life: invalidated, disempowered and under-resourced" (Edley and Wetherell 1995: 180).

Having found these mixed experiences on the parts of Louise and Beth, I was interested to contrast their responses with those of Pete. In conducting this research I had a commitment to bringing the voices of the women probation officers to the fore (cf. discussion citing Eichler (1988) in Chapter 3), but had surprised myself by becoming increasingly drawn into considering the perceptions of masculinities by the men I interviewed within the probation service. Mindful of Rosemary Pringle's reflections on her bewilderment at finding interviews with male bosses often more pleasurable than with the secretaries who were the focus of her study (Pringle 1989), I too stopped to consider the implications of what was taking place in these situations. There was of course the possibility that I was being humoured and drawn back into the

'Gentleman's Club' atmosphere (Maddock and Parkin 1994). However, it seemed more consonant with my sense of what was happening that, in conducting these interviews in a way that was attempting to avoid a dichotomy between "what is personal and what is public" (Seidman 1991: 81), I was in fact opening up this topic to contemplation by male probation officers and striking a responsive chord.

The discussion with Pete covered a wide range of topics concerning changes in the probation service and his thoughts about his sense of identity as a probation officer. While he seemed grounded within the work setting, his responses incorporated comments about the implications of the demands of the job on his family life. He talked about his approach to being a probation officer as "bringing a personality to the job within the rules and regulations that the service has" and he stressed the sense of satisfaction that he obtained from his work, even though "it's hard to see things reduced to statistics". This sense of a shifting value base for the work of the probation service seemed troubling to Pete and he bemoaned the move away from a social work emphasis, particularly given his interest of working with clients with drug problems. In particular he linked his concerns about the shift in the focus of probation work with an interpretation of the type of masculine ethos that this seemed to be demanding:

> I don't see sergeant majors doing my job without actually having to speak
> to people about the ins and outs of heroin use and how it affects them... I
> think we will reinvent the wheel hopefully.

(Pete, generic community-based team, Area 1)

Within this context he re-stated his commitment to the job, but seemed ill at ease with the implications that the service was making ever greater demands on individual workers, largely accounted for by key performance indicators, increased administrative oversight, and the accompanying paperwork. This shift towards a more instrumental approach to probation tasks, alongside the ideological thrust towards

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'punishment in the community', left Pete musing in a rather dispirited way about the type of expectations that the job was now entailing. He stressed that he thought that "most people who are probation officers are very very committed to being probation officers and will walk the extra mile", but wondered what was entailed in being seen as a fully committed organisational member (Mills 1989). While I had come across these unsettled feelings before in discussions with some of the women probation officers, it was interesting to see these issues approached from a male perspective. Pete commented that

> my whinges really are not with the nature of the job, because I think you can still do it to a degree in the way that you want, it's about the volume of work and the quality that goes out of the window when the volume rises.

(Pete, generic community-based team, Area 1)

This sense of increasing pressures in the search for improvement in measurable outcomes allies closely with David Collinson and Jeff Hearn's comments concerning 'careerism', where "competition for career progress comes to be synonymous with conventional masculinity" but also makes "demands which are likely to be incompatible with domestic responsibilities" (Collinson and Hearn 1994: 15). This has a strong resonance with Pete's attempts to place himself as a 'family man':

> this 'business' between the potential conflict between home and office. I still don't think I've fully resolved that after doing this job for about four or five years now. I don't like to take work home, although sometimes I do. I feel tired in this job sometimes. I think overall in this country the employer is asking more and more of people in professional posts - I think it's not just probation. I try to strike that balance in life - that it's there to be enjoyed. It's not all about work though I think. But physically I do find the demands on my time quite..., you know, it's demanding I think to be a probation officer.

(Pete, generic community-based team, Area 1)

This uncertainty in his views concerning the inter-connectedness of his personal and professional sense of identity was a theme that ran throughout the interview with Pete. In particular his feelings seemed to have been stirred up by the most recent developments affecting the probation service, such as the recommendations of *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a), which in turn linked with organisational change and uncertainties of the gendered expectations of personnel. He referred to a recent job advertisement for maingrade officers in Area 1 where it had been stated that "applications will be particularly welcomed from male officers who are currently under-represented at this level in the organisation" (see gender breakdown of the organisational structure in Area 1 in Chapter 3). In responding to this unexplained statement that a readjustment in the gender balance was being sought he mused:

> I can't work this out... Is this what we call positive discrimination - if you were a woman would you want to apply for that? I can't see that it sits easily with an equal opportunities policy, but at the same time somebody somewhere seems to be saying that women are over-represented in this probation service at probation officer level. Is this a response to Michael Howard?... I don't know, I'm quite intrigued by that.

(Pete, generic community-based team, Area 1)

These developments appeared to be bringing to the surface for Pete (and indeed for other probation officers I interviewed in this area), an awareness of changing gender relations in the daily interactions within the service, raising questions and insecurities about the gendered order. At this time of change within the probation service Pete's responses indicated that he was becoming increasingly conscious of the "gender politics within masculinity" (Connell 1995: 37), connecting this with his concern to try to cling onto the value base of his social work training against the fast-changing ideological tide from central government. He referred back to the traditional 'care/control' dichotomy but concluded his comments by expressing his worries that the agency was increasingly

demanding a much more "conflictual" and bureaucratic approach from him in terms of his supervisory duties.

Summary

In considering the implications of these discourses concerning gender and gender relations with these male and female probation officers, these aspects can be seen not only as pervasive features of daily life within this organisation, but also as presenting potential problems in terms of "power, oppression, inequality, identity and self-doubt" (Hearn 1992: vii). These strands ran through my discussions with all three of these probation officers, with their reflections on the interface of their personal and professional self-concepts probing stereotypical gendered expectations, and which in turn emphasised the impact of the pace and extent of change on their perceptions of themselves as probation officers.

These issues have been explored within this section with probation officers who entered the service in the 1980s and early 1990s - a time of increasing government scrutiny and uncertainty about the future of the probation service, but nevertheless within the context of continuing recruitment of staff. However, by the mid-1990s the scenario had changed yet again, with the onslaught of change leading to the entrenchment of central oversight and direction over local working practices and organisational structures. Moreover, this situation was taking place against a background of a contraction in probation officer numbers and of threats to the future identity and role of the service. In considering the impact of these circumstances on the most recent recruits into the organisation, the views of the three first year officers I interviewed now come to the fore.

Maingrade Probation Officers in the 1990s

The most recent entrants to the service within this study talked to me about their reasons for wanting to join the probation service, and their responses now that they were working within the organisation when I attended a First Year Officers' Group meeting in Area 2 (see Appendix). Sarah and Jackie worked in the same office within this area, while Michael was based in a team some distance away. This was their regular monthly point of contact, which usually included several other new officers from the area. They had all trained on different courses, although the two women had been on placement together at a local probation office.

The timing of this meeting was opportune insofar as all three of these probation officers were coming up to the end of their confirmation period and were undergoing assessments carried out by their seniors as part of this process. This proved to be useful in terms of my interests as they were in reflective mood about their experiences and, as part of their formal evaluations, they had been considering whether they had achieved their professional goals within their first year of post-qualifying work. This requirement of 'demonstrating suitability' and of reaching a 'required standard' is contained within Appendix M of the 1984 Probation Rules, but it is not prescriptive in how these should be interpreted and carried out, leading to problems in terms of local variations in practice:

> The award of credits towards any qualification requires consistency and validity in assessment, adequate and known procedures and explicit criteria. At present, confirmation procedures in some areas may not meet all these standards and certainly on the evidence presented to us could not be shown to meet them. In most Areas they are probably adequate to ensure that officers who are confirmed in employment by Probation Committees meet locally acceptable standards and that

officers experiencing major difficulties will be identified, though not always offered appropriate help in overcoming those difficulties.

(Raynor, Roberts, Thomas and Vanstone 1994: 197)

The inference in this review that most probation service entrants are confirmed in post, with only a few appointees encountering any significant problems, was supported by the information collated within *The Dews Report*: of the 445 appointments of new probation officers in 1993, there were only 11 cases where confirmation was delayed or withheld (Home Office 1994a: 13). However, in spite an awareness of this relatively low 'failure' rate and indications that they were all 'on course', all three of these probation officers viewed this as an extremely stressful period. In particular the discussion in this meeting concerning their motivation to enter the probation service encapsulated some of their uncertainties about expectations. Sarah commented:

I think one of the things that took me by surprise which I hadn't expected - and maybe I was naive - I thought, okay, I've finished college, I'll start work and I can just take time to consolidate what I've learnt. But I realise that I'd fallen into a hornets' nest of political change and everything like that. And like, there's no breathing space because it's constant change.

(Sarah, 1st Year Officer's Group, Area 2)

Although Sarah had previously had some contact with staff within this probation area, she voiced a sense of disillusionment when her image of the organisation had been punctured in the early weeks of joining the service (Fineman and Gabriel 1996). Jackie followed on by outlining her experiences as a black woman, and suggested that uninformed or unsympathetic sources only saw a caricature of women probation officers as "flippy, flappy females, running around caring about men rather than disciplining these men". She went on to state that "I just look on it as the political climate" and in picking up on this strand spoke of her feelings about the findings and repercussions of *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a):

Initially it was a kind of anger because - I suppose - you feel kind of humiliated. Here we go again, you know, scapegoats, excuses etc. And then thinking, well, there's little I could personally do about it... I think I'm very challenging in a very gentle way, and I think I get a lot out of clients that way. But if Michael Howard, or whoever, wants to sit in an office somewhere and actually doesn't know what's happening, and wants to make stupid comments, then you know, that's for him. But I have to recognise the fact that they do have a lot of power and people can be influenced by what they hear them say. But I think with me and my clients and my colleagues, we have a completely different perspective on it.

(Jackie, 1st Year Officer's Group, Area 2)

Both of these women vocalised a sense of shock in becoming organisational members - as Sarah explained, "the first few months in our team were like hell on earth". Each of them described the ebb and flow of their reactions to the dissonance between the situations they had been expecting and what they actually found, expressing ambivalence about the way forward. In joining in with the conversation Michael aligned himself with the two women in voicing some frustration about adjusting to his new work situation, although he placed this within the context of concern about the lack of regular supervision from his senior probation officer. These views seemed to indicate the double-edged nature of the position they were all experiencing, with it being unclear what level of supervision (and support) they could anticipate from their line managers, and whether they should interpret the lack of contact as an implicit compliment that they were coping well. For her part Sarah summed up the regularity of supervision as "a very moveable feast!".

During this part of the discussion the responses of the three officers seemed to coalesce, cutting across gender, race and age, with each of them emphasising their feelings of discomfort in making the adjustment to becoming a 'probation officer'. However, when they moved on to talk more specifically about work within the court

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setting, differences began to emerge. In spite of also being a black probation officer Michael had not intervened when Jackie had vocalised her thoughts concerning racial issues from *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a) and he went on to present himself in a way that served to emphasise disparities, rather than similarities, with both of the female officers. In this respect Michael presented a very task-centred orientation and he came over as a competent young black executive, meeting ever-increasing demands and keeping an eye on detail. While he described his approach as a matter of personality, further consideration of this position indicates other dimensions: this response to the work situation accords with the 'smart macho' culture prevalent within the National Health Service and is epitomised by the 'new managerialism' of the probation service. As Su Maddock and Di Parkin point out from their research into gender cultures, within this particular type of setting "if you work hard and fast and can focus on narrow targets, your gender or ethnic origin is irrelevant" (Maddock and Parkin 1994: 36). However, while such an approach holds out the promise of meritocractic progression it also serves to underpin gendered differences on a structural level, particularly disadvantaging women who have childcare or other family responsibilities.

Notwithstanding these observations, the demands that the organisational approach was placing on all three of these probation officers were apparent: all of them found that they were taking work home, although their reactions to this situation again seemed to differ along gendered lines. Michael initially stated that "once I leave the office, that's it!", but then acknowledged the inevitability of undertaking some work at home. It was only after some further thought that he then added "if I take work home then I know I've got to do it". Given the very real difficulties presented by the organisational expectations I was not surprised to find the two women expressing much more ambivalence about establishing boundaries around their work. For instance, Sarah stated:

It worries me enormously that it could take over my life completely and I don't want it to. So I try to devise strategies for what I do at work. Even if it means spending more hours in the office so I don't have to take it home. But at the rate - I mean we've still got a fairly protected caseload, we're up to early 20s now on cases and stuff like that. And it's busy. I mean, I would say that I work hard and I'm still taking stuff home perhaps two evenings a week and working one evening late at the office. I don't really want to do that much. I certainly don't want to do more. So I've got to find a way of getting it done.

(Sarah, 1st Year Officer's Group, Area 2)

The situation seemed yet more complicated for Jackie who spoke of the difficulties she experienced in coping with the overlapping aspects of work and home: she placed importance on making dinner for her family every night, but in order to do so found she was working on in the evenings as she had come home 'early' from the office. She commented that she kept to this routine to maintain "a stable family life" but described her 'double day' working pattern (Reskin and Padavic 1994) in a rather apologetic way, implicitly contrasting it with Michael's more driven approach. It was interesting that for Jackie the train journey to work and back served as a transitional point in between these two areas of her life and she half-jokingly described herself going through a "metamorphosis" when travelling to work and then on the return trip back home again.

Summary

The comments from these first year officers can be seen as highlighting the 'sharp end' of the tensions brought about by the changes impacting on the probation service: all three expressed uncertainties about expectations in carrying out their professional roles as probation officers, with each of them identifying - albeit in different ways - the high levels of stress that they felt they were operating under.

However, in gendered terms Michael seemed to have transformed these pressures into a challenging opportunity for self-advancement in his chosen career, being prepared for the time being at least, to prioritise work demands above all other aspects of his life. Thus, any possible alliances of age (he and Sarah were both in their 20s), and of race (both he and Jackie identified themselves as black probation officers), were left undeveloped, with the interactions within the meeting being shaped along gendered lines, with only the women acknowledging the conflicts between the public and private aspects of their lives.

This review has concentrated so far on the responses from different cohorts of male and female staff at maingrade level within the service, indicating individual perceptions from within this layer of the organisation. However, the analyses from the earlier chapters pointed to other viewpoints from the management levels and the focus of this chapter now turns to consider the gendered positions and professional identities of some of the male and female probation service managers I interviewed when carrying out this research.

Becoming and Being a Manager Within the Probation Service

The changing organisational culture had been experienced firsthand by all of the senior and assistant chief probation officers I interviewed and I was interested to uncover their personal motivations in applying for promotion when they did and their observations of undertaking these roles. In terms of gender it again seemed important to interview and then analyse the responses of both men and women at these levels: the literature on management and organisations, as discussed within Chapter 2, emphasises the gendered implications of women moving into these positions, but in acknowledging

the shifting and interactional nature of these issues, it is also relevant to explore the masculinities inherent in the operating of the probation service and displayed in the discourses within the organisation.

The format of these interviews followed the same outline as those with maingrade probation officers and provided an opportunity to enquire into the personal and professional positioning of these managers and to investigate their perceptions of the gendered organisational structures and relationships. The material from these interviews again conveys a wide range of responses, countering taken-for-granted or stereotypical views of 'managers' and opens up a gendered view into the organisational culture of the probation service and into the public presentation of self (and private reflections on their positions) within these management roles.

Male Managers - The 'Primus Inter Pares' Legacy

The discussion within Chapter 1 highlighted the traditional promotion path within the service as resting on the demonstration of good practice at a range of probation duties at maingrade level over several years, prior to applying for an appointment at senior level. The authority of this form of leadership stemmed from the respect of colleagues - of being acknowledged to be the 'first among equals' (Haxby 1978) - and operated as standard practice throughout the period of expansion in the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s. However, as has been highlighted in the earlier chapters, the impact of change on the organisation and the demands being made on it in terms of accountability and operational competence, brought with them the need for senior probation officers to realign their professional roles and responsibilities to address the "process of formulating policy and setting objectives" (May 1991a: 107). In

this way senior probation officers have become managers of their teams, located in the middle of the organisational pyramid and sandwiched between the chief grades and maingrade officers.

It is perhaps not surprising that the legacy of the 'first among equals' style of leadership was evoked most clearly within my discussions with a male senior probation officer and a male assistant chief probation officer. Richard, the senior of the generic, community-based team within Area 1 (see Appendix), had qualified as a probation officer in 1974 and had had a range of experience at maingrade level: he had worked within two probation areas and had also undertaken a specialist post within a mental health setting for three years. This move had taken place at a point in his career when he had made several unsuccessful applications for seniorship within the probation service, and had provided an opportunity to extend his experience:

> I really wanted to get my head up and do something quite different. So, as within the probation world I wasn't going to have a change of role, I thought I'd have a change altogether... It had lots of opportunities for something quite different and something developmental.

(Richard, generic, community-based team, Area 1)

Yet again, the sense of maintaining a continuous career plan (as noted earlier with respect to the male maingrade probation officers), was strongly emphasised within this discussion. Richard seemed to view this change of role as an opportunity to extend his range of social work skills and to enhance his curriculum vitae in his efforts to gain promotion within the probation service. To this end he had negotiated with the chief probation officer of Area 1 that he could transfer back to probation after a period within this specialist post. On his return he had taken up a vacant maingrade position within a combined courts team and, having worked there for several months, he was given a temporary promotion ('acting-up') to cover for the senior who had retired unexpectedly. Richard had welcomed this opportunity, but pointed out tensions that had arisen as he

had jumped over colleagues within the team with more experience - as he put it, "I was anxious not to appear as a sort of upstart who had barely got into the team before I was asked to act up as senior".

The sense of this upwards 'drift' had been reinforced by the intervention of a male assistant chief probation officer who had acted as 'mentor' in facilitating this move, with Richard acknowledging:

> I think that the ACPO at the time asked me because he was aware that I wouldn't want to contemplate another round of maingrade jobs and would want to go for promotion again.

(Richard, generic, community-based team, Area 1)

Richard had subsequently applied for the permanent vacancy when it became available and was officially promoted to senior grade. In this way Richard epitomises an approach to (male) career development that is fast disappearing within the probation service: throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s the growth of the service came from the "bottom upwards" (Haxby 1978: 30), with increasing prospects of promotion into the hierarchical structure. For Richard, the sideways move into a specialist post had been a way of enhancing his promotion prospects (with the support of his probation superiors and a guarantee of a future position back in probation) at a time when he had perceived a discrepancy in terms of his career advancement between his 'actual' progress with his 'expected' progress (Goffee and Nicholson 1994: 83). The gendered framing of this position is striking in terms of the agency commitment to Richard's long-term professional development and the valuing of his work within a related setting, as contrasted with the fragmented career pattern and the discounting of accumulated practice skills as experienced by Lesley earlier in this chapter.

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This sense of recognising and meeting organisational norms in order to gain promotion was also displayed by John, the male assistant chief probation officer I interviewed within Area 1 (see Appendix). He was quite explicit about his 'upwards drift' within his original probation area:

> I had two or three jobs working differently in a city area and in rural areas, and also for a short time was a Crown Court Liaison Probation Officer - quite a short time. I then got promoted with the same area to senior probation officer... I think it was largely kind of..., if you'd done a minimum of five years that was a kind of unwritten standard I suppose. If you'd done about five years and were seen as an effective officer - irrespective of whether you had managerial skills - and if you were ambitious, you applied.

(John, assistant chief probation officer, Area 1)

It was interesting to note that although John presented this move in terms of meeting the criteria and as an almost 'natural' progression, he was in fact only appointed to senior grade on his third application for promotion. This would seem to indicate a more ambitious approach than his explanation implied, but does follow the pattern found by Felicity Collier in her research with regard to applications for senior management posts in that men were "more likely to have made repeated applications" (Collier 1994: 65). The spur to consider applying for the next step of the promotional ladder came after four years in the senior's post when he became aware that one of his (male) contemporaries from his training had become an assistant chief probation officer and found himself thinking "if he can do it, I can do it". Yet again he was not appointed on his first application for a vacancy at this grade, but obtained an assistant chief probation officer post within Area 1 with his second application.

In the discussion with John he mirrored within his own experience the changes that were impacting more widely on organisational structures within the probation service:

I think I would have said that in some ways I didn't find the move to ACPO that difficult, because I felt I was already a manager. But management then (in the late 1970s), was still largely about managing people skills. I would now say that, after some years' experience at ACPO level, there's an enormous difference between the way I performed the role and was expected to perform the role as SPO then, to the way I perform the (management) role and as it's perceived now - that's a very wide gulf. So I think, given the changes that have occurred there's been a pretty spectacular change from being a kind of supervisor, staff supervisor type SPO, to being a manager of tasks, resources, people, policies, strategies, all that.

(John, assistant chief probation officer, Area 1)

Both Richard and John acknowledged the shifting situation within probation in the 1990s that had fundamentally changed these traditional career routes (Goffee and Nicholson 1994), and meant that career progression was no longer operating in this way within the organisation. Indeed, the movement towards 'new managerialism' within the probation service entailed a much more openly competitive scenario, particularly with the prospect of higher management positions being filled by candidates with the required competencies from outside the organisation. In discussing the "hype" about being a manager, Richard cited the case of "the CPO who came out of the Navy". During the period of my research the example of the appointment of an ex-naval officer to the post of chief probation officer in West Glamorgan (see *The Guardian*, 18th October, 1995), almost seemed to be gaining the status of an urban myth. Wherever I went I heard it retold, with increasingly vague details and with added embellishments, but always bringing together the key elements of a man from the armed forces obtaining the post of chief probation officer without any background in probation. In this respect this development sent shock waves through the probation service, with the realisation that traditional organisational methods and structures really were under threat and that increasing centralised control was demanding, (and putting in place), public service managers with a "very different style of operating - go-getting, insurgent, and ruthless"

(Newman 1995a: 17). The gendered nature of these changes are multi-faceted and have wide-reaching implications for both men and women - for, as Judi Marshall suggests, "in some ways it could well be argued that the climate is colder for everyone" (Marshall 1995: 196).

Summary

The contrast between the progression of these two probation managers within the service in the recent past and their perceptions of the current situation throws into sharp relief the shifting expectations, uncertainties and tensions that are permeating the service and, in particular, impacting on those staff who are placed on the middle steps of the organisational pyramid. Indeed, within the probation service the relative positioning across the grades can now be seen as being typified by an increasingly competitive, instrumental ethos, driven by the need to meet centralised targets and to demonstrate efficiency.

This section focuses on the responses of two male managers, but again links their changing situations with the organisational structures and processes that involve both men and women, and points to gaps in considering the gendered inter-relationships across and within grades. At this point I therefore move on to look at the responses of several of the women probation officers I interviewed who had 'gone' for promotion and had moved up through the organisation. Within these discussions I had sought to enquire into their perceptions of the situation as they found it and to probe into their experiences of working as "travellers in a male world" (Marshall 1984).

Women Managers in the Probation Service

In turning the spotlight onto some of the women managers I interviewed in the course of this research (see Appendix), I am left with feelings of diversity rather than sameness, and with an impression that many different factors had influenced the choices they had made. In opening up this area the cautionary remarks made by Shirley Dex seem particularly apt:

> Women's attitudes are many and varied. The old stereotypes are clearly inappropriate, not just because women have changed over time in their attitudes towards work. There are considerable variations between women, not just by age and life-cycle, but according to their experience, education and prospects... We should not be tempted to think that childbirth is the only, or even the major effect on women's attitudes towards gender roles or employment.

(Dex 1988: 148)

In this respect I was struck by the disparate reasons and strategies adopted by these various women in deciding to apply for promotion. For example, in talking to Liz, the senior probation officer of the family court welfare team in Area 1, it seemed that the traditional 'time serving' model had served as the mechanism that had first brought up the possibility of seeking promotion, although she recollected that "I know that although the references I had acknowledged my potential, I don't recall actually being encouraged in that direction". It was only after a move at maingrade level to Area 1 (for personal reasons after the break-up of her marriage), that the question of seniority was again raised and she decided to apply for a vacant post at senior level. She had not been successful on her first application but she had received advice in terms of making a further application, including feedback that she should 'harness her energies' and 'work on her presentation'. The framing of these suggestions and the expectations of the organisation seemed more difficult to interpret, with Liz remembering that she had

off-loaded a lot of anger onto my assistant chief probation officer... I
think it was following an evaluation or something. He just came and sat
in my office, and made a point of giving me the kind of feedback that we
all need to get - which was that he thought I was doing a very good job.

(Liz, senior probation officer in the family court welfare team, Area 1)

The deciphering of these gendered messages within the organisational processes
seemed to have presented difficulties for Liz in following the traditional path towards
promotion. She had clearly welcomed the supportive comments from the assistant chief
probation officer that had taken place within "a very open and honest dialogue" and had
found them constructive and applicable to her situation. However, her uncertainty
about moving forward on a personal and professional level had proved more
problematic, with her experiences reinforcing her sense that she was being evaluated
within a different gendered framework to her male colleagues. In this respect she
echoed Clare Burton's observations that:

> Current practices do not wholly rest on individual merit or competence
> but on a range of perceptions, evaluations and decisions already based on
> a set of arrangements and understandings which provide women with
> less access to opportunities than men.

(Burton 1992: 194)

Liz had decided to persevere in attempting to gain promotion but with some
ambivalence, only completing the application form "at the eleventh hour" and then
omitting to confirm in writing that she would be attending the interview. She
commented that she felt she had responded in this way, partly "to really get the
adrenaline going" and, against keen competition, was "really thrilled that I got it". Her
first post at senior level had been as warden at a probation hostel - a position that she
viewed in gendered terms:

> I've often wondered how I would have managed the role differently had I
> been a male because I had a very strong sense of a kind of parental

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responsibility for the team. This was partly to do with the fact that both of my deputies at the time I was there were first year officers, so in a sense they needed nurturing.

(Liz, senior probation officer in the family court welfare team, Area 1)

In expanding on this sense of 'maternal caring' in fulfilling her responsibilities as a senior, Liz raised the difficulties she had experienced in letting go of worries about what was taking place when she was off-duty and of holding onto a distinction between work and private time. This was an issue that continued to concern her within her current position: she had wanted to transfer away from "the real heavy end of the criminal caseload" and saw the function of her present team as an opportunity "to be involved with the part of the operation where we were intervening at a much much earlier level - where hopefully you could effect some significant change for the better". However, she felt that the current changes impacting on the service were "too overwhelming to take on" and were demanding extra working hours that intruded into her personal life. She went on to refer to a high profile woman assistant chief probation officer who she viewed with some disquiet as a role model:

she works every minute of the day, you know, work, work, work, work... Does nothing but work. And I'm not prepared to do that, I've got a life outside work.

(Liz, senior probation officer in the family court welfare team, Area 1)

Given the concern expressed by this female senior probation officer about the price she perceived had to be paid for moving upwards in the organisation, it is interesting to compare her observations with the views of Joanna and Carol, the two assistant chief probation officers I interviewed within Area 3 (see Appendix). Their comments come from a joint interview I held at their Headquarters base, where each of them outlined their respective positions and then entered into a free-flowing discussion prompted by the points on my interview outline. While I have stressed the disparity of

the women I met with in the course of the research, the contrast between the presentation of these two women was particularly striking: Joanna came over in an open but rather intense way, stressing the feminist and political strands that underpinned her professional and personal life. As an example of her approach she commented that

> I'm not rude but I won't use words and phrases that feel uncomfortable to me. I won't compromise - there's a point beyond which I won't compromise. I mean sometimes you have to because of the sensitivity of a situation, but by and large that's the way I deal with it.

> (Joanna, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

Carol, on the other hand, voiced a more measured approach, indicating that she promoted the issue of 'women and management' in terms of women adding an "extra dimension" but said:

> now I am probably more self confident generally (than at the start of her career), so don't need to go around making so many statements about how I see myself because I would imagine people would see me as I want to present myself.

> (Carol, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

In talking about their entry into and progression within the probation service, each spoke of the support and encouragement they had endeavoured to give to each other, while acknowledging the differences in their styles and backgrounds. Joanna had qualified as a probation officer in 1974 and had worked for the probation service since then. She had initially applied for promotion after five years at maingrade level, and was successful on her second attempt two years later. She had then taken two periods of maternity leave, one while a 'field' SPO and one while working as a senior probation officer within a prison setting. She spoke of the discussions she had had with other women probation officers about the timing of promotion applications in the light of their personal situations and of the way this was interpreted by male manager colleagues. In talking about the period when her children were small (when she was

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working as a senior), she stressed that, while considering the possibility of further promotion, she had placed greater importance upon the regular working hours. She reported somewhat gleefully that

> The Chief kept saying to me, 'what are you doing in the prison?', and I'd say, 'playing with my babies!' He didn't understand that. 'Get out of that backwater!'

(Joanna, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

While it might seem that Joanna's career moves had been driven by the timing of her pregnancies and the ages of her children, in fact her situation was more complex than this. She and her partner had decided that he would remain at home as a 'house husband' but he had suffered from ill health necessitating periods of hospitalisation and she had then experienced problems in co-ordinating child-care arrangements:

> It was fine until somebody was ill. The childminder was ill, the child was ill, or you were ill, or whatever, and then the whole thing falls like a pack of cards. You've got all these arrangements, so and so's giving them a lift here, and taking them home here and you're kind of juggling it... And that's the stressful bit that the organisation could really help with. If you've got some way in which you could deal with things when the kids are ill, it would just make so much difference. That, and after school. The 3 to 5.30 bit - if people could help with that then life would be quite transformed I think. It's a real nightmare.

(Joanna, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

The stress of her immediate family situation, together with worries about her elderly mother who was becoming increasingly dependent on her, had led Joanna to reassess her professional position and she had just obtained a 'sideways' move to an assistant chief probation officer post in the adjacent geographical area where she lived. She was still considering the possibility of applying for a chief's post in due course but, as throughout her working life, she had placed family considerations over career progression:

It's a mixture of things. It's much more about deciding that I can't keep this pace up. I'm just going to die! I like the job, but it's at too great a cost at the moment, it's too much and I want to have more control over my working life. I think that I can... Though I am ambitious, I do want to go as far as I can go, I don't under-estimate that, but not at such a cost that I kind of fall apart.

(Joanna, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

In terms of 'career success' Joanna could be seen as having progressed at a rate that had enabled her to have two children and to continue move up through the ranks of the probation service. However, while she seemed to fit the picture of a high-powered women, supported by a 'new man' (Davidson and Cooper 1992), the reality turned out to be more complicated and stressful. Most of all, in endeavouring to be a 'full' organisational member in a position of some power, Joanna was still finding that she was faced by problems for which she was having to find individualised solutions in her attempt to retain her professional standing as a competent organisational manager (French 1995).

Throughout our discussion Joanna and Carol acknowledged similarities in their positions but also pointed to differences: Carol had had two parts to her career, with a 'career break' in the middle while her children were small. She had initially worked in hospital management and had gained a professional qualification within that setting. She had intended to return to work as her children became older and had undertaken some voluntary work for the probation service when they were young. This experience had led her to reconsider her options when she decided to restart her career but, unlike Joanna, (and in fact all of the other women I interviewed), she was clear from the outset that she wanted to pursue a career in probation management:

So right from the start, during training and when I was first employed by the service, I wasn't making any secret of the fact that I saw my future in management... It was seen as a very suspect thing to be saying, even

though I could explain that I'd previously had management experience, which I though made sense of it all. But not really, no. So I hit that. And sadly the criticism was equally, I guess, from men and women.

(Carol, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

In this respect Carol had adopted what was perceived to be a 'masculine' approach to career progression; she had anticipated mixed reactions from men within the organisation as she was well aware that in endeavouring to move up the organisational pyramid "the process entails squeezing someone else out" (Schrank 1994: 36). However, she had not expected the disapprobation of other women and this response, which had intensified as she had progressed through the organisation, had come as something of a shock to her.

Carol had entered the probation service in 1983 as a maingrade officer in Area 3 and, with the support of the then (male) chief probation officer, she had undertaken a number of different positions: "within four years I had four different postings, four different assignments within the service, in very different aspects, different specialisms". Yet again Carol had transgressed a traditional organisational norm - she acknowledged that this continuous movement had been beneficial to her, but this 'department hopping' had tapped into the "pursuit of a 'career ideal' rather than to the development of a 'service ideal'" (Lupton 1992: 99). This pattern had continued at senior level as well, with three moves within in a similar period of time, prior to her successful application for her current job.

Given this single-minded approach to her career progression I enquired into the way Carol perceived the work/home split within her life. Carol acknowledged the support she had received from her husband who she described as "not ambitious careerwise" and went on to comment that he was "happy to 'mark time' as it were while I developed my career - without that level of support I couldn't have done it".

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Nevertheless, as in Joanna's case, Carol's situation was more complex than it first appeared: after she had restarted her career her father had died and her dependent mother had lived with the family for three years.

In view of the changing circumstances it was only at the point now that she and her husband were on their own without other family responsibilities, that she was looking to her next move to enhance her career profile and to be in a position to realise her aim of applying for a chief probation officer post. However, even given her determined push towards progression within the service, Carol acknowledged that she potentially faced two other aspects of discrimination: the possibility of being thought too old, and the charge that her experience was too parochial as she had remained within Area 3 throughout this period. (Home Office approval for applications to Chief Probation Officer level from internal candidates demands experience in more than one probation area). Having addressed head-on the requirements of the 'new managerialism' within the service, she might now have to traverse the restrictions imposed by "the institutionalised barriers and organisational inertia that slow down any movement toward equality" (Reskin and Ross 1995: 129).

The discussion with Carol added a further dimension to the gendered picture of what is taking place within the probation service, indicating that it is possible for a woman to adopt a career-oriented approach that was traditionally viewed as 'male'. In pointing to the contrast between Carol's approach to her career and those of many of the other probation officers I interviewed, the shifting situation within the probation service is illustrated and the gendered implications are brought to the fore. However, it is important to view the complexities and complications of her position and not to stereotype her as a 'token man' (Bagilhole 1994: 177); it is not my intention to pigeonhole Carol as an exemplar of the emergent 'new manager' with the organisation,

nor should the investigation into the factors influencing her response overlook "the very real struggle for personal dignity, autonomy, and recognition that often lie behind these patterns of behavior" (Ferguson 1984: 101).

Both Carol and Joanna had decided to pursue their careers upwards within the probation service and it is conceivable that at some point in the future they may find themselves in direct competition over a chief probation officer vacancy. At this point in time though they stressed the support they could offer to each other, with Joanna pointing to the reciprocal help they had recently given: "we've both been helping each other because we'd each got knowledge about areas that the other needed". This supportive relationship seemed to be taking advantage of their positions as 'tokens' within the organisation (Kanter 1977: 238), drawing constructively on their positioning within the hierarchy and enhancing for their mutual benefit their shared, if differently portrayed, perceptions of being women at management level in the probation service.

Summary

The explorations within this section of the chapter indicate the wider structural issues, inter-relationships and personal factors that were impacting on all of these women's lifestyles and decisions about their career progression, particularly as they moved upwards into the male-dominated hierarchy of the probation service. For Liz there had been a trade-off in following through her aspirations for promotion, with her enthusiasm for her job being tempered by the restrictions she felt that work pressures were imposing on other areas of her life and the uncertainties she seemed to be feeling about the way forward in her professional career. In gendered terms these responses seemed to relate more to the implications and demands of the 'new managerial' style within the organisation rather than a traditional male/female divide: Liz's portrayal of

her situation contrasted markedly with the more upbeat ambitions of Carol and Joanna, and had more resonance with the reactions from Richard and John, both of whom acknowledged that the changing scenario had closed down their options in terms of career advancement within probation.

In reflecting on these various situations the potential divisiveness for many women (and indeed for some men) in trying to gain promotion to management level, stands out in sharp relief: while supporting each other, Carol and Joanna's commitment to mentoring and coaching other women within their area was limited, operating on an informal, ad hoc basis. Although they voiced a commitment to increase the awareness of women's needs (for both workers and clients) within the service as a matter of policy, Joanna pointed to the problems of developing and integrating this approach any further because of "being spread so thin". Carol also acknowledged that their actions were of necessity limited to individual contact and were not impacting in a way that would bring about transformative organisational change (Davidson and Cooper 1992). She commented rather half-heartedly:

> It would be nice to be able to devote more time to it, but at the very least
> I think I have tried to have conversations...

> (Carol, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

It is with these limitations in mind that I now turn to consider the position of a woman (ex) senior probation officer who made different choices in furthering her career. Unlike all of the respondents within the previous sections she had questioned the traditional career path and, while remaining ambitious to tackle future professional challenges and wishing to remain involved with the probation service, she had decided to step off the career ladder within the organisation itself.

<u>A Different Career Path - Opting Out of Probation Management</u>

The final part of this chapter focuses on the position of Sue, the convenor of the First Year Officers' Group within Area 2 - a woman who had previously been employed as a senior probation officer within another probation area, but who now worked on a freelance training basis for four local probation areas, as well as for other public service organisations. She presented as a capable, resourceful woman and she too voiced the ambition and drive that ran through the discussion with Joanna and Carol. However, unlike these two assistant chief probation officers, Sue had put her energies into developing a career path that side-stepped the hierarchical promotion ladder within the service, grasping hold of the opportunities offered by the emerging enterprise culture in terms of addressing specific training needs. In following up her suggestion to meet with me on an individual basis, in addition to the group setting, I was able to question her about her reasons for taking this career path and her perceptions about the changing scenario within the organisation. In this respect I was particularly interested to explore what had motivated Sue to re-negotiate her professional role and responsibilities vis-à-vis the area structures and her views about her organisational positioning within these contacts.

When outlining her situation Sue described herself as a person who liked "getting in there, when there was kind of chaos or whatever, sorting it out, helping people to move on, and then having got them moving, I was ready to go on to something else". She had gradually come to the realisation over a period of two or three years that she was dissatisfied at senior level within the service, but stated that "I knew I could not go on to be an assistant chief", emphasising the importance to her of being able to exercise autonomy in carrying out her professional responsibilities and duties (Dominelli 1996). There was some irony in the situation that although she had 'bought

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into' the opportunities presented by the 'new managerialist' approach within the probation service, (and indeed within the health service where she also carried out some consultancy work), she was operating from the outside in responding to the openings provided by these internal changing organisational cultures.

For Sue, the key to her approach was the range of skills she could offer to the various probation services and she emphasised the hard work and targeting that she had put into establishing her business. In response to my questioning she rejected any 'gender issues' in her situation, stressing the potential as she saw it for both men and women in adopting such an entrepreneurial approach. In taking this 'gender blind' stance (Parkin and Maddock 1995: 75) she distanced herself from the problems of the work/home interface mentioned by so many of the other female (and some male) respondents, and stated in a rather disingenuous way that

> I think what's happening to a lot of women is that they believe that they have to play the male game and I can't be doing with that. I can't be doing with it in men, and therefore I really can't be doing with it in women.

(Sue, freelance trainer, Area 2)

This rather detached attitude sat somewhat strangely alongside her defence of the traditional 'caring' background of probation values and practice. In observing that she was not sure that the "right sort of people" would now be coming into the service she commented that "the service, our probation service, has always been there to understand, to get alongside where people are". Notwithstanding her repositioning of herself as a professional 'consultant' it was striking that Sue continued to identify herself as part of the probation service and she spoke passionately about:

the values that brought people into the service. I stress their ability to look and see where they can still work on that kind of value base.

(Sue, freelance trainer, Area 2)

These comments point to an inherent paradox within the complex picture of the changing cultures within the probation service: on one hand, Sue in her role as a trainer, was upholding the importance of the 'traditional' values underpinning the personal and professional identities and work styles of probation officers, while on the other hand she had embraced a style of enterprise culture that demands a sense of self characterised by

autonomy, responsibility, initiative, self-reliance, independence, a willingness to take risks, to 'go for it', see opportunities, and take responsibility for one's own actions.

(Cannan 1994-95: 7)

<u>Summary</u>

This complex re-mixing of personal and organisational values and the emphasis on competency-based professional skills to meet the changing needs within the service seemed the crux of much of the uncertainty and stress experienced by many of the (male and female) probation managers that I interviewed. For her part Sue had side-stepped the internal hierarchical structures of the service, negotiating a role for herself on a individualised contractual basis, but one which lacked security of tenure and which had an ill-defined status. Given the prospect of encroaching privatisation and the requirement to develop partnerships with voluntary agencies, this is a switch that seems an ever-increasing possibility for both managers and maingrade probation officers working within many of the settings I visited: in particular, community service and the

family court welfare system were commonly cited as parts of the agency waiting to be 'hived off'. Within this changing situation Sue's response illustrates the potential repositioning and re-negotiation of roles and tasks from within and outside the organisation, with wide-ranging repercussions according to the differential power bases affecting outcomes in different parts of the service (Roos and Jones 1995). Nevertheless, for those working within the mainstream of the organisation the perception of the current situation is of an organisational culture that is "fluid, dynamic and fragmented" (Newman 1995a: 26), and which faces an uncertain future.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on the personal and professional identities of maingrade probation officers and managers within (and, for Sue, outside) the service and investigated the gendered implications of their positions. By avoiding a dichotomy between the public and the private, it has been possible to explore organisational experiences and individual perceptions of the probation officers from a perspective that encompasses the broader social picture within which they operate (Mills and Murgatroyd 1991).

In drawing on interviews with both men and women probation officers the multifaceted gendered structures and relationships within the organisation have been opened up to view, highlighting the interweaving of issues that on the surface appear unconnected: the responses from the different cohorts of maingrade probation officers illustrate the ramifications of change throughout the service, with the focus on gender extending an understanding of the tensions and challenges in the (re)alignment of expectations on personal and professional levels within the organisation. These

accounts point to the impact at grassroots level of the changing organisational demands, giving insight into professional self-concepts and individual responses in dealing with the work/home interface. While difficulties were acknowledged and verbalised most openly by the women probation officers, more nuanced concerns regarding the ideological push towards a (male) stereotype of a maingrade officer arose within interviews with both male and female staff.

All of the managers I interviewed had moved up through the service and the responses presented within this chapter bring to view their perceptions of the interaction between changing professional demands and gendered issues. The demise of the traditional 'benevolent patriarchy' within the hierarchical framework and the impact of the move towards a more competitive, instrumental ethos at management level within the service is traced through the experiences of both the male and female managers. Looking back at the 'upwards drift' into management prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, the process underpinning the entrenchment of the male gender order within the organisation is graphically illustrated, with the gendered implications of this practice being revealed in the contrasting viewpoints from the female managers. While the competency based approach of the 1990s appears to offer a more 'level playing field' for women, the experiences of Joanna and Carol point to the complexities involved in any re-adjustment to the gendered organisational structures. Indeed, in line with the reframed rationale of the service to "confront, control and monitor" (Worrall 1997: 63), the profile for probation management can be seen as putting in place a new type of dominance based on the male model of a manager, focused on meeting performance targets and unencumbered by extraneous family responsibilities (Halford, Savage and Witz 1997). This shift is complicated still further by the increasing permeability of the organisational boundaries, with openings for non-probation trained managers with the

requisite skills to gain entry, and the potential for experienced staff such as Sue to operate from outside the agency on an entrepreneurial basis.

The relentless pace of change reverberates across the various sections in this chapter through a gendered perspective that has looked primarily at the individual situations of the probation officers. The next chapter moves on to extend this analysis by considering issues of gender from a viewpoint that encompasses the dynamic interactions and wider organisational structures experienced by the male and female probation officers. This shifts the focus to take account of these gendered tensions within some of the different environments encountered by the probation officers in the course of their work within this part of the criminal justice system.

Chapter 5

Investigating Gendered Organisational Issues

Women's and men's relative positions of interpersonal power are reinforced at home by women's and men's relative positions in the workplace and are reinforced in the workplace by their relative positions at home.

(Colwill 1995: 52)

Organisations are not only purveyors of power; power is also distributed throughout and within them, through their own internal structures, hierarchies, goals and ideologies. Organisations express, maintain, reinforce and supplement these power relations.

(Hearn and Parkin 1987: 62)

Introduction

This chapter continues to focus on the accounts of the male and female probation officers interviewed for this research, but shifts in perspective to consider aspects relating to gendered organisational processes and relationships, probing into the expectations and assumptions that underlie day-to-day practices in carrying out the role of probation officer. This investigation adopts an approach that looks not only at interactions within the service itself, but also draws back to consider some of the other settings probation officers operate within as part of the wider criminal justice system. In this way this chapter links with, and builds on, the exploration of the individual professional backgrounds and personal situations of the probation officers within

Chapter 4, extending the investigation of gendered issues against the scenario of change, increased oversight from central government, and continuing uncertainty over the future of the probation service.

This perspective enables the experiences of probation officers as organisational members to be explored: the first part of the chapter reflects on the reactions expressed by the probation officers to an annual conference within Area 2, a gathering that brought to the fore the inter-connections of issues of power and gender for many of the respondents. These aspects are opened up to further inspection through consideration of formal equal opportunities policies within the local areas, in terms of the impact of their implementation, and as mediated through the work/home interface. The situations of some of the female probation officers are then investigated in more depth, with instances of 'status levelling' illustrating difficulties for women at different levels of the service, thereby providing further insights into the gendered social relations within these organisational settings.

The second part of the chapter moves on to locate these gendered concerns within two case studies, placing the exploration of the structures, processes and inter-relationships within these different working environments. The comparison of two probation team settings within the first case study investigates the embeddedness of gender in terms of working practices and office relations within the probation service itself. In contrast, the second case study focuses on probation officers inside prisons, and their accounts of what it is to be a probation officer within these various institutional settings. The decision to include this particular element of probation for this case study draws on Foucault's critique of the penal system as

the form in which power is most obviously seen as power... Prison is the only place where power is manifested in its naked state, in its most excessive form, and where it is justified as moral force... What is fascinating about prisons is that, for once, power doesn't hide or mask itself; it reveals itself as tyranny pursued into the tiniest details.

(Foucault 1996: 77)

The starkness of power within these contexts can be thus seen as throwing into sharp relief issues relating to negotiation of the gender order within these institutions. This in turn offers the opportunity to examine in a particularly penetrating way the gendered personal and professional identities of the probation officers within these organisational situations. In this respect the reports of these prison probation officers provide a critical case that sharpens up the insights into the gendered culture of the probation service, both internally and in its wider context. At this point however, I commence the exploration firmly located within the organisation, with probation officers looking inwards at themselves and at the probation service.

Gendered Organisational Experiences

One of my periods of contact with the generic community-based team in Area 2 (see Appendix) coincided with an annual conference of all staff within this local probation service and, while I did not attend this meeting, I was struck by the reverberations that emanated from the staff who had been there. Concern was expressed about the 'invisibility' and marginalisation of the probation officers: the annual conference had drawn personnel from across Area 2, including clerical and administrative staff, and unqualified workers from specialist parts of the service such as community service and a probation hostel. These feelings were illustrated in the

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response from William (maingrade officer within the generic community-based team), during my interview with him:

> The one criticism I have of recent staff day conferences is that they're for all staff. Now, I'm not saying that's a bad thing, that there shouldn't be a forum where all staff could meet, but the last staff conference we had about 250 people there I should think. We split into groups and you find yourself as a probation officer in a minority. You'd be in a group of seven and there could be only two probation officers - you've got CS (community service) workers, you've got information and technology people, housing and accommodation people, secretaries, all these other people - and you find yourself in a minority on what you think is *your* day.

<div align="center">(William, generic community-based team, Area 2)</div>

These expressions can be seen as stemming from anxiety relating to the blurring of status between the 'professional' probation officers and other staff within the organisation, with the resultant disquiet on the part of qualified probation officers about the maintenance of their position within the occupational structure (Roach Anleu 1992). In this respect William was highlighting his experience of both the shifting nature of the organisational set-up, and the resulting status confusion for probation officers vis-à-vis the more clearly defined competences of the now majority of other employees within the area (May 1991a).

A further dimension to the more informal discussions with the probation officers in this team concerning the conference centred on the gendered undertones: a strong impression had been made by the all-male higher management team sitting together on the platform. In particular, humorous but disparaging comments were made about the short hair cuts and smart suits - a form of presentation and style that was seen to be in tune with the 'tough line' official rhetoric in respect of the probation service. In terms of the gender distribution in the organisational structure, the maleness of the management team (the chief and assistant chief probation officers) emphasised the relative

positioning of men holding posts at the upper echelons of the organisational pyramid, in this case being physically - and symbolically - placed above the other staff members.

When discussing the gender structure of Area 2 with William (see outline in Chapter 3), he commented on the differentiation between the dominance of men within the head office management hierarchy, as contrasted with the preponderance of women working in the local offices. He explained that in the present circumstances, with a vacancy arising from the internal transfer of a male colleague, he was the only male probation officer in the team - a situation that he had experienced in other Area 2 teams in the past. He cited, as an example, his position several years previously:

> I can remember when ... (a female senior probation officer) was the senior, and admittedly there was a vacancy at the time, but going for the Christmas lunch I was the only male out of about 15 people, probation officers and secretaries.

(William, generic community-based team, Area 2)

For William this singularity seemed to enhance his position as a valued male colleague within the team and, as discussed in the previous chapter, his status was positively reinforced by his position vis-à-vis the male managers. However, for the women probation officers within Area 2 this gendered distribution of staff brought to attention the ambiguity of their positions within the organisation, with a particular pressure point arising for women senior probation officers, sandwiched between the all-male higher management and the predominantly female staff groupings at local level. Concern about these implications came to the fore during my discussion with Rebecca, one of the probation officers in the generic, community-based team (see Appendix). She expressed the view that she felt that their senior probation officer Jane tended to stand as a 'buffer' between the (mainly female) maingrade staff and the male management team at Headquarters:

That's not a role I think she should be in, but she is because it's something about working in depth that she supports but they don't. But there was thinking on my part, and on Nancy's as well, that there was a bit of a conspiracy about shifting people out, getting people out if they don't want to be doing work in that way.

(Rebecca, generic community-based team, Area 2)

Jane mentioned these concerns in my one-to-one discussion with her, in the context of her uneasiness about the quantification of caseload responsibilities, used to inform management decision-making regarding the staffing resources across the area. She then went on to comment that she saw herself as "ensuring that they're protected to a certain extent from some of the things that are going on now". This sense of 'parental care' of the team members contains some of the same overtones as expressed by Liz (the senior of the family court welfare team in Area 1) in Chapter 4, but within this context draws attention to the gendered complexities in responding to the external pressures coming from both the Home Office and area management, with respect to the explicit scrutiny of workload allocation and assessment in terms of measurable outcomes.

An overview of these responses indicates the interplay of gender and professional autonomy and discretion, echoed to varying degrees by the other probation officers within this team in Area 2, as well as reverberating through interviews in the other areas, in particular with women probation officers. In this respect it seemed that the embodiment of the gendered staff composition of Area 2 at the annual conference had crystallised for these probation officers an awareness of the underlying discourses concerning issues of power and gender as they impacted on working environments and practices. It is to address this interaction between the gendered organisational structures and processes, and the individuals working within the service, that I now look at aspects of equal opportunities in formal organisational policies, and review their

impact on the probation officers at different levels, and in different settings, within the service.

Equal Opportunities

The range of equal opportunity policy statements that I obtained from local probation services in the early stages of my research had alerted me to a potential gap between policy and practice (see pages 95-99 in Chapter 3), that was confirmed during some of the one-to-one interviews and in informal discussions. During these conversations many of the women probation officers pointed to difficulties in holding onto the fine line between acknowledging their femaleness, but avoiding the pitfalls of being seen to merit or be demanding special treatment. Ironically the development of equal opportunities policies within the probation service seemed to have aggravated, rather than relieved many of these difficulties, with several of the women commenting on the superficiality rather than substance of change. Within this context Nancy in Area 2 (see Appendix) remarked:

> I have always felt that as a woman I would be discriminated against in essentially what is a man's world... I think what is happening and what I see happening around me is that, whereas before you knew you were discriminated against and you just sort of put up with it and worked round it - now you are being discriminated against, although they're telling you that you're not, and it just makes you twice as angry really. I think to prove that you are being discriminated against is a well nigh impossible task. To prove that you're not discriminating is the easiest thing in the world and I just feel it is a token gesture. And in fact I think it's a dangerous one because I think people in power can use equal opps. to demonstrate that they're taking a particular line of action because of equal opportunities but in fact manipulating the situation for quite their own needs or benefits.

(Nancy, generic community-based team, Area 2)

This interpretation tallies very closely with the observations made by Su Maddock and Di Parkin regarding some public sector organisations where lip service is paid to equal opportunities: monitoring and 'objective' assessments convey a 'broad brush' picture of effective policy implementation and practice, but women nevertheless experience situations where they come across obstacles and lack of change at an individual level (Maddock and Parkin 1994). In this respect the Equal Opportunities Statement and the accompanying Code of Practice within Area 2 appeared comprehensive, covering six key areas (recruitment and staffing; training; disablement; caring responsibilities; service delivery to clients; and monitoring and review). However, these detailed documents stressed legal requirements and procedures underpinned by a formal review process, rather than setting in place a proactive move towards social change - an approach that seemed to back up Nancy's reservations about the potential for cultural transformation in this area.

These responses were also mirrored by Linda, one of the female assistant chief probation officers in Area 1, in my interview with her (see Appendix). She commented on the lengthy bureaucratic process of drawing up the equal opportunities policy document at local level and the difficulties in continuing to maintain a sense of momentum:

> We're just starting on actually looking at the strategy, it's taken a couple of years to get the policy through... I think there's been a degree of frustration - I can certainly identify with that... because the policy felt as if it was just lying on the shelf and nobody was doing anything about it... It's felt like an incredible journey to get us as far as getting the policy adopted. So really there's no infrastructure for its implementation at the moment and that's what again I'm in involved in helping with.

(Linda, assistant chief probation officer, Area 1)

This concern about the disparity between policy and implementation in terms of gender equality was a theme that was echoed in many of my discussions. Women at

management and maingrade levels commented on the impasse they felt had come about, with progress being made in procedural terms but with passive indifference stalling any meaningful progress. For instance, Alison who was a member of the Equal Opportunities working party in Area 1, spoke during our one-to-one discussion about her feelings that formal procedures were perceived as being an inappropriate means of dealing with most difficulties. She considered that "people are looking for an in-between stage if problems arise - they do not want to start grievance procedures" (Alison, prison probation officer, Area 1- see Appendix).

These issues were talked about most explicitly by the female respondents and come to the fore as being of particular significance for women within this section. However, in probing further into this area of organisational life and its wider implications, I move on at this point to explore and contrast the viewpoints of both male and female probation officers, in terms of their experiences of the interface between work and home.

The Work/Home Divide

The complexities of the gendered organisational relations and the apparent dissonance between equal opportunities policy and practice led me to increasingly question the situation as I found it during the course of this research. While there was an official commitment to a non-sexist culture within the probation service and the operation of 'politically correct' language within the office settings, the aspects raised earlier in this chapter, and within Chapters 3 and 4, led me to look for more subtle undercurrents. In addition, I began to puzzle over my own feelings of ambivalence

towards the espousals of support voiced by some of the male respondents for equal opportunities within the service, given my fundamental allegiance to such practices.

Within this context the underlying tensions seemed most apparent in the differential management of the work/home interface by the men and women probation officers, with lifestyle patterns seeming to sustain 'traditional' male/female roles and responses. For example, in the interview with Mark, the senior probation officer in the Qualifying Training Unit in Area 1 (see Appendix), he stated his commitment to developing gender-awareness within operational practice guidelines, and of including this element within the assessment process. In this respect he spoke of "multiple perspectives" and of "bundles of values", and of focusing on "practical issues rather than political correctness" (Mark, senior probation officer, Qualifying Training Unit, Area 1). However, in contrast to the apparently progressive input underpinning his work, his response to my questioning came over in a rather detached, cerebral way, conveying a strong sense of 'going through the motions', rather than any personal commitment to addressing embedded cultural attitudes and behaviours. He then went on to link this with his personal stance on the work/home split by stressing that he did not take coffee or lunch breaks, in order to 'free up' more time to spend with his family - an apparently laudable aim that nevertheless still prioritised work over 'spare' time, and conveyed an unremittingly driven, 'macho' approach to the working day.

In this respect it appears that the equal opportunities agenda within the probation service is being mediated through these day-to-day routines and responses, that in turn encompass a gendered divide upheld by the male/female distribution across the hierarchy. These observations link with the discussion in the previous chapter regarding the permeability of boundaries between work and home, but are extended here to consider the impact of organisational assumptions and practices on these aspects: it

seems that while some of the male probation officers, such as Mark (and Pete in Chapter 4), were verbalising an awareness of the need to (re)address the work/home balance, this was coming from a different 'starting point' from the lived realities experienced by many of the women probation officers, particularly those with family responsibilities. In this way the normative pressure of having to work long hours within the office - the 'jacket on the back of the chair syndrome' (Itzin 1995) - reinforces a daily schedule that emphasises the primacy of work over all other areas of life. Moreover, within the current organisational ethos stressing the imperative necessity of meeting Home Office targets and ever-shortening deadlines, this need to respond - and be seen to respond - to the challenges at work would seem to militate against any radical change to a more flexible work schedule in the foreseeable future.

In contrast to the pragmatism of Mark's response, Rebecca (maingrade officer, generic, community-based team, Area 2 - see Appendix) reacted in an emotional way when talking about the conflicts she had experienced in trying to balance organisational demands and family responsibilities. She spoke of her enduring memory of the difficulties she had faced early on in her career, in terms of making practical arrangements to maintain the smooth-running of the household, and of her concern to ensure the psychological stability of her children in the light of her changed situation. In commenting on the long-term strain this situation had imposed on her marital relationship, she vividly re-lived her experiences when she first started in probation:

> The pressures were great. I feel I had to deprive them [her children] of a lot because the training was so intensive, it was hard work, and looking back I don't think my needs were considered [by the training institution]. I don't think they [her defined needs] were as the parent who took the main responsibility for the children - my husband didn't... So it was a struggle really. I remember a huge anxiety about dropping the children off.

(Rebecca, generic community-based team, Area 2)

While Rebecca had no regrets about pursuing her professional ambitions, the tensions surrounding the demands of work, set against the traditional expectations of her role as a wife and mother, had remained unresolved:

> It (working for the probation service) does demand a great deal I think of individuals. People give different degrees of themselves... but if your partner isn't understanding I think it pulls away from lots of things. The children are fine - that was the one good thing about the children being the age they were, they grew up with it. So they don't have any problem, but my husband absolutely.

(Rebecca, generic community-based team, Area 2)

The structural and inter-personal complications of parental roles were demonstrated from a different perspective, in respect of the family situation described by Sam, a maingrade officer in the family court welfare team in Area 1 (see Appendix). He and his wife had both undergone social work training, but whereas he had worked full-time for the probation service since then, she had undertaken temporary work within a social services department. She had then been 'lucky' to transfer to a permanent contract within that setting that enabled her to take time off during the school holidays to look after their children. Sam expanded on this arrangement:

> Our boys are 11 and 14 now so it's slightly less important than it was, but it's still wonderful that she gets the school holidays. Years ago she used to talk about when her earning potential became the same as mine, i.e. when we both hit the top of the salary grades, that we could swop, but she seems to have forgotten that!

(Sam, family court welfare team, Area 1)

The personal ambivalences (and indeed the entrenched difficulties imposed by the lack of openings), in bringing about change are clearly illustrated in Sam's comments, demonstrating the gap between progressive equal opportunities attitudes and actual behaviour. Although there was ostensibly a wish on his part to pursue a dual-career, dual-parent family lifestyle, this had depended upon the flexibility that had been

negotiated by his wife, that had in turn placed her as the primary carer for the children. This observation is not to deny Sam's commitment and wish to spend time with his children - in this respect he too was hindered by stereotypical assumptions about the work/home divide and family responsibilities.

The responses within this section report on the experiences of some of the men and women probation officers in their efforts to manoeuvre the work/home divide, pointing to impediments arising from organisational structures and expectations, and illustrating some of the strategies adopted to meet the demands from all sides. These accounts give some insight into the inter-meshing (or not) of work and outside life and into the way that institutional practices conflict with the actual realities of these situations (Hewitt 1993). This draws attention to frictions and compromises in individual situations but, while acknowledging different male/female perspectives, moves away from a distinct gender split. However, this is not to overlook the disparate effects of the gendered processes within the organisation (Acker 1991) and I therefore turn to consider the area of 'status levelling', as an example of the 'sharp end' of working life as experienced by women probation officers.

'Status Levelling'

It seemed that the impact of the male hierarchical order, that had been so evident at the annual conference in Area 2, had served as a catalyst to bring issues relating to gender to attention within this setting, but within all of the areas a more generalised awareness of the gendered organisational structuring and processes was also apparent. Further exploration of these aspects in discussions with women probation officers indicated the operation of 'status levelling' - of women in the higher grades being allied with the more usual female roles on the lower rungs of the organisation

(Kanter 1977). Many of these women spoke of their endeavours to develop a professional identity and self-presentation within environments that were often characterised as 'male' settings, internally in meetings with higher management, and externally in court settings, within penal institutions, and in formal contacts with other organisations. In this respect they were 'walking the high wire', attempting to maintain a precarious balance between being concurrently 'feminine enough' and 'businesslike enough' (Sheppard 1989, 1992). These were themes that ran throughout the interviews, usually as an undercurrent, but sometimes surfacing with specific examples of situations where these issues had come to the fore.

In view of the stereotypical dichotomy between the presentation of 'softer' female characteristics and 'harder' male organisational characteristics, it was perhaps not surprising that these issues came most starkly into view in my discussions with the two women assistant chiefs in Area 3 (see Appendix). Joanna and Carol both functioned at a level of management where women were often in the minority, although they each stressed that it was unusual for them to be the only woman in inter-agency meetings. Carol went on to talk about problems she experienced in liaising with a "very male dominated senior management team within the county council framework" (Carol, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3), which she linked to the traditional Conservative political background of Area 3. They also commented that they had sometimes felt patronised and ran through a series of anecdotes of being mistaken for a secretary, and of times when they had been expected to organise the refreshments. They reported these instances in a good-humoured way, but Carol then went on to describe a more significant experience soon after her promotion to assistant chief probation officer level:

> The most extreme example which I still recall, was with one chief officer within the County Council, which was so extreme that it threw me for the first few weeks. He was talking to my boss, to our chief, and I walked up and our chief introduced me to this man. He then said

something along the lines that 'oh, I'm sorry we were just talking shop', you know, a real pat on the head - 'little you wouldn't understand shop' - having just been introduced as the new assistant chief officer! I mean that was just one example of the way women seem to be viewed.

(Carol, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

Carol voiced her infuriation at this stereotyping of her as a woman and of the complications of responding to this 'sex role spillover' (Colgan and Ledwith 1996). In this respect both Carol and Joanna verbalised their awareness of the need to develop strategies to deal with such responses and talked of reacting "with a mixture of challenge and humour and ... a bit of cunning!" (interchange between Joanna and Carol, assistant chief probation officers, Area 3). However, implicit in their comments were two particular problems: the first related to the difficulty of being new in post and being faced with the awkwardness of establishing "accurate and appropriate role relations" (Kanter 1977: 231). The second issue concerned the problematic aspect of avoiding being treated as representatives of women within the organisation - of inadvertently reinforcing the position that in providing a woman's point of view they were different to the men and by implication all similar to each other (Cockburn 1991). Carol summed up the focused approach they endeavoured to present:

I think what we tend to do is to say things like 'as a woman', or 'as a woman in senior management', or 'as a woman in the probation service', so we might bring this extra dimension in.

(Carol, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3)

While both of these women showed resilience and sensitivity in responding to these difficult situations, the strains arising from these gendered issues in carrying out their organisational roles were apparent. In this respect they stressed the mutual support they were able to offer each other in off-loading their frustrations - as Carol put it, "coming back and having a good shout at each other to feel better about it!" (Carol, assistant chief probation officer, Area 3).

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<u>Summary</u>

This exploration of gendered organisational experiences has traced through the implications of equal opportunities policies at local level, probing beneath the formal rhetoric and enquiring into actual experiences in terms of the work/home interface and 'status levelling'. These investigations call attention to the implications of what is taking place in respect of the gender order and relations within the probation service: first, the respondents pointed to the way that full organisational membership demands a commitment to the job that takes precedence over all other aspects of daily life, with the resultant stressful working conditions, denial or concealment of outside responsibilities, and strain on personal relationships. Second, although the development of formal policies seems to offer the prospect of more flexibility, many of the women respondents highlighted the superficiality of progress, while the responses from Mark and Sam indicated the persistence of the status quo and ambivalence about change. In this respect women have taken up career opportunities within the organisation, but the entrenchment of the model of a totally committed worker militates against more flexible arrangements. Moreover, the women are left balancing their various responsibilities, while men are reluctant to make significant compensating moves that could bring about transformative changes in the interface between work and home.

These observations suggest a re-negotiation of the gender order taking place against a shifting but persistent background of a male model of work. Within this context the reports of experiences of 'status levelling' emphasise the particular difficulties for women probation officers in endeavouring to establish their professional standing within the various organisational settings. These aspects indicate the complexities of gendered structures, processes and relations, with more recent changes

over-laying traditional expectations and working styles. In order to explore these gendered organisational concerns against a wider canvas I now 'open up' this area for further consideration, initially from within the service itself and then from the perspective of probation officers working within prison environments.

Gendered Workplaces: Constraints and Performances

Being a Woman Probation Officer

The irony of the relative certainties of 'knowing where you are' when gender roles were defined in a more entrenched, traditional way, was not lost on some of the women probation officers I spoke to. In particular, Felicity, who worked within the generic community-based team in Area 1 (see Appendix), spoke robustly about one particular male senior who she remembered imposing an absolute boundary between work and home. She had been a single parent when she first started working as a probation officer and remembered him saying:

> the worst thing in the world was for children to be in the office, and he then said, "God, next we'll have dogs", with the implication that children were even worse than dogs. It was extraordinary!

> (Felicity, generic, community-based team, Area 1)

Felicity indicated that, while she found such attitudes shocking, there was scope to engage openly with, and possibly counter responses of this kind. However, she voiced a more deep-seated concern about the psychological sexual harassment that she had experienced on her training course, and had subsequently observed affecting others within the organisation:

> I think it's about bullying really and I suppose to a certain extent that could be called a feminist perspective because you know, the whole

thing is about subtle, and not so subtle abuses of power... There are very few safeguards and they're getting less. About four years ago there was a great sort of fashion for equal opportunities and bringing it all out in the open, but that almost has weakened it because there is an assumption now that everything is okay - and it's not.

(Felicity, generic community-based team, Area 1)

She spoke of her intention to start 'naming' (i.e. 'outing') men who behaved in this way, but as she talked about adopting this strategy she acknowledged the possibility that she could be seen to be conducting a personal vendetta - again highlighting the structural and inter-personal intractabilities of dealing with such matters. Furthermore, Felicity was experiencing difficulties in deciding on the appropriate level to take up these issues: on one occasion she had voiced some concerns to Richard, her senior probation officer, relating to the gendered suitability of the allocation of a case to an (out-of-team) male colleague, but found that the situation had reached an impasse. She commented:

I do feel sorry for them (i.e. male senior probation officers), because as a senior to be told this information, they must worry what to do with it.

(Felicity, generic community-based team, Area 1)

In reflecting on this turn of events she then found herself in a dilemma, feeling "inadequate in that I am now holding this stuff", and wondering whether the best way forward was to de-personalise the situation and to discuss the issues in a more general way with the (male) assistant chief probation officer with responsibility for training. In this respect Felicity seemed to have come full circle: she felt that the patriarchal overtones upholding the status quo in the response from her senior left her in an awkward situation where, in bringing to the surface these sensitive gendered matters, it had become "her problem" (see Davies and Rosser 1986).

In the discussions with Nancy, Felicity, Linda, Alison, Carol and Joanna, I was left with the impression that they all were adopting a relatively low-key, but determined feminist stance, in carrying out their various roles within these different probation areas (see Appendix), and were drawing consciously on this interpretative framework in support of their day-to-day responses. This enabled them to acknowledge the contradictions and difficulties within the situations as they experienced them but, in the main, to seek to work in an empowering way with other women, and in a co-operative way with men and women in the face of common problems (see Burrell 1992). However, this sense of reaching an accommodation in the face of such difficulties had presented more problems for Rebecca, the maingrade probation officer already referred to in this chapter, who was now working in the generic community-based team in Area 2 (see Appendix). She came across as feeling rather battered by the masculinised ethos of the local management structure, and of finding it difficult to hold onto a sense of self esteem, in both personal and professional terms.

During our one-to-one discussion, Rebecca talked about her wish to work fairly close to home when her children were young, but of continuing to take post-qualifying courses to extend her professional experience and enhance her career prospects. She had decided to seek a move after a five year period of working within the same team, but commented that she then experienced difficulties in presenting herself within an interview situation, and in responding to the standard format of the questions:

> I hung on really for the children, I always thought in my mind I'd be going in five years. But then I had difficulty with interviews. Well, I hadn't had an interview for five years - and then suddenly I had one - oh, gracious me! And anxiety built up. But there go my objections to equal opportunity interviews because it just did not give me the opportunity to talk about the work I do. It's those questions - there's no room and there's nobody who can actually encourage you... and I needed that. But my anxiety got worse and worse.

> (Rebecca, generic, community-based team, Area 2)

Rebecca found that although she had built up her credentials in terms of work background and relevant courses, she had nevertheless stalled in trying to switch to a more linear career pattern - an experience that mirrors difficulties identified by Rosemary Crompton and Kay Sanderson for women with family responsibilities at 'practitioner' level in other organisational settings (see Crompton and Sanderson 1990b). Moreover, in personal terms she felt entrapped by her support of equal opportunities and a commitment to meeting the defined competences for the job. In the absence of a mentor she had found herself floundering as she applied for another internal vacancy:

> I didn't perform well in the interview. So all the experience, and the evaluations, the training, never made any difference to me in that interview. I was absolutely horrified.

(Rebecca, generic, community-based team, Area 2)

Rebecca described her sense of anger with herself in not coming over within the interviews as a competent professional, but she was also left feeling that the implicit criteria for the stereotypical 'ideal' candidate had militated against her. The difficulty of trying to make some sense of this process had taken its toll: she disclosed that while she had lodged grievance procedures over the appointment decisions to these internal positions, she had not pursued them beyond this initial stage. Despite some backing from NAPO (National Association of Probation Officers, the probation officers' union), and an offer of feedback from a male assistant chief probation officer, Rebecca had eventually decided to initiate a sideways move to her current team, following her female senior probation officer (Jane) in a change of teams. This enabled her to add a different geographical location to her curriculum vitae and she was endeavouring to circumnavigate the formal application procedures by taking on a semi-specialist position that had become available within this team. However, the limitations of this approach to her career development were apparent as she described her situation:

Jane (her senior probation officer) said basically, "I don't think you should come here", and I said, "no, neither do I, but I have to move and if I am going to go somewhere, I want to go somewhere that's safe". That was eventually the reason. But I didn't want to because it's very much the same for me.

(Rebecca, generic community-based team, Area 2)

Rebecca highlighted the issue of safety within the context of her personal fragility in terms of her career development and professional working style. In particular, she indicated her need to be validated as an experienced officer and for this to be placed within the framework of a value system that recognised the intricacies of working with recalcitrant probation clients. In this respect Rebecca acknowledged that her method of working, which rested on a psycho-dynamic casework approach, was running against the grain of developments within the probation service (see Chapter 1). She commented ruefully "I think National Standards say to me that there's a very uncaring top management and Government really", making a distinction for her between *doing things to people*, rather than *working with them*.

Summary

Implicit in these discussions with the probation officers was an undercurrent of issues relating to personal well-being: with Rebecca her main concern was in terms of her wider professional and personal sense of identity within the gendered organisation, but also within this, and within many of the other conversations, worries about physical and emotional self protection within the working sphere came to the fore. This in turn raised gendered concerns about working styles and anxieties stemming from *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a), relating to the perceived push towards a more 'macho' (male) image for probation officers. From these reflections on the need to feel professionally secure and valued as a probation officer, I now expand on such aspects

by considering two case studies that look at a range of personal and organisational interactions within these gendered working environments. The first contrasts two teams within the probation service itself, while the second investigates probation officers working within probation units in prison settings.

Case Study 1: A Comparison Of Two Team Settings

In sharp contrast to my experiences of working within probation in the 1970s and 1980s, I was struck by the physical security measures in place at all of the probation locations I visited in the course of this research. These developments seemed to stress the shift towards the 'dispersal of discipline' (Vass 1990) in terms of probation intervention within the wider context of the criminal justice system and, in particular, linked with official rhetoric concerning the probation service's role in implementing 'punishment in the community'. Indeed, on entering probation offices on occasions I was forcibly reminded of the procedure of gaining admittance to a prison institution - an association that brought to mind Foucault's observations concerning the surveillance of delinquents within prisons and "the whole social field" (Foucault 1977: 281).

In view of these ideological (and practical) developments I was interested to explore further the dynamics around the issues of organisational space, personal safety, and gender. This line of enquiry picks up on the discomfiture shown by Rebecca in respect of her job situation in the section above, querying whether this also extended to her feelings about her working environment. In response to my questions she contrasted her experiences at the two probation offices she had worked at:

> I feel safe within my own environment, within the room, and if I feel safe there, yeah, I don't worry so much about health and safety anymore, although I do recognise we're very lazy on that aspect because we do work with some very dangerous people... As an officer at my previous office I started to see the doors being shut and locked and I began to feel

imprisoned myself actually. They're out there, and we're locked in! But I think it's important - it can't be ignored, the climate is changing.

(Rebecca, generic community-based team, Area 2)

This sense of changing times is very apparent in the literature concerning the probation service (cf. Chapter 1), and was often repeated by the probation officers I met. In view of his length of service I asked William, the long-standing maingrade officer within this team (see Appendix), for his opinion of any trends, particularly picking up on his impressions on whether the range of probation clients had now moved 'up tariff'. He pondered over this and then responded:

> Whether I'm actually working with more dangerous people or more serious offenders? I don't think so because if you think about it, in the old days, your serious offenders went to prison, but they still came out on licence. They still came into the office - you were still working with them.

(William, generic community-based team, Area 2)

However, he did acknowledge the need to "be alive to the risk" and he drew my attention to the panic alarms that had been installed in all of the rooms. He jokingly pointed out that in terms of the seating arrangements within the room I was actually nearer to the alarm buttons than he was, and commented "they're right over there, so it's whether you or I could get there first really!". Although this casualness of approach portrayed at first sight a rather tough 'I can handle it' attitude, on a more serious note he described the office procedure for cover, so that no one was ever left in the building on their own. This operated alongside a code word to be used over the telephone to the receptionist if a probation officer felt concerned about being alone in their office with a client. It seemed that these safety measures were used infrequently, but were acknowledged by staff within this office to be unobtrusive but functional responses.

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This approach contrasted sharply with the situation that I found at the generic, community-based team within Area 1, where there was a dissonance between the policy pronouncements and their implementation in practice. The two office set-up of this team, together with various outpostings in the more geographically isolated areas, meant that despite an official commitment to the avoidance of probation officers working on their own in the offices, this in fact did take place. While all the probation officers I spoke to within this team (see Appendix) voiced their concern about this practice, what became particularly noticeable was the gendered split in attitude and routine, with the male probation officers seeing it as a regrettable necessity, while the female officers stated their wish to review what was taking place.

During a team meeting that I attended Louise voiced her anxiety about personal security both within the office and during home visits. She then endeavoured to move this on from being viewed as an individual issue to a team and organisational concern. On a structural level staff were faced with the logistical difficulty of offering flexible appointments to see clients in order to meet National Standards' requirements (concerning frequency of contact[1]), and there had been occasions when it had not proved possible to ensure 'double-cover', particularly out of office hours. However, as the meeting progressed the discussion turned in such a way that the issue became identified as a problem facing only the women probation officers, rather than a policy decision requiring the establishment of 'good practice'. During her subsequent individual interview with me, Louise outlined her concerns:

> People in the team were saying "well, how many clients are you actually scared of?". And I said, "it's not who I'm actually scared of, it's just a lot of the people we're working with, you know. I've read the horrendous things some of them do, and I don't think they would do that to me a lot of the time, but if they were under drugs or alcohol"... I'm just not prepared to put myself in that position.

> (Louise, generic community-based team, Area 1)

In coming up against this response from their male colleagues both Louise and Felicity stood their ground. For them this was not an issue of virility and they were emphatic that this was a matter that should unite rather than divide the team members regardless of gender. Despite this, it was noticeable in my discussions with Pete and James that, while they agreed in principle to the idea of providing 'cover' when conducting interviews in the office, there were no formal arrangements, and it was clear that their working schedules often did not coincide. When describing his work routine Pete reflected:

> The handling of risk, some of the things our service says, yes, they're beautiful on paper, but they're very hard to work out when you need to ensure that you're seeing people so often. I mean the office is staffed until 5.30, but yes, sometimes I do late night reporting on a Wednesday and then I'm here on my own. I think probably against policy... It's a poor system in some respects at the present time, but I don't interview anybody I consider a danger to myself.

(Pete, generic community-based team, Area 1)

These comments illustrate the way that the situation within this team had become polarised along gendered lines. The practicalities of organisational requirements were reinforcing the ideological messages that the work demands a tough, pragmatic approach that, by implication, was being dealt with by the men, but not the women (see Mills and Murgatroyd 1991). In this way logistical difficulties had become entwined with the male officers' reluctance to bring about any real change, reinforced by Richard, the senior's acceptance of the situation:

> So we take steps to cover safety as far as we can, and no risk management client who is regarded as a risk to staff would be seen if there was, say, only one member of staff in the building here, but you can't hold to that for everyone... I mean in the satellite reporting offices, either no one would ever be seen or we would deal with about a third

less of the people than we are now because we'd be doubling up on staff. So common sense has to prevail to some extent.

(Richard, senior probation officer, generic community-based team, Area 1)

This 'common sense' line of argument called on masculinised organisational norms in the blocking of any change, with any acknowledgement of these points and subsequent counter-arguments being set in the context of time-honoured working practices and the necessity of meeting Home Office requirements. Against this framing of the working practices demanded of 'full' team members, the issues raised by the women probation officers were listened to in a courteous way, but were effectively relegated to personal rather than organisational concerns.

Summary

This section has considered aspects of the gendered working conditions and environments within these two areas of the probation service: the contrast between the two generic, community-based teams seemed to stem from the operation of local working cultures, in the absence of any national implementation of dynamic and effective policy procedures (Sheridan 1993). In the generic community-based team within Area 2, it could be surmised that the high number of women officers, led by a female senior, had created a 'skewed/tilted' group ethos where personal safety was promoted as an integral part of carrying out their professional roles and tasks with an ever-changing client group (see Kanter 1977). This sense of 'looking out for each other' was conveyed during my discussion with Jane, the senior of this team when she commented:

There is pressure at times I think, but people get on and they work very hard. They're all up there on the floor together so they talk to each other

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and support each other quite a bit... And they come past here all the time, they know where I am if they need me.

(Jane, senior probation officer, generic community-based team, Area 2)

This was in stark contrast to the situation in the generic community-based team in Area 1 where the individualisation of issues concerning safety had led to a gendered polarisation of positions within the team, with official discourses taking place within a framework of apparently rational institutional constraints, that nevertheless ignored the wider factors concerning working conditions. The difficulties in addressing the implications of individual practices, as illustrated in the responses from Felicity and Louise, were apparent: it is the women who are left trying to initiate change against the tide of organisational norms, when confronted by apparently 'disembodied' male workers (Cockburn 1991).

In focusing on the difference in organisational experiences within these two settings, this section has concentrated in looking inwards at the probation officers within 'their' organisation, and at the gendered interactions and the impact of gender on working practices operating internally in these locations. However, probation officers are part of the wider criminal justice system and, during their everyday duties, they come into contact with staff working with the police, the courts and the prison service. Within the interviews conducted for this research this interface of different organisational expectations and roles was commented on by some of the probation officers, raising issues regarding the inter-relationships between the gendered occupational sub-cultures of these different organisations (see Chapter 2).

The gendered implications of these experiences particularly came to the fore with respect to the reactions reported by some of the male and female probation officers regarding their contact with staff within prison settings. While the numbers of

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probation officers working within prisons at any one time is relatively small[2], the uncovering of the discourses of gender and power within the context of inter-relationships within these locations, were concerns that frequently came up within the research interviews[3]. Indeed, the potency of these responses by the probation officers echoed Foucault's observations regarding prisons that "this marginal problem seems to disturb everyone" (Foucault 1996: 77). In this last section, therefore, I pick up on the insights offered by an exploration into the dynamics within, and reactions to these placements, and turn the spotlight onto a second case study that reflects on the accounts of the experiences of probation officers within the various prisons.

Case Study 2: Working as Probation Officers Within Prison Environments

The secondment of probation officers to custodial institutions was started in the 1960s, alongside the policy shift for the probation service to take over responsibility for after-care from the local discharged prisoners' aid societies (Haxby 1978). While this offered the possibility of a continuum in terms of through and after-care provision, these arrangements have often been seen as "a sop to the liberal conscience" (Walker and Beaumont 1981: 50), with reactions from probation officers since then ranging from "lukewarm to the unequivocally hostile" (May 1991a: 140). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s repeated demands for withdrawal from prison welfare work were voiced at NAPO conferences (National Association of Probation Officers), and it is therefore somewhat ironic that while this has faded more recently as a cause to be fought over, developments towards privatisation and the control of costs within the prison service have again brought the presence of prison probation officers into question.

In turning a gendered spotlight onto the experiences of these prison probation officers, this section draws on the interviews with staff in Area 1; Area 2 did not have any penal institutions to service within its geographical boundaries and the experiences of Joanna (one of the assistant chief probation officers in Area 3), as a senior probation officer within a prison were only touched on tangentially in the interview. However, within Area 1 all probation officers were aware that the local mobility policy ensured a turn-around of probation team members within the three prison institutions, (all for male prisoners), from the overall staffing complement within the area, with each secondment lasting between two and four years.

In addition to these post-qualifying stints, some of these probation officers had also undergone short-term placements as part of their probation training - experiences that had thrown into sharp relief the conflicts between the wider rehabilitative aims of the probation service and the closed, contained conditions of the prisons. Certainly Beth, now working in the Family Court Welfare team (see Appendix), described her placement at the medium security prison in Area 1 as futile in terms of her professional development, as there had been little contact with the inmates. Moreover, during her time in the prison she had been subjected to sexist comments from the prison officers, and had been disturbed by racist behaviour from both staff and inmates. In summing up she commented:

> It was awful, it was terrible. It (i.e. the placement) was very perfunctory, I mean it consisted basically of walking round the prison doing nothing all of the time... Well, this was my experience anyway, that I got nothing out of that placement - by the end of it I was reluctant to go up there... I was just infuriated by the whole regime up there, mainly the prison officers' attitudes and their sexist remarks which were directed at me and some of the female prison officers.

> (Beth, family court welfare team, Area 1)

Similar experiences of sexist responses from male prison officers were also reported in the one-to-one interviews I had with the two women probation officers working at that time within the local prison in Area 1. These meetings took place on two separate occasions at this institution - one with Patricia, the senior prison probation officer and the other with Alison, an experienced probation officer who had worked within this setting for almost two years (see Appendix). In outlining the staffing at this particular prison, Patricia pointed out the gendered division of roles, with education, probation and the medical services containing mainly female staff, but with only three women, (who she described as 'token'), currently working as operational prison officers. These distinctions reinforced the gender split between men carrying out the 'hard' disciplinary and organisational tasks within the prison, with women fulfilling the 'softer' caring aspects (cf. review in Chapter 2).

In our discussions both Patricia and Alison emphasised the power dimension of this gendered set-up, acknowledging the multi-layered complexities in terms of daily interactions with both staff and prisoners. While each of them commented on the 'general sexism' of this institutional life, played out daily with responses such as 'wolf whistles', more subtle and entrenched difficulties came up in trying to establish professional roles as probation officers within this very masculinised setting. Patricia explained that in her daily contact with prison staff she would 'block' any sexist ripostes but said rather wearily "it's still there in the eyes". Alison for her part stated that she was mindful of resisting the adoption of a 'jokey/flirting' role - a tactic that called for perseverance "until the message gradually got through".

In organisational terms both appeared to interpret these responses as part of the process of challenging their status and the imposition of a 'barrack yard' (male) hierarchical culture (see Maddock and Parkin 1994). In expanding on the situation

Patricia commented on the problem of literally "getting your voice heard" when shouting up the wing landings. From her perspective Alison pointed to the difficulty of being accepted by the prison staff, while still maintaining her professional difference. In this respect she felt that it had taken her at least 6-9 months "to get a grip" and that, although there was still constant testing by the prison officers, it was only now that she was tolerated as an 'honorary member of the staff'.

These difficulties could be seen as stemming from the 'double jeopardy' of being a probation officer and a women within this setting, but my discussions with some male probation officers indicated a still more complex picture of organisational cultures, with confrontations serving to establish and maintain an internal pecking order. In this way some of these probation officers had found themselves challenged in terms of their masculinity, with issues of gender and sexuality interlinked with issues of power. Personal experiences that illustrated the playing-out of these issues came to the surface during my discussion with Sam, (maingrade officer in the family court welfare team), who had previously undertaken a two-year 'stint' in the medium security prison in Area 1. He spoke with feeling about these encounters:

> I wasn't enthusiastic about going there but I think it was actually worse than I thought it was going to be... Although I never tried to take the prison authorities on head on, I was determined from day one that I wasn't going to take any crap. I wasn't looking for a fight (i.e. with the prison officers), because that had been the constant complaint about probation officers - that they go out there and think they're going to save all these thugs - 'you don't know what they're like', 'you don't have to live with them', all these sorts of phrases, a load of 'pinko lefties' really. So I was aware of that and I was determined that I wasn't going to play that role out, but as I say, I was also determined that I wasn't going to take any rubbish.

(Sam, family court welfare team, Area 1)

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The combination of uncertainties over (hetero)sexuality and challenges over occupational status come through this statement, with Sam pointing to his own engagement in this process. As in the cases of Patricia and Alison, he commented on the constant challenging of him as a probation officer, that had culminated in a particular experience:

> Some of the prison staff were constantly looking for you to do something wrong that they could then criticise you for... I went down to the Hospital Wing to see somebody - somebody who had AIDS. I think then there probably was a hell of a lot more scare around because I'm talking about quite a few years ago. I think that was the first time that I had ever met anyone who had AIDS. And when you went down there, the golden rule is you 'click over' so that the bolt is out, so that you can't get locked in... I went in to see this guy because he'd made an application and I'd only been in there about ten seconds and the prison officer shut me in. Actually locked me in, because I hadn't put the bolt across. Those were the sort of silly games they were into. Instead of saying (he whispers) 'bolt, do the bolt', you know I get locked in. Then I've got to ring the bell and then they make me sit in there for ten minutes. All of this kind of stuff. It was all of that all the time.

(Sam, family court welfare team, Area 1)

During my interview with Alison she had commented on her awareness that she was ultimately reliant on the prison officers for her personal safety and, with this in mind, I asked Sam whether he had felt insecure in terms of risk avoidance. He was emphatic that, on this particular occasion, he felt he was just being 'tested out' within a situation that touched on deep-rooted fears concerning male sexual identity, but continued:

> I think if anything serious had gone down, without doubt they'd have been there like a shot. I think they would have taken good care of me as they would have done for my colleagues.

(Sam, family court welfare team, Area 1)

This repeated buffeting experienced by probation officers within these closed male prison institutions brought into everyday social interactions the tensions of the conflicting goals of the staff working within these settings (see May 1991a). In this respect the unresolved clash between containment and welfare functions became enmeshed in issues of gender, with these male and female probation officers reporting on their experiences of the embedded masculinities of the prison officer cultures. However, lest these accounts inadvertently fuel a dichotomised stereotyping of staff working within these settings, I return to consider some of the experiences of Felicity that provide more nuanced insights into the contained world of gender relations within the Category C male prison in Area 1.

When I interviewed her Felicity was based in the generic community-based team in Area 1 (see Appendix), but she had had considerable previous experience of working in other teams, in a probation hostel, and within this third closed prison in the area. Unlike any of the other probation officers I met who had worked within these penal institutions, Felicity spoke positively of her time there, calling up the image of an 'extended family' in her dealings with the staff and inmates. Given this contrast in response I asked her whether she felt she had been accepted as an 'honorary man', but she was firm in her rebuttal of this:

> No I don't. It was really more about being human, about bringing in the home and being a person - and not being a hard man and strutting about with your hat on your nose and dark glasses and all that drivel.

> (Felicity, generic community based team, Area 1)

In probing further about her relationships with the male prison staff Felicity revealed similar skirmishes of the kind related earlier in this chapter, but she also spoke of the respect and two-way support that she had developed with some prison officers. With such a small number of respondents these examples speak to individual

experiences rather than generalised findings, but Felicity's reactions stress the need to avoid assumptions about a necessarily confrontational relationship between prison and probation officers, and the importance of taking into account the richly textured nature of gender relations within the institution.

In professional terms Felicity stressed that she endeavoured to view all staff as 'colleagues' and to make clear boundaries within the day-to-day interactions. In this respect she too commented on the "unspeakable sexual, racist and sexist attitudes" that circulated among prison officers within the institution, but took this on board in a vigorous way:

> I did get their respect and attitudes did shift. And in a way I enjoyed that... I used to enjoy the very hard repartee that we used to have and I used to object to all sorts of things... I think it's also about actually being interested in them as a person. You know, you'd ask them about their kids, you'd just treat them as you would anybody who you worked closely with.

(Felicity, generic community-based team, Area 1)

Interestingly, the one person Felicity did cite as having problems with this approach was her male senior probation officer, who had adopted a much more stringent public/private life divide. She described a situation where a prison officer had spoken to her about a tragic bereavement within his immediate family, whereas her senior's response had been to state to the probation team that this man "did not want to talk about it". Felicity placed this avoidance of emotions within the context of the dominant masculinity that operated within the institution: on an inter-personal basis with prison officers she had tried to acknowledge 'the whole person', but repeatedly came up against a 'command culture' where staff have orders bawled at them and in turn are rarely listened to (see Parkin and Maddock 1995).

While she had endeavoured to counter this on an individual level, in organisational terms she had continually faced battles within the institutional setting: the entrenchment and enactment of a white heterosexual masculinity revealed itself in instances of sexual harassment, and had come to the fore for Felicity in the battle she had taking up against female 'pin ups'. In our discussions Felicity spoke vociferously of the importance of countering the symbolism of these pictures being on display, pointing out the way they upheld negative images of women and sustained a male culture that emphasised the dominance of men over women (see Mills and Murgatroyd 1991). The particular instance she related to me involved a power struggle between her and the principal officer of the wing she was attached to. She outlined with gusto the campaign she had fought:

> A rule came out from the Home Office that pin-ups were not to be in public areas and in the Principal Officer's area we had a very unpleasant, obscene calendar. I pointed out that this was against Home Office rules and he just made a great joke of it and asked me what my (problem was). All that sort of crap. And then the next day he said "well, I've asked a new female prison officer what she thought" and she was alleged to have said, "well, it's fine", so he fed this back to me - "I've asked a woman and it's okay". So I took it down! For about a fortnight they didn't speak to me and then it just sort of petered out because I just laughed and ignored it.

(Felicity, generic community-based team, Area 1)

In adopting this crusading stance Felicity was emphatic in her rejection of the inference that these pictures were an expression of male desire, and interpreted this scenario in terms of power within this arena in the workplace. Nevertheless, she was well aware that she was directly challenging the distribution of male authority and subordination within the prison and that although she had 'won' this particular battle, her position was a marginalised one and this action had barely dented the overriding male culture within the institution as a whole.

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Summary

These interactions illustrate the stresses that are experienced by both male and female probation officers within these closed institutions, where the day-to-day realities of the penal system are enacted against a background of gendered organisational discourses and practices. The starkness of this form of institutionalised existence posed particular difficulties for the probation officers, given the interface between the conflicting goals of incarceration and rehabilitation, and most spoke of their periods as prison probation officers as 'serving their time' - a parallel with the position of the prisoners themselves. This is not to suggest an over-identification with the inmates, and an absolute distinction between probation and prison staff - the experiences related by Sam and Felicity avoid such a split interpretation.

These examples do, however, illustrate the range of difficulties impacting on the male and female probation officers working within these institutional settings, where the issues of power and gender are entwined in such a confrontational way in their daily routines in carrying out their duties. While the reactions from the probation officers I spoke to about their experiences within prisons varied from the resigned, through the 'thankful to be out', to the more feisty approach displayed by Felicity, all viewed this as a period when they had been tested in terms of their personal and professional sense of identity. Most reported this as being profoundly uncomfortable at the time, but reflected that in many ways these experiences represented the 'sharp end' of what many of them felt they were going through now in their current locations, with their professional and personal values being confronted by the pace and scale of change from central government.

Chapter Summary

This leads full-circle back to the concerns that have been explored within these two chapters that are perhaps best encapsulated in the comments made by Sean at the end of my interview with him: Sean had come into probation from the Navy and had worked in a variety of settings before his current post within the family court welfare team in Area 1 (see Appendix). Despite this supposedly now-favoured professional background he remarked ironically about the one-dimensional 'chameleon' qualities he felt were now being called on in order to fulfil the role of probation officer:

> We're preparing the way. We want good, sensible, firm people - you know, ex-Army officers. But of course, I fit the bill, I'm an ex-serviceman and I can assure my Chief that I'm adaptable to any circumstances!

(Sean, family court welfare team, Area 1)

These rueful comments regarding the shifting value base, the devaluing of the previous qualifying training, and the uncertainties concerning the professional and personal identities of probation officers strike at the heart of the issues that have been thrown into sharp relief by the pace of change impacting on the probation service. Within this chapter the gendered responses regarding aspects of organisational membership and commitment have offered insights into the situations of these men and women probation officers: the exploration of the impact of equal opportunities policies pointed to the distinction between the official rhetoric and the limitations of the actual implementation, as viewed through the various experiences of the respondents at different locations, and different levels of the organisation. Likewise, aspects relating to the work/home divide, and to instances of 'status levelling', indicate the complexities for the probation officers in interpreting and responding to official and informal organisational discourses in the operation of everyday practice. The immutability of entrenched gendered structures and relations indicate the constraints in bringing about

transformative change in this area of organisational life, with the reports of the women

probation officers reinforcing Cynthia Cockburn's comments that

> women may join in the exercise of power; they may even change the
> style of management; but they are unlikely to be permitted to change the
> nature of the organisation.

(Cockburn 1991: 71)

The organisational situations explored within the two case studies illustrate the

interaction of gender and power within these working environments and their impact on

the working practices and day-to-day experiences of the individual probation officers.

Within these different settings, the operation of social interactions and relationships

were shown to come up against organisational boundaries and expectations, that in turn

emphasise the embeddedness of gender relations within these working arenas (see

Halford, Savage and Witz 1997). In the first case study areas of contrast were

highlighted in the comparison of experiences and reactions within the two probation

team settings, indicating the impact of the team gender balance on organisational

relations and working practices. While the prison environments of the second case

study showed up the discourses of gender and power in a more stark light, with

uncertainty over personal and professional identities and values of the probation officers

being tested to a greater degree within these settings, this review could nevertheless be

seen as accentuating many of these concerns expressed throughout this chapter. In this

respect the interpretative framework applied here is intended to address the complexity

of the changing situation, and to avoid a simplistic dichotomised view of gendered

organisational dynamics and relationships, taking into account the medley of

similarities and differences, conflicts and alliances.

In this way the issues probed into within Chapters 4 and 5 have turned a

gendered spotlight onto the dynamic situation within the probation service, and onto the

positions of the individual probation officers, as they await Home Office pronouncements concerning the structure and role of the organisation within the criminal justice system into the next century. This has extended the analysis of what it is to be a probation officer within an interactional social framework that delves into the gendered intertwining of the past development, and current restructuring of the organisation, with the personal and professional histories of the individual respondents. Having 'heard' from the probation officers themselves I now move on to the final chapter to pull together the findings from the different parts of this research study and to revisit the way this particular organisation was, and is, 'doing' gender (Gherardi 1995), against the recurrent background of change and uncertainty.

Notes

[1] The National Standards for the Supervision of Offenders in the Community outline explicitly the frequency of contact to be carried out - for probation a minimum of 12 appointments in the first 3 months (Home Office 1995a).

[2] In 1995 there were 659 full-time and part-time probation officers seconded to prison service establishments (*Probation Statistics, England and Wales 1995*. Home Office: 1997a).

[3] The multi-level analysis within this thesis applies a conceptualisation of gender relations in organisations from a perspective that encompasses the connections between the discourses of gender and power that constitute the social construction of gender within these settings.

Chapter 6

Gender and Organisational Change in the Probation Service

Each organisation has its own history, linked to the actions of its members as well as its wider social and political context, with the result that particular organisational forms and cultures are developed as the crystallisation of various forms of struggle, contestations and negotiation between various organisational members.

(Halford, Savage and Witz 1997: 19)

Managerial thought and the psychological expertise of work play an active part in the formation of new images and mechanisms, which bring the government of the enterprise into alignment with cultural values, social expectations, political concerns, and professional aspirations... At the level of policy the new images and techniques are embedded in previously unthinkable strategic interventions into the enterprise to promote particular economic and social objectives.

(Rose 1989: 59)

The Interweaving of Gender and Organisation

The unrelenting pace of change within the probation service has been a central theme running through all of the chapters within this thesis. In addressing past developments and current issues and concerns, this investigation has adopted a multi-faceted approach: Chapter 1 presented an analysis of policy implications impacting on this part of the criminal justice system, putting in place a detailed exploration of the historical evolution, structural growth, and working practices of the probation service.

This review provided a contextual framework, but at the same time pointed to the androcentricity of the literature in this area, indicating the absence of a gendered analysis from both internal and external perspectives. In this respect Chapter 2 looked anew at these aspects, adopting a viewpoint that enabled the strands of gender and organisation to be brought together in a way that challenged the invisibility of gendered structures and processes. The insights gained from this detailed re-examination of organisational issues, and of the hierarchical ordering in relation to the probation service, supported Joan Acker's assertion that

> The concept "a job" is thus implicitly a gendered concept, even though organisational logic presents it as gender neutral. A job already contains the gender-based division of labour and the separation between the public and private sphere... Hierarchies are gendered because they also are constructed on these underlying assumptions. Those who are committed to paid employment are "naturally" more suited to responsibility and authority; those who must divide their commitments are in the lower ranks.

(Acker 1991: 170)

Moreover, the findings in Chapters 1, together with the gendered breakdowns in Chapter 2, indicated the need to probe beneath a national overview in order to enquire further into differences across, and within, the different grades of the service, and from one local area to another. This was addressed by the adoption of a multi-layered approach, scrutinising the intent and implementation of policy changes from central government, alongside the wide-ranging reverberations at grassroots level. The intertwining of gender and organisational change therefore underpinned the analysis within Chapter 2, and acted as a 'bridge' to Chapters 4 and 5, where the responses from male and female probation officer respondents in this research further informed the analysis of issues of power, discretion and workplace practices. Thus the study of the development of the organisation within Chapters 1 and 2 was able to indicate patterns

of change within the service, while the reports from the interviews within Chapters 4 and 5 extended the range and depth of analysis.

In this way it was possible to penetrate the day-to-day realities of probation officers working within the service, observing gendered workplace relations and enquiring into personal and professional senses of identity. The inclusion of male and female probation officers, with varying lengths of service, and at differing positions within the hierarchy, ensured that the social interactions and organisational expectations were considered in a way that did more than 'add women' (or for that point 'add men'), adopting an analytic framework that viewed gender as an "organising principle of work relations" (Pringle 1989: ix).

The application of this embedded approach to probation as a gendered organisation (see Halford, Savage and Witz 1997) allowed the process of change to be explored from external and internal perspectives. From the 'outside-in' the impact of the moves since the mid-1990s towards national planning, and the monitoring and standardisation of local working routines - all changes that appear 'gender neutral' - have been shown to have gendered implications. Similarly, internal interactions concerning professional practices and organisational relations have been opened up to inspection, providing insights from a gendered viewpoint into what it is to be a 'probation officer'. Gender has come into sharp focus on occasions, while at other times it has been in the background, but it has been regarded throughout as a crucial factor within the social structures and social processes. Likewise, this gendered approach supplies an awareness into the complexities of the organisational developments, connecting the historical background with the changing working expectations and experiences, and thus provides a conceptual framework to view the range of responses from the various probation officers.

It is from this interpretative position that I now review the key aspects arising from the organisational concerns, linking the themes raised initially in the early chapters, with the everyday experiences of the probation officers interviewed for this research. Following the ordering of this thesis I look first at the policy changes emanating from central Government and their impact on the probation service, making explicit the gendered implications of these developments. I then move on to consider the internal ramifications of the current situation, drawing together the strands of the gendered social relations uncovered within this research.

The Probation Service - The Gendered Policy Context

The fieldwork part of the research was conducted during the latter part of the Conservative Government's term in office, at a point when legislative changes and funding cuts were abruptly curtailing the plans for expansion of the service in the wake of the 1991 Criminal Justice Act. The advent of the Labour Government in May 1997 brought about a flurry of Home Office action, with measures in the Crime and Disorder Bill indicating a potential increase in the probation service's workload[1]. However, adherence to the previous Government's public service spending plans in relation to the probation service has continued the downward trend in probation officer numbers nation-wide, within an overall contraction of the size of the service (*NAPO News* April 1998: 3)[2]. More significantly, the prospect of further change continues unabated, with the Home Office's Comprehensive Spending Review[3], and the Prisons/Probation Review[4], both scheduled for publication mid/late 1998, promising to bring renewed upheavals to the service.

Responses to this whirlwind of change have been varied, ranging from suggested realignments of its value base (see, for example, Nellis 1995a, James 1995), to belated rear-guard action endeavouring to shore up its positioning within the criminal justice system. From this latter viewpoint plaintive comments have been voiced, bemoaning the lack of recognition of the service's function:

> For too long... the Service has understated the importance of its role and its work... It has beavered away at the edges of the justice system's main institutions, content, mistakenly as we now can see, that its value was taken for granted and its position secure. The Service must now spell out, in both its rhetoric and its practice where it stands.

(Ward 1995: 297)

The tenor and content of this statement portrays the depth of the problems facing the probation service: in the harsher penal climate of the 1990s the probation service has responded to the political agenda by focusing on 'confronting offending behaviour'. In endeavouring to entrench its niche within the criminal justice system, the traditional 'advise, assist and befriend' legacy has been pushed aside, replaced by the 'What Works' rhetoric, with its emphasis on effective, measurable outcomes as the central goal of probation intervention.

These approaches, outlined and reviewed within the Home Office's research paper *Strategies for Effective Offender Supervision* (Home Office 1998), can be seen as both extending, and at the same time, restricting the role of probation officers. In terms of expansion these methods can be applied to the full range of offenders, under all types of supervision, and thus support the role of the service as part of the criminal justice system, albeit in a more formalised 'community corrections' style[5]. However, these types of cognitive behaviourism do not require the lengthy training or the specialised social work and psycho-therapeutic skills utilised by probation officers in the 1970s and 1980s, and leave the role of probation officer vulnerable to de-skilling and de-

professionalisation[6] (May and Annison, forthcoming). In addressing this shift Anne Worrall starkly points out:

> What needs to be changed are particular pieces of unacceptable behaviour - no more and no less.

(Worrall 1997: 101)

In responding to these discourses within the criminal justice system, where the difference between law-abiding 'victims' and criminals has increasingly been emphasised, the main function of the probation service is now enacted in terms of the implementation of actuarial forms of assessment and the development of supervisory techniques, approaches that are "aimed at keeping segregated and under surveillance those who possess the factors identified as associated with risk of crime" (Hudson 1996: 155). This development of the 'bifurcatory' approach (Bottoms 1977) emphasises the control function of probation staff within a culture of enforcement within the community, implemented at local level, but subject to central Home Office control:

> To fulfil roles effectively, staff need to be competent and committed...
> The future strategy should seek to develop staff competences - with work
> needed to clarify requirements for different staff roles. Core and
> ongoing training needs to provide knowledge, build confidence in
> methods and skills, and develop ownership and understanding of
> effective supervision approaches. Staff recruitment needs to select staff
> committed to work within a culture that supports effectiveness, able to
> use an effective style and capable of achieving the required competences.

(Home Office 1998: 9)

Thus far this review has adopted the 'gender neutral' stance of Chapter 1 in exploring the current situation. However, the analysis within Chapter 2 revealed the pertinence of gender in accounting for the developments impacting on the probation service at a political and policy level. Most importantly, the constellation of changes taking place within the probation service in the mid and late 1990s was set within the

context of moves by central Government to rein back the increasingly feminised staffing of the service (particularly at maingrade level), by re-aligning the probation service more firmly alongside the culturally masculinised agencies of the 'coercive apparatus' of the state, including the police, courts and prisons (Franzway, Court and Connell 1989). In this respect the implementation of the recommendations of *The Dews Report* (Home Office 1994a) has not only led to the dissolution of the social work training route into probation, but has put in place a moratorium that, inter alia, has had the effect of putting a stop to the increasing numbers of women probation officers coming the service.

This stance, with its gendered implications, has not been dented by the change of Government, with the current Prisons/Probation Review considering options for closer linkage, or even the possibility of the merger of the two services. The probation service's susceptibility to such a fundamental shift in its organisational structure, working practices and professional autonomy has taken place in spite of, and indeed because of, the resistance by some probation officers to such changes. The structural fragmentation of the local areas, together with the gendered divisiveness arising from the instrumental ethos of the 'new managerialist' culture, have come together in a particularly significant way. The combination of these elements has left the way open for the macro political changes, with their gendered overtones, to be implemented under the guise of the "technical-rational mode of administrative behaviour" (May 1991a). Against the background of a lack of cohesiveness within the agency, the threat of redundancies across all grades, and insecurity surrounding the future of the organisation, the probation service has been effectively out-manoeuvred by the Home Office. In this respect the service has failed to take on board the full import of the "seasons of fury which lie ahead" (Nellis 1995a 36), in want of a coherent and unified defence of its value base and long-standing working practices:

> Probation officers, probation trainers and members of related interest groups like NAPO tend to speak of probation values as if it were obvious

what these are. The nature of the value base on which probation work rests seems almost to be defined by the threats it faces. Only when a new proposal or development is opposed do we tend to invoke probation values as an argument against it.

(Williams 1995: 2)

The organisational and individual implications of the extent of change and the sweeping aside of resistance from within the service are manifold: first, various parts of the service face the possibility of privatisation or, in the case of the Family Court Welfare officers, relocation to another part of the legal system[7]. The varied nature of probation tasks, originally unified under the social work training framework and the concept of 'transferability of skills', now faces a situation where there is no logic to this coalition and where 'pockets' of the organisation can be 'picked off'. Second, in line with this shift in focus from a "problem-solving to a performance organisation" (May 1991a: 169), and underpinned by the change in terminology within the probation working environment, the 'client' is no longer the offender, but the Home Office and the courts. Third, the identification of specific tasks within probation 'packages' lends itself to an increasing casualisation of staff appointments, with the full-time probation officers increasingly adopting a 'case management' oversight role, ensuring compliance with Home Office directives, but not necessarily working with the offenders themselves. Fourth, an ironic spin-off of these developments is for disenchanted, but capable, 'traditional' probation officers (such as Sue, the ex-senior probation officer in Chapter 4) to embrace this free-market style of operating by providing services to the various probation areas. In this way it becomes possible to hold onto the professional autonomy fast disappearing *inside* the organisation by operating from *outside* (Dominelli 1996).

The extent of the policy shift seems incontrovertible, but demands further investigation into the gender dimensions of these developments. While the analysis

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within Chapter 2 demonstrates that women had taken up the career opportunities offered by the probation service, the reservations expressed by many of the female probation officers within Chapters 4 and 5 indicate the continuing difficulties in establishing their professional identities and appropriate role relations. Moreover, these problems were not resolved by moving up through the organisation, but rather mutated into a different set of concerns, as graphically described by the assistant chief probation officers Joanna and Carol. In this respect it is crucial to acknowledge the gendered nature and placement of the organisation within the criminal justice system:

> Women in the state are usually, whether they like it or not, involved in a masculinised policy process. To resist this means to contest issues in sexual politics within a structure immediately controlled by men... and in organisational terms permeated with patriarchal interests. It can be done - it is done - but not easily.

(Franzway, Court and Connell 1989: 49)

The gendered ramifications of these changes are far-reaching, if usually left implicit within an apparently 'open' competitive field. Within the organisation they further endorse a model of work that demands total commitment to meeting the specified tasks and competences within a managerially controlled operation. The gendered messages underpinning the definition of 'effective working practice', as measured by performance indicators and quantifiable outcomes, establishes an environment where achievement in the high status of the workplace is accomplished only by those who are unencumbered by what are perceived to be low status domestic responsibilities.

In extending this connection between the theoretical concerns of Chapters 1 and 2, and the research findings in Chapters 4 and 5, I therefore now go on to link the implications of these wider policy considerations and their gendered significance, with

the social and cultural world of probation officers from the internal perspective of the organisation.

The Probation Service - Gendered Organisational Issues and Social Relations

In shifting the viewpoint to inside the probation service to consider the impact of these policy changes on working practices and indeed, on the reality of being a 'probation officer', the gendered perspective extends the explanatory, as well as the descriptive analysis. In providing further insights into the interface between personal and professional identities of the male and female probation officers, gender is therefore seen as being interwoven into the daily experiences within these scenarios, informing the understanding of this organisational domain.

Against the backcloth of changing work opportunities and contraction of the organisation, key aspects of professionalism, discretion and power arose in the discussions with the probation officers at their different levels within the hierarchy of the service. The investigation of these aspects in this research showed not only the embeddedness of gender and gender relations within this process, but pointed to the importance of acknowledging the nuances and complexities revealed from this perspective. The openness of the respondents in addressing these issues portrayed the way gendered structures and processes interacted with their own sense of identity and professional motivations, closely paralleling the research observations of Susan Halford, Mike Savage and Anne Witz:

> Restructuring is bound up with people's identities and values, and provokes reflection and discussion. Because it is so bound up with people's own lives, this makes it a messy, unpredictable and uneven process.

(Halford, Savage and Witz 1997: 269)

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While there were references to the uncertainty of the future, expressed in relation to both individual and organisational concerns, there were mixed responses from male and female officers about the course of change. Overall there seemed to be a weary acceptance of yet more upheaval, with many of the long-standing officers adopting a pragmatic view. For the probation officers who were the main wage-earners in their families, their options were constrained. In this respect I was struck by the sense of resignation voiced by many of these probation officers, with Sam's comments serving to summarise these responses:

> I get less worked up than I used to... I guess I'm just much more accepting that this is going to be the case now. I used to kick and scream about all that sort of stuff and then I actually realised that it was only me that was getting a bloody nose out of it. And that it didn't change a darn thing... I'm so against the privatisation of things, but if it happened I'd probably go with the flow.

(Sam, family court welfare team, Area 1)

For the probation officers who had joined the service motivated by the "occupational desire to help clients" (May 1991a: 169) there were now particularly acute difficulties: Pete's comments in Chapter 4 epitomised the sense of losing the fundamental value base to the work and of being ill at ease with the instrumentality of the new approaches. For others, such as Richard (senior probation officer of the generic, community-based team in Area 1), the disappearance of the paternalistic approach within management left him in mid-career at risk of being stranded as an anachronism. These changes had not only put in place a working environment that jarred with the organisational style that he identified with and that had served him well, but he was becoming isolated from realigned groupings within the service ready to grasp the new formulations of working structures and practices (Rose 1989). In contrast, these new opportunities were indeed being embraced by some of the probation officers interviewed for this research, as shown most distinctly by Carol and Michael

(see Chapter 4). However, while positively seeking out the career openings that the changing situation seemed to promise, their responses nevertheless indicated the stressful life-style choices that this single-minded approach entailed.

In this respect the findings from the research in relation to both the male and female probation officers demonstrate that the shift in culture and values that these organisational changes entail, remain under-stated unless the gendered implications are taken into account. The hierarchical pattern that developed in the 1960s and continued into the early 1980s rested on the portrayal of the service as served by a bedrock of autonomous maingrade workers, (male) seniors who gained the respect of their team members as 'first among equals', and surmounted by the traditional stereotype of a paternalistic male chief probation officer. The detailed analysis within Chapters 1 and 2 indicates that, while prevalent as an organisational pattern, this did not hold as an actual reality throughout the service. However, the importance of the symbolism of the male gender order inherent in this organisational model gives some insight into the current re-adjustments: the increasing feminisation at maingrade level at nation-wide level and the growing numbers of women in management in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Chapter 2), brought about a challenge to what had been perceived as normative in gendered terms within the staffing of the probation service. In this way the moves by central government as 'holders of social power' can be seen as indicative of the intention to re-establish male dominance within the gender order of this state agency (Connell 1987, Franzway, Court and Connell 1989). While this readjustment was stated as an explicit intention by the previous Conservative government as shown in Chapter 2, it remains an undercurrent within the current political agenda.

Awareness of the inter-relationship of these discourses varied among the probation officers I interviewed for this research, but was perceived most strongly by

those women such as Joanna and Jackie (see Chapter 4) who, from their different organisational positions, verbalised their commitment to a stance that encompassed the feminist adage the 'personal is political'. Their descriptions of their attempts to mesh their private lives with their work illustrate the unrelenting strains inherent in trying to meet the demands from all sides in their situations. For the women probation officers with children, or with other family responsibilities, who were working full-time there were continual problems and emotional quandaries about trying to reconcile conflicts arising from the interface between work and home. While there were some institutionalised and informal support systems[8], the changing dynamics of 'new managerialism' were putting in place a competitive atmosphere that militated against acknowledgement by the women probation officers of gendered differences or outside pressures. In this way the internal cultures and structures of the various areas perpetuate the illusion of a 'gender blind' meritocratic organisation (Maddock and Parkin 1994), that both negates and at the same time perpetuates the gender inequalities (Acker 1992).

Nevertheless, with the prospect of an increase in short-term and part-time contracts stemming from the changing requirements of probation tasks, there is the possibility of increased flexibility being opened up for women with family responsibilities who do not wish to work full-time. However, this runs the risk of accentuating still further the differentiation between these staff and 'full' organisational members, so clearly illustrated by Lesley in this research (see Chapter 4), with the possibility of the subtle down-grading of rights and benefits for staff on temporary contracts (Bradley 1994). In this respect the 'pool' of qualified women probation officers working part-time face the prospect of becoming a flexible 'reserve', facilitating the smooth running of the organisation, but concurrently reinforcing the male gender

order and male model of work within the 'core' of the service (Crompton and Sanderson 1990b).

While acknowledging the particular difficulties for women, the experiences related by both male and female respondents within Chapter 5 indicated the range of challenges within these gendered cultures encountered by the probation officers. Within the different settings there were variations in the 'fit' between personal and professional identities, as well as differences in the potential for resistance within the day-to-day working situations. The complexities of the gendered social relations were thrown into particularly sharp relief within the prison settings, where the organisational hierarchy and working practices of the prison officers rested on portrayals of dominant white, heterosexual masculinities. This critical case accentuated aspects that remained less overt within the probation service itself, bringing to the surface the gendered perceptions and responses of the probation officers operating within these environments. In this respect the turbulent times ahead for many male and female probation officers were foreshadowed, with the philosophical conflict between containment and rehabilitation being entwined with aspects of organisation and gender.

Throughout this thesis the analysis of the organisational change and the responses of the probation officers have been placed against the background of wider structural and political factors that have impacted on the social processes and work environments of local probation areas within the probation service. Perceptions of the implications and reality of change ran as undercurrents in my contact with the probation officers, coming most sharply into focus in discussions on the increased scrutiny of working practices, as being the most overt demonstration of the loss of autonomy and the shift from local to central control. Most of all, concerns about the implications of these changes in terms of professional identities and values, and the future of the

organisation, were voiced repeatedly. The ambivalences, contradictions and complications inherent in the current situation came through strongly in Pete's reflective comments:

> I actually think that we do a good job, but, you know, I don't think that we're on the side of the angels anymore... I think there's a difficult line to tread now... There are going to be some uneasy alliances here between our traditional role and the victim perspective. It's a challenge, but it could work well... Success in this job is not an easy idea at all.

(Pete, generic community-based team, Area 1)

The pace of change and the uncertainties that lie ahead leave the probation service and probation officers themselves in a state of flux. Meanwhile they continue, against this backdrop of insecurity, to carry out their work within the existing local organisational structures. In applying a gendered interpretative framework to this exploration of the probation service it has been possible to reveal, and account for, linkages between the historical evolution of the organisation and recent developments, with the gendered analysis providing insight into the full extent of the actual and proposed modifications. In this way this approach has not only added a further perspective to the existing literature, but has emphasised the crucial importance of taking account of the interweaving of gender, in coming to an understanding of all aspects of change, from both outside and inside the probation service.

Concluding Summary

This research has opened up to inspection change within the probation service and investigated the ways this is impacting internally on the organisational culture, structures and practices. While the focus has been on this particular organisation the theoretical concerns have a wider relevance beyond this part of the criminal justice system, indicating the importance of acknowledging the embeddedness of gender in any

conceptualisation and exploration of power, discretion and professionalism with regard to investigations into other organisational arenas.

The findings in this study indicate the persistence of the gender distribution across the probation service, with men predominating at the higher levels and with women making significant inroads only into the lower echelons of the gendered organisational pyramids. Moreover, the research material in this study points to the limitations of equal opportunity measures derived from liberal feminist perspectives. Therefore, it highlights the need to challenge the guise of gender neutrality in analysing the developing situation across a range of professional settings within the probation service.

In this respect the reflexivity underpinning the research methods and methodology in this research facilitated consideration of the complexities of change and immutability, and provided insights into the shifting alliances and resistances operating within the organisation. This reflexive engagement with the research problem and the process of conducting the research allowed for on-going reassessment and re-engagement with the fast-changing situation, encompassed within the overall theoretical framework focusing on gender and organisation.

Finally, this study has opened up to scrutiny a previously unresearched area relating to the probation service and emphasises the crucial embeddedness of gender in accounting for the developments within this organisation. In terms of future research avenues, the impending restructuring of the local areas of the service against the background of increasingly centralised Home Office control indicates the pertinence of further investigation and analysis from the perspectives advocated within this thesis. In addition, within the probation service itself there is scope to extend this gendered

approach to link with existing research into working practices and relationships with offenders, providing gendered insights into the shifting value base and changing professional duties of probation staff. However, the probation service is but one organisation among many that are facing radical overhauls of this kind and this research points to the scope for comparative analysis to be conducted in other settings.
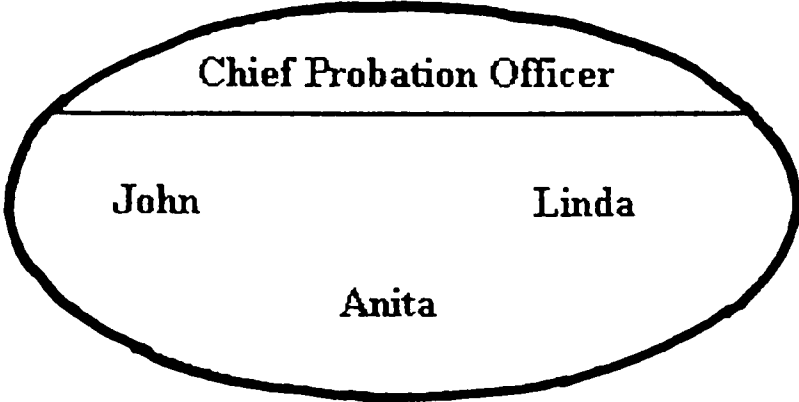
Notes

[1] The Crime and Disorder Bill includes the proposal of a reparation order which could be overseen by the probation service (*The Times*, 26th September 1997, Page 1 [CD version]).

[2] At the end of 1997 probation officer numbers (all grades) stood at 7,200, compared to 7,800 at the end of 1994. Most areas had lost staff; 3 areas remained the same, while in 9 there was a modest increase. (*NAPO News* April 1998: 3).

[3] As part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the possibility of contracting out parts of Community Service, to either voluntary or private sector organisations is being considered (*NAPO News* April 1998: 1).

[4] Three main options for structural change of the probation service are being considered within the Prison/Probation Review: area reform entailing alignment with police force areas; regionalisation matching Government Regions; or, nationalisation (*NAPO News* April 1998: 1).

[5] Current suggestions for the renaming of the probation service include 'Community Corrections', 'Community Justice' and 'Public Safety' Service. (*Probation Journal* March 1998: 2).

[6] The Diploma in Probation Studies is still under development - there is currently no official route to becoming a probation officer.

[7] A Government Review is currently taking place concerning Family Court Welfare and the Representation of Children.

[8] There is an annual 'Women in NAPO' day conference but this is on a relatively small scale, with places for only 100 women in 1998. The women assistant chief probation officers I interviewed in Area 1 (see Appendix) were part of an informal regional support group for women probation managers, but tended to prioritise work commitments over attendance at these meetings.
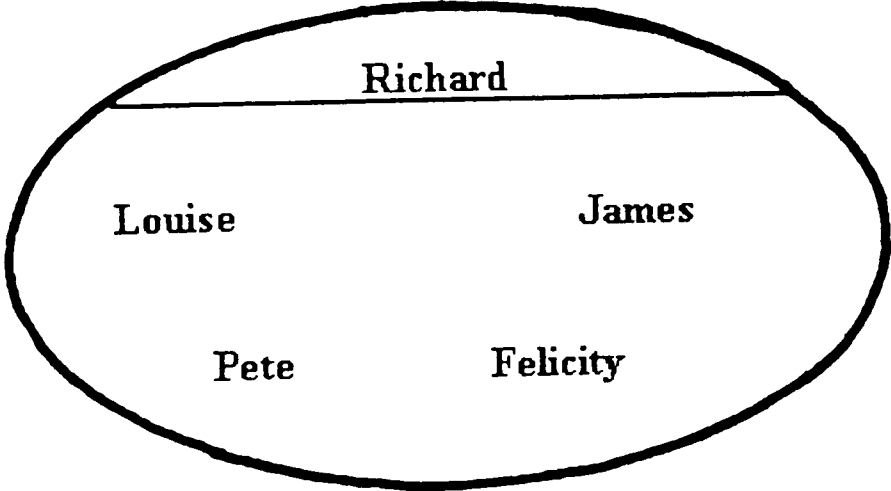
APPENDIX

Location of Respondents

Area 1

Senior Management Team

Chief Probation Officer

John   Linda

Anita

Qualifying Training Unit

Mark

Generic, community-based team

Richard

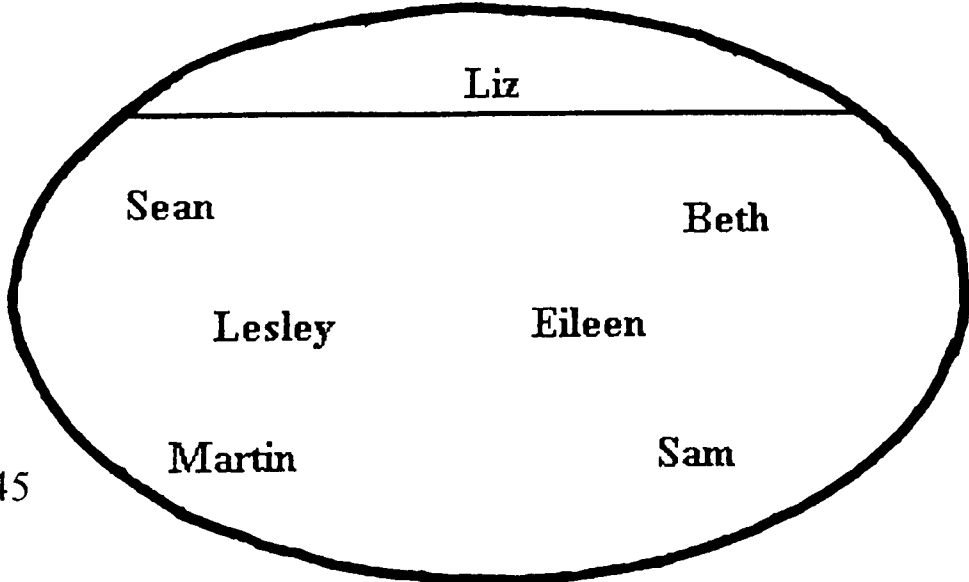Louise   James

Pete   Felicity

Community Service

Rosie

Family Court Welfare Team

Prison setting

Liz

Patricia

Sean   Beth

Alison

Lesley   Eileen

Martin   Sam

245

Area 2

Generic, community-based team

Jane

William   Rebecca

Nancy   Joan

1st Year Officers' Group

Sue

Jackie   Sarah

Michael
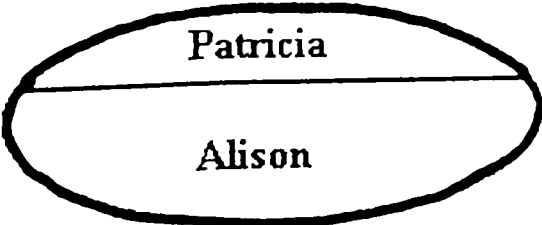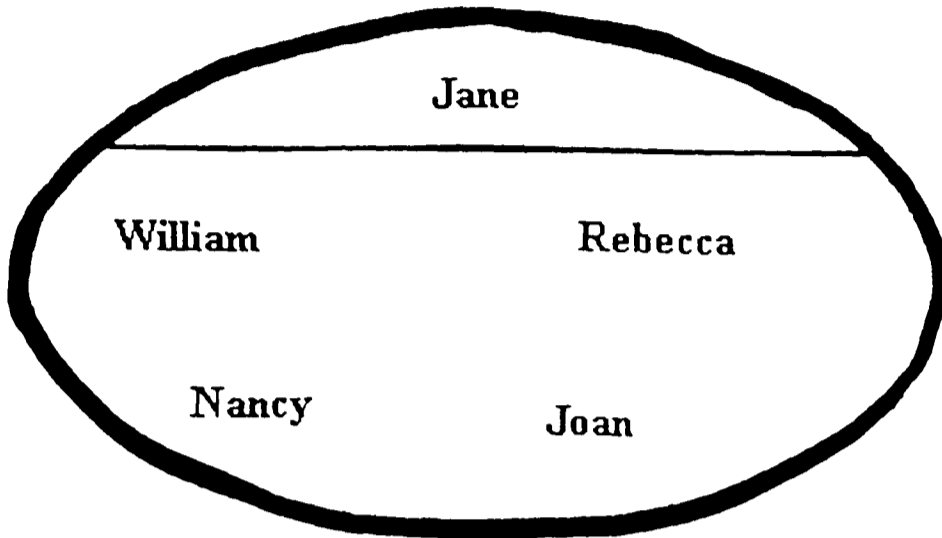
Area 3

Assistant Chief Probation Officers

Joanna   Carol

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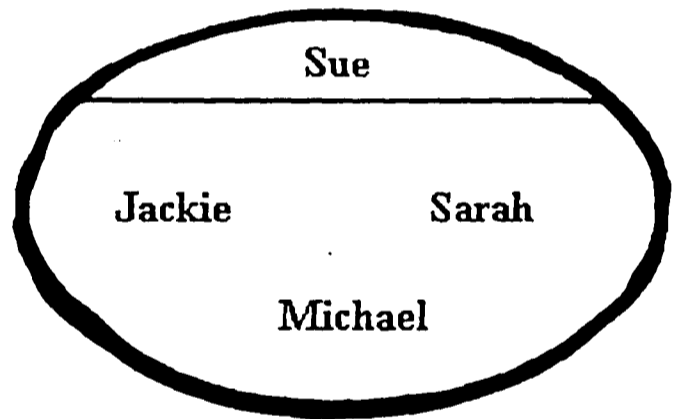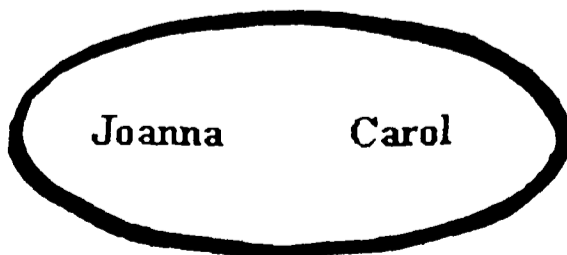Abbott, A. (1981). 'Status and Strain in the Professions', *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 86, No. 4: 816-35.

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