

# **Motherhood Challenged: A matricentric feminist study exploring the persisting impact of maternal imprisonment on maternal identity and role**

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To the best of my knowledge I confirm that the work in this thesis is my original work undertaken for the degree of PhD in the Faculty of HLS, De Montfort University. I confirm that no material of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification at any other university. I also declare that findings from this thesis have been included in publications and conference presentations (see list of publications informed by the research).

## Abstract

The persistent pains of maternal imprisonment, especially beyond five years post-release, is underexplored. A particular knowledge deficit concerns maternal identity and role. This study combined feminist and matricentric lenses to explore criminalised motherhood through prison and beyond. A matricentric-feminist criminological methodology was developed and applied, forming part of the original contribution of the thesis. In line with matricentric and feminist principles, 43 criminalised mothers contributed to the design and execution of this qualitative study through one-to-one interviews and letters. This research centres the Mothers<sup>1</sup> and their voices, and, in a loyally feminist methodology a reflexive exploration of my positionality as a mother, grandmother, former practitioner, and researcher is recognised, accounted for, and included in the thesis. The Mothers described criminalised motherhood as a paradox; they experienced judgement, discrimination and oppression alongside joy and hope. When motherhood was combined with criminalisation, the judgement and gaze the Mothers experienced in a patriarchally constructed and influenced society were magnified. Navigating through the criminal justice system and especially through imprisonment was a painful experience for Mothers. Not least because of the physical separation from children, but additionally due to institutional thoughtlessness and lack of recognition concerning their maternal identity, maternal emotions, and maternal role; which occurred at every stage of the criminal justice system. The investigation produced new knowledge and understanding about the profound, traumatic, and enduring impact of maternal imprisonment. The impact was intergenerational and had implications for Mothers wellbeing, engagement in rehabilitation and desistance. Further original contribution is demonstrated in the knowledge gained about the experiences of criminalised grandmothers, again especially in relation to maternal identity and role. The findings conclude with matricentric-feminist criminological recommendations for research, policy and practice that would contribute to understanding and challenging the social, political, and criminal justice context of mothers who break the law. If implemented, they would lead to fewer mothers being imprisoned and better outcomes for criminalised mothers, which in turn would facilitate better outcomes for children and society.

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<sup>1</sup> Where ‘mothers’ is capitalised it refers to the Mothers in the study, known hereafter as the Mothers or Mothers.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, I must wholeheartedly thank the women who were brave enough and kind enough to share their stories and sometimes their lives with me. Not only have you all contributed to work that will make positive changes for women behind you – but you have all taught me something and I am a better person for knowing you all. We will continue to fight for positive change together.

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Last but absolutely not least, I’d like to say thank you, sorry, and I love you, to my wife- she has been my rock. Without her none of what I do would be possible – she is the strength and the consistency, literally the wind beneath my wings and has made this thesis possible. I’m sorry we have haven’t had weekends and evenings for years – but move over on that sofa lovely, I’m coming in!

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## List of abbreviations in the study

CJS – Criminal Justice System

CRL – Childcare Resettlement Leave

FEW – Family Engagement Worker

GM - Grandmother

HMIP – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons

HMIPP – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons and Probation

HMPS – Her Majesty’s Prison Service

LA - Local Authority

MBU – Mother and Baby Unit

MF- Matricentric Feminism

MoJ – Ministry of Justice

NOMS – National Offender Management Service

PACT – Prison Advice and Care Trust

PRT – Prison Reform Trust

PSI – Prison Service Instruction

PSO – Prison Service Order

PSR – Pre-Sentence Report

ROTL – Release on Temporary License

TR- Transforming Rehabilitation

UNCRC – United Conventions on the Rights of the Child

## List of Publications from the Study

Baldwin, L. (forthcoming 2021) Presence, Voice and Reflexivity in Feminist and Creative Research: A Personal and Professional Reflection. In Masson, I, Baldwin, L and Booth, N., (Eds) (Forthcoming 2021), *Critical Reflections from The Women, Families, Crime and Justice Research Network*, Bristol, Policy Press (Peer Reviewed)

Baldwin, L. (forthcoming 2021) Criminal Mothers: The Persisting Pains of Maternal Imprisonment. In *Criminal Women: Gender Matters*, Co-Authored by The Criminal Women Voice, Justice and Recognition Network (CWVJR), Bristol University Press

Baldwin, L. (forthcoming 2021) Grandmothering in The Context of Criminal Justice; Grandmothers in prison and grandmothers as carers when a parent is in prison. In Weaving Creative and Scholarly perspectives in Honour of our Women elders. Demeter press. Canada. (peer reviewed)

Baldwin, L. (2020) A Life Sentence: The Long-Term Impact of Maternal Imprisonment. In K. Lockwood (Ed) *Mothering and Imprisonment*. Emerald Publishing. (Peer Reviewed)

Baldwin, L. (2019) Motherhood Judged, Social Exclusion Mothers and Prison. In C. Byvelds And H. Jackson (Eds). *Motherhood and Social Exclusion*, Ontario: Demeter Press.

Baldwin, L. (2018) Motherhood Disrupted: Reflections of Post-Prison Mothers. In Maternal Geographies (Sped) *Emotion Space and Society*. Elsevier, 26, pp.49- (Peer Reviewed)

Baldwin, L. (2018) Submission of Written Evidence to Human Rights Committee Inquiry On 'The Right to Family Life: Children Whose Mothers Are in Prison'. Available from: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/human-rights-committee/the-right-to-family-life-children-whose-mothers-are-in-prison/written/91676.html>

Baldwin, L. (2018) Submission of Written Evidence to Lord Farmer's Review, *The Importance of Strengthening Female Offenders' Family and Other Relationships to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*, Available at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/809467/Farmer-Review-Women.PD](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/809467/Farmer-Review-Women.PD)

Baldwin, L. (2017) Tainted Love: The Impact of Prison on Maternal Identity. *Prison Service Journal*, 223, pp. 28-34. (Peer Reviewed)

Baldwin L. (2015) Auth/Ed. *Mothering Justice: Working with Mothers in Criminal and Social Justice Settings*. Hampshire, Waterside Press. (Peer Reviewed)

Baldwin, L. (2015) Mothering from Prison: Understanding Mothers and Grandmothers, A Prison Perspective. In *Mothering Justice: Working with Mothers in Criminal and Social Justice Settings*. Hampshire, Waterside Press. (Peer Reviewed)

### **Joint Publications**

Baldwin, L. Quinlan, C . (2018) Within These Walls; Reflections of Women in and after prison; An insight into the experience of women imprisoned in Britain and Ireland. *Prison Service Journal*. 240:21-27. Available at: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20240%20November.pdf>

O'Malley, S. and Baldwin, L. (2019) Mothering Interrupted: Mother-Child Separation Via Incarceration in England and Ireland. In C. Beyer and A. Robertson (Eds) *Mothers Without Their Children*. Demeter Press. Canada. (Peer Reviewed)

O'Malley, S. **Baldwin, L.** Abbott, L. (Forthcoming) Starting Life in Prison: Reflections of The UK and Irish Contexts of Pregnant and New Mothers in Prison, Through a Children's Rights Lens. In F. Donson and A. Parks, *Presenting A Children's Rights Approach to Parental Imprisonment*. Palgrave. (Peer Reviewed)

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to Beth and Emma, two mums who tragically died during this study. They are not forgotten, and this work is dedicated to their memory and the memory of all those who tragically have lost their lives in or after prison.

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# Chapter 1:

## Women, Crime, Mothers and Prison: An imperfect storm

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*“In there [prison] I was not a mother, they stripped that from me, I was just a prisoner, not someone’s mum, now I’m out I don’t really know what I am, half a mother, half a failure. I don’t think I’ll ever feel like a good mum again.”*  
(Queenie)

### 1.1 Introduction

Well established sociological (Oakley, 1974), biological (Tiger and Fox 1972), psychological (Bowlby, 1946), and functionalist theories (Parsons, 1955) have offered enduring explanations of why women take on the mothering role and mother work. A common theme among them is that they are reductionist in terms of women’s agency, with the exception of feminist perspectives (Ruddick, 2002; Middleton, 2006; O’Reilly, 2006, 2016). Feminism has resisted some of these established theoretical standpoints and yet, historically, feminism has neglected motherhood, primarily because of the complexities surrounding the maternal-role and experience. A recently published edited collection (McCann and Kim, 2016) claimed to be a ‘comprehensive’ feminist companion, consisting of five sections and 53 chapters. However, there was not a single section or chapter devoted to motherhood. Similarly, in criminology, and especially in the United Kingdom (UK), ‘mothers’ have rarely been present in the broader literature as subjects worthy of distinct discussion, rather they are often only briefly alluded to within a general discussion about women and crime.

This thesis investigates the intersection of motherhood and criminal justice in the UK in order to better understand the experiences of mothers before, during and after prison. The thesis presents the argument and provides the evidence; to suggest that in order for



the needs of mothers in the criminal justice system to be met more effectively, significantly more attention must be paid to their maternal-role and identity, i.e. a matricentric approach must be taken. The thesis therefore concludes with a call for the development of a new and focused strand of criminology, namely ‘matricentric-feminist criminology’<sup>2</sup>, which forms part of the original contribution of the study.

## 1.2 Context and Landscape in the United Kingdom

Currently twelve women’s prisons in England accommodate around 4,000 women at any one time. Six mother and baby units (MBUs) have the capacity to hold 66 babies and 54 mothers<sup>3</sup>. Accounting for 5% of the overall prison population in the United Kingdom (UK), around 9,000 women are received into custody annually (Prison Reform Trust (PRT), 2019)<sup>4</sup>. Research suggests that 66% of those will be mothers of children under 16 years (Caddle and Crisp, 1997; PRT, 2015), meaning that an estimated 17,000 children are separated from their mothers annually, either via remand or sentenced imprisonment (Kincaid et al, 2019). It is important to emphasise that this figure does not include mothers of older children (i.e. over 18 years). Therefore, there is currently no accurate figure representing the *actual* number of mothers held in custody. Grandmothers and mothers of older children do not feature anywhere in the statistics; if included this ‘invisible’ population would place the actual number of mothers in custody as being much higher, nearer to 80% (Minson et al, 2015; Baldwin, 2015). Of the children left behind as a result of maternal imprisonment, only 5% remain in their own homes; 14% are taken directly into the care of the local authority (LA), and the fate of the remaining 81% is mixed. Some children are cared for by relatives (mainly their grandmothers), others are cared for by their fathers (9%), and the remainder are displaced into the care of other family members and carers (Caddle and Crisp, 1997<sup>5</sup>; Minson et al., 2017; Beresford, 2018). Significantly,

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<sup>2</sup> Baldwin first used the term in print in 2018 and again in June 2019 in publications arising from the PhD thereby generating a theoretical argument that is echoed and shared by other new matricentric-feminist scholars, most notably Sinead O’Malley (2018, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> There is an allowance for twins, hence the difference in number.

<sup>4</sup> The Bromley Briefings Fact file collates Ministry of Justice (MOJ) information and statistics related to the CJS annually on behalf of the Prison Reform Trust (PRT), available at: <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Publications/Factfile>

<sup>5</sup> The Caddle and Crisp Study is over 20 years old, but is the only comprehensive study available in the UK at this time, and is therefore the study most often quoted – smaller scale studies, for example the Baldwin and Epstein (2017) study (and others e.g. O’Malley, 2018), present a slightly different picture - for example in the Baldwin and Epstein study (*ibid*), and O’Malley’s, study 25% of the children were cared for by their fathers- therefore we have to accept the possibility that cultural shifts in parent care may have impacted on the Caddle and Crisp (1997) figures.

these figures originate from the last large-scale study undertaken by Caddle and Crisp over twenty years ago. Currently, there remains no officially recorded data concerning the numbers of children affected by parental/maternal incarceration and the circumstances of their care. However, there are plans for this to change following a recent enquiry<sup>6</sup>. What *can* be taken from the available statistics is that *most* of the UK female prison population are faced with mothering-related emotions and/or challenges during their imprisonment and following their release.

Women, prison and gendered aspects of incarceration have been extensively researched (Smart, 1976; Carlen, 1983, 2002; Worrall, 1990; McIvor, 2004; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2013). However, research has tended to focus on gender-based interventions and outcomes in relation to how the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and prison estate responds to male and female law breakers/prisoners (Walklate, 2001; Carlen, 2002; Fawcett, 2004 and Gelsthorpe, 2004). Others have explored how differently males and females might experience custody (Padel and Stephenson, 1988; Carlen, 1983; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Devlin, 1998). Internationally there is an established body of work regarding mothers and incarceration, particularly in the USA and Canada, e.g. Flynn (2014), Bloom (1992), Baunach (1985), Enos (2001). However, in the UK, prior to 2015 (thus at the outset of this study), mothers, and especially grandmothers<sup>7</sup> had often been 'invisible', subsumed or missing from research surrounding women and prison (Codd, 2008:129; Baldwin, 2015:140). The academic and policy landscape concerning mothers and prison has changed significantly over the duration of the study. The author's '*Mothering Justice; Working with Mothers in Criminal and Social Justice Settings*' (Baldwin, 2015) was the UK's first complete book to take motherhood as a focus in relation to the impact of the CJS. Thereby raising the visibility of mothers and grandmothers affected by the criminal and social justice systems by applying a matricentric lens to female criminalisation.

Wahidin (2004) undertook valuable and ground-breaking research on the older female prisoner population; however, mothering and grandmothering, although present in that

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<sup>6</sup> Joint Human Rights Committee enquiry into maternal imprisonment and the rights of the child, chaired by Harriet Harman QC: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/human-rights-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/right-to-family-life-inquiry-17-19/>

<sup>7</sup> Grandmothers under the umbrella term of 'mother' are present in this research as there was no upper or lower age limit placed on the mothers included in the study.

work, was not prominently featured (Baldwin, 2018). Maternal imprisonment has more recently gathered momentum, garnering interest in the UK and Ireland, with studies related to maternal imprisonment, the effects on the children, and alternative means of responding to women/mothers in the CJS, representing a rapidly developing body of work ( see Chapter 2). In addition, maternal imprisonment has recently been the focus of attention in developments in policy and practice, for example the Farmer review<sup>8</sup>; and in sentencing practices following the Joint Human Rights Committee into Maternal Imprisonment and the Impact on the Child<sup>9</sup> (both of which include evidence from this research). However, despite the increased interest in maternal imprisonment, and with the exception of Masson (2019) (who interviewed women up to five years post-release), there remains very little research in the UK relating to the *persisting* impact of maternal imprisonment on maternal-identity and longer-term mothering, or the relationship with supervision and desistance. Furthermore, maternal imprisonment is often studied in isolation with little reference made to the relationship between maternal criminalisation and broader societal issues. This matricentric-feminist thesis responds specifically to these gaps.

### 1.3 Historical Legacy

Zedner (1991) and Priestley (1999) provide historical reflection examining how women in UK prisons, especially mothers, have long been described as ‘deviants’, perceived as acting outside of gender norms and their role as mothers. Baldwin (2015) and Clarke and Chadwick (2018) argue that the legacy of such beliefs is still evident in the CJS, and in attitudes to women who break the law per se, again especially for those women who are also mothers (this will be revisited in the literature review). It has long been argued that prison is more damaging to women than it is to men (Smart, 1976; Carlen, 1983, 1985; Moore and Scraton, 2014; Lockwood, 2017) and that the impact on their families is greater, not least because women are most often the primary carer for their children (Enos, 2001; Codd, 2008; Booth, 2020; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Baldwin, 2015, 2017, 2018; Masson, 2019). Feminist criminologists and sociologists like Carlen (1985, 1998),

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<sup>8</sup> Importance of strengthening female offenders' family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farmer-review-for-women>

<sup>9</sup> See 3 also

Heidensohn (1996), Worrall (1990), Naffine (1997), Corston (2007, 2011), Quinlan (2011), Moore and Scraton (2014) and others, have argued that women enter prison already damaged and disadvantaged from an unequal position in both wider society and in the CJS itself. They then become additionally challenged and disadvantaged because they have entered a system that was essentially created by men and designed around the needs of male prisoners (Carlen, 1983; McIvor, 2004). Moore and Scraton (2014) argue that prison simply reinforces the cultural violence and powerlessness, physically and metaphorically, that women are subjected to in society generally. They examine the gendered 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958) and further suggest that:

*"In prison, the imposition of discipline and control of women's bodies, their identities and their associations developed a more stark manifestation of the subjugation of women beyond the walls."* (Moore and Scraton, 2014:27)

#### 1.4 The Need for a Gendered Response

The Corston Report (2007) provided an opportunity to stimulate and provoke the passions of activists and academics working in the field of women's imprisonment (Booth et al 2018). Baroness Corston highlighted the plight of women in prison. Although the report itself did not say anything new, it reiterated what the voices of researchers, feminist researchers and prison sociologists have been saying over the past thirty years; that prison does not work for women. In fact, prison generally further harms women (Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Worrall, 1990; Quinlan, 2014; Moore and Scraton, 2014; Booth et al 2018). However, importantly, Corston did specifically highlight the pains of imprisonment concerning motherhood as a distinct area of discussion in its own merit, in a way that had previously been less visible in prison research and literature. Corston (2007) quoted Baroness Hale in her report:<sup>10</sup>.

*"Many women [in prison] still define themselves and are defined by others - by their role in the family. It is an important component in our self-identity and self-esteem. To become a prisoner is almost by definition to become a bad mother."* (Corston, 2007:2.17:20).

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<sup>10</sup> Corston J. (2007) A review of Women with Vulnerabilities in The Criminal Justice System. Home Office. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf>

Corston (2007) made a total of 43 recommendations for a 'radical' overhaul of how women in the CJS are responded to. She reiterated in her report the gendered pathways into crime for women, recognising that women in the CJS are often victims as well as offenders. Because of this, women also need gendered pathways *out* of crime - pathways that ought to include wrap-around support and therapeutic interventions and *should*, wherever possible, be community-based and provided by 'one-stop-shop' women-focused specialist centres. Corston (*ibid*) identified the ways in which the prison estate and its male-orientated design disadvantages women and their need to remain engaged in family life, stating that this can have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of women. Corston highlighted the fact that women's prisons are geographically dispersed, meaning that many women are between 50 and 150 miles from home, which has an obvious impact on the frequency and possibility of visits from family and friends. Corston (*ibid*) argued vociferously for women to be diverted from custody, indeed from the CJS, wherever possible, advocating instead for the development of creative means of providing alternatives to custody and criminalisation. Barrow Cadbury Trust, in partnership with 'Women in Prison'<sup>11</sup> undertook research in 2017, '*Corston +10*', with the intention of seeing how far the recommendations of the original report had been implemented. They found that, despite the recommendations being widely accepted as required and sensible, only two had been fully implemented, and the remainder only partially implemented or not at all (Women in Prison, 2017).

Since the original report and the follow-on report (Corston, 2011) were published, there have been *some* positive and meaningful changes in the women's prison estate regarding improving physical conditions for women in custody. Such changes have come via the broader ambition for positive change of policy makers, academics and practitioners: to reduce women's imprisonment generally, to increase community pre- and post-prison support and to maintain family links. The Female Offender Strategy (FOS, 2018) launched '*a new programme of work to improve outcomes for female offenders*'<sup>12</sup>. The FOS at last included a stated intention to pursue the development of

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<sup>11</sup> Women in Prison, a national organisation which supports women in the CJS, and also campaigns for positive change for women in the CJS: <https://www.womeninprison.org.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> The Female Offender Strategy, a new programme of work to improve outcomes for female offenders published June 2018, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy>

small community-based ‘alternatives to prison’, although the details of how this will be achieved in terms of timescale and sources of funding remain unclear some two years later. Although the strategy clearly refers to the importance of family relationships and making positive change, until the recent female-focused Farmer Review<sup>13</sup>, there had been significantly less focus or development of policy frameworks specifically related to maternal imprisonment, maternal-identity, or mothering during and after prison (Howard League, 2018; PRT, 2015; Baldwin, 2015; Masson, 2019).

The central role that women often play in the family has led many commentators to present the argument that maternal imprisonment is more disruptive to family life than paternal imprisonment (Enos, 2001; Baldwin, 2015, 2018; Booth, 2017, 2020; Masson, 2019). As Corston (2007) identifies this ‘central role’ is often at the root of many of women’s anxieties in prison as they continue to attempt to mother and undertake mothering duties whilst incarcerated. Not all imprisoned mothers will experience prison in the same way or have the same emotional reactions to their experience (Rowe, 2011), nor will all mothers have contact and care arrangements before, during or after prison. Some mothers may see prison as a safe space (Bradley and Davino, 2002; Rowe, 2011; O’Malley, 2018) or as a positive opportunity to seek support and effect change either for themselves or for themselves and their children (Pollock, 1998; Codd 2008; Enos, 2011; Baldwin, et al 2015; O’Malley and Devaney, 2016). For others, and research suggests it is the majority, it may feel more like the end of the world (Carlen and Worrall, 1987; Carlen, 2004; Quinlan, 2011; Moore and Scraton, 2014; Baldwin, 2018). Individual and emotional circumstances and experiences will have relevance in the lived experiences of mothers in and after prison. However, whether or not mothers had their children in their care prior to custody or when they leave prison, from the limited research examining mothering-related emotions and incarceration, it is clear that motherhood and mothering emotions represent an additional layer of complexity, which is of significant relevance to those working with many women in prison (see Baldwin, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019).

Kaplan (1992) identified that there was a distinct lack of scholarly representation concerning mothers’ internal experience of mothering per se. Kaplan (*ibid*) argued that

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<sup>13</sup> See also 7.

much of the narrative empirical evidence relating to women's own experiences of motherhood was significantly influenced by patriarchy, and later by psychoanalysis. Suggesting, therefore, that it was not so much that the 'mother' had *not* received scholarly attention, but that '*she had mainly been studied from an other's point of view: or represented as an (unquestioned) patriarchally constructed social function*' (Kaplan, 1992:15). Thus, mothers' own voices are often silenced, muted, unheard or invisible in research and policy. Bassin et al (1994:2) again highlight the importance of mothers' own voices, stating that it is '*critical to fighting against the dread and devaluation of women*', and, further, that '*listening to the maternal voice disrupts deeply held views of women and motherhood*' (1994:10). This study, at least in terms of post-prison and criminalised mothers, responds to this 'gap' in the scholarly representation of mothers, and deliberately heavily features the voices of mothers and grandmothers and their experiences.

## **1.5 Aims and Objectives**

### **1.5.1 Main Research Aims**

The main aims of this study were twofold - to extend the knowledge and understanding of the impact of maternal incarceration, and to determine its enduring effects in terms of maternal-identity and role.

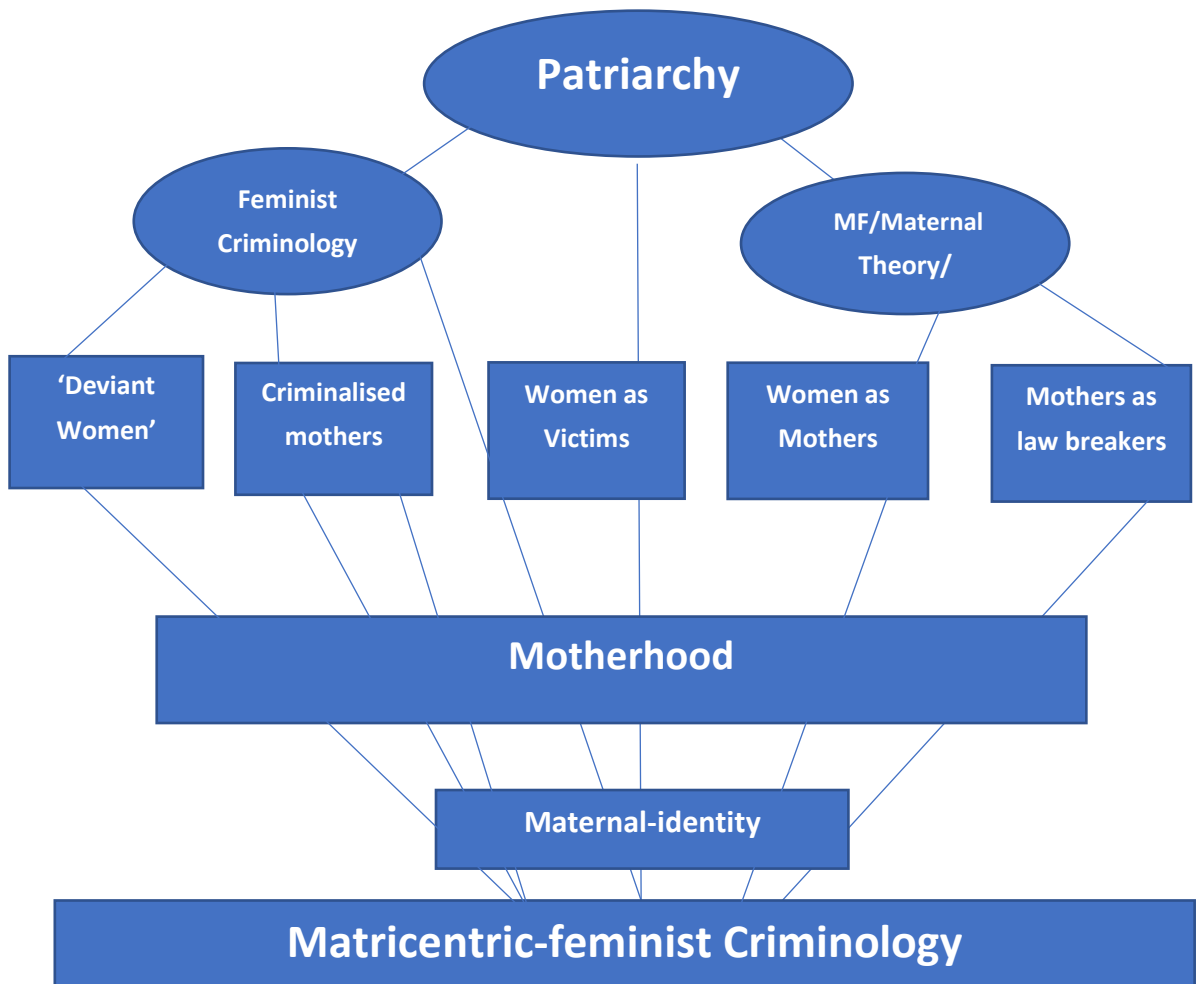
The specific objectives are:

- To critically explore the in-prison and post-prison experiences of mothers, particularly in relation to maternal-identity, and the mothering role.
- To consider the relevance of motherhood and maternal experiences, in relation to sentence planning and post-release supervision.
- To develop an understanding of the enduring impact of maternal imprisonment.
- To formulate matricentric recommendations to inform and shape policy and practice in relation to mothers in and after prison.

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

Matricentric-feminism (MF), (see Chapter three), and Feminist criminology, provided the theoretical framework through which the aims of this study were met (see Fig. 1). MF understands motherhood to be socially and historically constructed, recognising motherhood as a practice **and** an identity which is impacted on heavily by patriarchally influenced structures, systems, institutions and beliefs (O'Reilly 2016). In line with both feminist and matricentric principles, this study seeks to authentically centre the described experiences and voices of mothers who have been in prison.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**





Merriam (1998) and other social constructionists stress the importance of acknowledging and exploring reflexively, the relationship between researcher and participants, especially in feminist studies such as this one. Finlay (2002:534) further suggests that the researcher/researched relationship is significant because it is this relationship '*which is seen to fundamentally shape research results*'. As a mother and grandmother, but also importantly as an ex-social worker and probation officer and in line with feminist and matricentric research ethics, it was important to maintain an awareness of how my choice of topic, my lived experiences, my perceptions and beliefs about motherhood, and my practice-based history may have interlinked with the research. As such, my reflexive journey will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis (Chapter 5).

Utilising a matricentric-feminist lens, I explored the experiences of mothers affected by imprisonment. The study examined maternal-identity and role through the Mothers' concepts of motherhood; specifically, 'good' motherhood, within the context of prison and post-release, and whilst retaining a critical matricentric-feminist position. The mothers accounts were examined in the context of feminist criminological thinking and with reference to longstanding feminist ideology and maternal theory, thus creating a bridge across two currently distinct and separate disciplines to generate and develop a new matricentric-feminist criminology. The following literature reviews are based on this epistemological position.

The research was approved by De Montfort University Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) and was additionally supported by two national organisations that work with women in and after prison<sup>14</sup>. Those organisations agreed to host information about the study and invited potential participants to contribute to the research, thus leading to my first line of participants. The data in this qualitative study comes from a total of 43 mothers: 28 in-depth semi structured interviews with post-prison mothers, and 25 letters from 15 mothers still in prison. The letters and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006), which aligned with the researcher's own theoretical and feminist approach and thus prioritised the participants' own descriptions and experiences.

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<sup>14</sup> Women in Prison see 8 also; Women's Breakout were an umbrella organisation supporting 53 women's centres nationally – now merged with Clinks. <https://www.clinks.org/community/blog-posts/womens-breakout-new-chapter>

## 1.7 Overview of Thesis

Chapter two provides an overview of existing literature regarding, 'Women and Imprisonment', 'Mothers and Imprisonment', and 'Mothers After Prison'. After examining significant studies in relation to imprisonment the literature review, drawing on the work of feminist criminologists, it highlights the 'unequal playing field' in which women in prison are placed. The second section, 'Mothers and Imprisonment' reveals the historical legacy concerning attitudes and responses to maternal imprisonment and concludes by relating this historical context to contemporary feminist criminological research exploring experiences of mothers in the CJS.

Chapter three explores maternal theory, matricentric-feminism and maternal-identity, thereby informing the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis. Chapter four presents the theoretical, ethical and methodological considerations, design, decisions, research tools and analysis used throughout the research. Chapter five introduces the Mothers<sup>15</sup> but also, in the spirit of true feminist work provides a detailed reflexive account of the researcher in terms of my own relationship to the research and also the relevance of my own story.

Chapters six and seven present the empirical findings of the study which relate to two overarching themes: mothering from prison, and mothering after prison. Chapter six 'Motherhood Challenged', is divided into two parts. Part one, 'Pre-prison Circumstances' explores the mothers' pathways to prison, revealing new knowledge about mothers own experiences of being mothered, and its relevance to their narrative and later experiences. Part Two, 'Mothers Inside', via the themes 'Entering Prison Space', 'Mothering and Grandmothering from a Distance,' and 'Regimes Rules and Inside Relationships', explores how Mothers' efforts to maintain a healthy maternal-identity and role are continually frustrated during incarceration. The chapter highlights the Mothers' absorption of traditional models of mothering, highlighting challenges and support in the prison space, and the mothers' experiences of contact with their children and caregivers.

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<sup>15</sup> From herein the mothers in the study will be referred to as the Mothers, or Mothers.

Chapter seven explores the 'Persistent Pains of Maternal Imprisonment' through the themes of 'Renegotiating Motherhood, 'Trust and Surveillance' and 'Trauma and Pain'. The chapter exposes the continued challenges the mothers face post-release with a now 'spoiled' maternal identity. The Mothers describe the emotional challenges of feeling they must serve 'penance' in their relationships with their children in their pursuit of a return to 'good' motherhood. Moreover, the chapter reveals new and important knowledge about the long-lasting trauma inflicted on the mothers from their incarceration.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, reflects on the insights and understanding gained. The conclusions of the study are presented alongside matricentric recommendations for policy development and positive change concerning criminalised mothers. It argues for matricentric-feminist principles (O'Reilly, 2016) to be applied to criminology, particularly to penal theory and sentencing and debates about punishment. It reveals the impact of this research. The chapter further highlights the need for a broader cultural shift concerning definitions of 'good' mothering. It also reinforces the evidence-based need for positive, trauma-informed change concerning mothers and imprisonment and supervision. The chapter concludes with suggestions and considerations for future research, including the author's own post-doctoral plans.

## **1.8 Summary of Original Contribution**

By engaging directly with mothers and their experiences, this study has produced important, nuanced understanding and new knowledge about the experiences of Mothers and grandmothers before, during and after prison. The study evidences the need and justification for a new and distinct strand of criminology, namely 'matricentric-feminist criminology'. It also provides new knowledge and nuanced understanding about mothers pathways into and out of prison and the processes of maternal repair and renegotiation post-prison. Importantly, and in line with matricentric principles, the study evidences the experiences of *all* mothers; to include grandmothers, mothers of adults and mothers whose children have been removed from their care, thereby extending original knowledge and developing new knowledge. It reveals the long-term, persisting pains of imprisonment and the subsequent and ongoing trauma of maternal separation due to imprisonment, providing the evidence that the harm of maternal imprisonment continues for far longer than previously accounted for. The study evidences the profound

hurt caused by maternal imprisonment and examines the Mothers' vulnerabilities; however, the study also reveals the incredible strength and resilience shown by the Mothers as they strive to navigate a criminal justice system that often and repeatedly fails them.

The thesis now turns to the literature review setting out the theoretical lens and gaps to which this study responds.

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# Chapter 2

## Literature Review (Part One): Women, crime, and punishment

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### 2.1 Introduction

Through the combined lenses of feminist criminology and maternal theory this study explores how maternal experiences and identity in, and after prison are shaped and influenced by cultural and societal gender-based norms that are firmly rooted in patriarchy (see Figure 1). It will illustrate the valuable contribution of Andrea O'Reilly who, because of the historical lack of attention that feminism has paid to the complexities of motherhood experiences and theory (O'Reilly, 2006, 2016) advocates for motherhood to have a feminism of its own - 'matricentric-feminism'. A key element of matricentric theory, as will be discussed in Chapter three, is to pay attention to the voices and diverse experiences of mothers themselves and to the persisting structural and societal inequalities that perpetuate particular life challenges for mothers. In applying this theory, via the additional lens and methodology of feminist criminology, this thesis extends O'Reilly's theory of matricentric-feminism, to advocate for a new branch of criminology, generating 'matricentric-feminist criminology'. This enables an approach to research, through which the experiences of mothers in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) can be explored and understood.

This chapter identifies existing seminal notions related to imprisonment, which, despite being male orientated and heavily influenced by patriarchal ideology, have nonetheless contributed understanding concerning the experience of being a prisoner and ex-prisoner (of any gender). This seminal knowledge, now accepted wisdom, includes 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958), the 'power and discipline of punishment' (Foucault, 1977), the 'prisoner status' and ensuing 'stigma' (Goffman, 1963).

In exploring gendered criminal justice, this chapter will consider the patriarchal and historical roots of women and crime more generally, exploring how this legacy has shaped, and to some extent still shapes, contemporary criminal women's experiences of prison. The chapter will then adjust its focus specifically to women law breakers who are also mothers. It will trace the roots of their experiences, highlighting the tightly bound relationship between motherhood ideals, deviancy and patriarchy, exploring how this plays out in the CJS. Finally, it will discuss what is currently known about mothers' experiences of prison, the post-release period, and post-release effects.

## **2.2 Seminal Notions of Imprisonment and Accepted Wisdom**

Prior to focussing specifically on women and mothers in and after prison, notions of imprisonment that have become accepted wisdom are presented. However, it is important to appreciate that they are patriarchally reductionist. They do not present a full picture of understanding in terms of the prisoner experience and fundamentally are not coming from a position of understanding in terms of women's experiences or position in society. Notably nor do they accommodate a matricentric perspective. This thesis does not reject this knowledge, rather it builds on it, asking important questions about what this knowledge would look like if the experiences of women had also been explored and incorporated. This thesis extends this existing knowledge by investigating the processes of incarceration and what it does to women and especially what it does to mothers.

### **2.2.1 Power, surveillance and control**

Foucault (1977) offered significant contributions to penology, with an analysis charting the gradual move away from physical torture, leading to the dominance of imprisonment as a means of punishment. He rejects the notion that the development of prison was motivated by humanitarian ideology or as a means of rehabilitation. Although his work was not centred exclusively around prisons, his theories primarily address the relationship between power and knowledge and, importantly, how these are utilised as a medium of social control through institutions (such as prison) and beyond. While Foucault's (1977) theories of imprisonment are gender neutral, feminist criminologists have identified strong links between his emphasis on power and control as relevant to our understanding of the pervasive influence of patriarchy. Foucault (1977), views the

prison as a metaphor for modern life, examining historical development of the penal system and identifying how the punishment of wrongdoers in modern society was transformed from physical punishment of the body to the more existential punishment and control of the person. Which included their thinking, being and character - Foucault referred to these processes of power and control via surveillance as 'hierarchical observation' (1977:136-8).

Foucault argued that power is used to define and control what we 'know', and to maintain social control. He argued that the fear and experience of surveillance or unknown observation is a 'function' of power, providing a background or 'carceral network' (p.297) of normalised control. This is present both pre- and post-prison and is extended into wider society more generally, particularly in state institutions. It could be argued that this extension of the 'carceral network', formal and informal surveillance and 'normalisation' (Foucault, 1977:115), which has extended throughout society, is manifestly connected to the social control of women. Foucault purports that prisoners are classified, ordered and surveyed, and their subjectivity and individuality are denied. Feminist scholar McNay (2013) argues that this underestimates and fails to account for the agency and identity of individuals. Garland (2012), in his examination of control, also criticises Foucault for failing to appreciate the resistance and subjectivity of individual prisoners. However, like Foucault, Garland fails to account for gender, race and class which Bosworth (1999) argues renders critiques of punishment as non-reflective of society and, therefore, lacking in generalisation, especially so concerning women, mothers and their experience of prison.

Developing these themes for female prisoners, Moore and Scraton (2014) highlight how prison radiates a power which transcends the temporal experience of the prisoner to affect their mind, body and soul. Moore and Scraton (*ibid*) expose the extent to which women are controlled in prison, which they argue magnifies the 'accepted' and known 'pains of imprisonment'. They cite limited access to (and/or control) of their children and maternal-role, their fertility and fertility windows, and their access to gender-specific (as well as gender neutral) healthcare. This demonstrates that power, surveillance and control in prison and its regimes are felt distinctly differently by women. The ways in which we talk about punishment and women, are bound by patriarchal ideology or, as Canton (2015:42) argues, punishment is '*..inevitably led and constrained by broader, social, economic, political and cultural influences*' (which are of course inter-related).

Furthermore, Canton (*ibid*) argues, '*criminal justice and punishment, as authoritative social institutions, reproduce and can reciprocally influence these wider social developments*'.

For women, feelings of powerlessness and being under surveillance are often accompanied by feelings of suspicion and mistrust. Girshick, cited in Crewe et al (2017:15), highlighted that in women's prisons the element of mistrust 'is always present', which Crewe et al (2017:15) felt is related to the '*myriad of ways in which their [women in prison] trust had been broken*' in their lives before prison. However, how the issues of trust and surveillance translate to motherhood in prison or how they endure beyond prison, is not previously well addressed in the literature. Rose (1989:123) extends Foucault's work by arguing that '*childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence*' and that childrearing, and the health and welfare of the child, is subject to intense scrutiny - primarily because the outcomes are linked to the 'destiny of the nation'. Given that women generally take on much of the responsibility and 'work' involved in child rearing, this subjects mothers to state-mandated gaze and assessment (Rose, 1999), which is additionally magnified and compounded by their becoming a prisoner and which, as this study will demonstrate, endures post-prison as a persistent pain of imprisonment.

### **2.2.2 The pains of imprisonment**

Sykes (1958:18) suggests that '*the prison exists as a dramatic symbol of society's desire to segregate the criminal*' and that the '*hurts*' of prison lie in the '*frustrations and deprivations therein*'. He proposed that all prisoners experience 'pains of imprisonment' to a greater or lesser extent, which he contextualised as deprivation of liberty and autonomy, deprivation of goods and services, deprivation of heterosexual relations, and deprivation of personal autonomy and security. According to Sykes (*ibid*), the sum total of such social and material pains renders prison undesirable and with long-lasting effects. He suggested that in prison, carceral pain is everywhere and social order is fragile. Loss of liberty obviously takes away a person's freedom and so inevitably restricts contact with the outside world, thus impacting on personal relationships and not least, with children. Although not specifically explored by Sykes, this has an obvious and painful impact on parent/child relationships if it is a parent who is imprisoned. This



contributes to the argument that women, who are more often the primary carer and are subject to the broader societal expectations of motherhood, are therefore more vulnerable to these pains of imprisonment (Bosworth, 1996; Moore and Scraton, 2014; Baldwin, 2015; Masson, 2019; Booth, 2020).

Sykes argued that the more extensive the pains of imprisonment, the greater likelihood of increased and persisting recidivism. For example, restrictions on contact with the outside world in terms of social contact through visits and phone calls are likely to weaken social bonds, thus increasing the likelihood of reoffending (Shammas, 2017). The importance of family connections is echoed in research around prisoners and their families (Codd, 2013; Booth, 2020), and also recognised in the Farmer Reviews (2017, 2019) as a 'golden thread' needing to be visible and accommodated through the prison estate and prison policy. Although Sykes' work does not specifically relate to women or mothers, his argument that the more extensive the pains of imprisonment the greater the likelihood of reoffending becomes, has particular relevance for mothers post-release. This study will provide evidence for this. Sykes (1958) contended that an important consideration in examining the effects or pains of imprisonment was the impact on the 'self', stating that an understanding of how the 'deprivations and frustrations' (p.79) of imprisonment pose profound and enduring threats to personality, self-esteem and self-worth:

*"However painful these frustrations or deprivations may be in the immediate terms of thwarted goals, discomfort, boredom, and loneliness, they carry a more profound hurt as a set of threats or attacks which are directed at the very foundations of the prisoner's being. The individual's picture of himself as a person of value - as a morally acceptable adult {male} who can present some claim to merit in his material achievements and his inner strength - begins to waver and grow dim". (Sykes, 1958:79).*

Such threats are particularly salient to maternal self-esteem. Mothering after prison has been recognised as challenging (Opsal 2011; Leverentz, 2014; O'Neill, 2015; Garcia-Hallett, 2019; Gunn and Samuels, 2020), not least because of the impact on the 'self'. The lasting 'effects on the self' aspect of Sykes' work will be revisited in the findings and discussion chapters to reveal how these enduring 'deprivations and frustrations' interact specifically with motherhood and maternal self-esteem. Sykes argues that the '*prison*

*exists as a dramatic symbol of society's desire to segregate the criminal'* (1958:18), which serves to differentiate the 'criminal' from the non-criminals. Sykes describes how this contributes to a prisoner's threatened image of themselves as anything other than as a prisoner (or ex-prisoner). For mothers in prison, a reduction in or losing their maternal-identity, or it being subsumed by their prisoner identity, is particularly painful (Enos, 2001; Lockwood, 2018; Moore and Wahidin, 2018).

The most often cited pain of imprisonment for mothers is the enforced separation from their children, often coupled with feelings of fear, loss, anxieties about the future and a reduction in feeling of worth as a mother (Enos, 2001; Corston, 2007; Masson, 2019). Soffer and Ajzenstadt (2010) highlight that mothers are hit particularly hard in relation to their maternal role. They argue that being deprived of their autonomy as mothers makes the mothers feel less worthy or, as Enos (2001:63) described, 'less like mothers'. Crewe et al (2017), although not specifically investigating pains of imprisonment associated with motherhood, did identify that the life-sentenced women in their study were deeply affected by a deterioration in their familial relationships, especially with their children, thus adding another layer to the existing pains of imprisonment as described by Sykes. The lack of ability to take an active role in mothering and the resulting negative impact on imprisoned mothers (and their children) is a regularly observed pain of imprisonment (Baldwin, 2015; Booth, 2018; Masson, 2019; Lockwood, 2020).

Whilst most studies exploring the imprisonment of mothers focus on the negative aspects of maternal incarceration, several studies identify that for some women it can provide a sense of respite. Crewe et al (2017) highlight that women in prison often have 'trauma histories'. O'Malley (2018, 2020), O'Malley and Devaney (2015), and Soffer and Ajzenstadt (2010) found that, particularly for mothers whose pre-prison lives were marred by chaos, addiction and domestic abuse, prison could be a 'safe haven'. Soffer and Ajzenstadt (2010) have described prison for such women as an 'opportunity' to repair themselves, to address the root causes of their offending and, without the responsibility of children, to gain access to therapeutic and practical support, which they argue mitigates some aspects of the anticipated pains of imprisonment. Soffer and Ajzenstadt (2010:13) cautiously described prison for the mothers in their study as a 'far better alternative to their former dire lives'. However, they also highlight that prison is an environment that is not one-dimensional and that, especially for mothers, the emotional response to and experience of prison can be complex and contradictory. Moore and

Wahidin (2018) find it disturbing that prison is ever put forward as an appropriate response or solution to the many challenges that women face and that lead them to being criminalised. They state:

*“To suggest that prison can resolve the significant problems that women can experience - prior to, during and after imprisonment – is to downplay its punitive function, and to underestimate the pain and deprivation which lies at the heart of the incarceration process.”* (Moore and Wahidin, 2018:25)

Thus, existing literature has contributed to our understanding of gendered pains of imprisonment, continuing this discussion this thesis explores how the pains of maternal imprisonment persist for many years post-release. It reveals the enduring impact of maternal imprisonment experienced by both mothers and their children, not least via their feelings of stigma and shame, resulting in mothers feeling diminished and children feeling tainted and stigmatised for having experienced a mother in prison (Masson, 2019).

### **2.2.3 Stigma, shame and the effects of prison**

Through his seminal work, *‘Asylums’* (1961), Goffman explored the general characteristics of ‘total institutions’, investigating how socialisation occurs within to create a lasting impact on the roles and identities of its ‘inmates’ (1961:15). Goffman defines a total institution as, a place where the barriers between the three main spheres of social life - work, sleep and play - are broken down; where this will be experienced in a single place, under a singular authority, and in the company of similar ‘others’ who will be treated similarly; where activities will be scheduled or planned and will be in line with an overarching *‘rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution’* (1961:17). Goffman (1961) regards prison as a total institution through which a person experiences ‘prisonisation’, resulting in their individual norms and values being replaced by that of the prison. Prisoners become part of a ‘managed’ group and are labelled as such; similarly, the staff or ‘supervisory’ team also form a collective identity, and one which Goffman suggests comes with feelings of superiority and righteousness, as opposed to the prisoners’ feelings of guilt, inferiority and weakness.

Adding to prisoners' trauma and caused by the systematic separation from their 'home world' and its associations, together with the 'abasements, degradations, and humiliations' of prison (Goffman, 1961:24) the inmates experience mortification of the self and role dispossession. The 'stripping away' of old identities, roles and associations are confirmed through prison rituals such as designated clothing, allocation of a prison number, limited personal contact and restricted autonomy. These serve both to confirm the overarching prisoner identity and to embed the stigma. Although Goffman is not speaking about women or mothers specifically, given the restricted ability for mothers to continue to engage in mothering from prison, it is not difficult to apply his concept of 'role dispossession' to motherhood, thus the *mortification* of motherhood occurs. Goffman recognised that some roles can be re-established post-release, whereas some, (to include motherhood if children are permanently removed), are lost. Arguably, and as will be evidenced in later chapters, aspects of the 'self' and individual identities that accompany our 'roles' are also affected, often long after release from prison.

Through prisonisation, individuals become mortified, stigmatised and 'spoiled'. Goffman (1963) regards stigma as a public mark/attribute or face/identity that can be/is identified by others and which contributes to a 'spoiled identity', resulting in 'shame' - the inward facing by-product of stigmatisation. Hence, Goffman posits that stigma takes the form of an attribute (or label) which serves to discredit or shame individuals, making them stand out as different from the non-stigmatised, and creating two distinct groups; in Goffman's terms, the 'stigmatised and the normals' (1963:23). Accordingly, someone with these characteristics is 'different from others' (the norm) and therefore 'blemished' and 'reduced' *'from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one'* (1963:12). Thus, Goffman's work offers insight of what it is to be stigmatised and how it comes to be, demonstrating that it often results in exclusion, marginality, discrimination and internal shame. Given that Goffman did not specifically relate his discussions to women or mothers, the forthcoming findings and discussion will later explore how this manifests in relation to motherhood.

There is little doubt that Goffman has made important contributions to our understanding of the 'reducing' and stigmatising effect of prison, in addition to our understanding of the long-lasting harm and discrimination that is caused to the 'self' for those who have experienced prison. Goffman was concerned with interactions between humans, and he believed that people see themselves as others view them and that, as such, individuals

are influenced by how they think others see them (Goffman, 1959). He (1963:12) suggests that on first meetings, we, as socialised individuals, anticipate the '*social identity*' of those we meet and that we rely on these anticipations as '*normative expectations*' and '*righteously presented demands*'.

Modern sociology has offered some critique of Goffman's theory in that it focuses on the stigmatised rather than on the stigmatisers (Tyler and Slater 2018). It has been suggested that Goffman frames stigmatised individuals as victims, which has the effect of further stripping them of their agency. Feminists have suggested that Goffman pays too little attention to the broader societal and structured concerns that contribute to and perpetuate stigmatisation (Renzetti 2013); in this context, this would be those broader concerns which feminists argue contribute to ideology about women and about mothers. However, other feminist scholars (West, 1996; Henley, 1977) have acknowledged that Goffman's work influenced feminist thinking on gendered interactions and gender inequality. They note that Goffman had commented that women are often seen in a 'support' role to men which, obviously, Feminism recognises as evidence of broader inequality. Moreover, that such inequality in interactions needs to be recognised in order for that inequality to be challenged more widely (West, 1996; Henley, 1977). Feminists such as West and Henley (*ibid*) also credit Goffman's work as recognition that the biological justification of inequality is unacceptable. In his later work in '*The Arrangement between the Sexes*' (Goffman, 1977). Goffman examined gender from the perspective of public order and its sustaining social situations:

*"Women do and men don't, gestate, breast feed infants, and menstruate as part of their biological character. So too, on the whole women are smaller and lighter boned and muscled than are men. For these physical facts of life to have no appreciable social consequence would take a little organising, but at least by modern standards, not so much."* (Goffman, 1977:301)

Despite embodying patriarchal ideology in his writing, Goffman also encouraged the exploration and questioning of 'accepted' social order and the 'accepted' natural way of things when it comes to gender; a paradox, and a line of inquiry well received by Feminism and feminist criminology. Goffman's (1963) 'spoiled identity framework' has lent itself well to studies of maternal imprisonment and has provided a hook on which to hang the damaged maternal identity; or, as will be described later, the mortification of

motherhood. Nonetheless, few studies on maternal imprisonment refer to the truly enduring nature of the 'spoiling', or how such harms can be mitigated whilst mothers are still in custody.

This section has highlighted seminal notions of imprisonment and also the accepted wisdom of Foucault, Goffman and Sykes concerning the universal dangers and harms of imprisonment. However, it is clear that these seminal notions come from a male-focused narrative that has historically neglected women. Responding to this gap, the chapter now moves on to specifically explore gendered aspects of criminal justice.

## **2.3 Gendered Criminal Justice**

To fully understand the current position of women and the responses to them in the CJS, one must understand the legacy of a profoundly patriarchal society - a society set up to favour the male experience and which has shaped the lived experiences and positionality of women in all structures of contemporary society.

### **2.3.1 Historical context of women and crime**

*"The conduct of the female sex more deeply affects the wellbeing of the community. A bad woman inflicts more moral injury to society than a bad man."* (Hill, 1864:134, cited in Zedner, 1991)

Zedner (1995) suggests that, historically, the treatment of female law breakers has reflected their position within wider society, arguing that much theological and anthropological thinking related to women demonstrates a sense of women being subordinate to men. Feinman (1994) suggests that women are defined in relation to men, that men represent the human and the universal to which women are then the 'other'. This othering of women permeates all aspects of society and is found throughout all social and political thought. From this, a whole series of dichotomous categories have been/are constructed around one (men) and the other (women), and never more so than within the CJS.

Early penal responses to imprisonable women were heavily influenced by religious reformers such as John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, and centred around the 'saving of souls' and a 'return to feminine virtue' (Johnstone 2019). These reformers believed in better conditions and responses for *all* criminals, but it was felt that women could be 'saved' or 'corrected', rather than just punished. Benevolent ideology informed how women who fell afoul of the law were responded to, with many being 'supported' to return as 'reformed' to the roles of their gender and the rules of 'civilised' society (Priestley, 1999). If they could not be reformed then there existed a much more 'moral' and punitive response to female law breakers: all convicts were perceived as sinners, but women were additionally seen as depraved, deviant, wanton and dangerous (Zedner, 1991). Thus, both the punisher and the offender were defined, evaluated and punished in terms of traditional and cultural attitudes, which became reflected in law. Law written by men, essentially *for* men, designed often, to protect the traditional family and community and to 'control women' (Feinman, 1994:7). Feinman (*ibid*) suggests that there exists a universal fear of the 'non-conforming woman', further arguing that a criminal woman is the epitome of this. Notwithstanding criminality, women more broadly were expected to conform and act within their gender role, and within the rules of society.

Throughout history women have been criminalised and punished, even imprisoned, for things their male counterparts can take for granted as a right, suffrage being the most obvious. Another example being the anomalous point of law that saw women who were deemed to be exchanging sex for payment (i.e. soliciting) being prosecuted for the offence, but not the men (and it is most often men) who were involved in the very same exchange. This unequal position was resolved only relatively recently by the Sexual Offences Act of 1985, when 'persistent kerb crawling' became an offence (although it was arguably difficult to enforce until the caveat 'persistent' was removed in April 2010). Such traditional and oppressive ideology surrounding women, and especially criminal or 'deviant' women, has had an enduring influence on women's experiences of the CJS (Baldwin and Mezoughi 2015). Interestingly, it has resulted in the paradoxical arguments in contemporary criminology that women are treated both more *and* less harshly than their male counterparts.

The 'Chivalry Hypothesis' suggests that, because women are seen as the weaker sex and as 'prone' to irrational decision making – or making decisions under duress, or under the influence of substances - they are responded to more leniently by law enforcers and

the courts (Pollak, 1950). Some studies have offered support for the chivalry hypothesis (Daly and Bordt, 1995; Jeffries, 2002), whereas others have challenged this view, arguing that the opposite is true and that women are in fact treated more harshly than men in the CJS (Edwards, 1984; Eaton, 1986). Carlen (2002) argued that there is no solid consistent statistical evidence to support either argument, further suggesting that, even if there was, *'such evidence would be difficult to compute because of the difficulties of untangling gender criteria from others, such as those relating to racism and class'* (2002:7). Contemporary feminist criminologists have asserted that, in either instance, chivalry or harsher responses are not meted out equally or consistently to all female criminals.

Motherhood is one variable which affects outcomes for women in the CJS; the layered identities of women (in terms of race, class, status, motherhood), bear a significant relationship to their experiences within the CJS. Ultimately, not a great deal has changed for women in the CJS since Victorian times: women are still measured against longstanding ideas and ideals of gender norms and femininity, rendering them doubly or even triply deviant (Feinman, 1994; Morris, 1987; Bosworth, 2000; Carlen, 2002; Renzetti, 2013). What remains important is the development of research that explores the relevance of gender, and which has been undertaken through a critical, sympathetic, and informed feminist and/or matricentric lens.

### **2.3.2 Feminist criminology**

Whilst feminism does not assume that all men and all women are homogenous or are affected in the same ways by inequality and power differentials, feminism maintains that gender is embedded in all processes of everyday life, in all social interactions and social institutions (Renzetti 2013). In short, the social world is a gendered world. Many feminist scholars purport that gender is essentially socially (as opposed to biologically), created, reproduced and maintained (Renzetti, 2013). It is suggested that the norms of feminine and masculine ideology and associations, are generated within a social and structural context in which attitudes, beliefs and behaviours are prescribed. These scripts and prescriptions are then embedded into the 'institutions of society', such as the family, religion, education, employment, economy and government, thus forming a gendered structure of society (Renzetti, 2013:8). Feminists suggest that these differentials in a



gendered society are not equally valued, neither do men and women have equal access to the rewards or resources of society, defining this differential association as 'sexism'. Sexism thus manifests as discrimination on both interpersonal and institutional/structural levels (micro/macro) and permeates all systems, including the CJS.

Early criminology traditionally focused on men and male experiences of criminal justice, primarily because women law breakers were in a minority and research was being undertaken largely by men. The 1970's onwards saw an attempt to redress the balance by drawing attention to the fact that women and girls in the CJS had been generally overlooked and that they were discriminated against at multiple levels in their CJS experiences (Smart, 1976; Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1988). Early attempts to redress this imbalance focused on simply 'tagging on' women to existing research and research findings, measuring women and their experiences against male standards within traditionally male theoretical perspectives and research design. However welcome and important this was, Gelsthorpe and Morris (1988:229) suggest that this did little to shift '*the fundamental parameters of masculinity and criminology*', arguing that what was needed instead was a theoretical shift ergo calling for studies to be wholly undertaken through a feminist lens. They suggested that such studies should actively explore the similarities and differences between male and female experiences and offending. Crucially, also that they should factor in the value base informing these experiences, and how this contributed to the gender ignorance and inequality pervading women's encounters with the CJS and contributing to criminalised women's' negative experiences.

### **2.3.3 Advancing the thinking**

Early influential feminist criminologist, Carol Smart (1976) argued that knowledge surrounding female offending and criminality had, up until that point, been informed essentially by two studies, namely Lombroso and Ferrero (1895) and Pollak (1950). She maintained that these biologically orientated studies were outdated and as such offered little to contemporary understanding of female criminality. Renzetti (2013) suggests that feminist criminology has been influential in terms of research focus, methods, approaches and knowledge production; however, in terms of actual change, its influence has been less successful. This, she argues, is at least in part due to the historically

gendered nature of academia. Renzetti (*ibid*) reasons that academia mirrors the gendered imbalances within society, or 'gender structure' (2013:08). A structure in which certain traits and behaviours are assigned and 'rewarded' (in terms of services, resources and accessibility), according to gender. Despite some progress, society remains gendered and discriminatory.

Feminist criminology places great emphasis on the differential social roles of men and women. Which arguably leads to differential pathways into crime and deviance that are often overlooked in other criminological theoretical perspectives. Importantly, feminist criminology explores and explains victimisation and institutional responses to women; its purpose being to generate knowledge and understanding that will create, influence and shape policy and practice development, and that will alleviate oppression and '*contribute to more equitable social relations and social structures*' (Renzetti, 2013).

Feminist criminology argues that, notwithstanding factors such as race and class affecting outcomes, it is often the *type* of offence rather than the *severity* of the offence, which repeatedly determines how women are responded to in the CJS (Grabe et al, 2006). There persists an evidence-based argument that women who commit crimes of violence, or crimes against children, or sexual crimes - i.e. crimes deemed to be 'unfeminine', are treated more harshly than those committing crimes in support of traditional values, such as stealing food for children (Carlen 2002; Grabe et al, 2006). This is particularly true for mothers and, together with perceptions of whether the women were considered to be good or bad mothers, plays a part in the response to mothers in court (Carlen, 1983; Baldwin, 2015; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Minson, 2020). Chesney-Lind and Eliason (2006) suggests that violent women are demonised publicly via the media and are thus more harshly punished as a 'cautionary tale' or lesson to other women. However, Carlen (2002:8) rightly highlights that, regardless of which side of the debate one sits, '*very few commentators would argue that all women are sentenced more leniently than all men*'.

Carlen (*ibid*), also argues that such disparities are difficult to separate from broader socially constructed inequalities, suggesting that *certain* women will always be more likely to be sentenced to custody than others. These are women of colour, women who have spent time in LA care, women with substance misuse and/or mental-health issues, women with chaotic life paths, women who are or have been victims of abuse, and

women who have lost, or are at risk of losing their children. Hedderman and Hough (1994:4), point out that regardless of whether women are treated more leniently than men in terms of sentence disposal, the *impact* on them may be greater. Thus, the punishment will be felt more harshly, and particularly so for some individual women. Carlen and Worrall (2004), and many others (Enos, 2001; Moore and Scraton, 2014; O'Malley and Devaney, 2016; Moore et al, 2018; Masson, 2019), have consistently argued that, once women are in prison, their experience is very different from that of men. Not least because women are most often the primary carer for their children, and as mothers they bear their children's pain too (Baldwin, 2015; O'Malley, 2018; Booth, 2018;), but also because of their previous life experiences, their longstanding and unmet needs, the distance they might be from home and the organisation of prison and prison visits (Carlen, 2002; Minson et al, 2015).

Thus, feminist criminology argues that despite some universality and accepted wisdom regarding general *prisoner* experience, gender plays a huge part in how those experiences are manifest. It is therefore vital to consider dominant patriarchal ideology and gendered experiences in order to understand truly and critically the experiences of women in the CJS and how they came to be there. Moreover, as this research will show, it is through women-focused matricentric-feminist research that gender appropriate policies and practices concerning women in the CJS will be developed.

## **2.4 Women and Prison - The Background**

As outlined in the Introduction, the Corston Report (2007), was widely accepted across the political spectrum and should have been used both as a framework and a platform from which to launch fundamental long-lasting change. Feminist criminologists, and indeed Corston herself suggests that the reason the report did not spark the change intended, is because women remain a minority in terms of the overall prison population and because the system is male orientated in design and focus. Corston (2007) argued that women often leave prison with additional challenges and in a 'worse position' than before they entered it (Carlen et al, 1985; Worrall, 1990).

Most feminist prison researchers conclude that prison is not the most effective way to rehabilitate criminalised women (Carlen, 2004; Corston, 2007; Hedderman and Jolliffe,

2015). Women commit far fewer crimes than men (PRT 2020) and, as highlighted in the Introduction, women make up only 5% of the overall prison population<sup>16</sup>. As it stands the female prison population has more than doubled since 1995, in more recent years it has stubbornly remained around the 4,000 mark (Farmer, 2017). The rise in the female prison population does not appear to relate to a significant rise in the committing of crimes by women, but instead to a more punitive neo-liberal socio-political turn which has influenced legislative changes and sentencing patterns (Gelsthorpe, 2004; Hedderman, 2012; Moore et al, 2018; Booth, 2020).

Short prison sentences disproportionately affect women whose crimes are predominantly low risk and nonviolent. Their use has attracted widespread criticism, not least because of the significant impact they have on mothers and children (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Masson, 2019). Yet they continue to be used extensively. Female imprisonment has been the focus of recent discussion and debate at Government and policy level, informed by multiple reviews and reports which have made recommendations for positive change with regard to the treatment of female offenders. Yet, despite the publication of reports such as The Female Offender Strategy (2018), the female-focused Farmer Review (2019), and the Joint Human Rights Inquiry Report into Maternal Imprisonment (2019), there is little indication of forthcoming significant change. Sadly, all of the aforementioned reports stopped short of calling for a radical overhaul of the sentencing framework, highlighting instead the value of an independent judiciary. Though they did make recommendations for additional guidance regarding the sentencing of women and especially, of mothers.

Sentencers are already 'guided' by recommendations from the Human Rights Act (1998) and by Article 8 of the European Convention and the United Nations Bangkok Rules<sup>17</sup>, which request that sentencers undertake a 'balancing exercise' to measure the significant harms of prison to women and their children against the necessity of a custodial sentence. Yet, as demonstrated by Epstein (2012) and Minson (2014, 2020), such guidelines are readily and frequently ignored. There remains a real possibility that in the future, all of the valuable insights and recommendations contained in the

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<sup>16</sup> Bromley Briefings (see also Chapter 2)

<sup>17</sup> The [United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders \('the Bangkok Rules'\)](#) were adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2010 and fill a long-standing lack of standards providing for the specific characteristics and needs of women offenders and prisoners.

aforementioned reports; as in the Corston report before them, will be hailed as evidence of what *should* happen concerning criminalised women, but also of what *has not* happened. It is difficult to reach any other conclusions than the influences of a patriarchally-focused and structured government and CJS are the key reasons why women and their needs remain side-lined.

The disadvantages that all women in the CJS face are compounded for women from ethnic minorities, who make up a disproportionately significant group of the prison population<sup>18</sup>. Motz et al (2020) identified that ethnic minority women were 25% more likely to receive a custodial sentence, meaning that ethnic minority mothers are also disproportionately represented within the prison population (*ibid*). This is especially significant because over half of Black families in the UK are headed by single parent mothers (as opposed to less than one quarter of White, and less than one tenth of Asian families). The consequences of this for ethnic minority children is under-explored and is worthy of urgent attention. As an indicator of scale, David Lammy found that for every white woman sentenced to prison for a drugs offence, 227 black women were imprisoned for the same offence.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, this requires further investigation and examination.

#### **2.4.1 Gendered pains of imprisonment**

Prison is a gendered experience. Liebling (2009) and Carlen (1994) (see also Sim, 2009; Moore and Scraton, 2014), acknowledge that recognising prison as a '*state mechanism for legitimated pain delivery*' per se is important (Carlen, 1994:136), but assuming that the impact is the same across genders and simply 'adding in' an exploration of variables such as race, class, or gender, is inadequate. Liebling (2009) argued that women's prison research, particularly via the 'added in' approach led to a tendency to focus solely on issues traditionally seen as female, i.e. relationships and domesticity. Thereby, losing valuable opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding specific to women and punishment. Crewe (2017) illustrates Liebling's point by providing examples of earlier prison research around legitimacy and fairness in prison (see Sparks, 1994), which

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<sup>18</sup> Bromley Briefings

<sup>19</sup> The Lammy Review (2017), David Lammy <https://www.womeninprison.org.uk/research/reports.php?s=2017-04-21-double-disadvantage>

exclusively focused on male prisoners, thus failing to address the significance of power and trust regarding women in prison and how this could then impact on the power and trust in prison relationships and regime delivery. Liebling suggests that this is particularly significant because power and trust are of '*primary importance in the lives of women*' (2009:22) and thus worthy of study. Both Liebling and Carlen conclude that the generation of transferable knowledge in terms of broader penological matters is useful and valuable, but that specific gender-focused research is necessary to really understand individual and 'gendered pains of imprisonment' (Crewe et al, 2017), this is true also in relation to class, race, sexuality, deportation status, and I would argue, motherhood. Bosworth posits that the regulation of female prisoners takes a specific gendered form, which relies on the acceptance and employment of traditional ideology about feminine (passive) behaviour. Bosworth (1999) suggested therefore that femininity is the goal and form of women's punishment (1999:207).

Crewe et al (2017) taking a comparative approach and explored the universality and difference of experiences between male and female life-sentenced prisoners. Previous studies of women serving life or indeterminate sentences have focused on loss, and how womanhood or gender shapes the prison experience (Genders and Player, 1990). Crewe et al (2017) and Hairston (1991) argued that mothers experienced profound suffering concerning the loss of their children, their mother status and role. Hairston (*ibid*) reported that the mother's found the 'stripping of the mother role' was 'traumatic'. Walker and Worrall (2000: 28) concluded that female prisoners suffer in distinct and 'special ways', specifically related to loss of fertility, loss of opportunities to be a mother and loss of children or relationships with children. This thesis extends Walker and Worrall's (2000) and Crewe et al's (2017) findings by revealing that it is not only life or indeterminate sentenced female prisoners who experience this difference, but that all mothers in (and after) prison suffer magnified and specific 'pains of maternal imprisonment' (Chapter 8), over and above the traditionally accepted understanding of Syke's (1958) work.

Owen in Davies et al (1999) noted that women's physical and mental-health needs are often neglected in prison, with many women suffering long-term consequences of the inadequate care they received. Wahidin (2004) found this to be particularly true in her seminal research with older women prisoners. Women described being 'ignored' in terms of their health needs, especially with regard to particular female issues such as post-menopausal care and breast and cervical screening checks. Baldwin and Epstein (2017)

found that delays in obtaining medication for anxiety and depression left women vulnerable to self-harm and suicide and, like Wahidin, described menopause related medication being refused. Similarly, women experiencing difficulties in pregnancy also experienced refused or delayed help, resulting in two mothers miscarrying, one alone in her cell and another in handcuffs in the ambulance on the way to hospital (*Baldwin and Epstein, 2017*). Abbott (2018) in her important work with pregnant prisoners, found care for pregnant women lacking. She described how the women in her study were neglected in terms of their mental wellbeing and health care needs, even to the point of not having enough food to sustain them through their pregnancy. She describes a mother being forced to give birth alone in her cell because her calls to officers that she was in labour were refused or ignored (*ibid*). The baby was born breech, a particularly dangerous situation for both mother and baby. Abbott's research was published just before four separate instances occurred of women labouring alone in their cells, resulting tragically in the deaths of three babies - two died during the cell birth<sup>20</sup>, one in an undisclosed location within the prison, and the other en route to hospital.<sup>21</sup>

Confirming the gendered experience, women are more likely than men to be sent to custody for short periods (*Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Minson, 2018; JHRI, 2019*) and as such they are often unable to access any of the therapeutic or rehabilitative interventions offered to those on longer sentences. As Corston described, the short sentences may not be long, but they are long enough to cause women significant harm - long enough for women to lose homes, children and jobs, often compounding their already challenging circumstances (*Corston, 2007*). Thereby creating a situation where women are at an increased likelihood of reoffending. Particularly in the aftermath of the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR)<sup>22</sup> agenda, when more women became subject to post-release licence supervision. *Gelsthorpe and Hedderman (2012), Annison et al (2015) and Gomm (2013)* all described this as setting women up to fail.

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<sup>20</sup> Russell Webster criminal justice Blog [Why has another baby died in prison? - Russell Webster](#) and [Why do we still imprison pregnant women? - Russell Webster](#) both blogs discuss the babies deaths

<sup>21</sup> Bronzefield incidents <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/oct/04/baby-dies-in-uk-prison-after-inmate-gives-birth-alone-in-cell> and <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/nov/22/hmp-bronzefield-baby-death-prison-births>

<sup>22</sup> **Transforming Rehabilitation (TR)** was the name given to a White paper issued by the UK [Ministry of Justice](#) in May 2013, and to a programme of work from 2013 to 2016 to enact the strategy outlined in the paper. TR was concerned with the supervision and rehabilitation of offenders in England and Wales and was initiated by Chris Grayling, the then Secretary of State. It involved the splitting and partial privatisation of probation services. The new legislation meant that all prisoners serving a sentence of 'more than one day' would now be subject to post prison licence – whereas previously only those serving 12 months, or more were.

This section has explored the literature regarding women in prison generally, tracing the development of criminological understanding concerning women law breakers and highlighting the gendered experience of prison, but not specifically mothers. The following section is devoted entirely to investigating the literature relative to mothers in the CJS. The chapter will conclude with reflection on what is known about women and mothers in their immediate post-release period and beyond.

## 2.5 Mothers and Prison

The foundations of maternal theory and motherhood will be more extensively explored in the following chapter and, as such, this section will focus specifically on the 'criminal mother'. As alluded to earlier, mid to late nineteenth century perceptions of women and mothers were rooted in patriarchal ideology and ideas of femininity. Zedner (1991) argues that the shame and judgement directed at all women who fell afoul of the law (and social norms) was magnified for those women who were mothers, '*because in their role as mothers, they were identified as the biological source of crime and degeneracy*' (1991:14.308). The lasting influence of such beliefs has resulted in a pervading sense that mothers who break the law are classed as doubly and triply deviant (Heidensohn, 1996; Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Bosworth, 1999; Gelsthorpe, 2004).

The types of crime a mother commits can also influence perception and reactions to her both formally and informally (Baldwin et al 2015). Roberts (1993) argued that the law punishes women according to the extent to which their acts deviate from 'appropriate' female behaviour, resulting in mothers being punished (and judged) more harshly, especially mothers who commit offences against children, more so if the children are their own. Lockwood (2018:157) suggests that imprisoned mothers are afforded less sympathy than other prisoners, or than mothers who are separated from their children by orthodox means (even by state removal to the care of an LA). This is despite the fact that maternal imprisonment can 'severely alter, disrupt, or even terminate' mothering (*ibid*). Minson (2020) also posits that mothers are afforded less compassion in the criminal courts and are judged more harshly. Furthermore, criminal-mothers separation from their children is treated more casually than in the family courts. At least in part because the assumption is that a criminal-mother is by definition a bad mother. Prevalent



gendered ideologies surrounding the 'institution of motherhood' mean that most, if not all, mothers enter prison from a society that perpetuates these views.

As stated in the Introduction, when the author published '*Mothering Justice; Working with Mothers in Criminal and Social Justice Settings*' in 2015, it was the first whole book in the UK to take motherhood in relation to the CJS as its focus. The last decade - specifically the last five years - has seen 'Maternal Imprisonment' become significantly more visible. The topic has gathered interest and attention, particularly in the UK where information had previously been sparse. This has included research around imprisonment and the wider family (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; O'Malley, 2018; Beresford, 2018; Masson, 2019; Booth, 2020 and Minson, 2020;), stigma, prison and young motherhood (Sharpe, 2015), pregnancy and new motherhood in prison (Dolan 2016; Abbott, 2018, 2019), maternal-identity and maternal-emotion (Rowe, 2011; Baldwin, 2015, 2017, 2018 and Lockwood, 2014, 2017), and criminalised Muslim mothers (Buncy and Ahmed, 2019). Very recent publications include Masson, 2019; Minson 2020; Lockwood, 2020; Booth, 2020<sup>23</sup>. Thus, maternal imprisonment and its impact on the children involved is a vibrant and significant branch of criminology in the UK. However, with the exception of Masson's work (2019)<sup>24</sup>, less well documented (particularly in the UK) are the *long-term effects* of maternal imprisonment, especially regarding the wider family and, particularly, for mothers themselves. This study responds to that significant gap in UK understanding, evidencing new knowledge about the post-prison experiences of mothers even decades post-prison.

International studies, particularly in Canada and the USA, have returned a more significant body of knowledge about the experiences of mothers in and after custody (for example, see Eaton, 1993; Enos, 2001; Arditti and Few, 2006; Sheehan and Flynn, 2007; Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer, 2014 and Easterling et al, 2019). Although studies revealing the experiences of ethnic minority criminalised mothers is sparse. Ethnic minority women and mothers though over-represented in the CJS, are significantly under-represented in the literature. I am aware of two Doctoral researchers currently undertaking work in this area and believe that their final thesis's will make significant and

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<sup>23</sup> The author is also aware of the forthcoming publication of another edited collection and one sole authored text on the same subject, to be published between 2020 and 2022 (not including her own forthcoming two books).

<sup>24</sup> Masson's, (2019) important study explored the impact of first short prison sentences on mothers and children up to, but not beyond, five years post-release.

important contributions to the field.<sup>25</sup> The following sections will explore the landscape in terms of what is currently known about the experience of mothering in and after prison.

### **2.5.1 Mothering from prison – Maternal identity and role**

Research suggests that separation from their children is thought to be a challenging and damaging aspect of women's imprisonment (Covington and Bloom, 2003; Lockwood, 2014; Enos 2001), not least because of the disruption caused to the mother role. As will be more deeply discussed in Chapter three, and notwithstanding recurring feminist debates surrounding maternal-identity and role, dominant family models have long depicted child rearing as mother work<sup>26</sup> (activities associated with mothering) (Mead, 1935; Rich, 1976; O'Reilly, 2006). Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014) suggest that role socialisation is confirmed as growing girls are praised and celebrated when they show qualities associated with mothering, e.g. nurturing. Thus, motherhood and mothering becomes firmly embedded into the female identity. Because it is more often than not the mother who takes the lion's share of mother work, from the nurturing to the more practical aspects of caring for children, when a mother is imprisoned then the impact on her children is often greater than if it were their father (Minson, 2012). Lockwood (2018) suggests that mothers separated from their children by imprisonment are often seen as abandoning their children through 'choice'; informing her claim that imprisoned mothers are afforded less sympathy than is shown to mothers separated by 'involuntary' means (Lockwood, 2018:157).

Powell et al (2016), Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014), Enos (2001) and Baldwin (2015) all suggest that despite facing multiple disadvantages, many - if not most - imprisoned mothers will regard their children as their primary concern throughout their incarceration. Particularly those who had the care of their children pre-prison. The more involved mothers were able to be during their imprisonment then the more likely a mother is to continue to 'feel like a mother' (Enos 2001). Baldwin's earlier work (published from the findings of this study) identifies the significance of maternal-emotions in prison and

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<sup>25</sup> Researchers Sinem Bozkurt, (University of Westminster), and Monica Thomas (Cardiff University).

<sup>26</sup> 'Mother work' – work associated with caring for children but not necessarily always undertaken by women, e.g. education, laundry, discipline (as defined by Adrienne Rich, 1976)

how they are inextricably linked to disruption of the maternal-identity and role (Baldwin, 2015, 2017:18; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014:4) identified that, although studies exploring '*the challenges of mothering whilst incarcerated*' do exist (Enos, 2001; Lockwood, 2018; Masson, 2019; Booth, 2020), few studies specifically explore maternal-identity. This is a gap to which their USA-based study responded, and which is extended by Easterling et al (2019) and this study. Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014), Rowe (2011), and Lockwood (2017) all echo Enos's (2001), earlier findings, that maternal-identity for mothers in prison is closely linked to the mothering role, i.e. *doing* mothering was key to *being* and *feeling* like a mother and is resonant with the findings of this current study.

### **2.5.2 Managing maternal emotions**

Studies exploring carceral emotions (Crawley, 2004; Crewe et al, 2014 and Knight, 2016), particularly emotions related to maternal incarceration (Bloom, 1992; Baunach, 1985; Enos, 2001 and Flynn, 2014), have evidenced the challenge of emotional regulation (coping). Most research around maternal imprisonment has demonstrated that women who are mothers find prison much more demanding than prisoners who are not mothers, and that mothers struggle more to adjust and cope (Carlen, 1983; Enos, 2001; Loper and Turk, 2006; Rowe, 2011 and Lockwood 2014). Motz et al (2020) and Walker and Towl (2016) have all identified a link between mothers' separation from their children and mental-health issues and self-harm. Datesman and Cales (1983:142) described mother and child separation through prison as a 'profound hurt' which involves constant renegotiation of their maternal relationships and the challenge of striving to maintain an active mothering role (Hairston, 2002; Enos, 2001).

Most studies on maternal imprisonment speak about 'mother guilt' and the shame felt by mothers as a result of their incarceration (Enos, 2001; Booth, 2018; Lockwood, 2018; O'Malley, 2018). Research suggests that mothers in custody adopt a range of mechanisms to help them to cope with the emotional fallout of being a mother in prison. By far the most oft-cited emotion felt by mothers in prison is guilt; guilt at the pain caused to their children and to their wider families as a consequence of their imprisonment or their pre-prison lives (Enos, 2001; Rowe, 2011; O'Malley, 2018; Harding, 2020).

In contrast, Masson (2019:58) found the mothers' 'sense of injustice and fear' appeared to 'supersede any sense of shame', or guilt in relation to their children. Masson describes feelings of guilt and humiliation as being 'rarely discussed', also stating that '*very few spoke about guilt triggered by the burden they had imposed on others outside*' (2019:59). This is in contrast with several other studies (Enos, 2001; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Lockwood, 2018; O'Malley, 2018; Booth, 2020). Masson (2019) herself suggests that the mothers may not have felt comfortable discussing guilt (and shame) during their interviews. Interestingly though, Masson (2019:60) does then go on to quote two mothers who are very clearly speaking about their guilt (Dalia and Tara).

Controversially, Loper (2006:93) argued that being imprisoned as a mother is 'no more difficult' than as a non-mother. However, this conclusion can be challenged on the basis of the study limitations. Loper's study was quantitative in nature and used self-reporting scales and questionnaires as a means of gathering data which were then subject only to statistical analysis. The women in the study were not interviewed or asked questions directly about mothering per se, they were simply asked whether they were mothers or not. They were then asked to score, or rate, statements related to their 'adjustment to prison', and the 'mother and non-mother group responses' were then compared. I would argue that 'measuring women's adjustment' to prison, particularly using this methodology, is very different from exploring the subjective experiences of mothers in prison and the impact of prison on them as mothers. I question whether Loper's chosen methodology could actually lead reliably to her interpretation and conclusion that '*it is no more difficult to be a mother in prison than a non-mother*'. Yet, worthy of note and paradoxically, Loper concludes her study by arguing for the increased use of mother-specific interventions and support for mothers who experience 'parenting stress' whilst incarcerated.

Rowe (2011) cautions against assumptions that all women will experience prison in the same way, emphasising that individual differences can be affected by the individual institutions as well as by the individual characteristics and experiences of the prisoners. Even when characteristics (such as motherhood) are shared. It is therefore important to acknowledge that some research has indicated that for some mothers a period in custody is an opportunity to repair relationships with their children (Lockwood, 2017), particularly when mothers may have been living with addiction (O'Malley, 2017, 2018; Masson, 2019). For some mothers, custody provides opportunities for reflection and motivation in

relation to motherhood, rehabilitation and recovery (O'Malley, 2018). In such circumstances, mothers might, sometimes for the first time, take advantage of the substance misuse support services available to them in prison. Something that maybe they were not ready to engage with before prison or that may not have been available to them in the community (often due to systemic failures and cuts to funding for services).

The author's earlier work (Baldwin, 2015), echoes previous research findings concerning the emotional challenges for imprisoned mothers, highlighting the need for maternal emotions to be factored into responses to mothers in criminal and social justice settings. The findings of this study extend that work further and provide evidence for the absolute *necessity* of working positively, compassionately and supportively with mothers in prison regarding their maternal-emotions, maternal-identity and maternal-role. This is important whether or not mothers currently have the care of their children or may be likely to care for them in the future. There is little doubt that the conditions in which a mother is imprisoned has a significant relationship with how she adjusts to and copes with prison, and also impacts on her ability to maintain a maternal-role and her relationships with her children and wider family.

## **2.6 Carceral Challenges Concerning Maternal Contact**

There are far fewer women's prison than men's in England and Wales (12 as opposed to 105)<sup>27</sup>, meaning that many women are imprisoned far from home. Consequently, many women receive fewer or no visits from friends and family. Financial costs, unsatisfactory visiting conditions, and strained relationships with carers are additional barriers to positive experiences of visitation (Houck and Loper, 2002; Moran, 2012; Raikes and Lockwood, 2011).

Costly and time-consuming visits with children (in terms of travel time for families), harsh rules of the institution, for example, no touching, hugging, allowing the prisoner out of their seat or children on their mother's knees, mean that some mothers, particularly those who are on shorter sentences make the difficult decision not to have visits at all (Baldwin

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<sup>27</sup> Prison Statistics 2018/19 <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/our-work/performance-tracker/prisons>

and Epstein, 2017; O'Malley, 2018). Meaning telephone contact becomes vital in the pursuit of an ongoing maternal-role (Booth, 2018). However, not all prisons in England and Wales have in-cell telephones and calls from the wing phone are expensive, restrictive, lacking in privacy and completely subject to the prison regime (Booth, 2018) and the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme (IEP)<sup>28</sup>. Mothers in Irish prisons have pre-paid access to daily phone calls home to their children (O'Malley, 2015). Booth's (2018) research highlighted the significance and importance of telephone contact with children, revealing how mothers' efforts to retain contact were often frustrated through no fault of their own. Mothers have recounted feeling especially challenged by frustrated contact during the early days of custody (Beresford, 2018; Baldwin, 2017; Booth, 2018; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). It is not well understood or explored is how these interruptions to mothering and maternal relationships recover (or not) and how this then impacts on the mothers' long-term mental wellbeing in and after prison.

Booth's research (2017, 2020) focussed on the impact of maternal imprisonment from the perspective of the family, though she makes important contributions to our understanding of the specific impact on mothers themselves. She highlights the systemic and institutional failures that contribute to the specific pains of imprisonment for mothers, underlining how the structure and regimes of prison can impact on mothers and their children. As in the current study, most of the mothers in Booth's research were involved in the care of their children prior to custody and therefore felt the wrench of separation. However, Booth found that, regardless of whether mothers had had care of their children or not, they were deeply affected by the stigma of being a prison-experienced mother and their attempts to continue to play a mothering role with their children was repeatedly frustrated by 'the system'. Booth concluded that when a mother is imprisoned it becomes a 'family sentence' (2020:16) and as such requires a family focused response. She called for additional research around the deconstruction of maternal-identity and the long-term implications for successful reunification and reintegration – to which this study will provide a response.

Most studies on maternal imprisonment have highlighted the significant role of the caregivers, i.e. those caring for the imprisoned mother's children during her

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<sup>28</sup> IEP scheme is an incentive-based scheme based on reward and removal of privileges dependant on 'behaviour' and conformity.

incarceration. In the UK, around 17,000 children are separated from their mothers annually because of imprisonment (Kincaid et al, 2019). However, neither these figures nor the care needs of the children affected are represented in official inquiry. The Joint Human Rights Enquiry into Maternal Imprisonment (2019), and the female-focused Farmer Review (2019), have both made recommendations for this to change and have explored how this could best be achieved. It is hoped that if all of the recommendations are actioned, this will alleviate some of the current stresses and strains impacting on mothers in custody and their families outside. Not least, issues around overcrowding in blended homes, financial support, shared care, contact and disrupted education of children (Kincaid et al, 2019; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Masson, 2019; Booth, 2020). However, based on the failure to implement similar recommendations from numerous previous reports, it is difficult not to be pessimistic and suspicious that the promises made will not come to fruition. Historically, the needs of women and children, especially working-class women and children, are not always high on a political agenda, past election campaign stage (Philips, 1994; Gillies, 2006).

Imprisoned mothers have described strained relationships with their wider families, and particularly with those family members who are their children's caregivers, becoming what Booth describes as 'gatekeepers' concerning access to their children (Masson 2019; Booth, 2020). Research suggests that caregivers are most often the maternal grandmother (Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Raikes, 2016), although more recent studies have indicated that fathers are playing a more significant role (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; O'Malley, 2018), perhaps due to a slight shift in societal expectations around fathers and childcare. O'Malley found in her study that biological fathers constituted her largest group of carers for children of imprisoned mothers. This echoes Baldwin and Epstein's (2017) study which also found a significant number of father caregivers (again is evident in this study), indicating the need for an updated study regarding caregiver circumstances of children on imprisoned mothers. However, O'Malley's (2018) findings in her Irish-based study need to be understood in a context where Catholicism is still the dominant religion and therefore where marriage is more common. Indeed, in O'Malley's study most of her mothers were in long-term marriages or partnerships, which is not necessarily typical of women in prison elsewhere.

Research suggests that, regardless of demographic factors, close mother-caregiver relationships, contact with their family during imprisonment and the expectation of

regaining custody of their children upon release all impact positively upon imprisoned women's mothering identities (Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer, 2014:03). However, almost completely lacking in the literature is reference to the experiences of older mothers and grandmothers and their experiences of contact with their adult children and grandchildren. With the exception to an extent of Wahidin (2004), and Baldwin (*forthcoming*). There is much to be learned about how this generation of mothers fare in prison. This study responds to that gap, extending the knowledge and understanding of criminalised mothers *and* grandmothers through prison and long after release.

## 2.7 Post-Release Motherhood and Maternal Supervision

Although several international studies exploring the experiences of post-release women and mothers exist (Eaton, 1993; Arditti and Few, 2006; Huebner et al., 2009; Sheehan, 2014; Bachman et al, 2016), there remains little published in the UK about women leaving prison (McIvor et al, 2009; Codd, 2013; Wright, 2017), and even fewer focused specifically on mothers (with a few exceptions, Sharpe, 2015; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Masson, 2020).

Research suggests that mothers in prison are often naive about the issues they will face on release (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Masson, 2019). Previous research has found that mothers often expect things to 'return to normal' in home and family life (Hayes, 2009; Booth, 2020; O'Malley, 2018; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). Baldwin and Epstein (2017) and Masson (2019) found that mothers imprisoned, even for short periods, were deeply affected by imprisonment and that the impact of prison lingers. Despite the challenges they face while incarcerated, many women continue to regard themselves as mothers and believe they will be reunited with their children post-release (Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer, 2014). Covington (2007) and many others (Carlen et al, 1985; Eaton, 1993; Comfort, 2008 and Codd, 2013) have highlighted the importance of preparation for release concerning women prisoners. However, again there is a lack of research which relates specifically to the throughcare and aftercare needs of mothers, a gap to which this current Doctoral study responds.

Eaton suggests that most women exiting prison will feel 'disorientated', 'excluded' and 'degraded' (1993:56). She argues that women feel subject to gaze and judgement and



have a feeling of being under 'constant surveillance' (*ibid*). Opsal (2009) identified that the supervision of post-release women centred on 'surveillance' rather than the 'tenets of rehabilitation and reintegration' originally intended as a focus for supervisors (p. 308). Many women had previously escaped post-release supervision due to the brevity of their sentences; however, post the TR agenda revisions, all prisoners who have served more than one day in prison are now subject to post-release supervision of at least 12 months. Thus, not only must post-release women worry about meeting their basic needs, as previously described, but they must also be compliant with supervision and reporting requirements. Non-compliance may result in a breach of licence and recall to prison and further separation from children, so the stakes are high. In the UK, since the implementation of TR, breach and recall for women has dramatically increased (WiP, 2017). The increased punitiveness of supervision has impacted negatively on the 'one-to-one' relationship between the supervisor and supervisees in relation to women (Annison et al, 2015), although the impact specifically regarding mothers under supervision is unknown.

Mclvor et al (2009), in their Australian-based study, found that women exiting prison (60% of participants were mothers) particularly benefitted from supervision when they engaged with practitioners whom they felt exhibited 'genuine concern' (p. 347). Like Masson (2019) and O'Malley (2018), their research also highlighted issues related to lack of compatible housing (see also McMahon, 2019) and revealed mothers were troubled by many issues related to their children and their reunification or persisting separation. They noted many missed opportunities to prepare mothers for release more effectively.

Unsurprisingly, Mclvor et al's (2009) findings concluded that women who enjoyed the benefit of multi-agency support, and those who had a positive supervisory relationship with supervisors, were most likely to continue to desist. However, what Mclvor et al (2009), did not do was to explore ways in which mothers could be more effectively supported and how the statutory services could, and arguably should, adapt their service to better meet the needs of mothers under supervision. O'Malley (2018, 2020) also found that failures to respond to the needs of mothers during and after custody bore some relationship to whether the mothers reoffended and returned to custody, i.e. to their desistance, especially regarding mothers with addiction issues. Similarly, Sheehan (2014) argues that a multi-agency support approach is fundamental to family

reintegration following maternal imprisonment, highlighting that mentoring and peer support can play a key role in successful reintegration.

Opsal (2009) study of women's experiences of parole investigated how women manage surveillance and how women '*made sense of living under a system framed largely by monitoring their actions rather than meeting their needs*' (p. 313). Many of Opsal's participants were mothers; the women described feeling like they 'were on a leash' and were 'waiting to be caught out' (p. 318), generating fear and anxiety about recall. Opsal argued that the women's relationship needs, i.e. particularly those as mothers, were neglected or ignored altogether - findings that are echoed in this current study. The current study extends Opsal's work by exploring how the additional layer of motherhood interacts with the already heavy weight of surveillance felt by the women under supervision. In addition, the informal surveillance of family friends and agencies concerned about the mothers' maternal capabilities adds to the burden; again, this is further explored in this thesis.

## **2.8 Re-entry, Renegotiation and Repair**

It is accepted wisdom that prisoners post-release will experience challenges, not least stigma, disorientation and shame, as they re- enter society post-prison (Goffman, 1963; Sharpe, 2015). However, Opsal (2009) and Leverentz (2006, 2013) argued that the post-release experience is a gendered one. Leverentz (2013) acknowledges that both men and women are very likely to experience challenges related to housing, employment, reconnecting with family and financial support, but that women are additionally likely to face challenges related to past trauma and substance misuse, mental-health issues, together with reconnecting/reuniting with/ fighting for their children (see also Wright 2017).

Masson (2019) identified many practical obstacles faced by mothers in their return to normality however, although Masson's study is an exploration of the '*enduring*' harms of maternal imprisonment, the majority of Masson's participants were fewer than three years post-release, none were more than five years post-release. (In this study 61% of the participants were more than five years post-release, and 47% more than seven years post-release, the longest being 46 years post-release). Nonetheless, Masson's study

makes an important contribution to the understanding of the immediate and medium-term post-release impact of maternal imprisonment, particularly concerning the 'collateral harms' caused by a first short period in custody. Mothers in Masson's study described the loss of their homes, jobs and financial security, all of which impacted heavily on their children. Such losses are however experienced by many, if not most, ex-prisoners, both male and female. Significantly however, Masson (2019) concluded that the 'morally significant' (p.228) harms caused to mothers and their children by short periods of maternal imprisonment were disproportionate and unwarranted.

Multiple international studies, (again often not specifically focusing on mothers but which have mothers included in their studies), identify how women fare once released from prison with similar findings to Masson (Arditti and Few, 2006; Comfort, 2008; Opsal, 2009; Carlton and Seagrove, 2013; Leverentz, 2014). Most, prisoners typically return to the marginalised, structurally and individually disadvantaged positions they had experienced prior to entering prison (Hayes, 2009), now with the additional stigma, shame and hindrance of a criminal record (Goffman, 1963). However, for mothers this occurs alongside a perception of themselves as a failed mother (Eaton, 1993; Hayes, 2009; Sharpe, 2015 and Masson, 2019). Richie (2001) and Buncy and Ahmed (2019) also emphasise the fact that imprisoned mothers are often already struggling with their multiple identities generally, especially relating to gender, ethnicity, culture and economic status. Thus, their ex-prisoner status increases their marginalisation within already marginalised communities.

The literature suggests that the central concern for many mothers leaving prison is reunification with their children (O'Malley, 2018). There are multiple variables which bear some relevance to how successful reunification may be. For example, length of sentence, ages of children and housing situation. Mothers have described a long-lasting impact on their relationships with their children (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). Research has shown that there is often a honeymoon period, or a '*euphoria of freedom*' (Bernstein cited in Hayes, 2009) but beyond this, mothers face numerous challenges, that they may not have anticipated. Booth (2020) did not interview her participants post-release, but mothers in her study spoke about their fears and anxieties surrounding re-entry into family life. Booth, like O'Malley (2018), found that mothers who had a history of substance abuse and had secured therapeutic support in prison, were motivated and reflective concerning their relationships with their children. As such, they were keen to

re-engage with their maternal-identity and role. Baldwin and Epstein (2017) described how post-release mothers felt their relationships with children had 'forever changed', especially those with older teenage children. Like Masson (2019), Sheehan (2014) argued that short custodial sentences are especially harmful to women because of their impact on employment and housing, with little return by way of rehabilitation, pre-empting Masson's findings that early support would be a more appropriate and effective approach to avoiding criminalisation.

'Reunion narratives' of post-release mothers were characterised by difficulties (Bachman et al. 2016:223). Chiming with Eaton (1993), who found mothers struggled to regain status and authority. Mothers who have misused substances may face specific challenges related to motherhood that non-substance misusing mothers do not face, or perhaps face in different ways (O'Malley 2018). Additional factors such as race, culture and community acceptance of ex-prisoners mean that many ethnic minority mothers, experience an intersectionality of inequalities and varied experiences, especially around faith and culture (Bachman et al, 2016; Buncy and Ahmed, 2019). For example, Buncy and Ahmed (2019) found that when a Muslim mother had been imprisoned, very often her children were simply told that mum had 'gone away', and so visits would not have occurred at all whilst mum was in prison. Moreover, Buncy and Ahmed (*ibid*) also stated it was not unusual for communities to completely reject Muslim mothers who had been to prison and to keep children from their care, serving only to add to the mother's trauma.

An emerging area of research is the trauma prisoners leave prison with, triggered by or originating from the prison experience (Piper and Berle, 2019). Research investigating the relationship between trauma and prison itself tends to focus on Potentially Traumatic Events (PTE's) that might occur in prison such as prison rape, witnessing violence or witnessing suicide Rather than the trauma of separation or the prison experience itself. Due to the lack of published research in the area Piper and Berle (2019) undertook a systematic review exploring the relationship between prison experienced trauma, PTEs and PTSD outcomes. Moore and Scraton (2014) specifically recognise incarceration as a traumatising experience for women, one that is often experienced as 'destructive and debilitating', however how that translates post-release is not explicitly examined. The level of trauma women generally, but specifically mothers, feel after prison as a direct result of their incarceration remains underexplored, though this thesis aims to begin this conversation.

What is apparent from this current study, even where not explicitly mentioned, is the relationship between successful re-entry, support, positive re-unification and desistance (discussed in chapter 7). Wright's study (2017; 29) (where some participants were mothers), observed a relationship between motherhood and desistance, or at least '*the pathway towards desistance*'. Wright found that the hopes, ambitions and dreams of the mothers were repeatedly frustrated and undermined by the very interventions and punishments that were 'designed' to support them on their path to desistance. As a feminist researcher Wright (2017:29) powerfully concluded that this 'frustrated desistance', rather than 'persistent offending', is where we need to cast our activist gaze. When we focus on the women who 'persistently offend', we focus on 'the offender' rather than the wider structural inequalities and penal responses which have presented individual challenges to women in the first instance and impacted on their offending behaviour. The failure of multiple services to have a 'joined up approach' in understanding the needs of post-release women impacted on their desistance journeys (Sheehan, 2014). Mothers who are supported in their release, and whose reunification with their children goes well, are less likely to reoffend. This current study provides new evidence to support this claim, echoing and extending existing research.

## 2.9 Summary

This chapter has critically examined the relationship between women, crime and punishment. Seminal notions and accepted wisdom (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; Foucault, 1977) surrounding imprisonment have offered some understanding about the experiences and impact of imprisonment and the post-release period. However, as contributed by feminist criminology they do not offer a full appreciation of the relevance and legacy of a patriarchally organised society in the criminal justice experiences of women. The criminalisation of women is influenced by societal norms and values surrounding female deviancy and femininity, and female criminalisation and imprisonment is experienced in that context. The chapter has shown that women (ergo mothers), who enter the CJS are often multiply disadvantaged and that the CJS replicates the inequality and discrimination many women face in wider society.

Research has evidenced the 'profound hurt' of maternal imprisonment, revealing challenges for imprisoned mothers concerning the separation from their children and the

ability to maintain positive relationships with children and caregivers. Less is known about the post-release experiences of criminalised mothers, especially beyond five years. Understanding of mothers' and grandmothers' own perceptions of post-prison motherhood in the UK is limited. Mothers of older children, and grandmothers, have attracted very little attention and there is little understanding about the layered or intergenerational impact of maternal imprisonment. Research surrounding the post-release period has focused on material losses (homes, employment) which, although devastating and impactful are also dynamic situations which apply more generally to all ex-prisoners. Less visible is an understanding of the long-term impact of imprisonment on mothering, maternal emotion and maternal identity.

Knowledge concerning the relationship between criminalised mothers experiences and desistance is limited and understanding sparse. Resulting in missed opportunities to fully understand and/or support the custodial and supervisory experiences and desistance journeys of mothers. This study contributes original knowledge to this discussion. The literature review will now turn its focus to the relationship between and development of feminist and maternal theory and its position on motherhood, maternal identity, mothering and mother work, with a view to informing this matricentric-feminist criminological study.

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# Chapter 3

## The Making of Motherhood

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### 3.1 Introduction

Motherhood has been described as the 'unfinished business of feminism' (O'Reilly, 2016:2). This chapter examines the contributions of decades of Motherhood scholarship and investigates the notion of the 'good mother'. Rich (1976) suggests that 'motherhood' is a term universally recognised as the 'institution' surrounding mothering. Social constructionists and feminist thinkers (Parsons, 1937; Kelly, 1955 and O'Reilly, 2004) suggest that the 'good mother identity' is shaped as a result of socially constructed ideals relative to dominant cultural norms, values and expectations. These ideals inform the norms associated with motherhood which are influenced by patriarchy, religion, biology and dominant ideologies (Kaplan, 1992). This chapter will explore the early foundations of maternal thinking, revealing the often complex relationship between motherhood and feminism, together with the examining of recent (post-war) perspectives on mothering ideology, and concluding with a discussion of O'Reilly's (2016) 'matricentric-feminism'. Moreover, it will examine perspectives on maternal-identity and associated maternal-emotions. Motherhood studies and research on motherhood has tended to concentrate on non-criminalised mothers, however criminalised mothers and mothers who go to prison are no less exposed to the rules and expectations surrounding motherhood, operating within the confines of a patriarchally influenced society. Therefore, this chapter lays down the matricentric foundation for understanding the experiences, assessment and treatment of criminalised mothers, from internal and external perspectives.

### 3.2 Foundations of Motherhood Ideology

As motherhood scholarship has observed, through time immemorial the world has been bombarded with images of mother and child, deemed to be the 'purest' love. Philosophy, mythology and theology had all laid a foundation for the mother-child relationship to be regarded as the most important human relationship, long before psychology and

psychoanalysis began to explain and discuss the significance of motherhood. The mother-child relationship has been presented as the basis of the subsequent healthy development, both physically and mentally, of children and the adults they become. Early representations of mothers were revered and the burden and responsibility for society's children and their future lay firmly at the feet of mothers (Thurer, 1994). Freud (1941) suggested that the mother-child relationship was 'unique' in that it set down a lifetime pattern for all love relations to follow. Weitzman et al (1985) suggest this simple premise was the foundation of future psychological development theory, including Bowlby's (1958, 1969), attachment theory, which remains influential today.

Bowlby's (1951) theory of attachment is based on his assertion that the mother-child relationship is uniquely important and biologically driven. Although he accepted that other figures *could* have significance and form a 'primary bond' with a child, it was *always* preferable that the child's primary caregiver should be their mother. He defined this vital and close bond with one figure as *monotropy*. Bowlby (1951,1988) believed that failure to initiate, prolonged interruption, or a severing of this bond could have serious and lifelong consequences, particularly if they occurred within the first two years of a child's life. Bowlby's theory of monotropy led to the development of his arguments surrounding maternal deprivation (1953). Bowlby believed that a person's experience of being mothered contributes to their understanding of the world, their self, and others, and that it informs a person's developing expectations, responses and evaluations of contact with others, i.e. it shapes an individual's internal working models<sup>29</sup>.

Developmental theorists such as Bowlby (1951), Ainsworth (1962) and Winnicott (1987) therefore set in motion a dominant ideology about the importance of positive mothering, especially in the early months and years of a child's life. Weitzman et al (1985:3) suggests that this led to maternal behaviour and mothering practices being 'scrutinised, analysed and measured' like never before. Winnicott (1987:3) suggested that the 'ordinary devoted mother' was of utmost significance in a baby's life. He attempted to concede that mothers do not have to be 'perfect', only 'good enough'. By way of explanation, he offers the illustration of a mother with depression who he suggests would

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<sup>29</sup> See appendix 18 for image of Bowlby's model.



be deemed to be 'neglecting' her child, but the fault would not be her hers<sup>30</sup>. Mothers, as the 'primary source of emotional sustenance' (*ibid*), were viewed as the foundation of a well-adjusted or maladjusted adult. Weitzman et al (1985:30) emphasises the responsibility placed on mothers, who '*were told they held not only the fate of their own children in their hands, but also the fate of the world*'.

Although attachment theories, and early protestations of the importance of the mother-child relationship have endured and remain influential, they are not without their critics. Rutter (1972) expanded on Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation, highlighting that there were multiple factors that might influence attachment, not least social circumstances, intellectual stimulation, additional attachments and ongoing nurture and care. Nonetheless, he did agree that failure to develop emotional bonds, especially with a mother figure, can lead to long-term emotional, intellectual and physical disadvantage.

Thurer (1994:xvi) states, the '*all importance of mother love has been fuelled by a giant collective wish for perfect mothering*'. Although undoubtedly influenced by her psychoanalytical background, Thurer recognised that mothers are not the omnipresent influence that *exclusively* determines their children's future, instead '*poverty, sexism, racism or war can undo any mother's best efforts*' (*ibid*). Thurer states that she published, 'The Myths of Motherhood: How culture reinvents the good mother', to free mothers '*from an uncritical dependency on an ideology of good mothering that is ephemeral, of doubtful value, unsympathetic to caretakers, arbitrary, and literally man-made*' (1994:xxv). It was this notion that motherhood was socially created and perpetuated by a patriarchal society which further demonstrates how motherhood has become a 'feminist issue' (Rich, 1976).

### 3.3 Motherhood and Feminism

De Beauvoir (1949) and Feinman (1994), amongst others, have suggested that women have long been defined with reference to men, i.e. females are relative to the male, the male is the absolute, the subject, women are the 'other'. De Beauvoir (1949:16) suggested that the '*peculiarities of a uterus*' and ovaries '*imprison*' women in their

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<sup>30</sup>A collection of Winnicott's essays and presentations between 1957-1970 are presented (posthumously) in Winnicott, (1987) – see references.

*'subjectivity'*, rendering them *'essentially to the male as a sexual [and reproductive] being'*. Early feminism (or first wave feminism) was concerned with emancipating women from patriarchal restrictions and challenging inequality between the sexes, which had manifested in the denial of women's basic rights, such as rights to education, to suffrage, to own property and to be able to divorce, and even to rights over their own bodies. Feminism was not at this time focused on motherhood (Friedan, 1963). However, Reid (1983) suggests that it is difficult, if not impossible, to completely separate discussions about motherhood from feminine and feminist ideology, i.e. how women should and should not behave or are expected to behave. This in turn is impossible to separate from patriarchal ideology and structures that have long defined and confined women. Weitzman et al (1985) argued that the 1940's and 50's were dominated by a 'maternal ideal' that trapped women in the pursuit of perfect motherhood. However, during the 1960's and 70's second wave feminism broadened its reach, retaining its early commitment to equality of women's rights, but also now becoming more concerned with addressing issues that still affected women, but that were controlled and influenced by patriarchy. This included domestic violence, responses to rape, marital rape, reproduction, and motherhood, which all now became the focus of feminist activists. Women began to demand control and rights over their own bodies, which inevitably led to the spotlight beginning to shine on motherhood.

Motherhood has not always enjoyed an easy relationship with feminism, particularly when intersected with race and class (Collins, 2005). Motherhood is a contentious issue that has split feminist movements and caused tension between women otherwise united in the pursuit of equality (Neyer and Bernadi, 2011). On the one hand, motherhood has been regarded by women as a source of agency and power; a reason to celebrate the uniqueness of womanhood, the wonder of biology, and a means of uniting women through age, culture and race. Paradoxically, motherhood has also undoubtedly been a means of excluding women and reducing their status. Furthermore, motherhood has provided anchor points for discrimination, inequality and disadvantage (Smart, 1996), which were problematic to feminist thinking. It is from this latter vantage point that mainstream feminism, particularly from the end of WWII until the 1970s, took a critical stance concerning motherhood, arguing that for the subjugation of women to be overturned, motherhood should be rejected (De Beauvoir, 1949).

In 1976, Adrienne Rich published '*Of Woman born: Motherhood as an experience and an institution*', widely regarded as the first book on feminist motherhood and mothering. Rich's book influenced a whole generation of scholarly work on motherhood in an area of womanhood she felt had been neglected. Rich (1976:11) wrote, '*we know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood*'. She maintained that motherhood through the ages has been culturally and continuously 'redesigned' in response to economic and societal factors, arguing that modern dominant motherhood practices were rooted in industrialisation and the need to support the male breadwinner and therefore women were imprisoned by society's need to protect the patriarchal status quo. Rich (1976) suggested that people found it difficult to see motherhood as the 'prison of patriarchy' because, she argued, neither men nor women wanted to view the mothering of society's children through this lens. She believed that women perpetuated the patriarchal status quo by allowing themselves to be conditioned into accepting that they *should* have children, and for believing that they were somehow going against the feminine grain if they did not.

O' Reilly (2004:2) states that Rich provided, for the first time, the '*analytical tools to fully study and report upon the meaning and experience of motherhood*'. Rich (1976:13) made the distinction between the '*two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other*', i.e. the '*institution*' of motherhood, and '*mothering*' which refers to women's own experiences of being mothers. Rich (1976) argued that *motherhood* as an institution is male defined and controlled much like all other institutions which, she suggests is how power is 'maintained' and 'transferred' (or not), and which '*guarantees that it [power] shall reside in certain hands but not in others*' (Rich, 1976:279-280). Echoing De Beauvoir (1949), Rich believed that '*motherhood*' is sustained by patriarchy, and also by women becoming mothers, thus securing their place as secondary citizens. Whereas the act of '*mothering*' refers to women's experiences of 'doing' mothering, which if women-centred and defined could be potentially empowering to women/mothers - albeit within the oppressive confines of the socially constructed patriarchal institution of motherhood.

Rich's (1976) distinction between the *institution* of motherhood under patriarchy, with all that that entailed, and the *experience* of mothering, which was more amenable to being shaped by feminist mothers themselves and left an important imprint and legacy in terms of the recognition of maternal power. The coexisting oppressive and empowering dimensions of mothering have been a challenge and focus in feminist motherhood

scholarship ever since. O'Reilly (2004:2) citing Umansky, presents the '*two competing views of feminist motherhood*', as the '*negative discourse, which focuses on motherhood as a social mandate, an oppressive institution, a compromise to women's independence*', and the positive discourse, which offers the view that, motherhood can be a unifying, empowering site of liberation, nurture, creativity and agency, if released from patriarchy. However, even with this distinct split being recognised, it is difficult to disentangle one view completely from the other, as inevitably both 'camps' have areas of shared opinion. The challenge to presenting discrete arguments may explain why feminism has a 'complicated' relationship with motherhood (O'Reilly 2016;2).

### **3.4 Examining Mothering and Feminism Post – Rich (1976)**

Rich is widely regarded as a pioneer of maternal scholarship and her work remains influential decades after her book was published. Following in her footsteps, Oakley's (1979) book '*Becoming a Mother*' was hailed as revelatory about the transition to motherhood in which women were 'telling it like it is', as opposed to repeating the trope of how motherhood was 'everything and more' to women. The book was widely read and well received, giving the explicit message that it was 'acceptable' to be a less than perfect mother.

However, Reid (1983) offered what was at the time an unpopular critique, arguing that the book and the research underpinning Oakley's publications represented more of Oakley's personal struggles with the transition into motherhood, and its immediate aftermath. Nonetheless, Reid (*ibid*) acknowledged that the book was an important contribution to feminist study in that it centred the voices of mothers themselves and made a very clear political statement that mothers and motherhood are important. Like much of the published literature at the time concerning motherhood, Oakley's work was critiqued for focusing on white, middle-class motherhood. Although Reid does not explicitly use the term 'reflexivity', she makes it clear in her critique of Oakley that researcher reflexivity and representation are important factors to consider in feminist research, something that Oakley herself later acknowledged (Oakley, 2016). Mothers, like all humans, are a complex mixture of biological, sociological and psychological influences, race, culture, class, sexuality and disability, all have a role to play in discussions of how women undertake mothering.

Perspectives from psychology, sociology and philosophy have generated conflicting ideas about how to 'solve the problem of motherhood' (O'Reilly, 2004). Chodorow (1978) and Ruddick (1983) shared the view that motherhood had been shaped, at least in part, by patriarchy. Ruddick (1983:343) argued that mothers are essentially powerless; that almost everywhere, mothering or mother work takes place in societies governed by and geared up for men. Paradoxically, Ruddick (1983:343) states that in circumstances where women have power and control over their own bodies, then they have the 'power to grant or deny children to men', as well as enjoying some kind of power of omnipotent love over their children. She suggests that mothering is experienced at a '*poignant conjunction of power and powerlessness*' (*ibid*).

Like Chodorow (1978), Ruddick (1983) suggests that it is difficult when writing about motherhood - or experiencing it, to be balanced about both its grim and its satisfying aspects; or, as Oakley (1979) describes it, the 'agony and the ecstasy' of motherhood. Ruddick believes that maternal practice is governed by three principles: to preserve life, to sustain growth (physically and mentally), and to promote and develop social acceptability in the child. She suggests that some mothers will be committed and successful in this and others will not, in much the same way that some scientists will be successful, and others will not. Ruddick recognises that there will be internal and external factors affecting a mother's commitment and success (important in the context of this study), which she suggests is defined by dominant ideological thinking.

Ruddick (1983) suggests that '*the ideology of womanhood has been invented by men*', that 'maternal thinking' is an example of 'womanly' thinking, but that it need not be. She asserts that women are *perceived* as being more 'maternal' *only* because, as daughters, we are taught to emulate the nurture of our mothers, and that this fosters the behaviours associated with maternal instinct, i.e. 'maternal thought'. She believes that men can and should develop maternal thinking and the 'maternal practices' that would follow would be more gender-balanced. Ruddick rejects the biological argument that women, and only women, can 'mother' well. She argues that 'maternal thought' deserves a more significant place in society and that if wider society could absorb more readily the 'thinking' behind mothering practices and desired outcomes, quite simply the world would be a more peaceful and better place. She argues that to facilitate this, men and women need to adopt a more egalitarian role in the home and in childcare, but without either

feeling that they are acquiescing to the other (which would simply be maintaining gender-based ideology); i.e. successful fathers would not be 'helping' mothers, and mothers would not be 'giving up' or 'handing over' maternal practices to fathers. Both would simply be parenting or, as Ruddick puts it:

*"There will be mothers of both sexes who live out a transformed maternal thought in communities that share parental care - practically, emotionally, economically and socially. Such communities will have learned from their mothers how to value children's lives."* (Ruddick, 1983:362).

Influenced by psychoanalytical thinking, Chodorow (1978) also suggested that the reproduction of mothering from generation to generation is heavily influenced by differences in how boy and girl children are raised. She argues that although this is not fixed, the social organisation of gender is influenced by women's mothering, and consequently so is gender inequality and male dominance. She argues that male and female children identify with their same sex parent, and girls therefore develop a maternal identity long before they have children of their own. She states that, whilst 'other factors' might contribute to a woman's choice to be a mother, none of those factors could or would compel a mother to mother (or to engage in a maternal relationship) '*unless she to some degree, and on some conscious or unconscious level, has the capacity and sense of self as a maternal being to do so*' (1978:33). Chodorow has been criticised, however, not least because her conclusion contradicts her own theory – i.e., she concludes that the social reorganisation of childcare in the home would not significantly alter gender outcomes, and also because she regards children as purely 'objects', as opposed to the 'subjects' that they obviously are (Di Quinzio, 1999).

Similarly, Ruddick (1983) has been critiqued as 'naïve'. She is accused of recreating an ideology that women, and especially mothers should be 'good', and for giving the impression that maternal traits are essentially 'feminine' traits. It has been suggested that there is a lack of robustness to her arguments (Keller, 2010) and that she is completely child-focused (as opposed to mother and child) and is particularly ethnocentric in her writing and theorising. This is a common criticism of feminist mother-focused theory (Bailey, 1995). A growing criticism of the feminist motherhood influencers became apparent because of the continued failure to accommodate the voices of mothers, together with their failure to recognise diverse motherhood in terms of

heteronormative assumptions, class and, especially - race. Bailey (1995) and Collins (2005) both highlighted the failure of Rich, Chodorow, and particularly Ruddick (1993), to recognise the differences and distinctiveness of ethnic minority mothering. Bailey (1995:193-194) reiterates for example that not only are western world black mothers mothering in a patriarchal society, they are doing so whilst living in a white dominant society that *'devalues their history, work, culture, and customs'*. Collins (1994, 2005) argues that motherwork, and particularly 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996), is especially challenging for ethnic minority women, not least because the mothers often are already facing multiple oppressions as well as having to resist - and teach their children to resist - dominant oppressive ideology in socially acceptable ways, and to not be complicit in their children assimilating into dominant cultures. Thus, although feminism united women in the pursuit of equality of status, employment, wages and other issues, unity in relation to feminist perspectives of motherhood has been less evident.

### **3.5 'Intensive Mothering' and Beyond**

The 1980's and 1990's continued to be represented by conflicting perspectives of feminism and mothering. Feminism had begun to accept that 'liberated' women could also be mothers but continued to be clear that this would only be possible if mothers denounced patriarchy and 'fought back'. As such, more women than ever appeared to 'reject' full-time motherhood and entered the workplace, although many actually did so because of economic need, especially ethnic minority women (Bailey, 1995; Collins, 1994). Nonetheless, some women did so because now came the message 'we can have it all', i.e. be a mother and have a career. Slaughter (2015) highlighted how this created a divide between mothers: there was judgement from mothers who were employed outside of the home, towards women who were 'only' full-time mothers and who chose not to work, and judgement from stay-at-home mothers, who perceived working mothers as 'selfish' and as placing their own needs above their children's. Hays (1996) highlights the emotiveness of discussions around motherhood, recognising that it has a polarising effect even amongst women - something she calls the 'Mommy Wars' (1996:131). Arguably, this represents a significantly challenging period in history for mothers, who were damned if they did (work), and damned if they did not.

In the 1980's and 1990's, dominant motherhood ideology continued to demand that mothers adopt a selfless devotion to their children, meeting their every need through the absolute devotion of time, money, effort and emotion (Hays, 1996). Persistent idealised notions of motherhood made it challenging for mothers who were struggling with multiple identities or multiple realities, (such as mental illness, addiction, or domestic abuse), to seek help and support, not least because they feared the judgement of professionals that they were bad mothers; ultimately mothers feared the risk of losing their children if they were seen not to be coping (Baldwin, 2015). Mothers simply 'got on with it'. Hays (1996) analysed socially developed ideas of motherhood which she too, believed is a constructed ideology, serving not only men but also capitalism, at least for the white middle-classes. Hays (1996:6) observed that more women than ever were entering the workplace but doing so whilst remaining influenced by and beholden to the dominant ideology of 'intensive mothering', which she argued is rooted in an ideology which suggests that children need their mothers more than anyone else (see earlier discussion), and that mothers must remain selfless, i.e. putting their needs behind those of their children. She argues that, in a society where *'the logic of self-generated gain seems to rule behaviour'*, it is a *'cultural contradiction'* that women and mothers were also now expected to succeed in the workplace without being freed from the constraints and expectations of motherhood. Mothers were now, argued Hays, expected to work a 'double shift', one as a mother, one as an employee (*ibid*).

Hays (1996) argues that positioning men as less competent in the home renders them as more powerful in the workplace, thus contributing to the subjugation of women whilst placing mothers at odds with the ostensible priorities of society, wealth and individual gain. As previously discussed, some maternal theorists (Rich,1976; Chodorow, 1978; Ruddick, 1983;) argued that this contradiction could be resolved to some extent by a social and gendered reorganisation of childcare and traditionally female tasks in the home. However, Hays (1996:5) offers what she suggests is a more logical, rational and contentious solution, namely that:

*"Given the power of the ideology of the marketplace, a more logical (and cynical) solution would be an ideological revolution that makes tending the home and children a purely commercial, rationalised enterprise, one in which neither mother nor father need be highly involved. Why don't we convince*



*ourselves that children need neither a quantity of time nor 'quality time' with their mothers **or their fathers***" (emphasis in the original). (Hays, 1996)

Hays (1996) argues that it is not so much 'motherhood' that is the problem, but 'childhood'. She questions whether it is right that dominant ideology places so much emphasis on the needs of the child by demanding that at least one parent is the dominant caregiver which, she argues, 'glorifies' the role of mothering (or fathering) and perpetuates an ideal as opposed to a reality. Hays has, however, been criticised, perhaps obviously, by developmental psychologists, but also for not listening to the voices of mothers - mothers who feel they have agency and power in motherhood and who do not want to lose the 'ideals' of motherhood, but instead want to gain support to mother well **and** to work outside of the home, if they choose, yet equally to be valued and supported in a choice not to (O'Reilly, 2006). However not all women are faced with equal 'choices' or share the same beliefs about mothering practices.

Crenshaw (2017) coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989, initially to explore the oppression of women of colour but later expanded it to include race, gender, sex, sexuality, class, ability, nationality, citizenship and body type. Although not fully utilised by feminists until the 2000's, intersectionality became a key feature of third wave feminism. For the first time, the multiple realities and experiences of women and mothers were explored and gained entry into feminist discussions of motherhood. Collins (2005, 2007) believes that the 'anti-motherhood' bias in mainstream feminism alienated black mothers and was a serious impediment in the development and theorising of a black motherhood scholarship. She highlights that in black mothering (particularly African American/African Anglo mothers), there are often 'other mothers' raising children, and mothering is not solely the responsibility of the birth mother; furthermore, that black motherhood is often '*both dynamic and dialectical*' (Collins cited in Takševa, 2018:184). This is further evidence to support O'Reilly's assertion that a universal approach to understanding motherhood is inadequate (discussed below).

In the 2000's, motherhood arguably remains as influenced by dominant motherhood ideology as it ever was, but with additional pressure on mothers to be 'perfect'. Social media has added a whole new area of judgement for mothers, and the 'celebrity' and 'influencer' culture has arguably placed even more pressure on mothers to not only 'love and adore their child' but also, to provide the best pram, designer clothes, and the best

toys, to 'snap back' into their pre-pregnant body shape (obviously thin!), and to transition into motherhood in a bubble of maternal contentment (Chae, 2015). Nevertheless, the multiple realities of mothers and motherhood have gained ground, and scholarly motherhood literature has been bolstered by semi-scholarly literature written by non-academics who are nonetheless influential. Publications on a theme have regularly appeared on 'best seller' lists: books such as *'The Good Mother Myth: redefining motherhood to fit reality'* (Norman-Natham, 2014); *'Misconceptions: truth, lies and the unexpected journey into motherhood'* (Wolf, 2003); *'Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the illusion of reality'* (Asher, 2012); and *'Making Babies: Stumbling into Motherhood'* (Enright 2005). Such publications share several themes, that true equality between the genders does not exist and potentially never will because women give birth. In addition, they offer rousing admiration for mothers who are doing a fantastic job (although, arguably focus remains on middle-class, white mothers), and, finally, an acceptance that there is no such thing as the 'perfect' mother. Nonetheless, women continue to aim for the ideal of the perfect mother, engaging in negative self-evaluations as they inevitably 'fail' to live up to perfection.

The continuing complicated relationship between motherhood and feminism can be evidenced by motherhood often being completely excluded from essential or comprehensive edited collections of feminist edited collections (for example, see Price and Shildrick, 1999; McCann and Kim, 2016). Takševa (2018) also highlights that significant developments and growth in motherhood studies are often not given even a 'passing acknowledgement' in many feminist collections. Purely scholarly writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on motherhood was quiet, and in fact, O'Reilly (2016) has documented the 'vanishing' percentage of maternal scholarship publications. O'Reilly herself, is a prolific writer on motherhood and founded the *Association for Research on Mothering* in Canada in 1998, which later became the *Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* (MIRCI). It was through her progressing scholarly activity in motherhood studies and listening to mothers that O'Reilly (2004) developed her concept of 'empowered mothering' and 'Matricentric-feminism'.

### 3.6 Matricentric-Feminism

O'Reilly (2016:01) argued that matricentric-feminism (MF) was born from an acceptance of the position that 'mothering matters'. O'Reilly stated that she was not saying that mothering 'is all that matters or matters most', but that any true *'understanding of women's lives is incomplete without a consideration of how becoming a mother shapes a woman's sense of self and how she sees the world'*. She goes on to say:

*"I can say with confidence that for women who are mothers, mothering is a significant, if not a defining dimension of their lives, and that arguably, maternity matters more than gender...[...]. Mothers need a feminism that puts motherhood at its centre."* (O'Reilly, 2016)

Illustrating her comparison with gender, O'Reilly highlights that, although there has been significant progress in terms of equality and reduced discrimination between the sexes, discrimination for mothers has remained consistent. She argues that, although not completely eradicated, the 'sticky floor' and 'glass ceiling' that impede women in the workplace have been, to a degree, successfully challenged, but that the 'maternal wall' remains to limit and challenge women in the workplace (O'Reilly, 2016:2). O'Reilly (*ibid*) cites Crittenden (1998) who stated, *'once a woman has a baby the egalitarian office party is over'*. O'Reilly (2016) asserts that, despite over forty years of feminism, mothers remain marginalised and disempowered. O'Reilly (2004:10) suggests a 'counternarrative' of motherhood would involve reimagining and implementing a motherhood that is *'empowering to women as opposed to oppressive'*. Within empowered mothering, the emphasis is on the mother's own experiences and meanings; importantly that she, the mother, and her culture ascribe to, so that motherhood becomes a site of power, a site through which the mother and the mother role can influence future generations from the home *'through new feminist modes of socialisation and interactions with daughters and sons'* (O'Reilly, 2004:10).

O'Reilly (2016:2) argues that MF ought not to replace traditional feminist thought, rather that its role is to recognise that the role and category of 'mother' is distinct from 'woman'. She maintains that maternal issues relating to economic, political, social, psychological, cultural and emotional spheres are *'specific to women's role and identity as mothers'*. Furthermore, Di Quinzio (1999) argued that mainstream feminism and motherhood have

a complicated relationship, primarily because of the need and want to challenge the oppression of patriarchy and patriarchally favoured structures, balanced against the want and need of individualist but still feminist mothers who want to celebrate the experience of mothering and the power and agency of motherhood. This is in part why O'Reilly (2016) argued that motherhood should have a feminism of its own.

Matricentric-feminism rejects the essentialism of previous feminist work on motherhood – that which assumed the centrality and normalcy of the white middle-class family and replaces it with more pluralist and contemporary perspectives which foregrounds mothers' own experiences, cultures and voice, plus a recognition of the importance of allowing mothers to theorise their own experiences. This may include experiencing maternal agency, power and autonomy, and, importantly, how those individual aspects are oppressed, judged, frustrated and prevented (Takševa, 2018; O'Reilly, 2016). O'Reilly (2016:6) states that, as a relatively new, emergent and collegiate feminism, MF is 'difficult to define', and instead she offers 'central and governing' principles and aims. These are:

*“...that motherhood, mothers and mothering as a topic is deserving of sustained scholarly activity and inquiry that will establish itself as a legitimate and independent and productive discipline; that it identifies mothering as ‘work’ which is important but not the sole responsibility of mothers; that it challenges patriarchal oppression of motherhood, thus seeking maternal-identity and practices that are empowering to mothers; that it seeks to contest the child-centredness defining much of the scholarship and activism on motherhood; that it develops a research activism centring the voices and experiences of mothers; that it recognises mothering experiences to be diverse and in the context of race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, age and geographical location; that it will actively pursue and seek social change and social justice concerning mothering - whilst regarding motherhood as a site of power wherein mothers can and do create social change through feminist childrearing and activism.” (O'Reilly, 2016)*

Although MF will provide a space for feminist mothers frustrated by the neglect motherhood has faced in mainstream feminism to date, it is not beyond reproach. O'Reilly (2016), like Hays (1996) and Ruddick (1983), appear to set the needs of the

mother and child against one another - as if one *must* come before the other, whereas in fact there is no reason why the mother's and child's needs cannot be balanced with each being met 'first' at different times throughout the long journey of motherhood (Baldwin, 2015).

O'Reilly (2016, 2019) goes to great lengths to demonstrate the difference between matricentric-feminism and maternalism. Maternalism, she argues, relates to 'difference feminism', which argues that women are biologically predisposed to want to be mothers and have innate qualities to enable them to do so, and to do so 'better' than men. O'Reilly (2016) echoes the motherhood is a social construction school of thought, arguing that *'although MF does hold a mother-centred perspective, it does not advance a maternalistic argument or agenda'*. Through the lens of MF she positions mothering *'more as a practice than in identity'*. However, despite advocating that MF was founded from listening to the voices of mothers, O'Reilly denounces all of those mothers in the school of thought who believe their mothering *is* 'natural' and that they *do* have a 'maternal instinct' which at least renders them 'better' able to care for children than men - something some women gain power from believing. Therefore, it could be argued that, in her intention to empower mothers, O'Reilly actually reduces the 'power' of some mothers by minimising their self-defined maternal-identity and maternal claims.

Nonetheless, MF does at least recognise that 'motherhood matters', and that motherhood is an individual as well as a collective experience that occurs in a cultural context within mothers' multiple realities, creating a space in feminism where motherhood is better understood and valued. It also centres motherhood in a broader societal context and demands a political, social and structural response. O'Reilly (2016), like Kitzinger (1994) before her, argued that mothers must be supported to have the 'freedom' to choose whether to have a career or not – and not to be judged as a better or worse mother for either choice.

O'Reilly (2019) asserts that the disavowal of motherhood in mainstream feminism must now be recognised and reconciled. She argues that MF must be acknowledged as an established, viable, and legitimate school of thought which must become evident and embedded in feminist theory readers, in gender and women's studies programs, and that MF scholars must commit to writing for publication. She argues that it is vital that mother work and the work of 'care' is valued, and that women's multiple identities and realities

are acknowledged and supported at every level. Key to understanding MF is the acceptance of the notion that to women - whilst subject to aspects of gender roles that are to some extent socially constructed - their motherhood matters and '*maternity is integral to a mother's sense of self and her experience of the world*' (O'Reilly, 2016:204).

Important messages from within MF (and as is evidenced in the findings chapters), are that motherhood needs to be supported, politically and socially, by society's structures, policies and practice; that mothers and motherhood should be supported and that women who choose not to mother, or who cannot have children, are not made to feel inferior. Women need to know that, whatever contributions they may wish to make to the children of the future, whether as aunts, godmothers, mothers, grandmothers or friends, their input is valuable and appreciated. O'Reilly (2016) argues that gender difference has been the 'elephant in the room' (*ibid*) which has 'shut down' much needed conversations between feminism and motherhood. To redress the balance and give motherhood its rightful place in feminism, O'Reilly (2019:60) argues, matricentric-feminists must be recognised as scholars and activists, that they and matricentric-feminism should have '*a room of its own in the larger home of academic feminism*'. In summary, O'Reilly (2016:20) is not suggesting that only motherhood matters, or that it is motherhood that defines the self or makes a woman a 'real' woman, or even that as a variable of 'self' it is the most important: but it *is* saying that '*motherhood matters*' and is integral and central to '*understanding the lives of women as mothers and their maternal identities*' (2016:204).

Thus, she concludes, mothers need a feminism of their own, both in theory and practice, for and about their identities and experiences as mothers. This thesis argues that the same is true of criminology, i.e. that there is a place in academic study for a 'matricentric-feminist criminology'. Accordingly, in relation to this study, criminalised mothers need to be recognised *as mothers*. As O'Reilly argues, 'motherhood matters' and motherhood and maternal identity needs to be understood in the context of criminalised mothers' pathways into crime, their criminalisation itself, their imprisonment, and their pathways out of crime. The following section identifies how motherhood scholarship and the sociology of motherhood has contributed to our understanding of how a maternal identity is developed and shaped, thus providing a backdrop and theoretical lens through which the experiences of criminalised mothers in this study can be examined and understood.

### 3.7 Maternal Identity

In her review of motherhood scholarship, Arendell (2000:1192) explored two predominant 'streams', one 'theorising mothering and motherhood' and the other an 'empirical study of the mothering experience'. Arendell argues that definitions of mothering share common ground, i.e. the nurturing and caring for dependent children; 'mothering' is also an adjective defined as '*actions related to being a mother, especially in being protective, caring and kind*' (Oxford Dictionary 1989). Thus, mothering is focused on *doing* mothering, but also can involve the experience of *being* a mother. In his phenomenological study of transition into maternal-identity, Smith (1999) found that experiences during pregnancy, and of the pregnancy itself, bore some relationship to the development of a healthy and affirming maternal identity. He argued that part of the process of developing a maternal identity involved a drawing away from the world of work, becoming more insular and involved in the 'familial world' (Smith, 1999:288). Similarly, he suggests that spending time with other pregnant friends and other mothers, and attending antenatal appointments, bonds mothers to other mothers – which again assists in the development of a maternal-identity. However, the extent to which generalisations can be made from Smith's (1999) findings are questionable. The findings and conclusions were based on the experiences of four women. All were white, married or in long-term relationships, all were employed with no previous history of abortion, miscarriage or unwanted pregnancies, and were therefore not representative of women more broadly, and certainly not representative of the women taking part in this current study.

Many women, especially women from ethnic and/or working-class backgrounds, are living in challenging circumstances (including criminalised women), where the maternal experiences described by Smith may not be possible. Many women do not have the luxury of a safe, planned, uneventful pregnancy with regular antenatal appointments/classes because their reality might be trying to survive through domestic abuse, or as a migrant seeking asylum, or simply working every day and so making regular antenatal appointments impossible. These diverse experiences of pregnancy are bound to impact maternal identity. Smith (1999) leaves no room in his model of a '*thoughtful and reflective pregnancy*' for women who do not share the experiences of his participants and does not discuss how women with different experiences might develop a maternal identity. It was then ambitious of Smith to conclude his study with a 'theoretical

model'; however, he does concede that the model is '*not the comprehensive and final statement on the matter*' and suggests that '*subsequent work could include groups of different women to expand the model*' (1999:296).

Stryker and Burke (2000) suggest that identity theorists from anthropology, sociology and psychology have offered various explanations through the decades about what contributes to the formulation of identity or identities, many of which are rooted in Mead's social interactionism (1935). Identity theory, like feminism, has a complicated history (Hornsey, 2008) with sometimes competing ideas about the significance of individualistic, internally focused self-development, and the significance and role of 'group' or relational dynamics (Hogg et al, 1995). Although competing theoretical perspectives remain in terms of specifics, Mead's premise of '*society shapes self, shapes social behaviour*' (cited in Stryker and Burke 2000:285) is largely accepted although 'highly simplified'. It suggests that for a mother, her maternal identity is made up from and affected by both internal and external forces, which are in turn influenced by a multitude of variables, to include her upbringing and personal circumstances, class, ethnicity, culture, relationships with others, perceptions of motherhood, the responses of others to her (as a mother and as a woman), and her own self-assessment of herself as a mother.

Hughes (1945), an American sociologist, was the first to speak about '*master status*' in terms of identity. He was referring to aspects such as gender, race, and occupation, which he argues could all co-exist as master statuses. Master statuses can be ascribed or achieved; an example of an achieved status is that of mother. It is suggested that when one aspect of identity influences all others or 'overpowers' the others, it is determined as a 'master status'. For many women 'mother' becomes their 'master' (ironically) status. Equally, for ethnic minority or black mothers, 'black mother' for example can become her master status (as has been demonstrated, this can be influenced both internally, i.e. by the mother herself, or externally, i.e. by wider society). More recently this has been referred to as 'identity salience' (Stryker and Serpe, 1982 cited in Hogg et al, 1995). Lockwood (2020) identified that mother status remains the most important aspect of identity to criminalised and imprisoned mothers.

'Maternal identity', although difficult to define exactly, involves the assimilation of the maternal role into a women's self-concept, to include how she would evaluate and



describe herself in the mother role (Mireault et al, 2002). A mother's own self-evaluation of her maternal-identity, and her 'internal working model of caregiving', is related to her own assessment of her 'performance' as a mother, which is related to a number of other variables, to include uncertainty, lack of confidence, experiences of being mothered, and external factors such as poverty, class, and the ability to engage in mothering activities (George and Solomon, 1996). Becoming a mother for the first time involves learning new skills, accepting bodily changes and constructing or negotiating a new, special and permanent self-concept (Abrams and Curran, 2010), confirmed through normal pregnancy tasks and rituals (Kitzinger 1992, Rubin 1984). Many of which would be unavailable to pregnant mothers in prison or mothers living in the challenging circumstances with limited agency previously described. McMahon (1995, cited in Abrams and Curran, 2010:2), conceptualised motherhood as a 'rite of passage' through which women generate and attain an identity associated with a 'maternal or loving character'. Abrams and Curran (2010) highlight that 'successful' motherhood is often wrongly measured against supposedly 'universal' maternal standards and the 'production' of a healthy well-adjusted successful child, which is only able to be assessed fully when the 'child' becomes a successful adult.

Unsurprisingly, a number of factors have been shown to have an impact on the development and sustaining of a positive maternal-identity, to include a history of trauma (Covington, 2007), early parental loss (Mireault et al, 2002), substance misuse, (Stone, 2016) and domestic abuse (Lapierre, 2008), mental illness (Hackett, 2015) and poverty (Baldwin, 2015), teenage mothering (Breheny and Stephens, 2010; Sharpe, 2015) and finally, active mothering or *doing* (Enos, 2001). Rittenour and Colaner (2012) suggest that, although motherhood is often cited as a source of joy and fulfilment for women, it is not without sacrifice. They suggest that motherhood is often accompanied by financial burden, emotional and physical costs in terms of health and wellbeing, work and family conflict and considerable self-sacrifice, and yet many women choose to be mothers and 'experience great satisfaction' at being a parent (Rittenour and Colaner, 2012:352). They go on to suggest that mothers' satisfaction in their role is influenced by the aforementioned factors, but also by mothers' commitment to the role of mothering and their 'maternal-identity', and fundamentally their love for their child. Thus, mothering even in challenging conditions and circumstances (like criminalisation and imprisonment), can still bring joy and agency to mothers if they are supported to do so.

However, Takševa (2018:183) reminds us that mothering practices and experiences vary widely and suggests that this is important because it *'has significant implications for how to understand identity, experience and agency, within not only motherhood studies, but feminism as well'*. Takševa (2018) questioned decades-long dominant theorising of motherhood and the relationship to maternal-identity, arguing that it is fundamentally flawed because of its failure to incorporate diverse voices and experiences of motherhood (for example Black mothers or imprisoned mothers), and suggests that these omissions *'have serious intellectual and institutional implications (ibid)'*. Furthermore, that it is decidedly outside of core feminist principles of inclusivity. Thus, aspects of 'maternal-identity', and particularly when related to context, are essentially missing from literature.

Takševa (2018:179) suggests that to assume that the 'knowledge' we have thus far of feminism and maternal identity is true is essentialist and reductionist in that motherhood is seen through a heteronormative, white, middle-class lens. She argues that according to this logic, the discourse of being a mother and a 'good mother' is seen in relation to being a wife, *'with all of its concomitant oppression and lack of power typical of a [traditional] patriarchal and domestic context'* (ibid). This fails to recognise or acknowledge mothering and mothering styles and experiences that lie outside of the dominant mothering culture and ideology. Mothering from the margins of society often requires more than a commitment to a maternal-identity or even maternal love. Cited in Takševa (2018:183), bell hooks<sup>31</sup> writes:

*"early feminist attacks on motherhood alienated masses of women from the movement, especially poor and/or non-white women who find parenting one of the few interpersonal relationships where they are affirmed and appreciated"*. (bell hooks, 2018)

This in effect denies and renders invisible the experiences of lesbian mothers, single mothers, working class mothers, surrogate mothers and mothers from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It imposes or risks a negative maternal identity on/for women who may not actually share that experience or perception of themselves. For many

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<sup>31</sup> bell hooks, aka Gloria Jean Watkins, feminist writer and scholar prefers her pen name to be non-capitalised and she prefers to be referenced by her pen name as opposed to her birth name

women, just *being* a mother and doing her best in that role in the set of circumstances in which she lives is enough to have a positive sense of themselves and a positive maternal identity as a good (or good enough) mother. Many of the problems and challenges for mothers in terms of their 'good mother' identity comes from external judgement, fundamentally because their maternal-identity is often '*under attack and vulnerable to the 'external gaze'*' (Ruddick, 1983) of other mothers and wider society. 'Universal' standards and ideals of motherhood, (e.g. 'quality time') are not so simple for mothers who might be working multiple jobs simply to provide the basics for their children. Key to note is that experiences of '*becoming and being mothers are inextricably linked to 'race', social class, and socio-cultural location and lived experiences - and as a result are diverse and fragmented'* (Miller, 2008:46, cited in Odum, 2017).

Rose (1989:123), argues that childhood is 'intensively governed', and mothers are closely scrutinised at different times throughout the journey of childhood/ motherhood, by a range of professionals concerned with the health and wellbeing of children. Rose (1989) suggests, and as feminism has also highlighted, this is because mothers hold the 'destiny' of the nation in their hands. Rose (1989:131) argues that from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 'legal powers and practices of judgement' began to identify and judge some families and family structures as 'troublesome'. Often this would be single parent families and families existing in challenging circumstances. Thus through 'normalisation and surveillance' (Foucault, 1977) emanating from external agencies and institutions, the family, especially mothers and maternal identity, continues to be directed, controlled and judged.

In addition, Rose (1989:134) argues that through the increasing influence of the state, 'normalisation' through institutions and state agents such as education, social services, psychology services and governmental bodies, childhood – and ergo the mother - has '*been opened up for regulation in new ways'*. The mother must mother according to society's will and fashion. Rose argues that this means '*the soul of the young citizen [to some extent also of the mother], has become the object of the government through expertise'* (*ibid*). Such high levels of surveillance (Foucault, 1979; Rose, 1989) denotes that, despite the 'gains' of feminism, despite the liberation of women and the increasing recognition of the importance and value of motherwork and mothering to a greater or lesser extent, mothers remain at best influenced, at worst controlled, by the state. Furthermore, if they do not 'perform' well, there are likely to be consequences that are

internally felt and experienced, (i.e. feeling like failed mothers, or inferior), or externally felt and experienced (i.e. externally judged with potential sanctions - for example, the prosecution and imprisonment of mothers who 'fail' to send their children to school). Or as Thurer puts it:

*"In a time where society [finally] values the fulfilment of women persons, we have an ethos of maternity that denies them that very thing, or at least judges them harshly if they are not perceived to be meeting the needs of their children first and foremost". (Thurer, 1994:xxvii)*

When the stakes are this high, the consequences and losses are potentially great. This is especially so for mothers mothering children in adverse circumstances, but also for those who are not, so it is not surprising that motherhood is an emotionally challenging experience. The plethora of emotions associated with mothering can feel all-consuming especially, but not exclusively, to new mothers, and only to be repeated when grandmothering occurs. The relationship between mothering and emotion is an enduring one.

### **3.8 Maternal Emotion**

The relationship between motherhood and emotion has stimulated research and discussion, particularly so in relation to 'good' mother, 'bad' mother labels, and emotions such as guilt (Sutherland, 2010; Rotkirch, 2009). Maternal identity is rarely, if ever, separated from emotion/emotions. Mothers are by definition – or at least are expected to be – selfless, compassionate, giving, tireless, nurturing and, perhaps above all else, 'good' (Mead, 1935; Rich, 1976; Chodorow, 1978; Codd, 2004; Rotkirch, 2009; Baldwin, 2015). In addition, the association between motherhood and *powerful* emotions is commonplace. It is often said that there is no love, greater than, more nurturing, enduring or forgiving than a mother's love. Of course, such beliefs are generated from the aforementioned ideas, ideals and expectations of motherhood, patriarchally shaped and influenced, but also from mothers themselves, as mother love and motherhood can be a source of agency and power. In the context of this thesis, maternal emotions (emotions the Mothers associated as being related to their motherhood and mothering), are compounded by the location, i.e. prison and prison space (Baldwin, 2018; Jewkes and

Laws 2020). For example, should a child win a school prize then a free mother might feel (and be *expected* to feel) pride and love; a mother in prison might well feel the same pride and love, but might also feel guilt, shame and sadness at not being present to share the experiences and the emotions of the occasion *as she is supposed to* or as is *expected* of her. Similarly, an imprisoned mother previously (or currently) living in an abusive relationship or dealing with addiction might be feeling love and loss in terms of missing her child, but she also might feel relief at being imprisoned (sometimes perceived as 'safe') and thus be able to access support and to focus on her own needs whilst she recovers or accesses support, without the pressures of motherhood (O'Malley, 2018, 2020). Yet, she may feel reluctant to disclose that 'relief' because she is beholden to the ideal that children and *their* needs are *supposed* to come first, thus triggering guilt – thus highlighting the complexity of maternal emotions in criminalised women.

The expectations of motherhood are such that a mother's ambivalence, contradictions, and inconsistency towards her children are deemed anomalous, which develops into a theoretical strand of maternal theory in its own right. The theory of 'maternal ambivalence' was developed to describe co-existing positive and negative feelings/emotions towards one's own children, and/or towards the role and expectations of mothers and/or towards the institution of motherhood (Parker, 1995). Maternal ambivalence can be defined as a '*woman's experience of simultaneous and conflicting positive and negative feelings (and/or actions) towards her children, her position as a mother, and towards the institution of motherhood*' (Parker, 1995:1).

Widespread acceptance of the 'maternal ideal' makes it challenging for women who do not live up the ideal (or want to), to admit to (Parker 1995). Meaning mothers who feel that they do not live up the ideal either in thought or action find it difficult to discuss or reveal and they can become trapped in a cycle of guilt and shame (*ibid*). For some mothers, (including criminalised mothers), this can trigger addiction or damaging mental-health issues, and/or an unnecessarily harsh self-critical evaluation of their own mothering and maternal-identity (Baldwin et al, 2015). Parker argues that although mothers are encouraged into silence or minimisation by expectations of motherhood, all women experience some degree of maternal ambivalence. The key point she proffers is whether it becomes 'unmanageable' (Parker 1995).

Almond (2010) cited in O'Reilly (2016:63), suggests that *'too many women suffer in their attempt to be perfect, [...] or 'maternally correct'*. Mothers are literally driving themselves crazy in their quest for maternal perfection which can only be proven by the perfection of their 'offspring' when they become successful adults. This presents particular challenges to mothers mothering through challenges and adverse conditions (like prison). Parker (1995) and Thurer (1994) both highlight the harm of 'maternal shame', which they argue comes from the prevalence of 'mother blaming' which appears to be inherent in society and which Parker and Thurer claim is rooted in patriarchal motherhood ideology.

In her ground-breaking book on motherhood, Rich (1976:217) summarised motherhood as an experience that elicited terrific guilt: *'the guilt, the guilt, the guilt'*, something most mothers even forty years later would still identify with. Indeed, Sutherland (2010:310), also believes that motherhood is synonymous with guilt, arguing that maternal guilt is 'so pervasive' in contemporary culture that it has become considered 'natural'. In line with Sutherland's description of maternal guilt as 'natural', Rotkirch (2009) suggests that maternal and grandmaternal guilt may have evolutionary roots, and exists to ensure that mothers protect their young, ensure their survival and provide appropriate maternal/grandmaternal care. Rotkirch (2009) also suggests that women's lower levels of aggression compared to men are similarly rooted in evolution and are born out of a need to protect and nurture their young. She goes on to suggest that guilt as a 'moral emotion' may *'serve to inhibit aggression, impulsive actions and neglect in parenting'* (Rotkirch, 2009:92). However, she does concede that maternal guilt is also a by-product of dominant motherhood ideology and culturally influenced aspirations of mothers. Rotkirch (2009:95) found that the most often cited emotions/emotional states in her research with mothers were *'fatigue, love, rage, anger, aggression, and guilt'*. However, when reflecting on her research aim which was to uncover maternal emotions normally 'forbidden' to be expressed, and on her survey questions (for example, 'which emotions make you feel guilty or ashamed?'), it is perhaps not surprising that the negative outweighed the positive in the mothers' responses.

Motherhood literature suggests that expectations of mothers, together with the assumption that motherhood is absolutely fulfilling, is universal across class, cultures and ethnicity (O'Reilly, 2016). However, most mothers will describe a vast range of emotions felt during their experiences of mothering and grandmothering their children. Mothers, whether they mother well according to their own internal or society's external

standards, will be aware of the emotions expected of them. Ergo, feelings of failure as a result of failing to live up to these standards can hit mothers hard (Sutherland, 2010). The 'mandates of motherhood' (Sutherland, 2010:212) serves to *'inform women of the right way to mother'*. The intensive mothering, according to Hays' (1996) dominant ideology, as previously described, inevitably leads to negative emotional states because of the 'unreasonableness' of its demands.

Sutherland (2010) argues that however 'natural' or inevitable maternal guilt might be, pervasive guilt impacts on the physical and mental wellbeing of mothers and can be counterproductive. In both Sutherland's and Rotkirch's observations, maternal guilt was often connected to social disapproval and judgement and to the 'myths of motherhood' or dominant motherhood ideology. Sutherland (2010:311) highlighted the difference between maternal guilt and maternal shame, arguing that guilt often refers to a 'specific act or behaviour', whereas shame often relates to *'a negative evaluation of self, a more core reaction to public disapproval, with a focus on the entirety of the self'*. Sutherland also argues that while for some mothers the terms guilt and shame are interchangeable, they can also be distinctly different, albeit related and coexisting. Shame, she suggests is felt in relation to others, or to external values, ideas, ideologies, and standards, and guilt is often an internalisation of that shame.

Like Rose (1989), Foucault (1977), and Liss et al (2013), Sutherland (2010:311) argued that mothers *'exist under the gaze of society'*, which she believed renders women (as demonstrated in this chapter) subject to definitions of what constitutes a 'good mother'. Sutherland (2010:311) goes on to say that being a good mother is directly related to 'the representation of a moral self'. Sutherland (2010:313), in her research with mothers, found that 'doing motherhood' as society told mothers it *should* be done was nigh on impossible, which women 'knew'; and yet, paradoxically, mothers continued to strive for the impossible, and thus also accepted guilt and shame at not meeting those impossible ideals, an 'inevitable' aspect of mothering:

*"...the guilt that many mothers feel is endless and tyrannical. Guilt for providing too much attention or not enough, for giving the child too much freedom, or not enough, for spanking, or not – these feelings are common yet often hidden. The guilt of the working mother, the guilt of the mother who does not have to work, the guilt of the mother who tried to do both – work*

*part-time and mother part-time – and feels both jobs suffer because of it... the guilt of the mother whose child is showing signs of disturbance, unhappiness, physical illness; the certainty you've somehow damaged your child permanently, no matter what you've done or fail to do.”* (Sutherland, as cited by Swigart, 1991:66)

Garey (1995) found that some mothers 'buffer' guilt differently by interpreting cultural norms, allowing themselves to justify or reshape their guilt. For example, women who work might work only on a night shift or when children are at school – thereby not technically leaving their children and minimising any opportunities to be accused of maternal neglect. For mothers for whom working is a necessity, they are 'providing' for their children, a basic requirement of motherhood. Sutherland (2010) similarly found that mothers would attempt to manage their maternal-emotions of guilt and shame by focusing instead on their positive maternal-emotions (love, pride, joy) and the needs of their children they were meeting. Sutherland's (2010) findings were extended by Liss et al (2013) who explored the relationship of maternal guilt and shame explicitly to a fear of negative evaluation. Liss et al (2013:1113) believe that the distinction between whether mothers are feeling guilt or shame is important, '*because shame has more serious repercussions*'. Highlighting Higgins (1987) '*Self Discrepancy Theory*', Liss et al (2013) suggest that:

*“...one explanation for maternal guilt and shame is that women experience a discrepancy between their actual sense of self and their ideal sense of who they think they should be as a mother”.*

Liss et al (2013) go on to argue that, as mothers, women are open to public and private scrutiny – that mothers feel guilt and shame as a result of a failure to live up to their internalised standards. They, like Sutherland (2010) argue that guilt and shame are challenging to disentangle, citing Gilbert (2000) who argued that fear of public exposure (and judgement) and a sense of inferiority are specifically related to shame. This led Liss et al (2013) to conclude that fear of negative evaluation is related to shame explicitly, which Higgins (1987) had noted can lead to 'self-punishment'. Liss et al (2013) also highlight the significance of the '*fear*' of negative self-evaluation which then enhances and magnifies the sense of failure and a negative focusing on potential or impending



judgement and evaluation (which can be worse for mothers who are either already lacking in self-esteem or who are very socially self-conscious). Put simply:

*“feelings of guilt and, especially, shame that may result from discrepancies between actual and ideal maternal sense of self may be exacerbated if women fear negative evaluations from others.”* (Liss et al, 2013:1114).

Liss et al (2013) suggest that this is important because the experience of guilt and shame have negative consequences for mothers, particularly in terms of depression and broader mental-health issues (see also Motz et al, 2020; Walker and Towl, 2016; Covington (2007). In the context of this thesis, this is significant because mental-health issues, entwined with other criminogenic factors, can have a relevance to women’s pathways into and out of offending (chapter 6). Liss et al (2013) conclude their study by stating that maternal-emotions, especially negative ones, can be moderated if mothers are supported to have more realistic expectations of what it means to be a ‘good’ mother, which would in turn act as a protective factor against guilt and shame. Adjustment in individual and societal maternal expectations and ideology would be beneficial.

From the limited literature available pertaining to maternal emotions and post release support, again there is a distinct ethnocentric focus, which Collins (2005) argues leaves ethnic minority mothers underrepresented and misunderstood. Collins argues that there are cultural differences in terms of choice and necessity which impact maternal practice and maternal emotion in ethnic minority women. For example, in families additionally challenged by poverty, it might be culturally usual and also necessary for childcare to be shared amongst family members, where individual ‘quality time’ between mother and child is deemed a luxury. Many mothers in challenging situations can ill afford such time, often being between working multiple jobs, and doing so as a single mother. Although there might be an assumption in terms of white middle-class values and dominant mothering ideology that such a mother would (or ‘should’) feel guilt, she is perhaps more likely to simply feel exhausted by trying to do the best for her child, and grateful to her wider family and community for supporting her, if indeed they have.

Maternal guilt is not the monopoly of the white middle-classes, but it is often only ever examined there. There is a dearth of literature concerning the mothers’ own views of what it is like to mother in poverty, with/through mental-health issues, in domestic abuse

situations, through homelessness, or as a criminalised mother. This occurs even less if multiple categories apply, and the mother is also from an ethnic minority group. This current thesis at least responds to the knowledge gap in literature concerning the emotions and experiences of imprisoned and post-release mothers; those mothers whose own view of themselves as mothers, and others' views of them as mothers, is altered or affected by their 'criminality'. It is acknowledged that a great deal more research is required concerning motherhood and multiple realities. As Odum (2017) reiterates, the traditional Eurocentric model of motherhood, as previously discussed, is not fully representative of African/Afro Caribbean (ethnic minority generally) families, and she emphasises that class, race, age and gender greatly influence understandings of the maternal experience, particularly of maternal-identity and maternal-emotion. Ethnic minority mothers, and other marginalised mothers, are often left out of motherhood discussions (McDonald-Harker, 2016), but mothering occurs within interlocking structures and contexts, and must be analysed as such (Sutherland, 2010).

Although her research specifically related to guilt felt by working mothers, Collins (2020) found that public policy has a role to play in reducing maternal guilt, and there is no reason to assume that the knowledge and conclusions resulting from her study are not more widely transferable. Thus, like O'Reilly (2016) and matricentric-feminism, Collins argues that increasing the societal value of motherhood, politicising motherhood and supporting motherhood at policy and individual levels, would contribute to the reduction in negative maternal-emotions and experiences, thereby maximising the chances of positive outcomes for mothers, children, and wider society generally.

### **3.9 Summary**

This chapter has highlighted the complicated relationship motherhood has had with feminism and presented the argument for why a 'matricentric-feminism' (O'Reilly 2016), is necessary. The chapter underlines that the stakes are high, not least because it remains a desire of most women to have children: whether that is born from a biologically driven desire, a socially expected desire, a personal choice. The chapter highlights that Motherhood, (and actually non-motherhood) attracts gaze and judgement arguably like no other status. This watchfulness over motherhood is deeply informed by patriarchally influenced, 'traditional' norms, values and motherhood ideology.

The chapter reveals how absorbed motherhood ideology and maternal expectations have far reaching implications for mothers concerning the formation and maintenance of a healthy maternal-identity and mothers internal and external experiences. When viewed in the shared context of Chapter 2, this chapter has provided a foundation on which to build an understanding of the experiences of criminalised mothers and mothers who mother from and after prison. Investment in *all* mothers is important, including, and perhaps particularly, for criminalised mothers. In recognising that feminist motherhood is consistent with '*broad feminist ideals of female empowerment and social Justice*' (Takševa 2018: 180), motherhood should also be considered not only in academic study, but more visibly and centrally in wider policy and practice, and specifically in criminal justice.

The thesis now turns to examining how the literature and the author's ontological and epistemological position informed the methodology, research tools and decision-making utilised to undertake this study. The thesis will examine the experience of managing mothering expectations and ideals before, during and after prison, revealing the impact on maternal-role and identity. Further, it will argue that the principles of matricentric-feminism should be applied to criminology, thus formulating a matricentric-feminist criminology i.e., a mother-centred branch of criminology, informed by mothers' individual backgrounds and experiences, which in turn must inform the political, the social, the systematic and the structural responses to mothers affected by the criminal justice system.

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# Chapter Four: Methodology

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*“A good ‘methodology’ is more a critical design attitude to be found always at work throughout a study – rather than confined to a brief chapter called methodology.” (Clough and Nutbrown, 2013:39)*

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes research undertaken with 28<sup>32</sup> mothers interviewed post-prison, incorporating a further 15 mothers who contributed to the study via 25 letters written from prison. Informed by the literature review, this chapter outlines the theoretical underpinning, methodological orientation, strategy, ethical considerations, and design of the study. It describes the research process concerning recruitment, data collection, and analysis.

## 4.2 Main Research Aim and objective

As outlined in Chapter 1 a matricentric-feminist approach was taken to develop a critical understanding of the enduring impact of imprisonment on maternal-identity and the maternal-role.

### Objectives

- To critically explore the in-prison and post-prison experiences of mothers, particularly in relation to maternal-identity, and the mothering role.
- To consider the relevance of motherhood and maternal experiences, in relation to sentence planning and post-release supervision.
- To develop an understanding of the enduring impact of maternal imprisonment.

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<sup>32</sup> Twenty-nine mothers originally agreed to be interviewed but one mother withdrew from the study (see statement in Chapter 5); another mother, Emma, died four weeks after her release from prison before her recorded interview could take place (although she contributed to the study via her letters, written from prison before she died).

- To formulate matricentric recommendations to inform and shape policy and practice in relation to mothers in and after prison.

The study was informed by an in-depth critical literature review and a matricentric-feminist stance. The literature review identified limited information, particularly in the UK, of the impact of prison on maternal-emotions, identity, and role<sup>33</sup>. There was a distinct lack of discussion in relation to older imprisoned mothers and grandmothers, or the long-term impact of a spoiled maternal-identity and an interrupted maternal-role because of imprisonment. The literature review and the philosophical orientation of the researcher informed the research strategy and design, providing the epistemological foundation and theoretical underpinning as outlined in this chapter. The literature review was centred around women and prison, prison motherhood, motherhood, maternal-identity, and maternal-role.

#### **4.2.1 Philosophical and Theoretical Positioning and Design of the Study**

Bryman (2012) suggests the philosophical position and role of the researcher is significant in the undertaking of any research study. My position is aligned to an interpretivist, matricentric-feminist (O'Reilly, 2016) ontology and epistemology. My feminist and matricentric position (as shown in Fig1), informed the research approach, design and methodology which lies within the interpretivist paradigm (Doucet and Mauthner, cited in Bryant 2006). I am coming from a position of acceptance that, epistemologically and ontologically speaking, there is no possibility of purely 'objective knowledge'. The world is made up of subjective experiences and 'truth' is negotiated (Cicourel, 1964; Garfinkel, 1967; Schultz, 1972) through dialogue, personal and cultural constructs, relationships, exchanges, and individual, cultural, and social experiences (Kelly, 1955).

The interpretivist paradigm places an emphasis on extracting and exploring constructed meanings and understanding. Therefore, lending itself well to qualitative orientation and feminist research design (Angen, 2000). Thus, facilitating the production of generated

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<sup>33</sup> Except for Lockwood's 2014 PhD Thesis which does discuss the impact of imprisonment on maternal-identity but does not explore the long-term implications of a spoiled identity or the wider impact on relationships once a mother is released. Nor does this research explore issues pertaining to grandmothers and mothers of older non-dependant offspring.

knowledge rich in participants' voices. The data sought in this research are the wider aspects of lived experience, emotions and feelings as opposed to the statistical information related to the topic, which would be more suited to a quantitative research approach (Bryman, 1986).

It is not unusual to see studies describing themselves as a 'feminist study' in their introduction and methodology chapters, but which then offer no further evidence in the study of feminist principles in the research design, methodology or researcher reflexivity. In this study, feminist criminology (Snider, 2003; Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Renzetti, 2013) provides the framework for exploring and understanding the experiences of women in and after prison, whilst matricentric-feminism (O'Reilly, 2016) offers an additional lens through which to better understand the experiences of criminalised mothers. Thus, matricentric and feminist principles are at the heart of this study and combine to inform the design and execution of this study, meaning the voices of mothers are centered through a matricentric-feminist criminology. Where possible participants were involved in the design processes and decision making of the study (and will be in its dissemination). The reflexivity of the researcher was transparently and honestly acknowledged. Hence the methodological decision to include an 'additional' Chapter (5) – where the Mothers will be introduced, and reflexivity will be critically explored.

The development of a relational model, or 'matricentric-feminist criminology' (Baldwin, 2018:55), generated and demonstrated by this research seeks to contribute to ongoing feminist criminological understanding and research concerning criminalised mothers. Understanding the long-term impact of imprisonment in terms of maternal-identity and role is a central concern of this study and has been largely absent in previous feminist research in penal studies (particularly in the UK).

#### **4.2.2 What Constitutes 'Feminist Research'?**

There has been much debate over what constitutes feminist research and, indeed, whether it has an identity of its own that makes it distinct from 'other' research (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1990; Letherby, 2003). Harding (1987) makes a clear distinction between research methods, which she clarifies as "*techniques for gathering evidence*", and research methodology, which she defines as "*a theory and analysis of how research*

*does or should proceed*" (Harding, 1987:2-3). Questions have been asked about how these techniques translate into practice and how, or even *if*, they translate into research strategies that are unique. Is it the case, as proposed by some feminist researchers (Merriam, 1988), particularly in the late 1980s, that 'feminist' researchers are simply doing 'good' research? Gelsthorpe suggests it is often challenging to differentiate between feminist research and 'good' research, asking "*is feminist research simply 'old wine in new bottles?'*" (1990:105).

Doucet and Mauthner (2006) state that, whilst it may be difficult to argue that methods and methodology can be particularly and uniquely feminist; there are key underlying principles which should always be present in feminist research, specifically that feminist research ought to concern itself with giving voice to women who have traditionally been neglected in research and who may lack social power (*ibid*). Oakley (1981) has presented a convincing and long-standing argument that interaction between the researched and the researcher is imperative in feminist research, suggesting that an objective standardized and detached approach to interviewing is not the most effective means of finding out about people or their thoughts, and feelings. Rather, this is "*best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship*", thereby facilitating mutuality and exchange (Oakley, 1981:41).

Feminist researchers acknowledge that the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher may have relevance and they encourage their examination as part of the research process and even topics chosen to research (Renzetti, 2013). Thereby transparently identifying how potential bias, shared experiences or sympathies may influence the work. It becomes an essential part of the research process. Feminist research questions not only the possibility of but also the rightness of value-free knowledge/science. That is not to say that feminist researchers reject scientific standards in their studies, not so, it is simply that feminist research accepts that there are varied and multiple means of gathering information, and that open honest reflection on the research process/choices is essential.

Oakley (2016) suggests that, where both interviewer and interviewee share the same gender socialization and critical life-experiences social distance can be minimalized, which can impact positively on the richness of data. When membership of the same minority group is shared, the basis for equality may impress itself even more urgently on

the interviewer's consciousness (Oakley, 1981:55; see also Finch, 1993; Stanley and Wise, [1983] 1993; Rheinharz, 1992. Renzetti (2013:10) calls this *reciprocity*, which she suggests involves reducing the relational distance between the researcher and participant by engaging in self disclosure when asked or appropriate, by offering physical comfort where appropriate, and by providing supportive and advisory information if appropriate (see also chapter 5). Renzetti (*ibid*) further suggests that in criminological research with women where sensitive topics that are discussed, this approach is essential. She maintains that feminist criminological researchers often "*also try to take an empathic stance*" (p.11) and are (or should be) committed to facilitating a more active role for participants in terms of guiding the direction of the research). Thus, Maynard and Purvis (1994:2), suggest that whilst there is "*no clear consensus as to what feminist research definitionally might comprise*", feminist research is certainly (or ought to be) adaptive, flexible, interactive and reflexive.

Feminism is not only a theoretical perspective but is also a social movement which, Renzetti (2013), suggests, makes feminist criminologists 'scholar activists'. They are (or should be), in their pursuit of new knowledge also committed to reducing gender inequality and providing an understanding of where and how this exists and can be addressed and challenged. Matricentric research shares the same principles, though focused naturally on mothers and motherhood, but essentially echoing the same principles and with the same drive for activism and equality in research. Sociologist John Miller (2011) calls this purpose-driven research, i.e., research that produces useable knowledge that will contribute to the reduction of gender inequalities and gender-based knowledge and practice gaps. With these arguments in mind, feminist criminology advocating for a distinct feminist methodology in criminological research as essential to generating an accurate understanding of female criminality and, importantly, to ascertain gender appropriate responses to it.

*"Feminist social scientists, including feminist criminologists, strive to acquire scientific knowledge through research process that empowers individuals and groups to act to change behaviours and conditions that are harmful or oppressive" (Renzetti, 2013;12).*

The 'call for action', activist stance and pursuit of subsequent change is important to feminist criminologists (and MF criminologists), and, as such, is, and has been an important part of this study and thesis. Feminist research and ergo matricentric-feminist



research incorporates principles widely regarded as ethical good practice in research generally, but also include an increased awareness of the significance of power, agency, reflexivity, and the facilitation of voice, specifically concerning women (and mothers). It seeks to invoke and provoke positive change, to challenge oppression and inequality (Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Letherby, 2003; Renzetti, 2013). Feminist research embraces inclusive research design principles and the pursuit of reducing the traditional hierarchy between researchers and the researched. In keeping with my feminist *and* matricentric standpoint, these underlying principles were central to this study and have informed my research via methods, analysis, design dissemination, and research-related activism. Thus, resulting in a matricentric-feminist study. This thesis supports, advocates and demonstrates matricentric-feminist research.

### **4.3 Matricentric-Feminist Design, Ethics, and Execution of the Study**

Qualitative research approaches facilitate the feminist exploration of lived experiences, the meanings, emotions, feelings, and thoughts (Bryman, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Glesne, 1999; Snap and Spencer, 2003). A qualitative research orientation regarding method and research tools was adopted from the outset. Qualitative research methodologies 'suited' the main theoretical influences of this inductive research, namely matricentric-feminism (O'Reilly, 2016) and broader feminist theory (Oakley, 1979), thus valuing the exploration of individual experiences, individuals themselves, their responses to and perceptions of their position and lived experience.

#### **4.3.1 Research consultation sessions (RCS's)**

Feminist principles in research, particularly those related to inclusivity and power, posit that wherever possible participants should have some input and ownership into all aspects of research, i.e., the methodology, the final product, and the overall research design (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). To that end, it felt important to me to discuss the study with mothers who shared characteristics with the intended study participants. The RCS's were not a source of data collection but were an essential part of the overall research design and informed all aspects of the study.

I undertook two RCS's, one in the community and one in prison. Both groups had six participants who were criminalised mothers. The community RCS group was partially recorded (the machine failed). Recording in prison was not permitted but extensive notes were made as soon as possible after the event. The purpose of the RCS was not to discuss experiences of incarceration but rather to; 'check out' my concerns about interviewing mothers in prison (discussed below), discuss my research questions, discuss my proposed participant information sheets (see appendix 3) and my proposed interview strategy (see appendix 8); and finally, to discuss planned interview-location options (community resources or participants' homes/offices). The RCS's facilitated mothers with lived experience of the topic under investigation to have input and 'voice', alongside an opportunity to validate the research topic, shape the research design, and to inform the interview schedule.

The RCS's increased and generated my insight and understanding of common experiences and prominent themes, namely 'bad motherhood', shame, and guilt. All of which fed into the research itself. The in-prison RCS confirmed my instinct that to speak about the most painful aspect of their imprisonment, i.e., the separation from their children, might prove too 'emotional' and 'overwhelming' and potentially 'dangerous' (discussed further below). It was the in-prison RCS members who suggested that 'in prison' mothers were likely to still want to contribute to the study, but that 'writing letters' might be more appropriate as they would have 'more control', thus this avenue of data collection was included in the study. The mothers from the RCS's were invited to participate in the study directly should they so wish (via letter or interviews where appropriate): n=4 from the community group chose to give interviews and n=2 of the in-prison group chose to later send letters.

#### **4.3.2 Ethics and ethical considerations**

As an ex-social worker and probation officer, I am familiar with ethical and professional codes of conduct. As a member of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) I remain bound by the ethical code of conduct for social work. I feel that my practitioner background lent itself well to the ethical care decisions I made in preparation for the study

and prior to seeking ethical approval. Ethical approval was given by the university Faculty Research and Ethics committee (FREC) (12/1/2016) and followed long-held ethical guidelines of research (Belmont, 1979). Additionally, I consulted the National Research Ethics Service, The Department of Health Audit Safeguarding, and the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care.

#### **4.3.3 Decision to interview post-release**

At the outset of my study, it had been my intention to interview mothers whilst still in prison. Interviewing mothers in-prison as well as post-release may have offered benefits in terms of immediacy of effect and 'real time experience'. However, I strongly felt that the study was secondary to the welfare needs of the Mothers. I discussed my concerns with the Mothers in the in-prison RCS's (prior to the start of the research), who confirmed that my concerns were valid.

As previously outlined, mothers in custody are a 'vulnerable' population (Moore and Wahidin, 2017:65) (see also chapter 2), and, mindful of this, I made my research decisions based on matricentric-feminist principles of ethical care and conduct and following consultation with mothers in prison via the RCS's previously outlined. As a researcher I have a responsibility to ensure that my research is responsibly and ethically undertaken. I had concerns that, if I were to speak to mothers whilst they were still incarcerated, there were many variables over which neither I, nor the participants, would have control - factors, which may subsequently impact on their welfare. For example, if for external institutional reasons an interview may have had to be ended early and at a particularly emotional/sensitive point, the mother might then have been locked up alone in her cell in a highly emotional state. Given that 46% of women in prison have previously attempted suicide, and that women in prison account for one-third of all self-harm incidents across the prison estate (despite representing only 5% of the overall prison population (PRT, 2019), I was mindful of the potential consequences if such an event occurred. It is my view and experience that, although prisons are a place where, at least theoretically, 'support' is available, they are not necessarily places where 'comfort' is available, neither is there a statutory responsibility on the part of prison staff to provide it. I was concerned that mothers might become deeply emotional during interview and remain so afterwards without access to 'comfort' or care.

Furthermore, research has shown that prisoners are often willing to participate in 'any' research to alleviate boredom (Liebling, 1999; Copes and Hoschtetler, 2013). Thus, I was concerned that, perhaps motivated by a desire to alleviate prison boredom, mothers might volunteer to participate in the research but without full reflection on how emotional and challenging the subject matter might be. I was mindful that speaking about the loss of access to children, the potential permanent loss of children, and the consequences of maternal imprisonment may have proven too emotionally difficult for a mother currently imprisoned (I acknowledge this is a personally constructed belief). I made the decision not to interview mothers in prison, but only post-release. My rationale is more deeply explored in the table found in the appendices (see appendix two).

Quite soon after the decision was made to only interview women post-release, I received correspondence from both the Scottish Prison Service and from the Head of Research within the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), to whom I had written enquiring about access when I was initially considering in-prison interviews. Both responses suggested that my research was likely to have been approved on the basis that it would have contributed into the then forthcoming reviews of Women and Criminal Justice and a new Female Offender Strategy. However, I had by this time made my decision, based on what I felt were 'ethical care' principles, and would not have felt ethically comfortable in reversing my decision.

#### **4.3.4 Voice and choice**

Several participants, whilst being assured of confidentiality and anonymity as part of the opening interview routine, expressed the desire for their input *not* to be anonymized, but for them to appear in the research with their 'real' names. I am committed to feminist research principles in research – which includes wherever possible allowing participants to influence the research and magnify voices (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). However, my ethical approval clearly stated that the research would be anonymized. Clarification and reassurance were given to the participants that anonymity was not intended to render them invisible, or to silence or hide them (they were free to disclose to whomsoever they wished that they had participated in this research), but that it was about shielding from any negative consequences and/or exploitation. I was clear that explicit confidentiality was a requirement of my University Ethics Committee. However, participants were given

the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. One participant who had questioned the requirement for anonymity was assuaged stating, “*well at least if I’ve chose it, it’s still my name and I will know it’s me if I see this written anywhere, won’t I?*” (Kady). Other researchers, interestingly in a similar field, have described facing this issue and have called for additional consideration of this in future research, particularly in feminist research (Lockwood 2013; Grinyer, 2002).

#### **4.3.5 Research relationships and ongoing contact**

Ongoing contact with participants post-research is something many feminist researchers regard as an accepted aspect of research (Finch, 1993; Cooper and Rogers, 2015; Oakley, 2016, 1981) but one which can raise ethical eyebrows (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002). Like feminist researchers before me (Cooper and Rogers 2015; Oakley 2016), I have remained in contact with some of the participants - always at their instigation, and to varying degrees. I have no ongoing contact with most of the participants but of those who chose to stay in touch with me I have reciprocated. I continue to be in irregular contact with three of the interviewees, and in relatively regular contact with two of the letter writing mothers, one a life sentenced prisoner (I was in regular contact with a third, but she died - chapter 5), and two of the interviewed mothers. I was mindful of closing relationships ethically (Abbott and Scott 2019), and in line with my own values and experience as a practitioner and feminist researcher. Like Abbott and Scott (2019) I was able to leave most participants with some aspect of practical advice or guidance for the future, perhaps details of an organisation for support, or contacts regarding potential voluntary work. For one mother I was able to provide contacts to secure voluntary work in a prison, which eventually led to paid employment and another I have supported through her release journey and into employment. A third participant and I will be writing together following the PhD and have had a book proposal and book chapter accepted. Mothers will also be involved in the dissemination of the findings. These are all acceptable and important aspects of true feminist research, and especially so to matricentric research which undertakes to commit to the empowerment of mothers.

Burgess-Procter (2014) acknowledges there may be some cautious reaction to such outcomes by ‘conventional’ University Ethics Boards, but she points out that many such Boards ‘*may be unfamiliar with the types of methodologies frequently embraced by*

*feminist researchers*' (125). In fact, she suggests, and I concur, that the '*conventional orientation*' of University Ethics Boards may limit feminist researchers, arguing that they '*may actually serve to reinforce participants disempowerment*', (*ibid*). She goes on to say,

*"Thus, feminist interview strategies that go beyond simply protecting participants and that instead create opportunities for participant empowerment may be especially welcome, especially for participants who are survivors of violent victimization". (2014:125)*

Burgess-Proctor (2014), suggests, seeking to 'do' something is not outside of feminist research principles of ethical care, furthermore that in '*ethically important moments*' (Burgess-Proctor, 2014;130), it is important to facilitate agency and positive outcomes for research participants and for participants to feel part of any process of change. I was able to tell the participants that my desire for positive change went beyond the scope of the research, and that they had all played a part in what I hoped would be evidence-based change for women in and after the criminal justice. As far as it is possible to know, I left my participants in a healthy frame of mind, feeling positive that they had contributed to the research and to change. Importantly, and in line with broader principles (Moore and Wahidin, 2017), I feel that I had done 'no harm' to the women and therefore was able to exit the research ethically and with care.

#### **4.4 Methods of Data Collection**

The findings of this study are informed by one-to-one interviews with post-release mothers, letters from mothers in-prison, and fieldnotes.

##### **4.4.1 One-to-one interviews**

Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that interviews facilitate a deeper understanding and the ability to truly 'investigate' the issues via 'active listening', providing a two-way interactive process which gives voice to participants. This is especially important to those who might

previously have been silenced or muted or have experienced trauma (Wahidin, 2004; Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

Patton (2002) suggests that in a qualitative study, one-to-one interviews are an appropriate means of finding out about 'what we cannot observe' (340), particularly when the focus of the research is to explore experience, meanings, feelings, and emotion, rather than statistical information (Glesne, 1999; Legard et al, 2003; Braun and Clark, 2013). I acknowledge and appreciate that other qualitative methods might have generated useful data, for example open question surveys or focus groups. However, based on my practitioner knowledge and experience, I am aware that group conversations can be inhibiting as much as they can be liberating and may not have facilitated equal contribution from all members, which would be at odds with my feminist standpoint and methodology. Similarly, many of my concerns about interviewing women in prison and leaving them unsupported would translate to the use of questionnaires. One to one relationships and rapport established via in-depth interviews can have a positive impact, not only on the quality of data produced but, importantly, on the research experience of the participant (Oakley, 2016). In a matricentric-feminist study this is especially important, particularly one which aims to give 'voice' to its participants. Thus, interviews were chosen as the primary means of data collection and were undertaken in line with previously outlined theoretical and underpinning philosophies.

Cooper and Rogers (2015) suggest that sharing a key characteristic with interview participants can form the basis of a solid and productive interview, facilitating a deeper relationship and therefore eliciting richer data. It is worthy of note that all the mothers either asked or assumed (and I confirmed) that I had children. Illustrated by Rita who, at the outset of the interview had enquired if I had children of my own, then said, "*We mothers love an excuse to talk about our children don't we?*". I had a strong rapport with all the mothers and felt I was 'trusted', possibly because I am a mother and had a similar background to some of the Mothers. I felt these shared characteristics, or 'insider status' facilitated open and honest dialogue (discussed further in reflexivity section in chapter 5). In line with matricentric-feminist principles trust, empathy and where possible gaining something from the experience as opposed to just feeling probed or researched were important (Oakley, 1981, 2016; Finch,1984). Newton (2017) suggests qualitative interviews can be of mutual benefit, even therapeutic. It is clear that this was the case for many of the mothers in this study; most interviews ended with some kind of statement

of gratitude or thanks. Chiming with other feminist research, which argues that the interview process can be beneficial to participants by facilitating the development of new insight and meaning surrounding their experiences (Burgess-Proctor, 2014). Several mothers described the interviews themselves as positive and rewarding experiences and saw them and the research itself as 'recognition' (Ursula) of their pain, and Mothers expressed gratitude about being offered an opportunity to be able to voice their experiences **as mothers**, often for the first time:

*"You know what in prison, 4 years in prison and 4 years on licence and no one never asked how my kids were, how I was **as a mother** away from them, how I was as a mother trying to get to know them again as teenagers, all grown up... they just asked, 'was I using? was I offending?', not how was I **living**? Five kids and no one ever asked, ridiculous isn't it? I feel happy you asked, glad you think it's a topic worth discussing, it's really made me think, in a good way I mean, thank you."*  
(Ursula)

Rubin and Rubin (2005:108) describe a 'responsive interview' as an 'extended conversation' reiterating the importance of listening skills, self-awareness, empathic listening, and reflexivity. I acted as a responsive interviewer. The interviews became 'structured conversations' (i.e. a conversation framed by the interview schedule questions) (Noakes and Wincup, 2004), returning rich data in the form of powerful reflections about the participants experiences as mothers adjusting to life post imprisonment. Interviews facilitate immediacy in terms of sensitivity and encouragement, which was especially important here given the personal and potentially painful nature of the topic.

#### **4.4.2 Interview characteristics**

The RCS's and literature review, together with my matricentric-feminist standpoint, informed the design and decision-making concerning interviews. I devised 'test' questions for my interviews after consultation with the mothers in the RCS's. The interviews were, as far as was possible, free-flowing and unstructured. It had been intended that the interviewees would simply be invited to 'tell their story' following an



opening statement; however, feedback during the RCS's was that the topic was 'too big', 'too overwhelming', for most women to simply 'launch' into in an unstructured way. This was a useful insight to have early in the research. An ethically approved interview schedule was prepared (see appendix 7), allowing interviews to be framed by questions if need be (i.e., a semi-structured interview). The RCS's mothers' suggestion was indeed validated by Margaret (amongst others), one of the first interviewees, who explicitly stated,

*"You will have to ask me stuff, I can't just talk about it because it will all just whirl round in my head and come out a jumbled mess". (Margaret)*

All interview participants were interviewed post-release from prison (see earlier ethical care discussion). Permission to record the interviews was sought at the outset of each in-depth one-to-one interview. For each interview, the participant information (appendix 3) was read through again and consent forms were signed if they had not already been (appendix 4). The interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes, and took place over one year, with most taking place over a deliberately focussed period of six months. Four interviews were held in women's centres (community-based centres where the women were attending as service users), but most (n=23) were in the participants' own homes and one in my home. In line with feminist principles, all participants were given the choice of where the interview would take place (Herzog, 2012). It was important that the mothers felt as comfortable as possible, and there was no doubt that most Mothers felt most comfortable in their own homes/environment. Feminist researchers Elwood and Martin (2000) posit that interviewing participants in their own homes can go some way towards redressing the power imbalance between researcher and interviewee.

Apart from consistently using opening statements about the purpose and intention of the study, as a responsive interviewer I allowed each interview to become unique concerning pace or approach, tailoring my use of my interview schedule to each participant. Some mothers needed more open-ended questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013) and prompts than others, with each interview allowed to evolve according to the content and emotional experiences of the participant and coming to a natural end. Recorded interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, and any immediately striking thoughts/notes were also made as soon as possible after the interviews, which facilitated early and ongoing analysis (Layder, 2012; Braun and Clark, 2013).

#### **4.4.3 Letters from Mothers in prison**

During my RCS's discussions with mothers in prison regarding whether to interview mothers while in custody or post-release (see above, and Ethical Decision-Making section), it was suggested (by the mothers) that mothers in prison might want to contribute to the research by letter and, further, that this might be an emotionally 'safe' means of collecting data on their in-prison experiences as mothers. In line with the matricentric-feminist principles of the study, not only did this suggestion provide a useful contribution to the design of the study but also facilitated an increased degree of participant control. It allowed mothers in-prison to divulge as much or as little as they were comfortable with, at their own pace and either in private or in the company of friends (see below for recruitment strategies). I received 25 letters in total from 15 different women (some wrote multiple times), their length varying from one side of note paper to six pages of A4 lined paper.

The benefit of the inclusion of the letters is highlighted by Denscombe (2007;134), who suggests that multiple sources of data not only add richness, but additionally support and triangulate the data. Thereby adding to the quality and robustness of this research and its findings. The use of 'other forms' of data, (like letters), particularly in the study of emotion and human thought and feeling, is supported by many researchers. Pithouse-Morgan et al (2012), Jackson (2009), and Sikes (2006) write about the importance of valuing an account of something whether it is represented pictorially, verbally or in prose. The 'in-prison' experience is relevant to the post-release period and thus the letter data was important and a useful source of data in themselves (Letherby, 2004), which contributed to the overall understanding delivered by the study. It is worthy of note that a study focused solely on data from letters could offer a useful return in terms of knowledge and understanding (*ibid*).

#### **4.4.4 Researcher reflexivity and field notes**

Merriam (1998) and other social constructionists appreciate the co-constructed nature of qualitative research, stressing the importance of acknowledging, and reflexively exploring, the relationship between researcher and participants. In line with my

matricentric-feminist approach and alongside the Mothers pen-portraits, my reflexive journey and my reflexive relationship to the study and participants is presented in more detail in the following chapter. Finlay (2002) suggests that the researcher/researched relationship is so significant because the researcher is both a tool and a conduit through which data is filtered. An established means of exploring this relationship as the research develops, is through fieldnotes. Twelve fieldnote books were used in this study and contributed to analysis in this thesis. The books hold my reflective thoughts and feelings regarding the study (see appendix 20 for extracts).

The notebooks also contained notes of less extraordinary, but nonetheless significant, thoughts serving to remind me to keep an open mind and to be mindful of my views in shaping the research/data/interviews. For example, *“today Dee spoke about how for her prison was a positive sometimes in that it gave her space to ‘get clean”*. Reflecting on this mother’s statement, I wanted to ensure that I was not ‘only’ seeing the negative in the mother’s narratives based on my own assumptions. This prompted me to use the notebooks to write a list of positive and negative terms that the mothers had used in their descriptions of their experiences (appendix 15). This was, of course, basic in terms of analysis and I did not produce an exhaustive list; however, the resulting table proved valuable to me in terms of overview and insight. Serving as a reminder to me to challenge my assumptions and maintain reflexivity. Fieldnotes can take many forms (Lofland and Lofland, 2006). I would often write poetry in the notebooks (a habit I had as a child), not only as an outlet for my personal thoughts and emotions which surfaced throughout the research, but also as a useful means for me to examine my thoughts and feelings about the actual research, the mothers and the data. Thus, the poems were an aid to reflexivity as the unfiltered language I would use in the poetry would reveal much about my own thoughts of motherhood<sup>34</sup>. An example of one of the poems I wrote can be found in Appendix 16.

Although it is impossible to capture everything (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), fieldnotes written up as soon as possible are important in the process of developing and

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<sup>34</sup> Using poetry in this way reminded me of a poem given to me some time previously by a mother in prison and inspired me to produce and (jointly) publish a collection of poetry written by mothers, fathers and children affected by imprisonment. (Baldwin, L and Raikes, B (2019) *‘Seen and Heard: 100 poems by parents and children affected by imprisonment’*, Waterside Press.

<https://www.watersidepress.co.uk/acatalog/Seen-Heard-Poems-Prisons-9781909976429.html>

generating emergent themes (Lofland and Lofland, 2006). My notes incorporated my feelings and emotions (and the Mothers), after interviews together with anything that had particularly struck/moved me, or that needed to be revisited/explored or considered for later interviews. Ideally, research notes should be organised and observe a protocol (Silverman, 2013; Cresswell, 2016); however, possibly in part due to my dyspraxia (which affects organisation of thoughts and objects), mine were essentially disordered and varied. However, Abbott (2018:48) found that even ‘messy puzzlements’ and ‘chaotic’ notes provide useful reflection and a means to inform analysis, although with hindsight I do recognise the value of a more systematic approach.

## **4.5 Sampling and Recruitment**

### **4.5.1 Sample size**

The Mother participants were made up from 28 interviewed mothers and 15 letter writing mothers. Marshall (1996:42) suggests that in qualitative research sample size is defined by saturation, or when *‘the answers adequately address the question.’* My sample was defined by criteria and data saturation (see also see appendix 6 for tabulated summary of research criteria and recruitment strategies). The research criteria were simply that; all participants self-defined as mothers, and they had experienced or were experiencing a custodial sentence. Mothers were included whether they had or were expecting to have care of their children or not post-release and were mothers of any age to children of any age (i.e. including grandmothers and mothers of adult offspring). In the face of widespread conjecture about sample size, important factors in relation to qualitative research are, to remain flexible, iterative if necessary and, of course, to be adaptive, with manageability and availability also being key considerations (Layder, 2012). The parameters of this study regarding the number of participant interviews remained flexible but with preliminary ‘targets’ set at 16-25 participants for interviews. Saturation was reached. I had no pre-determined figures in mind in relation for letters. The mothers in the study (known as the Mothers), are introduced in the next chapter by way of individual pen-portraits; a tabulated summary of the mothers and their circumstances can be found in Appendix 1.

#### 4.5.1 Access, research sites and preparation

Following my ethically based decision not to undertake interviews in prison, I utilized existing professional contacts in the community. I approached an ‘umbrella’ organisation, which at that time oversaw 56<sup>35</sup> nationwide community-based women’s centres (see appendix 5). The centres facilitated formal supervision for women released from prison, and also provided ongoing formal and informal multi-disciplinary support, sometimes long after formal supervision ended. I corresponded with the director of the umbrella organisation and with a national charitable organisation working with women in and after prison<sup>36</sup>, providing information about the study. Permission was subsequently granted, allowing me access to their resources for recruitment and/or interviews and a RCG. I drew my first line of participants from three separate centres, spread over a wide geographical area across England, Wales and Scotland (this subsequently generated additional participants via snowball sampling, see below and appendix 7). I recruited from three different centres because I wanted to try to encapsulate a participant sample group as ethnically diverse as possible, and also wanted to ensure that, if for any reason access to one centre was lost, the research project would not be unduly affected.

#### 4.5.2 Recruitment

Purposive, and snowball sampling was used to identify and recruit eligible participants. It is based on logical decision making and is designed to deliver ‘information rich’ cases for in-depth study (Cresswell, 2016; Layder, 2012). Patton (2011) further suggests that ‘strategic’ or ‘purposive’ sampling facilitates the uncovering of a wealth of rich knowledge and understanding and is designed to reveal more about the issues of ‘central importance’ to the research aims/ questions/objectives; its use is therefore appropriate for this study. Standing (1998:188) advocated snowball sampling when accessing groups of women who may be “*vulnerable and stigmatised in everyday life*” (see appendix 7 for more detailed model of the sampling strategies utilized, Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981).

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<sup>35</sup> Women’s Breakout: see also footnote 12.

<sup>36</sup> See also footnote 9.

Following the RCG and staff briefings I attended centre service user meetings at three sites in order to share and disseminate information about the study and also to address service users directly, to invite suitable participants to become involved via letter or interview, and to leave information and posters about the study inviting people to contribute (appendix 9). This is action purposive sampling. Flyers and posters were left within the three community-based resources and supplied to prison inreach workers working with women via their role in supporting and supervising women and families affected by imprisonment. Letter writing mothers were additionally recruited via the poster invitation, which was printed in several publications; for example, via a feature about my study in the '*Women in Prison*'<sup>37</sup>, quarterly magazine, and advertisements placed in several practitioner/ service user publications and prison newspapers, ('*Inside Time*' and '*JailMail*'). The invitations to participate in the study by post specifically mentioned the possibility for such contributions to be used at a future date in separate publications. Invitations to participate via interview or letter were circulated via service user, family support and practitioner websites and via organizations that disseminated requests on my behalf via their 'mailing lists' (e.g. *Women's Breakout* sending to their membership list).

All interviewee participants were provided with participant information sheet (PIS) containing detailed information about the study. Consent forms were also provided, and signatures requested (see appendices 3 and 4). PIS were sent to all letter writing mothers who had provided a return address. It was made clear that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the research during or after the interview or my receipt of a letter, up until analysis began. One participant, Tahira, did in fact withdraw at the request of her husband (see Chapter 5 for her statement).

The 'first line' of interviewee participants were secured following the resource centre visits, leading directly to several women wishing to take part in the study. Further participants were secured via snowball sampling. The recruitment of interviewee mothers occurred quite organically, with almost every participant interviewed able to provide details of additional potential interviewees. Some participants contacted me directly to

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<sup>37</sup> '*Women in Prison* see also footnote 9.

volunteer, without my approach, due to their friends describing the interview experience as a positive or 'cathartic' experience (see also Finch, 1993; Cooper and Rogers, 2015).

## 4.6 Analysis

Various options for analysis could have been considered for this qualitative study; for example, I had considered using Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992). However, it became clear that *'the 'clean slate' mind-set of the researcher'* suggested by Glaser as a requirement for grounded theory analysis, did not and could not apply given my own personal stance, my professional knowledge and my experiences in and around the CJS (see reflexivity in chapter 5). Narrative analysis could have been considered given that the mothers are describing their experiences, or 'life stories'. Narrative analysis involves the researcher in analysing a participant's 'story', leading to the production of generalisations in thought, meaning, actions and attitudes related to the topic under investigation (Riessman, 1993). However, narrative analysis is more suited to much smaller participant groups (Lockwood, 2014). Thus, thematic analysis was chosen as the analytical tool for this study for its theoretical fit (i.e., investigating thoughts, feelings, experiences, and emotions) and its data-driven nature in understanding the nuances of a phenomenon (Hollaway and Todros, 2003). Further, it sits well with my ontological and epistemological positions, in that it supports the data-led (therefore participant-led) production of knowledge. Braun and Clarke (2006:5) further suggest that the flexibility of thematic analysis facilitates the return of complex, detailed and rich data, which was certainly achieved in this study.

The analytical process for this study essentially followed the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis model. My analysis of letters and interviews began early and was undertaken throughout the life of the study. Initially I had considered analysing and keeping the letter and the interview data discrete, however following the analysis of letters and during analysis of the interviews, it became clear that to do so would result in repetitive themes and discussions. Thus, I combined both forms of data and the analysis and presentation of findings are reflective of that blended data.

Maxwell (1996); Layder (2012) and Braun and Clarke (2013) all reiterate the importance of early and ongoing analysis, suggesting that early 'codes', 'themes' or 'meanings' will

become apparent during these early stages and can then be developed as analysis moves through the stages. Early analysis facilitated the identification of patterns and themes, and the shaping of later interviews, allowing any emerging gaps or 'misses' to be noted and rectified (Layder, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2013). Richards (2005) suggests that this early analysis, as well as proving fruitful in terms of reviewing the data, encourages the researcher to reflect on their 'performance' as an interviewer, something that I found especially useful. On listening to some of the earlier recordings of interviews, I realised that I had on several occasions interrupted my participants, perhaps changing the flow and trajectory of their story. This frustrated and disappointed me, and I endeavored to rectify this in later interviews. Marshall (1996) and Burgess (1984) similarly affirm that this early analysis encourages exactly this researcher reflection and responsivity. Maxwell (1996) suggests that the 'blending' of more than one type of data analysis facilitates comprehensive analysis and authenticity. Layder's (2004) open coding strategies, and thematic analysis are not incompatible or mutually exclusive of each other, and it was this hybrid of analytical tools and methods that formed the basis of analysis in this study. In relation to aligning the analysis to the research aim, it is important to keep in mind that, although the philosophical and theoretical foundation provides a framework on which the research is built, it is the data collection, analytical processes, and the end results that will ultimately show whether the research aims have been achieved. In other words:

*"we need a way to argue what we know based on the process by which we came to know it". (Agar, 1996:13)*

#### **4.6.1 Analytical procedure**

Braun and Clark (*ibid*) did not intend their six-phase model to be prescriptive, linear or inflexible, rather to be iterative and adapted to the unique research aims and data of a particular study. Thus, in this study I moved betwixt and between the phases iteratively. The model utilised for this study consists of six steps or phases, as follows:

- Phase 1- Becoming familiar with the data (immersion)
- Phase 2 - Generating initial codes
- Phase 3 - Searching for themes



- Phase 4 - Reviewing themes
- Phase 5 - Defining and naming themes
- Phase 6 - Producing the report (thesis)

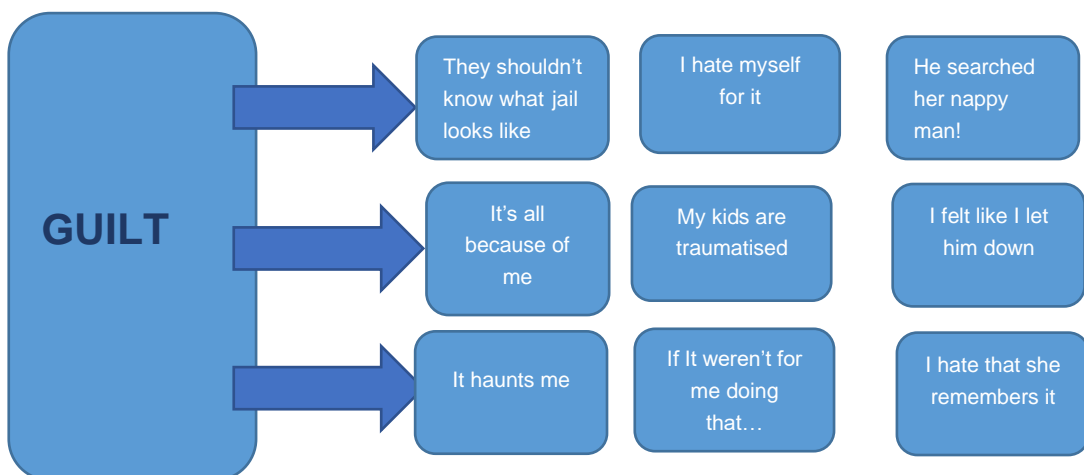
#### 4.6.1.1 Phase one - immersion

During phase one, I immersed myself in the data, transcribing, reading and re-reading the transcripts and letters and listening to the tapes. I revisited this process throughout the analysis period; for example, I would listen to the tapes again and make notes, then I would make additional notes on each transcript. I repeated this process for each transcript/letter until the point when I was not noting or noticing anything 'new' or different. Noakes and Wincup (2004) identify transcription and iterative revisiting of data as an important first stage of analysis, facilitating familiarity and the early emergence of codes, which later become themes.

#### 4.6.1.2 Phase two: generating initial codes

During phase two, and in line with Layder's (2006) and Bryman's approaches (2012), I had several 'pre-codes' that I looked for initially (phase 2). I utilised Layder's suggestion that when initially exploring the data it is a sensible idea to use 'pre codes', i.e. codes that one expects to apply to the data but that can be 'firmed up and/or validated' (Knight 2012:144), and/or moved into other codes and themes as familiarity with the data deepens. 'Guilt' was one such pre code (see Fig 2).

**Figure 2: Example Pre code and evidence**

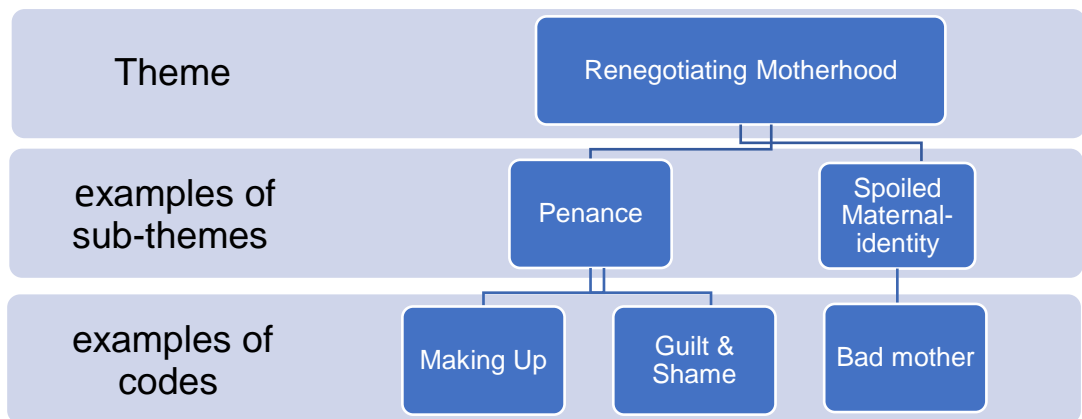


The pre-codes were chosen as the study progressed based on feedback from the RCS's, my own expectations and knowledge, and the interviews/letters themselves. Examples were 'guilt', 'separation', 'loss', 'coping', 'mothering from prison', 'bad mother' and 'hopes for the future'. Following line by line coding, I created a cardex for every letter/interview in order to record additional codes, notable quotes/ aspects of interest and emerging ideas for themes. Over 300 data-driven codes were initially recorded. As this is an inductive study, it was important to allow the emerging codes, patterns and themes to answer the research aims and not solely to use what lies behind the research aims (in terms of existing knowledge) to view the data analysis. For example, my 'assumption' that mothers who have experienced prison will feel, to a greater or lesser extent, some guilt and loss (based on my professional and personal experience, academic knowledge, and my own social constructions of motherhood); it was important not to impose this or see this in the data where it was not present or was only present to a lesser degree than I might have 'expected'. In the interests of transparency, the acknowledgement of, and honest reflection on, such 'expectations' can and should be factored into thematic analysis (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the next phase is characterised by the identification and sorting of codes into potential themes. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest that codes are more numerous and specific than themes but provide an indication of the context of the conversation.

#### **4.6.1.3 Phase three: searching for themes**

In refining the codes, I collapsed them into groups, and initial overarching themes began to emerge. Additional codes were added/blended and honed as analysis progressed, leading to the identification of themes and sub-themes. An example of a blended code would be 'visits' and 'phone calls', both identified as early codes, now were placed within a new code 'contact'. Initial codes such as 'confined space' 'closed conditions' 'no access to each other' were grouped together under the developing theme of 'environmental conditions/support'. Similarly, codes around individual support were identified, such as 'personal officer' and 'friendships', which led to an emergent theme of 'Relationships'. See Figure 3 (and Appendix 13).

**Figure 3: Example 1 Renegotiating Motherhood Theme**



#### 4.6.1.4 Phase four: reviewing themes

The writing and discussions in supervision were an integral part of the analysis in stages four and five, with themes almost defining themselves through the writing process. By way of illustration, mothers spoke of factors which ‘helped or hindered them’, regarding the afore mentioned support on an individual or structural basis. The mothers described having less access to each other as a means of support in closed-prisons<sup>38</sup>, but they found support in their relationships with each other, but these were impacted on by the environment itself; thus, the previously named ‘individual and external support’ theme became ‘Regimes, Rules and Relationships’. The theme ‘Pre- Prison Circumstances’ was an example of where considered reflection assisted analysis. I initially tried to separate out and code for individual experiences, but this was too chaotic. I found that the mothers did not separate their experiences, so I felt that it was impossible for me to

<sup>38</sup> The main two security categories of women prisoners are:

Closed Conditions - Prisoners for whom the very highest conditions of security are not necessary but who present too high a risk for open conditions or for whom open conditions are not appropriate.

Open conditions - Prisoners who present a low risk; can reasonably be trusted in open conditions and for whom open conditions are appropriate.

There are also two other categories used, though very few women prisoners fall into these categories:

Category A - Prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or the police or the security of the state and for whom the aim must be to make escape impossible.

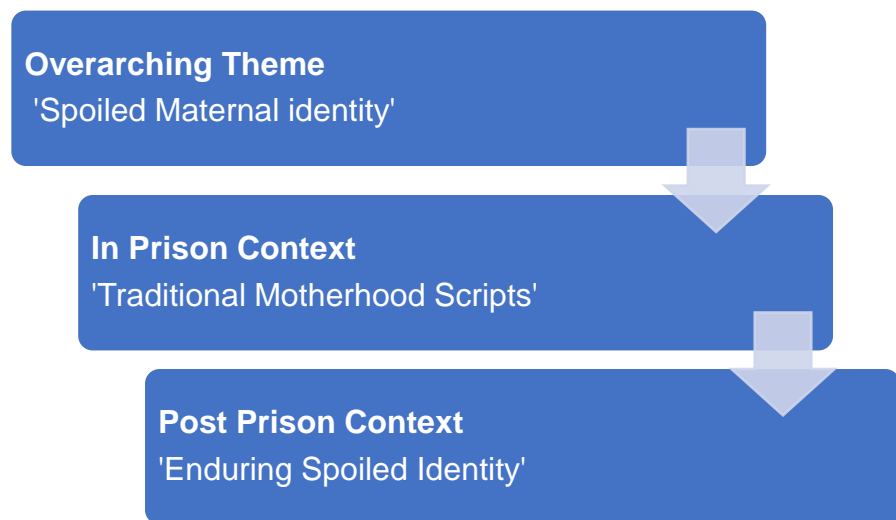
Restricted Status - Any female young person or adult prisoner convicted or on remand whose escape would present a serious risk to the public and who are required to be held in designated secure accommodation.  
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/ForPrisonersFamilies/PrisonerInformationPages/Categorisation/Categorisationwomensprisons>

try. However, grouping experiences where appropriate led to subthemes and eventually to an overarching theme of 'Pre-prison Circumstances'.

#### **4.6.1.5 Phase five: reviewing themes**

I was mindful of Patton's (2002) internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity measure, i.e., that data between themes should be clear, distinct, and identifiable or, as Braun and Clarke put it "*ensuring there is not too much overlap between themes*" (2006:22), in the organisation of my findings. Whilst accepting that some overlap is inevitable, in reviewing the originally intended organisation of my chapters and themes it became apparent that, although distinct in their separate locations, the Mothers inside prison (i.e., mothers still serving their sentence) and the Mothers outside prison (i.e., speaking from a retrospective position) all shared common emotions, feelings and the consequences of their imprisonment. Through analysis it became clear that the post-release mothers felt their 'in prison' maternal experience was relevant to their outside experience, and thus their input into the chapter focused on 'in' prison was essential. Furthermore, several of the letter writing mothers eventually became interviewees post-release, and other letter writing mothers continued to write post-release, meaning that my previous organisation of data had become blurred. Through the refining and defining process it became very clear that there were broad overarching or umbrella themes which straddled both inside and outside maternal experiences: for example, Relationships, Support, and Spoiled Maternal identity. It became necessary to blend the data from the letters and interviews to authentically represent the Mother's voices and the matricentric-feminist model. I therefore discarded the 'candidate themes' and instead identified themes which incorporated the formerly identified codes (and extracted data), whether the mothers were inside or outside of prison. For example, two developed and related core themes which sat under the overarching theme of 'spoiled maternal identity' were 'acceptance of traditional motherhood script' and 'enduring spoiled maternal identity' (see Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Model for determining themes**



The role of key theories as identified in the literature review, were aligned to the themes. For example, all the Mothers spoke about 'failing' against widely held values and standards of motherhood, or of their 'spoiled identities' (Goffman, 1963) as mothers because of their imprisonment.

#### **4.6.1.6 Phase six-producing the thesis**

Following the completion of phase 5, 'defining and naming themes', the final stage (phase six), is to 'produce the report' (Braun and Clark, 2006), in this case is the thesis, and to clearly articulate the central thesis argument (drawing on the conceptual framework). From the data, overarching themes, patterns and relationships emerged, and are presented in the findings and discussion chapters six and seven. The findings revealed the distinct and specific ways in which mothers experienced imprisonment, and how such effects endured post-release thereby providing evidence for the need for a matricentric-feminist response to criminalised women.

## 4.7 Quality Assurances

### 4.7.1 Quality and rigor

Knight (2012) suggests that qualitative research, rather than seeking a single 'truth', should recognise multiple realities (for example, the mothers' response to prison was sometimes neither wholly negative or wholly positive), and that "*accounting for differences and variations in research can enhance credibility*" (p.153). Seale (1999:465) posits that quality is an 'elusive' phenomenon that cannot necessarily be 'achieved' by following preset guidelines, but that can be enhanced by utilizing a series of checks and measures related to a study's epistemological position and execution. As such, 'checks and balances' were in-built throughout this study as per Maxwell's (1996) model. Which involved ensuring that every strategy, method, and tool was something that would work towards meeting the aims of the research, i.e., that it is relevant to the overall 'purpose' and is in keeping with the overall theoretical framework (for example the inclusion of letters from mothers in prison, which facilitated triangulation).

Additional rigour can be evidenced by the detail of the research planning, thus ensuring that the study could be replicated. In this study, the use of RCS's at the planning stage validated the research aims and subsequently informed the study and meaning the mothers were present in the shaping of the research tools. This facilitated accuracy, trustworthiness and rigour which was in keeping with matricentric and feminist principles of inclusion. However, if the study were to be replicated, the underpinning philosophy would suggest that the results could be different but still valid, as the 'story' of each piece of research or respondent would have 'its own truth' (Angen, 2000). Nonetheless, the study itself *could* be replicated based on the information demonstrated. I acknowledge and accept that I was a research tool and bore some relevance to data and analysis (as discussed earlier and in more depth in Chapter five).

Nonetheless, the data generated resonates with other similar studies and, importantly, across both forms of data collection. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denscombe (2007) suggest that this evidences not only triangulation but also credibility. Knight (2012) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) rightly point out that, even when a research process strives to be auditable for the purpose of repeatability, there will always be limits to how exact a

replicated study might be by comparison, especially in qualitative research (Merrill and West, 2009).

#### **4.7.2 Credibility**

Interpretivist feminist research is built on the foundation that theoretical belief and therefore knowledge gained from research, is 'fluid', socially constructed, a 'temporary reality'; always negotiated with and between cultures, social settings and relationships (Seale, 1999). From this perspective, absolute validity or truth cannot be obtained (Angen, 2000). However, Layder (2012) and Maxwell (1996), propose the idea that generalisation can be drawn from research of the 'typical'. That is, if a sample can be seen to be a typical sample of its own group, or a setting is a typical sample of its type, then generalisations can be made. This research reflects the typicality in relation to settings and participants and therefore has produced data from which generalisations can and will be drawn.

Research decisions made during the study reflect my matricentric-feminist commitment to record 'accurately, fairly and responsibly' (Knight, 2012) the Mothers' voices; described by Angen (2000:387) as 'ethical validation'. Standard formats of data collection, handling, storage, analysis and generation were used (Silverman, 2010). Thematic analysis, although sometimes described as a generic method of analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2000), facilitates a recursive and iterative process, which evolves through specific phases (see earlier discussion) to ultimately produce a detailed representation of the analysed data (Braun and Clark, 2006). The findings presented represent significant examples and data fragments taken from transcribed one to one interviews and Mothers' handwritten letters, which Seale and Silverman (1997) and Letherby and Zrodowski (1995) suggest are highly reliable sources of qualitative data and which triangulate.

#### **4.7.3 Reflections, challenges and limitations of the study**

The decision to interview mothers only after release was an ethical one and consequently Mothers' emotions were not perhaps as raw as they might have been when still

imprisoned and despite my ethical justification, this could be levelled as a criticism. Nonetheless, the persistence of the guilt, pain and other emotions reflect the depth to which they were felt (Baldwin, 2018). The richness of the data is informed by the additional enduring challenges and reflections of the post-prison experiences of the mothers. Indeed, the evidence of the longevity of the impact of maternal imprisonment is one aspect of the study which represents 'original contribution' to knowledge. This, whilst interviewing only post release might be considered a criticism, it is also part of the study's value and strength. It was not possible to capture all aspects of criminalised motherhood, for example not all women will choose to or are able to have children and there is no doubt that being imprisoned, especially for long periods, can impact on women's fertility windows and choices. However, this did not fall under the scope of this study. Nor was it the experience of any of the Mothers, it is nonetheless important to note and is an important area worthy of future attention. Similarly the distinct and specific issues related to mothers who offend against children/their own children is another area worthy of further research but that again did not fall under the remit of this particular study.

It is unfortunate that, despite my being mindful of diversity, there were limitations to the study in that I could only facilitate English-speaking participants for interviews. However, the locations of the community resources and the characteristics of the prison populations provided some reassurance that respondents were from a diverse range of backgrounds. As identified in the literature review the experiences of maternal imprisonment concerning ethnic minority mothers is extremely limited. There is little in published existence directly exploring ethnic minority mothers experiences and/or needs in the CJS in the UK. This study responds to this gap only partially. Although 46% of the participants categorised themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority, (32% of those were not white), the study did not explicitly explore mothers' experiences in the context of their ethnicity. Some mothers did discuss how their experiences intersected with their race, and in those instances, mothers' experiences were often striking. However, as a white researcher, I must admit and acknowledge my privilege, and speaking honestly and reflexively, my lack of awareness during the data collection of how important an area it was to explore. It is an important learning experience for me. I will take my increased awareness with me into future studies.



Additionally, I have a greater appreciation for the self-care as a researcher and will in future research take steps to ensure I take time out from the research and engage in supportive activities more readily and importantly to develop strategies to assist me in the organisation of my time and work more effectively.

#### **4.8 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the epistemological and ontological underpinnings and position of the researcher. It presented the research design, tools of research, ethical considerations, theoretical framework, and methods of analysis used in the completion of this study. It emphasizes the importance of the feminist strategy and the matricentric focus. The chapter explores the researcher as a tool and identifies the limitations of the study whilst highlighting its strengths and credibility. The following chapter introduces the mothers in greater detail and in line with the principles of feminist research provides a fuller reflexive discussion about my relationship with the research. This is followed by the Findings and Discussion chapters.

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# Chapter 5: Matricentric-Biographical Accounts: Visibility and Voice

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## 5.1 Presence and Voice

This chapter celebrates and acknowledges the Mothers by increasing their visibility in the 'product of research' (i.e. this thesis). This felt methodologically and ethically imperative and is in line with matricentric research principles. Feminist research aims to illuminate, substantiate, and authenticate women's experiences in terms of their concerns and ways of being (Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Renzetti, 2013; Oakley, 2016). Therefore, the Mothers' accounts, memories and assimilated experiences, whether recent or past are respected, trusted, represented and authentically reproduced in this thesis (via the findings chapters). The interviewed Mothers are introduced via pen-portraits in this chapter to avoid mothers being 'reduced' to a series of disembodied quotes without any sense of the mothers as women. Feminist research places great importance on in-depth reflexivity (Maynard and Purvis 1994; Letherby, 2003; Oakley, 2016;), arguing that the *'only morally defensible way to conduct research with women is to invest some of one's own identity'* (Finch, 1993; 81). Thus, the observation and criticality of this additional chapter also explores how I related to the study, especially to the Mothers themselves and represents a commitment of agency and principle over structure<sup>39</sup>. This aligns with inclusive and matricentric-feminist principles and my epistemological stance (see Chapter 4).

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<sup>39</sup> I felt this 'additional' chapter was important for reasons previously argued. Consequently, to avoid the sacrifice of equally important aspects of a traditional thesis, in order to accommodate this chapter and my matricentric-feminist commitment to increased visibility and heavy use of mothers voices; permission to submit with an increased wordcount was sought and given by the research office (10/11/2020).

## 5.2 Mother Pen Portraits<sup>40</sup>

**Annie, 33**, mother-of-one (aged twelve), four years post-release. Annie was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment for fraud, her first offence and first ever time 'in trouble'. Annie, an ex-professional with mental-health issues (bipolar disorder), had experienced domestic abuse and her ex-partner remained controlling. Annie was experiencing a severe depressive episode at the time of her offence. Annie had not expected a custodial sentence, it was a complete shock to her. She went to prison not knowing who would pick her child up from school that day. Her ex-partner prevented any contact with her daughter for the first five weeks of her sentence and would not allow her immediate return to her mother on her release.

**Beth, 19**, the youngest mother I interviewed, twelve months post-release. Beth was sentenced to four months in prison for shoplifting when her child was three months old. Beth was not in contact with her family as there was a history of domestic and sexual abuse which was unresolved. Beth had left home at fifteen and had a history of substance misuse. Social services were involved prior to her sentence. When Beth was imprisoned her child was taken into LA care and fostered. Beth had been determined to get her back. However, on release Beth's child did not know her (there had been no contact during her sentence as social services refused to bring her daughter to the prison). She was now allowed only supervised access to her daughter in a contact centre. Tragically, I later found out that Beth, aged only twenty, had taken her life. Her daughter is in the process of being permanently adopted.

**Kady, 28**, a mother-of-two girls, eight years post-release. Kady, a student was seventeen at the time of her offence (theft). Kady gave birth to her first daughter as a prisoner. She was sentenced to immediate custody for her offence (thirty months). Kady had one previous offence, committed when she was a juvenile, for which she had been given a community sentence and was fully compliant. Kady applied for an MBU space when she entered prison. She did not find out the outcome until several-hours after her baby girl

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<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that none of the information recorded in this chapter renders the mothers identifiable, although it is interesting that many of the participants were willing, if not keen, to be identifiable in this research and wanted to use their 'real' names in the research (as discussed in Chapter 4), to increase agency all mothers chose their own pseudonym.

was born. Kady and her baby spent five months in the MBU. She now studies law and hopes to work with women affected by the criminal justice system. She recently gave birth to her second daughter. Her eldest daughter is unaware that she spent her first half-year in a prison MBU, or that her mother has been to prison.

**Dee, 29**, mother-of four, five years post-release. Dee has experienced ten periods in custody and had previously had a history of drug and alcohol misuse, which she described as being like her mother before her. Her children ranged from two to fifteen years of age at her last custodial sentence. Her children had various caregivers during her sentences; on one sentence her sister initially had care of Dee's children but latterly gave them over to LA care. Dee is still trying to get one of her children back from care. Dees' offences were drug/alcohol and breach related. Dee once absconded from court, after being told she would be remanded in order to secure care for her children, whom she had dropped at school, again not expecting a custodial sentence. Dee now works in a women's centre as a women's support worker and plans to attend University.

**Queenie, 64**, mother-of-three, grandmother-of three, ten years post-release. Queenie was sentenced to her first custodial sentence (for fraud), only one day after telling her children, she had been on police-bail for over twelve-months. Her family are very religious, and she was nervous of their reaction. Her relationship with her children is now strained because of her ex-prisoner status and she is no longer permitted to care for her grandchildren in the same way she had. Queenie's grandchildren do not know their granny has been to prison. Queenie is trying to establish a business venture which will support women after prison into paid work on release.

**Tarian, 29**, mother-of-five (one child deceased), now five years post-release. Tarian on reception into prison (for drug-related offences), found out she was pregnant (women are usually routinely tested). This was Tarian's first prison sentence but not her first offence. She was successful in gaining, a place on the prison MBU where she resided for most of her sentence. Her children outside were informally cared for by their fathers and maternal and paternal grandmothers. Tarian's partner and father of her youngest child committed suicide not long after her release. Her children still spend time living with various relatives informally and Tarian. Tarian's oldest daughter died of leukaemia some time before her sentence.

**Sophie, 21**, sent to prison for arson, now six years post-release her first and only offence (she maintains her innocence). Sophie was in a domestically abusive relationship and she alleges it was in fact her partner who had set the fire. Her infant daughter was taken into care because she was in the house when the fire was set. Post-release Sophie fought hard to regain custody of her daughter after a difficult period of gradually increasing contact. With the support of an advocate, she was successful, and mother and daughter are happily reunited. Sophie feels that, had she not fought hard for her daughter, challenged social workers and had the support of an independent housing provider, she would have lost her daughter permanently. She now wishes to work with women adjusting to life after prison.

**Ursula, 48**, mother-of-five, grandmother-of four, all under 18 when she was sentenced to eight years (drug-related offences), approximately ten years post-release. This was not her first offence, but her first custodial sentence. Her offences were committed with her husband, who did not receive a custodial sentence. Ursula's first grandchild was born whilst she was in prison. Ursula served four years in prison and four years on licence. She states that when on licence, despite being a mother-of five, no one ever asked her on release how her re-entry and reunification was progressing. Ursula now has a significant role in an organisation campaigning for reforms in criminal justice.

**Rita, 36**, mother-of-four, four years post-release. Rita is diagnosed as living with bipolar disorder. Rita's youngest child was eighteen months old when she was sentenced to custody for fraud. Rita became pregnant whilst on bail and waiting for her case to come to court. She had not expected a custodial sentence for a first offence. Rita was not immediately informed of her right to apply to bring her youngest child into prison with her to reside on an MBU. When informed, Rita made the decision not to apply for a space, because he was 'settling'. This would have meant separation from siblings and a further distance for them all to travel - potentially reducing the number of visits. Rita has started her own business and community initiative which employs women after prison.

**Maggie, 61**, mother- of-four, grandmother-of two, sentenced for a first offence (theft), nine years post-release. When Maggie's offence was committed her family were experiencing financial difficulties, including the potential repossession of their home following her husband's retirement on health grounds. She was his full-time caregiver and childcare for her grandchildren when sentenced. Maggie was diagnosed with

depression in custody. Her grandchild was hospitalised with cancer whilst she was in prison and Maggie was refused ROTL to visit him. Maggie now volunteers with women in the criminal justice system.

**Nicola, 41**, mother-of three, now eleven years post-release, has two children who were taken into care several years prior to her sentence and one taken into care during this most recent sentence. Nicola had a long history of substance misuse and mental-health issues. Her two older children had previously been removed from her care. She had been sober and well for several years, relapsing prior to her sentence following the death of her mother. Her offence was related to funding her alcohol abuse. Nicola had previously experienced custody but was not expecting a custodial sentence this time as it was over ten years since she had been before the courts. She challenged but lost the application for her son to be placed for adoption.

**Mary, 65**, mother-of two, thirty-eight years since the sentence from which, she lost her children, and twenty-six years post-release her last sentence. Mary served several short custodial sentences and remand periods, mainly for alcohol and public order related offences. She was sentenced to eighteen-months in prison when her sons were aged seven and nine. Her sons were taken into care, they were in a series of foster homes over many years, themselves later serving time in prison. Mary decided her children were *'better off'* without her. She stopped seeing them and 'gave up' her parental rights. She did not see her sons for over thirty years. In their 40's, they eventually found her and were reunited. They now have a tense, fragile, but improving relationship. Mary is a volunteer.

**Carla, 45**, mother-of two, six years post-release. Carla had a long history of domestic abuse, substance misuse and MH issues. She had served three previous short sentences. She shared care of her children with her mother prior to custody and this arrangement had continued after previous sentences; on her last release, her mother would not agree to shared care and the children now reside permanently with their grandmother; Carla visits. Carla's home was repossessed during her last sentence, she lost everything and lived a transient life for 14 months. She was eventually housed in a one-bedroomed flat, where she still lives; she attends a women's centre for support and hopes to volunteer there in the future.

**Margot, 32**, mother-of one, two years post-release. Margot had previously served a short period on remand. Margot's fourteen-year-old daughter was severely bullied about having a mother in prison. Margot struggled to deal with this in prison and states that she self-harmed as a means of coping. Margot served 18 months at what she felt was the most important stage of a teenager's life, Margot feels their relationship has suffered enormously and struggles to accept her daughter's maturity and independence and describes their relationship now as strained.

**Lauren, 26**, single mother-of a two-year-old, four years post-release offence her first custodial sentence (not first offence). Lauren disclosed mental-health issues stating she had begun self-harming in prison. Lauren's son was taken into LA care at the point of her sentence as she was estranged from her family at the time. Post-release, Lauren's son was eventually returned to her (after 12 months). They now live together with Lauren's mother. During her sentence Lauren accessed support not available to her in the community and found it a positive experience - this also resulted in her securing support on her release which helped her to reunite with her mother and child. Lauren is employed and engaging with mental-health support.

**Mavis, 60**, mother-of two adult children, grandmother-of two, six years post-release. Mavis, a retired teacher, had been the full-time childcare provider for her grandchildren before going to prison. Her son is a legal professional, his wife works for the Government. Mavis is no longer permitted to care for her grandchildren. Despite previously being close, her son and his family have little to do with her. Mavis believes this is because they are ashamed and embarrassed. She has a better relationship with her daughter, although it is 'still not as it was'. Mavis has been prescribed anti-depressants since her release.

**Karen, 44**, mother-of three children aged eleven and seventeen, ten years post-release. Sentenced for a serious driving offence. Karen was a professional with a good support network. Her husband cared for her children in their family home during her sentence and they were reunited post-release. Karen stated she struggled with her experience of the CJS and with the stigma of being a middle-class mum who had been to prison. She could no longer work in her previous profession and is hoping to retrain in an alternative profession where her prison experience can be turned into a positive.

**Sandra, 46**, mother-of four, grandmother-of two, twelve months post-release, Sandra had a long history of alcohol and substance misuse, she stated she used to block out childhood trauma. Sandra's teenage daughters became pregnant during her first sentence, something she blames herself for. Her family cared for her children during her sentences. One child 'refuses' to return home and now lives with his grandma permanently. Sandra states that she is now clean 'for her grandchildren' and wants to work with women exiting prison.

**Shanice, 30**, mother-of two aged two and eleven, five years post-release. Shanice has served three custodial sentences with large gaps between them. One was only a few weeks; the others were around six months. Shanice's eldest child has behavioural difficulties and is on the autistic spectrum. Shanice believes this is partly attributed to her substance misuse and prison sentences. She is now clean and sober but struggling to stay this way. She states she feels 'under surveillance' from social services. She and her mother no longer speak due to tensions concerning the children arising whilst she was in prison. Shanice is a graduate and wants 'eventually' to work with women in the CJS.

**Tanisha, 31**, mother-of three aged four, six and twelve, seven years post-release. Tanisha served her first custodial sentence at the age of seventeen (she was 'looking after' drugs for her much older and violent boyfriend), her first son was born during a custodial sentence. She served one further sentence when she was pregnant with her second. Tanisha stated that at various points in her life the LA have taken her children into care through concerns about domestic abuse in the home (by Tanisha's partner). She also had a period of shared care of her children with family members. She now has the full care of all her children and is with a nonviolent partner.

**Tanya, 27**, mother-of two aged six and seven, two years post-release. Tanya had two periods in-custody, eight-weeks on remand and fourteen-months as a sentenced prisoner following an assault. Before prison, Tanya informally shared care of her children with her mother, their caregiver during her sentence. Post-prison, Tanya stated the children 'chose' to stay with their grandmother most of the time with Tanya having them usually only for overnight stays once or twice a fortnight. Tanya and her mother remain in conflict about the children.



**Cynthia, 50**, mother-of one, four years post-release, has a long history of alcohol abuse, and mental-health issues. Cynthia experienced extreme trauma as a child and young adult describing being 'forced' into prostitution to fund her addictions. Cynthia now has 'close' relationship with her adult son, who is 'very protective and nurturing' towards her. He himself suffers from MH issues and lives with anorexia, which his mother believes was caused by their repeated separations because of her multiple short custodial sentences.

**Tamika, 26**, mother-of three, aged twelve, two and four, five years post-release. Tamika was pregnant during her last sentence (her second). Her baby was born post-release. Tamika stated she had 'a problem with anger'. Tamika put this down to unresolved emotional issues following her abuse. She had spent time in care (where the abuse occurred), resulting in anger issues with her mother whom she blamed for '*putting her into care*'. Her children had been cared for by grandmother (GM), during her sentence. Tamika now has resumed care of her children but with 'strained' support from GM.

**Tia, 26**, mother-of two aged twelve and four, five years post-release. Tia, a graduate, had been addicted to heroin prior to her traumatic arrest at her daughter's school gates. She had been what she described as a 'functioning addict' but was 'dealing' to fund her own addiction. Her mother and ex-partner cared for her children, so were separated for her sentence duration. As a result, they are not now close, a constant source of guilt for Tia. Tia's daughter feels Tia 'lost the right' to be a mother. They now have a fragile, strained but developing relationship. Tia feels she has a 'second chance' with her son, who was very young when she was jailed. Tia went on to secure voluntary work, leading to paid work with prisoners and ex-prisoners struggling with addiction.

**Margaret, 66**, mother-of two and GM carer of her grandchildren, whilst their mother was in prison. Margaret was 46 years post-release at interview (the longest post-release period of all of the mothers). Her now adult children were not born when she served her sentence; she had been pregnant when sentenced but her baby was adopted shortly following her release. Margaret's sentence and her first baby are a 'secret' from her grandchildren, she feels 'deeply ashamed and guilty' about this. Margaret feels responsible that her own daughter went to prison, too. She feels she was not a positive role model.

**Jaspreet, 36**, mother-of eighteen-month-old twins with special needs, one-year post-release. Jaspreet, a professional prior to her first and only offence, maintains her innocence but was found guilty at trial. She served five months. Prior to her sentence, Jaspreet stated she had not expected to be able to survive the separation from her children. Jaspreet bears what she describes as additional cultural shame at losing both her profession and her respectability in such a publicly 'shameful' way. Her mother-in-law and husband cared for her sons during her sentence, and she described relations as strained but slowly improving.

**Rayna, 36**, mother-of two aged six and eight, two years post-release. Rayna served three-and-a-half years for her first offence. Rayna is a foreign national. The Home Office were seeking a deportation order on her release. Rayna appealed this decision; she won her case and now has indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Rayna's husband cared for her children during her sentence; however, they have since separated. Rayna's mother, to whom she was very close, died during her sentence after a short battle with cancer. She is struggling to integrate and readjust and feels traumatised by the separation from her children.

**Marjorie, 61**, mother-of one, grandmother-of one, eleven years post-release. Marjorie served twelve months of a two-year sentence for fraud. Her son was eighteen when she was sentenced and still lived at home. Her first grandchild was born whilst she was in prison, something Marjorie states she cannot get over or forgive herself for. Her son subsequently offended and served a short prison sentence, during which she shared the care of her grandchild (as per her son's pre-prison arrangement).

**Tahira** asked to withdraw from the study, and for none of the content of her interview to appear in print, and her transcript destroyed. However, she asked that her chosen pseudonym and her presence/withdrawal be documented. She specifically asked that her withdrawal statement be documented in the study, as follows:

*"Although I enjoyed participating in this study, and think and feel it will be of importance, my husband has asked that I, and all my given interview details be withdrawn from the investigation. My offence and imprisonment caused me and my family great shame, to that end we would, on reflection prefer to leave the past in the past. We seek peace and*

*solace in this rebuilding period and therefore wish to keep our experience a very private one. We wish you every success in your study.*

*With very kind and respectful regards.*

*Tahira”*

### **5.3 The Mothers and Their Circumstances**

A total of 43 mothers contributed to the study: 15 mothers who were still imprisoned contributed by letter (the ‘letter writing mothers’), and 28 post-release mothers took part in one-to-one interviews (the ‘interviewed mothers’). Twenty-eight per cent of the interviewed mothers were grandmothers (n=8). I would have no way of knowing how many of the letter writing mothers were grandmothers, but n=3 revealed themselves to be grandmothers, therefore twenty-six percent of the total number of participants were known to be grandmothers. I did not specifically ask the mothers about their offence (chapter 4), although most chose to disclose something. All bar two disclosed offences that were nonviolent in nature. From what was known (i.e. disclosed), the mothers could be crudely categorised into one of four main categories: mothers who had issues with addiction and had offended to fund their addiction or someone else’s; mothers in poverty who stated they had offended to provide/survive; mothers who were coerced/forced into offending by male partners and mothers who had made a ‘one off’ mistake’ of varying gravity.

Most of the mothers in the study disclosed traumatic histories typical of women who experience prison (Corston, 2007) although, importantly, all also demonstrated strength and resilience and were emphatic that they had ‘survived’ prison. A tabulated summary of the mothers’ known characteristics, including their number of children, time spent in custody and childcare arrangements during and post sentence, can also be found in the Appendix (Appendix 1). All Mothers were involved in or had access to their children prior to custody (Appendix 2. Fig.6), either via shared care, visitation or as a primary carer. Most children were cared for by family, usually their grandmothers, whilst their mother was incarcerated, six mothers in the study lost the care of their children either permanently or temporarily to their LA as a direct result of their sentence, (Appendix 2.fig 7), (n=3 were eventually returned to at least partial maternal care). The post-release circumstances of the children are represented in figure 8 (appendix 2).

## 5.4 The Letter Writing Mothers

I received a total of 25 letters from 15 different mothers who were writing from prison; they each had at least one child, most had more than one child. It was difficult to confirm the actual number of children for this group, as not all mothers fully disclosed this in their letters (nor were they asked to). However, this group of mothers had between them at least 27 confirmed children. The mothers were Taranpreet, Emma, Alexandra, Rosie, Natacha, Danielle, Diane, Erin, Sandy, Helen, Jennifer, Adel, Sam, Pham and Melanie. Not all of the letter writing mothers disclosed details about their offences or sentence length (and were not asked). Information collated from those who did offer the information was as follows: six were serving sentences of less than 6 months, two disclosed sentences of less than three months; two disclosed that their sentences were over four years but did not specify length. One was a life sentenced prisoner who was several years into her sentence. Several mentioned they were within weeks of release. The disclosed offences ranged from murder, fraud, assault, theft, recall and debt/non-payment of fines. Most disclosed offences were minor non-violent offences, as is typical of women in prison (PRT, 2019).

Three mothers were foreign national mothers. I do not have accurate information about the ages of the letter writing group, but the ages of their disclosed children ranged from a few months to aged 45. Obviously, these mothers were writing about separation from their children in 'real time' and contributing their experiences as they were occurring, along with their hopes and fears for release and reunification. One of the mothers, Emma, imprisoned for shoplifting and breach of a previous order, wrote several times. She had wanted to also give an interview. We had planned to do this following her release. We did meet several times but were waiting until she was more 'settled' to record her interview. However, before we could do so, tragically Emma died aged 36 from pneumonia just five weeks after her release from prison. I had supported Emma into new permanent accommodation via my contacts. She had found voluntary work, was drug free, and had been hoping to reunite with one of her children, a teenaged daughter she had not seen for some years (her youngest child had been permanently adopted). Her older daughter attended her funeral, as did I.

## 5.5 The Interviewed Mothers

The 28 interviewed mothers were geographically widely spread across the UK and were ethnically diverse (Appendix 2, Fig. 11) and representative of the wider prison population. Most Mothers were interviewed in their own homes (at their request), all had been out of prison for at least 12 months. The longest period post prison was 46 years; the remainder of the post-release periods varied, with 61% being five years or more post-release (Appendix 2, Fig.10), and the women were aged between 19-66, (Appendix 2, Fig. 11). Periods in custody ranged from two to four years, (Appendix 2, Fig. 12). Fifty-six percent of mothers were either serving their first custodial sentence for their first offence or were serving their first custodial sentence but had previous offences; the remaining 38% had multiple offences/sentences (Appendix 2, Fig. 13).

## 5.6 Reflexivity and Researcher/Research Relationship

### 5.6.1 Motivation for the topic

Oakley (2016) and Liebling (1999) suggest researcher's motivation for undertaking research in a specifically chosen field is itself a potentially revealing factor that must be considered and recognised in order to facilitate honest and genuine reflection. Throughout my previous roles as a social worker and a probation officer I have always had a particular interest in women, specifically mothers involved with the CJS, and particularly when separated from their children. This topic therefore seemed an 'obvious choice' for my Doctoral research.

Quite early in the research I realised that there was a much deeper reason for my 'obvious choice'. Confirmed to me on reading a paper by Liebling (1999) in which she stated her observation that *any* research is often driven by personal curiosity, conscious or unconscious interests. Reading this comment really felt like a 'light-bulb' moment. It brought home to me that in choosing motherhood as my topic, I had combined my passion for motherhood (born out of powerful personal and professional experiences around mothering and motherhood), with my area of work, i.e. criminology. Thus, I became acutely aware that I had chosen a PhD topic closer to me than I had initially

realised. Motherhood is central to my world – in fact, I consider it to be the single most important thing about me. My values are matricentric, informed by my own experiences of mothering and being poorly mothered alongside my practitioner experiences of working with mothers, particularly those who mother through challenging circumstances.

### **5.6.2 Reflexivity and the biographical lens**

Letherby (2004) and Oakley (2016) argue that the presence of the ‘personal’ story of the researcher is essential to accurately viewing, and ergo understanding, the research itself. Feminist research, particularly research with women, values the presence and transparency of the researcher and acknowledges that the research relationship, i.e. researcher/participant, can and does have a great impact on quality and reliability of the data (Olsen 2011). Letherby (2004), argues that the ‘complex’ social encounters of researchers and respondents and the products of the research are likely to be affected by the background and values of the researcher. Thus, if they are not actively recognised, acknowledged and visible, there would be an omission (2004;144). Hence my decision to include aspects of my biography in this chapter, particularly those I feel interacted with the research and research process. As outlined by Doucet and Mauthner (2008), determining the *actual* impact of the researcher on the research is challenging. It is not something easily measured, not least because reflexivity is ongoing. In qualitative research particularly, interpretation of the research processes and products is dynamic, subject to change and adaptation (Layder, 2012).

I became a grandmother and a step-grandmother during the research. This new role has had a significant impact on me and on my research. Seeing the vital role I play in supporting my daughter and son via childcare, and in supporting my sons and daughter through their journeys into parenthood, contributed to my understanding of the significant role grandmothers play in the lives of the Mothers in this study. This was especially pertinent as I have limited experience of extended family and have never benefitted from maternal support as a parent. I now see the value of grandparents in children’s lives on multiple levels. I acknowledge that this has influenced my analysis and knowledge production. For example, my specific inclusion/appreciation for the grandmother perspective in this study, either as carers when their own offspring are imprisoned, or as criminalised grandmothers, was probably triggered by my new grandmother status. I also

asked questions about maternal relationships with grandparents that I might not otherwise have thought to ask. I am not certain I would have explored this as fully had I not become a grandmother right at the very start of my PhD journey (incidentally, it also influenced two of my peers researching a similar topic to pay attention to the grandmother prison experience too).

My background and my role as a mother interacted with the research and research relationships too, sometimes bringing up painful emotions and memories which I would write about in my reflexive journal (see appendix 20) or discuss in supervision. For example, the demands of work, family, childcare and studying often created conflicting feelings regarding my motherhood. I was sometimes consumed with guilt and regret that I was not making enough time for my children and grandchildren yet remaining committed to the study. This reinforced to me Enos's (2001), concept of 'doing' mothering as opposed to simply 'being' a mother. Again, this reflection powerfully interacted with my research by recognising that *availability* is key to *my* mothering, thus questioning whether availability is key to mothering in general and how available are or can mothers in prison be? This made me very aware, not only of the importance of 'being there' for children, but also that it is not just dependent children (usually the focus of policy and practice developments), who need their prison mothers. Older children and ergo older mothers need that connection, too. I remember feeling guilty that I **could** talk to my adult children/grandchildren whenever I wanted to (within reason), but that the Mothers in my research could not talk to their children, reinforcing my empathic feelings towards the Mothers.

However, over empathizing with research participants can provide its own challenges. Abbott (in Abbott and Scott, 2017: 1425) stated that, in her '*conscious attempt to give voice*' to the women, she often found herself '*on their side*' in terms of reflection and reporting. I became conscious of this following feedback during a research presentation to my peers, when a colleague said to me, '*you do know they are not all victims right? They have broken the law*'. This was relatively early in my research and analysis and I was able to be reflective and therefore mindful of overidentifying and over-empathising in my interactions and, importantly, in my analysis. However, it remains important to acknowledge that *most* criminalised women and mothers are convicted of nonviolent crimes, sometimes for deb, often for 'survival crimes' or crimes related to poverty; furthermore, most *are* actually 'victims', or survivors of abuse, inequality, poverty, and

coercion into crime by male partners (Corston, 2007, 2011; PRT, 2019). Nonetheless, ongoing reflexivity informed my research design and analysis by assisting me in the development of research questions and analytical skills. Rolling reflexivity is only one important aspect of feminist research, Doucet (1998), suggests it is also important to consider our own multi-layered position, values, beliefs, identities and experiences.

### **5.6.3 My maternal identity**

I have been a mother since I was sixteen. Following a lifetime of abuse, borne out of a pervading sense of hopelessness and worthlessness, I made a serious attempt to end my life at 15. Shortly after my release from hospital (five weeks or so), then aged sixteen, I became pregnant with my first son. From the second I knew I was pregnant I felt like I had a purpose and a use (other than being someone's punching bag or object of sexual abuse, which I had previously felt was my role in life). I knew without question I would love my child devotedly. Although not planned for, I was desperate to have my baby. I felt a baby would know no better than to love me warts and all. It is not dramatic to say that without question, becoming pregnant at that point saved my life. I have no doubt that without my baby, I would have taken the learning from my previous suicide attempt and successfully taken my life at a not too distant point. Before him, Christopher, my life felt nothing, it was nothing; with him I was someone's mum, I was not worthless – well at least not to him. Without realising it then, I saw motherhood as a source of power, freedom and agency, rather than a site of oppression as purported by some advocates of radical feminism (Rich, 1995). Thus demonstrating the beginnings of my current ontological and epistemological stance. I had a very clear mothering script or narrative regarding good and bad mothering (my own mother being an example of everything I deemed 'bad mothering'). I was determined to mother well, which to me at that time meant, above all else, to love my children devotedly and to put them first, always.

I became aware during my data collection/ analysis, of the significance of my own maternal experience and value base as a mother. Early in the research I realised that I was perhaps empathising with the mothers who felt the pain of separation from their children more than I did with the mothers who seemed to take the separation 'in their stride'. I was aware that I was, whether I liked it or not, experiencing feelings of judgement



particularly with one interview. Reflecting on this took up a considerable amount of time and emotional energy.

This interview and my feelings troubled me. I actively worked through my reactions and emotions via trusted relationships and supervision, and eventually I was able to connect my own biographical story and experiences of maternal separation and neglect. Once I had made that connection, ironically it became easier to separate my research reality from my personal reality. Despite considering myself a matricentric-feminist researcher, I had judged this mother. Only once I had worked through these complex and layered emotional responses to this interview was I able to leave it behind and move on to analysis of other interviews. This interview became very important in illustrating that; "*exceptions illustrate the norm*" (Supervisor). This mother was the only mother who did not explicitly express regret or shame, nor did she speak about guilt or long-lasting harm to her maternal self/ identity, or her children (that is not to say that she did not feel it). Not only had my reaction to this interview troubled me for my own self-assessment, but it also reiterated to me just how susceptible all mothers are to scrutiny and judgement from the wider world, especially mothers who are deemed not be living up to or conforming to the ideals of good motherhood. (Minnaker and Hogeveen, 2015; O'Reilly, 2016; Baldwin, 2019). If I, as a huge advocate for mothers, a social worker trained in anti-oppressive practice, educated and feminist, could judge this mother then what hope was there that others would not? Thus, the interview reiterated to me that not only did the *Mothers* in the study accept traditional models of motherhood and motherhood ideology (Chapter 6), but that so did I.

Most mothers, to a greater or lesser extent absorb traditional motherhood values, emotions, and roles (Chapter 3), and the subsequent pressure this exerts. I am 'educated', I resist patriarchal-based assumptions and restrictions about mothers and mothering, I consider myself a feminist. Yet I, too, on many levels have accepted these norms, striving to be a good mother and to mother well within a culturally and socially constructed norm. I personally see motherhood as a source of power, liberation, and unity, but I appreciate that others see motherhood as oppressed and oppressive (Chapter 2). Undoubtedly influenced by patriarchal and motherhood ideology, I have huge guilt that I have not always been able to provide the stable family life I would have wished for my children, at least in the traditional sense – my boys' father killed himself when they were young, and my daughter's father is not present in her world (despite my

best efforts to encourage this). I have been married and divorced several times (the same as my mother - another source of guilt). My children (aged 36, 37 and 27) say I have always been all the parent they have ever needed – but this does not assuage my guilt. My sons' dad was very present in their world until he took his life; he was a lovely man – we had separated when I was 18, for reasons too long to go into here, but not because of a lack of love. However, he remained a best friend and source of emotional support. Essentially, though, I was a young single parent of a six-week-old baby and an 18-month-old toddler. I was desperate as a mother to ensure that my children would leave the poverty and benefit-reliant existence we found ourselves in. So I made the decision that I needed an education to enable me to have a *career* and not 'just a job'. Motherhood was my motivation to succeed, but it was education that gave me the passport. I became educated by luck. A vicar and a health visitor saw potential in me and encouraged me to register for 'A' Levels, also paying for a year of childcare. I completed them within that year so did not get wonderful grades but achieved enough to access University.

I felt that as a 'good mother' I needed to be my children's provider and role model. This was important to me. Even though my boys were tiny, I wanted to be the best I could be to maximize the chances of them being proud of me. I remember that felt desperately important. Another hugely motivating factor was that I wanted to challenge the perceptions of others that I would inevitably fail - not just people in my small world, but also more generally. In the mid 1980's and early 1990's, 'Tory' Britain was very much against the 'scourge of the single mother' (Kiernan et al. 1998); whom at that time Margaret Thatcher labelled as the cause of teen criminality, evidence of loose morals, and as being responsible for the breakdown of traditional family values (see for example<sup>41</sup>). This broad-based societal and media attack on young single mothers had a profound impact on me and my self-worth. I felt then, and to some extent still feel, the need to justify and prove myself, perhaps especially in relation to motherhood. However, importantly my cumulative experiences sowed the seeds of what would later become my commitment to the pursuit of social justice, alongside a realisation that when mothers are disadvantaged and judged, there are deep implications for her and her children. Such are the roots of my feminist and matricentric principles and beliefs which contribute to

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<sup>41</sup> See Atkinson et al (1998) discussion of perceptions of single mothers.  
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/88198/1/Happy%20Families.pdf>

and underpin this research. With the benefit of education and hindsight, I recognise the influence of patriarchal and Victorian values which have long influenced perceptions of how women and girls, particularly mothers, should and should not behave or 'be' (Oakley, 1979; Rich, 1976; Zedner, 2010; O'Reilly, 2004, 2016). I now recognize this as being stigmatised. At the time I just felt exposed, self-conscious and judged. Similarities can be drawn with criminalised mothers who also describe such feelings, and who are also labelled, and who experience and internalise the judgmental attitudes accompanying stigma and negative media portrayal of mothers who break the law (Sharpe, 2015).

In her seminal Motherhood work Rich (1976) noted that motherhood is difficult to write about without being, at least to some extent, biographical and there is no doubt that my own maternal-identity and arguably my background gave me an element of 'insider' status (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). A key factor in my undertaking of this research study and which bore some relationship to the shaping and interpretation of the data.

#### **5.6.4. Relatability and 'insider' status.**

Research with mothers by feminist mother researchers has identified a relational aspect between researcher, researched and products of research (Finch, 1993; Frost and Holt 2014; Cooper and Rogers, 2015; Oakley, 2016). Frost and Holt (2014; 90), suggest that the '*the often conflicting identities of 'mother', 'researcher', 'feminist' and 'woman',*' may interact with research in 'subtle, yet profound' ways (*ibid*). The honest reflexivity so essential to good feminist research, becomes even more imperative when several aspects of lived experience is shared (Finlay, 2002; Doucet 1998).

In relation to women I have worked with over the years, and certainly the Mothers in this study, I have always felt 'there, but for the grace of God, go I'. Only due to good luck, sometimes good judgement, and other times sheer determination, have I ended up on a different trajectory from the women in my research. Addiction is a feature in many of the lives of women in the criminal justice system, often rooted in past traumatic experiences (O'Malley and Devaney, 2016). I genuinely consider myself lucky that my only addiction was not illegal (cake!), and that my coping-strategies were essentially private and inward facing; facilitating secrecy and to some extent deception and ill health, but not criminality.

Nonetheless, I do recognise my relationship with food as an unhealthy coping strategy for dealing with negative trauma rooted emotions. I have a relatively strong regional (north east England) accent, and working-class background. I consider myself (and was described by the mothers) to be 'down to earth', which also lent itself to a more egalitarian research relationship.

As an academic and a researcher, I appreciate the significance of what Olsen (2011; 135) describes as an 'acute awareness' of how my background can shape the research experience, and affect research relationships with research participants, a critical component of feminist research (Burgess Proctor, 2014:126). My awareness of our similarity is acute because of my abusive past, my working-class background, but also, and significantly, because I once stole food (bread and baked beans) to feed my children. I had lost my last five pound note the day before I was due to receive my child benefit. I am painfully aware of the potential consequences had I been caught and am forever grateful that I was not, but I still remember deep feelings of failure and shame. Thus, I became aware that my 'story' intersected with the research and the Mothers. It is vital therefore, to be reflexive not only to produce 'better research' (Lockwood 2014), but also to understand and examine how a researcher's own 'story' shapes the research question and informs the generation and analysis of data. Although in this study I do not go as far as Letherby (1997) and involve or 'weave' my own autobiographical account directly into my interviews or analysis, I do acknowledge that my representation of the mothers' stories is filtered through my own biographical lens. As Cotterill and Letherby (1994) in Letherby (2003:142) suggest:

*"As feminist researchers studying women's lives, we take their autobiographies and become their biographers. [...] thus, their lives are filtered through us and the filtered stories of our lives are present, (whether we admit it or not) in our written accounts."*

It is argued that there is no scientific way of knowing that if another interviewer/researcher were to undertake the same study, they would find the same results, or that the interviews would flow in the same fashion (Doucet and Mauthner, 2013), but this does not make the 'knowledge' gained any less valuable. In fact, it has been argued that sharing characteristics and/or having 'insider' status with research participants can actually return deeper more nuanced understanding (Cooper and

Rogers 2015). Burgess Procter (2014: 125) identifies the importance of a non-hierarchical relationship with participants in feminist research, endorsing a compassionate stance which emphasizes care, connectedness and collaboration. She states that this is '*especially true of feminist research involving abused women and survivors of other forms of victimisation*', which many of the participants were. I believe, to an extent, my background, professional experience and motherhood provided me with knowledge that assisted me in establishing rapport with the participants, and in understanding their experiences. It also influenced how the mothers related to me; enabling the women to feel comfortable, facilitating open, honest and deep conversations. All of the participants asked me if I was a mother if I had not already revealed it, mostly during our informal 'warming up' conversations prior to the interviews and before the recorder was switched on. Although always mindful of not oversharing and shifting the focus to me, I did not shy away from speaking about my children/grandchildren. This often led to participants drawing attention to our shared role as mothers when speaking about their experiences: '*Well you know what I mean don't you? ... as a mother I mean ... you can imagine, can't you?*' (Dee), or '*... Can you imagine not seeing your granddaughter straight away ... well I know you can put yourself in my shoes, can't you?*' (Ursula), or '*... a man wouldn't get the pain, but I bet you know what I mean ... its different for us mothers isn't it? We feel it different, don't we?*' (Cynthia). Whilst some might question the possibility of the production of 'scientific' knowledge in these circumstances, Cooper and Rogers (2015), defend the integrity of the 'insider' position that mothers researching mothers might have. They argue that mothering as an 'insider role' is a 'powerful and reflexive position' and as such is especially valuable in qualitative research. (2014:2).

Cooper and Rogers, stress the importance of reflexivity in order to avoid 'complicity' or the 'danger of assumptions of sameness' (2015:2.4), but there is no doubt that the sharing of mother experiences can facilitate a trusting relationship and a deeper disclosure. Equally, this can result in the interviewer unintentionally framing a discussion, which, it must be acknowledged, happened on occasion during this research, and is something I was mindful of during analysis. As Cooper and Rogers (2015), also found, the interviews themselves often became an 'interactive process', where both the researcher and the researched gained something. In this study, the mothers often stated that the research interview had a profound effect on them and, despite being only one meeting, they often said they felt they 'knew' me, 'trusted' me' and, importantly, that I

could relate to them, and them to me. I felt that the similarity in our background, but specifically our shared mothering identity, made me more relatable, ergo trustworthy and safe in turn facilitating the return of rich data.

I am not suggesting that having a shared background, especially related to past abuse, is essential to feminist research. I do feel that in this study my own background assisted me to be not only an effective feminist researcher but, importantly, to be 'trauma-informed'<sup>42</sup> in my approach, whilst simultaneously highlighting the importance of such an approach (for example making the decision to interview post-release based on ethical care). However, equally as relevant and important to recognize and acknowledge was the fact that I am no longer in my original circumstances (Oakley 2016). Whatever similarities I may have shared with my participants in my past, many aspects of my present are very different from most of my participants. I no longer live in poverty. I have a relatively professional, apparently successful career. Although not affluent, I am relatively comfortable and very grateful for that. I am finally in a safe and loving relationship and enjoy good relationships with all my children and grandchildren. That is not to say I do not bear the scars physically and mentally of a damaged past. I consider myself to be a hugely imperfect person and remain haunted by many ghosts of my past. As do all researchers, I brought my experiences and their consequences with me into this research and I have had to engage with those experiences (previously put to the back of my mind) to be fully reflexive. In turn, it was important to ensure that, as far as possible, my own experiences and beliefs did not unconsciously influence or shape my interviews, attitudes or analysis – and that, if it did, I would be able to recognize and acknowledge this.

Furthermore, I felt my 'new' position and increased agency fuelled my sense of responsibility and activism, leading to me becoming very involved in the active pursuit of positive change and publication – not borne out of self-gain or a feeling of superiority but a genuine passion and desire for positive change (chapter 8 for impact of research). Most importantly my activism is in keeping with feminist research methodology and reflects my matricentric and feminist stance (Renzetti, 2013). The empowerment of others is an important part of feminist research (see also Chapter 4). Again, this is in

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<sup>42</sup> Trauma-informed is a way of working sensitively with people who have experienced abuse and being mindful of words, phrases and ways of being that may be triggering or oppressive, even unintentionally.

line with feminist action research principles (O'Malley, 2018), although perhaps not as common as it ought to be.

Thus, having fully explored my relationship to the research and introduced the mothers, I now turn to the findings chapters which reveal the profound impact of maternal imprisonment. The findings are presented via themes emerging from the data, the first data chapter, 'Motherhood Disrupted', examines the mothers' pre-prison and in-prison experiences.

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## Chapter 6: Motherhood Disrupted

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*“Going home is all I think about, the joy and love, to be able to cook his tea, hold him, to know what his day has been like, to dress him, to choose his clothes, to know what time he goes to sleep, to hold him, to smell him. Just be a mother really.” (Lauren)*

### 6. Introduction

In order to fully understand the post-prison experience of mothers, the pre-prison and ‘in’-prison experience must be contextualised. This chapter, demonstrating the fundamental matricentric principle that ‘motherhood matters’ (O’Reilly 2016), explores mothers’ experiences of prison. Extending previous studies, the chapter contributes new knowledge and more nuanced understanding regarding mothers and grandmothers pathways to prison and how incarceration intersects with their maternal-identity and role. The layered nature of grandmothers’ and older mothers’ experiences, as detailed herein, are an important contribution to an overall understanding of the experiences of *all* mothers in custody. Therefore, grandmothers’ experiences are interwoven into both of the findings chapters (Chapters 6 and 7). Under-explored in existing research are the mothers’ own experiences of being mothered before custody, and the reproduction of motherhood whilst in custody, both of which are presented in this chapter via the Mothers’ described experiences.

By applying matricentric-feminist principles (O’Reilly, 2016), and centring the voices of mothers themselves, this the first of two findings chapters, examines the experiences of imprisoned mothers from their perspective. As is important in feminist research (Maynard and Purvis, 1994), and is especially important in matricentric research (Takševa, 2018), the Mothers’ observations, perceptions and descriptions of their experiences are centred, whilst the broader structural inequalities and discriminations which provide the backdrop



and context to those experiences are also kept in mind. Thereby demonstrating matricentric-feminist-criminology.

The chapter is divided into two: Part One will focus on the 'Pre-Prison Circumstances', revealing the challenges the Mothers were already facing and their impact on their maternal-identity; Part Two examines the Mothers' in-prison experience, through the themes of 'Entering the Prison Space and Early Days', 'Mothering and Grandmothering from a Distance', and 'Regimes, Rules and Inside Relationships'.

## 6.1. Part one: Pre-prison circumstances

Women entering prison have frequently experienced abuse and violence; many have mental-health issues, and/or problems with addiction; women have often experienced poverty and neglect (Baunach, 1985; Carlen, 1985; Worrall, 1990; Codd, 2008; Stewart, 2015), (Chapter 2). The Mothers in this study described many such challenges, thus forming the basis of this section. These circumstances all bear some relationship to each other and were impossible to discuss completely discretely. However, the circumstances have been organised in accordance with the Mothers' own accounts.

### 6.1.1 Poverty and mental health

Several Mothers were living in severely disadvantaged circumstances in areas of high unemployment and few opportunities. Many were struggling with mental-health issues, often compounded by their financial circumstances. Mothers described how they felt like they were '*failing*' (Tia) by not being able to provide their children with not only the basics of living but also the latest TVs, trainers, and video games, seemingly increasingly important to a consumerist society and which present an added pressure on mothers to provide.

Contemporary motherhood is bombarded with media-driven images and messages of 'must have' toys, gadgets, even certain baby bottles, dummies and, especially, 'the pram'. The pram itself is often seen as a status symbol and perhaps one that sometimes belies the true financial position of the mother (Thomsen and Sorenson, 2006).

*'My pram was the best you can get, it was over a £1,000, my little Quenisha, she was my show pony. I wanted her to have the best of everything.'*  
(Tarian)

Mothers have always been under pressure to provide and provide well for their children (O'Reilly, 2006), but in single parent families, which most of the Mothers in this study were (n=26), mothers often bear that pressure alone. Thomsen and Sorenson (2006) argue that providing the 'desired' trappings of motherhood contributes to an image of an elevated financial position, assisting in the construction of a positive maternal-identity - or a negative one if mothers are unable to provide not only the basics in terms of food and clothing, but also those commercially suggested 'essentials':

*"It's ironic really, you fall into bad ways partly because you want to provide things for your kids, and you end up in prison and it all goes to shit anyway... I feel like a worse mum for being in prison than I did for being skint, but I just wanted them to have nice things you know, not even flash things... just nice things."* (Tanya)

Some of the Mothers, particularly those who lived a 'good lifestyle' (Tarian), from their offending had originally begun offending to 'earn more money than I ever could have legit' (Tarian). Tarian, Kady, Maggie and Tia all explicitly stated that their original motivation to offend was to mitigate their poor financial position, to provide 'nice things' (Tia) for their children, or to try to reduce a level of debt that was having an impact on their lives. Kady described offending to 'save the family home'. She felt she had had 'no choice' but to offend as the family were facing eviction:

*"What was I meant to do? My mother hadn't told me about the debt, so I found out with two weeks' notice, where was I going to get £1,000 in two weeks, bank loans aren't options for like people like us man, ... I know I did wrong... but how else man? How else could I have got £1,000 pounds in two weeks? It was wrong though, I know. But well... we kept the house."* (Kady)

For the Mothers, living in poverty was not their only challenge but it was significant. Mothers described the hopelessness and powerlessness of living on benefits. Facing

benefit sanctions, unstable employment<sup>43</sup> or unemployment compounded their often already difficult circumstances:

*"... it was no one thing really, it was all of it. It was all shit, but it all looks worse with no money, don't it."* (Beth)

Parenting through poverty takes a great deal of coping energy (Ghate and Hazel, 2002). Financially challenged Parents, and especially single mothers, face multiple disadvantages and often are parenting with already depleted personal resources in a society not structured to support them. It is not surprising that mothers in such circumstances, sometimes in the midst of the 'desperation', described by Ghate and Hazel (2002:216), fall afoul of the law. What perhaps is more worthy of note is how many women actually *do* manage to parent their children alone, and parent them well, despite the multiple challenges they face in our structurally unequal society (Hackett, 2015). It is not uncommon for poverty to be a factor in relation to mothers' imprisonment. In Baldwin and Epstein's (2017), study, several mothers were imprisoned for debt, or poverty-related issues including stealing nappies. Experiencing poverty or addiction issues was relevant to Mothers imprisonment impacting on their view of themselves as mothers:

*"How could I call myself a good mother when I couldn't give them what they needed, let alone what they wanted."* (Nicola)

The multiple challenges the Mothers faced contributed to poor mental-health and exacerbated existing mental-health conditions. Resulting in 'depression', 'emotional fatigue', 'stress', and 'desperation' (Ghate and Hazel, 2002:216). However, for the Mothers, the discrepancy between their 'ideal' mother self and the mother they were able to be in their circumstances was a contributing factor to their mental wellbeing (Higgins, 1987; Liss et al, 2013). The relationship between poverty, mental-health and maternal-identity was clear:

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<sup>43</sup> The number of people on zero hours contracts has drastically increased in recent years - with significantly more women than men being on such a contract: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/398576/number-of-employees-zero-hour-contracts-gender/#statisticContainer>

*“When they cut my benefits because I missed an appointment, I just felt like giving up, you know not being here, I just felt ‘what’s the point’, I felt useless as a mother... useless.” (Nicola)*

Many of the Mothers struggled to secure support for their mental-health issues, adding to the complexity of their situations. This is typical and symptomatic of structural failure to support criminal and social justice services, which often then disproportionately affects women (Hackett, 2015). For several Mothers, their mental-health issues interacted with their limited financial resources, trauma-filled histories and controlling or abusive relationships, creating a ‘perfect storm’. Rita, Annie, Nicola, Emma, Sam and Cynthia all disclosed that they had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder or severe depression. Annie and Rita both offended whilst in a ‘full-blown bipolar episode’ (Annie).

*“I had this fine to pay and I was just obsessed with it... really paranoid. I was facing eviction because I hadn’t paid my bedroom tax, I couldn’t cope - my brother would just tell me to pull myself together cos he couldn’t see I was ill, I’d tried suicide and failed, everything, everything was just too much.” (Annie)*

Cynthia disclosed that she had felt suicidal on at least two occasions, she had at various points been received into secure psychiatric care as opposed to prison. She openly stated that some of her offending represented ‘cries for help’, including setting fire to herself, for which she was imprisoned (because she had been in a public place).

*“I’ve done [prison] nine or ten times, twice in a [psychiatric] hospital instead of prison, sometimes came out homeless ... so then it would never be long before I was back... but mostly I did deliberate acts to get help, self-harm and public disorder to get help, arson to get help, shoplifting to get help. The last time, the judge didn’t want to sentence me, he said I needed help, but probation couldn’t find a place for me because it was arson... serious isn’t it, see?... so I had to go to prison. There was nowhere else, see.” (Cynthia)*

A further six Mothers disclosed mental-health issues. Most were not in receipt of adequate support prior to their prison sentences. All but one had requested support: some had received intermittent support and three were prescribed anti-psychotic medication (Sam, Annie, Cynthia). Seventeen of the Mothers volunteered information

(they were not asked about medication) that they were prescribed anti-depressants or had been in the past. For most of the Mothers their mental-health issues were deeply rooted in trauma and abuse, which for some had resulted in 'self-medicating' (Dee), which often in turn led to addictions.

### 6.1.2 Abuse, trauma and addiction

Couvrette et al (2016) highlighted the complex and interwoven relationship between trauma, addiction and motherhood, suggesting that addiction/substance misuse provides an additional 'layer' of judgement over mothers. Most addicted mothers are 'deeply traumatised', not only by whatever prompted their substance misuse in the first instance, but also by the additional guilt they feel as 'failed' mothers (Baldwin et al, 2015). Of the Mothers who had issues with addiction (n=16), all disclosed abuse or trauma histories, which they linked to their substance misuse. This is not untypical. Over half of all women who enter prison have experienced abuse in some form (Bromley Briefings, 2019). For many women, the only way they can cope with the traumatic legacy of abuse is to obscure their memories and associated feelings with substances like alcohol and drugs; for many it is the only alternative to suicide (Walker and Towl, 2016; Motz et al, 2020). Beth, the youngest Mother in this research, illustrates:

*"Sometimes just being alive was hard. I was so wrapped up in trying to cope with my past it was hard to live in the present you know... hard to be the mum I should be."* (Beth)

Similarly, Lauren and Nicola traced their substance misuse back to their traumatic experiences:

*"Nothing went right in my life from the minute it [childhood rape] happened you know, I was a good kid you know, I had plans, I was going places... but after that I just couldn't cope, I was on a slippery slope to nowhere."* (Lauren)

As a direct consequence of her addictions, Nicola's three children were taken into care, two, several years prior to her most recent offence and one at her most recent sentence. Nicola had a long history of substance misuse and addiction which had begun in her teenage years. Nicola had been a victim of sexual exploitation and rape as a teenager

and had struggled to cope with her experiences and emotions. She was bullied at school due to local publicity surrounding her case. In her words, she felt everyone *'knew'* she was *'dirty'*. Nicolas' mother had also experienced child sexual abuse and Nicola described her mothers' parenting as *'shit'*. Many of the Mothers described circumstances which warranted help and support, which for most was not forthcoming. Nicola, like Beth, Shanice, Dee, Cynthia, Mary, and Carla, explicitly attributed her addictions and mental-health issues to past experiences of abuse and/or to her childhood trauma, a common phenomenon (Malloch, 2004; Woods, 2007; O'Malley, 2018;):

*"The only time I could cope was when I was off my head... the rest of the time it was just too painful... it's a lot to come to terms with you know... all that stuff... it tortures you."* (Beth)

*"I hated the fact I'd become my mother, I needed alcohol to cope with everything... everything from my past and actually everything I was living in... it blocked it out, dulled the pain... I tried counselling but that literally did my head in... pardon the pun... so I just went back to drinking."* (Mary)

Cynthia had a long history of drug and alcohol abuse and had also used substances as a means of *'coping'*. Others described *'dealing with'* (Ursula) or *'blocking out'* (Lauren) their emotions and trauma as a result of abuse of one description or another:

*"I was dealing with so many issues, so many issues, it was all brushed under the carpet... the abuse I mean... no one listened to me, so I drank, and I took drugs, I know drinking and drugs are self-harm really but I didn't know how else to deal with it."* (Cynthia)

Despite their substance misuse being described as a coping-mechanism, some of the Mothers struggled with the consequences of engaging in an activity they saw as incompatible with motherhood. Mothers repeatedly described how being a mother who misused substances was *'at odds'* with how a mother *'should behave'* (Shanice), this challenging their maternal self-esteem. Mothers who misuse substances *and* break the law are often perceived as *'triple deviant'*, because they are deviating from societal, feminine and motherhood norms (Malloch, 1999; O'Malley, 2018, 2020). Zedner (2010:332) suggests this is not something that male addicts, even those who are fathers,

experience in the same way, and arguing, 'lack of sympathy' for women who 'escape misery' in addiction is commonplace.

The Mothers were very aware of the contempt and derision they received as mothers using substances. They felt that as addicted mothers they were perceived as '*selfish*', not '*putting the needs of the kids first*' (Sandra), and therefore as undeserving of support. The Mothers negatively evaluated themselves as mothers, internalising shame and guilt concluding they were 'bad mothers' (Liss et al, 2013), leading to further substance misuse in order to block out their feelings. This triggered a perpetual cycle of substance misuse, maternal-guilt and shame, further substance misuse to bloc-out maternal guilt and shame - and so on (Baldwin et al, 2015), creating a "*cycle that I just couldn't escape*" (Beth).

Alongside their own internal performance assessments (Sutherland, 2010), Mothers were subject to widespread formal and informal scrutiny (Ruddick, 1983; Rose, 1999; Liss et al, 2013). This impacted on the Mothers' willingness to seek help and support. For some Mothers, the stakes were high, and they attempted to secure support for their complex needs whilst trying to navigate their way through systems that at every turn had the potential to remove their children. Mothers described being wary of asking for help, fearing formal negative evaluation or state assessment or surveillance that might result in their being deemed a 'mother not coping', 'not able to protect her children', or simply just not 'good enough' (Rose, 1999; Barnes, 2015):

*"I really wanted help but knew if I asked then the spotlight would really be on me, and I just didn't want to risk losing my kids."* (Shanice)

Not all Mothers who misused substances necessarily viewed themselves as bad mothers despite widespread disapprobation (Enos, 2001; Aiello and McQueeny, 2016). Particularly if their drug-related offending brought financial benefits or if they were still able to meet their children's basic needs (Couvrette et al, 2016). This was true for some of the Mothers, for others there was a process of realisation that addiction was not compatible with motherhood and that it had impacted on their ability to mother, and to mother well:

*“You don’t see it when you are living in it... you know what I mean... in it, living it you don’t think about the times you are not there for them... but I do now.” (Ursula)*

Similarly, Dee and Tia talked about a developing awareness that they had not been ‘emotionally there’ (Dee) or ‘emotionally available’ (Tia), when they were in the midst of their addiction. Being ‘available’ and present as mothers was something discussed by several Mothers, and some struggled with the fact that their addiction or their imprisonment had impacted on their availability. Which in turn impacted on their perceived self-esteem and worth as *mothers*.

As observed by Garey (1995) and Couvrette et al. (2016), some mothers reshaped their guilt or provided justification and ‘evidence’ of positive aspects of their mothering whilst minimising their substance misuse and its impact on their children, *“They never saw me use, ever; I was careful.” (Tanya)*.

*“I don’t feel guilty because I know I was providing for them through my dealing, they went without nothing.” (Tarian)*

Motherhood can be a valuable source of moral worth and self-esteem (Aiello and McQueeney, 2016:34), and some of the Mothers were steadfast in their determination to retain a positive maternal identity. Mothers defended their ‘good mother’ status by offering ‘proof’ of how much they loved their children, and their maternal achievements (vicariously through their children).

*“They [social services] called me a functioning addict, that was the term, and I did function, I fed them, I clothed them, I took them to school, I didn’t use in front of them... well they were upstairs, but they only saw me do it once. I always thought the kids were alright, they’ve got family providing stuff for them too, providing love and affection for them that I wasn’t providing for them.” (Dee)*

*“My social worker said they are very ‘resilient’ children, and that’s down to me... I mean they went through twelve raids and were ok, they can take*



*certain situations... [...] when I knew I was going away [to prison], I gave them a good Christmas, they got everything they wanted... but then they have always had the best trainers, best everything. I've done this [sold drugs] so we can all be a bit more comfortable. Like our Mario, he would have a sleep over and there's not many mams would say oh well order anything from the pizza place you want... most would get a Tesco pizza if they were lucky".*  
(Tarian)

Echoing earlier studies (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; Masson, 2019), there were many missed opportunities to help and support the Mothers. Several Mothers described explicitly asking for help:

*"I needed help, but I didn't need to go prison, if the help had been there I wouldn't have, and I wouldn't have been separated from her [daughter]." (Annie)*

Dee described once asking for help *'before things got really bad'*. She described being so *'off her head on crack'*, she had *'passed out'* on the sofa and the social worker had climbed in through the window to see her. Dee disclosed to him she was smoking crack, that her partner had died and that she *'needed help'*. She described how he looked in her cupboards, and over the next couple of days phoned the school to check on the children's welfare:

*"He came back – climbed in the window again and said, 'Dee your house is clean, there is food in the cupboards, everything seems to be fine with the kids and school. I really don't know how I am supposed to support you'. My life fell apart after that." (Dee)*

Dee provides yet another example of where severe cuts to public sector funding has resulted in reduced services because of limited staffing and resources (Barnes, 2015). Subsequently having implications (especially for women), regarding the point at which a service can intervene or provide support. For example, much of social-service provision has become firefighting or crisis-management as opposed to primary, supportive or preventative work that would provide better outcomes for mothers and their children (Barnes, 2015; Morriss, 2018).

Several Mothers felt their imprisonment was a result of being inadequately supported in the community. They articulated clearly that it was in the community where their issues began and where their maternal identity had already begun to spoil.

Schram (1999), and Gunn and Canada (2015), suggest that for addicted mothers there are multiple traversing stigmas that go beyond social, gendered and motherhood norms, which then taint the ideals of both 'good woman' and 'good mother'. This occurred on multiple levels, contributing to the Mothers spoiling maternal identity. Interestingly, despite acknowledging the failure of the 'systems' to intervene and support them, the Mothers internalised their 'failure' as mothers rather than contextualising the broader structural failures to support mothers (and women) per se. Despite motherhood arguably being the single most important safeguard for society's future generations, and the most governed (Rose, 1999), there remains a failure to adequately resource, fund and maintain the services that support women, especially woman with children (O'Reilly, 2016; Booth, 2020).

### **6.1.3 Mothers not mothered**

Although commonly noted as a relevant criminogenic factor in the backgrounds of women in prison (Carlen, 1983), women's experiences of being mothered has not yet been well investigated or evidenced in literature. In this study, the Mothers' assessments of their own mothers, and their own experiences of being mothered were clearly based on the widely accepted ideas and ideologies of traditional motherhood (Chapter 3). Providing the Mothers with a double-edged sword, i.e., they measured their own mothers against these established criteria, yet they were the same criteria with which they assessed themselves; and a fact of which the Mothers were all too aware of; they were the same criteria that others used to judge *them*.

Nicola, like several Mothers (n=15), reflected on her experience of being poorly mothered. Concluding this had an impact on her own ability to mother. Importantly, also on how she had coped (or not) with her past trauma:

*“My mother was shit really; I know that sounds bad, but she was. She wasn’t like other mothers ... she just seemed blank most of the time. When what happened to me happened... she wasn’t really there for me you know, I think the social thought about putting me in care cos they could see it... that she struggled with it and didn’t help me, but I dunno I think they just forgot about me in the end. Anyway, so yeah... I didn’t learn how to be a mum from her.” (Nicola)*

Mothers who spoke of being poorly, negatively or inadequately mothered and the impact this had had on them often described being ‘*determined*’ (Sam) not to repeat the ‘mistakes’ their mothers had made. Several Mothers became reflective during the interviews. Making connections, sometimes for the first time, about their past experiences of being mothered and their own experiences of mothering. Stewart (2015) argues this is very important in terms of ‘breaking cycles’ and being a key feature of her work as a forensic-psychotherapist with mothers in prison.

*“My mother was crap. Crap childhood, crap mum, crap life, what do my girls have?... crap mum, I really wanted to do it better.” (Emma)*

Mothers who had experienced poor mothering were angry with themselves that they had not ‘*done better*’ (Sam), but equally seemed to accept or believe that there was an inevitability about their own ‘*failure*’ (Nicola) as mothers:

*“My mother wasn’t there for me, I lost her to addiction, she died to addiction and we went into foster care, I learned through counselling that my addiction... all that happened to me... it wasn’t all my fault, I’ve made bad choices yeah... but it wasn’t my fault ... not with my life, with my childhood, you know what I mean?... with my mum... two dead addict parents, addiction it’s genetic innit?... what chance did I have really, your childhood traumas, they come back... they get you... they gave me addiction, addiction made me a criminal, being a criminal gave me prison... all traceable back innit?” (Dee)*

Sam, whose emotionally abusive mother would regularly leave the family home for months on end, telling her and her siblings it was their fault she was leaving - reflected:

*“I didn’t want to be like her, she was a cow really, pure and simple, what kind of mother behaves like that? I was determined to be better than her, I hated her because she left me, but then when I think about it what did I go and do? I left my daughter too, I went to prison, I suppose my daughter must have felt the same way I did really. Just not important enough.” (Sam)*

Stewart (2015) reiterates the importance of recognising the significance of mothers’ own experiences of being mothered. She argues that for many criminalised mothers this bears some relationship to their life chances and choices and their own ability to mother. Particularly to mother to widely accepted, expected, exacting external standards (Chapter 2). Stewart (2015), in accepting the theory and work of Winnicott (1967) and Bowlby (1969), observed in criminalised mothers with whom she worked, the frequency with which they had not experienced ‘good enough’ mothering (Winnicott’s term), or had a ‘deficient’ maternal relationship. Stewart argues that when early years are marred by neglect and chaos the child does not develop well *‘physically, emotionally, or cognitively’*. Making them more likely to act emotionally and on impulse. Diane, who was serving a life sentence for killing her abusive husband, was very angry with her own mother, directly attributing her adult experiences and her offence to her childhood.

*“I had the most horrendous upbringing from age 4, beaten starved, abused by my mother and stepfather and all of her boyfriends in between. Witnessing all her sour relationships. I stepped out into the world and into violent relationships of my own. I had no chance.” (Diane)*

Hackett (2015:45) suggests that mothers experiencing mental distress to an extent that it limits their own mothering abilities, are ‘othered’. In agreement with Stewart, Hackett suggests that women often find themselves in these multiply disadvantaged and challenging positions, not always because of personal or individual failure, but because *‘they are often disadvantaged as a result of discrimination, inequality, weakened socio-economic positions and victimisation’* (2015:46). There is little doubt that many Mothers in this study experienced a lack of mothering by mothers impoverished by their own circumstances, or that this had an effect on their mental wellbeing. Mary, who had

struggled with mental-health issues from an early age, left home at 14, in an attempt to 'escape' her addicted and abusive mother:

*"I only really remember my mother as just being 'there', not absent, but not present either. Drunk more often than not and she was obsessed with her pills. ... [...]. They definitely meant more to her than I did, I can't imagine her getting that stressed if she couldn't find me. I always felt like I was a burden, in the way, an irritation. So as soon as I was able to, I left. I left home just before I was 15."* (Mary)

Mary's subsequent transient lifestyle left her vulnerable to abuse, and without the resilience and wisdom that Stewart (2015) suggests comes from a stable mother (or mother substitute), Mary found herself in a series of relationships with abusive men (i.e. replicating the cycle). Mary goes on to say how she got pregnant very quickly but was 'pleased' because she felt that having a child 'to love' and for it to love her 'right back' gave her, her 'own family'. Nonetheless, Mary describes how her life swiftly spiralled out of control. Through a period of deteriorating and painful circumstances, Mary became addicted to alcohol. She experienced multiple violent and controlling relationships, lost the care of her sons to the LA, and found herself in prison. All of this Mary felt was traceable back to her childhood and her relationship with her mother. She felt she 'didn't have any self-worth to fight with' because she had never 'felt loved'.

*"It's probably not surprising that I entered the world I did. I never sold myself for sex, [...], but the drink got me too. In some ways I understand her a bit better now, maybe she used the drink to block it all out too - I get that. I would end up trusting men who would hurt me, ply me with drugs, try to get me on the game, knock me about. It was like I had a sign on my head saying, 'do this, treat me like a cunt, I'm used to it!'"*  
(Mary)

Cynthia, described a childhood also marred by maternal neglect, reflected on her pathway into an offending and substance-reliant lifestyle:

*"I'm not saying it was her fault... but we never got no affection from our mam, not even when we were babies, she was a drinker, see. If my mam*

*had said that [I love you] to us when were young, us girls and a boy, well maybe we would have turned out different... who knows... but I think we would have.” (Cynthia)*

Early experiences of mothers who are distracted, addicted or abusive can have a devastating and lifelong impact on a child (Stewart, 2015:173); but, she argues, it is important not to solely lay the blame for such experiences in the laps of the mothers, but rather on ‘*a society that fails to support them*’ (*ibid*). Part One has demonstrated how additional circumstantial factors mean that many mothers - even those entering prison for a first offence - enter prison ‘*already feeling they have failed as mothers because of their life chances and life choices*’ (Baldwin, 2017:233). Their maternal identity is already *spoiling* (Goffman, 1963). Criminalised and imprisoned mothers are often struggling to hold on to a positive sense of self as a mother in a world seemingly trying to undermine that view.

#### **6.1.4 Summary**

Many of the mothers entered prison with an already spoiling maternal identity. Most of the Mothers entered prison from disadvantaged backgrounds where they had faced multiple challenges which impacted on their maternal identity and maternal self-esteem. The Mothers narratives reveal the many missed opportunities to support them, either as children or as adults. Mothers were reluctant to seek support as mothers for fear of being negatively assessed and they feared losing their children. Earlier support might have prevented the mothers being criminalised at all. Significantly, and at least, Cynthia, Annie, Mary, Nicola, Carla, Ursula Alex and Emma (19%) of the mothers had disclosed that they had experienced violent/controlling relationships with male partners who had either directly contributed /caused their law breaking behaviour – who had pressured the women into committing their offences and had benefitted directly from them.

**Part Two** will explore the physical prison space and the dynamics within. Revealing how they can contribute to a highly stressful, frustrated and painful experience of incarcerated motherhood. It will show the ways the Mothers sought to use the ‘skills of motherhood’ (Kitzinger, 1994:242) to navigate through the prison system via their relationships with each other, with prison staff, and through their children and outside contacts.

# Chapter 6 (continued) Part two:

## Mothers Inside

### 6.2 Introduction

Part-One revealed how Mothers entered prison with an already spoiling and reduced maternal identity. Part-two takes up that narrative from within the carceral space, examining how the maternal experience is assembled and challenged in and through this space, thereby germinating an enduring spoiled maternal identity.

Conflicting opinions exist about whether the maternal in-prison experience can be an opportunity for positive and focused reflection, a reprieve from external and oppressive pressures (O'Malley, 2018), a cruel, disproportionate and largely unnecessary punishment and separation from children (Moore et al, 2018; Minson, 2019; Baldwin, 2019) or perhaps most controversially, that it is no different from the experience of prison for 'non-mothers' (Loper, 2006). Loper (2006:93) suggests it is *'no more difficult to be a mother in prison than it is to be a non-mother'*. This research provides strong evidence to dispute this. Mothers in this study described how they struggled specifically *as mothers* to adjust to prison life, and how they felt that prison for a mother is *'a million times harder than if you're not a mother'* (Jaspreet).

Embodying Goffman's (1961:24) concept of mortification, this chapter demonstrates how imprisoned mothers become *more* 'spoiled' in their maternal self through the 'abasements, degradations, humiliations' and deprivations of prison. This interacted with their motherhood and imported beliefs about 'good' motherhood. Through the themes of 'Entering the Prison Space and Early Days', 'Mothering and Grandmothering from a Distance', and 'Regimes, Rules and Relationships', Part Two explores the women's reactions to entering prison *as mothers*, and the impact on their maternal identity. It examines how the prison system frustrates the maternal role, as mothers and grandmothers are separated from their 'home world' and the tasks associated therein (Quinlan, 2011), leading to role dispossession. For many Mothers, their mothering

activities and, consequently, their mothering role was significantly reduced or stripped away by the prison, rendering the mortification of motherhood complete.

## 6.2.1 Entering the Prison Space and Early days

The prison environment brought specific challenges, opportunities and experiences to the Mothers, discrete from the separation from their children. This included the actual prison space itself; whether the prison was open or closed<sup>44</sup>, how it was organised, the regime, and Mothers relationships with prison staff and each other. These factors either mitigated or aggravated the pains associated with Mothers' maternal experience, which were disrupted, altered, or destroyed by prison (Lockwood, 2018; Baldwin, 2018).

### 6.2.1.1 'It just hit me'

Mothers spoke of the shock, horror, fear and shame they felt on entering the 'total institution' of the prison space (Goffman, 1961). Most Mothers found the experience of entering custody and the early days and weeks of their sentences profoundly painful and harmful. Like many prisoners do, Maggie described how she entered reception and immediately felt a sense of bewilderment and shock at being there at all. She contextualised this by her motherhood. Stating that her bewilderment was *immediately* coupled with a feeling of shame that specifically related to her children '*... that's it... I've let them [her children] all down*'. Other Mothers described similar feelings: for some this started in the Court or in the 'van'<sup>45</sup>, the prison transport that had conveyed them from court to prison but *confirmed* on arrival at the prison. Kady described how she was completely disorientated having being abused by male prisoners in the 'van' for '*hours*'<sup>46</sup>,

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<sup>44</sup> See also appendix 22 In the female estate, prisons are defined only as 'open' or 'closed' as women are not categorised in the same way as male prisoners (see also footnote 5). Ten of the twelve women's prisons in the UK are closed-prisons, despite more than 80% of the women being in prison for non-violent offences. See also <file:///C:/Users/lbald/Downloads/SN05646.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> See appendix 19 for image of prison transport

<sup>46</sup> Although guidelines suggest against it, it is not uncommon for female prisoners and male prisoners to travel in the same vehicle - verbal abuse/threats between prisoners, especially male to female, is not uncommon. Women are usually the 'last drop off' as they will be furthest away and so are often in the vehicle for long periods of time.



after being ‘shamed’ in Court, but said that was ‘nothing’ compared to how she felt when she arrived at the prison:

*“I was exhausted after that awful journey, I cried for most of it. The things they said were vile [...] I didn’t think I could feel any worse... but man was I wrong... nothing can prepare you for it [entering the prison] nothing.”* (Kady)

The Mothers’ feelings of powerlessness, shame and disorientation during their early days in custody were compounded by and interrelated to their mother status:

*“Going to prison as a mother is I think the worst thing... I genuinely can’t think of anything worse as a mother to do to your children... I felt like I was watching it as if it was someone else. I was numb with shock but at the same time all I could think about was my children.”* (Jaspreet)

Diane stated that entering prison made her feel like ‘the worst mother in the world’. Annie, like many mothers, had not expected a custodial sentence (Minson, 2020) and was sent to prison in shock after taking her daughter to school on that morning. Annie expected to be able to make calls to family to find out where her daughter was, who had picked her up from school. She was not given her reception phone call<sup>47</sup>, which led to untold stress:

*“I was supposed to get a reception phone call, but I didn’t get it because there was so many of us on the prison transport that day. I was literally going crazy crazy crazy. It was driving me mad not even knowing she was safe. It was hours and hours before I finally got an officer to check for me that she was safe. I genuinely thought I would have a heart attack from the stress.”* (Annie)

Annie’s experience was not unusual, echoing various previous findings by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Many Mothers (n=14) stated they had experienced

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<sup>47</sup> See guidance regarding reception phone calls: [https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2015/psi-07-2015-pi-06-2015-early-days-see also custody.pdf](https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/offenders/psipso/psi-2015/psi-07-2015-pi-06-2015-early-days-see%20also%20custody.pdf)  
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Prisoner%20Information%20Pages/04%20Keeping%20in%20contact%20with%20family%20and%20friends.pdf>

delays in accessing their reception phone call. Mothers described how the delayed contact, especially with their children, impacted negatively on them, making their first days in custody - when they were at their most vulnerable, even more challenging. Tia, who experienced a traumatic arrest at her daughter's school and in front of her children (discussed in the following chapter), was remanded immediately. She spoke of her desperation to speak to her daughter, saying, *'I just wanted to know she was safe, to apologise to her, to ask her to forgive me... It was all I could think about'*. Rita did have her reception call, but all of her children were out *'trick or treating'*. Revealing the complex emotions mothers in prison often struggle with, Rita spoke of feeling *'relieved'* that *'life just carried on for them'*, but *'torn'* because she wanted them to miss her, and then also *'guilty'* for thinking that.

Mothers spoke of not being able to *'settle'* (Sophie), *'think straight'* (Cynthia), *'concentrate on anything'* (Karen), *'sleep'* (Annie), or *'eat'* (Sophie), until they had seen or at least been in contact with their children. Missing their children permeated every aspect of their prison life and to many it was all-consuming, especially in the early days and weeks. Taranpreet, who had convinced herself that her toddler children had not recognised her on their first visit, wrote *'I'm totally broken, [...]. I'm literally dead inside, [...] the mere fact my own children don't recognise me has torn me apart... [...] I've lost everything'*. Like several of the Mothers, Taranpreet struggled to get through her first days and weeks in custody. Six Mothers spoke of feeling suicidal during that period, sadly not unusual for mothers in prison (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). It was the most emotionally intense period for most of the Mothers. Beth states, *'I just didn't want to be here anymore, I felt like I'd lost her [her baby] forever, if I wasn't a mother anymore what was the point of me?'*. Some Mothers made explicit reference to suicide:

*"I must admit I did have very negative thoughts, I'm ashamed to admit it crossed my mind to take my life... obviously I didn't!"* (Mavis)

Kady felt that it was only the fact that an officer *'was kind'* to her and *'made time'* to support her as a newly pregnant mum that she *'got through that first week'* and if not for that officer, Kady might have taken her life.

Visits as well as phone calls were often delayed, this had a significant impact on the Mothers' wellbeing (and likely their children's wellbeing). Tia was sentenced just before

Christmas and had not yet seen her children after three weeks in custody. She was told she was being moved to another prison the day before her children were due to visit. She was already more than two hours away from home, the prison she moved to was a further 150 miles away (almost three hours) from her home:

*“They shipped me out to [name of prison the day before the visit] Just because the prison was full they said - simple as that... I said I can’t go, I can’t go on the ship out I haven’t seen my kids yet... they are coming tomorrow, and they just said ‘the visit will be cancelled’. There is no emotion, no sorry... the answer was just ‘tough you are going, you are booked on the van’. I was devastated, I couldn’t believe it.” (Tia)*

Tia goes on to say that staff forgot to cancel the visit and her children (aged four and twelve) arrived at the prison expecting to see their mother, whom they had last seen when she was arrested at the school gates three weeks before. Tia stated ‘...to say they were devastated is an understatement, apparently Theo [the 4-year-old] could be heard crying right through the hall, I was told’. Tia’s move meant that the children and their caregiver would have to stay overnight in a nearby hotel to facilitate a visit, adding further financial burden to a family already struggling. Nonetheless, the visit was booked, the accommodation was booked with the cheapest no refund option. Three days before this visit Tia was told she had a further court appearance in a Court near her previous prison. However, when she arrived she was told her presence was not required. As she had been travelling for a total of five hours by this time she was asked if she needed a toilet break. She did but the transport from that particular Court only served her previous prison. So that was taken and readmitted to, despite her children’s replacement visit being booked at her new prison and where all her belongings were. By the time new visiting arrangements were made, six weeks and Christmas had passed without Tia’s children seeing their mother.

Tia’s experience was not unusual. Several Mothers identified that being separated from their family was generally ‘hard’, but that prolonged periods of separation from their children was worse. Rita, who also had to wait weeks for a visit, summed up how many of the women felt by stating:

*"...at that point, I would have given up all access to all the rest of my family, even my own mum, for that one visit from my children... I didn't feel I could function without seeing them, for the first time in my life I considered self-harm for no other reason than I had no idea how to handle the pain." (Rita)*

About a third (n=13) of the Mothers disclosed they had self-harmed at some point in their lives. Mothers (n=4) spoke of self-harming *directly* related to their mothering pain, especially during the early days and weeks, often the most vulnerable period for Mothers. Sam described self-harm 'as a way of coping [with missing her son]...*letting out the pain*'. (Sam). Mothers who self-harmed, like most other prisoners who self-harmed, had additional factors contributing to their self-harming behaviour, such as pre-existing mental health issues and trauma histories (Walker and Towl, 2016). Nonetheless, maternal emotions were a factor. Nicola had previously lost two children to the care system and her third child was taken on her reception into custody, '*yeah I thought about ending it, the pain was too much, another child, gone... I felt dead.*' (Nicola). Clearly, Mothers who self-harmed, missed their children and the associated guilt and shame of being a mother in prison was a trigger for both suicidal ideas and self-harming actions. Rita spoke of being in the cell next to a girl who attempted (unsuccessfully) to take her life after being informed that her child would be adopted. Rita spent the '*next few days trying to talk her out of killing herself*'.

Mothers are supposed to be asked about and tested for pregnancy on reception (MOJ, 2020). As noted in Chapter three, Smith (1999), Rubin (1984) and Kitzinger (1992), argue that pregnancy is an important aspect in relation to developing a healthy maternal identity (and obviously a healthy child). Being in prison frustrated mothers' efforts to view themselves or their pregnancy in a positive light (Abbott 2018). Kady, who found out she was pregnant on reception into prison, struggled to articulate her feelings at first but her meaning was clear:

*"I dunno... it was like... aww man... like pregnancy is a pure time innit... becoming a mum. Its special... and to be in prison for it... I can't describe it. It just felt wrong... more wrong than if I weren't [pregnant]." (Kady)*

Eight Mothers in the study were pregnant for some part or the whole of their incarceration. Not only did this provide yet another opportunity for additional surveillance by the authorities (Foucault, 1977), but also for additional, internal and external judgement and shaming. This was heavily influenced by traditional motherhood ideology about motherhood, with the additional layer of imported values and beliefs about pregnancy (Abbott et al, 2020).

### 6.2.2 Importation of 'traditional motherhood' values and beliefs

Mothers' 'worry' and concern about their families and especially their children 'outside' was the biggest adjustment for them in prison. Some women, and especially mothers, never do fully make that adjustment (Dye and Aday, 2019). Inextricably bound to challenges in adjustment for mothers was the imported beliefs about motherhood and a conscious or unconscious acceptance of traditional motherhood ideology:

*"Almost as soon as I went into the prison, I knew I would forever be looked at as a bad mother... and I felt like one too to be fair... there can't be much worse than a mother who goes to prison can there?" (Rita)*

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, throughout history, mothers, including imprisoned mothers, have internalised attributes and circumstances important and acceptable to 'good' mothering (Collins, 2020; Winnicott, 1987; Hays, 1996; Rich, 1975). Arguably the most fundamental of these widely held beliefs is that mothers '*are, or rather are supposed to be, just good*' (Baldwin, 2017:233). How well prisoners adapt to prison life is influenced by the deprivations of prison life (Goffman, 1961) and pre-prison characteristics which are imported into the prison (Dhami et al, 2007). Dhami et al (2007) argue that, although often seen as two discrete models of adaptation, both the deprivation (indigenous) and importation models are important and can and do co-exist, as evidenced in this study. The Mothers felt the deprivation of their maternal role keenly but were also greatly affected by the traditional motherhood values and beliefs they imported into the prison space. The traditional motherhood ideological framework which underpinned all of the Mothers' experiences was at the root of a great deal of guilt and shame. Primarily because the Mothers were measuring themselves against the aforementioned exacting and almost universal standards of motherhood or a mothers'

'code of conduct' (Baldwin, 2020). This perceived failure to 'measure up' triggered 'guilt and shame' which permeated their narratives.

Many of the Mothers spoke about the '*expectations*' and '*normals*' (Maggie) of motherhood and how accepted ideology of motherhood is fundamentally at odds with going to prison. The Corston Report (2007) states that many mothers who go to prison automatically feel like and are deemed as 'bad mothers', and Lockwood (2018: 157), identifies that imprisoned mothers are afforded less sympathy than mothers separated by other means. Embodying Sykes' (1958:79) concept of a 'morally acceptable identity', many of the Mothers struggled to retain a healthy and affirming maternal identity because of the self-imposed principle that you cannot be a 'good' mother *and* go to prison.

Queenie spoke about how her daughter '*shamed*' her as a mother and questioned how she could '*as a mother*' allow herself to be in a position where prison was '*even a possibility*'. Queenie goes on to say that as a grandmother, this was '*layered*', and that her motherhood *and* grandmotherhood were measured against her daughter's friends' mothers and mother-in-law, who were - by definition of the fact that they had not been to prison - '*better*' than her:

*"I'm compared to the other nanny all the time – the granny who hasn't been to prison – I can never be as good as her – because she hasn't been to prison....I'm the runt in the mother department now."* (Queenie)

Similarly, Maggie, also a grandmother and feeling the burden of expectations of motherhood, grandmotherhood and age, stated,

*"I was a good Mam, well I did my best... when I went to prison I felt like that was all wiped out, I'd failed... even worse because I'm a Nanna **and** a Mam, I'm meant to be respectable at my age..."* (Maggie).

Collins (2020), echoing Rich (1976), argues that 'guilt' is synonymous with motherhood. She suggests that 'cross-nationally' most mothers feel guilty about their 'failings' because they are set up to fail, due to impossibly high societal standards. Further, and importantly, she argues that 'maternal guilt' is compounded by society's failure to deliver structures and policies that actively support motherhood, including within the prison estate.

For the Mothers in this study, guilt as *'prison mothers'* (Danielle) went above and beyond the guilt familiar to most mothers (Sutherland, 2010; Collins (2020). Prison provided the hook on which to hang a sense of guilt, shame and perceived failure. Liss et al (2012:1113-4), suggest that although shame and guilt are often used synonymously, they are distinct emotions. They argue that guilt *'involves a negative evaluation of a specific behaviour'*, whereas shame *'represents a more global negative self-evaluation'* and social evaluation (*ibid*). The Mothers in this study used the terms interchangeably but referred to guilt more often in the 'in-prison' context, in relation to their physical absence in their children's lives, and also their children's own expressed pain at missing their mothers. Ursula described her deeply felt guilt, which pervaded her whole narrative, particularly triggered by one specific painful conversation with one of her daughters:

*"And then I remember Irie coming, so she's my middle daughter, ... the one that's the gymnast, coming on a visit, I went to hug her at the end of the visit and said oh I love you Irie. And she goes 'mum don't do that again'. And I said what do you mean... what do you mean? She goes, 'don't say you love me'. And I said oh, what do you mean? She goes, 'mum, I'm going to tell you this, I'm going to tell you this once only... if you ever knew what love is you as my mother would have never put yourself in a position where you could have been taken away from me. So don't ever say you love me again'. And I think it was like a dagger in my heart that day. It felt like a dagger. The guilt man, the guilt... It felt like the worse pain ever and... I suppose it brought me to life in a way, you know, maybe.... I'm one of these people that probably needs painful experiences to learn. I went back to the cell and I really thought about it and I thought she's right, you know, here's the reality, I'm a shit mum because I'm in prison. At the end of the day how can you be a good mum, how can you even pretend to yourself you're a good mother, because you're actually separated from your children. You are not there for them and your children are in intense pain and you are not there, you are not available to them to ease their pain. So there isn't really anything that I can respond to that other than sit here and hold that. I suppose the only thing to be done is to make sure that I'm never in that position again and just hope that they'll forgive me at some point." (Ursula).*

Similarly, Rosie described her guilt and its relationship to her spoiled maternal identity:

*“I’ve missed so much, the guilt eats away at me knowing I wasn’t there for her first period, her first boyfriend, her first day at big school. She will always remember I wasn’t there. I feel guilty every single day. I feel like the worst mother in the world.”* (Rosie)

Rayna was explicit in rooting her ‘biggest guilt’ in the separation from her children, despite the fact that her mother was ill and subsequently died during her sentence:

*“Yes I felt guilty about my mother and not being there for her, for the family, of course I did, I don’t even know how to process that... but my biggest guilt was about not being there for my children. When they needed me most, I wasn’t there.”* (Rayna)

Tamika and Tanisha both mentioned the additional guilt and shame they felt as pregnant mothers in prison, especially on occasions such as attending hospital for maternity appointments in handcuffs. However, their ‘shame’ was not confined to outside appointments:

*“Being pregnant in prison is awful, you can feel people eyes on you judging you, I tried so hard to hide my bump all the time – I was scared for my baby, but I was mostly just ashamed.”* (Tamika)

Most pregnant women in prison spend their pregnancy feeling powerless and fearful of miscarrying or giving birth in prison, or alone in their cells (Abbott, 2018; Baldwin and Abbott et al, 2020, O’Malley et al 2021), fears echoed by the pregnant Mothers in this study. These complex concerns add to the guilt and shame by ‘reminding’ mothers that they are pregnant in abnormal circumstances. Arendell (2000) suggests that the ‘tasks of pregnancy’ and preparing for the birth are important aspects for a mother in developing a maternal identity. Mothers in prison are essentially denied this experience, at least until (and if) they secure a place on the prison MBU. Places are often not secured until very



late in pregnancy, or even after the birth<sup>48</sup> (Sikand, 2017). Thus, pregnant women in prison do not always go through the process of 'becoming a mother' in the way that free mothers do, via attending antenatal classes or buying baby clothes or preparing a nursery (Abbott, 2015:20). This can have a profound effect not only on a mother's maternal emotions and identity, but also the mother-child bond, which can have lifelong implications (Abbott et al, 2020; O'Malley et al, 2021).

*"I was so concerned with keeping my belly safe in there I didn't really think about it as a baby or even me as a mam... so when the baby was born I felt quite disconnected. I didn't feel like he was even mine"*  
(Tanisha)

As previously demonstrated, many of the Mothers had felt their maternal identity was already spoiling prior to them coming to prison. Some Mothers described a further spoiling having occurred in the court room and via judges' comments related to their motherhood, illustrating Collins' (2020) points about shame and social evaluation, and Liss et al's (2012) point about a fear of negative evaluation:

*"I would play over and over in my head what the judge said in court, he basically said I was not fit to be a mother, after he said that I didn't really hear anything else. My head was swimming."* (Carla)

Nicola's lawyer had informed the judge that her son would in all likelihood be adopted if she was given a custodial sentence, hoping that would be a mitigating factor. However, in fact Nicola felt it served to 'seal her fate':

*"The judge knew my other two were taken off me and so I think assumed that that would be best for my son, he took no notice of the fact that I'd been clean for years, that all that had happened... my relapse was*

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<sup>48</sup> In July 2020 following a review of pregnancy and new mother provisions in custody, new measures and recommendations are due to be implemented which seek to improve outcomes and make the MBU application earlier and easier. Staff are also due to receive training and guidance for working with pregnant and new mothers in custody, as directed by the MOJ: the author is involved in its development and implementation.

See

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/905559/summary-report-of-review-of-policy-on-mbu.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/905559/summary-report-of-review-of-policy-on-mbu.pdf)

*because of my mum [who had died], but he just said that social services had decided I wasn't a good enough mum to keep my other kids so why would I be good enough now... he actually said my son would be better off without me... words to that effect. It broke me. Everyone in that court looked at me like I was scum, a shit mother... scum."* (Nicola)

Maggie had offended as a way of trying to alleviate debt and had paid back most of what she had stolen. She was hoping for a non-custodial sentence, especially as she was a primary carer for her terminally ill husband and one of her grandchildren. Nonetheless, the judge had said to her, in words that Maggie stated she would never forget, that she could not *'hide behind her husband's illness, or her grandchild'*. Shockingly, the judge went further, stating:

*"You didn't think of these things when you stole, as a mother and a wife you should have been thinking of your family's needs. You were not. You took those risks knowing the potential consequences, and now Mrs Brown, those consequences have found you out."*

For most of the Mothers their identity as mothers was truly spoiled, and their motherhood was mortified, once they were imprisoned. Several Mothers used the phrase *'the worst mother in the world'*, revealing not only the strength of feeling with which they felt their failure, but also the significance of their comparison to other mothers and wider mothering 'standards'. Several Mothers felt their maternal identity was fully spoiled as they entered custody, for others it was gradual. Maggie described how, from the moment she entered prison, she knew that as a mother she had let her family down and that for her and her children she *'knew it would never be quite the same again'*. Similarly, Annie described how for her, being in prison was incompatible with 'good' motherhood:

*"Being in prison made me feel like I was just a rubbish mum... I know she felt abandoned, she missed me, that's all she kept saying, I need you she'd say... that was the one, I need to smell you, I don't know what you smell like anymore... what kind of mother can put her child through that and still think they are a good mum."* (Annie)

While Ursula described a gradual *'dawning'*, she had felt, as did Tarian and Dee, that when she first went to prison, she *'did not want to examine myself as a mother'*. Like Dee, Tia and Tarian, Ursula had stated that, despite her lifestyle and conviction, she had held on to a positive maternal identity and continued to describe herself as a *'good mum'*. However, once in prison the Mothers all struggled to retain that same view. Ursula, when speaking about the aforementioned visit from her daughter Irie, had previously *'held'* on to her belief for some time, but for her it disappeared in a *'moment'*:

*"In terms of how I felt about myself as a mother, I would say that when I first went to prison I was still of the mindset that I was a good mother, [...] I don't think I really wanted to really look at my mothering and so I just thought this is an occupational hazard, selling drugs, ... the kids are fine and they're not in care, they're with their dad, everything's fine... But then, because in that moment of understanding that I wasn't a good mother, nothing else about me made sense, did it. It's like my whole life fell away in that moment in the prison."* (Ursula)

Many of the Mothers expressed very clearly that they felt that prison life was *'different for mothers'* (Mavis), that prison would have been *'piss easy if I weren't a mother'* (Shanice). Even those who had current partners who were *'good'* fathers to their children felt that their role as mothers was more significant to their children, and to society, than that of the fathers. They were not all (although some did) saying explicitly that, as mothers their role was *more important* than the fathers', but that the *'traditional'* expectations and roles of motherhood meant they would be *'missed more'* (Karen) by their children than if it were their fathers who were incarcerated:

*"It's not him they go to when they are ill, or when they have forgotten their homework, or when they have an issue with friends, it's me, it's not him who takes time off work when they are poorly, it's not him who knows their favourite colour, or their best friends names... it's me... They go to him for money and lifts... don't get me wrong they love him just the same I think... but it's me they **rely** on; me they depend on to always just be there."* (Karen)

Annie put it simply, '*mums make it better*', availability, was something raised by most of the Mothers and because of their absence they felt they were failing their children, further challenging their maternal identity. Most of the Mothers felt their children and grandchildren were in good hands and that their alternative caregivers would be '*doing a good job*' (Rita).

Nevertheless, they worried about how their children would cope with their absence as well as dealing with the confirmation that they were bad or failed mothers. Being physically separated from their children was traumatic, as Ursula stated, '*I just wasn't there... that was the problem, I just wasn't there*'. However, not all mothers described this sense of guilt or failure, as Tarian and, to a lesser extent, Dee both felt that their actions and offending helped them to be better mothers and they refused to 'wear' the judgement of others, that they were by definition of their substance misuse and imprisonment automatically 'bad mothers'. Tarian stated:

*"I've never been a mamsie mam, I'd cook and clean and obviously I was a provider, but never been one to get on the floor and do puzzles with them and stuff, [...]... but we don't all have to be the same do we? Doesn't mean I love my kids less... do I feel guilty about my life no... they were always ok I made sure of it."* (Tarian)

Similarly, although Dee does later talk about her own feelings of guilt, she also spoke about how she felt the responsibility for her situation was not solely hers:

*"I'm not going feel guilty about it all... it is what it is, life happened to me you know... I didn't choose all that... and it all had consequences so why should I feel guilty about it all... I did my best with the shit hand I was dealt."* (Dee)

Powerfully evident was Mothers' resilience and hope, many of them had continued to mother well through complex and challenging circumstances, with hope of continuing this. Despite facing an uncertain future, imagining and planning (Warr, 2016) for their maternal future was an important part of the Mothers' hope. As Chapter 7 will further illustrate, hope was the antidote to guilt for many of the Mothers and provided the bridge between their past and present experiences and their anticipated 'better' futures.

A significant observation in the Mothers' absorption of traditional motherhood ideology was a collective sense that motherhood gave the women a sense of agency and power. The Mothers might have felt powerless in being unable to undertake as much active mothering as they would have liked, being subject to the regime of the prison, yet they found strength in just *being* mothers. Mothers felt that, *as mothers and grandmothers* they had achieved something that *'men can't do'* (Annie), something that could not be easily replicated, something *'special'* (Mavis). They were separated from their children or may even have had children removed from their care, but they were still mothers, they had borne children – and it mattered:

*"I might never see them again, but I have sons, I am a mother, and I will always be a mother, no one can take that from me."* (Nicola)

The Mothers took comfort and had a sense of marvel and achievement because as mothers they felt they were *'better than dads'* (Taranpreet). Where a Mother had been able to retain a sense of a positive maternal identity, she felt a sense of pride and would get angry and frustrated at attempts to minimise or reduce her mothering role. Beth, like others, felt, *'it's the only thing I'm good at'*. As O'Reilly (2016) succinctly states, *'motherhood matters'*, and it most certainly did to the Mothers in this study.

A significant factor of the everyday lived prison experiences of mothers in prison is the support they receive from outside (Dye and Aday, 2019). Demonstrating traditional models of motherhood and family, the most common source of support the Mothers referred to came from their own mothers - who were often their children's caregivers and despite sometimes having troubled relationships with them. Traditional models of family and mothering (Morgan, 1999; O'Reilly, 2016) evoke *'natural order'* and a series of expectations, for example that in times of need, mothers *'should'*, can, do and will provide support, encouragement, guidance, motivation and hope throughout their child's life.

For some of the older Mothers and grandmothers in this study, this significant source of support was not always available: four of the Grandmothers' in the study's parents were already deceased, others had very elderly parents and two had very sick parents. The expectation was that they as daughters *'would and should'* take on the caring role - to *'return the favour'* (Margaret), by looking after their own parents in their advancing years.

This echoes the findings of Dye and Aday (2019) who worked with female lifers, and Wahidin's (2004) research with older women prisoners.

This was yet another source and layer of guilt for the Mothers who were also grandmothers, and a source of worry for the older Mothers in the study. They worried about their parents' health and their own absence and subsequent inability to provide care and support for them; and within that, should their parents become ill, then who would look after their own children? Maggie's elderly father died whilst she was in custody and she felt that her mother blamed her for 'causing the stress' that killed her father. She was very angry with Maggie for not being there *'like a daughter should be'*. They rarely spoke after Maggie was released. Such thoughts and emotions occupied the minds of the grandmothers, together with the parallel worries and feelings that they (as per the expectations of motherhood) were failing their own adult children, *and* their grandchildren, *and* their own elderly parents.

Being physically apart from their children and grandchildren was a source of universal pain, as was not actually being able to 'do' the tasks associated with mothering (and daughtering), adding to the negative impact on the Mothers' and grandmothers' maternal identities and self-esteem.

### 6.2.3 Mothering and Grandmothering from a Distance

All of the Mothers in the study articulated that there was a distinction between 'being' a mother and actually *'doing the job'* (Beth) of mothering. The 'actions of mothering' or, as O'Reilly (2006) calls it, 'motherwork', was hugely important to the Mothers and grandmothers. The 'stripping away' (Goffman, 1961) of their maternal role and their maternal identity was painful:

*"There's a massive difference in actually **being** a mother and actually **doing** it, anyone can get pregnant, anyone can have a kid, but that's not the doing bit is it? Being there for them, being reliable, being on their side and putting them first, loving them more than anything or anyone, that's being a mother **and** doing the job."* (Beth)

### 6.2.3.1 Reflective, active and invisible mothering

Enos (2001) suggests that 'roles' in life reaffirms who we are by what we do; thus, as a fire fighter fights fires, and a nurse nurses, she argues that mothers need to mother in order to 'feel like' mothers. It is clear from previous research (Easterling et al, 2019) that the disruption to their mothering role was hard for mothers *and* grandmothers to bear. Losing their mother role illustrates what Goffman (1961:11) called 'role dispossession', which he suggested is a by-product of 'total institutions' like prison. For the Mothers, the actions associated with mothering, i.e. 'doing' mothering, were important. Not being able to do mothering made them feel like failed mothers. For those Mothers who had already lost care of their children or whose return to them was in question, the challenge to retain a positive maternal identity was even greater. Danielle spoke of missing all of the '*jobs*' of motherhood, saying that it drove her '*demented and tortured*' not knowing where her son was or how his days were being filled. Even though she had a good relationship with her mother, who was his caregiver and with whom she was in contact every day, she said:

*"...it's not the same as doing, or knowing, I don't feel like a mam anymore, how can I be when I'm not there?" (Danielle).*

The Mothers' anxieties and guilt were at their height when they felt their children '*needed them most*'; often, but not always, this would be on special occasions or for specific life events. Shanice spoke a lot about missing the '*little things*' she associated with motherhood and described how she felt her role as a mother was '*diluted*' by not doing them. Shanice felt '*replaced*' and '*displaced*' as a mother, jealous that her own mother had taken on *her* mothering role. Although Shanice phoned home daily, she described those calls as '*difficult*'. Stating that, afterwards, she would reflect and feel like she was '*an outsider*' looking through a window at '*what used to be my life*'. She described how she would try to do some small '*jobs*' of motherhood during contact, such as doing her daughter's hair, or trying to assist with her homework during phone calls with her; but her daughter would always tell her it was '*ok*' and that her '*nanny had done it*'. Shanice said this made her feel '*pointless*'. These frustrations and deprivations (Sykes, 1958) were similarly described by several of the Mothers:

*"It was hard man, you miss so much of their lives, things you don't even think of on a day-to-day basis, but they are the things that make you a mam. Things like walking to nursery with him, picking my daughter up from school, those journeys in the car where we did most of our talking really. I missed that... watching cartoons with them. Just hearing about their days, even watching them fight and bicker, I never thought I'd say it, but I even missed that!" (Tia)*

Ursula described a phone call in which her daughter was very distressed because she had a gymnastics competition, her leotard was not washed, and they had run out of soap-powder. Ursula knew that if she had been at home she simply would have 'washed it with shampoo or soap, or actually not run out of soap-powder at all!'. Ursula found this particular phone call distressing because she could not 'mother', she could not solve the problem. This made her feel 'powerless, hopeless' and 'disconnected'. Ursula hung-up the phone in 'utter despair'. Annie and Shanice described how not being 'actively' involved in their 'motherly duties' (Annie) made them feel like 'less of a mother' (Shanice). Annie described how she did not recognise herself, 'when that gets taken away from you, you don't know who you are. You have lost who you are because that is me, I am a mum'. Similarly, Shanice stated;

*"It's the little things that get you, not taking them to school, not knowing how their day has gone, not being able to see what they are wearing that day, not making their packed lunches. You expect to be upset at birthdays and Christmas, not going to parents' evening, that kind of stuff, you expect to miss that and it's not a shock, but honestly the worst pain is in the little things." (Shanice)*

Echoing previous research on mothers in prison over an extended period of time (Carlen, 1983; Datesman and Cales, 1983; Baunach, 1985; Enos, 2001; Baldwin, 2015, 2016; O'Malley, 2018; Lockwood, 2018; Masson, 2019; Easterling et al, 2019), all of the Mothers were preoccupied with thoughts of their children, related to missing their children, hoping to reunite with them, worrying about them, anxieties about resuming their mothering role, or even coming to terms with the loss of their children to LA care. Motherhood related issues were of **primary** concern, reflecting on their mothering and 'thinking about' their children was something Mothers engaged in 'all the time' (Jaspreet).



Tia described this as *'invisible mothering'*. Tia felt that it was an important part of her prison experience and was possible only because she was clean and away from the pressures of her substance-misusing peers and her old lifestyle. She felt that the reflection she undertook in prison was an important part of preparing for release and *'doing better'* in the future: Emma also spoke about how reflecting on her motherhood helped to motivate her:

*"I've been thinking a lot about it lately, I want to be a better mum I want to see my daughter. If I go back to my old lifestyle before I came to prison... well it's just drugs, drugs, drugs, heroin... I don't want that. I'm getting too old for that game and I just want to see my girl... but I wouldn't let her see me on the gear."* (Emma)

Mothers spoke of how they mothered *'in the background'* (Sandra) of their children's lives, physically invisible or out of reach but still trying to organise and manage caregivers and how they *'brought up my kids'* (Jaspreet). This sometimes caused friction with caregivers and Mothers stress and worry. Karen spoke of how she was determined to ring her daughter's school when her daughter was being bullied, stating, *'I was still her mum'*. It was important to Karen, that, even if she could not directly mother her children in the same way as she had prior to coming to prison, she wanted to still be able to maintain some of the tasks she felt were her responsibility. Echoing Lockwood's (2018) research, Mothers in the study felt that the more involvement they lost in their children's lives, the more their positive maternal identity reduced. To counter this, they would *'micromanage'* (Rita) from prison, trying to *'foresee'* all of the potentials.

Several Mothers had known in advance that they were going to prison and so had time at home before sentencing to prepare - or mother - in advance. For example, Rita *'cooked loads and filled up the freezers'*, even buying sanitary products for her pre-teen daughters *'just in case they started while I was away'*. Others had bought birthday and Christmas presents, or had *'sorted out the bills and left loads of notes'* (Maggie). Most of the Mothers had worried about how *'they would manage without me'* (Maggie), and had assumed or worried that their families would *'fall apart'*, *'descend into chaos'* (Rita) or *'break down completely'* (Jaspreet). This brought up mixed emotions for the Mothers: they wanted their families - and especially their children - to be cared for but, as Rita put it, *'I also wanted them to miss me'*. When most of the families survived their absence, to

a greater or lesser extent, the Mothers worried about how it would be when they returned to their families, and what their role would then be (the focus of the next chapter).

Tarian, who spent time on a prison MBU with her son, reflected on her desire to be a *'different kind of mam'* when she was released. She said that her life outside as a *'drug dealer'* and mother of four other children had been frenetic and focused on drugs. She stated, and that, had she not found out she was pregnant when she came to prison, she would have been a *'very different kind of prisoner'*, admitting she would have kept *'ducking and diving'* and being *'a player'*. As she wanted to keep her new baby with her, and knew she was being *'watched and assessed'* informally even before she put in her application for the MBU, she *'played the game'*, actively preparing for the impending birth like a *'perfect mother'*. Tarian was successful in her application and found herself really enjoying the intensive active mothering of her baby in a non-chaotic space in a way she had never experienced with any of her other four children. Ironically, the prison space had provided Tarian with a sanctuary from her home chaos and created a space where she could *'just be a mother'*. Sadly, Tarian's MBU experience was not common amongst other Mothers who had spent time on a prison MBU (n=3): although they were grateful that their children were not removed into care, they had found the *'constant threat'* of their babies being removed and the additional surveillance stressful (Kady).

Several Mothers (n=6) had experienced one or all of their children going into either temporary or permanent care of the LA, and all six described this background/invisible mothering, even though they may not - or were not expecting to - regain custody of their children. The Mothers all described their mother identity as significant to them.

*"I thought about my kids every day, in that sense I was no different to the other mothers."* (Nicola)

Beth, who had been still breastfeeding her three-month old baby when she was sentenced, described the *'agony'* of having full and leaking breasts, *'but no baby'*. She stated that she:

*"...thought of my daughter every single minute of every single day, it was awful. I didn't want to be here most of the time, I felt like nothing... I missed her so much."* (Beth)

One of Dee's children was living with Dee's sister but her sister *'couldn't cope'* and so handed Dee's daughter to the LA. Dee stated she was *'beside herself'* and *'worried all the time'* that she would not get her daughter back. The loss of a child to the care of the LA has far reaching psychological effects (Morriss, 2018) and the Mothers in this situation struggled to deal with their emotions, which were compounded by them being in prison. Morris (2018) describes mothers who have lost a child to care as *'haunted'* and highlights the lack of compassion and empathy afforded to mothers who lose their children in this way in contrast to a child dying. Nicola described herself as *'an invisible mother now'*.

Even when a mother does not lose her children to the care system on imprisonment, the impact of maternal imprisonment on their children and the wider family is huge (Beresford, 2018; Condry and Scharff-Smith, 2018; Baldwin, 2015). Not least because she is most often the primary caregiver of children (Masson, 2019), and maintaining contact and navigating caregiver relationships is challenging (Booth, 2020). Contact with children and caregivers was sometimes supportive and assisted the Mothers in maintaining an active and involved maternal role. At other times it was fraught with difficulties and served to remind the Mothers of their separation and undermined them in terms of their maternal-role and identity. Contact with children was often bittersweet.

#### **6.2.4 Contact**

Mothering from the confines of prison generated a number of challenging issues for the Mothers and their families regarding contact. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) directs that all prisons must promote and facilitate easy and regular access to visits and phone calls. Furthermore, the Farmer Reviews (2017, 2019) have reiterated the importance of *'family ties'*, arguing that families have a significant role in the rehabilitation and desistance of prisoners. Despite now having devolved budgets and some freedom to develop family-friendly initiatives, prisons do not always reflect this significance in their policies and practices regarding families or contact (Booth, 2020). Experiences of contact between the Mothers and their children was varied and challenging, influenced somewhat by institutional challenges and also by the Mothers'

own emotions and relationships with their children and caregivers. It has been argued that for parents, especially mothers, contact with children is particularly important (O'Malley, 2015; Baldwin, 2018; Masson, 2019; Booth, 2020). In fact, more than one of the Mothers felt it was a matter of life or death:

*"...if I hadn't been able to see them, I just wouldn't have survived, it's that simple."* (Rita)

Most of the Mothers had the care of their children pre-prison and most, though not all, were expecting to resume care on release (Appendix 2). Communication with children and grandchildren provided the most important and concrete strategy for maintaining relationships and an affirming maternal identity for the Mothers:

*"...just hearing her say mummy was the best, I missed being called that so much."* (Sophie).

Visits and phone calls were an opportunity for the Mothers to engage in 'active mothering', which was important not only to meet the needs of the children, but also to affirm the Mothers' maternal identities and assist their coping. However, contact was often fraught with difficulties. Echoing previous studies (Booth, 2020; Masson, 2019), regular contact for the Mothers was often compounded by circumstances beyond their control, reinforcing their sense of powerlessness concerning their children:

*"...you knew a visit could be taken away or ended at any point, it was like a knot in your stomach all the time,"* (Tanya)

The Mothers described contact with their children as '*complicated*' (Mavis). Not unusually, some Mothers, especially those on shorter sentences or in closed prisons (see later discussion) chose not to receive visits from their children (Baldwin and Epstein, 2017). This was for a myriad of reasons, some related to practicality (i.e. cost of travel, time, distance from prison), or the non-child friendliness of the visiting experience, sometimes because it was '*too much*' (Shanice) either for themselves or for their children. Mothers made what they saw as a 'protective' decision not to allow their children to visit (Baldwin, 2015; O'Malley, 2018, 2020):

*“I didn’t want him to visit because I thought... I didn’t want to upset him because I know he wouldn’t understand what was going on. I would be the one breaking down when he had to go, and I didn’t want him to see that .....because he wouldn’t understand why mummy couldn’t come out...I didn’t want that for me or for him. It would be just too painful.”*  
(Shanice)

Some Mothers had not disclosed that they were actually in prison. Mignon and Ransford (2012), suggest that this reluctance to disclose is sometimes related to embarrassment and the avoidance of stigma and/or judgement:

*“I don’t let my children come to visit; they think I am away at work, a few of us have done this ... I wouldn’t cope if I saw them. How could I stay here and let them go at the end... how? But anyway I just don’t want them to know I did bad things.”* (Alexandra)

Similarly, Danielle had also told her son she was working away, although now she regretted that decision because of the impact it had had on her son:

*“But now he thinks I’ve chosen work over them and he hates me, so I probably should have just been honest.”* (Danielle)

Shanice described how she witnessed mothers coming back from visits and self-harming, or just breaking down and not coping at all. Like Rita, Taranpreet spoke of a mother in the next cell to her who had tried to take her own life after a visit with her six-month-old baby. Visits were a source of both joy and pain for the Mothers and described as a *‘mixed blessing’* (Rita), and *‘bittersweet’* (Casey-Acevedo et al, 2004; Arditti and Few, 2006) because of the complex emotions they triggered, in both themselves and their children. Mothers described complex and competing emotions before a visit, such as anxiety, foreboding, worry, excitement, guilt, shame, sadness and happiness - with a similar range of emotions occupying their thoughts post-visit. On the one hand, the Mothers were desperate to see their children, wanting to *‘hug them and tell them I love them’* (Tanisha), but on the other hand, Mothers wanted to *‘protect them from the shame of a prison’* (Mavis), or to protect and control their own and their children’s emotions:

*“I was scared of the emotional fall out of visits, mine and hers... I just don’t think I would have coped if I seen her in person, it was easier to block off my feelings into boxes... by not seeing her I mean. I wouldn’t have coped I know I wouldn’t, and I don’t think she would have either.”*  
(Margot)

Moran (2013) describes the ‘liminal space’ of the visiting room as a place where families temporarily feel the same shame and surveillance experienced by prisoners. Something others have argued results in secondary stigmatisation (Minson, 2018, 2020), and is closely linked to Goffman’s (1963) concept of courtesy stigma. Karen’s children, aged eleven, twelve and seventeen, only visited the prison once, like Mavis’s adult children. Karen, a middle-class professional, had been ‘*embarrassed*’ and ‘*ashamed*’ when her children visited. She did not want to go through the experience again and wanted to spare her children’s shame, despite her youngest child pleading to see her.

*“I just hated it, I could see Tilly and Oliver just looking around aghast at what they saw and... I know this sounds awful, but at the people in the visiting room, it’s just not our world. I think the two older ones were relieved when I said no more visits. I absolutely know Francesca would have come back in a heartbeat because she’s a mummy’s girl, but I just couldn’t allow her. It was too painful, and I don’t actually think my husband had any desire to repeat the experience at all. He did not put up a fight when I said no more visits, let’s put it that way.”* (Karen)

Rees et al (2017) suggest that several factors affect the ‘quality’ and ‘success’ of a visit between mothers and their children. They found that longer visits, with flexibility of movement and the freedom to hug and enjoy physical contact, were unsurprisingly regarded more positively by mothers and children. Not all prisons facilitate these ‘Family Days’ or ‘Special’ visits<sup>49</sup>. Only two of the Mothers on the study experienced them (Tarian

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<sup>49</sup> A number of prisons have projects running that will allow more meaningful visits between mothers and their children – they are often managed by the third sector as opposed to prison staff. They are characterised by being several hours longer, permitting freedom of movement around the room, and physical contact is allowed. Some schemes, like the ‘Visiting Mum’ scheme at HMP Eastwood Park (now closed due to lack of funding), also arranged transport and did not require the presence of caregivers during the visit, thereby facilitating a deeper mother/child bonding experience. Some prisons even facilitate overnight contact where mothers are able to cook with their children in a separate house in the grounds of the prison.

and Rita); however, it was very clear that they found this type of visit a much more enjoyable experience than 'normal' visits. Tarian, who had her extended visit because she was on a MBU, said:

*"It was mint, we were only supposed to have sandwiches, but I'd told my mum to bring Christmas dinner stuff and the staff didn't care so I just about cooked for us all, loved it I did, I was a proper mam for a day I was."* (Tarian)

Rita's special visit was also around Christmas, although it had so nearly not occurred as her application was misplaced. Rita felt it only went ahead in the end because she pushed for it:

*"Because I was articulate and strong and passionate about it, if I'd backed down I wouldn't have got it... but I'd told the kids, I could not let them down. In the end we had a lovely day. So much more relaxed than a normal visit, they, by and large were awful and stressful."* (Rita)

Several Mothers experienced prison moves at very short notice (as described by Tia earlier), which again impacted on the regularity and possibility of visits. The women felt that their needs as mothers and their children's needs consistently came second to the needs of the 'the system':

*"This is my third prison in two months. Just as I have got settled, planned courses, made friends, booked in visits, I'm moved again – visits lost. I haven't seen my kids or grandkids now for five months. I miss them like mad."* (Sandy).

The rules of the institution and whether the prison was open or closed had an impact on the quality of the visit for both mothers and visitors. Mothers described how these rules around physical contact and free movement within the visiting space were inconsistent between prisons, even between those in the same category. Some prisons allowed only a first hug and then no further physical contact, this included the Mothers holding their very young babies or toddlers or allowing them on their knees. In other prisons (or in the special visits described above) this was allowed. In some prisons Mothers were not

allowed out of their seats, which they found incredibly frustrating - especially for Mothers of toddlers and younger children because children would go over to the play area (if there was one) to play with other children and the toys provided. Tia described how on one visit, her four-year-old and another visitor's child made friends and spent the whole visit playing in the play area in the far corner of the room, then sitting themselves down for their 'picnic' on a separate table from their mothers. Tia stated it was awful and frustrating, but she and the other mother felt helpless as they were not allowed out of their seats to interact:

*"Me and the other mother just looked at each other and shrugged, we were gutted, but what can you do... they were happy". (Tia)*

Mothers therefore spent the whole visit watching their child play from a distance with minimal mother/child interaction, and would spend the visit time engaging with the caregiver or the professional (e.g. foster carer/social worker) who had accompanied the child on the visit:

*"I had to stay seated at all times, [the social worker] could move into the play area with my kid, but not me. I wasn't allowed... so for at least an hour of the visit I wouldn't even see her. I used to pray to get seated next to the play area... but usually I wasn't nowhere near it. One time my daughter fell over... I wasn't even allowed out my seat to pick her up... if that had happened outside and I ignored her crying... well then that would be abuse. Another time my daughter wanted to give me a picture... [it was] taken off her, not even allowed to show it me. So before she even got in she was upset already... then she wanted to bring some crayons and paper from the play area to sit with me... which is allowed... but this officer told her no. She went round and took crayons off all the kids. My daughter was broken, the visit got ended because my daughter was heartbroken, the social worker took her out and that was it over. I put a complaint in about that but the IMB<sup>50</sup> never did nowt about it. All I*

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<sup>50</sup> **Independent Monitoring Boards (IMB)** are statutory bodies established by the Prison Act 1952 to **monitor** the welfare of prisoners in the UK to ensure that they are properly cared for within Prison and Immigration Centre rules, whilst in custody and detention.



*could think about was how sad my daughter would be on her way home.”*

(Sophie)

Another Mother was frustrated that not being allowed out of her seat prevented her from even *‘doing the basics’* for her children during visits:

*“I just wanted to get them the stuff from the café, just to be able to buy their treats. Basic stuff... not even allowed that.”* (Tanisha)

It was clear that Tanisha saw buying provisions from the snack bar as an act of mothering. These frequent frustrations of their maternal role affected the Mothers deeply and was one of the reasons cited as to why they might have only one, none, or infrequent visits with their children. This had obvious implications for the maintenance and strengthening of family ties and bonds and, ultimately, the Mothers’ desistance (Farmer, 2019). Several Mothers described feeling relieved when visits were over. They were exhausted at having gone through an extensive period of being ‘watched’ and ‘judged’ by staff, and sometimes by family or caregivers in their performance as mothers:

*“...you knew they [staff] were watching you to see if you were a good mum or not.”* (Dee).

Rose (1989) asserts that family life is subject to close scrutiny in the community, and it was felt no differently by the mothers in prison. The additional surveillance of themselves as mothers, and of their children and families, was another reason cited for the cessation or infrequency of visits. Wells (2019:82) suggests that prison visits have long been a means of regulating mothering behaviour, and that they are a time of increased scrutiny because the mother and the child (or other visitors) are viewed as potential vehicles for contraband.

Some of the Mothers in the study had the additionally challenging experience of closed visits<sup>51</sup>, where prisoners and their visitors are separated by glass and are in a small room

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<sup>51</sup> Closed visits (not exclusive to closed-prisons) are visits actioned if the prison staff believe there may be a potential risk of smuggling contraband. The prison may impose these either due to previous convictions or suspicious behaviour, or dog indication on previous visits.

separate from the main visiting hall. As well as it being traumatic for her and her children, Ursula described how this was *'stigmatising'* because *'everyone knew then that you were regarded as suspicious'*. She added:

*"This is how wicked these people are man. They put me on no contact [closed] visits for three months, they can't hug you, you can't touch them, just look at them through the glass... I mean... you know what... one time I said then no more I just said don't ever come again."* (Ursula)

However, for some of the Mothers the visits were *'all that kept me going'* (Lauren) and were opportunities *'to be a mum, even if only for an hour or two'* (Tanisha). Tanisha goes on to say that the *'cuddles'* were all she could think of before a visit. As described earlier, most Mothers felt anxious before a visit, often fearing it would be cancelled, or scared that it would be tense or awkward. Although they were excited to see their children, they were ashamed that they were coming to a prison. Several Mothers described visits as *'emotionally exhausting'* or *'draining'*. Nevertheless, visits were definitely viewed positively by many of the Mothers and grandmothers and provided them with windows of opportunity to show the love and care for their loved ones that they had been craving and missing, *'just to hear their news and just to hold their hands.'* (Rayna)

*"We would almost pretend like we were round the dinner table and it would be like a normal conversation at home, me just being a mum and them just being their normal bickery selves."* (Rita)

Several Mothers were frustrated that the male estate seemed to them to be more advanced in the use of additional technology to facilitate greater contact, they wanted to see an advancement in the women's estate that could improve their contact with their children. However, *'surveillance'* of motherhood in prison is a form of control over mothering practices and Wells argues that video visits actually have the potential to increase this, as the prison staff take on the role of *'watcher'* (Wells, 2019:77). Wells (2019:78) further argues that this *'forces mothers to perform motherhood under the gaze, influence and judgement of correctional officers, peers and other mothers'*. This demonstrates that mothering in these circumstances reinforces the stigmatization and stereotyping of prison mothers as *'bad'* mothers, by the very fact that they have to be surveilled, through video calls, but also telephone calls and letters.

### 6.2.5 Phone calls and letters

Like all people in prison Mothers faced practical challenges and disadvantage around other forms of contact such as access to phones, the cost of paper and postage stamps (Booth, 2020a, 2020). There were inconsistencies between prisons in the support and facilitation of contact with children, again highlighting structural failures to recognise and value the needs of mothers and their children. Interestingly, in Ireland – where motherhood enjoys a greater status and significance because of the Catholic ethos of ‘the family’ (O’Malley, 2018), prisons provide free phone calls home to children, even if they are in multiple homes, and free postage stamps (*ibid*). In contrast, in this study the Mothers were frustrated by the cost of calls (six times the cost of calls outside of prison), by the delays in official approval of phone numbers and of adding them to the personal PIN<sup>52</sup> list, and just by access to phones generally. Mothers described having to choose between buying stamps and buying toiletries. Because most of the Mothers in this study were single parents the impact of frustrated contact with their children added to their maternal guilt and pain.

These structural frustrations regarding telephone contact (Barnes and Cunningham Stringer, 2014; Booth 2018, 2020a) added to the demands on Mothers to navigate prison rules and regulations, which they saw as serving to complicate and confound their relationships with their children. Rita, like several of the Mothers, spoke of how challenging it was even to access the telephone, particularly when she had been in a closed prison:

*“...for a time we were only out half an hour a day and told there would be no phone access, but even on a normal day... we were locked up mostly 23 hours a day, in our cells... we only had access [to phones] between three and four, well my kids weren’t at home then how could I phone them?” (Rita)*

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<sup>52</sup> Personal Identification Number (**PIN**) This PIN number allows prisoners to make call to both landline and mobile numbers and you put phone credit on weekly as needed.

Rita described how this was even more frustrating as there were '*phone sockets in the cells, but no phones, how ridiculous*'<sup>53</sup>. However, as with visits, the phone calls home were also sometimes bittersweet, and the Mothers described again their mixed emotions. Mothers found it painful, frustrating and difficult to phone home and some avoided it, feeling that it was less painful for them and for their children. Like the mothers in Baldwin and Epstein's (2017) study, some of the Mothers had multiple caregivers for their children and so they would have to 'choose' which children to ring if they did not have enough phone credit to phone them all. Tia described this as '*Sophie's Choice*'<sup>54</sup>. Mothers of teenagers would describe their frustrations; at not being able to get hold of teenage children and the expense of calling mobile phones; this would then be a source of tension for the Mothers which might sometimes leak into the next phone call or visit:

*"I just used to get pissed off I couldn't speak to her; she wouldn't answer if she was with her mates... but then I'd be hurt and mad and grumpy with her next time she called, then it would escalate... in the end it was easier just not to phone at all... we wrote instead."* (Tia)

Grandmothers in the study faced similar challenges, as obviously their grandchildren were not all siblings and so were not located in one space, so again they were sometimes forced to choose which grandchildren to ring, and then whether to speak to the grandchildren or to the parents (their 'child'). This is something that Pham, Sandra and Mavis cited as an additional source of guilt. Several Mothers spoke of an 'emotional transfusion' where they would speak to their children and feel their pain, then their children would recognise their mother's pain, and so deep conversations were sometimes avoided as coping strategy – on both sides. This had an impact on the quality of the mother/child relationships (discussed in Chapter 7) and rendered some of the phone conversations superficial - especially, though not exclusively, between older children and adult offspring.

*"I didn't want to upset her by telling her it was awful, and she didn't want to upset me by telling me she was struggling... so we were both like 'you*

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<sup>53</sup> Some prisons can facilitate in cell telephones for incoming calls only – this is more common in the male estate than in the female estate.

<sup>54</sup> A well-known film about the Holocaust and a mother in a Nazi concentration camp who was forced to choose which of her children would live and which would die.

*ok?"... 'yeah, I'm ok, you ok?'... 'yeah'... it was silly, really, we both knew we weren't... but it was easier that way for both of us to cope."*  
(Maggie)

Mothers of younger children described how they would adopt a forced cheerfulness to try to mitigate the pain that their younger children were feeling, which again would leave them emotionally exhausted:

*"I just used to try to distract her and tell her it was ok, mummy would be home soon and just make it sound nonchalant... but inside I was breaking."* (Sophie)

For some Mothers phone calls were an opportunity to engage in active mothering, but from a distance. This was essential to the mother's own sense of self as a mother and to her ability to retain an affirming or positive maternal identity. Mothers in the study endured several home crises that they tried to guide and assist their children through, over the telephone and sometimes in visits. These included school bullying, teenage pregnancies, relationship breakdowns, miscarriage scares, exams, serious illness and bereavement. These were, of course, stressful times for the Mothers and grandmothers, yet being involved in decision-making and solutions as they might have been had they been at home was an important factor in their retaining a positive maternal-identity and role. As previously stated by Shanice, however, it was often the '*little things*' that some Mothers missed most, and they would phone home as often as they could, sometimes daily, to be able to engage in 'normal' everyday conversations and activities:

*"We would actually go through the shopping list together on the phone and I would help her decide what meals to cook for the little ones and her dad... then I'd go through how to do it, step by step. I think I enjoyed those phone calls the most as I was just a mum then... just a mum on the other end of the phone."* (Rita, 35)

Mothers described how they would continue their active mothering via telephone and letters, going through homework with their children, phoning to see how their school day had gone or continuing to parent them by disciplining or just listening to them:

*“Yes all of us used to say that... it was so important to still be mum, even to nag them. I would be telling them off down the phone, and they would tell me stuff they wouldn't tell their dad.” (Rita)*

Alexandra and Adel both described how they continued in the same disciplinary role that they had undertaken at home, and how this was an important factor in retaining their ‘place’ in the family. Similarly, Natacha was *‘the organised one’* in her family, and despite her being in prison, it was she who organised everything for her son’s and daughter’s birthday parties: where possible she made the calls herself, but where not possible she posted out lists and tasks for others to complete to her specifications. Carla and Adel both described how their telephone calls and letters home were opportunities to *‘build bridges’* and *‘mend fences’*, which they hoped would stand them in good stead for their release. Both felt that away from the chaos of their pre-prison lives, the telephone calls and letters were a *‘calmer’* means of communication with their children and families, better than they had had for *‘some time’*.

Four of the Mothers were able to take positives from their incarceration although, as previously stated, this was mostly because they were able to secure help and support that had not been available to them within the community. Prison was described by four Mothers as a *‘safe’* place where they were able to secure help, and which actually assisted them in the reforming and repairing of fractured relationships with their children and their wider family (see also Lockwood, 2018 and O’Malley, 2018). Mothers (Annie, Dee, Shanice and Tarian) felt that opportunities to engage in active mothering via the telephone or during visits was an important part of their time in custody and was *‘practice’* and an *‘opportunity to build up trust’* (Dee) and to repair relationships before they returned home and to motherhood full time.

Research has demonstrated that this contact with family is a significant and positive factor in relation to desistance (Farmer, 2017, 2019); more than that, it is vital to the maintenance of family relationships and the wellbeing of prisoners (Datesman and Cales, 1983; Hairston, 2002; Farmer, 2017). However, as this research has demonstrated it is not always without tension or strain. The families of prisoners are forced into challenging circumstances as caregivers, in circumstances where they are completely unsupported by the state (Booth, 2020). It is perhaps not surprising that the challenges faced by the mothers inside and the families outside can result in tension. Some of that *‘tension’* may

previously have been present in family relationships, and relationships dynamics, and simply became exacerbated by the mother's incarceration. For many women who experienced domestic abuse, the abuse continued through the bars and children were used as a means of punishing, gaslighting, and hurting the women *as mothers*, perhaps where their abusers knew they could hurt them most.

### **6.2.6 Caregivers, tension gatekeeping and control**

Aiello and McQueeny (2016:32) suggest that mothers are the 'glue that holds families together', and when mothers go to prison, the dynamics within the family are altered. The importance of maintaining family ties has attracted recent policy and practice attention (Farmer, 2017, 2018; JCHR, 2019). Often it is families who take over the mother work, or caregiving role, hopefully (and where appropriate) whilst assisting the mother to maintain an active mothering role from prison. As demonstrated in this thesis, the Mothers' efforts, and whether they were allowed to engage in active mothering from behind bars, were varied and challenged; most if not all were constantly trying to renegotiate their mothering role and identity in the carceral setting and the challenges this presented. However, not all of the challenges originated from within the prison. For some of the Mothers, difficulties with family dynamics and caregivers impeded or complicated their ability to continue actively to mother their children and grandchildren, which further contributed to their spoiling maternal identity and feelings of powerlessness. Mothers were reliant on caregivers to facilitate contact and their relationships with caregivers was therefore a significant factor in the shaping and maintenance of the Mothers' relationship with their children.

The majority of the children connected with the study were cared for by their grandmothers, but similar to O'Malley's (2018) and Baldwin and Epstein's (2017) findings, a quarter were cared for by their fathers, a significantly higher figure than the most often quoted figure of 9%, which relates to a 1997 study by Caddle and Crisp (see chapter 5 for a breakdown of childcare circumstances). For some of the Mothers this was not a positive factor and some ex-partners who had been abusive and controlling of the Mothers pre-prison simply continued their abuse by restricting and controlling their access to their children. Six Mothers experienced (disclosed) violent/controlling ex-partners who engaged in this type of behaviour, contributing to the women's sense of

powerlessness as mothers. The abuse and control they had previously endured was simply continued through their children. Taranpreet stated, '*...he knew he could hurt me most through the kids*'. These acts were deliberate and represented direct attacks on the Mothers arguably *because* the abusers believed this would be the *most* painful way to 'attack' the Mothers. Melanie illustrates:

*"I don't have much contact with my daughter, my ex has her whilst I'm in here and he don't want me to have contact with her, it's just an excuse to punish me and control me like he always does. He don't care that it punishes her too. God knows what he's saying to her about me."*  
(Melanie)

Similarly, Annie described how her violent and controlling ex (the father of her child), controlled not only her access to her daughter, but also what she was 'allowed' to tell her on the phone:

*"I didn't speak to my daughter for the first five weeks I was in, I cannot explain the emptiness of that time. We have a good bond my daughter and me and we had been together or spoken every day before that [they had a 50/50 shared custody arrangement]. But he wouldn't let me speak to her, I was literally in pieces literally you know, emotionally and physically. I can't describe the pain because she is and always has been the reason I get out of bed. But he told me what I had to agree to say to her before he would let me speak to her. I had to say I'd let everyone down. I had to say I'd done wrong and I was ashamed and that I was a bad person and was now where bad people went. He made me promise to say all of that when she rang and if I didn't he said he would cut off the call and not let her ring me back. He only allowed five-minute phone calls, that's it five minutes once a week... then he would hang up"* (Annie)

Annie goes on to say how she tried desperately to retain a 'connection' with her daughter between these infrequent and highly controlled phone calls:

*"I would write to her and I would send her a picture and she would write back and then by the time she wrote back she had got the next one – so*



*it was like a conversation almost... I wrote to her every day... and she would send, I mean I would send her a picture not coloured in and she would send it back coloured in... that was our thing, our connection.”*  
(Annie)

Jennifer’s ex, who had secured custody of his son when Jennifer was imprisoned, completely blocked her contact with her son, saying it ‘*wasn’t in his best interests*’. He then moved 300 miles away to his former hometown, taking their son, changing his school and refusing to provide her with an address even to write to him:

*“I was powerless to stop him moving as we had shared care, I begged him not to move him - it was his GCSE year, my son had plans, a future, that must all be wrecked now, and I can’t even speak to him to see if he is happy or how he coped with the news. He [ex-partner] writes to me, almost taunting me, but I can’t get to my son... I have begged him. How do I even fight this from in here?”* (Jennifer)

Violent ex-partners were not the sole source of control and tension. The Mothers’ contact was restricted by other caregivers who acted like gatekeepers, too. One of the ways in which the Mothers were impeded was by caregivers physically restricting access to the children, either by refusing to accompany them to the prison, or by limiting and controlling access via visits and telephone calls, or sometimes both:

*“My son and his wife only came once, and they wouldn’t bring my grandchildren at all. They said it was not ‘something they wanted in their world’, which I can understand, I guess. But it was hard having no contact with them... and teenagers, well they don’t like to write these days do they. So no, I had no contact at all with my grandchildren whilst I was in prison... and before I went in I had them every day. It broke my heart. I missed them even more than my own children. That bond you have with grandchildren, well its precious isn’t it.”* (Mavis)

Similarly, Queenie’s daughter would not allow her child to visit her grandmother in prison. Queenie stated:

*“My daughter categorically said to me, Ria is not allowed. I don’t want her to come to those places.” (Queenie)*

Both grandmothers felt that their children were explicitly giving the message to the grandchildren that prisons were a place of shame; this added a whole new layer to their spoiled identities (Goffman, 1963) as mothers. They were now also ‘spoiled’ as grandmothers (this discussion is revisited in the next Chapter 7), and it was made clear to the grandchildren in both cases that *‘normal grannies don’t go to prison’* (Queenie).

Arditti (2018), Booth (2020) and Codd (2013) all highlight the significant financial and emotional pressure on caregivers when they are caring for a child of an imprisoned parent. It can lead to tension, recrimination, anger, frustration and judgement, which the Mothers described would sometimes leak into their communication and contact with caregivers. As the ‘gatekeepers’ (Booth, 2020) of their charges, other family caregivers sometimes physically restricted or blocked contact with children. Understandably, some of the tensions between caregivers and the Mothers would leak into the visiting space or into phone calls, sometimes negatively affecting the Mothers and their maternal identity, even when mothers were sympathetic:

*“She had every right to be mad at me... I get that. I fucked up and she had to drop everything to care for my kids, I feel bad about it I do... but I was doing my punishment... I didn’t need her punishing me through the kids as well. When she came on a visit with them, I just wanted to be a mam and have a nice time and that... not sit there getting told what a fuckup I am in front of my kids. I’d rather she didn’t bring them than it be like that, so I told her not to come and I stopped the visits. It weren’t fair on any of us having them [the visits] be like that.” (Tia)*

Several Mothers talked about feeling replaced or displaced and, as Dee states, it was often a feeling that was intensified in the visiting space.

*“My mother-in-law would deliberately bring them in clothes she knew I’d hate; she’d just talk about stuff they’d been doing and kind of excluded me from conversations with them... I know life goes on and that. But that was meant to be our time... and she couldn’t even let me have that*

*hour... it was all about her and what she was doing with them... made me feel crap man... like she was the mother now and I didn't matter."*

(Dee)

Mothers spoke of children being 'clingy' with caregivers which, although they were grateful from their child's perspective, it still '*hurt*' (Rita) as a mother. Rita described how her eighteen-month-old son became especially close to her oldest daughter, Penny, who had taken over the bulk of his everyday care (Penny was 13 years old). Rita described how in visits Penny would 'mother' him:

*"She would say, 'oh he's tired now mum', or 'he wants his bottle'... I would be like, yes I know Penny... I am his mum! On the one hand it was nice to see but on the other it really hurt."* (Rita).

This sense of 'competing' for their children and feeling replaced and/or displaced was a common theme of the Mothers. As previously stated, most of the dependent children in this study were cared for by grandmothers. Strozier et al (2011:55) argue that, as most mothers in custody 'retain dreams of a return to active parenting' and indicate that their children are their primary concern, it is then apt to characterize the relationship with grandmother caregivers as a 'co-parenting one'. However, they highlight that whereas previously the mother may have been the family individual with all of the parenting 'power', this is substantially reduced once she is incarcerated. Strozier et al (2011) argue that co-parenting with an incarcerated mother is inherently challenging, suggesting that when co-parenting alliances work well, this fosters a healthy environment in which children are reassured, supported well and feel secure – which in turn bodes well for their futures (already disadvantaged simply by having a parent in prison). However, when it does not work so well, children experience 'conflict, strain and resentment', promoting insecurity and less favourable long-term outcomes. The Mothers in the study experienced both of these types of co-parenting alliances. Taranpreet described her parenting relationship with her mother-in-law of her twin toddlers as a '*tug of war*'. Like several of the Mothers, Taranpreet had mixed emotions about her children being in their grandmother's care. On the one hand she was '*grateful*' as her husband '*would not have coped*', but on the other she stated, '*A big part of me feels so bitter towards my mother-in-law, like as if she has taken my place*' (Taranpreet).

Mothers described being '*visibly, emotionally and physically reminded*' during visits that they '*no longer had any real power or control*' over their children. Ursula described how '*from the food they were eating, the clothes they were wearing, the words they were using*' that it was '*obvious*' she had been '*replaced as a mother*' (Ursula). Five of the grandmother caregivers refused to bring the children to the prison for at least part of their mother's sentence and to a greater or lesser extent controlled the telephone access, too:

*"I would ring up and ask to speak to the kids and she'd say, oh they're in bed early or out with mates... I could blatantly hear them in the background... but she just didn't want me to speak to them."* (Tanya).

For some of the Mothers, grandmothers restricting access and contact with their children came after periods where the Mothers had been addicted and/or living chaotically, or - in the grandmothers' opinions - had repeatedly '*let their children down*':

*"I know I'd been a rubbish mam but how was I supposed to make it up to them or prove myself if she wouldn't let me speak to them... It honestly made me hate her. I could understand it, but I hated her. I felt like she was turning my kids against me."* (Carla)

The Mothers' resentments and upsets with caregivers would impact on their relationships during contact and for some Mothers, they felt this also impacted on their relationships with their children as well as generating tensions between each other. Sometimes the difficulties surrounded 'differences' in parenting styles – '*he makes them do homework, I hate it and I think it should be banned – childhood is for fun... I would not have encouraged them to do it*' (Rita). At other times anger, resentment, and frustration related to things happening in their children's lives that would not have happened if they had been '*at home*'. Sandra's two teenage daughters both got pregnant whilst she was in prison, which Sandra felt '*would not have happened on my watch*'. For Dee, her anger was with her sister who had initially agreed to care for her children but then '*couldn't cope*' and so had placed them in the care of the LA:

*"She gave my kids up man... how am I meant to forgive her. She could have asked my friends. She didn't have to put them in care... she was their auntie, man."* (Dee)

The relationships with caregivers and the success of the parenting relationships with caregivers outside closely aligned with the findings of Strozier et al (2011). Healthy, meaningful relationships were found: where the parenting was shared and without struggle; where the caregiver and the mother both accepted and agreed the relationship and importantly who would 'lead' or control the relationship; where good communication, teamwork, problem-solving and compromise were all easily achieved; and, finally (and importantly), where affirmation and empathy existed for both parties:

*"I was lucky, we had a good relationship, and he recognised my need to parent from prison and made sure I was involved in all decisions about them and even in their day-to-day care wherever possible."* (Karen).

Conversely, a negative relationship resulted if communication is poor and influenced by conflict and power struggles; where each party undermines the other with differences in parenting styles and discipline, the mother is disconnected and experiences an overwhelming sense of despondency, guilt and fear. When this occurred, some of the Mothers simply refused to allow visits, partly because they were making protective decisions about their children (O'Malley, 2018) and partly because they did not have the emotional resilience to maintain those physical links and relationships, or the 'fall out' (Tanisha) from visits.

What was clear from this study was that relationship dynamics whilst the Mothers were incarcerated set-in motion other dynamics that persisted post-release. Ultimately, many of the difficulties and challenges faced by the Mothers (and their children and grandchildren) whilst they were separated by prison left an enduring legacy which affected post-prison relationships and family dynamics (explored in Chapter 7).

### **6.2.7 Regimes, Rules and Relationships**

It has been demonstrated that the Mothers found the experience of entering custody both painful and harmful; they felt that the punitiveness and harm of the experience was exacerbated and magnified for them as mothers. They all described how they would turn to each other for mothering support, replicating the nurturing they were used to

performing as mothers of their children. The prison environment, especially whether the prison was open or closed, and their relationships with the prison staff bore a relationship to how the Mothers coped and managed their maternal emotions, maternal role and maternal identity.

#### **6.2.7.1 Open/closed conditions and maternal relations**

The type of prison to which the Mothers were sent had an impact on their maternal experience and the Mothers' relationships with each other. Unlike the male estate women are not always placed strictly by their risk<sup>55</sup> or in local prisons, unlike in the male estate: women are placed based on the requirements of the prison estate and the availability of spaces; although efforts are made to place them near to their homes, women are often sent over 100 miles away from home (PRT, 2019). This is yet another example of the criminal justice system mirroring the discrimination and inequalities of wider society (Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Gelsthorpe, 2007). Ten of the twelve women's prison in the UK are closed prisons, although some prisons, have both open and closed areas within a closed environment. Guidance from the Ministry of Justice Women's Policy Framework (2018:3:3.20) states that: *'Women are managed appropriately to their current risk level and complexities of need, with the aim of reducing risk as their sentence progresses. Where possible, and subject to the considerations of security, good order and addressing their offending behaviour, women are held in prisons that best enable them to maintain their family ties.'*

Despite this guidance, women are often located many miles from home, are subject to being moved at any time, and are often held in closed conditions despite their offence and risk levels (in terms of harm or escape) not indicating that necessity. Most of the Mothers experienced at least one prison transfer, while some experienced several. Often these moves would take place with only a few hours' notice, and for no reason other than

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<sup>55</sup> In the male estate, prisons are categorised as A, B, C, or D and prisoners are housed based on their risk of harm or risk of escape. Cat A is the highest category of security, and Cat D is the lowest, and prisoners are categorised accordingly, too, and their individual risk category will match the category of their location. In the male estate, those not deemed Cat A will go automatically to their local prison – which, as the name suggests, is the prison most local to their home court - and may serve their whole sentence there; or they may be dispersed to one of a correlated category. Male prisoners often move through the categories as their risk reduces: in the female estate, there may not be a 'local' prison, so this does not currently happen and women can be sent to any UK prison dependant on available space: location is often 'considered' (but not always), meaning that women prisoners can be sent randomly to an open or closed establishment. (At the time of writing, this system is under review with evidence from this research in support of positive change being considered).

to accommodate the prison estate needs (as opposed to those of the women). For women who were mothers, such moves could be especially traumatic, as often they would have imminent visits with their children booked in and have no way of informing relatives that they had been moved (as described earlier by Tia). The Mothers in this study were often moved further away from home and would often move between open and closed prisons *'without rhyme or reason'* (Mary). Consequent changes of regime impacted on all aspects of prison life, but especially on mothers' contact with their children and caregivers and, therefore, their emotional regulation (Baldwin, 2018).

The Mothers described how, when they were held in open conditions, they would *'at every opportunity'* (Maggie) talk about their children and grandchildren and found that motherhood was something that bonded them. Several Mothers spoke of how they would gravitate to other mothers *'because we all knew what we are going through'* (Cynthia). Rita spoke about how she and *'a group of other mums, we called ourselves the Mothers Club'*, would seek each other out *'just being mums and talking about life and everything... actually it was always about the kids'*. Karen, who by her own admission tended to avoid social interaction with other prisoners, described how when she did speak to other prisoners, they *'tended to be other mothers'* because she felt that:

*"Although we might have nothing else in common in our lives, as mothers we were often the same. Thinking the same thoughts, just missing our kids, it wasn't so much being a prisoner we had in common but being mothers."* (Karen)

Similarly, Rita highlighted the positives of an open regime, whilst expressing her frustration about the inappropriateness of most women being confined in closed conditions:

*"We all bonded over motherhood. It felt lovely to be able to talk about our kids, it wasn't all we talked about - but it was mostly... it made us all feel 'normal'. [...] we had nothing in common at all other than we were mothers. We probably wouldn't have spoken outside, yet in prison we walked in the grounds, about three miles a day every day... just walking and talking. Closed conditions you can't do that... it makes it harder... and for what for? For nothing... most women don't need to be in closed*

*conditions... what were we going to do? Shoplift them or fraud them to death?" (Rita).*

Contrastingly, the Mothers spoke of how, in closed conditions they would adopt a stance of emotional control and restraint: they would avoid talking about issues that would upset them the most, i.e. their motherhood and/or their children. They did not want to 'burden' (Marjorie) other mothers or 'remind them what they were going through' (Marjorie). Crewe et al (2014) described similar observations related to male prisoners; however, in the male estate this 'emotional control' was a means of maintaining a 'masculine' mask or stance as well as a means of coping. In this study the Mothers described it more in terms of emotional regulation and protection over each other *as mothers*:

*"In closed you didn't know them [other mothers] as well, you didn't know if they had their kids in their care, or had had them took off them, or if they had visits... you just didn't know them as well so you'd just keep it light in case they went back to their cells upset like." (Rita)*

Annie, Rita, Ursula, Margot, and Carla all explicitly stated that being in open conditions made a significant difference to how they spent their time with each other *as mothers*:

*"In open conditions it was so nice, we had the freedom to walk about and mix with who we wanted to, it made a difference and groups with things in common bonded together - like I always bonded with the older mums and grannies, it was funny we were, like a kind of 'Mothers United'."*  
(Margot)

In a closed prison the regime is often such that women spend considerably less time out of their cells and have much less freedom while out of their cells. In a typical open prison<sup>56</sup>, women are unlocked for most of the day from their rooms, and they are able to walk around the inside sections of the prison freely during their non-lockdown hours, except when at work. They are often unescorted and are allowed to congregate or associate with a chosen peer group. Women in such environments make full use of the

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<sup>56</sup> See Appendix 22 for detail and example images of open and closed women's prisons.



outside space and enjoy a sense of freedom within a confined space, thus they create and access their own networks to help them to cope. In this study, this network was often made up of other mothers. The Mothers described how they felt united in a kind of motherhood solidarity. Contrastingly, women in closed prisons are held in much more rigid and regimented conditions, escorted by staff, they mostly mix only with other women on their wing, except sometimes at work, and they spend more time behind the door or locked into their wing, which makes it more difficult to form bonds of choice rather than association.

In closed conditions, particularly, the 'cell' became a private space of concentrated pain and or/hope where mothers desperately tried to create a space where their children were 'present' via photographs and drawings, and to '*make it feel like home*' (Kady). It was also a space where mothers would 'hold' their pain and try desperately to manage their maternal emotions: tragically, when they could not manage, it would be in their private spaces that they would self-harm or attempt suicide (see also Baldwin and Quinlan, 2018). Maggie speaking about being alone in her cell:

*"...[in my cell] was when I missed my kids the most and it was always then I would cut up - I never felt safe on my own or in my own head... I coped much better when I was with the other girls, they understood."*  
(Maggie)

As acknowledged by Sykes (1958:82) the pains of imprisonment can never be completely eliminated by the very definition that it is a prison, '*but if the rigors of confinement cannot be completely removed, they can at least be mitigated by the patterns of social interaction established amongst the inmates themselves*'. Sykes suggests that understanding this simple fact is key to understanding the inmate world. This was certainly important for the Mothers, however, their attempts to generate, maintain and sustain relationships with each other as *mothers* were often frustrated and challenged by the prison space itself and its regimes. Mothers in closed prisons found accessing supportive relationships with other women challenging, but nonetheless they would actively seek relationships with other mothers.

Mothers' acceptance of each other as mothers was not, however, universal. Representing Sykes' (1958:77) concept of 'outlaws within this group of outlaws', the

Mothers revealed that, although many bonded through shared motherhood or - more accurately - perceived 'good' motherhood, this was also a source of division and separation. Enos (2001) alluded to similar findings in her study, that negative judgement was directed at the addicted mothers by the 'other' mothers. Enos (2001) and Couvrette et al (2016) found that, despite the fact that the mothers in prison felt negatively judged themselves and resented it, some would nonetheless judge each other.

This phenomenon was replicated in this study, with several Mothers (n=6) speaking about a hierarchy of good motherhood where a mother's place was judged against the 'traditional' models of motherhood and how far from this widely accepted model each mother was deemed to be. Several additional factors influenced where mothers were placed on this perceived hierarchy, they included offence type, who had care of their children whilst in prison, whether the mothers used substances, whether or not children visited, and whether the mother was likely to have care of her children on release. Mothers who abused children, especially their own, were at the bottom of the hierarchy, and mothers who had had the care of their children prior to prison and who expected to resume their care from family caregivers (but not from LA care) on release, and who did not misuse substances, were at the top. Mothers who had already lost their children prior to coming to prison were seen as *'the lowest of the low'* (Shanice). Such mothers were not well regarded because it was felt that *'if the state didn't think they were good enough to be mothers why should we'* (Shanice).

This judgemental stance was different from that observed by other Mothers such as Queenie, who felt they were all *'just mothers who'd made a mistake'*. However, most of the Mothers exhibited some form of judgement towards certain 'groups' of mothers. Mothers were openly judgemental of mothers who had misused substances, even though most often they understood that drugs were a means of escapism or of coping, often from abusive histories:

*"The child molesters, no I would have nothing to do with them, disgusting a mother being a kiddy fiddler – you just think how? How could she?"*  
(Sophie)

*"I really didn't want to associate with those ones, the smackheads the druggies, the pervs and the ones on the game, I just couldn't get my*

*head round it. Kids come first, I know I'm in here, but I had no choice, and I wasn't well... I'm not like them."* (Annie)

*"Yeah like I said, the addicts, the prostitutes, the ones that beat their kids, neglected their kids, left their kids to starve, put drugs before their kids, they were like dogs, don't speak to them, don't have nothing to do with them, spit on them even, whatever... because how could you do that to a child. How can you call yourself a mother?"* (Shanice)

In other words, mothers who were deemed to be acting outside of the norms and ideals of traditional motherhood were judged the most harshly, which again indicates how the Mothers in the study had deeply absorbed traditional motherhood ideology and imported it into the prison (Rich, 1977; Ruddick, 1989; Dhimi et al, 2007). Mothers who were violent were not necessarily placed lower on the scale - if their offending was in 'defence' of their children, then they were put higher up the scale. For example, Shanice spoke about one mother whom she used as an example when discussing the 'scale':

*"So there was a woman on my wing and the screws hated her because her offence was vicious, but the bastard she tortured raped her six year old daughter, good on her I say, we [the prisoners] all were like, "go Tina", we admired her and thought she'd done what any good mother would and should."* (Shanice)

In this instance the Mothers appear to endorse the behaviour of the mother described because her actions were in keeping with the most basic of motherhood ideals, i.e. to protect. Shanice described how maternal emotions were '*on high alert*' in prison and that mothers' responses to what they saw as 'bad examples of mother' and mothering triggered an emotional response in mothers '*because we were really feeling not being with our kids*'. While it is clear that managing emotions in carceral settings is challenging for all prisoners (Knight, 2012; Crewe et al, 2014), Garland (1991) suggests that the effective management of this contributes to the control of prisoner behaviour. Knight (2012:275) suggests that prisoners and staff are '*both encouraged and coerced into achieving emotional composure in line with prison's 'feeling rules*'.

The above accounts reflect the challenges and coping-strategies employed to manage emotions and behaviour amongst mothers in a setting comprised of rules and regulations, all of which impacts on mothers' experiences, self and maternal identity and their perception of others. The regime and staff/prisoner relations were important factors in how the Mothers coped with their imprisonment.

#### **6.2.7.2 Care or uncare: Rules and staff relationships**

Mothers in the study described being '*desperate*' (Mavis) to hold on to their maternal identity and role, whilst navigating through a carceral space entrenched in rules and regulations which served to frustrate their efforts at every turn (Rowe, 2011). Mothers described how they felt that the prison environment and their own identity as a prisoner served to disempower them *as mothers* by reducing their maternal agency. Motherhood interacted with accepted notions, as proposed by Foucault (1977) and Goffman (1961) to replicate the power and control relationship of a 'total institution'. Ursula described her perception of her lack of power as a mother, and the lack of visibility of that role, which she felt was afforded to her by prison officers:

*"Denying your motherhood... it's a visible tangible demonstration of their power, isn't it. So prison life is all about tip toeing around the power, they hold the power and whether you get out or not, whether you get an easy job, or you don't, whether you see your kids or not... that's the reality. Whether you realise it or articulate it, that actually is the reality. You are in an abusive relationship with that power aren't you – because you don't have a voice... nobody cares. Do you think the public cares what happens to a prisoner? Nobody cares about you... You're just... you're what... you are [prison number], you are not even Ursula you're a number... certainly not a mother, that's the last thing you are to them... ... That's the reality." (Ursula)*

The 'cultural contradiction' (Hays, 1996) of the prison was the dichotomy between Mothers' identities as prisoners and as mothers. To the prison they were prisoners first, and to themselves they were mothers first. Mothers felt that the rules and regimes of the prison impacted on them more heavily as mothers, not least because their children were

affected, too. Which most Mothers felt was unfair. For example, Pham described her frustration at the rules around Childcare Resettlement Leave<sup>57</sup>:

*“The difficulty that has been the greatest is that the Child Resettlement rules mean that because my youngest has turned 16 I am not able to claim this right, nor I was told does it apply to grandchildren - so even though they are younger, I can’t see them either.” (Pham)*

Pham goes on to say, ‘these are his most important years’, and ‘not being there for him’ at such a time fuelled her ‘guilt’ and ‘failure as a mother’. She was frustrated that her status as a mother was ignored by the prison simply because her children were older.

*“The enormous guilt and sorrow that being away from your child at such an important time as their GCSEs, especially when you’re a person that places great emphasis on education like myself, is so hard to deal with....it’s my job to take him to college, to university open days, all of that and I can’t do it... I don’t understand why more flexibility to allow mothers the opportunity to support their children isn’t allowed... it’s my punishment not his.” (Pham)*

Although all prisoners are subject to the Incentive and Earned Privileges Scheme, Mothers described how this had at times affected them differently as mothers. Goffman’s (1961) concept of ‘total institutions’ offers a framework in which to understand the Incentive Earned Privileges (IEP)<sup>58</sup> scheme within prisons<sup>59</sup>, i.e. controlling prisoner behaviour through deprivation and access to previously held goods, services, and rights. Although the Joint Human Rights Committee Report (2019) and the female-focused Farmer Review (2019) recently advocated against it, prisons have historically regarded visits and contact with children as a privilege rather than as a right (Booth, 2017). Threats

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<sup>57</sup> Childcare Resettlement Leave (CRL) can be granted if the prisoner provides proof that he/she has sole caring responsibility for a child under the age of 16. CRL permits the primary carer to have contact with their dependants outside of the prison environment – for a day leave or overnight stay at home (Prison Service Order (PSO) 6300, National Offender Management Service (NOMS), 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Prisons are run on an Incentive and Earned Privileges (IEP) basis -which has three levels - basic, standard and enhanced.- Each level comes with additional privileges that are given and taken away based on compliance and conduct

<sup>59</sup> Each **prisoner** is set a status within the **prison** based upon their behaviour. This called your Incentive and Earned Privileges (**IEP**). Initially you will be given the status of an entry **prisoner**, which allows you certain number of visits each month and access to TV etc.

of losing visits or losing access to phone calls has been an established means of controlling prisoners' behaviour. Rita described how she had seen it happen '*many times*', in hindsight she was aware it was wrong, but at the time she had not challenged it. Sam had two visits with her mum and her son cancelled, once because she self-harmed, and another because she '*kicked off at staff when I was moved back to basic*'. Several Mothers described similar instances, amongst the most troubling were from Mothers who had spent time in a prison MBU:

*"I remember they used to say all the time about being on the Unit 'it's a privilege not a right to be here', man they used to make threats all the time that our babies would be sent out - we had all heard stories of mothers this happened to, and one girl I was in with said it had happened when she first was on the Unit, they sent a baby out because the mum had answered back a few times so then she was a real goody two shoes after that cos she was scared."* (Kady)

Echoing Rose's (1999) arguments about state governance of the family, and embodying Foucault's (1977:136) concept of 'hierarchical observation', this form of surveillance, regulation and control secured compliance in the women by promoting an atmosphere of fear. The ultimate fear being losing the care of their babies and their space on the MBU. In this context it is not surprising that the MBUs tend to have far fewer adjudications than 'normal' prison locations. Five Mothers spent time on MBUs, whilst they were able to take some positives from their experience, all would have much preferred to have been '*at home with family - anywhere but a prison with a baby*' (Kady). Kady and Carla had both found the MBU experience, and the additional surveillance of them as mothers, stressful, described by Kady as '*like a goldfish bowl*'. One Mother wrote about her experience of how the surveillance and control could manifest, describing how her refusal to '*comply with an instruction*' had led to the removal of her child:

*"I felt they were always watching me and waiting for excuses to challenge me, I felt it was personal. They had no thought for the wellbeing of my baby or myself after she was removed. They gave my mother less than 2 hours' notice and said if she didn't come to collect her she would be handed over to social services. I could not believe it. My heart is broken and I'm angry."* (Erin)

Erin goes on to say how she felt *'frustrated, angry and powerless'*, unable to do anything because of her prisoner status. She felt *'embarrassed and ashamed'* moving back to the general prison population after losing her space on the MBU. Sykes (1958) argued that *'deprivations and frustrations'* of prison pose threats to the self and to self-esteem. Erin made it clear this was true for her:

*"Going back to the wing was like a walk of shame, my baby was gone and I know the other mothers and especially the staff would have been thinking 'what did she do to risk losing her baby', they would have imagined it was something really bad. I felt embarrassed and ashamed... like the worst mother in the world."* (Erin)

Erin spoke of another incidence she was aware of where a mother had temporarily lost the care of her twins, again as a *'punishment'* for bad behaviour. The twins were later allowed back on the Unit, once they had secured the total compliance of the mother. This situation powerfully reflects Moore and Scraton's (2014) argument that prison radiates a power that is tortuous to women, deeply affecting their hearts, minds and souls, and is damaging their children in the process. The sense of powerlessness in prison, as previously described in literature (Sykes, 1958; Crewe et al, 2017), pervaded many of the Mothers' narratives but was particularly relevant regarding their motherhood. Mothers described feeling that their motherhood was *'at the mercy'* (Queenie) of the prison, its regime and sometimes of individual officers. Rita described her motherhood as being *'held hostage'* by the prison, with the prison dictating the terms of its release:

*"I felt like they held my motherhood and my access to my kids as a hostage, and only if I played the game and did everything they asked did I gain access to my kids, but actually even when I did everything they asked, they still decided not to do what they said... it was all on their terms... my release from incarcerated parenting all up to them. A one-way street."* (Rita)

Similarly, Adel describes her frustration at having no control over her children's lives and struggling with that, *'It's my job to be in control, to know'*. Tamika, also described her sense of powerlessness and relating it to her motherhood, stated:

*“You just have everything taken away from you, you have no rights over your children, no contact with your children, nobody cares about it either. They don’t look at you as if you are a Mother... they don’t care.”* (Tamika)

Canton and Dominey (2020:17) highlight the often contradictory relationship between punishment and care, recognising that ‘care’ is more easily directed towards ‘victims’ of crime rather than the perpetrators. This ‘selective compassion’ (*ibid*) is even more complicated concerning female ‘offenders’ as they are often ‘victims’ of crime, too. Law breakers are often only considered ‘reductively’ and in terms of their criminal behaviour thus are perceived as ‘undeserving’ of care (Canton and Dominey, 2020). For the Mothers in this study, this already disadvantageous position was compounded by their mother status, and they were seen as being even less ‘deserving’ of care.

Tait (2010:440) believes that ‘care is central to staff prisoner relationships’ and argues that exchanges of care in prison are frequent. She suggests that the ‘care’ that officers extend to prisoners is often overlooked and underreported, but nevertheless is an inevitable part of working with traumatised individuals and an aspect of their work that officers find rewarding. Care is especially important concerning vulnerable and suicidal prisoners (Crawley, 2004). Tait (2010) suggests that ‘care’ can be interpreted in different ways. Suggesting that although an officer might not recognise something as necessarily delivering ‘care’, it may be interpreted as such by the prisoner, as demonstrated by Nicola, *‘just by asking their names, or even acknowledging I was a mum, showed me she cared... she was nice.’* (Nicola).

Thus, caring is a ‘malleable concept’ shaped by variables such as personality, perception, individual experiences and location (Canton and Dominey, 2020:26). Tait (2010:449) concludes, despite not being necessarily a specific objective of the prison or even an officer’s intention ‘caring’ nonetheless occurs through the actions of individual officers (within the confines of an institution) and must be understood in that context. Tait (*ibid*) condemns the individual behaviour and lack of care she also observed. However, such behaviour highlights not only the ‘othering’ and ‘dehumanising’ that can occur in total institutions like prisons, but also the power imbalance between officers and prisoners. Which Goffman calls the ‘supervisory’ and the ‘managed’ groups (Goffman,



1961;10), something which, despite its obviousness and significance, Tait does not address.

There was an inherent power behind the staff/prisoner relations. All of the Mothers described how treatment from prison staff (particularly prison officers) towards them as *mothers* was important. Moreover, how it could impact on their maternal experience and ultimately contribute positively and/or negatively to their maternal identity. Crewe (2011:455) suggests that prisoner/staff relations are 'at the heart' of the prison. He argues prison staff have changed in more recent years, becoming less physically 'combative and impenetrable'. He argues that officer power has become 'softer', but still remains significant. He rightly highlights that trust can be an issue for both prisoners and staff in their relations with each other. Crewe (2011) does not explicitly state that his research and arguments are based on male prisons and prisoners, but they clearly are. Gender plays a role in staff/prisoner interactions as it does in most social interactions (Carlen, 1983). Many of the women in the female prison estate will have issues related to trust because of past abuse by men; although the power imbalance is present in the male estate too, for women it may feel magnified, especially concerning male staff.

Additionally, for the Mothers, the fear of negative evaluation as *mothers* (Liss et al, 2013) also created a barrier between officers and themselves. Mothers spoke about 'expecting' officers to treat them negatively as prisoners but appreciated that not all officers would be the same: 'you get bad bus drivers, you get bad prison officers' (Queenie); but as Mary stated, 'I didn't expect them to treat me as a bad mother... who are they to judge me on that, they know nothing about me... or my life'. Mothers spoke about the level of 'out and out judgement and disapproval' (Rita) they had experienced from some officers concerning their motherhood, and that this had had a definite impact on their mothering self-esteem and maternal identity:

*"The way they look at you when they see you are pregnant... the look on their faces... it's disgust, you can see it is... you know they are thinking what kind of mother will you be... I used to hide my belly as much as I could... they made me ashamed... I was already ashamed, but they made it worse."* (Kady)

*“On D wing... the officers would say stuff yeah... they made all of us feel like we didn’t even deserve to be mothers let alone treat us like mothers... we all said it, we all felt it.” (Rita)*

*“He actually said to me these exact words, ‘what kind of mother are you? You must be really bad to have three kids taken off you?’.... that nearly broke me you know because he was a decent bloke... that made it worse.” (Nicola)*

Crewe (2011) rightly highlights the enduring nature of ‘soft power’, particularly when it is written into reports, assessments, or rehabilitative records. These can have a particular significance for mothers, especially those engaged in childcare proceedings where such records have potentially huge implications if they are included in personal and maternal assessments. Mothers worried what the officers thought of them as *mothers* and worried about what was written down about them.

Mirroring Goffman’s (1963:23) avoidance of interactions between ‘normals and stigmatised’ individuals, many of the Mothers described how they would actively avoid having any conversations with staff about their children, even if they were preoccupied or stressed with maternal worries, because their perception was that the ‘*officers didn’t care*’ (Ursula). However, the Mothers described some incredibly powerful and positive interactions with individual officers, and Kady credited the officers in her first night centre<sup>60</sup> as having saved her life. She felt that had it not been for the compassion and observation afforded to her on her first days in custody, she ‘*would not have made it*’. Similarly, Dee, Tarian, Rita, and Sophie all described positive officer interactions in which they had found particular officers to be compassionate, kind, mindful of them as mothers and supportive and understanding about a mother’s situations and circumstances:

*“Then I went to [name of prison] and there was this fantastic Family Support worker who knew that I had got kids and knew their names. To*

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<sup>60</sup> Most prisons will have a dedicated first night centre or induction wing where new arrivals will be placed, with a separate unit for vulnerable prisoners. In some cases, sharing a cell can offer newly arrived prisoners with additional support in their first hours in custody.

*walk into that on your first day after having - actually, I don't remember anybody ever asking about my kids - an officer or anybody, so to have that it was like a different world.” (Rita)*

*“Miss Brown said I shouldn't even be in prison; she knew a different kind of help was what I needed, and she said that my sentence was just punishing my little girl... she was really kind.” (Sophie).*

Crawley (2004) argues that prisons are 'emotional places' where the relationships between prisoners and staff are 'structured and performed' through the 'feeling rules' associated with prison. She argues that prison officers are people too and therefore not immune to responding to prisoners on an emotional and human level as well as a professional level.

Several Mothers (n=6) mentioned positive experiences with Family Engagement Workers (FEWs), who are staff members employed by third sector organisations such as *Barnardo's* or *Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)*. The Mothers observed that these staff members, although a welcome positive support to their maternal needs, were *'mostly run off their feet... you couldn't get hold of them, but when you did they were brilliant'* (Rayna).

Mothers who had experienced pregnancy in prison were especially grateful to those officers who treated them well, although the Mothers gave the impression this was more to do with individuals acting independently of the rules rather than with a sense of them being accommodated and cared for in any procedurally, structurally organised way:

*“If Mr Ball was on then I knew I'd get extra food and milk, but not if he wasn't on... he wouldn't put the cuffs on at the hospital for my antenatal, either. If I'd still been in prison when I was in labour I would have wanted him to be there - even though he was a man. He was kinder than all of the women put together.” (Emma)*

The Mothers who gave birth during their prison sentence (n=4) also highlighted how important it was to them to have good officers on duty when they were in labour, and

how they hoped for a 'good' officer when they would eventually go to the hospital to give birth. This was best summed up by Kady:

*"You just prayed it wasn't one like Mrs White<sup>61</sup>, or the ones that ignored the bell, we all heard the horror stories of giving birth in a cell, one woman I know did and she nearly died, but the thought terrified me so, yeah, I wanted Mr Pink or Miss Blue, they always made me feel supported and didn't judge me... some of them others well they just make me feel shit as a Mother' man they really did... but Mr Pink and Miss Blue they used to even take the cuffs off me at the hospital scans... they were kind, man." (Kady)*

The grandmothers in the study did not fare so well in terms of positive prisoner/staff relations. All of the grandmothers stated that they felt disrespected because of their age, but importantly also because of their grandmother role and status. Echoing Wahidin's (2004) findings, Mothers said they felt officers infantilised them and '*had no respect for my age, what I had previously achieved, my status as a mother, and certainly not as a grandmother... as a grandmother, I was dismissed*' (Queenie).

Grandmothers reported how their role was undermined when accessing resources such as phone calls, that their value as grandmothers was deemed as less important than that of mothers:

*"I was told I was selfish for 'hogging' the phone and that I should let the 'younger mums with little ones' have the phone, but I loved my grown-up children and my little grandchildren just as much as they love theirs." (Diane).*

Prison staff responses to the Mothers not only impacted on their maternal selves in terms of their positive maternal identity, but also their engagement in prison life and sentence planning, as illustrated by Tanisha:

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<sup>61</sup> All Officer/Staff names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

*“Mr Green was so kind when my daughter was being bullied, he knew I wouldn’t be able to concentrate in the sentence planning meeting, so he asked for it to be postponed. If it had gone ahead that day I was so distracted I know I would not have joined in or seen the point to it - in fact I think I would have withdrawn from the programme... but because he moved it and helped me speak to the school and my daughter to sort it out my mind was clear when we did have the meeting. I was happy and they were happy... but without Mr Green understanding it could have gone badly wrong.” (Tanisha)*

Jaspreet and Tanya particularly spoke of how ‘good’ officers listened to their worries about losing their maternal role and encouraged them to be open with their families and children about their fears: both Mothers did this and described how their children and families reassured them and, as a result, their communication and contact improved. Both women said this then allowed them to engage in the opportunities offered for progression in prison more fully than they had before. Mary also highlighted how conversations with one particular prison officer had prompted her to get back in touch with her children whom she had not seen for ‘years’ when they had been taken into care. Mary had believed her children ‘*were better off without her*’ and had ‘*put them to the back of my mind*’ for years, but the officer who spent time with her in what Mary described as a ‘*non-judgy way*’, encouraged her to see that it was ‘*never too late*’ and to think about what ‘*kind of Mary*’ she would want her sons to see if they did come back into her life. Mary said this motivated her to ‘*change*’ and to access the support in prison that she had been unable to secure outside. She wanted to ‘*be a mother again*’.

Sociologists argue that social expectations and reactions are influenced by the norms and values inherent in a given society and culture (e.g. Kelly, 1955). As illustrated in Chapter 3, the ideology surrounding motherhood is heavily influenced by widely held societal and cultural beliefs. Such beliefs shape and influence mothers and reactions to mothers in the free world, and those beliefs are not left at the prison gates but are imported inside in the mothers’ own values and beliefs and also those of the staff. Almost every Mother in the study had experienced an officer or staff member say to her in response to their mentioning their children, or of missing their children, ‘you should have thought of your children before you did what you did’, or words to that effect. This had a profound effect on the Mothers and added to their level of mistrust and distance already

felt between prisoners and prison officers (Goffman, 1961), whilst also impacting on their maternal self-esteem.

Feminist geographers have identified intersections between gender space and feelings (Valentine, 1989) which are relevant to the relational experiences of mothers in prison. Emotions specific to time and place are generated by and are expressive of wider social relations (Bondi, 2005; Held, 1995) and they played out and impacted on the women in the study *as mothers* (also discussed in Baldwin's earlier work, 2018). Mothers felt othered and stigmatised not only by being in the prison space itself but by the officers and, importantly, *specifically* with regard to their motherhood. This layered and deeply felt '*disapproval*' (Tanya) concerning their motherhood was on top of the feelings mothers already had as already 'discredited' individuals because of the very fact that they were prisoners. Goffman (1961:18) suggests that inmates and staff in total institutions will view each other with hostility and suspicion and through stereotyped lenses of their 'side' - but what the Mothers described was more than this; it was about them *as mothers*. Motherhood was a pivotal aspect of their incarceration experience and, as demonstrated, was often compounded by the prison space and staff interactions yet mitigated (to some extent) by the Mothers' relationships with other mothers in prison. This remained the case whether the Mothers were mothers of very young children, teenagers or adults, or were grandmothers.

### **6.2.8 Grandmothering behind bars and reproducing motherhood**

Particularly when viewed through a matricentric lens, it is impossible to ignore the valuable contribution grandmothers often make to the lives of their grandchildren. The significant role grandmothers play in the family, even from behind bars is not to be underestimated. The experiences of older mothers and grandmothers have been almost invisible in UK-based prison research and this study responds to a significant gap in knowledge. Grandmothers in this study experienced prison in similar ways to the Mothers and shared many of the Mothers' emotions and descriptions related to their maternal pain. However, for grandmothers, the challenges of the prison experience were often amplified, not least because their experiences and emotions were 'layered', relating to their own adult children *and* their grandchildren. The grandmothers not only had to contend with imported beliefs about motherhood, but also those about age and the

grandmother role. Mothers of older children, and/or grandmothers, in the study described feeling an *additional* sense of shame and judgement *specifically* related to their age and/or their grandmothering identity. The sense of shame alluded to by most, if not all, of the Mothers was magnified for the grandmothers because of the expectations and ideology of both femininity *and* ageing.

The lack of research around older women in prison represents what Wahidin (2004:10) calls a 'latent form of agism' highlighting the status of older women in prison, whom she suggests are perceived as 'not worthy of discussion'. Wahidin did not specifically explore the experiences of grandmothers in prison, but several of her participants were grandmothers who spoke of their pain and the challenges they faced as incarcerated grandmothers. Wahidin quotes Petra Puddepha who stated, '*You never stop being a mother, you're a mother till the day you die*'. Petra goes on to express her frustration that the prison fails to recognise her as a mother, focussing instead on the mothers of younger children (Wahidin, 2004). Echoing Wahidin's research, grandmothers in this study felt they lost the status that '*automatically comes with or should come with age*' (Maggie), but more than this they also felt 'reduced' in terms of their motherhood and grandmother status, feeling an additional layer of shame as older mothers '*who should know better*' (Queenie), alongside a feeling of invisibility.

Mavis, a retired teacher who struggled with depression in prison, described the stripping away (Goffman, 1961) of her maternal and grandmother roles as '*uniquely painful*'. She said:

*"I wasn't a grandmother anymore... that's what it felt like, yet I had looked after my grandchildren every day, but then nothing, it was like I was nothing to them. It's like I am nothing, just nothing."* (Mavis)

Sandra who, as previously stated, felt the officers' judgement of her was exacerbated by her grandmother status, said:

*"It was like they just thought we were... I dunno, double wrong, we was last in line for any of the mother stuff... like I said invisible, its wrong really you know, grandkids are just as important to us as our kids."*  
(Sandra)

Similarly, Mavis was frustrated by the lack of recognition for her role as a grandmother, despite her significant role in her grandchildren's lives:

*"I used to do all their childcare, in fact because they [her son and his wife] were professionals, I saw my son's children more than he did. I feel so guilty for them, that I'm not there for them, it's bad enough their parents work the long hours they do, at least they had their granny to fill that gap. I should be there for them, for my son and daughter, too, obviously, but especially for my grandchildren. It's what grandmas do isn't it, it's what we are for."* (Mavis)

Many of the grandmothers felt that their maternal needs were neglected and that they were not afforded the same courtesies or access to support as the mothers with young children. Wahidin (2004) highlighted how failing to meet the needs of older women prisoners constitutes additional punishment, and that was certainly something felt by the grandmothers in this study:

*"It was so much worse for us grannies and nannas, we got none of the special leave or ROTLS, we missed funerals and things younger mums would get compassionate leave for, it felt like we were either invisible or extra punished."* (Sandra)

Maggie spoke of her frustration at the prison and *'the system'* and its failure to recognise grandmothers and grandmothering as important. She described challenging the rules about what was defined as *'close and immediate family'* and described how she *'took on the fight'* for other grandmothers to help them challenge negative decisions about compassionate or childcare special leave. Maggie's grandchild was diagnosed with leukaemia while she was in prison and she felt that her grandmother role and status was ignored at a time when she was *'most needed'*, not only as a grandmother but as a mother to her adult child:

*"I absolutely had to fight for everything.....in the end I was given permission to see him [grandson] in hospital, but only because he was so ill they thought he might die! Before all of that there was his*



*treatments, his appointments, the diagnosis. I should have been with my daughter for all of that and I would have been. Even when they grow up its times like that your kids need you the most, I was her mum and I wasn't there, it honestly nearly killed me and I know it broke my daughter's heart, it so added to the pain for her, doing all of it without her mum, can you imagine that?" (Maggie)*

Grandmothers described feeling 'ignored' (Queenie) in activities that focused on mother/child separation or mothering. This made the grandmothers feel that not only had they lost their status and roles as grandmothers, but even as mothers:

*"It was like because we're old, because our 'children' were adults we didn't count... yeah there were some things for mothers inside... but mainly for mothers of little kids like family visits and parenting classes... which weren't parenting classes as such, but where the mothers got together to talk about their kids, but because my kids were grown-ups and even my grandchildren aren't babies then I was ignored as a mother, I feel." (Queenie)*

It is important to note that grandmothers' experiences were not all completely negative. Different prisons had different rules; for example, in one prison where the 'family day' visits were run by a third sector organisation (PACT)<sup>62</sup>, grandmothers are automatically included in the reach of eligible mothers, although mothers with younger children were given priority - which was still a bone of contention for one Mother:

*"It's shit... it just gives the message to my grandkids they aren't as important as the other kids... but they are." (Sandra)*

As a grandmother in custody, Ursula was allowed childcare leave to attend the birth of one of her grandchildren, but the sense of benevolence was not lost on her:

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<sup>62</sup> Prison Advice and Care Trust – a large charity working with prisoners and their families by delivering services but also advocating for and championing change in the CJS and penal reform.

*“I was overwhelmed with gratitude when I was told I could go but imagine that, man, being grateful for being allowed to attend to your daughter, to your grandchild... imagine having to feel grateful... if I had missed the birth I don't think my daughter would ever have forgiven me – I don't think our relationship would have recovered, it was already hard enough because of my sentence. She was angry with me for missing her pregnancy – if I had missed the birth too... well I think that would have been it.” (Ursula)*

As has been stated Mothers were far away from home, so for some visits were few and far between, and for others did not occur at all. For Mothers of older or adult offspring, employment reduced visiting opportunities:

*“My son would never have taken leave from work to visit, he would not have seen that as a worthy reason to take time off work... and I suppose neither would his employer. Not that he would ever have told his employer where I was. But no, he would not take time off work to come.” (Mavis)*

The Mothers of older and adult children described feeling the judgement from their children, which was less of an issue for the Mothers of young and very young children. Diane highlighted that children who were *‘emotionally old enough to express their feelings’* were able to *‘use their words to hurt’* and to make choices that younger children could not – like to refuse to visit. Queenie felt the disparities between older and younger mothers and the expectations of motherhood were never more apparent to her than in her adult daughter's judgement of her and, conversely, her lack of judgement for her father:

*“Her judgement of me was harsh, she gave me absolute hell, ‘I should know better, what kind of Mother was I?’ worse still, ‘what kind of a grandmother was I?’ Her verbal was worse than prison, her trying to teach me right from wrong. She just dug and dug and dug and dug, ‘I've never known any woman, a woman in her fifties that's been to prison’, blah blah... then ‘all my life I'm going to be ashamed of you, my own Mother’... no sympathy, none. [...]... yet you know what? Nothing about*

*the domestic abuse I went through, nothing about her father. Dad's been to prison, yeah her dad's been to prison for drugs and whatever but nothing about that... she's good with him... but I have let her down being her mother, her children's grandmother and who's been to prison', [...]* she doesn't hide the fact he has been to prison, but she does me. It's more normal for a man to go to prison isn't it, more acceptable.”  
(Queenie)

Ursula also described struggling to deal with the ‘judgement, disapproval and disappointment’ of her older children:

*“The thing I couldn't cope with was like, the emotional... like my daughter saying that I wasn't a good mother. It was like destroying to the core. She was old enough to know her mind man and that's what she thought.”*  
(Ursula)

Ursula goes on to say that the earlier mentioned statement from her daughter that Ursula could not consider herself as a good mother was more painful than hearing in court that she would be in prison for years and more painful ‘*than actually being in prison*’. Diane, who also experienced judgement from her older children, described how she ‘*distracted*’ herself by focusing on those she felt would not judge her at all - her fellow prisoners.

A way for some of the grandmothers to ease the ‘profound hurt’ (Datesman and Cales, 1983:142) of being separated from their loved ones and losing their maternal role, was to replicate motherhood with those prisoners much younger than themselves and who were perceived as in need and receptive of their nurture. Queenie, who was imprisoned over 200 miles away from home, described how rewarding she found her ‘*grandma persona*’ in the prison space:

*“Every prison I went to I was one of the oldest, sometimes there were only another two or three women fifty plus... so I did adopt grandma persona in prison. For 99% of the time it was like ‘Oh Queenie will know’, ‘Queenie will sew that for you’, ‘Queenie is a nice lady go see her’... I was pulled into it but I loved it. It made me feel still like a mother. I loved it especially when I was up in [name of prison], I never saw my own*

*family, so my prison family made me feel better - better than my own actually because they didn't judge me.” (Queenie)*

The lack of judgement of her as a *mother* was important to Queenie. Judgement felt by adult children was something discussed by all of the Mothers of older or adult offspring. Diane described herself as a '*more mature lady*'; she was serving life for murder, and gained a degree of comfort from 'mothering' the younger women on her wing:

*“They actually call me mum some of them, or nan the really young ones... I can't believe they are here, poor souls, breaks my heart it does, I just look at them and think they could be my daughter, or my granddaughter and it just makes me want to hug them, which I do. Apparently, I give the best cuddles. The thing is I do it to make them feel better, but the truth is it makes me feel better too. The officers have started asking me to mentor the young ones when they come in now. Because they know I've got a long stretch, all these little ones, they come and go, and well me, I'm here for a long time so they get some consistency with me. I think that's why they've put me in the reception bit, t[...]. I think they think a kind maternal face will help and apparently I have one, quite funny really when you think what I'm in for!” (Diane)*

These findings extend Crewe et al's (2017) who described women 'lifers' in their research as struggling to 'switch off' their mother role and describing the loss of the act of mothering as an ache that never goes away. Hairston (1991) suggested that the 'stripping' of the mother role was the most traumatic aspect of being a mother in prison. This research demonstrated that for those Mothers who were also grandmothers, losing their active role as mothers *and* as grandmothers was especially painful. Mothering other mothers gave the women a sense of purpose while creating a kind of prison family. For the mothers of older or adult offspring or those who were grandmothers, replicating motherhood in prison was a means of coping and also of retaining their maternal-identity and role. 'Mothering' the younger women served the purpose of giving the mothers an 'outlet' for their maternal-emotions and their need to nurture, whilst also making positive connections and letting them feel better about themselves:

*"I mothered the younger ones... because I could, I liked it, it made me feel better, and them feel better why not? so win win really." (Maggie)*

Mavis, a grandmother with a very middle-class background, surprised herself with how her maternal instincts transcended class barriers; she described in her interviews almost 'needing' to mother as a way of healing her own maternal pain and managing her emotions:

*"I would not have looked at some of those girls twice outside, in fact I'm ashamed to say I would have avoided them and been suspicious of them. Yet in prison I just wanted to nurture them, I felt sorry for them and I did used to mother them I suppose. I think we needed each other, they needed to be mothered and I needed to mother." (Mavis)*

As previously evidenced, many of the Mothers had negative or poor experiences of mothering in their childhoods and lives before prison, something also evident in O'Malley's (2018) Irish study with mothers in prison. This was relevant to both Mothers who replicated mothering and those who experienced the mothering from older women prisoners:

*"I guess in some ways it was a chance to redeem myself almost as a mother, I looked after those young girls in some ways better than I ever had my own kids on the outside." (Carla)*

Rayna, whose own mother was sick with cancer and died whilst she was in prison, felt 'desperate' for the nurturing she was missing from her own mother and she took a great deal of comfort from the fact that an older woman in prison had taken on that role for her:

*"There was this old lady Elsie, I don't know how old she was, I never asked her... but she was a lifer and she just really took me under her wing. I would be desperate to see her every day, for her to cuddle me in her big fat arms... she was all warm and mamsie looking... and she'd tell me it would be ok... even though it wasn't... ok I mean, she still always made me feel better. I really really loved her... like a mother and*

*I think she saw me as a daughter... in fact she used to call me that, just 'daughter'... all the time " (Rayna)*

Rayna goes on to say that she felt many of the women were looking for opportunities to mother someone - *'even the staff'* - and that she observed it *'making them feel better'*. Interestingly, Rayna described how, whilst her own mother was sick, her role as a daughter preoccupied her as much as her mother role. So, for her to have had the opportunity to seek out and find a mother figure in prison was especially important. Sophie and Beth also spoke about older women taking them under their wings, mothering and *'looking out'* for them. Both described how they felt this was something they had benefitted from, especially Beth, the youngest Mother in the study who had had to leave behind her three-month-old baby:

*"Without Anya [mother substitute], I don't know how I would have coped, in the end they padded me up with her and she really did just become my mam'. (Beth)*

### **6.2.9 Summary**

This study reveals how completely the Mothers absorbed traditional societal models and ideology and expectations of motherhood and mothering. Many of the mothers entered prison with an already reducing maternal self-esteem and spoiling maternal identity. The spoiling continued and was confirmed to the Mothers once in prison. Being a *'prison mother'* was seen by the Mothers as the ultimate failure, failure to live up to deeply embedded ideals of what a 'good' mother should look like. The pain of separation from their children, was profound and traumatic. Mothers experienced a stripping away of their maternal identity and role, resulting in distinct and specific maternal pains of imprisonment. Mothers and grandmothers sought comfort and support in their relationships with each other, demonstrating their maternal skills through nurture or the replication of motherhood. Motherhood and its associations remained Mothers' and grandmothers primary focus. The Mothers felt their motherhood and maternal identity mattered most to them, but that it seemed to matter least to the prison system. Being in

prison compounded Mothers' already challenging circumstances. The physical space of prison and the dynamics within interacted with the Mothers' experiences to shape a heavily stigmatised, painful experience of incarcerated motherhood/grandmotherhood. The prison environment bore some relationship to how the Mothers coped and managed their maternal-emotions, maternal-role and maternal-identity. Mothers felt surveilled and controlled not only as prisoners but as mothers, and this sometimes had an impact on their relationships with each other, and on contact and relationships with their children and families outside.

The Mothers struggled to manage their maternal emotions whilst navigating through the carceral space. Most of the Mothers felt their motherhood and grandmotherhood status was either ignored or judged. In the main they felt their needs as *mothers* were not well accounted for, and where they were met, it was because it suited the prison. As such, the Mothers embodied Sykes' (1958) 'pains of imprisonment', illustrating how the 'frustrations and deprivations' of prison impacted on their maternal-identity and role, and subsequently their interactions with their children, thus setting in motion the persistent pains that would prevail beyond the prison walls on release.

The following Chapter 7 explores the experiences of the Mothers and grandmothers post-release, revealing the impact of their incarceration in the months, years and decades following their release; thus, revealing the enduring and persistent pains of maternal imprisonment.

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# Chapter 7: The Persistent Pains of Maternal Imprisonment

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*“It never ends, the guilt the shame, the worry that their mistakes are because you went to prison, I get good days and bad days.... But even now all these years later it’s back in a flash... it is, it’s a life sentence when a mother goes to prison... for all of us.” (Margaret)*

## 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the pre-prison and in-prison experiences of mothers and grandmothers. Taking up the Mothers’ narratives post-release and through a matricentric lens, this chapter demonstrates how the effects of maternal imprisonment are felt far beyond the prison walls. The Mothers’ imported (Dhami et al, 2007), values and beliefs about motherhood continued to impact and inform their maternal self-esteem post-release. When considered alongside the complexities and challenges of post-prison life, this served to frustrate and undermine Mothers maternal role and identity, their re-entry into their families, and their desistance.

Responding to the formally identified gaps in literature (Chapters 2 and 3), this chapter provide new insights into the post-prison experiences of mothers and grandmothers and new knowledge about the persisting long-term traumatic effects of maternal imprisonment. Particularly concerning maternal identity, maternal emotions and the maternal role. Responding to an additional and specific gap in the literature, this chapter identifies the particular ways in which grandmothers and mothers of adult children have been affected by imprisonment and how the subsequent *‘layers of shame’* (Mavis) continue to challenge their maternal identity for many years.

Through the themes of *‘Renegotiating Motherhood’*, *‘Trust and Surveillance’*, and *‘Trauma and Pain’*, the chapter explores the *‘deprivations and frustrations’* (Sykes, 1958) that contribute to the persistent pains of maternal imprisonment. It explores the Mothers’



attempts to renegotiate and repair their motherhood as they re-enter the lives of their children and families. Further, it reveals how mothers strive to come to terms with the collateral damage of their imprisonment in terms of enduring guilt, shame, losses, changed relationships, post-prison supervision and long-lasting trauma.

## **7.2 Renegotiating Motherhood**

As has been evidenced by this thesis, maternal identity, maternal self-esteem and maternal role are all disrupted and reduced by imprisonment (Enos, 2001). Mothers in the study articulated their *'hope'* and *'wish'* for things to *'get back to normal'* (Margot) on release. However, the reality is often very different (Eaton, 1993; Enos, 2001; Brown and Bloom, 2009; Leverentz, 2014). Reintegration and re-unification into families presented many challenges for the Mothers. Their greatest challenges lay in the re-establishing of their altered and/or broken relationships with family, especially with their children and grandchildren. Resuming their maternal role, was a *'precarious enterprise'* (Brown and Bloom, 2009:313).

All of the Mothers found their release and the post-prison period challenging, some in ways they had anticipated - *'I knew it would be a while before they forgave me'* (Tanisha) - others in ways they had not expected - *'I did not expect to feel like a stranger in my own home'* (Rayna). The Mothers found that they had to renegotiate their place in their families, their relationships with their children, and their new or altered maternal identity. In short, they had to renegotiate their motherhood from their now disadvantaged position as a *'spoiled'* mother (Brown and Bloom, 2009).

### **7.2.1 Spoiled maternal identity**

Feminist scholarship has made significant contributions to knowledge about the bearing of identities *'other'* than *'ex-prisoner'* and the effect this has on the re-entry experiences of women (Opsal, 2015). The legacy of their pre-prison and in-prison experiences had left the Mothers feeling *'tainted'*. In most of the Mothers' own eyes they remained *'bad'* mothers, not now because they were *in* prison but because they had *been to* prison. The repair to their maternal identity was not immediate on release if it happened at all.

Although most of the Mothers demonstrated a 'spoiled maternal-identity', several actively resisted the 'spoiling'. Mothers fought against being labelled, and sought to make their experience 'count', either by utilising it as a catalyst for change (Giordano et al, 2002), also using it to assist others with similar experiences, and/or by actively challenging and disrupting 'the system' via activism, and/or by simply refusing the label.

*"I refused to be labelled as just a mother who's been to prison. All the way through [the system] that label is shoved onto you and all the bad that goes with it. But I am much more than this, I am not going to let what I did to myself and my family define me for the rest of my life."* (Rita)

Some of the Mothers felt angry at the persisting negative emotions they felt and pushed against the negative identity and connotations they felt were imposed on them by others as well as by themselves. For example, Kady stated she was '*not ashamed to be me*'; and Emma stated:

*"I know I've been to prison and that makes me a bad mother, but I'm out now so does that mean I can never be good enough? what person hasn't made mistakes? It's just that we mothers aren't allowed to make mistakes are we?"* (Emma)

Similarly, Cynthia - felt strongly that her past should be allowed to remain in the past despite the guilt she described '*living with every day*':

*"I know most people think I must be a rubbish mum because I went to prison, but I'm not completely. I was, but I got better, [...] now I think I'm a better mum than some people I know who haven't even broke the law... who are they to judge me? My son thinks I'm a good mum and that's all that matters to me now."* (Cynthia)

Post-prison mothers often encounter challenges (Eaton, 1993; Brown and Bloom, 2009), and stigmatisation (Goffman, 1963). Many face the same difficult circumstances that they were living in pre-prison, now compounded by ex-prisoner status, spoiled maternal-identity, reduced maternal self-esteem and, sometimes, agency (Carlton and Seagrave,

2013; Leverentz, 2014). The internalised perception of themselves as 'bad mothers' was something the Mothers felt unable to escape from, and they were often reminded of it:

*"...there will be a happy family discussion going on, you know just normal round the table chit-chat, then someone will say 'oh Mum, do you remember when such and such happened?'... then there will be the inevitable, 'oh sorry... that was when you were away'... then the room will fall momentarily silent, it will only last a few seconds... but those seconds feel like a lifetime for me. A lifetime of being a bad mother."*  
(Ursula)

Several Mothers felt that they had permanently relinquished any previously held 'good mother' identity, in their own eyes, and in the eyes of their family and wider society.

*"I'm not sure I will ever be able to think of myself as a good mother now. Going to prison changed that and even if I weren't judging myself I know others would judge me if they knew. It's not something I'm proud of, or am happy for people to know about me, put it that way. Even all these years later."* (Karen)

Feeling stigmatised (Goffman, 1963), was familiar to many of the Mothers and was often related to a fear of negative evaluation by others (Liss et al, 2013):

*"I hate people knowing that I was pregnant both times I went to prison, it was bad enough being judged in court... I think, well everyone thinks, it's worse being in prison pregnant... so no I don't tell people if I can help it... it's just wrong, innit, and those that I do tell or have told, well they just look down their noses at you... it's like, 'how could you?'. You can see it in their eyes. It makes them question what kind of person you are."*  
(Tamika)

Many of the Mothers experienced discrimination, stigma and judgement in their pre-prison lives as women, as working-class women, as black women, substance misusing women, older women. Often there was an intersectionality to their experiences, and they were deemed triply or even quadruply deviant (Collins, 1994, 2005; Murray, 2007;

O'Malley, 2018, 2020). This was replicated post-release. For several Mothers, their age, class, race and culture interacted with their motherhood and their own maternal self-assessment and others' assessment of them.

*"My family obviously told me I brought shame on the family, I flip between being shunned by those who know [about prison] and lying to those who don't... obviously, I did know it would be like this. My culture is very judgemental, especially to women... It's worse because I'm a mother, ... even now my mother-in-law gets digs in all the time, she told my husband I was not 'morally capable' of guiding them [the children] now and bringing them up. I lost my profession, too, and that doesn't help me feel good about myself at all... that I can't practice anymore, but it is as a mother I feel the most ashamed. For my husband it is both, but for my mother-in-law... to her I am not fit to be a mother."* (Jaspreet)

Kady, a black Mother, was supervised by a black probation officer and on her release was told by her probation officer that she had '*let her race down*'; she told Kady that as '*an intelligent black mother you should have been better, you have let us all down*'. Kady described how this conversation played over in her head, interacting with her own already reducing self-esteem, specifically her maternal self-esteem. For Kady, her guilt and shame was layered:

*"I have never forgotten it. I was already questioning myself, could I do this, could I be a good role model to my daughter as a mother who'd been to prison? As a mother whose baby was born in prison. I was already questioning, man, and she went and said that... she said that!.... so now I have to feel guilty not only as a mum... but as a black mum too."*  
(Kady)

Eight years post-release, Kady had yet to tell her daughter she had been to prison. Nor that she was born in prison and had spent the first five months of her life in a prison MBU. Kady stated she had '*put off*' telling her daughter '*because I feel like... like there's something just so wicked about it*'. She was afraid of her daughter's rejection but also feared others would judge and negatively label her daughter a '*prison baby*'. Kady did not think her daughter would '*forgive*' her:

*"I put her there, she didn't ask to be there. I just don't think she will [forgive], and the thing is I wouldn't even blame her if she hates me....[.] but she will always be that child who was born in prison. My shame is her shame, or it will be when she knows, I don't want her tainted like me, why would I want her to know that about herself, about me, she's got the most horrible birth story forever, I did that to her, me."* (Kady)

Goffman (1963) suggests that mothers, like all ex-prisoners, now had what he called '*blemishes of character*' and would continue to be further stigmatised. However, as alluded to in Chapter 6, just as motherhood held master status in terms of identity (Higgins, 1987), 'ex-prisoner motherhood' occupied a master identity in terms of spoiling. It was Mothers damaged maternal identity that hurt and impacted the Mothers the most. Mothers spoke of feeling '*forever tainted*' (Kady), '*damaged*' (Cynthia), and '*tarnished*' (Mavis), *specifically* as mothers. Thus further illustrating the mothers absorption of traditional motherhood ideology (Rich, 1976; Oakley, 1979; O'Reilly, 2006).

Maggie described how she felt *all* of the positive aspects of her previous mothering and grandmothering were now erased. The expectations of mothers and motherhood, and their relationship to guilt was more fully explored in previous chapters (Rich, 1976; O'Reilly, 2006), but this research revealed that the shame and guilt mothers *continued* to feel post-prison remained rooted in traditional expectations of motherhood, maternal-role and identity. Queenie, who had previously described herself as the '*runt*' concerning motherhood, repeatedly spoke of her daughters' '*shame*' at having '*an ex-prisoner, a criminal as a mother*'.

*"...it's years later now, and they are still ashamed of me, so how can I not be ashamed of me too, they don't know anyone else with a mother who's been to prison... it's a big secret, this is. No matter what, her shame [daughters] won't go so how can mine? I want to shed it, but I just can't."* (Queenie)

Arditti and Few (2006) argue that the 'enactment' of mothering is altered dramatically during imprisonment, and mothers' identities change as a result of that disruption. This struck a chord with Mothers in the study. Illustrated by Taranpreet, writing from prison:

*“I just don’t feel like a mother anymore, and if I’m not a mother I don’t know what else I am except just a criminal.” (Taranpreet)*

The Mothers spoiled maternal identities sometimes acted as a paralysing factor regarding reactivating their mothering. Mothers were so traumatised by their experiences that they were simply unable to mother their children because of an overwhelming fear of failing (again):

*“in the end I couldn’t see the point in fighting her... she [grandmother] was a better mother to them than I could ever be, and I just didn’t want to let them down again.” (Carla)*

Mothers felt keenly that the reduction in their maternal self-esteem was heavily underpinned by guilt and shame and was directly related to their fear of negative evaluation and judgement by others (Liss et al, 2013). For Mothers who had previously had issues with addiction, and/or had experienced their children being permanently or temporarily removed from their care, their maternal guilt, shame and fearfulness of an uncertain future; was a trigger for a return to substance misuse as a means of blocking out or coping with their ongoing, all-encompassing maternal emotions. A return to substance misuse often made a return to law-breaking more likely.

*“I can’t turn the clock back and I know I’ll feel shit about it forever, I know it makes me a bad mother, all I can do it try to be better, it shames me, it really does... it shames me... it’s so difficult not to use [substances] to block out feelings like this... and that’s what I always did in the past... it was a cycle: block out, use, feel worse, block out, use more.” (Sandra)*

Beth, the youngest mother in the study, had predicted in her interview that a return to drug use or suicide would be likely for her because of her struggle with guilt, shame and sadness. She was utterly traumatised by the enforced separation from her baby (who was three months old when Beth was sentenced), which, alongside her own negative self-evaluation of herself as a mother. This was too much for Beth to bear:

*“The bairn had to stop breast feeding cos I was sent down... that’s sick isn’t it? Her health for life affected because of me and my mistakes. I felt like a shit mother, the worst in fact... she went into care because of me, I felt like nothing when I was in prison [..]. Even now I think what’s the point of me. She doesn’t know me now... I try in the contacts<sup>63</sup> like, but she doesn’t want me... when I come out of my contacts, all I want to do is block out the pain with drugs... that or leave this life altogether... sometimes both.” (Beth)*

Beth’s shame and guilt were layered: not only did she feel stigmatised as an ex-prison mother, but she worried about what her daughter would ‘*think of her*’ in the future when she found out she had been in care. Worrying about this fuelled Beth’s lack of hope and her uncertainty about what kind of future they ‘*could have*’ (Warr, 2016).

### **7.3 ‘It’s just different’.**

Motherhood and maternal experiences preoccupied Mothers thoughts. The reduction or altering of their maternal role had a profound effect on their self-concepts and self-worth (Mireault et al, 2002). Rita, like several Mothers, was torn between feeling ‘*invisible*’ and wanting to retreat further into the background of her family and fighting to regain her previous role and matriarch status.

Echoing many of the Mothers’ experiences, Rita recognised that she had lost ‘*power*’ as a mother. Not just over her toddler son, but over all her children. Previously the linchpin of the family, Rita went on to describe how she had to renegotiate her relationships with all of her children (Brown and Bloom, 2009). She, like several of the Mothers of teenage children, stated it took her time to recognise that her children had all matured whilst she had been in prison. Her elder children had been young pre-teens and teenagers when she went inside – a period of intense change in young people’s lives. They had all become more emotionally mature and more independent in her absence and Rita felt

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<sup>63</sup> Supervised regular contacts organised by social services and usually in a contact centre, with a plan to move gradually to more frequent and unsupervised contacts as part of the process of a gradual full reunification.

they all needed a 'period of adjustment', whilst she fought to re-centre herself in the family and come to terms with the changes in their relationship dynamics. In Rita's case, she felt her, and her family eventually found and negotiated 'a new normal' they were all happy with, and slowly relationships between her and her children strengthened.

Sadly, this was not always the case. Shanice, who had described feeling like an 'outsider' 'watching in' whilst in prison, had not expected that feeling to continue once she was released. However, and echoing Brown and Bloom's (2009) findings, Shanice found that feeling was in fact magnified. She felt more of an outsider than ever.

*"Sometimes I'd watch my mother with the kids and think, that should be me doing that... but at first it was like I was paralysed or something, I just used to watch and not do nothing."* (Shanice)

Similarly, Tia had been heavily addicted to heroin before prison, and by her own admission had 'never been a mother to Meg', due the chaos they lived in. Now clean and sober, she wanted a better relationship with her daughter, but felt that it was gone:

*"...we are not close in that way now. It feels more like we are living together as sisters or something. It doesn't feel like mother and daughter anymore. I'm on eggshells."* (Tia)

This was compounded because Tia had a younger son, whom she had felt it was not 'too late for'. She described very different relationships with her two children. Her youngest had been so young before her sentence that he did not remember much about Tia's 'chaotic pre-prison drug-affected life', so Tia felt that to him she was untainted. Tia described her relationship with her son as less scarred by guilt, so to her 'it is easier, more pure'. Paradoxically, Tia describes this 'pure' relationship with her son as also a source of guilt because it triggers anger and jealousy in her daughter:

*"He has a clean mother, he doesn't really remember me being in prison or away from him, so he doesn't know any different and we are close, really close. She never had that. I see her watching us and I know what she's thinking, like she's on the outside... I see it and I hate it because I know it's too late for us."* (Tia)



For some of the Mothers, their relationships with their children were affected long-term or permanently because the children 'chose' not to return to their mothers post-release (n=4). With the exception of Tarian who felt that in her family they all '*shared the kids anyway*'. Mothers felt to blame for this situation and saw it as rejection, further reducing their maternal self-esteem and changing their relationships with their children:

*"Now she [grandmother] has them more than me so when we are all together it's like I have to check with her if it's ok to give them something, like she's the mum now not me, worse is the bairns look to her first to check as well. I hate it."* (Tanya)

Several Mothers described their relationships with their children as '*forever changed*'. Some Mothers with older or adult children felt their relationships with their children would never be as strong or at least the same again. Particularly if their children had matured into adulthood (Lockwood, 2020). Sandra lamented the changed relationships with her teenage daughters, believing it is a direct result of her imprisonment:

*"We had made headway and put the past behind us... I thought we were really close, I worried about them every day when I was in prison... but we are now not close again. I wasn't expecting that."*  
(Sandra)

Sandra's situation was compounded by the fact that both of her teenage daughters became pregnant during her imprisonment, as did one of Ursula's daughters, one of Queenies' daughters, and Marjorie's son became a father whilst she was imprisoned. All of the Mothers, as grandmothers-to-be, were deeply affected by this. They all felt their maternal guilt was magnified because they were '*not there*' for such a significant event in their children's lives. An event which they as '*mothers were supposed*' to be there for. The Mothers felt that not only did this add to their guilt and shame, but it affected their relationships with their children - either temporarily or permanently - and ultimately then affected their relationships with their grandchildren, too, adding to the layered impact.

Research has demonstrated that having a parent in prison, especially a mother, can be a factor in subsequent anti-social behaviour and offending in children (Beresford, 2018; Murray and Farrington, 2005). Some of the Mothers felt that their teenage children had

'gone off the rails' (Karen) because of their absence. Their teenagers' behaviours interacted with the mothers' guilt, which also had an impact on their relationships and the Mothers' parenting decisions (discussed later). Dee describes how her teenage daughter now uses cannabis, but Dee felt that she *'just'* has to *'let her'*, *'because she's just like I was so what right have I got to tell her not to?'* Dee describes how she and her daughter had *'actual physical fights'* where there would be *'venomous arguments'* about Dee's *'neglect'* of her daughter, and her decision not to allow her to visit whilst she was in prison.

Opsal (2015) argues that prison rules and policies do not appropriately accommodate mother/child visits and reunification complications are therefore amplified. Some Mothers took the 'protective' decision (O'Malley, 2015) to not allow their children to visit at all. Dee said she made this decision because she herself had visited her own mother in prison and she had hated it; she remembered being *'terrified of the dogs'* and just feeling *'confused and frightened'* (Dee). The Mothers made this decision feeling they were sacrificing their own need and desire to see their children whilst *'sparing them'* the experience of prison visiting, which Mothers felt was or would be a negative experience for them and their children. It was however a decision that had far reaching implications for both parties .

### **7.3.1 Prolonged separation**

In refusing visits Mothers were using their maternal agency to make decisions which they felt were in the best interests of their children. Retaining at least some decisions about their children was an important part of retaining a maternal role (Enos, 2001). Whilst none described regretting that decision, several Mothers felt that the sometimes lengthy periods of no contact had 'changed' their relationships with their children, even if only temporarily:

*"On my first sentence, I didn't let them come, the baby was too young but my son, well I didn't want him to even know I was in prison... but that meant he was angry when I got out, ..[...] so he was angry... and he acted out a lot... at me, always at me."* (Shanice)

Sophie stated simply, *'I didn't want her to think it [prison] was normal so I stopped her coming'*. Sophie goes on to say that the prolonged separation was painful, but she was reassured and empowered by the fact she had made a positive and selfless decision – ironically this made her feel *'more like a mother'*. However, it also meant that when she was released, her daughter was *'so different'*. Sophie described her daughter as *'unfamiliar'* to her, this feeling endured and left an imprint:

*"...she smelt different, her hair was long, she knew words I hadn't taught her, her... just everything... she even walked different. It's like... when I got out I felt like I didn't know her, I felt like I didn't know my own child, like I didn't know what made her tick, I didn't know what food she liked or owt like that. And that's horrible, my own child and I don't even know this stuff about her. Like now I have caught up with it, her favourite colours, her favourite books, blah de blah... but it made me feel depressed until I did... and I still don't feel I get it right no more."* (Sophie)

When asked how this made her feel as a mum, Sophie replied, *'It didn't make me feel like a mum because mums are supposed to know this stuff, aren't they'*.

Given that the maintenance of family ties and bonds is an important consideration in relation to recidivism (Farmer, 2017, 2019; Shamma, 2017; Codd, 2013), the implications of mothers making the painful decision not to see their children, whether they were *'protective'* or not, are huge for both. Particularly when, as argued by Sykes (1958), the more deeply felt and extensive the pains of imprisonment are, the greater the likelihood of reoffending. Despite making what they felt were positive maternal choices, the Mothers acknowledged that not seeing their children affected their adjustment post-release and impacted on their relationships with their children (Brown and Bloom, 2014). Karen, sentenced for a serious driving offence, had no prior contact with the criminal justice system *'or people like that'*. After one *'awful'* visit she did not want her children to experience prison again, as it was *'not something I ever thought would be or wanted to be part of their world'*. She described her children as feeling angry with her post-release, and she felt *'distanced'* from them as a result:

*"Oh, they were all angry. My middle daughter had started her periods whilst I was inside, but she didn't tell me this when I phoned home, I only*

*found out when I was home, and even then only because she asked me to buy sanitary products. I asked her why she hadn't told me, she said it was because she didn't want the prison guards to hear at my end or her brothers at her end, but I know having to go through that on her own... without me has changed how we are. I still don't know who bought her first sanitary towels. I worry we will never be as close as we were. Same with the other two really, they grew up so much when I was away, I was away at such important developmental phases in their lives, it's hard for me to know them, really know them... like I did before. Same for them with me, I think they feel like I've changed. I'm not the mum they knew anymore. We have all changed and because of that our relationships with each other have, too. It's sad." (Karen)*

Sophie stated that *not only* had her daughter 'grown up' whilst she was incarcerated, but she felt that *she* had too. She felt more independent and less needy, both as a daughter and as a young mother; this caused tension in her relationship with her own mother:

*"It caused real tension between us - me just wanting to be a mum, she was used to me asking her everything and I think she felt redundant... but I developed a much better bond with my daughter because I was actually being her mum, so in the end I think I'm a better mum to my daughter now." (Sophie)*

Several Mothers felt their relationships with their children had changed because *they* had changed. Ursula said, *'I've changed, I know I have; the kids say I'm colder now'* (Ursula). Some Mothers, particularly those whose children had been separated from each other and cared for by different family members, found their mother/child relationships had fractured. Tarian, whose eldest daughter had lived between her father and both her paternal and maternal grandmothers during her mother's sentence, continued to do the same (aged 14) when Tarian was released:

*"I don't feel I know her now, not like I used to, she doesn't want to come home, I thought she'd want to be just with me, but she's got used to her freedom, I think she uses her moving about as a way to get away with*

*stuff - how can I tell her off for being late if I don't know which house she's meant to be in, it's gone. We won't ever be the same.” (Tarian)*

Several Mothers described their different relationships with individual children, something perhaps all mothers have, but in Tia and Tarian's cases, their relationships were directly impacted by their prison sentence. Tarian found out she was pregnant on admission to prison and had her youngest son with her on an MBU throughout her whole sentence, resulting in a closer bond for her and her new baby.

*“...for a bit I wasn't as close to the others no, with him [the baby], it was like it was a chance to do it properly, be a proper mum, being pregnant with him in there, it was like it was just me and him in our own bubble. Plus I was clean and sober for this pregnancy, so I was focused, especially because I didn't see the others much. Then when he came, god I loved him. Still do, he's my baby, he'll always be my special baby’.*  
(Tarian)

Tia's pre-teen daughter hated visiting the prison, and so Tia would go for long periods without seeing her; she also *'wasn't great on the phone'*. Tia goes on to say:

*“So for over a year [on the phone] we barely had a conversation beyond you ok? yeah, I'm ok, you ok?... it was like getting blood from a stone, but visits with her were worse, like a long-drawn-out hospital visit. She was embarrassed, I think, ...that made me feel ashamed, in the end I stopped making her come – she hated it, I hated it, so what was the point. I know it was the right thing to do, but that changed us as well... I don't think we will ever again have a brilliant relationship, too much has gone on, [...]... we are not like mother and daughter now, more like sisters really....” (Tia)*

Tanya's children 'chose' to stay with their grandmother when their mother was released: their roles were completely reversed, with Tanya now being the weekend parent and her mother being the children's primary carer. This had a profound effect on their relationships, and she felt *'unable'* to take back her full maternal-role or even her maternal-identity. Resonating with previous studies (Arditti and Few, 2006; Codd, 2013;

Leverentz, 2014; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; O'Malley, 2018; Masson, 2019; Booth, 2020), the Mothers' changed relationships with their children impacted on their re-entry experiences. Mothers had lost confidence (Brown and Bloom, 2009) in their maternal-roles and felt a reduction in their maternal self-esteem, further fuelling their guilt.

The guilt and shame the post-prison mothers and grandmothers felt manifested in several ways, not least the need to 'make it up' to family and all that that entailed. Whilst trying to cope with crippling, self-flagellating internal blame and shame, which Mothers often accepted as their new normal, and as their penance.

### 7.3.2 Penance and making-up

As well as the pitfalls and consequences the Mothers faced in society as ex-prison mothers, they were also to some extent authors of their own penance<sup>64</sup>. The Mothers would either do all they could to 'make it up' to their children and families. Or they would absorb and focus on their own perceptions of their 'blame', - or a combination of both.

Masson's (2019:58-9) stated that in her study, '*admitting*' feelings of guilt was '*rarely discussed*' or that the '*burden they had imposed on others outside*' was not something disclosed. However and in direct contrast Mothers in this study spoke frequently about their guilt and shame and the impact of offending and imprisonment had on their children and wider families. Echoing other studies (Enos, 2001; Sharpe, 2015; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017; O'Malley, 2018, 2020; Lockwood, 2020), the Mothers' narratives and post-prison maternal experiences were underpinned by guilt and shame.

Influenced by their internalised guilt, Mothers described 'spoiling' their children upon release to 'make up' for lost time and their absence. Most of the Mothers expressed their need and desire to '*make it up*' (Lauren) to their children by '*making up for lost time*' (Mary), or by '*spoiling*' them (Annie), or '*ruining*' them (in the Northern sense of the word - which equates to spoiling). '*Spoiling*' children to '*make it up to them*', was something

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<sup>64</sup> Dictionary meaning *punishment inflicted on oneself as an outward expression of repentance or wrongdoing* – Oxford English Dictionary.

almost all of the Mothers of younger children described they would do and was often linked to shame and guilt. Tamika stated:

*“... I felt disgraced ... like I didn't love him enough... like other people would think I didn't love him enough. That's probably why I spoil him. To this day I still do. I still feel like I've got making up to do, I am constantly trying to make up, constantly trying to play catch up.”* (Tamika)

Cynthia, who had served nine sentences, most when her son was younger, had felt she had *'much to make up'* to her son:

*“David used to see his mum [Cynthia] drunk on a lot of occasions and then his mum goes to prison, I was so guilty and so ashamed that's why I always used to spoil him and buy him lots of things. My sister used to say I spoilt him, but who cares, I don't, but he's my son, if I want to spoil him I will, he's been through a lot.”* (Cynthia)

Similarly, Annie, described how in the early days of her release she would *'basically give her anything she wanted'*. Annie, now a few years further down the line, reflected how her need to *'make it up'* to her daughter almost drove her into a spiral of debt that could have gone disastrously wrong for her. She had missed her daughter's birthday whilst in prison. So when it came to her next birthday, Annie wanted to *'go all out'*, spending an inordinate amount of money on an *'outrageous'* party that she could ill-afford. Annie stated the debt she got into for the party, had she not been supported by friends, would have led her to reoffending, triggered her mental-health issues and potentially further imprisonment. Her feelings of guilt and how they manifested could easily have led Annie back into a further separation – creating a spiral not difficult to imagine. This 'risk' caused friction with Annie's family, resulting in enduring strained family relationships. Annie is annoyed and frustrated that her family do not understand her need, and her family were frustrated and *'embarrassed'* by the cost of the party. Furthermore, they had issues with Annie's new parenting style, which they described as unduly lenient or *'soft'*, something they felt would potentially have a negative impact on Annie's daughter in the future. Similarly, Queenie described how she was:

*“...desperate to make it up to my daughter[...] So, now I drop everything if she asks me to do anything, I really think it’s a conscious effort to make up for what I missed. I know with her next baby I will be on her like a rash. I just so want to make up that lost time with Belle [the baby], through the next one.” (Queenie)*

This need to ‘make it up’ to their children also affected the Mothers’ ability or willingness to discipline their children.

### **7.3.3 ‘It’s a bit rich coming from you ....’**

Mothers felt that their discipline related challenges impacted directly on the children themselves. Maggie felt that her indulgence as a parent (borne out of guilt) had been a significant factor in her son ‘going off the rails’ and becoming an offender himself, a potentially under-explored contributory factor to what is already known about intergenerational offending (Farmer, 2017):

*“I felt guilty because I hadn’t been there, so I gave him everything... too much, so he didn’t learn he couldn’t have everything he wanted, and now he’s in prison. I blame myself; I really do.” (Maggie)*

Maggie was not the only Mother whose child offended and who blamed herself. Maggie reflected that her ‘reluctance’ to discipline her son, alongside her need to ‘make it up’ to him, may have contributed to his waywardness. Mothers described struggling to discipline their children because they felt ‘hypocritical’, but also because of their conflict with the need to ‘make it up’ to their children. Kady, even though her daughter did not know her mother had ever been in prison, stated:

*“Since the day she was born, I’ve promised myself I’ll make it up to her. Sometimes if I’m shouting at her or if she does something wrong... I’ll catch myself. I do put her in time out, I do... but all the time I’m thinking, do I have the right to do this, should I be shouting at her considering what I’ve put her through?” (Kady)*



Tia described how, when she was previously heroin-addicted, she was *'less bothered'* about discipline. There had been no rules or sanctions in her home as she was constantly under the influence of substances. Now clean and sober, Tia wanted *'to be a good mother'*, part of which she saw as being a disciplinarian where appropriate; however, both she and her daughter struggled with the change. Tia was torn between *'just wanting her to have whatever she wanted, because of what I've put her through'*, and knowing that she *'should'* discipline her.

*"...the discipline I just found so difficult, because for her she thinks, why am I like this all of a sudden, like I say to her help me run the house or clean your room and stuff like that – all stuff I wasn't bothered about before. I see the confusion on her face and that just makes me think, oh I should do it all for her anyway – that might make up for how I was before and in prison, but then I'm not doing her any favours for the future by doing that am I? It's so hard."* (Tia)

The Mothers felt their *'maternal authority'* had been reduced by *'conviction, incarceration and absence'* (Brown and Bloom, 2009:326), because they have been publicly discredited as persons and, by default, as mothers. This discredited status further complicated the issue of maternal discipline. Mothers of teenagers felt this particularly, with several saying their children *'threw it back in my face that I was the criminal'* (Karen). Mothers struggled with losing the *'moral high ground'* they are *'expected'* (Tanisha) to have as mothers – chiming with Brown and Bloom's (2009) US-based findings. Many of the Mothers felt the reduction in their maternal-role and maternal power was their own fault, *'I've only got myself to blame for all of this haven't I?'* (Rayna)

#### **7.3.4 Shame and blame**

As previously illustrated (Chapter 3), most mothers internalise mother-blaming attitudes, often for things that may be completely out of their control (Sutherland, 2010). Wider societal tendencies to blame mothers for their children's negative outcomes (Jackson and Mannix, 2004) are in fact mirrored by mothers themselves. For post-prison mothers,

their ex-prisoner status provided the hook on which to hang their own internal blame and shame. The range of outcomes Mothers accepted or wore the blame for were almost infinite. Rita, speaking about persistent thoughts of guilt and blame, simply stated:

*“...you feel to blame for everything. Every time they do something that’s out of character or they play up, you question is it all because I went to prison?”* (Rita)

Three Mothers whose teenage daughters became pregnant during their sentences felt this would not have happened had they been at home. They blamed themselves for the early pregnancies and all of the potential negative outcomes of a teenage pregnancy - *‘her future is limited now’* (Diane). Ursula questioned whether her daughter having a child at such a young age would also limit her future, and she felt that her daughter’s choices of partners and life-path had been negatively affected by her prison sentence: *‘I feel responsible, all the time’* (Ursula).

*“I know it was all my fault, I dunno maybe I’ve internalised from prison, you know, like it’s your fault, you’ve got to do something about it... You know, actually there’s a socio-political-economic context in which offending takes place but, you know, it’s your fault, your responsibility, to fix it, do you know what I mean? I don’t know, it’s shit.”* (Ursula)

Ursula’s son offended whilst she was still in custody, something she insists would not have happened had she been home; revealing her deep-seated guilt about this, *‘he has that label now, ex-offender, because of me. I have to find a way to make it up to him’* (Ursula). Mary blamed herself for the fact that her sons were now described as ‘career criminals’, which she felt was rooted in them being taken into care ‘because’ of her. Echoing Lockwood’s (2020) research, the Mothers of teenagers felt responsible for any disputes in the family home where siblings were fighting with each other. This generated additional worry for the Mothers and was a source of discontentment when they were reuniting:

*“I’m like a sodding referee... there is so much tension and resentment in my house now... it wasn’t like this before. It’s like we all have our own*

*private hurt from that time, and we focus on that instead of supporting each other like one family... we are fractured now, broken.” (Karen)*

Mothers blamed themselves that some sibling groups had been ‘*spread out*’ amongst relatives and so had not lived together during their mothers’ incarceration. As a result, relationships between the separated siblings had altered, causing additional stress, tension and resentments through the families. Echoing other studies (Booth, 2020; Baldwin and Epstein, 2017), Tia’s two children, who had been separated and had rarely seen each other during their mother’s imprisonment (because the two caregivers ‘*did not get on*’), were described by Tia as ‘*nowhere near as close*’, and Tia feared they never would be again.

The Mothers blamed themselves for their children being bullied at school, for their changed behaviours, changed relationships, offending behaviour, disconnection with education and a myriad of other outcomes. Rayna felt that her mother’s cancer had ‘*spread faster*’ because of the stress of Rayna’s prison sentence (as, indeed, some of her family believed). Maggie went as far as to blame herself for the fact her grandchild went on to develop cancer:

*“...when Ryan got cancer, all I could think was that cancer is related to stress isn’t it – the stress of me being inside, us being separated, that’s what caused it – I know it. It doesn’t matter what anyone says, I just know it was the trigger and I have to live with that now.”*  
(Maggie)

This self-blame did not ease as the children grew older; many of the older Mothers blamed themselves for outcomes in their mature adult children and their children’s children. Both Mary and Maggie felt that their sons had trouble bonding with their own children *because* the bond with their own mothers had been broken by imprisonment.

*“He struggled as a parent, he couldn’t show them affection, but then it’s not surprising really, is it – he hadn’t been mothered, not properly and not by me anyway, so how was he meant to know how to be a parent when he hadn’t been parented... something else that is my fault.”* (Mary)

The Mothers spoke about how there was ‘no end’ (Tanisha) to their penance when it comes to their children: *‘it’s a life sentence for a mum’* (Ursula). Ursula goes on to say that she prays to *‘be released’* from her life sentence of questioning and examining her children’s outcomes and looking for positives as *‘evidence’* that they were not irrevocably affected by her imprisonment.

Cynthia blamed herself for her son’s anorexia: *‘my son was anorexic...and I thought... I’ve done that to my child... my boy... because he was pining for his mother’*. Cynthia’s son was an adult when he developed anorexia and she had been out of prison for 24 years, having been sentenced to custody for arson after setting fire to herself (in a public place). She had a long history of horrific abuse, sexual violence, substance misuse, and mental-health issues; she had been repeatedly failed by MH services and was unsupported at the time of her ‘offence’. The judge had apparently ‘not wanted’ to send Cynthia to prison, but ‘there were no probation beds’ (approved premises will not take those accused of arson) or secure hospital beds available at that time. Cynthia, who was described by a Women’s Centre worker as ‘completely and utterly traumatised’, also described how she would obsess and *‘torture herself with guilt’* over an imagined life *‘if only things had been different’*. Yet despite the significant and relevant external factors over which Cynthia had had little control, she maintained it was she and she alone who was to blame for her son’s illness.

*“I know I drank because of all the abuse, and that wasn’t my fault, maybe if I’d had help or been believed it wouldn’t have happened, maybe none of the rest would have happened, the violence, the wife beaters, all of it, my mental-health, I think I would have been a good mum. So even though I know they are all to blame, and even the social and probation in a way for not helping me, even though I know that the guilt eats me up, all I missed, I obsess over it – how can I let that go? I’ll feel guilty till the day I die, and I should.”* (Cynthia)

Most if not all of the Mothers absorbed the blame, and often the responsibility, not only for their own crimes but for the circumstances around them too. The Mothers who misused substances, as a means of ‘blocking out’ or coping with abuse, only ever blamed themselves for their addictions. Not their abusers nor society that had failed them by its

lack of resources to support them either financially, practically or emotionally. Influenced by discriminatory policies and legislation and cultural ideology, the widespread failure to support 'troubled' women plays out through all of society's 'systems' (Clarke and Chadwick, 2018:64), yet it is the women themselves who most feel the guilt of their failure (O'Reilly, 2016; Sutherland, 2010). Feminist criminology (Carlen, 2002; Renzetti, 2013) argues that this kind of 'individualist thinking' is influenced by criminal justice policy makers and sentencers, which give strong messages to criminalised women that their circumstances are solely of their own making; it perpetuates the belief that women need only make better 'choices' to 'turn their lives around' (Clarke and Chadwick, 2018: 208). The reality is that the responsibility for the outcomes of criminalised women is, arguably, at the very least, shared amongst the resources who failed them and at a higher lever the policies and practice that underpin and facilitate that failure and harm. Illustrating this internalised blame, Beth stated:

*"I did this, me, I chose to take the drugs, yes it was the only way I could cope, but I chose that path, what kind of mother does that."* (Beth)

Tragically, such was the level of Beth's trauma, pain and self-blame surrounding her separation from her baby daughter, and the subsequent painful process of gradual and surveilled reunification, Beth, as she had predicted, inflicted on herself the ultimate penance, and took her own life just before her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

#### **7.4 Layers of shame – Grandmothering post-prison**

The deep sense of shame felt by the post-imprisoned mothers was magnified in the grandmothers, not least because of the cultural ideas, ideals and expectations around age, gender, motherhood, and grandmotherhood (Wahidin, 2004; Baldwin, 2020). Mavis described it as *'like an onion of shame'*. Grandmothers felt their shame was related to not only their maternal identity but also specifically to their grandmother identity, *'it's ridiculous really a grandmother in prison'*, (Mavis). Another factor adding to the 'layers' of shame for post-prison grandmothers related to secrecy and enduring shame. For several of the grandmothers, their status as ex-prisoners was a 'family secret' that had been kept from grandchildren.

*"It's the elephant in the room - my grandchildren know nothing of it, imagine them bringing it up, god forbid, oh my granny was in prison, it's not right is it, I should have known better."* (Queenie)

Margaret felt she could never truly relax or be herself in front of her grandchildren, despite being 46 years post-release:

*"Sometimes I feel really on edge with them [grandchildren] if I'm not in control of a conversation, just in case it goes down an avenue that will lead to prison talk... in some ways its meant I've had to keep some distance, I'm not totally relaxed with them... it's actually very stressful, you know, even now... carrying all that about... it wears you down."* (Margaret)

The grandmothers '*lived in fear*' (Margaret) of their secrets coming out, the secrecy, fear of judgement and negative evaluation, and the unknown added to their shame (Liss et al, 2013; Warr, 2016; Goffman, 1963). For Margaret this was compounded by the fact that her own daughter was now in prison and she became the caregiver for her daughter's children. Margaret not only felt '*to blame*' for her daughter's criminality but was also fearful of her grandchildren discovering *her prison* past. Fearing their blame and rejection, Margaret found her maternal identity and maternal self-esteem vulnerable and precarious (Sharpe, 2015):

*"The thing is now I don't feel I can ever tell my grandkids about me being in prison in case they think it's normal [...] I'd feel like I'd let my family down all over again if they knew... but it's just layers of deceit, isn't it? I just feel guilty all the time, it never goes[...] It's bad enough my children knowing I went to jail, but if my grandkids found out... well... it's just..., shameful isn't it?"* (Margaret)

Despite her own children being not yet born when she was imprisoned and now being forty-six years' post-prison, Margaret still spoke of her ongoing guilt as a mother and grandmother. She revealed an additional 'secret', a baby she had given up for adoption soon after her prison sentence. She called her prison sentence '*a dirty secret*', so

ashamed about her ex-prisoner status that she rarely even used the word *'prison'*, instead preferring to refer to it as when she was *'away'*.

*"There are so many situations where I have to tell white lies to cover up for that period I was away. Just the other day my granddaughter asked me what I did for my 21<sup>st</sup>, well it was a kick to the stomach because I was away for my 21<sup>st</sup>. I just feel so guilty for lying but I'm too ashamed for them to know. Imagine telling them their granny was a common criminal."* (Margaret)

Several Grandmothers described how the perceptions and judgements of their adult children, especially those who were parents, now shaped their relationships, not only with them but also with their grandchildren.

Queenie, previously the main childcare provider for one daughter, was told that her *'services'* were *'no longer required'* (discussed later), conversely she felt she was being used for *'unlimited childcare'* by another daughter. Queenie felt she was *'sort of being blackmailed to do whatever she needs in terms of childcare and see her on demand [...]... because I owe her'* (Queenie). Queenie felt that the childcare service she was now providing for that daughter, and which was her route to forgiveness, impacted negatively on her relationships with her other children who resented how much she did for *'the most judgemental one... but if I don't, she digs and digs... and her knife is quite deep when she digs'* (Queenie). Since leaving prison, Queenie had tried to *'turn a negative into a positive'* and set up a business for women leaving prison: it had garnered attention in the media. She recounted when she was telephoned by the BBC to discuss her venture:

*"I phoned my daughter to tell her, all proud and that, and I told her and nothing... complete silence on the end of the phone. She turned around and just said, 'do you think that's a good thing, bringing all this attention, do you ever think about me in this?' And that's it really, that's how we've changed with each other - she can't be proud of me and I can't talk to her"* (Queenie)

Mavis, who had previously been the main childcare provider for her grandchildren, was all but rejected by her adult, middle-class children:

*"I thought I'd raised my children to be less judgemental than this, so you could have knocked me down with a feather when he reacted like this... I've looked after my grandchildren for years so he and his wife could be the highflyers they are. I made one mistake, and now it seems I've lost them all, I feel sick at the thought that my grandchildren are embarrassed, and I miss them desperately. I effectively brought them up. As for my son, well I don't know what to say, I feel I've failed as a mother because he's so unforgiving, but I love him and hate the thought that he's ashamed. It's like there are just layers of guilt and layers of shame, it consumes me. I just miss them, desperately, all of them."*  
(Mavis)

Mavis not only took on the shame of being a grandmother who had been to prison, but also of what she felt had been a fault of her parenting - that her son was not able to be more empathic with her. Mavis, and Queenie both described maternal judgment particularly from their daughters, who told them that 'as mothers' they would never have 'risked' being separated from their children by becoming 'criminals'. Several mothers anticipated that the level of judgement of them as mothers would increase as their sons, and especially their daughters would become parents. Rita stated she 'knew it was coming' and would have to 'prepare a defence' for it. Some Mothers described how as their 'children' did become parents a 'whole other layer' of judgment surfaced, again especially from daughters as they became mothers, and even after 'settled' period where Mothers had felt the past was 'behind' them'.

*'You think it's all done and dusted, then now my girls are mothers I know they hate me more – they say how could you have put yourself in that position, I would never etc etc etc ... but they don't know that they just think they do ... but yeah it's a whole other layer of judgment from them'.* (Sandra)

Sandra described how the shame was also layered regarding her grandchildren. She did not want her grandchildren to view her in the same ways that her children had/continued to. Sandra 'accepted' that she was spoiled as a mother but did not want to be spoiled as



a grandmother, too. This chimes with Bachman et al's (2016:225) research which found that '*second chance grandparenting*' could be directly related to desistance.

*"I can't undo what I did, I know me going to prison ruined their childhoods and it's almost too late for them to see me as a good mum... but for the grandkids, well maybe it can be different."* (Sandra)

Sandra highlighted how, through her grandchildren, she was seeking to '*do a better job*' than she felt she had as a mother. She described how becoming a grandmother, despite the fact that she blamed herself for both her teenage daughters' pregnancies (*'if I had been home it would never have happened'*), was a motivating factor in her desistance (Kerrison and Bachman, 2016):

*"I want to do well for them... nanas are meant to be warm and kind and the 'go to' person, not in prison, not a criminal – that's not the nanna I want to be. I don't take anything anymore. I think I would have stopped anyway, outgrown it – but I'm definitely clean for them. I don't want them to have no drunk and druggie nana, imagine the shame of that"* (Sandra)

However, Sandra's newfound motivation and desire to be seen as a '*good nanna*' was a source of tension with her daughters who, although pleased their mother was doing so well, felt frustrated and angry that she '*had not done the same for them*'. This compounded Sandra's layered shame and she stated how she would '*torture*' herself with the knowledge she had '*failed*' as a mother:

*"I know they are pleased I'm better, but I torture myself with knowing they feel shit because I didn't do this for them. Our Molly actually asked me why they weren't enough, isn't that awful that that's how she feels. But the fact is I suppose they weren't, I was too into the drugs, too selfish, in too much pain, really, to stay off them, I couldn't have done it then. But you get stronger as you get older don't you, you think more I guess. Maybe I just grew up. I'm ashamed of that old me... but I can be a good nanna, it's not too late for that."* (Sandra)

This section has revealed how, for post-prison mothers and grandmothers the often already challenging experience of re-entry into family life is further compounded by their maternal experiences, role and emotions. It has begun to demonstrate the importance of supporting all mothers in their re-entry and renegotiation of their motherhood. As part of their re-entry, all of the Mothers were subject to forms of supervision or state surveillance. The Mothers revealed how their motherhood and mothering role was often frustrated, complicated - and occasionally supported - by the agents of the state and their families, and how their experiences were marred by issues of trust.

## 7.5 Trust and Surveillance

Trust has important implications for the engagement of mothers with statutory services post-release. Harris and Falot (2013:26) posit that when a traumatic experience occurs, trust is broken, as *'trauma violates our beliefs that the world is a safe place'*: for the now additionally traumatised Mothers, engaging with services that have the potential to 'hurt' them further was often challenging. Not least because Mothers found it difficult to trust that services were there to 'help' and support them, rather than to punish them further.

*"Trust is a very difficult thing isn't it. It was broken in my personal life. I didn't go into prison as a person who trusted [...]... and when you get out, well it's even worse, trust no one! – Because the stakes are higher, you can lose your kids - at the drop of a hat. If they think you are not good enough, not proving yourself, then they are gone – you have to be a better mum than all mums, whiter than white." (Ursula)*

Earlier chapters have revealed the extent to which all mothers come under scrutiny and surveillance and are measured against widely accepted motherhood ideals (Rose, 1999; O'Reilly, 2016) in ways which do not necessarily transfer to fathers (Jackson and Mannix, 2004). The Mothers felt that their post-prison mothering was subject to increased scrutiny and judgement, describing how they felt that others' trust in them had reduced not only because of their 'ex-prisoner' status, which Goffman (1961) referred to as a common phenomenon in individuals perceived to be of 'blemished character', but additionally and specifically as *mothers* who were '*obviously*' now not '*good mothers*' (Tamika). This in turn was experienced by some of the Mothers as a lack of trust in them as *mothers*. This

section will explore how issues of trust, surveillance and support interacted with motherhood to affect and inform the Mothers' post-prison experiences in both the short- and long-term, impacting on their relationships with 'agents of the state' such as Social Services and the Probation Service, and also with their families and children.

### **7.5.1 State surveillance – Untrustworthy motherhood**

Hays (2008) argues that support for post-release mothers is vital to their success but that mothers are often reluctant to ask for help for fear of negative assessment (formal and informal) and of ultimately losing their children (Liss et al, 2013). Empathy and genuine concern for criminalised mothers can be lacking and, as Lockwood (2018), identifies, criminalised mothers are not always afforded the same level of empathy as mothers who have experienced child death or their removal in other circumstances. Opsal (2015) identified that women's experience of post-prison supervision is underexplored: her study with women, although not specifically focused on mothers, offered important insights to women's experiences of 'surveillance' (Brown and Bloom, 2014). The Mothers' experiences of probation supervision will be discussed later but several Mothers experienced additional surveillance from social services, either because their children had been taken into care or because they were subject to reunification processes. The previous Chapter evidenced how criminalised mothers feel the gaze, evaluation and observation of others keenly whether formal or informal (Rose, 1999; Liss et al, 2013). Even for those Mothers whose children had long ago been taken into care, managing their maternal pain remained a challenging aspect of Mothers post-prison life and was intertwined with all aspects of their post-release rehabilitation and desistance.

Trust is particularly important for criminalised women, whose lives have often been characterised by abuse of power (Liebling, 2009). The Mothers described the impact of feeling '*untrustworthy*' (Annie) and '*watched*' (Tanisha). As Ursula had stated, the threat and fear of losing their children was significant and most of the Mothers had anxiety about this, especially if social services were actively involved. This fear and lack of trust in professionals, particularly felt by mothers of younger children (Sharpe, 2015), was something mentioned by several Mothers in the study, verbalised by Tanya:

*“You have to be careful about trust after prison, it is certainly something to be really careful about, you keep your guard up.” (Tanya)*

Issues of trust ‘went both ways’, i.e. Mothers felt wary of trusting others, especially professionals, but they also felt as though professionals had an automatic mistrust of them, over and above the ‘expected’ mistrust directed towards ex-prisoners (Goffman, 1963). The Mothers felt it **as mothers**. Six Mothers had lost the care of their children to their LA, (Beth, Mary, Nicola, Dee, Lauren, Tanisha), either permanently or temporarily, as a result of their sentencing, but several more Mothers had Social Work involvement in their post-prison lives (mainly for pre-existing substance-misuse or MH issues).

Sophie, whose daughter had been taken into foster care, felt a palpable level of mistrust directed towards her from social services concerning her resuming the care of her daughter, despite there being no concerns about her ability to be a successful and suitable parent *prior* to her incarceration. The sole reason why Sophie’s daughter was placed with foster parents was because there was no ‘suitable’ adult to care for her when Sophie was imprisoned. Sophie felt that, because of her status as an ex-prisoner mum, she had to mother to a higher standard than ‘*normal mums*’ in order to prove that she was capable of having her daughter returned to her, stating, ‘*if they had their way they would have kept her and had her adopted*’. She felt that social services were ‘*waiting*’ for her to fail and made her feel that she ‘*couldn’t be trusted with my own daughter*’. Sophie goes on to say:

*“I felt under surveillance... is that the word? spied on... I think if it was legal they’d have put a camera in my house to watch me when I had my home contacts.” (Sophie)*

Before her death, Beth had described how only seeing her baby through supervised contact visits<sup>65</sup> made her feel ‘*not a real mum*’, saying she felt like she could not be ‘*trusted even with my own baby*’. It is not unreasonable to assume that the culmination of these feelings, the weight of the perceptions of others and the continued surveillance

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<sup>65</sup> Visits with children that are pre-booked and pre-arranged, often in a Social Services Contact Centre building, are either observed via two-way mirrors or are physically supervised by a Social or Family Worker; they are often part of a prolonged process of reunification and may progress to being unsupervised, and then overnight contacts, before full reunification.

of her reunification with her daughter were pressures that contributed to Beth's decision to end her life. Mothers, especially the younger Mothers, spoke of a constant feeling of *'being watched'* (Beth). Which they associated with an expectation of failure and a lack of trust (Brown and Bloom, 2009). Mothers described how others' lack of trust in them made them doubt themselves, increasing their own levels of anxiety and paranoia. In some cases, these feelings were relevant to their relapse into substance misuse, (and ergo, offending to fund it).

Beth's and Sophie's experiences chime with Sharpe's research (2015:1) with young post-prison mothers whom she found had experienced judgement, *'gendered surveillance social censure and stigma,'* long after they left prison and regardless of whether they were currently engaged in criminal activity.

Mothers lack of trust in professionals also contributed to the Mothers' reluctance to ask for help just as it had pre-prison.

*"If I said I was finding it tough, I knew they'd assume I was back on the drink, then they'd be all over me like a rash. I would have lost my kids forever this time... so I just kept quiet and managed... it nearly killed me, but I managed."* (Shanice)

Shanice goes on to describe how she struggled with her autistic son post-release. She described coping with his behaviour on her own, reluctant to ask for help for fear of unwanted attention. She had therefore not been able to access support and guidance in managing his behaviour and ensuring their safety:

*"My son was kicking off, I thought he was going to hit me... but I didn't want to call the police or ask for help because then they'd assume I couldn't cope and mark me as at risk of drinking again... but the last time I had no choice, he was really kicking off so I had to call them, he's so much bigger than me now, but also to protect him... the police asked if there were any other children in the house, I was terrified of saying so because I'd had to sit in my car to protect myself from him... but my daughter was upstairs in bed... she slept through it all thank goodness... but now I'm just waiting, waiting for them to come and say*

*that that wasn't good enough, they already think I'm a shit mum because I went to prison so this will just confirm it in their eyes."*  
(Shanice)

Several Mothers had experienced violent and toxic relationships that had at different times in their lives brought them to the attention of social services. Despite rarely being the perpetrators of domestic abuse or violence towards their children, it is often the mothers who will come under scrutiny from social services for their 'failure to protect' (Barnes, 2015). Mothers felt this scrutiny particularly keenly post-release. Several Mothers felt their previous traumatic experiences (although obviously not their 'fault'), and their imprisonment was '*held against*' them (Carla).

*"They, the SS I like to call them, kept talking about all these risk factors being part of their assessment – apparently the fact I was raped and abused by a sick bastard is a risk factor for me being able to be a good enough Mother... how the fuck that can be right?... none of it was my fault what happened to me and was directly related to why I lost my way and went to prison... so instead of helping me, they punish me through my kids and tell me I can't be trusted to look after my kids... and apparently 'getting myself locked up' proved that to them!... I honestly wanted to scream...WELL FUCKING HELP ME, THEN!"* (Carla)

The Mothers felt their prison sentences confirmed to social services that they were bad mothers, again making Mothers fearful of engaging with support agencies. This also often compounded their situations. Mary had been in a violent relationship and struggled with mental-health issues and alcohol-misuse and her partner had '*forced*' her to offend. She fled him once, but he '*found*' her and forced her '*home*' and to offend again. Mary stated she was too scared to ask for help and refused it the one time it was offered, she felt that if she '*let them in*' her children would be removed. Mary lost the care of her sons after her second custodial sentence. Mary illustrates how reluctance to seek help and fear of negative intervention, and/or negative evaluation (Liss et al, 2012), had a devastating and long-lasting impact on her and her sons.

*“They said that because I didn’t ‘engage with services’, whatever that means, that I hadn’t proved I wanted to change enough... but I was in a lose-lose situation. They had already made their minds up I was a terrible mother. If I had asked for help and told them I’d taken him back, was not coping and drinking again, well they would have taken the boys into care, so I just made the most of it while I had them... and guess what? They took them anyway.” (Mary)*

Kady felt isolated and nervous after the recent birth of her second child, eight years post-release, yet was *‘afraid’* to ask for support from the usual networks (e.g. health visitors, midwives, social services). Kady felt that, if she asked for help with her *‘troubled past’* - as a mother who’d been to prison, she would be inviting unwanted attention into her life, stating, *‘once they [social workers] get their claws into you they don’t let go, they watch you like a hawk, ready to pounce and take your kids’* (Kady).

The Mothers’ lack of trust in professionals and their fear of negative interventions (Baldwin, 2015) resulted in many missed opportunities to access the support they needed. Several Mothers felt they would have benefitted from input regarding ongoing issues of domestic abuse, addiction, housing, and mental health, but did not want to draw attention to themselves for fear of being seen as failing, inadequate or neglectful mothers. Mothers who felt unable to access support were therefore vulnerable to many of the same pre-custody challenges that had led them onto an offending pathway in the first instance. Their fear of accessing support, as mothers, had the potential to affect their rehabilitation and desistance pathways (Garcia-Hallett, 2019), as well as the safety well being and outcomes for mothers and their children.

Creating an atmosphere of *‘emotional safety’* (Baldwin 2015), for mothers so that they can share their concerns with professionals is vital for services engaged in work with mothers, particularly when working with criminalised mothers. Leaving Mothers to cope alone increases the risk of a return to previous unhealthy coping-strategies, which may include substance misuse (O’Malley, 2018), which may be used as means of coping with maternal-emotions and the enduring stress of post-prison life. This can be accompanied with a return to offending to fund the substance misuse - which can ultimately lead to a return to prison or permanent loss of children. Furthermore, not being able or willing to

seek support (or find it), can leave women and children in abusive and dangerous situations, leading to damaging or even fatal outcomes.

### 7.5.2 Invisible motherhood

Significantly, Mothers who did not have care of their children remained pre-occupied with their motherhood. Nicola described feeling desperate to hold onto her mother identity despite no longer having the care of her son. Parallels are drawn with Morris's research (2018), which explores the experiences of mothers who live through state-ordered child removal, which Morris calls 'haunted motherhood' (816). Compounding their existing stigma and shame as ex-prison mothers, mothers whose children were taken permanently (or even temporarily) into care felt additional layers of stigma and shame. Losing their children gave the *explicit* message that they could no longer be trusted to care for their children themselves, that they were deemed to be 'not good enough' mothers (Winnicott, 1987) by the state. Yet the Mothers who had lost children to care still very much felt like mothers. Their maternal emotions remained relevant to their wellbeing, their successful re-entry and their desistance. Nicola, whose three-year-old child was taken into care during her sentence stated:

*"Just because I don't live with my child and my child doesn't live with me, doesn't mean I'm not a mother, I still feel like a mother, I think like a mother – I worry about the world he's growing up in, where he is and what he's doing. I remember his birthday and think of him at school, in fact now I'm clean, even though I don't have him, I'm more of a mother than I was before, I was too chaotic to think of all that stuff then... it's sad though that he doesn't get to see this mother, I'm invisible [to him], that pain for me is my worst enemy because it makes me want to use."*  
(Nicola)

Their children's loss was a source of great shame and embarrassment and contributed to the Mothers' enduring spoiled identity (Liss et al, 2013). Mothers internalised the 'blame', which had a devastating impact on their wellbeing and maternal self-esteem, already reduced by imprisonment. When coupled with the critical gaze (Rose, 1999) and surveillance of the state (Jackson and Mannix, 2004), this proved 'overwhelming' for the



Mothers. Morris's (2018:816) suggested 'haunted mothers' feel 'forced' into silence about their experiences for fear of the judgement of others:

*"It's not something you can easily tell people, 'oh I was a mum, but they took him off me'... not to mention the two they took before him. It's like one of those huge birthday badges, but instead of happy birthday it says, 'bad mother'. It's too much really."* (Nicola)

Nicola and Mary had both felt so 'ashamed' of having their children removed from their care that they often lied about having children at all. Which served only to add to their layers of shame and maternal guilt:

*"When my boys were in care, I thought of them every day, even as the years went on I did... but it got to the point where if anyone asked if I had kids I'd just say no. It was easier than explaining everything that had went on, me going to prison and losing them and all that... but doing that, denying them, made me feel ashamed."* (Mary)

Being criminalised mothers was felt as an additional layer of the already heavy shame of being an 'invisible' mother. Perceived by the Mothers as additional outward 'proof' that they were bad mothers or, as Morris puts it, 'a *deeply flawed mother*' (2018:816). Mothers felt the loss of their children was their 'own fault' (Lockwood, 2018). Mothers who lost care of their children stated that their children remained their 'primary focus' post-release '*in my mind*' (Dee), but felt muted or '*too ashamed*' (Carla) to talk about them – again something that impacted on their post-release coping. Mary, Nicola and Dee all fought unsuccessfully to get their children back from LA care (Dee regained care of some of her children but not all) and they remain/remained preoccupied for many years with hopeful fantasies about reunification. This chimes with Morris's (2018) research with mothers, (who were not necessarily criminalised mothers), whose children were subject to state ordered removal. She, too, found that mothers fighting to reunite with their children would '*exist in a state of haunted motherhood, paralysed in anticipation of an imagined future*' (Morris, 2018:816). Mary described this exactly.

*"Before my boys did come to find me I thought of them every day at first, it used to make me drink again because it hurt so much that I'd lost them, the hurt and the guilt... but I*

*wanted them to find me, it was all I thought about, I used to imagine hugging them and us just being so happy... like on Cilla Black's 'Surprise Surprise'<sup>66</sup>." (Mary)*

Morriss describes mothers who lose their children as '*abject figures... silenced through the stigma and shame of being judged as a deeply flawed mother*' (2018:816). Mary stated that the fear of having future children removed was the single most relevant factor in her choosing not to have any more children. As she said:

*"What would have been the point, they would have taken them anyway they had already decided I was a bad mother; I couldn't have handled losing another."* (Mary)

As well as living in the future, the mothers would obsessively focus on their past and the circumstances in which they lost their children – again absorbing all of the 'blame' for their circumstances with little or no recognition that services had failed them (Clark and Chadwick, 2018):

*"let's face it, I wasn't the best mother anyway before I got to prison, what could I offer, we were always skint, I'd had fucked up relationships where he'd seen violence, heard screaming, I couldn't even give him brothers and sisters because of my fucked-up insides from the abuse, no dad, a crap flat and a useless mum."* (Nicola)

All of the Mothers who had children removed from their care described feeling powerless or '*at the mercy*' (Lauren) of social services/social workers. This added to their sense of invisibility and further reduced their maternal self-esteem and maternal-identity as well as their maternal-role and maternal capital (Brown and Bloom, 2014). The Mothers felt their situation was compounded by their post-prison status, disempowering them even further as discredited mothers. Dee's son was placed with gay foster parents, which was something she really struggled with:

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<sup>66</sup> Popular TV show in the eighties hosted by Cilla Black and in which long lost family members were reunited.

*“they went into care for three years with a same sex couple that was a big choice for me... I wouldn’t say I was homophobic, but I grew up in a Rastafarian culture and I am like, NO, my son is going to be gay - arggh!”*

(Dee)

Dee was told that if she did not agree to her children being placed with a same-sex couple then her children would be separated, so she felt ‘forced’ to ‘compromise’ her own ‘cultural and religious’ beliefs and agree to the foster placement. Losing custody of one’s children is seen by the Mothers themselves, and by wider society, as ‘the ultimate failure’. This had the potential to send the Mothers into a downward spiral (Stone, 2016:967). Mary stated that because she had lost her sons, she saw ‘no point’ in either ‘trying to be good and stay off the drink’, or in fact to leave her violent partner of that time, both factors were relevant to her ongoing offending which resulted in many more prison sentences.

Emma, who died a short time post-release (from pneumonia), had written and spoken about how, after her child was ‘stolen’ from her and placed for adoption, she felt she had ‘nothing much to live for’ or ‘stay clean for’. She gave birth one week after getting out of prison, and described how losing a second new-born daughter (her first daughter was in the custody of her father) triggered exactly the downward spiral described by Stone (2016):

*“The memory of them coming in the hospital with the car-seat, I had thought I was taking her home, but as soon as I saw that car-seat I knew they were taking her. I remember hearing someone screaming and screaming and then I realised it was me screaming. I discharged myself from hospital and went and got off my face. I didn’t know what else to do.”* (Emma)

Emma served multiple sentences all centred around her substance misuse, which was triggered by her traumatic history and the loss of her daughters. For which she had received no support. Effectively, Emma’s trauma - including her maternal trauma – was criminalised (Clarke and Chadwick, 2018). Several Mothers who had served more than one sentence (Carla, Mary, Sandra, Shanice, Dee, Tanya and Cynthia) described how their guilt, as well as their shame as mothers, snowballed. They felt that the guilt and

shame would multiply with each sentence. Dee, who had lost more than one child to the care system, stated, '*as a mother there's no worse feeling than feeling you've failed your child is there?... well imagine that feeling again and again and again.*'

Morris (2018) also found that mothers in her study who had lost a child to LA care feared that all future children would be taken away too (see also Barnes in Baldwin, 2015, and Broadhurst et al, 2015). Criminalised mothers who lose the care of their children are vulnerable to having more than one child removed from their care either because of their offending and their 'chaotic lives' or directly as a result of their prison sentence. Four Mothers in the study (Dee, Nicola, Emma and Mary) had more than one child permanently removed.

It was evident in the Mothers' narratives that there had been many missed opportunities to support them before, during, and after prison and that women were criminalised for poverty and trauma. Once their children had been removed from their care, none of the Mothers were offered support to assist them in understanding or dealing with the issues that had led to their child's removal or the removal itself. Therefore, the Mothers now had the culmination of previous trauma and experiences, their imprisonment and now the additional trauma of losing their child. As evidenced by this study, the lack of timely and appropriate support contributes to mothers' already challenging circumstances and to the loss of their child/ren into care (Morris, 2018; Hackett, 2015; Barnes, 2015) and so a cycle perpetuates.

As previously noted, it is not the services who failed the mothers who are held to account, or the government that failed to adequately fund the resources to support them (Morris, 2018); it is the women and children who are directly punished by being separated, sometimes permanently, and with a consequence of altering the trajectories of all their lives. The lack of trust in the women as mothers, and the scrutiny the Mothers felt subject to, came from both professionals or agents of the state (Rose, 1999) and mothers' own families and friends, their children, grandchildren and caregivers, too. It was not only social services who would deny mothers access to their children, or who caused issues for mothers post-release - the tensions that sometimes began during a mother's imprisonment continued between caregivers and the mothers, often worsening post-release.

### 7.5.3 Post- release tensions with caregivers – family eyes

Post-release changes in family dynamics and strained relationships occurring because of the Mothers' imprisonment (Booth, 2020) were often also influenced by issues of trust. Queenie, who as stated earlier was now no longer *'trusted'* to take care of her grandchildren, stated:

*"Apparently, I am no longer good enough to care for grandchildren, my daughter finds me unsuitable to care for her children now, I don't know what she thinks I'll actually do but she just sees me as a criminal now and not much else."* (Queenie)

Sandra and Tanisha's sisters questioned them and their ability to be consistent in their post-release mothering. For example, Sandra's older sister suggested that she should *'keep the younger ones, to make it easier'*. Sandra refused. This placed an additional strain on their already fragile relationship. Sandra's sister felt that Sandra's prison sentence was *'proof'* that she was *'not the best mother'*. Tanisha stated her sister and mother visited much more frequently than they had prior to her arrest. Tanisha did not feel this was rooted in support but was because her sister and mother did not trust her to not start drinking again and were *'keeping an eye'* on her. Barnes and Cunningham-Stringer (2014) suggest that incarcerated mothers often chose grandparent carers hoping this would minimise their subsequent loss of control and input into their children's lives, however, as this research illustrates, such arrangements are not without issues.

As previously discussed, (Chapter 6), tensions between imprisoned mothers and caregivers may have begun whilst the mothers were still incarcerated (Booth, 2020; Masson, 2019), and for many they continued or escalated post-release. Some of the issues that Mothers raised were simply around different opinions in child rearing practices which may well have occurred regardless of the mother's imprisonment. For example, it is not uncommon for new mothers and grandmothers to have some tensions between them about generational changes in mothering practice (Chodorow, 1978). However, Mothers in this research raised several issues which could be regarded as *specific to mothers* who had previously been incarcerated.

Several Mothers, despite having legal custody of their children, felt 'prevented' from either having full access to or care of their children, either temporarily or permanently, (Appendix 2. Fig. 8). Two Mothers had grandmother carers who 'refused' to return the children to their mothers' care, and a further three grandmothers insisted on being involved in their grandchildren's care either formally (directed by social services) or informally; other Mothers mentioned feeling 'monitored'. Thus their maternal role was significantly reduced or lost post-release, because of their imprisonment. Tia's children had been cared for by her ex-husband and the children's grandmother whilst she was imprisoned; she now had her children back in her own care, but her ex-husband was initially reluctant to return his son permanently and Tia felt he wanted to maintain '*unreasonable*' levels of access to the children to '*check*' on her (rather to just see his children). Similarly, Tamika revealed that, despite social services agreeing that her children could all be returned to her, her mother '*refuses to trust*' her to care for them. Allowing only the eldest child home and insisting the two youngest remain with her. Tamika visits her children daily and is angry and frustrated with her mother, but feels powerless to challenge her for fear of recrimination:

*"...she says if I kick off [about the arrangement] she will tell social services, so I have no choice... that's the worst thing after prison, no one ever trusts you again."* (Tamika)

The Mothers felt the mistrust of others, especially other mothers was influenced by a lack of understanding of the complexity of their trauma and pathways into offending, but also in maternal judgement. The mothers' mothers, sisters, aunties etc who were also mothers could not understand how a mother would '*put herself*' in a position where separation from children was a risk.

' My own mother said to me , "how could you? as a mother how could you do that knowing you could go to jail?... why would you even risk it ... I don't get it ... I could never." ' (Carla)

This additional layer of judgment informed the lack of trust in the women as mothers, if, as mothers, they had 'risked' it once, how could they be fully trusted. Some of the Mothers, especially those who had used substances in the past, felt that some of the mistrust in them was '*understandable*' (Tia), and was rooted in their previously chaotic

lifestyles. Sandra remembers her mother telling her in prison that she had been vindicated in keeping the children from her:

*“I used to try to fight my mother and convince her I could manage the kids, even with my habit, I thought I was ok.... I thought I was that like a functioning addict... but when I went to jail my mother was like, well you are not functioning now, are you!”* (Sandra)

However, Sandra feels that her ‘hard work to get clean and deal with my issues’ warranted a second chance. She felt that her mother had ‘actively discouraged’ her son from coming back home once she was released. He had in the end refused to come home and Sandra was forced to accept this:

*“I guess I have to accept that whatever my view of how I lived and why is one thing, but he went through his own experience and I understand how hard it is for him to trust me still, and actually I suppose for my mother to trust me. I know I won’t relapse again, but I guess they don’t, do they, maybe one day they will, this is the longest I’ve gone... but they need longer I guess.”* (Sandra)

Mothers found it challenging to ask for or obtain support for motherhood-related issues. Finding their maternal-identity and role was all but ignored in their post-release supervision.

#### **7.5.4 Supervision and ‘support’**

Probation supervision fundamentally expects and reproduces hegemonic, culturally influenced ideals about what is good citizenship (Bosworth, 2000; Opsal, 2015;). Such constructions are gendered, (although arguably the Probation Service requirements are most often not) and therefore have consequences for women who are subject to supervision (Jordan, 2013). Probation supervision requires individuals to abide by a set of conditions that are designed to regulate their behaviour, to maintain desistance and to rehabilitate (Opsal, 2015). Mothers described leaving prison feeling ‘disoriented’ and

degraded' (Eaton, 1993:56). 'Anxious' and 'suspicious' about the additional surveillance and judgement they expected to face via post-release supervision:

*"I didn't have high expectations of probation to be honest, I hate all that watching you stuff... all I wanted was to get my kids back."* (Carla)

Feminist scholarship identifies a two-fold lack of support for mothers post-release mothers - support concerning mothering, and for the factors which led to their imprisonment in the first instance (Opsal 2015). The shape of post-release support has significant relevance for how successfully mothers will re-enter into their families and society (Hays, 2008). Hays (*ibid*) found that once the initial 'honeymoon' period of reunification had passed, some 'old' issues resurfaced for mothers, which had often been compounded by incarceration. Hays, (2008) found mothers returned to or began substance misuse as a mean of coping with their maternal-emotions and maternal post-release experiences. Mothers who were identified as vulnerable to this and who received support not surprisingly fared better than those who did not. Those findings are echoed in this study. Motherhood did not feature in formal supervision for most of the Mothers in this study either pre or post-release, despite motherhood being Mothers' primary focus, and biggest source of scrutiny outside of supervision (Rose 1999). Despite *all* of the Mothers describing at least some negative impact of their incarceration on them as mothers, *most* of the Mothers stated they were '*never asked*' (Taranpreet) about their motherhood, whatever their circumstances (i.e.. reunification or permanent loss of children) in their post-release supervision.

Ursula, a mother of five, stated that the research interview was in fact the first time she had been asked about her imprisonment and its effects on her *as a mother*, something she said she would be '*eternally grateful for*'. Ursula was conflicted in her feelings about probation 'support'.

*"...it's incredibly difficult. They didn't ask about my kids at probation, but even if they had I would have said everything was ok, why would I be stupid enough to say if I was struggling? Probation have the potential to breach you so how am I going to say I'm struggling to somebody who's got the potential to send me back to prison, and the potential to flag me to social services as a mother not coping."* (Ursula)



Echoing Masson's (2019) findings, most of the Mothers experienced some form of 'collateral damage', such as loss of homes, loss of employment, relations or education opportunities; however, the Mothers in this study felt most concerned at the losses or harms that directly impacted on their maternal-identity and/or role, losses in which they remained unsupported. Significantly, Mothers felt that, even if they did ask probation for support, 'real' support would not have been offered:

*"But what are you actually going to do?[...] They never even came to visit my home or visit my children or visit... I never had a home visit. Nobody ever came to see me. I lied for the whole four years. I genuinely did, I lied for the whole four years. On my licence I was supposed to live elsewhere... I wasn't allowed to go back to my family home because they said Denzel [dad - pseudonym] was a risk because the offence occurred with him. And remember he lived in the house with the kids. They said I couldn't go back to **my** house with **my** kids. So they licensed me to my daughter's house, Kenise's house. I went back and lived at my house for four years and just lied. I needed to be a mother to my children, to be in our home, so I lied." (Ursula)*

Such was Ursula's need to be with her children to focus on repairing and renegotiating her maternal-identity and role she was prepared to risk being breached and returned to prison. This situation added significantly to her post-release stress but was a decision she does not regret. In fact, she wonders what her relationships might have been like if she *had* complied with her licence conditions and concludes, '*I don't think I'd have a relationship with them, the state would have destroyed my motherhood*' (Ursula).

Wright (2017:21), whose research with women who 'persistently offend' also found that on the whole women in her research had negative experiences of post-prison supervision. She found that the women reported their needs, in terms of practical support and relational bonds, came secondary to the goal of probation, i.e. a 'reduction in offending'. Although Wright's research was not specifically with mothers, she did identify issues with supervision that affected mothers (and their children) . For example, mothers being housed away from children and in accommodation not suitable for children.

Like Ursula, Beth said that her motherhood simply was not discussed during her probation supervision:

*“At the first appointment she said something like... ‘oh, I know there is social services involvement with your daughter so we’ll leave that to them, and we will just deal with your offending and your drugs here’... so after that we never even spoke about it, I don’t think she even asked me once how it was gannin with the bairn after that... shitty really.”* (Beth)

Beth went on to say that supervision for her offending and her drug use constituted simply being asked if she was offending and being asked if she was ‘using’ or ‘drinking’, to both of which Beth would reply ‘no’, ‘and basically that was it really’ (Beth).

Several Mothers, when specifically asked about the Probation Service response to their motherhood, said words to the effect of ‘they don’t care’. The significance of ‘care’ is observed by Canton and Dominey (2020:31), who argue that although questions have long been asked about whether the primary mission in the role of probation is care, or control, or both, there has been little attention given to how it is experienced by those under its supervision. Canton and Dominey (2020) suggest that indifference to this enquiry or such accounts is in itself a ‘failure to care’. In this study, the Mothers’ experiences of post-prison supervision was enriched when Mothers felt their supervisors demonstrated ‘genuine concern’ or care. However, four mothers (Ursula, Shanice, Rayna and Kady) explicitly stated that they saw probation as simply an extension of prison:

*“...prison is not a caring environment and that just continued outside. I know that people want to portray it as such, it really isn’t. Or if it is I didn’t actually ever see it or experience it. In four years in prison and four years on probation, I never once felt as if anybody actually cared.”* (Ursula)

Throughcare and planning for resettlement<sup>67</sup> is relational to successful post-release outcomes, especially for mothers (Hays, 2009). McIvor et al, 2009, found the most

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<sup>67</sup> The term ‘resettlement’ is of relatively recent origin, first appearing in a Home Office consultation paper (1998) as the preferred term for what had previously been called ‘throughcare’ or ‘aftercare’ (Bateman et al, 2013:8)

effective supervision relationships were gendered and tailored, and ideally formed around supervisory or supporting relationships that began whilst the women were still in prison in preparation for release. Rayna stated that she was not prepared for her release and did not really understand what would be required of her outside. She felt that planning for release and '*getting me ready for it*', was an element of her relatively long sentence (3½ years) that had been neglected, '*especially as a mother*'. This contributed to what for her was an '*extremely hard*' period of adjustment post-release. Several Mothers felt they were '*just let out*' (Emma), with little support in the areas they felt they needed it most, and one of those areas was their motherhood.

Significantly, some of the Mothers who had been free for longer periods had experienced the Probation Service in an era where individuals would meet their 'outside' probation officer whilst still in prison. Previously the probation officer who wrote the pre-sentence report (PSR) might be the officer who was assigned to an individual throughout prison and release. Mary highlights how important this can be; in present times more women than ever are released homeless, many of them being mothers (PRT, 2015):

*"On one sentence yeah I met my probation officer a couple of months before I got out... it helped knowing who I was going to see and she made sure I had somewhere to go to when I was released, she thought I might be able to get my kids back see... that was the only time it happened though... it didn't work for me because social services wouldn't let me have them anyway, but some of the girls who are mothers if they were let out with no home, how were they supposed to get their kids back?" (Mary)*

This level of throughcare has always been harder to achieve for women as they are more geographically distanced (Minson et al. 2015), but historically, in such instances probation areas would often fund a probation officer to travel to meet their client in prison from between six and three months before their release with the aim of establishing their needs and to form a relationship with them<sup>68</sup>. In more recent years throughcare, if it exists

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<sup>68</sup> The author is a qualified probation officer, and this is how I was initially directed to practice – when the then 42 probation areas were merged to become the National Probation Service (2000), and the New Choreography for probation meant 'national standards', enforcement and supervision were the highest priority, and funds for travelling for the purposes of resettlement were all but removed (see also Chapter 2).

at all, has been undertaken by third sector organisations – but their funding and tenure in a prison is often precarious. However, where it has existed, the third sector workers have often provided an important link between the prison and the community supervisors. Many mothers' efforts to successfully re-enter society are challenged by practical losses such as loss of homes and loss of employment, and by ongoing difficulties in regaining them (Masson, 2019). Mothers in this study encountered the same difficulties described by Masson (2019), and often felt their probation supervision did little to alleviate their situation:

*"I lost my house when I went in, all my stuff, kids clothes, photos, photos of me dad, everything... my whole life was in that house gone... I was broken, man, broken. What did probation say? 'Oh we can't help with housing; you need to go the council'... how was I supposed to get my kids back without a house for them to live in... but they [Probation] were literally not interested." (Carla)*

Supervisory relationships are important (Jordan, 2013; McIvor et al, 2009). This study evidences the value and need of understanding and accounting for mothering status and emotions, and how doing so improved engagement:

*"I had a good one yeah and I thank god for that, she helped me she really did, and it was through her help and the course I did that I got my kids back. She knew that was most important, but she helped me see I had a road to go down to get there and she helped me get there, without her I'd be back inside, she helped teach me I deserved better and that my kids needed me." (Tanisha)*

Similarly, Sophie described how her officer:

*"...just made me open my eyes and see that my bad decisions and partners were affecting my daughter and I didn't even see it, he was good yeah, he knew she [daughter] was most important to me and so he focused on that to help me learn." (Sophie)*

Some of the Mothers had experience of community orders as well as prison, or had served more than one sentence and so had experienced help from multiple officers:

*“I had some half decent probation officers, you can tell the ones who actually care because they get to know you and want to know you... but some of the others I wouldn't piss on if they were on fire, they didn't care, they didn't understand and they didn't try to... you just didn't go to those appointments.” (Mary)*

It is clear that most women have similar complex needs on exiting prison to those they had on entering prison (McIvor et al, 2009). Rehabilitation, especially for women, often pays too little attention to the root causes or pathways into crime, or to the fact that, all too often, women's routes into crime are marred by abuse, poverty, mental-health difficulties and substance misuse (Carlen, 1985; Jordan, 2013; Brown and Bloom, 2009). However, women's pathways out of crime are often filled with strikingly similar 'landmines in the road' as before. Importantly which are then compounded by motherhood (Garcia-Hallett, 2019), *'When I got out... same shit, different day but so much harder as a mum'* (Dee). Despite being described as 'complex', many Mothers felt that few of their additional 'needs' like motherhood needs were met. The Mothers described it as *'pointless'* (Emma) to discuss any of their maternal challenges or emotions with supervisors. Although it is still relatively underexplored, especially in the UK, there is an increasing awareness that desisting pathways can be *'shaped by motherhood'* (Garcia-Hallett, 2019:214). Negotiating post-prison motherhood and attempting to re-establish a maternal-role whilst trying to repair a reduced maternal-identity, presents significant challenges for mothers in their desistance journey (Garcia-Hallett, 2019), and it requires informed support. As Dee states:

*“Yeah, it was a challenge to stay clean and straight, it was stressful coming back to being a full-time mum after prison and still having all the same shit to deal with as before but now worse... and fighting to get my other kids back, yeah I could have done with some help with that.” (Dee)*

The Mothers revealed that the relationship between motherhood and desistance can be complicated and sometimes is paradoxical. Desistance must be understood as a journey - it is not fixed (Stone, 2016). For example, Mary, Nicola and others all identified how the

loss of their mother role, before and after prison, set them on a path of reoffending because they felt they *'had nothing left to lose'* (Mary). Returning to the complex and challenging circumstances in which many of them had lived pre-prison, alongside the now considerable added burden of a spoiled maternal-identity and change in maternal-role (as discussed earlier), made it challenging for the Mothers to not be drawn back into the situations that had led them to offend in the first instance.

Ten of the Mothers (Shanice, Cynthia, Dee, Mary, Emma, Sam, Jennifer, Sandra, Nicola, and Carla) explicitly stated that their status as ex-prison mothers (and all that entailed), was a factor in their return to substance misuse and subsequent repeat offending. A number of the other Mothers admitted that they had used illegal substances or over-relied on alcohol *'to cope'* (Beth) following their release, and also to cope with their enduring trauma, *'old'* trauma, as well as *'new'* trauma which had occurred because of their Mothers imprisonment.

*"I had so many nightmares about prison and my kids... I used to dream I couldn't get to Susie [daughter]...[...]. I could see her but there was like... I dunno some kind of forcefield and I just couldn't get to her... I had it all the time, so I'd take my mate's sleepers and drink wine when it was bad... I still have to do it sometimes even now."* (Tanya)

Stone (2016:959) identifies that, particularly in the case of mothers who misuse substances, the *'powerful and stigmatising master narrative'* of addicts challenges mothers' abilities to release themselves from their offending pasts and to move successfully into a non-offending future. O'Malley and Devaney (2016) and Baldwin et al (2015) found that for addicted mothers, the 'shame' of their perceived previously 'failed' motherhoods compounded the trauma that led to their addiction in the first instance. This contributed to mothers' abilities (or inabilities) to abstain from drugs and/or alcohol and ergo from the offending they undertook to fund their addiction (and often the addictions of their male partners). Some Mothers felt that once they had 'failed' at motherhood they *'had nothing to go straight for'*, (Mary).

However, Mary later described how her motherhood also became her motivation to seek support and that it was the most important factor in her desistance, because she wanted her sons to be proud of her. Mary's motivation was set in motion by an individual officer

who acknowledged her motherhood (Chapter 6), using it as a hook for Mary to harness as motivation (Giordano et al, 2002). This again highlights the significance and importance of understanding the maternal-emotions and roles of criminalised mothers (whether they have the care of their children or not), and of the importance of good quality, compassionate, gendered and tailored supervisory relationships (Dominey and Gelsthorpe, 2020; Canton and Dominey, 2020).

Reassuming the maternal role can have a transformative effect on mothers' desistance (Brown and Bloom, 2009; Giordano et al, 2002). Many of the Mothers sought to demonstrate desistance through the pursuit of an idealised motherhood. Several Mothers expressed that if they '*could just be a good mother*' (Tamika), they could put prison behind them, equally as important was being **seen** to be good mothers. When/if this was achieved, then the Mothers felt that their 'good' mother status could override their ex-prisoner status. The Mothers described how in achieving or returning to a place of perceived good or good enough motherhood would assist them in their abstinence from substance misuse (and therefore from re-offending) and from crime. Because, as *mothers*, they became reluctant to 'give up' their hard-won, newfound feelings of increased maternal self-esteem, respectability and acceptance (in their own eyes, and those of their children and wider society) and sometimes increased/returned maternal-role. These findings echo and illustrate previous findings on desistance (Maruna and Mann, 2019) and motherhood and desistance (Bachman et al, 2016):

*“Eventually I just changed my shit. I worked hard to leave that life behind me and the longer I was just a mum, and a good mum and not using and stuff, the further I felt away from the shit mother who didn't think of her kids... well, I did but everyone said I didn't. So... I didn't want to go back, to that life, to prison, to any of it. I just wanted to be a mum to my kids, to be a good mum.”* (Tamika)

Conversely, if mothers did not achieve this place of 'good enough' mothering (Winnicott, 1987), either by their own or others' evaluation, then the impact on the mothers was, as Beth's death tragically illustrates, devastating. However, even once the Mothers had moved on, and were successfully moving forwards, living a life uncomplicated by offending or substance misuse, it is important to note that, their positive or affirming maternal identity still often felt precarious to them (Sharpe, 2015). Tamika illustrates,

despite where she felt she was now (in a positive place), *'it will never take a lot to put me back there through... I can't hide what I was'*. Tamika states that her *'shameful'* past still haunts her and, despite the fact that most people in her *'new life'* do not know that she has been in prison, she still feels ashamed of *'the kind of mother I used to be'*. Fearing the judgement of her children most of all - *'more than anything, I don't want them to be ashamed of their mam'*. The Mothers demonstrated that, although they might be seen as *'reformed'* characters and may be now externally judged as *'good'* mothers, internally they retained an enduring maternal shame which was often rooted in their permanently spoiled maternal-identity.

The Mothers universally felt that what would have assisted them in their post-prison journeys and would continue to assist them long past their release - was the feeling that someone *'cared'* about their journeys **as mothers**. They felt that by their motherhood being ignored during their imprisonment and supervision not only were they often left struggling and floundering, but that their motherhood, their maternal roles and their maternal identity *'didn't matter'* (Rayna). Given that it was often the most important aspect of their identity to them, this gave Mothers the message that they themselves did not matter. Not addressing the in-prison and post prison needs of mothers had left the mothers vulnerable to the effects of deep rooted and ongoing trauma.

## 7.6 Trauma and Pain

The processes of imprisonment, i.e. the whole criminal justice process from arrest through imprisonment, to release and resettlement, must *'take trauma seriously'* (Ellison and Munro, 2017:56), and must be pursued more meaningfully if we are to have a fair and just system. Not only for those easily identified as *'victims'* but also for law breakers, who have experienced their own forms of victimisation. There is greater acceptance of traumatised *'victims'* who are seen as more deserving of care and understanding than traumatised law breakers (Canton 2016), yet the impact on both can be significant and enduring. Covington (2007), a leader in the movement for trauma-informed practice within the CJS, advocates for wide-ranging therapeutic responses rather than penal responses to criminalised women, and suggests:



*“Recognising the centrality of women’s roles as mothers provides an opportunity for criminal justice, medical, mental-health, legal and social service agencies to include this role as an integral part of program and treatment interventions for women.” (Covington, 2007:78)*

There has been an increasing awareness of the need for a trauma-informed approach (TIA) in criminology and criminal justice processes (Durr, 2020; Jewkes et al, 2019; Bradley, 2017; Ellison and Munro, 2017; Covington, 2007). Which Durr (2020) further argues should be gendered. The TIA seeks to recognise and respond with understanding and compassion to the ways in which trauma can manifest in and influence the lives and behaviour of individuals. The TIA approach has steadfastly informed policy and practice, especially related to criminalised women, since the early 2000’s (Covington and Bloom, 2003; Bradley, 2017).

Most studies examining the relationship between prison and trauma focus on the trauma that the prisoner brings *into* the prison. It is accepted wisdom that both male and female (especially female), prisoners have experienced multiple traumatic events prior to coming to prison (Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Bradley, 2017). However, significantly less is known about the association between incarceration and subsequent trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)<sup>69</sup>. Significantly, Masson (2019:146) found that mothers in her study experienced ‘enduring psychological harm’. Understanding the full psychological impact of imprisonment is vital to improving outcomes for ex-prisoners (Piper and Berle, 2019; Masson, 2019). Although Piper and Berles’ (2019) research into post-prison PTSD focuses on the aftereffects of potentially traumatic events (PTE’s) in prison, such as violent assaults, they raise important and transferable questions about the significance and prevalence of PTSD in ex-prisoners who, as previously stated, are often already struggling with trauma from their pre-prison lives, and who will be additionally traumatised by imprisonment.

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<sup>69</sup> PTSD is an anxiety disorder characterised by a traumatic stressor leaving one to continuously have negative thoughts about the experience. Symptoms often appear within three months after a traumatic event but may be delayed by months or even years (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The severity, proximity, and duration of a person’s exposure to the traumatic event are the best predictors for determining who is most likely to develop PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). PTSD was first acknowledged as a mental illness in 1980, when it was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III). The DSM is a handbook written by the American Psychiatric Association and used by mental-health professionals to diagnosis mental illnesses  
[http://ilfvcc.org/assets/pdf/ResearchReports/PTSD\\_Female\\_Prisoners\\_Report\\_1110.pdf](http://ilfvcc.org/assets/pdf/ResearchReports/PTSD_Female_Prisoners_Report_1110.pdf)

### 7.6.1 'It's like PTSD...well in fact it is PTSD'

Most of the Mothers had traumatic histories, and many were victims of crime as well as being criminalised. Ellison and Munro (2017) highlight the potential for additional trauma to be caused to those who are involved in the processes of criminal justice. Women have the potential to be doubly harmed by those processes, as both victims and as 'perpetrators', though many crimes against women go unreported (Munro, 2018). Most of the Mothers had previously been victims of violence and/or sexual abuse and were already dealing with the traumatic aftereffects as victims of such crimes. Nonetheless, most of the Mothers were clear that their imprisonment was an *additional* traumatic experience for them, notwithstanding any PTE's, the prison experience itself was traumatic. For the Mothers, the trauma of continued separation from their children (or in some cases the loss of their children), and their subsequent experience of mothering from prison with all that that entailed, left them deeply and profoundly traumatised, and was often compounded by their ongoing post-release challenges.

Mothers were potentially undiagnosed as suffering from PTSD in relation to those offences (Ellison and Munro, 2017). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is characterised by a number of recognisable 'symptoms', including flashbacks, nightmares, feelings of isolation, guilt, difficulty in sleeping and coping which are often severe enough and persistent enough to interfere in a person's day-to-day life (NHS guidelines)<sup>70</sup>. Thus, many of the mothers had experienced previous trauma that had affected them, but were now additionally and specifically traumatised from the imprisonment process. Most of the Mothers described having ongoing nightmares and obsessive thoughts, sometimes decades post-release, where they would be unable to '*get to*' (Tamika) their children, separated by some sort of physical barrier (Maggie). Mary described a '*growling bear*' separating her from her children; Sandra described a wall in front of her children and every time she reached the top the wall would '*grow*'. The Mothers described what are known and accepted as signs and symptoms of Post-

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<sup>70</sup> See also 68 Symptoms of PTSD <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms/>

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) such as detachment, intrusive thoughts, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, and flashbacks<sup>71</sup> directly related to their imprisonment.

*“It wasn’t like life was rosy before prison, but I thought it would be all alright once I was out and back with them, it didn’t occur to me I’d spend hours of days just re-living being apart from them. I’ll be sitting watching TV then all of a sudden I’ll be thinking about when she was leaving after visiting, or when they said to take me down in court and I knew I wouldn’t see them that night. It just haunts me, and the weird thing is in some ways it stops me enjoying being with them now... because I can’t stop thinking about not being able to see them... crazy.” (Shanice)*

The Mothers described how they would ‘re-live’, or ‘play over and over’ (Tanisha) in their minds, various traumatic aspects of their sentence or arrest, i.e. the process of imprisonment. Maggie described her anxiety, emotions and feelings to her counsellor, who subsequently diagnosed her as living with PTSD. Mary’s experience was not unique, suggesting that parallels could be drawn of her PTSD diagnosis with most of the Mothers in the study, despite the fact that, prior to custody, many had been living in what could be classed as traumatic situations:

*“I get what I can only call flashbacks of that awful visit... of my children leaving and of the first steps I took into the prison yard... just seeing the prison in front of me. I get nightmares and I feel anxious all the time... I wasn’t like that before, it’s like... it’s like PTSD... that’s the only way I can describe it.” (Karen)*

However, even when Mothers did not explicitly mention PTSD, or themselves label their experiences as ‘traumatic’, it was painfully clear that they were speaking about trauma triggered by their maternal prison experience:

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<sup>71</sup> Post-Traumatic Stress. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms/>

*“The effects of that place haunt me, the physical scars on my arms only remind me of the pain and heartache I felt when I was in there. Just not being with my kids, man... but worse for me are the mental scars that no one sees, everyone thinks I’m over it... no one knows, but I’m wrecked really. I still have nightmares from that place you know[...]...nothing will take that away.”* (Dee)

Mothers described some of the ‘potentially traumatic events’ (PTEs), communicated by Piper and Berle (2016), which did indeed have a lasting traumatic effect. Mothers described experiences that included witnessing a suicide attempt, the aftermath of suicide, witnessing mothers’ ‘last’ visits in the visiting hall before children were placed for adoption, witnessing a cell birth. Strikingly, many of the PTEs described were intertwined with their and others’ mothering emotions and experiences. Ursula described ‘*walking in on this... I dunno 60 year old officer fondling some young girl*’. Ursula goes on to say how ‘traumatised’ she was not only by witnessing this happening at all, but by the fact that she ‘walked away’, going on to say that:

*“I should have said something, shouldn’t I, because it’s abuse. Like that’s abusive, she’s vulnerable and he shouldn’t be doing that, but he holds the power.”* (Ursula)

What was equally traumatising to Ursula was that, in being aware of the power that officers, and the prison had over her, she ‘knew’ that if she spoke up she was likely to be moved to another prison, and she was fearful then that she would not then be able to see her children. Ursula felt traumatised by the choice she made to put her own mothering needs before ‘*an abused girl who could have been my daughter*’ (Ursula). The impact of this event, and Ursula’s response to it, was obviously a source of significant pain and trauma to Ursula. To deal with her prison trauma, Ursula felt she had to learn to ‘*contain it*’, something she and her children felt had left her ‘*cold*’. She added:

*“You have to prevent yourself from being emotional about anything just to survive, don’t you. You desensitise yourself to the pain, you squash the emotions, learn to depress the emotions, to keep control of them, to push them away from you. So I think I was quite numb... still am... like my children say I’m cold now... yeah they think I’m really cold. But*

*sometimes that's because when I'm faced with emotional demands, emotional memories, I retract into quite... like an analytical mode... like I don't engage with emotional stuff very well even now... it's how you cope with the trauma.” (Ursula)*

Ursula described how she tries to avoid thinking about the period of separation from her children because it is *'just too hard'*. Carla described how she felt she *'deserved'* to live with her trauma and that she had the *'impression'* that most of the CJS practitioners she had come across felt she should, too. She was told she was *'responsible for your own pain'*. Piper and Berle (2019) and Liebling (2009) have previously argued for greater understanding of the impact of trauma on prisoners' lives, and how previous trauma interacts with additional trauma both in and after prison. It is clear from the Mothers' accounts that the imprisonment process and separation from children has distinct and specific long-lasting implications for mothers.

### **7.6.2 Pain of separation**

The post-release Mothers felt that the trauma of being separated from their children, and the memory of being separated, was their most significant, persistent, long-lasting pain of imprisonment. It was this enduring memory that traumatised them most, triggering their PTSD symptoms. For some Mothers, it was the actual moment of separation, or the realisation that it was coming that was worse, for others it was the prolonged separation; for others all of it. Rita, who had known she would be going to prison in advance of her sentencing, stated:

*“During the day... I mean on a conscious level I can't actually remember physically saying goodbye to my children... it's like I can't let myself remember... but at night I have nightmares and it all comes back... it was horrendous, absolutely horrendous.” (Rita)*

Maggie, who also knew before court that she was *'most likely'* to get a custodial sentence, remembers saying goodbye to her children:

*“I hadn't seen my son cry for years and years... he was a man really, but to me he's my boy. He was broken... he literally just sobbed in my arms...”*

*I wish I could forget it I really do... but it's burned on to my brain like... what do you call it?... a branding that's it... it's branded. And my daughter, well I thought she'd be the most upset, but she just was so brave and just said 'mum I'll look after them'... well that finished me off... it was the worst day of my life... the worst moment of my life." (Maggie)*

Highlighting a lack of compassion and thought sometimes demonstrated in police arrests, where the needs of the service are placed above the needs of mothers and children; Tia experienced a particularly traumatic arrest in front of her nine-year-old daughter at the school gates. Tia, at five years post-release, considered herself to be 'mostly ok', yet described the persistent invasive and traumatic memory of her arrest:

*"I got arrested outside her school, she was in primary school and I was picking her up from school. The police were watching me and had been for three week, so they could have pulled me over at any time, but they didn't, they waited until I was getting her from school. There was a riot van outside, everyone's parents picking up their kids, and they put me in the van in handcuffs. I was shouting saying, 'no, no my daughter is coming out of school, I live ten miles away'... and when she came out I had to shout at the woman parked next to me, I shouted at Meg [daughter] first, but she put her hands in front of her face and she just turned round so as not to look at me. How can I talk to her if she won't look at me, she obviously doesn't want to see,... or to see me like this...[sobs]... so I'm shouting at this woman to take her to my mum's. This lady just wrapped her in her arms and Meg started sobbing. I was shouting, please take her to my mum's, please. I didn't know what else to do. I was in handcuffs. The lady took her to my mothers." (Tia)*

Tia was charged with resisting arrest because she tried to finish shouting to someone to look after her daughter before she was forced into the police van. Tia described how this memory would occur as a 'flashback', at 'random' moments, knocking her off guard and taking her back to the trauma. This would trigger guilt, irrationality, over-protectiveness towards her daughter, anxiety and worry. It was the main reason why Tia had considered taking anti-depressants, which in the end she decided against as she had previously been drug-dependant. She therefore continued to struggle on unmedicated to manage

the ongoing trauma of this memory. For the Mothers, their enduring trauma was more than a result of their sense of powerlessness, or their lack of control, or the lack of agency or the reduction in their maternal-role and maternal self-esteem whilst incarcerated - it was all of that. The Mothers' narratives were very clear: the biggest source of their trauma and persistent pain was the memories and actual agony of being physically apart from their children and the enduring consequences of that for all of them. Several mothers (n=17) described experiencing nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty coping and an almost obsessive 'reliving' of parts or all of their imprisonment experience and the imprisonment process, some decades post-release:

*"I just ached for my children; I can't begin to describe the trauma of what it felt like to just not be physically with them... it occupied my every thought... I thought when I got out at least that ache would go, and I know this won't make any sense... but now I have an empty ache... that sounds stupid doesn't it... but like the hurt has left a hole and it won't go. I still think about being in prison every day."* (Jaspreet)

Beth, who was still breastfeeding her three-month-old baby, spoke of how her baby had to be wrenched from her arms by social workers; she remembers giving her 'one last feed before they took her', adding:

*"I was feeding her, and she was looking up at me with these totally innocent eyes... she had no idea what was coming and honestly my tears were just dripping all over her face, but she had no idea... no idea... just innocent. I was broken... I still am, I think about that all the time."*  
(Beth)

Two other mothers, Dee and Shanice, spoke of how they tried to flee to stop their children being taken into care. Shanice, who was arrested at home, remembers the police coming and knocking at the door, and she ran out of her back door to a neighbour to hand over her baby daughter so that she would not be taken into care. Similarly, Dee, who at eight months pregnant, recalls how, as soon as she realised that the magistrate hearing her case was about to sentence her to immediate custody, she absconded from court to take her children to her sister's so they would not be taken into care, 'all I could think about was getting there and getting them to my sister's... it was mad, but I had to' (Dee). Dee

described how this memory of her running would often trouble her dreams, where she would just be running and running but never getting anywhere and she relates this to trying to get to her children, *'it's a memory and a living nightmare at the same time'* (Dee).

### 7.6.3 Pain of memories

It was very clear that both Dee and Shanice continued to be traumatised by memories of their imprisonment and the imprisonment processes, and for some Mothers (n=9) it was these traumatic memories that trapped them in the cycles of substance misuse and reimprisonment.

*"...honestly, I was mentally scarred by having Dwayne in prison... I used to obsess over it. It was stupid but I couldn't put it behind me... so I drank to cope but that just made things worse and I ended up back in again... its crazy, I know... it doesn't make sense, but it was all part of the same thing."* (Tanisha)

Kady described how she often has nightmares from aspects of her imprisonment and feels that her anger issues are a symptom of her not *'being able to process the memories of that place'*. She describes how she was *'made'* to return to *'education'* in the prison when her baby was very young:

*"They made me leave her at six weeks... six weeks, man!... and go to education, I had to listen to her screaming and not be able to go to her, how fucked up is that? I can feel myself getting angry thinking about it all now, it doesn't need to be like that. I mean why was it essential I go to a classroom and colour in! That's I was doing you know..."* (Kady)

Kady *'accepts responsibility'* for her offence and the consequences but feels that the *'system'* further harmed her and her daughter; she states that if she had been a drug user she knows she would have used drugs to cope with the trauma of her experiences; instead, she drank, not to excess but *'to cope'* with her emotions. Several Mothers who were now free from substance misuse described how the hardest thing for them now was having to deal with their emotions as a result of past trauma, not only the original



trauma that had triggered their substance misuse but also the trauma from the process of their imprisonment and its legacy. Dee recalls:

*“the hardest thing I have ever gone through is getting clean... and that’s because clean I have memories not seeing my kids... it hurts, man... it’s trauma, isn’t it... every time a feeling or a memory would come up my head would be saying, ‘just use something’... I wasn’t consciously thinking I was using drugs to bury my pain... but I was... it would be like, here’s a feeling - my head would start going off... whoa fuck this and use... now I have to stay with the pain. And fucking hell, it cripples me, especially as a mum it makes you more ashamed, not ashamed, I dunno scarred maybe?... but I won’t let it consume me... I have therapy now.”*  
(Dee)

Many, if not most, of the Mothers spoke of how they would be ‘*dragged back*’ (Margaret) to prison every day in their thoughts:

*“Literally every day when my daughter goes to school I see the panic in her face in case I’m not here when she gets in... every day I’m reminded of what it was like being without her.”* (Margot)

Some of the Mothers, especially those whose children were younger when they were separated, felt their trauma was triggered and retriggered by their children’s ongoing trauma from their separation.

*“...yes she hates being away from me... she cries if I leave her and I know that’s because of what happened [prison]... seeing her traumatised reminds me so much of how traumatised I felt in prison being away from her... we need to get past it, we both do... but it still just feels so raw.”*  
(Lauren)

Despite the fact that most of the Mothers spoke about their experiences as ‘*traumatic*’, not all of them recognised their subsequent feelings or emotions as ‘trauma’: some described it as an experience they simply had to survive. Mothers described enduring states of feeling ‘*overwhelmed*’ (Carla), ‘*emotionally unstable*’ (Jaspreet), and ‘*exposed*’

(Mavis). Many of the Mothers described feelings of disorientation and panic once released, as previously observed by Eaton (1993); Masson (2019); Leverntz (2014); and Moore and Scraton (2014) as associated with post-prison woman generally. However, this study reveals the enduring nature of trauma, and impact related to ongoing post-release trauma and its interconnectedness to motherhood.

*“I have good days and bad days, the weekend was bad, I just couldn’t control my emotions, I just wanted to cry and cry. I can’t explain it to anyone, and I know no one understands, they just think, I’m out now, I should put it behind me and move on, but I can’t... it’s not behind me, it’s with me every day... the memory of leaving them outside, their faces, I can’t bear it.”* (Jaspreet)

Sometimes years after release, several Mothers recalled or described just ‘bursting into tears’ (Tanya), most often triggered by a reminder of their time in prison as *mothers*, or when recalling the separation from their children; but sometimes ‘for no apparent reason, whilst feeling a constant knot in my stomach on some days, like I’m worried about something, but I don’t know what’ (Lauren).

#### **7.6.4 Pain of fearful anticipation**

Rayna described how once released she struggled to sleep at night, stating she had a constant feeling of foreboding, a fearful anticipation, that someone was going to come and return her to prison and thus separate her again from her children. Her experience was something several Mothers described and was felt particularly keenly whilst still on licence (see later discussion). For several of the older mothers, this haunting feeling of threatened separation was something that persisted throughout mothering and into grandmothering. Cynthia tried to avoid being separated from her son at all costs, to avoid it triggering painful memories; ‘*being apart from my son even now kills me, it kills me... and he’s 32*’. Maggie described how her ongoing fear of separation not only applied to her children, but also to her grandchildren to the point where she was unable to book holidays for longer than a week as she could not ‘bear’ to be away from them.

*“I couldn’t shake the fear that something awful would happen to them if I didn’t see them for more than a week, I know it was irrational but I kind of thought they would go off me if I didn’t see them... Like they would forget to love me or something. Ridiculous I know, I haven’t admitted that before.”* (Maggie)

The Mothers described how they would avoid certain people and situations where these feelings seemed to be triggered: for some of the Mothers their anxiety seemed most triggered when they felt they were being watched or observed by people who ‘*just wouldn’t get it*’ (Lauren). Rayna spoke of a similar fear, which although she said she recognised was ‘*irrational*’, it nonetheless stopped her living a ‘*normal*’ life:

*“I hated going out in my community, not only because of the shame but because I thought someone would take them from me, what is the word - abduct them, crazy crazy crazy.”* (Rayna)

The fearful anticipation described by mothers was over and above Goffman’s (1963:23) suggested wariness and anticipation about encounters between the ‘stigmatised’ (mother) and the ‘normals’ (everyone else), which suggests that the ‘stigmatised’ might seek to avoid. Or that encountering ‘normals’ may trigger anxiety (Sharpe, 2015). This feeling was specifically related instead to fear, and uncertainty (Warr, 2016), in turn related to their children, their motherhood and their mothering futures.

#### **7.6.5 Pain of ‘ifs’ and maybes’**

Maggie described how she is traumatised not only by the prison experience and the separation itself, but by ‘*missed memories*’ in her children’s and grandchildren’s lives. Maggie’s’ grandson was diagnosed with cancer Maggie was refused ROTL to attend his hospital appointments to help support her daughter. Maggie became visibly upset at the memory of this:

*“Sometimes I just torture myself with the ‘what ifs’... what if he’d died when I was still inside... then that makes me think what if my kids had*

*got run over... or my husband died, and they had no one... I drive myself mad with what ifs.” (Maggie)*

Many of the Mothers *obsessed* over what *could* have happened whilst they were in prison. Margaret had been pregnant during her prison sentence - she described how she was so traumatised by her prison experience that she had felt totally unable to bond with her baby during her pregnancy, feeling so ashamed she had been in prison that she felt like an *‘unfit mother’*. As a result, she made the decision to place her child for adoption, which now haunted her. Margaret describes feeling so traumatised by the separation and the memory of her child being taken that, when she did go on to have more children, she found it difficult to *‘let myself love them’*. She felt that only now as a grandmother was she able to find that maternal love, and to love *‘in a motherly way’*.

*“...all the time, what if I’d just had him, kept him I mean, or what if I’d not gone to prison, it’s all... what ifs and ands and pots and pans my mother used to say, it’s all what ifs, but I do think if I had kept him I would have been closer to my others [other children] but I guess we’ll never know.”*  
(Margaret)

Margaret’s narrative powerfully further highlights the long lasting implications and consequences of maternal imprisonment, the fact they can endure for life and intergenerationally.

Queenie, despite admitting that her relationship with one of her daughters had always been *‘difficult’*, wondered whether it would be different if she had not gone to prison: *‘maybe if I hadn’t been to prison we would be closer’*. Margot, whose 14-year-old daughter had been badly bullied during her mother’s imprisonment, stated:

*“if I hadn’t have gone to prison maybe she wouldn’t have been bullied at all, but she certainly might have been more able to stand up for herself if she knew I was at home and life was normal.”* (Margot)

The *‘ifs and maybes’* were an ongoing source of pain for the Mothers torturing them as they navigated the post-release landscape, often being the trigger for the Mothers to

*'want to get out of my own head'* (Karen), and *'do'* something to reframe their experiences.

#### **7.6.6 Wounded healing**

It was striking in the narratives of the Mothers to observe the frequency with which they sought to make their trauma and experiences *'count for something'* (Tarian). Mothers felt they could manage and transform their own traumas by supporting other women going through similar experiences within the criminal justice system, hoping their own experiences could inform the comfort and support of others – sometimes in ways they had not had themselves. *'I know ive got something positive to offer women like me, I know what we need because I didn't have it'* (Lauren).

The concept of the 'wounded healer' is born from an archetype that suggests that healing power is amassed and emerges from a healer's own woundedness (Zerubavel and Wright, 2012:482). The desire to 'help others' was frequently expressed by several Mothers (n=12). They felt uniquely placed to offer support and would often seek out opportunities to do so whilst in prison. Moreover, several (n=7) had or have formally pursued this on release (Ursula, Dee, Rita, Queenie, Mary, Tia, Jaspreet, Maggie), with more (n=6) stating that they intended to pursue their goal in the future (Lauren, Kady, Tarian, Karen, Sandra, Shanice).

One reason given for this by the post-release Mothers was that they felt 'comfortable' with other criminalised Mothers. Goffman (1963) suggests that groups of 'tainted individuals' (Chapter 2) such as ex-prisoners, become 'stigmatised', and those who have not experienced imprisonment are the 'normals'. The Mothers described how this phenomena translated to motherhood too. The post-prison mothers felt like 'stigmatised mothers, especially when they were in the company of the 'normal' mothers, i.e. the ones who had not been to prison. Such a division can result in feelings of inferiority, generated by perception of the superiority of 'normals' (Goffman, 1963) and for the Mothers this resulted in the avoidance of certain social situations, such as the school gates (Tia), playgroup (Sophie), or a wedding (Queenie). They feared being rejected, ostracised and vilified not *'just'* as ex-prisoners but especially as ex-prisoners who were also mothers.

Some Mothers coped with the pain of actual or feared rejection of them as ‘good mothers’ by trying to dismiss it: *‘it’s just life, isn’t it’*(Diane); some developed what Goffman (1963:29) called a ‘hostile bravado’, summed up succinctly by Cynthia: *‘fuck them all, what do I care’*, which similarly Sam called her *‘fuck it approach’*. Several Mothers described feeling a sense of *‘difference’* between themselves and mothers who had not experienced incarceration, and that was something was long-lasting and that *‘hurt’* (Taranpreet). Consequently, several mothers arranged their lives so as to minimise painful situations and contacts in which their past might be exposed or judged,. Mothers described the managing of the underpinning shame and guilt as *‘exhausting’* (Karen):

*“I was high alert all the time [when out], I can’t keep weight on me anymore and I’m sure it is nervous energy. I just feel so ashamed of being a mum who has been to prison, but honestly living with it is literally exhausting.”* (Karen)

As Goffman highlighted (1963:27), even when the ‘normals’ are not even noticing the stigmatised person or are not concerned with the root of the stigma, the ‘stigmatised person’ will nonetheless *‘feel that to present amongst normals nakedly exposes him’*. Goffman (1963:31) suggests that the stigmatised person ‘stands as a discredited person facing an unacceptable world’. It is perhaps obvious that individuals seek to be in the company of ‘sympathetic others’, the first set of whom are those who share the same stigma, i.e. in this instance criminalised mothers.

Thus not only is pursuing ‘work’ and company with those who share one’s experiences therapeutic (Stewart, 2015), it can be a significant source of identity repair (Stone, 2016; Bradley, 2017). Several Mothers reshaped their own trauma and tried to ‘manage’ it by supporting and helping others in similar circumstances, something Motz et al (2020) suggests can be an important part of recovering from trauma; *‘if I can say its happened for a reason it is easier to accept.’* (Diane). Several Mothers began taking on ‘healing’ roles during their incarceration, seeking out roles like ‘prison listener with the intention of taking the role further in the future’<sup>72</sup> .

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<sup>72</sup> The Listener scheme is a form of peer support; prisoners work together as a team. Local Samaritans’ branches, select and train prisoners to become Listeners and provide ongoing training and back-up.

*"I'm a prison listener now and I love it. It takes your mind off your own problems when you are helping others, doesn't it. It stops me thinking about the kids so much, especially at night and hopefully I can use these skills to get a job in woman's centre or something when I get out ."*  
(Sandy)

As discussed in the previous Chapter 6, the older mothers particularly sought to utilise their maternal skills (Kitzinger, 1992), and would mother others, especially younger mothers. This gave the older mothers and grandmothers opportunities to 'mother' but was also a means of managing their own pain and trauma as criminalised and imprisoned mothers. It gave them a purpose and again for some Mothers planted seeds of hope about their future. Mary now volunteers in a rape crisis centre.

*"You know what?... mothering them little ones... I loved it; I knew they needed it yeah... but you know what it helped my pain as well. I was distracted from it... it made it easier for me to cope... and that was where I got the idea I should do it when I got out. I made a promise to myself to help other girls like me. I thought if I could help one girl not to go to prison and suffer like this, then my life will have meant something... you know what I mean?"* (Mary)

Baldwin (Michele) (2000) highlights the significance of the relational aspect between two human beings in any therapeutic exchange. Although speaking about a formal therapeutic relationship such as that with a psychologist or counsellor and their client, it is easy to apply her argument to the Mothers in this study. It was clear that the bonds and relationships Mothers formed with other mothers in prison were supportive, even therapeutic (Stewart, 2015), simultaneously boosting the self-esteem of both. An important part of the process of renegotiating a positive maternal-identity, for some of the Mothers involved trying to assimilate their experience and turn their imprisonment into a positive by focusing on supporting others and assisting others to believe in the possibility of a 'better' future. Emma had befriended two young women who had left prison and been placed near her supported accommodation and she took great pleasure in supporting them. She had just formally registered as a volunteer when she died.

*“It sounds stupid I know but being there for them young lasses like, well it kept me feeling like a mam, like I could still do good, you know what I mean? Still be like a mam. I just used to sit and listen to them and they knew I had gone through the same. One girl had her baby taken by social services like me and I knew what she was going through. She used to say that she did, I mean that I knew how she felt but that none of the others did - and I’m thinking speaking to someone who did know helped her, but really it did help me, too, because I had to try to believe what I was telling her, that it would get better, that we could have more kids and be better, that we could get it right. I was giving me hope as much as I was her.” (Emma)*

Bradley et al, (forthcoming 2021) highlight the value and significance of ‘lived experience’<sup>73</sup> when working with people, especially those who have experienced trauma and particularly with women. They note that the shift towards a trauma-informed approach throughout the CJS (Bradley, 2017; Jewkes et al, 2019; MOJ, 2018) demonstrates an increasing recognition of the trauma trajectories behind many of those who find themselves in the CJS. Bradley et al (*ibid*) argue that people who share the same experiences as those they are supporting are able to facilitate deep trust and meaningful relationships: they call this ‘relational healing’. Bradley et al (*ibid*) recognise that shared experiences can promote feelings of safety and a feeling of ‘not being alone’, in a similar vein to Goffman (1963:32), who identified that sharing space with those with the same lived experience not only generates ‘moral support’ but also the ‘comfort of feeling at home’:

*“I volunteer here [Women’s Centre] with the young mums because it makes me feel worthwhile again. At first I can see them thinking, ‘what would she know?’, but when I tell them I went to prison too then they listen, they know I get them, and they get me.” (Maggie)*

Similarly, Queenie, who had described feeling ‘*just an ongoing pain*’ about being a mother and grandmother who had been to prison, also wanted to ‘*turn my pain into good*’,

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<sup>73</sup> Personal knowledge about something gained through direct first-hand involvement



both through her church work and also through a business she set up to work with ex-prison mothers:

*“I’m not going to lie, working with other prison mums is the only place I don’t feel judged – escaping from the judgement of my kids and my church... I can still do the good my church expects of me but I do it where I’m not reminded all the time what a bad person I am, especially what a bad mother I am because I went to prison.”* (Queenie)

Rita, who initially had wanted to do something specifically for mothers in and after prison, set up a community space for women to meet, either just to visit or as a place where they can learn skills to assist them in earning money by selling items they can make at the centre:

*“I wanted to do something for all mothers who were struggling, initially yeah it was only going to be for mums who’d been to prison only but then I thought, why should I carry on that finger pointing - that’s what we are trying to escape, that’s the same shaming. So yes the centre helps mums who have been to prison but also mums who haven’t, and they all work side by side and no-one knows who’s been where unless they choose to tell each other... in my view that’s what a women’s centre should be, for **all** women.”* (Rita)

Rita, like several of the post-prison Mothers, stated definitively that it was her motherhood that provided her with the motivation to ‘*move forward and succeed*’. Becoming a successful entrepreneur was an important aspect to Rita’s identity repair and maternal healing - she knows her children ‘*feel proud*’ of her and she feels like her ‘*new identity*’ ‘compensates’ for the fact that she went to prison as a mother; although profoundly affected by the separation from her children, Rita feels that ‘*helping others has helped me to move forward with less shame*’ (Rita).

What was apparent and significant amongst the Mothers in relation to their maternal trauma and pain was that it was, and continued to be, ignored in the post-release support agency responses. This represented a continuation and replication of a failure to meet the needs of mothers more broadly in social policy and practice (O’Reilly, 2016). Munro

(2018) argues that the '*complex burdens associated with trauma*' require a broad-based commitment to care and concern in wider society generally, but especially amongst statutory agencies tasked to respond to trauma survivors (whether they are law breakers or not). Most, but tragically not all of the Mothers did survive the trauma of maternal imprisonment. The Mothers who survived live with their pain, and manage to mother and mother well, but they do so mainly as a result of their own resilience and sheer determination rather than because they were able to access gendered and structured support.

## 7.7 Summary

This chapter revealed how the now traumatised post-release Mothers struggled to repair and renegotiate their maternal identity, maternal role, maternal self-esteem and maternal capital. All of which had been reduced by their imprisonment, sometimes permanently. The Mothers continued to be measured (and measured themselves), against not only the expectations of society as law-abiding citizens but also specifically against a motherhood ideal (formally and informally). The chapter evidenced the distinct and specific ways in which the 'accepted wisdom' of the spoiled identity and pains of imprisonment notions endured and were magnified for the post-prison Mothers and grandmothers, with effects being felt for decades and often intergenerationally.

This chapter identified how notions of control, trust and surveillance interacted with the post-prison maternal experience to reveal the pervading gaze of the state on Mothers. The Mothers experiences were additionally frustrated by lasting changes in relationships and relationship dynamics with children and caregivers, which again were influenced by mistrust. Continued missed opportunities to offer support, understanding, care and compassion related to their motherhood impacted on Mothers wellbeing and desistance. The institutional and structural inequalities, discrimination and under-resourcing of gendered support that contributed to the Mothers criminalisation continued to have an impact on the Mother access to appropriate support. Support, which if offered and available might have prevented further criminalisation and reimprisonment and a minimised the subsequent enduring harms described.

Although most Mothers shared the same challenging histories, they also shared a strength and resilience that had enabled them to survive not only their multiple realities

but also a system that, by and large, does not understand or meet their needs, but the personal cost to Mothers and their children has nonetheless been significant. In recognising this, several of the women voiced a desire to work with women in the CJS or the third sector, either on a paid or voluntary basis, which in line with matricentric and feminist principles of agency and empowerment, should be supported and encouraged.

Having presented evidence and new understanding of the significant and enduring impact of maternal imprisonment, the thesis now turns to concluding thoughts, recommendations and impact of the study.

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## Chapter 8

# Valuing A Matricentric-Feminist Approach to Imprisonment: Concluding Discussion

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### 8.1 Introduction

This matricentric-feminist criminological study provides empirical evidence of the disproportionality of punishment when a mother is criminalised and imprisoned. Alongside reiterating the widespread enduring harm of maternal imprisonment caused to the children and families of imprisoned mothers; the study demonstrates the significant and sometimes life-threatening harm caused to an identity and role many women regard as their most important. It has demonstrated how motherhood, and mothering are defined and experienced within broader structural, patriarchally influenced ideologies, but which nevertheless is an experience treasured by most women who choose to take on this role. The study revealed the strength and resilience of mothers who continued to mother, often 'against the odds' in a society that judged them. As demonstrated herein, prison continues to be used readily for women and mothers because reactions to crime are fuelled by 'moral emotions' (Canton, 2015; 59). Reactions and responses to crime and 'criminals' do not always reflect the harm they cause but reflect how far removed they are from the accepted norms and values of society, which Canton (2015), frames in the terms 'sanctity and degradation'. Thus, and as this study has demonstrated, mothers committing crimes are deemed to be acting outside not only society's norms, but also outside the social, emotional and moral framework of motherhood. This represents a perceived perversion or degradation of maternal 'duties'.

Feminist criminology and matricentric-feminism (Chapters 1 and 2) provide the theoretical framework underpinning this study. It responds to a gap in knowledge about the long-term impact of maternal imprisonment on maternal identity and maternal role (Chapters 2 and 3). The application and execution of a matricentric-feminist criminological lens has offered new understanding for how enduring inequality, disadvantage, discrimination and institutional thoughtlessness concerning motherhood

combine to have a lasting impact on criminalised mothers. This study has made a significant contribution to the application of matricentric-feminist principles to research and within the field of criminology.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that the CJS, largely designed by men for men, essentially fails criminalised women, especially mothers, whose needs have often been neglected or ignored. Which feminist criminologists and matricentric scholars alike argue reflects wider society (O Reilly, 2006; Moore and Scraton, 2014,). The literature reviews provided the framework and lens informing this study in method, design, execution and analysis (Chapter 4). My position as an ex-practitioner, a mother and someone who shared many life experiences with the study participants occupied an exceptional stance, providing an insider status which inevitably bore some relationship to the study (Cooper and Rodgers, 2015). The reflexivity essential to feminist and to matricentric research, is often overlooked in final products of research (Renzetti, 2013). Thus, it felt ethically and methodologically imperative to this study, that alongside the Mothers pen-portraits my reflexive journey was fully detailed and my relationship to the research transparently explored (Chapter 5).

Building on previous literature and theory a matricentric-feminist approach was taken to meet the aims of this study. These were; to develop a critical understanding of the enduring impact of imprisonment on maternal-identity and maternal-role; to consider the relevance of motherhood and maternal experiences regarding sentence planning and post-release supervision and, to formulate matricentric recommendations to inform and shape policy and practice in relation to mothers in and after prison.

In addressing the aims of the study, the dominant findings and original contribution of this research (Chapters 6 and 7) are that motherhood, maternal identity, maternal emotions and maternal role are important and *must* be factored into the effective care and supervision of mothers in the CJS. Part of the original contribution of this research demonstrates that the impact and pains of maternal imprisonment persist far longer and reach wider than previously documented, and this study has demonstrated this is persistent and enduring for many more years post-release than previously known. It provided evidence that maternal imprisonment triggers enduring trauma, sometimes to the extent of PTSD, which is previously underexplored. This then affects the lives and relationships of post-prison mothers and their relationships for decades, often

intergenerationally. Original contribution is further demonstrated in relation to a greater understanding of the experiences of criminalised grandmothers and older mothers, which has been distinctly lacking in previous research, even previous research on maternal imprisonment.

Further original contribution is demonstrated by the extension of O'Reilly's 'matricentric-feminism' (2016) and Sykes' (1958) 'pains of imprisonment' (Chapters 2 and 3). O'Reilly (2016:1) argued that motherhood required a 'feminism of its own', in order that women's own perceptions and experiences of maternal thinking, mothering and motherhood could be fully understood. Thus, from the previously outlined ontological stance, using a feminist approach and a matricentric lens, this study has extended and applied O'Reilly's theory (2016) generating and demonstrating a 'matricentric-feminist criminology'. This study stands firm in its argument that mothers' experiences of criminalisation and imprisonment has specific and distinct differences from those of women per se and ultimately, that imprisoning mothers results in distinct maternal pains of imprisonment. Matricentric-feminist criminology neither denies the oppression of mothers nor diminishes the joy of mothering, it listens to the voices of mothers and responds to the intersectionality of motherhood and criminalisation. It seeks to confront the systems and structures in society where motherhood is challenged, discriminated against or ignored, as evidenced by this study.

At the outset of this study, despite extensive existing research around women and imprisonment, there had been a failure, especially in the UK, to fully investigate or deeply understand the experiences of mothers in and after imprisonment, especially by way of a truly feminist study and particularly beyond five years post-release. In order to demonstrate what has been learned by adopting a matricentric-feminist approach and to discuss how the aims of the study were achieved this chapter will be organised into the following sections.

- Mothers' experiences before, during and after prison
- The relevance of motherhood regarding sentence planning, supervision.
- Matricentric recommendations for policy and practice
- Matricentric recommendations for research and academia

Following concluding thoughts, the chapter will end with the impact of the research, final reflection and my research plans.

## **8.2 Mothers' Experiences Before, During and After prison**

Motherhood is a fascinating paradox in which mothers often feel oppressed, exhausted, judged and invisible, whilst simultaneously feeling joyful, powerful and fulfilled (O'Reilly, 2016). This paradox is magnified for mothers in and after prison, because as has been demonstrated in this study being a criminalised mother was a source of sadness, lasting pain and trauma, yet motherhood often also remained a source of joy and hope. The aims of the study provide the scaffold for this section, and as such the impact of maternal imprisonment on the Mothers will be synthesized under the headings, Maternal Identity, Maternal Role, and Enduring Harm.

### **8.2.1 Maternal identity**

The Mothers demonstrated the significance of life and motherhood experiences pre-imprisonment, revealing that for many of the Mothers, the 'spoiling' of their maternal identity began before prison, was confirmed in prison and endured long after prison. In addition to the direct *process of imprisonment*, it was also experiences pre-criminalisation and beyond release, which caused harm and impact to maternal identity, maternal emotions and maternal role.

The Mothers detailed how their challenging pre-prison circumstances interacted with their motherhood, revealing how their absorption of traditional motherhood ideology influenced their maternal self-esteem, maternal identity and role. The study provided new and nuanced understanding about the specific relevance of being poorly mothered as children and how this then informed or shaped the Mothers own adult experiences and views on 'good and bad' motherhood. Which in turn informed their own maternal identity (Stewart 2015). Chapters 2 and 3 provided a framework for understanding why the criminalised Mothers absorbed the expectations and ideology around motherhood and mothering, rendering them subject to internal and external blame and liability, especially

in relation to outcomes for their children (Caplan and Mcquornindale, 1985; Rose 1999; Burrows, 2001; Jackson and Mannix, 2004; Reimer and Sahagian 2015; O'Reilly 2016).

The Mothers revealed how their motherhood provided an additional layer of complexity to the intersectionalities of race, class and culture affecting criminalised women. Mothering through poverty and trauma before prison, often unsupported, is where the tarnishing of the Mothers maternal identity began. Most of the Mothers felt they were already failing to 'live up to' widely accepted standardised norms of motherhood, sometimes worrying even before prison that they were not 'good enough' mothers. This endured through and after prison. The Mothers felt they were judged more harshly by society, by the courts and agents of the state. They also judged themselves more harshly as *mothers*. In addition to feeling angry and frustrated that they were judged as bad mothers, often for things that were outside their control, Mothers internalised the blame and shame for their circumstances and criminalisation. The matricentric-feminist lens (Chapter 3) applied to this research demonstrated how easily the Mothers 'issues' became individualised, rather than looking more broadly at the role played by successive governments concerning the lack of supportive policies for women (Burrows, 2001; O'Reilly, 2016; Clarke and Chadwick, 2018). Mothers were perceived as *solely* responsible for their criminalisation and imprisonment because of their own actions and 'choices'. This affected the Mothers maternal identity and self-esteem consequently impacting Mothers' engagement with rehabilitative support, their relationships and sometimes, desistance.

Present in all of the Mothers narratives of their CJS experience, and from a range of sources; was moral condemnation not only as criminals, but specifically as *criminal mothers*. The Mothers powerfully described the difference it made to them when someone in authority demonstrated 'care', 'kindness', understanding or compassion concerning their maternal identity and role. Several mothers described how simply being asked about their children or their motherhood being acknowledged 'saved' them, for some it literally was a matter of life and death.

It was challenging to separate maternal identity and role for the Mothers, as where one was reduced the other was impacted. Mothers practical and physical mothering practices were limited by incarceration, further diminishing their maternal identity and maternal self-esteem. Once imprisoned, the Mothers described how they felt less like mothers, in



that their motherhood was removed from their identity or subsumed by their prisoner identity. More than that, it was the pain of not 'being', of not doing, pain of losing a sense of who they were. Of losing what Mothers described as the most important part of themselves, i.e. their motherhood and/or grandmotherhood. This was accelerated and amplified by the structure, organisation and regimes within the prison. Which impacted on Mothers ability and willingness to engage in rehabilitation as well as their wellbeing and relationships with children and caregivers. Mothers sought comfort in their relationships with each other and with older mothers and grandmothers, where the prison regime permitted. This helped Mothers retain a sense of maternal identity and had a positive impact on the Mothers and grandmothers wellbeing. Mothers in open prisons were more able to support each other and were often united in their motherhood. However, in closed-prisons Mothers were less able to engage in this support, which had a detrimental impact on their mental wellbeing and maternal identity.

The effects of mothers spoiled identity lasted long after prison, with Mothers describing how their reduced maternal self-esteem persisted post-release, in some cases, for decades. The Mothers also described an internal shame, over and above their ex-prisoner status (Goffman, 1963). The ongoing pains and shame of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958) related specifically to their mother status. Mothers described feeling 'tainted', forever labelled and perceived as 'bad mothers' because they had been imprisoned as *mothers*. Feeling worthless or hopeless left many of the Mothers vulnerable to self-harm and/or suicide. Several Mothers described how losing their maternal identity made them feel like 'nothing'. During incarceration and afterwards, their spoiled maternal identity made some Mothers question whether they ought to remain in their children's lives at all (some didn't). Others withdrew from their children's lives and refused or reduced visits/contact, sometimes for their own wellbeing, but usually because they perceived their children as 'better off' without them. Thus, the impact of maternal imprisonment on maternal identity had enduring, often lifelong and sometimes intergenerational impact and which created long lasting harm to mothers, children and their wider families.

### **8.2.2 Maternal role**

As previously described, many of the Mothers became criminalised in the midst of multiple challenges to their mothering role. This included past and current trauma,

addiction, mental health issues, domestic abuse and substance misuse. Yet all of the Mothers were involved in the care of their children before prison and were steadfast in their efforts to continue to mother to the best of their ability. For some of the Mothers their maternal role was a source of agency and power, for some their only source of agency and power, meaning it was all the more valuable to them. Not all of the Mothers managed to retain a full maternal role through imprisonment or post-prison. Several Mothers shared their mothering role with additional caregivers, however, maintaining their maternal-identity and hopes of an improved future maternal role was often their primary concern.

The study confirmed that motherhood intersected powerfully with the Mothers prison experience, adding to the Mothers' 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958). As soon as Mothers entered the prison space they experienced a stripping away of their maternal agency, maternal-identity and especially their maternal-role (Goffman, 1961). Mothers' efforts to continue to mother from a distance were frustrated and disrupted by the carceral space and the rules and regulations therein. Many of the challenges mothers in prison faced reflected the focus of the penal system and prison estate on male prisoners. Prison officer training is centred around the male estate, and officers do not currently receive more than a couple of training sessions specifically devoted to working with women prisoners. Only because of this current research have some officers received specific training for working with mothers at all (provided by the author). Thus, the Mothers felt their motherhood and maternal role was either essentially ignored by CJS staff, or was a source of judgment, mistrust, surveillance and control, which impacted on Mothers engagement and maternal self-esteem.

The Mothers ability to maintain a healthy maternal identity and an affirming maternal self-esteem and active mothering role, were affected, both positively and negatively by the prison space, rules, regimes and relationships. Maternal emotion and active mothering were of central importance to mothers during their incarceration and beyond, whether or not Mothers had the care of their children or were expecting to on release. As a matricentric-feminist investigation this study's remit was to recognise the experiences of *all* mothers, crucially to include grandmothers and mothers of adult children. Grandmothers described feeling discounted in institutional considerations, even those that recognised the maternal role (such as 'family visits and ROTL). Grandchildren and older adult children were rendered secondary and/or invisible to their younger

counterparts, making it challenging for grandmothers to retain an active grandmothereing role. This study revealed that for grandmothers their pains of maternal imprisonment were also persistent post-release. Furthermore, they were layered and often experienced via their adult children as well as their grandchildren. Failure to account for the needs of grandmother prisoners and post-prison grandmothers was not only neglectful and unjust but resulted in missed opportunities to support families to heal and to reduce the likelihood of intergenerational offending and enduring trauma.

The legacy of maternal imprisonment and the impact on maternal role was significant. Some Mothers lost their maternal role altogether, for others it was reduced. Mothers whose children were in the care of the local authority were consumed with thoughts either of fighting for their return or trying to accept their maternal loss. The mothers were not supported with these needs and emotions, which had an impact on their maternal wellbeing, engagement and sometimes their desistance. For some Mothers, their maternal role was diminished because caregivers were reluctant to return their children to them or heavily scrutinised the mothers in their mothering. Mothers continued to be subject to the formal gaze of the state (Rose, 1999) as well as the informal gaze of family, and crucially, none of the mothers experienced any post-release support focused on rebuilding family relationships.

The Mothers described how their internalised shame and blame left them feeling like they were in penance and needing to compensate in their post-release mothering. Some were overzealous in disciplining their children, where others relaxed rules as a means to seek forgiveness and favour from their children. Thus, for many, maternal imprisonment not only interrupted and disrupted mothering and maternal role, it changed it completely. The disregard of Mothers' maternal role from custodians and supervisors means that opportunities are being missed not only for families to be supported in and through these changes, but also to try to ensure that any changes that do occur return positive outcomes.

Paradoxically, despite the aforementioned widespread 'knowledge' and acceptance of the importance of motherhood, and the role of motherhood in terms of 'producing' well-adjusted, socially acceptable children and adults, mothers and motherhood are essentially ignored and/or neglected in the process and experience of imprisonment. Given all that we 'know' about mothers, motherhood and the mother/child relationship, it

is illogical to think that forcibly separating mothers from their children - restricting contact and reducing the mother's ability to mother her child - will *not* have a traumatic effect on both mothers *and* their children. This significant harm and long-lasting trauma may be an unintended outcome of maternal imprisonment but nonetheless constitutes additional and disproportionate punishment.

### **8.2.3 Enduring harm**

As the previous two sections have identified the criminalised Mothers in this study most often felt reduced, tainted, judged and traumatised as a result of their criminalisation and imprisonment. The enduring harm of maternal imprisonment was powerfully described by the Mothers, and all aspects of their post-prison lives were affected. In addition to the collateral damage often experienced by women leaving prison (Masson, 2019, Minson, 2020), the Mothers described lasting effects of shame and guilt regarding their imprisonment, meaning they were not now and perhaps never would be again perceived as, or feel like 'good mothers'.

Mother's experiences prior to prison reflected a state which had abdicated responsibility for the Mothers as children and continued its failure into their adulthood. This was manifest in missed opportunities that could potentially have prevented Mother's criminalisation, and the consequential enduring harm. Yet, it was the Mothers themselves and arguably, their children, who were held to account and who suffered the consequences of this lack of support. Painfully illustrated by Cynthia, who after repeatedly asking for help and none being forthcoming, set herself on fire in a blatant cry for help. She was subsequently imprisoned for arson when the Judge found 'there was nowhere else' to send her. Cynthia and her child live with the lifelong consequences and enduring harm of her offending and imprisonment. Cynthia took responsibility for her 'crimes' and paid the price, yet for the services who failed her, there was no accountability. Similarly, Mary, who felt so worthless as a mother, and was completely unsupported in that role, made the decision to completely remove herself from her children's lives. Tragically her children then grew up in care, later to become 'career criminals'. As a result were absent from their own children's lives. This powerfully reveals

the intergenerational impact of maternal imprisonment and highlights the importance of early and consistent support and interventions for mothers and their children.

Mothers were often unprepared for the challenges they would continue to face post-release. Many had simply assumed that things would go back to 'normal'. Yet, the Mothers narratives revealed significant challenges in renegotiating their place in their family and their maternal role and adjusting to life without their children. Mothers were unprepared for the roller coaster of emotions and turbulent times they faced with their children, grandchildren and wider families post-release. Or how long the difficulties would last. Additionally, Mothers described experiences of trauma – an issue previously under researched. This trauma endured and was attributed to the memory of the separation from their children. Indeed, some Mothers were formally diagnosed with PTSD directly stemming from their maternal harm as a result of imprisonment. Others exhibited most of the symptoms of PTSD, but simply learned to 'live with it'. Those who remained in their children's lives described how they felt 'tainted', 'watched', 'judged' and 'permanently changed' by their imprisonment. For Grandmothers, the effects were often magnified, producing what Grandmothers described as 'layers of shame'. This reflected the 'institutional thoughtlessness' (Crawley 2005) concerning motherhood that occurred at all stages of the CJS. This must be addressed if we are to mitigate the enduring harms described by the Mothers and Grandmothers in this study.

In-part due to earlier failures to support women and mothers, and whilst recognising prison as an institution of patriarchally influenced pain (Moore and Scraton 2014); it cannot be ignored that the Mothers sometimes experienced prison a place of safety and refuge (O'Malley 2018). A place where some Mothers were finally able to access support related to substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health issues. Nonetheless, it must also be acknowledged that with regard to the Mothers in this study who did mention there had been some safety, solace and support for them in prison, *all* felt that the support *should* have been available to them in the community and importantly, that if it had been, they would in all likelihood have not 'ended up' in prison at all.

### 8.3 The Relevance of Motherhood Regarding Sentence Planning, and Supervision

These research findings directly contrast Loper (2006; 93) who suggests it is '*no more difficult to be a mother in prison than it is to be a non-mother*', instead aligning with numerous previous studies (Enos, 2001; Lockwood, 2014; O'Malley, 2018, Masson, 2019; Easterling et al., 2019; Minson 2020; Booth, 2020,). This research showed the distinct and specific maternal pains, frustrations and deprivations of maternal imprisonment (Sykes, 1958). Furthermore, it revealed tensions between what mothers said they needed in terms of in-prison and post-release support, and what they experienced. The Mothers narratives described how current approaches and support provisions failed to take account of the persisting trauma caused by criminalisation, maternal interruption and separation. The damage to maternal identity and mothering-role was not often regarded as something that fell under the remit of custodians or supervisors and as such it was often ignored. Mothers revealed that trying to repair and renegotiate their identity and role in and after-prison was often of central importance to them. Or as O'Reilly (2016) put it their 'motherhood matters'. Whether Mothers had their children in their care when sentenced or not or whether they were to be reunited with children post-release, the Mothers were preoccupied with all matters maternal whilst trying to navigate their challenging maternal circumstances pre-prison, through prison and post-release.

However, Mothers reported that their maternal matters and emotions, though of primary importance to them, were not viewed as important *enough* by the Courts, Prison or Probation services (other than as an additional means of judgement, control and punishment): which the mothers perceived as a lack of 'care'. The Mothers described how this lack of 'care' and failure to recognise the challenges they faced *as mothers* made it very difficult, if not impossible for them to focus on rehabilitation or supervision, which ultimately had implications for their wellbeing and desistance.

Care focused approaches in CJS are of significant importance (Dominey and Gelsthorpe, 2020:40), both morally (Canton and Dominey, 2017) and because it fundamentally underpins good practice and effective outcomes thereby fostering a trusting relationship. The lack of 'care' experienced by the Mothers contributed to them feeling that the only role of their custodians or supervisors was to control and subject them to punitive

surveillance (Foucault, 1977), particularly in relation to their motherhood (Rose, 1999; Opsal, 2009,). With a few individual exceptions, the Mothers felt that '*what was really going on*' in their lives was regarded as not important, or not within the role of the supervisory relationship. Instead, they felt 'watched', 'judged' and 'surveilled'. Mothers found the additional surveillance challenging as *mothers* and most Mothers described an 'abject terror' of recall and a further period of separation from their children. This had implications for the Mothers in terms of asking for and receiving adequate and appropriate support. Significantly, where Mothers were supervised via a Women's Centre, they described receiving a gendered form of supervision in which their emotional and maternal needs were understood and responded to. Indicating that this is the most effective means of supervising women.

Several mothers had been supervised by probation multiple times over quite a long time span and noted the shift in the type of supervision they received. Nicola felt that probation officers no longer seemed to 'care' as part of their role. In the UK following a politically led tide of change, there has been a shift over the last 30 years which has seen probation or parole moving further away from welfare-focused values and ideology (Canton, 2015). Subsequently, in the New Labour 'tough on crime' era following the implementation of the National Standards and the 'New Choreography'<sup>74</sup> in the work of probation, the importance and flexibility of the one-to-one 'supervisory relationship' came secondary to the rigid enforcement and supervisory directives that some of the Mothers encountered. Such philosophical shifts have had far-reaching implications for supervisors and custodians and how they undertake their role. This study has demonstrated the detrimental impact of the political shifts in relation to the quality of supervision and custodial care for mothers. Primarily, this is because without wider aspects of 'welfare' being deemed of importance, supervision for post-release women became all about avoiding re-offending, managing the threat of being returned to prison and managing the increased surveillance of their lives (Opsal, 2009) – with little attention paid to the structural or causal factors relevant to women's offending.

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<sup>74</sup> National Probation Service (2001), *A New Choreography: An Integrated Strategy for The National Probation Service for England & Wales*, London: NPS archived. Home Office.

Dominey and Gelsthorpe, (2020) argue that the absence of individual care in probation practice, and arguably also throughout the whole CJS, is what leads inevitably to shifting priorities that are influenced by political imperatives. This is reflected in deficient funding streams, ultimately potentially leading to the poor or ineffective practice that some of the Mothers experienced. However, and importantly, rather than it being the fault of individual officers or agents of the state, the matricentric-feminist lens supports the view that this points to institutional failure at the highest levels. Failure to provide adequate funding and resources that would facilitate staff in meeting the needs of women in the criminal justice system has consequences. The Mothers demonstrated how this structural lack of care, alongside services not being adequately funded, made it challenging for their post-release needs to be successfully met.

Several studies, while not explicitly exploring the experiences of post-prison mothers, have identified a relationship between motherhood and desistance. Finding that motherhood sometimes serves 'as a prosocial bond' that may assist women in their desistance journeys (Giordano et al, 2002; Bachman et al, 2016; Garcia Hallett, 2019). Bachman et al, (2016:215) argue that, given mothers do of course enter prison, then it is not motherhood per se that will influence women to desist from offending; however, they argue, that at some point a mother may become ready to adopt '*a pro social identity by reclaiming their role as a mother*'. A view shared by Opsal (2011). Maruna and Mann (2019) suggest security and stable family relationships alongside, an individual perception of themselves as 'changed' and hopefulness and an affirming self-esteem are important factors in the desistance journey. For post-release mothers, as this thesis has evidenced, motherhood was an important part of their self-esteem and self-worth, often the most important part, and as such, it was relevant to their desistance (Maruna and Mann 2019).

Michaelson (2011) highlighted the importance that post-release mothers attached to their love for their children and saw this as a significant factor in their desistance. However, they also found that, mothers facing multiple disadvantage and continued substance misuse sometimes re-offended to simply survive. Similarly, Masson (2019) and Brown and Bloom (2009) found that being a mother was a motivating factor for desistance, but for some, the realities of continued poverty, addiction, lack of housing, financial and therapeutic instability disrupted mothers attempts to desist from offending. Which was also evidenced in this research. This study found that for some post-release mothers,



the guilt and shame they felt as criminal mothers, intertwined with the loss of children or disrupted mothering, became overwhelming. The additional trauma caused by imprisonment and the separation from, or removal of their children, led some Mothers to feel their only coping strategy was a return to substance misuse. Which often meant a return to criminal activity as a consequence. In the case of Beth, the lack of support, or a reluctance/inability to ask for mothering related support led to tragic consequences. This clearly indicates a need for motherhood to be factored into supervision and sentence planning. Furthermore, to acknowledge that engaging criminalised Mothers in supportive relationships requires understanding, compassion and resources.

Mothers described finding it challenging to access or ask for support because of the fear of inviting additional unwanted surveillance and attention, which ultimately could potentially result in recall and/or the loss of their children. For some, this had devastating, enduring and intergenerational consequences (e.g. Mary). It is important to note, some Mothers did ask for help, especially whilst in prison but were disappointed when the support accessed did not continue post-release. Something O'Malley (2018, 2020) identified as a key factor in post-prison relapse and recall. This study echoes those findings and highlights the significance of and need for effective matricentric throughcare and post-prison support. Clearly, it is essential that resettlement work starts within and continues through the prison gates and must involve supporting mothers and families using a matricentric-feminist approach. To meet Mother's needs more effectively in the challenging period of post-prison re-integration and resettlement must involve women's centres. Failure to do so will impact mother's ability to engage in rehabilitative supervision, which ultimately will further impact Mothers desistance, their children and wider society. This study has demonstrated the 'ripple effect' of imprisoning mothers, as an enduring and long-term harm, with family and community wide impacts (Baldwin, 2015, Booth 2020).

This research has highlighted the need for further in-depth research concerning the relationship between motherhood and desistance. This study provided evidence to support the view that there is merit in 'factoring in' motherhood and maternal emotion when engaged in the rehabilitation and/or supervision of criminalised mothers. The Mothers demonstrated Canton's (2015) argument that that emotions have a role to play concerning the individual desistance of offenders, in this instance particularly maternal emotion. The study also demonstrated how the emotional literacy of criminal justice

professionals (Knight, 2012) played a key role in the purposeful and effective support of Mothers. By understanding the emotions associated with motherhood and maternal imprisonment, some custodians and supervisors contributed significantly to the effective rehabilitation of post-prison mothers. Where this was not present, Mothers trauma and support needs were unmet, which in some instances triggered a return to substance misuse and/or offending. Facilitating the resources, time and space for mothers to explore the impact of their sentence in terms of their trauma and their resilience, would enable supervisors to better support mothers through their reintegration. It is particularly important to recognise, as evidenced in this study, how the impact of imprisonment for mothers can leave a specific and distinct trauma footprint, one which has an impact on their rehabilitation.

#### **8.4 Recommendations for Research and the Academic Community**

An important aspect of this research was to employ matricentric and feminist principles in the design and production of the thesis. There was significant value in applying an appreciative approach to understand motherhood and to centre the voices of the Mothers. Thereby, recognising the mothers for their resilience and strength as well as the reality and trauma of their experiences. Specific recommendations from this research approach are that:

1. Motherhood and feminist researchers must work to enhance and improve their 'complicated relationship' with an acknowledgement from mainstream feminism that feminism, ergo feminist criminology, cannot claim to give an adequate account of women's lives and criminalisation or to represent women's needs and interests if mothering, and all its associations and contexts are ignored or unaccounted for.
2. Embracing O'Reilly's (2006, 2016) ideals of empowered motherhood into criminology, thereby creating a matricentric-feminist criminology, has facilitated the voices of criminalised mothers being heard, and must continue to do so. This would ensure criminalised mothers views and experiences are used to directly inform policy and practice. Motherhood could then contribute to both

rehabilitation and desistance by becoming a site of reflection, agency and change in a more constructive and productive way than it has previously been viewed. This would be best achieved by the acceptance and inclusion of matricentric-feminist criminology and MF scholars by wider academic communities in motherhood and criminological schools of thought.

3. This research provides an opportunity for a call to the research community to truly think about what constitutes feminist research – there are too many examples of ‘feminist’ studies which do not fully reflect the principles of this approach in the research design, product or dissemination of findings. Feminist epistemology and methodology provide a blueprint for how feminist research, in terms of methods, tools and analysis should proceed. As stated by Harding (2019) ‘the connections between epistemology, methodology and methods are an important aspect of what makes research feminist’ (2019:2).
  
4. This study uncovered several findings worthy of further study, including the experiences of ethnic minority mothers in the CJS. An examination of the intersectionality of motherhood and race would be an important contribution to the overall understanding of maternal imprisonment. This study revealed there is a relationship between motherhood and desistance – but it is a complicated one and again is an area worthy of further study. Investigation concerning motherhood and desistance, particularly combined with maternal experiences of supervision and intersectionality would contribute significantly to making the case for alternatives to custody for the majority mothers who commit crime.

## **8.5 Matricentric Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

In considering the evidence from this study a broad umbrella recommendation is that criminal justice for women and how it is approached must be fundamentally reconsidered. The study has evidenced the significant and consistent failure to meet the needs of women and mothers. A commitment to improved social justice is required to address the issues and experiences described in this study. Prison is a feminist issue of

matricentric concern, not least because for women, especially mothers, the effects of criminalisation and imprisonment are experienced in a wider context of patriarchy, oppression, discrimination and disadvantage. Prison replicates the outside-inside. As this study has shown the effects of maternal imprisonment persist for decades, if not for life. As feminists we must challenge and replace the term 'female offender' with the more considered term 'criminalised women' or in the case of mothers 'criminalised mothers'. Doing so challenges the perception that once an offender always an offender but also and importantly, it leaves room for criticality in the discussion about how the woman/mother became criminalised in the first instance. We need to ask was it right and just that she was criminalised and what was the role of the state, or the relevance of our social structures more broadly in her criminalisation. Based on the evidence of this study specific recommendations are:

1. **Commitment to Social Justice.** First and foremost there must be a commitment to minimising opportunities for women to become criminalised, facilitated via improved social justice and early support. The study revealed the many missed opportunities to support mothers much earlier and the impact of this. This requires supporting families and actively tackling inequalities, like food poverty, improving access to mental health and addiction/trauma support. Maintaining partnership working and early intervention for families, requires a continued commitment from the government in terms of resources and funding, which would reduce the risks of offending for mothers and its implications. The Matricentric-feminist criminological lens of this research has provided understanding for how multiply disadvantaged mothers often become criminalised unnecessarily. Thus, alongside improved social-justice, early support and diversion away from the CJS is essential. There must be a commitment to support and replicate the many successful, but still nationally varied Diversion and Deferred Caution/Charge Schemes<sup>75</sup> thereby reducing the numbers of criminalised women entering the system at all.

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<sup>75</sup> Several CPS Areas have bespoke facilities providing tailored support to help address the particular needs of women and the drivers behind their criminal behavior, for example, drug or alcohol abuse or involvement in an abusive relationship.

These facilities are provided by both statutory and voluntary sector agencies. They may be, for example, dedicated Women's Community Projects or similar 'One-Stop-Shops'.

Where such facilities exist, and a conditional caution may be an appropriate disposal, prosecutors should consider the suitability of the offender for a Women Specific Condition, especially where a referral to a Women's Community Project might lead to the breaking of their cycle of offending.

2. **The Courts.** Turning attention to the Courts, Magistrates (and it is most often magistrates who sentence women), *must at least* adhere to current guidelines (The Bangkok Rules) far more consistently than they currently do. There needs to be accountability of sentencers when they do fail to adhere to guidelines. Mothers described horrendous experiences from the courts where inappropriate comments were made and guidelines were not followed. In order for the Courts to have a more compassionate, informed response to criminalised women and mothers, there should be some consideration given to 'Women Only' courts, where Magistrates in those Courts have *chosen* to sit. Furthermore, have undergone gender specific, matricentric and trauma-informed training concerning women's pathways into and out of crime and the impact of imprisonment on women. Furthermore, no mother with dependent children should ever be sentenced unexpectedly or without a PSR. In the case of *all* mothers, if a custodial sentence is imperative and likely, there must be a period of deferment to allow mothers to make provision for her family and prepare her children. Immediate custody and/remand should cease, and remand should *never* be used if a custodial sentence would not be a *definite* outcome at sentencing, as currently over 60% of women remanded do not go on to receive a custodial sentence (PRT, 2019). This would avoid situations as described in this study where mothers were imprisoned not knowing who would collect her child from school, and which had a dangerous and detrimental impact on the Mothers mental wellbeing. Pregnant and new Mothers described the additional harm and disproportionate harm caused by their imprisonment. This could be avoided by a cessation of sending pregnant Mothers to prison. MBU's should be community based and modelled on matricentric-feminist principles of support and empowerment.
  
3. **Prison.** If we are to continue to send women to prison (and the preferred option is wherever possible we don't), the additional trauma caused by maternal imprisonment and the associated disproportionate harms described by the mothers must be addressed. Large women's prison as we know them should be

replaced with smaller, community based units and modelled on matricentric-feminist principles of support and empowerment. In the meantime, the institutional thoughtlessness and uncompassionate policies and practices concerning motherhood evidenced in the study, must be acknowledged, challenged and addressed. Following matricentric training for prison staff, compassion and understanding must underpin work with all mothers in prison. Motherhood must be factored into sentence planning in terms of consideration of needs, but also outcomes and preparation for release. Definitions of who is eligible for ROTL and Child Care leave must be broadened to include grandmothers, who described feeling 'excluded' from such provisions. Consideration must be given for how to improve and maintain contact and relationships with children and caregivers, (For example improved in-cell and video calling facilities – especially important if Covid restrictions remain in place, and welcoming child friendly visiting spaces, and subsidised telephone contact with children). All of which would positively assist and support maternal-identity, role and wellbeing. It is imperative that reception phone calls occur. Delays in facilitating contact with children and caregivers should be avoided at all costs if we are to reduce the trauma, self-harm and suicidal thoughts evidenced by the Mothers. There must be an urgent review of the management of all female prisoners particularly concerning open/closed conditions and the regime restrictions, which the Mothers powerfully described impacted on theirs and sometimes their children's' wellbeing. To reduce the additional punishment and harm caused to mothers and their children prison-moves at short notice must be avoided and should never occur when an imminent visit with children is booked. Consideration must be given of how best to support mothers who are involved in proceedings involving their children and 'bridges' facilitated between inside and outside support resources and caregivers, especially in preparation for release. This could be achieved by an expansion of the prison social-work role. Programmes for mothers, over and above parenting programmes must become commonplace in prison, as must 'safe' spaces to facilitate supportive relationships and conversations about motherhood and to prepare for release. Which the Mothers described as so important to their wellbeing.

4. **Family and Caregivers.** The Mothers described struggling with the family relationships during and after prison. To better support Mothers and families and

improve outcomes, there must be improved support for caregivers and prisoner's families during the period and of incarceration and post-release. Mothers described how providing formal support for families engaged in caregiving for children of imprisoned parents especially financial support, would improve the stability of caregiver relationships and reduce the tensions between caregivers and imprisoned mothers. This would result in better co-parenting partnerships and improved outcomes for Mothers and their children. Furthermore, Mothers stated that positive caregiving relationships would improve their mental health and wellbeing in custody, enabling them to engage more fully in sentence planning and rehabilitation.

5. **Post-Release Support.** The Mothers described a lack of post-release support, regarding their maternal identity and role. Post-release support must be gender-specific and must be mindful of the challenges faced by reintegrating mothers. Motherhood, maternal emotions and maternal identity must be factored into supervision support and release planning. Wherever possible post-release and supervised mothers should be supported by women's centres. In order to provide effective support to criminalised women, women's centres must be centrally and permanently funded in order to deliver good quality, multi-agency effective support. There needs to be some recognition of the enduring impact of maternal imprisonment with the possibility of ongoing support (for mothers no longer subject to licence), or an outreach for post-release support attached to and delivered by women's centres. Probation staff must receive guidance and training in relation to the supervision of mothers and have an increased awareness of the need to work in a trauma-informed and mindful way with post-release mothers and mothers under supervision. All of the above would contribute to improve outcomes and assist mothers. Mitigating some of the challenges described in this study.
6. **Multi-agency Working.** The Mothers' narratives clearly demonstrated the multiple missed opportunities for support, despite repeated requests. There must be a 'joined up' whole system approach to improving the care and outcomes for criminalised mothers involving all of the agencies that make up the social and criminal justice systems. This would seek to minimise the many missed opportunities to support mothers and divert and support mothers away from

criminality and prosecution. Throughcare, consistency, compassion, understanding and support are key to working positively and effectively with mothers in the CJS. Where it was done well the Mothers were able to articulate the positive impact it had on their lives, equally where it was not, the consequences were vast. Agencies working together, must seek to empower women and mothers to move forwards with positivity and to pursue opportunities as opposed to focusing only on supervision and compliance.

7. **Inclusion, Voice and Valuing Lived Experience.** Many of the mothers expressed a desire to work in the CJS with women in similar situations. Several went on to do so, some in leadership roles where they are able to guide and influence positive practice. In line with matricentric-feminist principles of empowerment and voice, there must be a commitment to involving service users and others with lived experience, to inform, shape and lead policy and practice concerning criminalised women. Matricentric-feminism and feminist principles provide the scaffold on which future developments can be framed.

## 8.6 Conclusion

The application of matricentric-feminist criminological theory has shown that there is a need for a genuine commitment to critically examine and challenge the failings in policies, institutions and structures. Which currently fail women by individually problematising women and which 'intervene harmfully in women's lives' (Clarke and Chadwick 2018: 64). The 'hidden role' and, arguably hidden harms of institutions, like education, the welfare system, police, courts, social services, and prisons, must be examined and challenged. This is vital in order to understand how such institutions influence and shape women's lives by exacerbating and reproducing marginalisation and discrimination (*ibid*), making criminalisation more likely. As this research has shown, it was rarely simply a matter of 'women making better choices', which is an oft cited judicial response to female criminality (Minson, 2020). There have to be real possibilities of other 'choices' to make (Clarke and Chadwick, 2018).

The Mothers described what amounted to an 'institutional thoughtlessness' (Crawley, 2005), regarding their status and role as criminalised, imprisoned and post-release



mothers. This thoughtlessness impacted Mothers in many ways and at every stage of the CJS. The theoretical approach facilitated an understanding of how and why once criminalised the Mothers absorbed societies' perception of them as troubled and troublesome. Finding the blame for their imprisonment solely within themselves. However, this self-blame and subsequent self-imposed penance often obscured the root causes of the Mothers criminality and subsequently left them vulnerable to a broad failure to recognise their pathways into crime and out of crime. Compounded by a lack of informed support.

Furthermore, it had enduring consequences for the mothers in terms of long-lasting trauma, relationships and outcomes. The challenges to maternal-role and identity from prison as described by the Mothers continued post-release. Mothers felt unsupported, surveilled and mistrusted. Mothers' preoccupation with their re-entry and maternal re-negotiations made it challenging to engage in rehabilitation work or rehabilitative relationships. The failure of custodians and supervisors to take into account their maternal identity and role was a significant factor in Mothers' inability or reluctance to fully engage.

Through applied matricentric-feminist criminology this study offers new insight, understanding and recommendations on how best to work with mothers affected by the CJS. In extending O'Reilly's (2016) matricentric-feminist theory, this study offers a greater understanding of why this is important. Furthermore, how developing a matricentric-feminist criminological understanding of enduring impact of maternal imprisonment is crucial to the development of compassionate and appropriate support for mothers before, during and after prison.

Understanding the social, political and criminal justice context of mothers who break the law will facilitate an appreciation of the discrimination and inequality mothers who have fallen afoul of the law have historically faced, and continue to do so (Clark and Chadwick, 2018; Moore and Wahidin, 2018). Despite being '*conceived out of crisis*' (Moore and Wahidin, 2018: 24), the previously called for paths to reform and transform in relation to women who break the law have not happened. Abolitionists (Moore and Scraton, 2014; McNaull, 2018) have argued that this is because proposals for change have not been radical enough. They argue that the first step to real change for criminalised women is

the closure of women's prisons, as 'prime candidates for abolition' (Moore and Wahidin, 2018:25).

This study provided further proof if it were needed, of the different ways in which women experience prison to men. This is especially true of mothers, and therefore, without change, women will continue to be damaged by prison, mothers will continue to be separated from their children, and many are destined to remain trapped in the cycles of guilt, trauma and harm. Furthermore, children will continue to be deeply affected by not only the harms caused to their mothers, but also by their own enduring harm, representing the layered *persistent* pains of maternal imprisonment. For criminalised women and mothers it is essential to accept the matricentric-feminist position that without social justice there cannot be effective or morally acceptable criminal justice. Furthermore, as in this study, the pursuit of change must actively facilitate and prioritise the voices of those who have experienced injustice and incarceration in order for '*individuals to speak truth to power*' (Scruton 2007 cited in Clarke and Chadwick 2018: 65).

## **8.7 Impact of the Research**

The (published) research evidence from this study has been accepted within the academic community, in policy development, and in practice. Based on the findings of this study I was invited to provide evidence, orally and in writing, to the female focussed Farmer Review (2019), and Joint Human Rights Inquiry into Maternal Imprisonment and the Rights of the Child (2019). Furthermore my research provided evidence which fed into the Female Offender Strategy (2018). Lord Farmer wrote of my research (see appendix 17 for full letter), '*her research made a significant contribution to my findings and was influential in developing the final recommendations of the Farmer Review for Women*'.

My research findings have led to the development of a new programme for mothers in prison. The programme was piloted by myself and a co-facilitator from a partner organisation PACT, with whom the programme is now licenced and accredited (with the

Skills for Justice)<sup>76</sup>. The programme was due to roll out across the female estate just as COVID19 hit but will resume once restrictions are lifted. The mothers who completed the programme pilot evaluated it extremely positively. One mother stated that during her time on the course *'it was the longest I have ever gone in prison without self-harming, and that's cos I had here to come to and be a mum'* (Sam). A community version of the programme is under development between myself and PACT. These programmes seek to contribute to mitigating the harm (both in the short and longer term), to maternal-identity, maternal-role and relationships for imprisoned and post-prison mothers. They support mothers in examining and managing their maternal emotions and relationships, enabling mothers to safely explore their maternal emotions and responsibilities, and to prepare for release.

Additionally, the research evidence has led to the author providing guidance, now held on the National Probation Service Intranet<sup>77</sup> available to all supervising officers. Furthermore the author has designed resources which are Nationally available and are now included in probation officer 'toolkits' for working with mothers under supervision (the first resources of their kind for working specifically with mothers). The research has led to me delivering training nationally to Social Workers, Probation Officers and other CJS professionals in relation to working positively with mothers in the CJS. Plans are underway to develop and deliver training to HMPS Prison Officers and for this to be embedded into general prison officer training, also for the first time. I have now delivered bespoke training on working with mothers to prison officers who are employed via the 'Unlocked Graduates'<sup>78</sup> scheme and the input has now been added to the training programme for future cohorts. Additionally, I am working closely with Sodexo, who accommodate 25% of the female prison population at HMP Bronzefield and HMP Peterborough to assist in the development of their gendered provisions, specifically in relation to developing supportive programmes and resources for mothers in prison, and

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<sup>76</sup> The author has worked with the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) to use this doctoral evidence to design and deliver the 'Mothers Inside Out' (MIO) programme. The programme pilot was successfully completed in August 2018, and the full programme is in process of being rolled out across the female estate and is now licenced and accredited by Skills for Justice. A post-release community supervision version is under development and will be piloted in London and in Plymouth in partnership with the Devon and Cornwall Criminal Justice Alliance, (DCCJA) and will be added to the Probations Officers 'toolkit' for working with women nationally.

<sup>77</sup> See appendix 21

<sup>78</sup> 'Unlocked Graduates' scheme was established in 2016 with the explicit aim of attracting high-calibre graduate talent to work in the UK prison service and provides training for officers who will likely be fast tracked to management positions <https://unlockedgrads.org.uk/why/who-we-are/>

for those working with mothers in prison. I will also be providing training to Sodexo officers related to working with mothers in prison which will eventually lead to a train the trainer package. This means that as a direct result of this study, eventually a quarter of the staff workforce working with mothers in the female prison estate will have access to resources to support mothers in prison and will receive training in working with incarcerated mothers. As the training will be a rolling programme this number will gradually increase. I am also now working with probation and third sector partners to develop additional training and resources for criminalised mothers and staff who work with such mothers in the community.

## **8.8 Final reflection and My Immediate Research Plans**

The limitations of the study are discussed in chapter 4, so I do not repeat them here. Undertaking this study has been an invaluable learning experience. I have genuinely learned something from every woman I met or who wrote to me, often far more important things than what is required to be evidenced in an academic thesis. I learned too about my own strengths and weaknesses and recognised, possibly for the first time how challenging my motherhood journey has been and actually that I am a little bit proud of myself for being here at all. I realise how lucky I am. We do not all have the same opportunities, but what I recognised was just how much better things could be for more mothers if we did. This made me angry and determined, which the Mothers sensed and often shared. Undertaking this research gave me a renewed vigour and passion for feminism and one of my great joys of undertaking this study occurred very recently when a friend heard me speaking about the research and said to me *'it feels like a joint effort between you and the women and its very much about them and by them'* (Charlie).

It was important (to the women involved and to me), that this study became part of a process of change, that it contributed to positive change within existing frameworks, processes and provisions; but vitally that it did so whilst also challenging the status quo. Continuing this work will be a lifetime commitment for me and as such my future research plans will be a continuation of this study. I have recently been invited to be part of a large National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) project to explore the importance and development of parenting programmes in the male estate, so it will be interesting to draw some critical comparisons with the female estates. Furthermore, I have secured a small

research grant from the Oakdale Trust to investigate more deeply the experiences of mothers under probation supervision subject to both community orders and post-prison licence. This will provide an opportunity to further explore how motherhood and desistance interact. It will of course be a feminist study. I will continue to work in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, the Probation Service and private criminal justice providers to challenge and improve conditions, provisions and services for women and mothers in the CJS and beyond.

It is fitting that this thesis is concluded by one of the Mothers. Dee provides a timely reminder of the strength and resilience of criminalised women and the need for us all to do better:

*It was awful, it was shit, it hurt, and I'm scarred, my life was chaotic and complicated before prison. My life as a mother in prison was broken. I've experienced more abuse in my life than most people do in a lifetime. I was an addict; I suffer from nightmares and trauma and depression. All of that is true, but don't just call me complex, don't just call me vulnerable. I'm strong but I want to be stronger. I'm free but I want to be freer. I've moved on but I want to go further. I want society and services to support me not just label me, I want people to help me create chances for others not just give one to me, I don't want to be held back I want to be driven forwards. (Dee).*

### **Note to examiners**

*As a loyally feminist and matricentric study this thesis centres the mothers and their voices and required the methodology to pay deeper attention to the reflection and reflexivity of the researcher. As such, chapter 5 is an 'additional' chapter justified by the approach. In order to accommodate this chapter and my matricentric-feminist commitment to increased visibility and heavy use of mothers voices, and to avoid the sacrifice of equally important aspects of a traditional thesis permission to submit with an increased wordcount (approx. 105,000) was sought and given by the research office (10/11/2020).*

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## Appendix 1: Tables 1 and 2: Interviewed Mums in the Study/Letter writing mums

**Table 1: Interviewed Mums in the Study**

\*Children's' ages in the table are age at point of mothers most recent sentence, not their ages at interview

GC = grandchild, SP= single-parent, LA = local authority care, GM = grandmother, GP = grandparents, MBU= mother and baby unit.

Name	Age	Ethnicity	No. of Children	Children's Age	Cared for Children Pre-custody	Cared for children During custody	Cared for Children Post Custody	Time served if known	Time Post most recent Release	Multiple sentences
<b>1. Annie</b>	33	White British	1	12	Shared with ex husband	Ex husband	Shared care – more with mum	4 Months	4 years	1 <sup>st</sup> offence
<b>2. Beth</b>	19	White British	1	3 months	Yes SP	LA care	LA care	4 months	12 months	Previous offences but 1 <sup>st</sup> custodial
<b>3. Carla</b>	45	White British	2	4 & 6	Self and grandmother SP	GM	GM	Multiple sentences	6 years	Yes prior to last offence not 1 <sup>st</sup> custodial
<b>4. Dee</b>	29	Mixed Race British	4	15,14,11, & 2	Mixed LA care, self, family SP	Mixed LA care and self	LA care and family (family 1 <sup>st</sup> them handed over to LA care)	Multiple lengths from 2 weeks to 10 months	5 years	Multiple offences 10 <sup>th</sup> custodial
<b>5. Kady</b>	28	Black British	1	Baby born in prison	N/A	Self on MBU	Self SP	11 months	11 years	2 <sup>nd</sup> offence but 1 <sup>st</sup> custodial
<b>6. Karen</b>	44	White British	3	17, 12, 11	Self and husband	husband	Self and husband	12 months	10 years	No 1st and only offence
<b>7. Lauren</b>	26	White British	1	2	Yes SP	LA care	LA 1 <sup>st</sup> Self and GM eventually	18 months	4 years	Not 1 <sup>st</sup> offence but 1 <sup>st</sup> custodial
<b>8. Maggi Mum &amp; GM</b>	55	White British	4 (+2GC)	21, 27, 25,24,	X2 GC in her care and one adult child at home	GC Shared through family – young adult child stayed at home	GC family and self, adult child left home by time sentenced	6 months	9 years	No 1st and only offence



<b>9. Margot</b>	32	White Irish	1	14	Self	GM	self	18 months	2 years	No – 2 <sup>nd</sup> offence 1 <sup>st</sup> prison sentence previous remand
<b>10. Mary Mum &amp; GM</b>	65	White Irish	2	7 & 9	Self SP	LA care	LA care	Multiple sentences	38 years	Yes Multiple sentences
<b>11. Mavis Mum &amp; GM</b>	60	White British	2 (+2 GC)	30, 35	Adults although previously cared for GC	N/A	No longer 'allowed' to care for GC	8 months	6 years	1 <sup>st</sup> sentence 1 <sup>st</sup> offence
<b>12. Nicola</b>	41	White British	1	3	Self and family SP	LA care	LA care	3 years	11 years	Several offences 2 <sup>nd</sup> custodial
<b>13. Queenie Mum &amp; GM</b>	64	Black British	3 (+2 GC)	29, 34, 39	N/A although was GC carer	Family	No longer GC carer	2 years	10 years	Several offences 1 <sup>st</sup> prison
<b>14. Rita</b>	35	White British	4	16,12,11 & 18 months	Self and husband	Husband	Self and husband (now single parent through)	10 months	4 years	1 <sup>st</sup> and only offence
<b>15. Sandra Mum &amp; GM</b>	46	White Irish	4 (+2 GC)	16, 18, 12, 13	Self (SP)	GM	GM and self	Multiple sentences	12 months	Multiple offences – 2 <sup>nd</sup> custodial
<b>16. Shanice</b>	30	Black British	2	2, 11	Self SP	GM	GM and self	2 years	5 years	Three custodial sentences multiple offences
<b>17. Sophie</b>	21	White British	1	1 year	Self SP	GM	Self & GM	12 months	6 years	1 <sup>st</sup> and only offence
<b>18. Tarian</b>	29	Mixed Race Welsh	5 (one deceased)	14, 12, 7 & baby born in prison	Self/partner GP's	Partner/family	Self & GP's (partner now deceased)	2 years	5 years	1 <sup>st</sup> custodial but previous offences
<b>19. Tanisha</b>	31	White British	3	12,4, 6, (1st child born in prison)	Family/LA / partner at differing points	Family & LA	LA then self and partner	12 months	7 years	2 <sup>nd</sup> custodial
<b>20. Tanya</b>	27	Mixed Race British	2	6,7	Self/ GM	GM	GM mainly self PT	14 months	2 years	Multiple, 2 <sup>nd</sup> sentence
<b>21. Tamika</b>	26	Black British	3	12, 4, 2	Self	GM	Self and GM	6 months	5 years	no

<b>22. Tia</b>	26	White Welsh	2	12,4	Self & Husband	Husband and GM	Initially GM & self now self (SP)	18 months	5 years	1 <sup>st</sup> offence 1 <sup>st</sup> sentence
<b>23. Ursula Mum &amp; GM</b>	48	White British	5 (+2GC)	Two under 10 and three teenagers (plus x2 GC born during sentence)	Self and husband	husband	Self & husband although now SP	4 years served	10 years	Not 1 <sup>st</sup> offence but 1 <sup>st</sup> sentence
<b>24. Margaret Mum &amp; GM</b>	66	White British	2 +2GC GC in her care 8, 9	Her own children were not born when sentenced	Cares for daughters' children whilst imprisoned	N/A	Shares care of GC with mum	4months	46 years	Only sentence
<b>25. Cynthia</b>	50	White British	1	30	Lived with mum until last sentence	N/A	Lives alone	Multiple sentences	4 years	Multiple sentences and remands
<b>26. Marjorie Mum &amp; GM</b>	61	White British	1 and 1 GC	18	Young adult but lived with mum	Self at mum's house	self	1 year	11 years	1 <sup>st</sup> offence 1 <sup>st</sup> sentence
<b>27. Rayna</b>	36	Romanian	2	6 & 8	Her and husband	Husband	Mum (SP now)	3 ½ years	2 years	1 <sup>st</sup> offence 1 <sup>st</sup> sentence
<b>28. Jaspreet</b>	36	British Asian	Twin boys (both with special needs)	18 months (functioning younger)	Her and husband – mother-in-law as childcare	Father and mother-in-law	Self and husband	4 months	12 months	1 <sup>st</sup> offence
<b>29. Tahira</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

*\*Tahira Withdrew- see Chapter 5 for statement*

**Table 2 : Letter writing mothers**

**Letter Writing Mothers'**

*\*Details of offences, length of sentence and numbers of children not asked for, criteria only they are mothers of any age, with children in their care or not.*

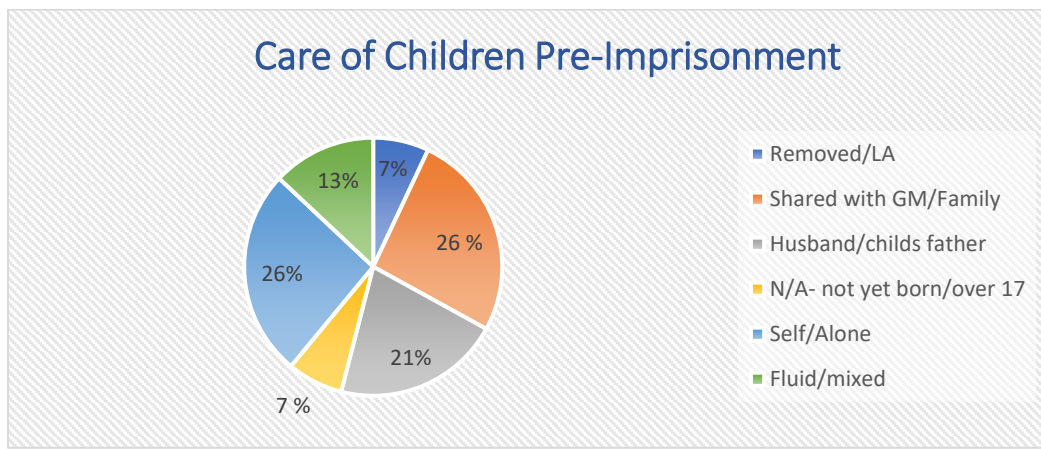
Alexandra	Natacha	Jennifer	Erin
Danielle	Helen	Sam	Sandy
Adel	Pham	Emma	Melanie
Taranpreet	Rosie	Dianne	

**Confirmed/known additional details collated from 25 letters (some mothers wrote more than once)**

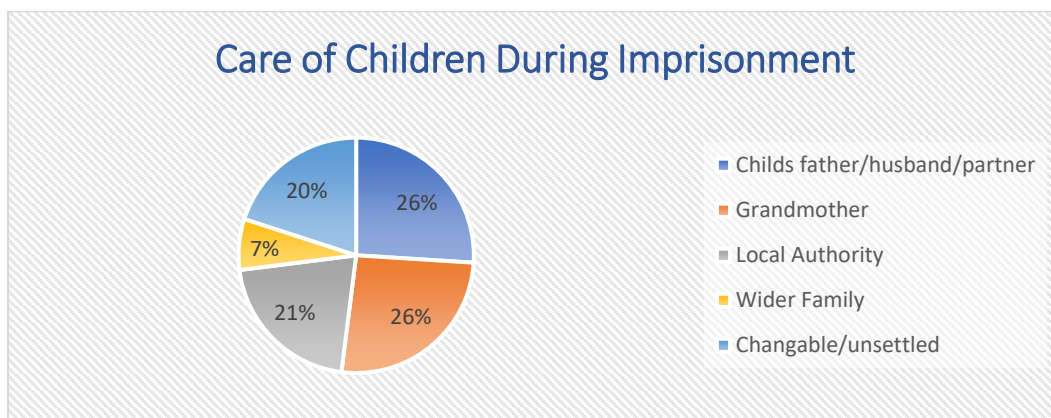
- The mothers had at least 27 children between them
- Six mothers were serving sentences of less than 6 months, two disclosed their sentences were for less than three months; two disclosed that they had sentences of over four years but did not specify how long. One was a life sentenced prisoner
- Ages of their disclosed children ranged from a few months to aged 45.
- Sentence length disclosed – 10 weeks to life , (some were within weeks of release)
- Three were foreign national mothers and were facing deportation (two successfully appealed)
- Offences disclosed were murder, fraud, theft, recall, debt/no payment of fines
- All were involved in or had sole care of their children prior to imprisonment

## Appendix 2: Data on the circumstances of mothers

**Figure 5: Care of children prior to custodial sentence**

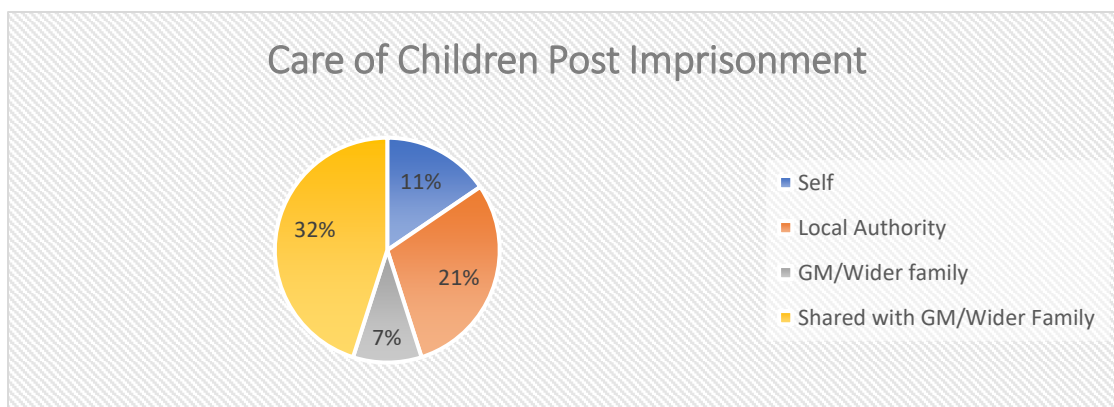


**Figure 6: Care of children during custodial sentence**



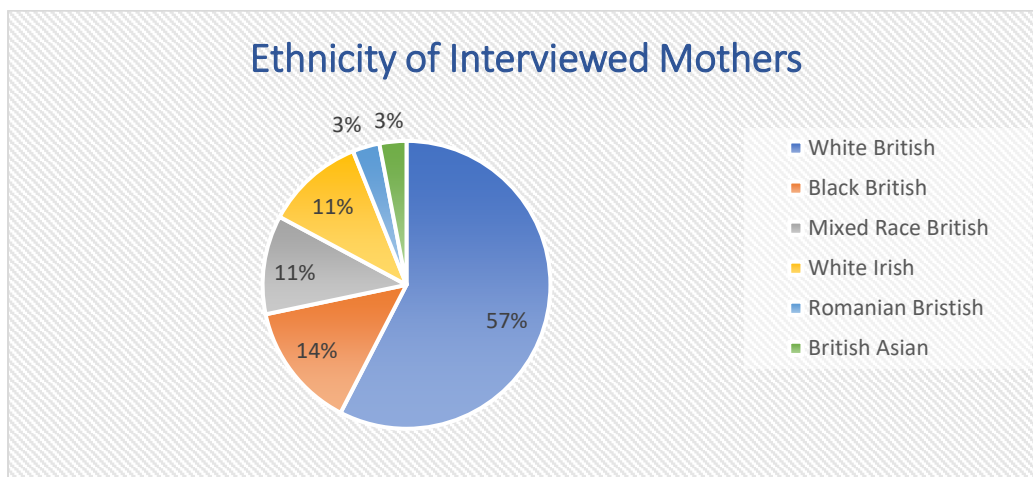
\*note some were adult children (17 +)

**Figure 7: Care of children post custodial custody**

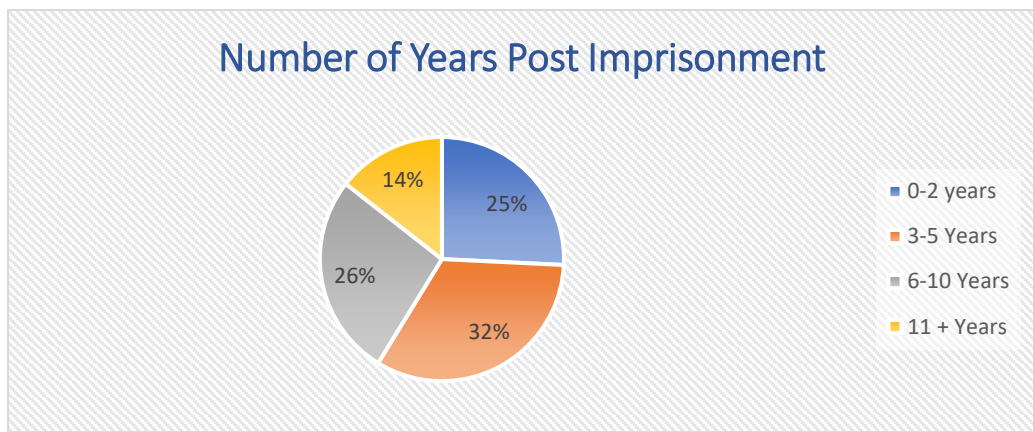


\*note, some children moved between all of the above – and some offspring were GC and adults so N/A

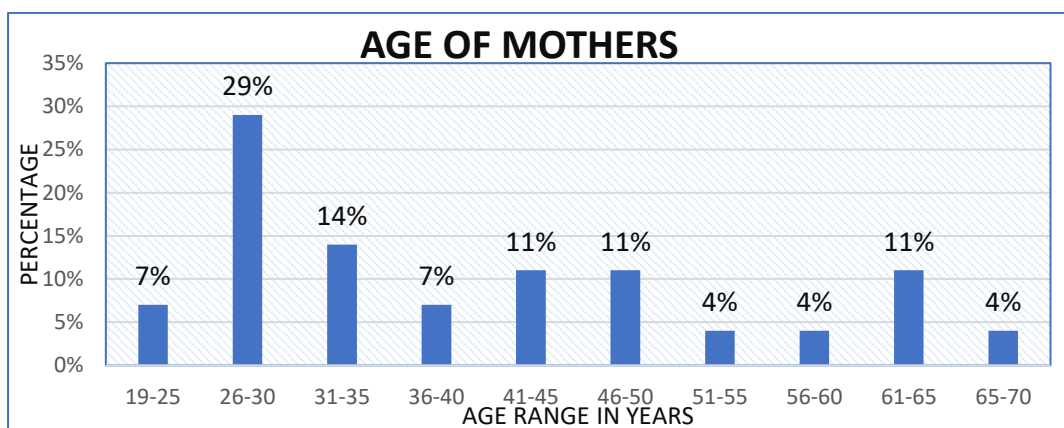
**Figure 8: Ethnicity of mothers**



**Figure 9: Time since release from the last sentence**

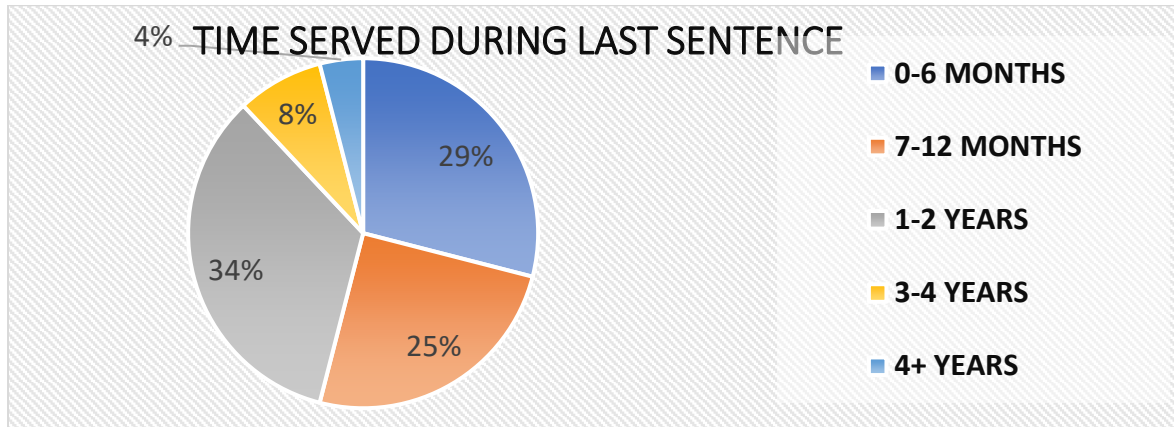


**Figure 10: Age of mothers**

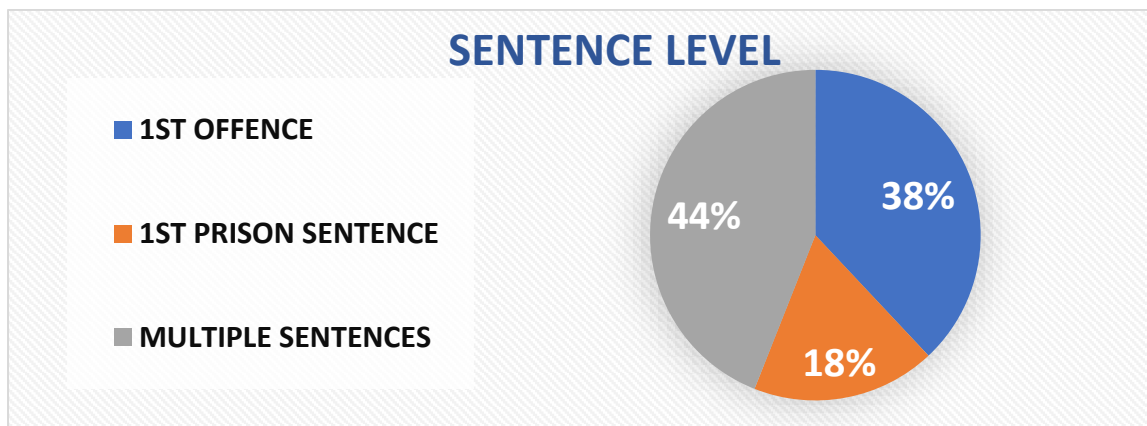


The youngest mother interviewed was nineteen, the oldest was sixty-six years old.

**Figure 11: Interviewed Mothers' time served (not sentenced)**



**Figure 12: Sentence level of Interviewed mothers**



### Appendix 3 - Pros and Cons for ethical decision making re: insider/outside access

UNDERTAKING RESEARCH IN PRISON	
Advantages	Disadvantages /Risks/Balances
<p>Immediacy of feelings: emotion felt will be ‘ongoing ‘, valuable for research.</p>	<p>For Participant, immediacy of feelings may equally a disadvantage as emotions are ‘raw’ - therefore there may be an increased risk of self-harm, suicide, increase anxiety levels and increased feelings of helplessness and guilt. 46% of women in prison in custody have attempted suicide at least once before. Therefore, they represent a high risk, as well as vulnerable group.</p> <p>Emotional management for participants may be – impacted on by the ‘restrictions and limitations’ of the prison environment. i.e. being locked up alone following the interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not being able to access support</li> <li>Not be able to access a <i>chosen</i> person for support</li> <li>Not being able to access <i>immediate</i> support (e.g. telephone)</li> </ul> <p>Any supportive access that is possible may not be ‘<i>comforting</i>’ support (i.e. difference between duty of care and comfort -not the role of prison/ wing staff to ‘comfort’).</p> <p>Length of sentence remaining may make emotional and practical management more challenging – e.g. access to children, may be moved further away or children may be being removed due to length of sentence available. Prisoner ‘movement ‘restrictions – i.e. prisoners are often escorted to and from locations, not always the case, but researcher will not have control of this – meaning participant might <i>wish</i> to leave/ cut short interview, but this might not be possible due to lack of escort – meaning participant may ‘feel obliged’ to continue interview.</p> <p>Response/management of raw emotion for researcher. Although experienced as a practitioner and skilled at emotional management, researcher will not have practitioner role with the participant and therefore many of the practitioner /case management skills do not apply in this</p>

	circumstance, and ability to offer practical support will be more limited.
Kudos 'of Prison Based Research.  Comprehensive in relation to research bases covered.	Measured against researcher feeling to pursue prison would be ignoring all the risks outlined above – to continue with prison-based research now would feel selfishly motivated and result in researcher guilt, and feelings of responsibility and anxiety in relation to participants (particularly in relation to risks of self-harm and suicide as outlined above)
Ethical Approval – no advantage	Ethical approval – Difficult to achieve and long winded in relation to both length of time to achieve approval and likelihood of acceptance. High profile researchers recently have been denied access and/or commented on how difficult it is to secure access for prison research in the current climate. (Frances Cook, Professor David Wilson). Furthermore, a PG PhD colleague who is also a Prison Governor was recently denied access to research in her own and a partner prison.

<b>UNDERTAKING RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY</b>	
<b>Advantages /Balance</b>	<b>Disadvantages /Risks/Balances</b>
In balance to loss of immediacy –mothers will have had 'time' to reflect on the full range of emotions in relation to the impact of custody and retrospective reflection can sometimes be more objective /complete.  Mothers will either be in a more settled position or at least in a position in which they are likely (though not always but see below for support) to have more control and input into any practical external factors that may have emotional relevance in relation to their children.	Loss of immediacy of emotion/memory.
Balance of loss of kudos: Peace of mind of researcher and confidence that I remain an ethical researcher.	Loss of 'kudos' = kudos of prison research
All mothers in the sample will be 'voluntary' participants – but mothers not located in prison will have the freedom to cut short and physically leave the interview – which imprisoned mothers may not. They will also feel less time pressured and will therefore have the space and time to reflect, pause, ask for a break or consider their responses. Thus, meaning their emotional wellbeing is more effectively accommodated.	No disadvantage
Ethical approval process simplified. DMU approval required only.	No disadvantage



<p>Access. Fieldwork access possible as soon as researcher able to begin and ethical approval has been given. 3 external resources for women have indicated a willingness to engage and facilitate the research – which in turn also means: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother participants identified via these resources, will by the very fact their initial contact will be via the resource centre mean women will either currently have or can have access to ongoing emotional and practical support.</li> <li>• Because of that support their emotional management is ‘shared’ and supported by others</li> <li>• All resources identified as a starting point in relation to mother participants have an extensive list of support networks available for vulnerable women and the women who use their services. (24 hour some of them)</li> </ul> <p>All the above, together with willingness to engage in research, provide positive supporting information to suit the rationale for this sample location choice</p>	<p>Purposive/targeted sampling via specific host resources may invite discussion re randomness of sample (Although balance to this potential negative would be it facilitates the evidencing of ‘defensible decision making’ choices.</p>
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<p>Target /purposive sampling of relevant ‘host’ resource will facilitate snowball and chain sampling amongst service users (i.e. mothers) and will assist research in relation to access to participants</p>	<p>No disadvantage – but potential risk of small ‘pool’ of participants – balanced by the fact three research units are identified in diverse geographical locations across England and Wales.</p>
<p>Mothers in the community will be able to have immediate access to ‘comforters’ i.e. those relationships that offer comfort, maybe children themselves or friends and family. Furthermore, that comfort and support can be immediate – i.e. face to face or on the phone – this obviously would may not have been possible in the prison</p>	<p>No disadvantage</p>
<p>Increased researcher flexibility and responsiveness: if participants miss interview slots it would be easier to re arrange If themes, new ideas develop, it’s easier to revisit resource and identify additional samples /participants if required. Multi-disciplinary staff access/support the resources so easier to seek diverse support types.</p>	<p>Will require discussion in relation to data analysis in relation to sample characteristics – i.e. will they all be too similar with the issues too similar – balance to this is, would have had to have same discussion in relation to custody. May increase likelihood of ‘saturation’ of data – although this could equally be viewed as a positive.</p>

<p>The potential for motivation to be involved to avoid the boredom of ‘doing time’ is reduced greatly.</p>	<p>No disadvantage – risk of motivation as a negative factor or participants lowered because of service level support and guidance.</p>
<p>Practicalities easier for researcher in relation to location, contacts, shared goals, willingness to participate.</p>	<p>No disadvantage</p>
<p>I can more easily provide lists of local support networks if required as all participants will be located geographically in set places. (whereas prisoners could have been ‘coming out’ to anywhere)</p>	<p>No disadvantage</p>
<p>Because participants will have an active support network in place, and even if they are not current service users (snowball sampling may identify ex-service users via networks of participants for example), they will have the ability to secure and engage support if they themselves feel it necessary. Thus, facilitating participant wellbeing and welfare, and researcher peace of mind, (as far as is perhaps possible with a vulnerable participant group).</p>	<p>No disadvantage</p>
<p>I will have more immediate access to the support of the practitioner teams of the resources as well as my supervisors should I feel the need.</p>	<p>No disadvantage</p>

## Appendix 4 - Participant Information Sheet



### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### **Motherhood Disrupted: An Interpretivist study exploring the emotional impact of incarceration in post-prison mothers**

**Name of Researcher: Lucy Baldwin. lbaldwin @dmu.ac.uk 0116 2551551 ext 8358  
Hawthorn Building. Room 00.03. The Gateway. Leicester, LE1 9BH**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish to. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part or not. Thank you for reading this and for your time – it is much appreciated.

#### **What is the study about?**

The aim of this study is to find out more about the emotional impact of prison on mothers – the reason for the study is to increase understanding in relation to working with mothers and grandmothers and hopefully by improving understanding will improve services.

#### **What does the study involve?**

If you agree to be interviewed, we will meet at a time and place convenient to you such as the university, the resource centre or home -wherever you prefer and will feel most comfortable. I will ask you questions about your experiences and feelings and views and you will be able to tell me what you want to tell me. The interview will last for around one to one and a half hours. With your agreement, the interview will be recorded as that will be less disruptive than me trying to take notes. No-one else will be present during the interview.

I am also inviting you to send to me (or give me during the interview) copies of any poems, letters, songs or stories you have written about your experiences.

If you would like to be interviewed but not to give poems, stories, letters, songs or pictures that is fine.

If you would like to send me poems, letters, stories, songs or pictures but not be interviewed, that is also fine.

If you would like to be interviewed, I will ask you to sign a consent form. If you want to just send poems, pictures, etc, you won't need to sign a consent form. You can submit artefacts anonymously too if you prefer by just posting or e mailing me your contribution to the above address. I am unable to return personal artefacts.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

You are a match to my sample group. I am looking to interview 15 mums who have been to prison – or you have agreed to send/sent in a letter/story/poem or picture or song.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time up to when I have started the data analysis (a date will be inserted once fieldwork has begun) and without giving a reason.

### **I am interested in taking part, what do I do next?**

If you are willing to contribute to this research - Either send me your submission to the address / e mail above – or e mail or telephone or let one of the staff in the centre know if you would like to take part and are willing to be interviewed – you don't have to tell anyone else if you don't want to – and we can arrange to meet up in a suitable place. If you want to know more about the project before you make up your mind, then please do get in touch and I will be happy to tell you more with no presumption that you will take part.

### **What if I agree to take part and then change my mind?**

You can withdraw from the study at any time (including during interviews and up to the date the data will be looked at in detail (August 2017), without giving a reason. Should you wish to withdraw from the research after the interview this will be possible until August 2017 – if you withdraw from the research and have informed me of such your recording will be destroyed along with relevant notes. Should you wish to withdraw your artefact (postal contribution) again once I have been informed of this I will destroy or return the contribution –whichever is your preference up until the point where data will be looked at (August 2017).

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

You might find it emotional – and it may make you sad to think about things that are emotionally challenging and difficult – or it may make you happy and proud of your experiences – either way you can chat to people who you find supportive afterwards if you need to or you can stop the interview at any point – or take a break and resume – all face to face participants (or participants who supply an address in the case of postal submissions ) will be given a sheet with contact details for supportive voluntary agencies whom you may wish to contact. You may consider it a loss to send in a postal contribution – therefore please feel free to send a copy where appropriate and keep your original – it will not be possible to return artefacts once submitted.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You will be helping to create a better more full picture of what is like to have your experiences – either as a mum/grandma a family member or a member of staff working with mothers who have been to prison – in all cases you will be providing insight that may inform future services for people coming 'after' you in your role who may have similar experiences to you.

### **What if something goes wrong? / Who can I complain to?**

If you would like to complain or you are unhappy about something during the research –please, try to come to me first - if no satisfactory outcome is achieved then participants can contact the Chair of the Ethics Committee or my supervisor and the Ethics Committee Office, Administrator for the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, Research & Commercial Office, Faculty of Health & Life Sciences, 1.25 Edith Murphy House, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH or [hlsfro@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:hlsfro@dmu.ac.uk) - my supervisor is Vic Knight who can be found at [vknight@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:vknight@dmu.ac.uk) via e mail or the address at the top of the page .

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Your contributions will be anonymised, and the geographical locations will be confidential - you will be given a pseudonym that only you and I will know (in relation to interviews – for personal artefacts pictures, poems etc I will allocate a pseudonym or you can chose to send in anonymously). Your recorded interview and all other data and submissions will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home and any electronic data will be password protected. Only I will have access to the original un – anonymised data but supervisors, examiners and potentially the ethics committee will have access to anonymised data. The data will be kept for the standard university period of five years and then destroyed. Confidentiality may be compromised only in the event of risk of harm to self or others – any action because of concerns would be discussed with participants in the 1<sup>st</sup> instance.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research will be published by way of a PhD thesis – and will hopefully be published in smaller pieces in a number of journal articles, conference papers, presentations or a book after the research project has been completed or during the period of the study. If you remain in touch with the researcher she will be happy to advise you where you can locate any publications if you want to read them.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

“This study has been reviewed and approved by De Montfort University, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee.” Include names of any other ethical committees.

**Contact for Further Information**

Please contact Lucy Baldwin (me) either by e mail [lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk) or at the address on the top of this sheet. Or my supervisor Vic Knight [yknight@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:yknight@dmu.ac.uk) if you have any further questions or concerns.

Thank you so much for taking part in this research – I appreciate it very much.

Very kind regards

Lucy

## Appendix 5 - Participant consent form

Title of project: **Mothers Confined: A study**

Name of researcher: **Lucy Baldwin**

**Please initial all boxes if you agree**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet [**date and Version number**] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
  
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until data analysis begins (date tbc) without giving any reason.
3. I agree that non-identifiable quotes may be published in articles or used in Conference presentations and or journal articles /books in the future.
4. I agree to any interviews being digitally audio recorded
5. I understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by research Supervisors from De Montfort University. I give permission for supervisors to have access to my anonymized data and examiners where appropriate.
6. I agree to take part in this study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name of participant                      Date                      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print name of person taking consent      Date                      Signature

Consent form date of issue: [**date**]



## Appendix 6 - Request to access community resources for research purposes



Lucy Baldwin Senior Lecturer in Criminology .MA BA (Hons) Dip. SW. FHEA.FRSA

[lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk)

### Request for permission to seek Participants for Research from Women's Breakout Community Resource Bases.

#### **Background to Research.**

This research serves to support the recommendation suggested by Corston (2007) and reinforced by Women's Breakout (2013):

*Women offenders are often overlooked in policy decisions as they form such a minority, albeit a proportionally costly one. We urge the Secretary of State to take women offenders out of these proposals altogether, and, in co-operation with other stakeholders, including ourselves, to design a system of local commissioning and delivery and national accountability which will reduce*

*the number of women going into prison, reduce reoffending and cut the financial burden that women offenders and those at risk currently place on government budgets.' (Russell 2013:2)*

My Doctoral research aim to explore the emotional impact of imprisonment on women who are mothers and grandmothers. The research aims to include the 'user voice' and therefore will incorporate data drawn from interviews, songs, poems pictures and stories of mums and grandmas.

In the Women's breakout response to the transforming Rehabilitation Agenda, the case for gender specific interventions in the existing CJS and gender specific accountable reform in the CJS is clearly made and arguably justified. Furthermore, and rightly so with great emphasis on the importance of women being involved in 'designing out' the flaws in the system and on women and their 'lived experiences' to inform changes in approach, practice and policy.

Whilst aspects of this research relate specifically to Mothers and grandmothers in the criminal justice system the principles and potential benefits of this research would apply to all women.

Women's Breakout suggests:

*'women should stand alone as a distinct group when there is an opportunity to design out some of the inherent problems and design in successful solutions. Further, the argument and rationale for transformation must be based on a gendered analysis and it must also hear the voice of the service user. The Transformation agenda must include proper structures for taking relevant feedback from service users; learning from their experiences; and involving them in the design, development and delivery of interventions.*

*We understand the intention to 'punish offenders properly' but are concerned with the interpretation of this intention and would want to ensure that this aim is fully informed by the differences between male and female offenders, in order that punishment does not actually exacerbate causal problems and thereby lead to an inevitability that the woman may offend again.' (Russell 2013:2)*

The objectives of this research hope to assist in exactly the aims described above – and are therefore in line with the Women’s Breakout overall philosophy. I would therefore like to respectfully request that Women’s breakout allow access to resources as confidential research ‘bases’ for the research.

The participants would all only be engaged in research on an individual, entirely voluntary and confidential basis. The only recorded reference to the organization would be within the university ethics committee approval requests (and a copy of this letter in the final thesis, which could be withdrawn prior to publication if required). Participants would be sought via flyer, advertisements/posters in the resources – and possibly the researcher would go along to geographically possible locations to speak to staff or service users to undertake research (interviews) in the centre or other mutually convenient resources – and additionally to either discuss the research in more detail or speak to potential participants via a focus group in advance of the research.

All participants would have written details about the purpose and aims of the research and would sign consent forms. Participants will be able to take part in the research in a variety of ways which includes, interview, submissions in writing, pictures and poetry and /or questionnaires. I will briefly outline the aims and objectives of the research below.

### **Doctoral research aiming to explore the impact of maternal imprisonment on maternal emotion and maternal identity. Researcher Lucy Baldwin**

This study is an interpretivist enquiry which, using qualitative research design and methodologies will seek to explore the emotional impact of the additional layer of complexity motherhood and the social construction of motherhood brings in relation to mothers and grandmothers who have experienced custody.

### **The main aim of this research is to understand more about the emotional impact of maternal incarceration on mothers, grandmothers and their relationships.**

#### **The research objectives are:**

- To develop an understanding of the emotional experiences of mothers who are / have been incarcerated.
- To explore whether and how the emotional impact of imprisoning mothers and grandmothers who have experienced custody affects the interpersonal relationships between – between themselves, their families and those who work with them.
- To consider the relevance of the emotional experiences of incarcerated mothers to sentence planning, with a view to making informed recommendations for effective practice as appropriate.
- To add to existing research, knowledge and debates in relation to mothers, grandmothers and prison.
- To add to existing research, knowledge and debates in relation to emotion and prison – with special regard to mothers and grandmothers.

Once completed this study will provide a focused body of evidence about the lived, felt experiences of mothers that will contribute to wider debates, policy and practice.

Of particular interest in this study is the critical exploration and a developing understanding of the ‘emotion’ and impact on maternal identity surrounding mothers, incarceration and relationships. The research is designed to achieve the objectives described above. The study will be subject to ethical procedures and requirements of the University Ethical Approval processes, will be confidential and voluntary.



**Research to be undertaken by Lucy Baldwin in relation to Mothers, Grandmothers, Emotion and Imprisonment**

I can confirm that I have read the proposal presented by Lucy and give permission for Lucy to access women's breakout resources with a view to inviting staff and /or service users to participate in the research. I understand that participants will agree to participate in the research on an entirely voluntary basis and will sign their consent after receipt of the research information.

I understand the local resources identity will not be revealed at any point and that confidentiality for individual participants will be absolute, as far as is possible, (with the exception, should any child protection/risk issues be intensified via the research the researcher will inform staff- this will be made clear to participants).

Signed .....Date.....

Jackie Russell. Director. Women's Breakout.

\*original signed and seen by ethics committee and supervisors

## Appendix 7 - Table 3: Criteria and strategies for recruitment

**Table 3: Criteria and strategies for recruitment**

Criteria	Strategies /tools for recruitment.
<p><b>Letter writing Mothers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-identified as a mother (any age), to children of any age</li> <li>• Currently serving a custodial sentence (any length)</li> </ul>	<p>Invitations to participate –via adverts/posters/flyers in resource centres for mothers to send letters/poems/pictures from prison, (families accessing the centre may have had relatives currently in prison).</p> <p>Invitations to participate via prison magazines and newspapers, (e.g. Inside time, Jail mail, Women in Prison).</p> <p>Flyers/invitations were given to prison based inreach workers to disseminate in prison during their contact with imprisoned mothers.</p>
<p><b>Interviewee mothers.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-identified as a mother (any age), to children of any age</li> <li>• Previously a custodial sentence (any length)</li> <li>• Post imprisonment 12 months and beyond (a requirement of NOMS<sup>79</sup>).</li> </ul>	<p>Invitations to participate in interviews –via adverts/posters/flyers placed in resource centres.</p> <p>Via purposive and linear snowball sampling following 1<sup>st</sup> line of participants.</p> <p>Direct invitation to participate to focus group members</p> <p>Direct invitations to participate via existing contacts of researcher and staff and resource centre staff during ongoing pre-existing work contact.</p>

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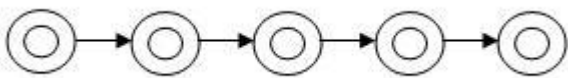
<sup>79</sup> Because this research did not include interviewee participants currently imprisoned National Offender Management Service (NOMS), approval was not required. However, a condition of such research is that participants have been out of prison for 12 months or more.

## Appendix 8: Models of recruitment

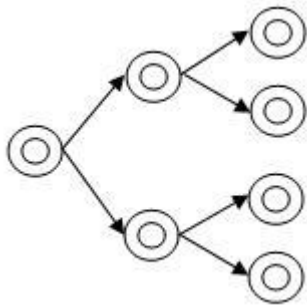
### Snowball sampling – models of recruitment (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981).

#### Sample Strategy - Snowball Sampling

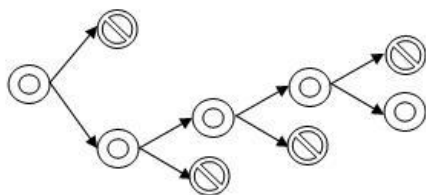
- 1) **Linear Snowball Sampling** is the form of sampling where the researcher starts with one subject, and through referral gets only one subject. That individual subject again refers to a single subject and the chain goes on.



- 2) **Exponential Non-Discriminative Snowball** Sampling is the type where the first chosen subject refers to multiple subjects, and all these multiple subjects are chosen as the next subject.



- 3) **Exponential Discriminative Snowball Sampling** is the type of sampling where among the multiple referrals by the primary subjects at each level, only one is chosen



**Models 1 and 2 were utilised in the current study, up until the point of saturation.**

## Appendix 9 - Back up Interview schedule and prompts

### Interviews: Welcome, Opening Statement, and Prompts – Mothers and Grandmother Contributors

Hello, thank you for coming.

As you know you have been asked to take part in this interview because you are a mother who has experienced prison, (whether you have your children with you at this time or not) and my Doctoral research is looking how this felt for you.

I am really very grateful to you for taking part, and for giving up your time. I want to reassure you that this research has nothing to do with the prison service or probation or social services, and any information that you tell me will be treated confidentially unless you disclose something that means there is a real risk of harm to yourself or others.

The questions I will be asking will involve exploring how you felt about your prison sentence- specifically in relation to you being a mother or grandmother, (or both) and your emotions and feelings. We will be talking about ways you may have experienced /or managed emotions and feelings as a result of being a mother and being in prison. However if at any time you're uncomfortable with any of the questions or want to stop the interview for any reason, please just let me know that would be fine, we can take a break and re start or we can stop the interview and re schedule or you can decide not to take part in the research at all (if you do decide this and this is your decision we will delete anything recorded so far).

If you are willing I may also like to re-interview you at some point but this is not something you have to agree to at all, taking part in this interview doesn't mean you 'have' to do or are agreeing to do any follow up interviews. You may also wish to send me letters, poems, stories or pictures that might reflect how you felt or feel about your experience of being a mother or grandmother who has been to prison. That is fine, and I would love to receive them – although please be mindful I won't be able to return them so if it is something special to you please send me copies.

My contact details are Lucy Baldwin [lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk)  
De Montfort University. Hawthorn Building. The Gateway. Leicester .LE1 9BH

(This sheet will be given to participants alongside PIS alongside 2 consent forms – one copy for recipient one for the researcher to keep)

***NB Notes for Reviewer;*** *As the interviews are intended to be essentially free flowing and it is likely each interview will evolve naturally, and I do not want to pre-empt exactly which and /or how many prompts/questions will be required. It is expected in an 'evolving' interview during which questions and prompts will occur naturally and it would be impossible to predict them all in relation to the interviews, however example prompts, and topic areas expected to cover are detailed in the diagram - but I believe this sample to be representative of what be asked.*

**Opening statement in Interviews; Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this study, I trust you have had the chance to read the information given to you and you are still happy to continue? (Confirmation will be recorded). Before we start do you have any questions?**

Okay, so you know this interview is to do with how it 'feels' to be a mother who has experienced custody .I would like it very much if this interview could be as free flowing as Possible and want to allow you to just tell your story – but I may need sometimes to ask a question or ask you to expand a bit more about certain points .Is that ok?

So, I know you are a mum– can we start there, and you can tell me more about your family and the circumstances around your prison sentence.....

Questions /prompts if required will be used around 4 main themes all dependant on and led by the participant

- 1. Context and background** – i.e. Facts, how many children, their ages, and their residency – who is in contact with them, who cared for them during sentence – where are they now etc...
- 2. Reflections and perceptions (emotions and feelings)** – What did that feel like? Can you tell me more about that? How do you think others felt about ...? What emotions stand out most from this experience? – What? How? Why ? And other encouraging prompts.
- 3. Observations/ Experiences/Hopes** – what did you see, think feel about .... What helped, what didn't, what would have etc...can you think of a specific example that will illustrate how you feel/felt?
- 4. Relationships** – How did prison affect your relationships with, children, family, practitioners – inside –outside – long short term what are your expectations, hopes fears—what is the impact as you see it feel it on all of you?

## Appendix 9 (cont.).

Examples of Questions/Prompts that may be used with Mothers and Grandmother participants

### 1. Context and Facts

### 2. Reflections and perceptions (emotions and feelings)



### 2. Observations/experiences /hopes

### 4. Relationships

## Mothers in and after prison research



### Invitation to Contribute...

Are you a mother or grandmother who has been to prison or perhaps you work with women who are in or have been in prison? Or maybe you have a family member who is mum who has been to jail? Either way I would love to hear from you and hear about your experiences. Your contribution will assist and be part of a research project to understand more about the emotions surrounding mothers in prison – from a range of perspectives, mothers themselves, people working with mothers who have been in prison and family members of mothers and grandmothers who have been to prison too– with the aim of using that understanding to inform positive change

This research is nothing to do with prison, probation or social services. You can contribute to this research by agreeing to be interviewed, by sending something to me or both (I can receive postal contributions only if you are a mother currently serving your sentence).

I would be very happy to receive contributions by post or via e mail, in any format that you feel will express your thoughts, feelings and /or emotions about your experiences. Those contributions can be letters, personal stories, songs poems or even pictures. I would be delighted to receive them in any format. Every single response with a return address will be acknowledged with an explanation how it may be used – you will be free to change your mind and withdraw from the research up (up until August 2017).

If you would like to find out more, please do e mail or write to me (details below)

I really do look forward to hearing from you – in whatever form!

Very kind regards

*Lucy Baldwin*

Lucy Baldwin. Senior Lecturer

[lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:lbaldwin@dmu.ac.uk) : De Montfort University. Hawthorn Building. The Gateway.LE1 9BH

NB. Please note that sending of poems, letters pictures, songs etc. is taken as assumed consent for your submission to be used in this research and/or connected work in the future. Please contact me in advance if you are not sure.... you must be over 18 to take part in this research. Anonymous submissions are fine and gratefully accepted too.

## Appendix 11 - Examples of a poems sent by mothers in Prison

### Frozen time

I look at the photos in my cell, my sanctuary my place to dream  
I see them, I kiss their image, but I can't feel *them* or smell *them*  
My children, that hurts, but I look anyway, thoughts lead to memory lane  
I remember the day at the beach or the one in nannas house  
I remember the smells of them, the candy floss nannas cooking  
I search my mind for every detail, but the smell of them I can't get to it  
How do you build a memory of a smell – it's what I miss most  
In my snapshots of frozen time all is well, I'm there with them  
I can see them feel them smell them – I should have savoured it all.....

### Don't Give up your dreams

Don't give your dreams, they are yours to keep  
My children are gone, for them I weep  
My heart hurts, I feel only pain  
For me there is no sunshine, only rain

Don't give up your dreams they will get you through,  
I think of me, I think of you  
Together once more, on a summer day,  
Me eating chips and watching you play

I don't want much, I don't need reams,  
I just want you  
Let me keep my dreams



## Appendix 12 - Example of a picture from prison

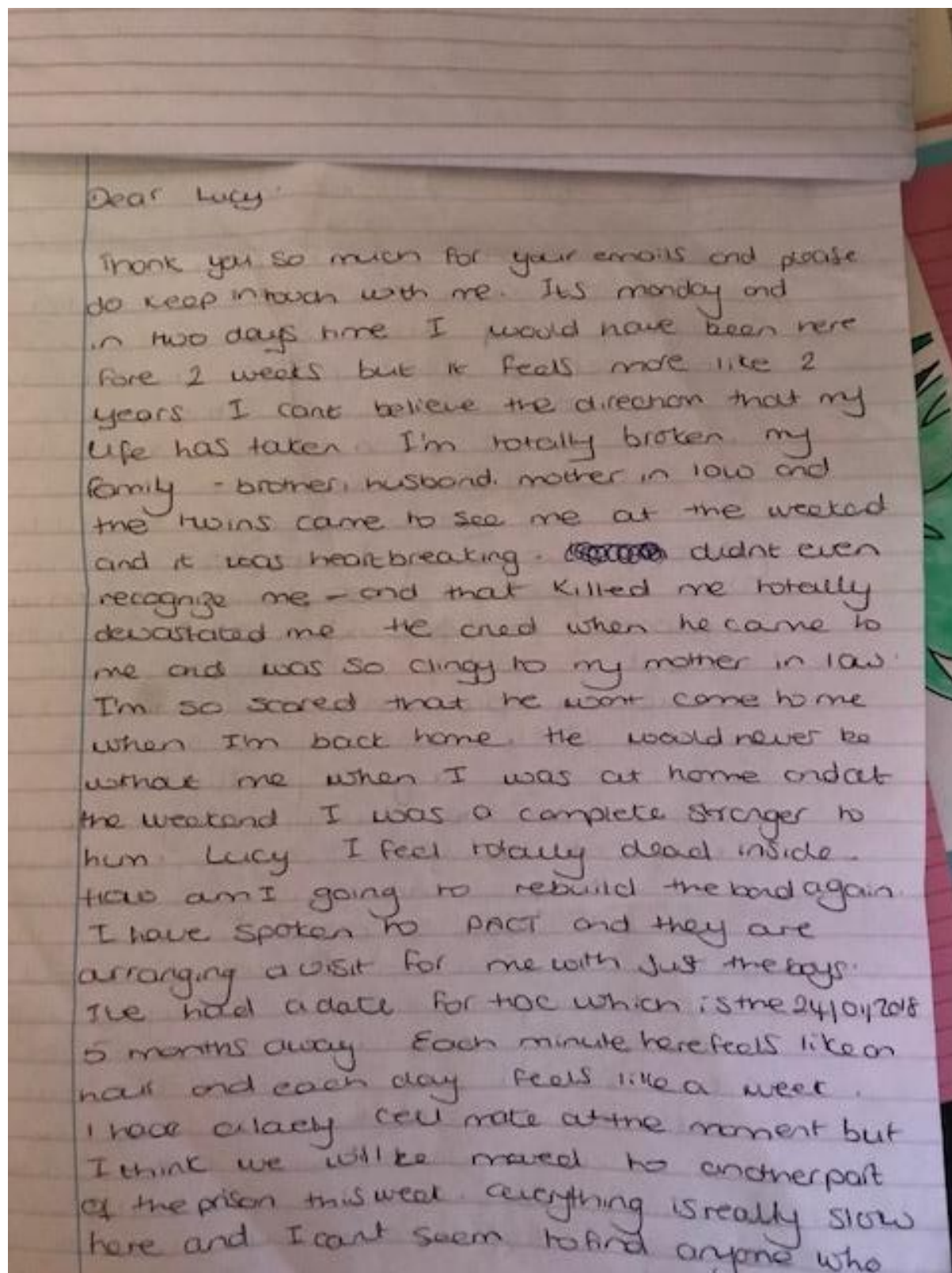
Example of a picture from prison – mum sent to me with the message “this will break your heart as much as it broke mine” (sent from 10-year-old daughter to her in prison).



## Appendix 13 - Example of a letter from mum in prison

## Appendix 13 - Example of a letter from mum in prison

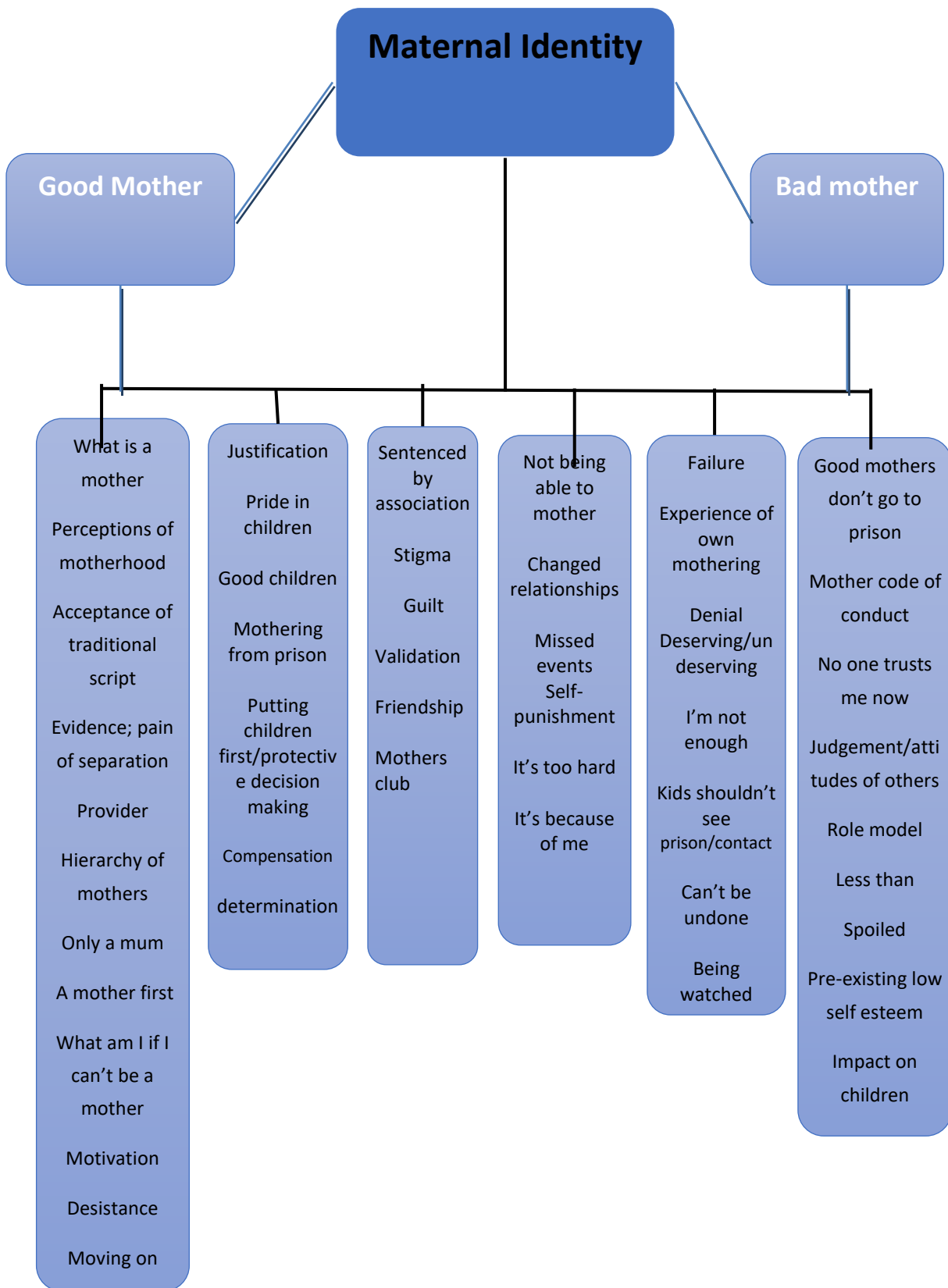
Example of a letter from mum in prison, mother of 2-year-old twins sentenced to 4 12 months (served 4 months released on tag). (specific permission was given by the mother to include her actual letter)



Dear Lucy

Thank you so much for your emails and please do keep in touch with me. Its Monday and in two days time I would have been here for 2 weeks but it feels more like 2 years. I cant believe the direction that my life has taken. I'm totally broken. My family - brother, husband, mother in law and the twins came to see me at the weekend and it was heartbreaking. ~~Lucy~~ didnt even recognize me - and that killed me totally devastated me. He cried when he came to me and was so clingy to my mother in law. I'm so scared that he wont come home when I'm back home. He would never be without me when I was at home and at the weekend I was a complete stranger to him. Lucy I feel totally dead inside. How am I going to rebuild the bond again. I have spoken to PACT and they are arranging a visit for me with just the boys. Ive had a date for HOE which is the 24/10/2018 5 months away. Each minute here feels like an hour and each day feels like a week. I have a really bad rate at the moment but I think we will be moved to another part of the prison this week. Everything is really slow here and I cant seem to find anyone who

**Appendix 14 - Example of developing themes a Maternal identity theme/sub theme and codes.**



## Appendix 15 - Positive/Negative codes

### Positive /Negative table

<b>'Negatives'</b>		
Lost	Departed	Disappointed
Frustration	Sadness	Embarrassed
Judged	Pain	Numb
Nothingness	Safe	Less Than
Despair	Resentful	Misunderstood
Broken	Not whole	Low
Jealous	Hopelessness	Disgusted
disconnected	Anxiety	Overwhelmed
Angry/Anger	Deserving	Dead Inside
Underserving	Empty	Ashamed
Different	Powerless	Suicidal
Hollow	Fragile	Mistrusted
Fearful	Terrified	Watched
Failure	Othered	Stupid
Disgusting	Mocked	Unsafe
Played	Scared	Justifying
Fear	Detached	Labelled
Disgraced	Unmothered	Forgotten
Confused	Separate	Useless
gratitude		
<b>'Positives'</b>		
Release	Sanctuary	Appreciative
Relief	Proud	Determined
Refuge	Hopeful	Protected
Pleasure	Motivated	Self-Assured
Safe	Determined	Worth Something
Rest	Rested	Loved
Stress Free	Wisdom	Admired
Protected	Improved relationships	Enough
Informed	Security	Valid
Supported	Responsibility Free	Capable
A Break	Connection	Honest
Free	Kind/kindness	Encouraged
Insightful	Informed	Time out
gratitude	Friendship	

## Appendix 16 - Poem by Lucy Baldwin

### Flawed

*Judged and othered, their mistakes laid bare*

*Mistakes borne from loss*

*from pain, trauma and deceit*

*Often to do others bidding*

*yet the price they pay the highest*

*Separated from their children*

*from motherhood and all that they are*

*all that they wish to be*

*'We are failures, we are flawed they say'*

*our children suffering with us*

*our fault, our shame our guilt*

*When will it end?*

*Will I feel normal or whole once more?*

*or forever flawed, imperfect as a mother*

*But aren't we all?*



## Appendix 17 - Letter from Lord farmer about impact of my research



De Montfort University  
Hawthorn Building  
The Gateway  
LE1 9BH

6<sup>th</sup> August 2020

To whom it may concern

### **Re Lucy Baldwin, Senior Lecturer in Criminology**

I am pleased to write to confirm that I invited Ms Baldwin to give evidence to my Review, commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, on the importance of strengthening female offenders' family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and intergenerational crime. Her research made a significant contribution to my findings and was influential in developing the final recommendations of the Farmer Review for Women, published in June 2019. All these have been accepted by the MoJ and are currently being implemented.

Her research was particularly salient in the development of my recommendation on the need for social workers in women's prison. When I presented the whole Review to the Government's Advisory Board on Female Offenders I recommended Ms Baldwin as an expert advisor on the implementation of the prison-based social workers policy.

It is my understanding that her research was also influential on the development of Female Offender Strategy which pre-dated (and announced) my Review and has provided indispensable insights on the realities for women and their children when mothers are given custodial sentences.

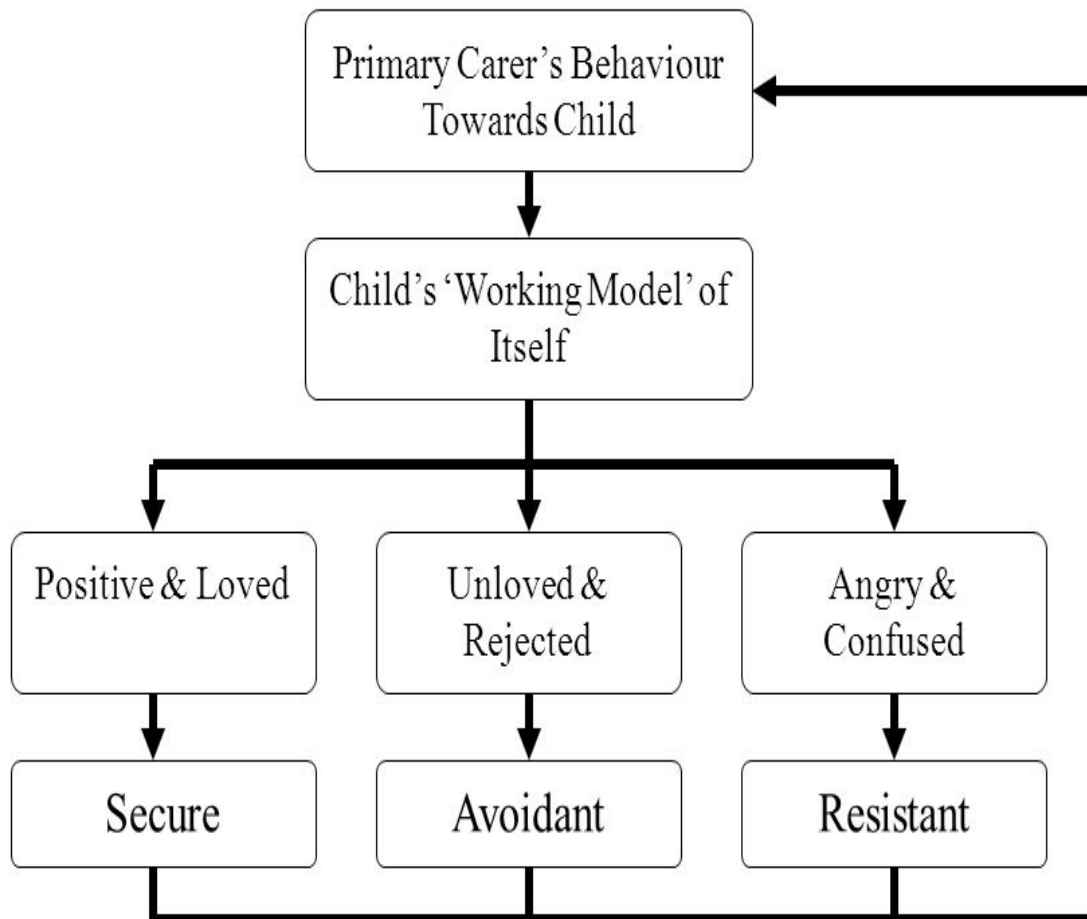
Her manner when disseminating and presenting her research is collegiate and engaging. She is a strong and convincing advocate for her findings and therefore a highly effective policy actor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Farmer'.

LORD FARMER

House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW  
Tel: 020 7219 6565 Email: [farmerm@parliament.uk](mailto:farmerm@parliament.uk)

**Appendix 18 - Bowlby's model of monotropic attachment.**





## Appendix 19 - Image of Prison Transport

### Prison Transport



A typical 'cell' inside a prison transport van. The doors are solid with a small window at the top and the bottom of the door. Males and females are often moved in the same van.



## Appendix 20 - Examples of Reflexivity Notes and extracts from reflexive research and personal diaries

Note 1. As the PhD progressed, I found myself thinking about my own relationship with my mother, my childhood was abusive, and my mother neglectful but nonetheless I was consumed by guilt that I don't see her or speak to her; whilst simultaneously accepting of the fact that this decision is the best one for me and my family. Nevertheless, I wrote in my PhD diary:

*"my book on mothering came out, my son lost a baby, my daughter had a baby, my son and his wife are pregnant again, I became a grandmother, now a step grandmother, I'm doing a PhD on mothering - and yet still nothing from my mother, no relationship nothing - now I'm a grandmother it's a whole other layer of her I don't understand. How did she not care? She showed so little interest when I was a young single mum, they were her grandchildren, how could she not have cared?!"* (diary entry November 2015)

Anger towards my mother for being a non-conforming mother created havoc with my emotions. Through my research and activism, I am demanding compassion and understanding for criminalised mothers – yet I am not able to do the same for my own mother. There was a period of the thesis where managing these emotions was quite challenging for me. Simultaneously I was managing guilt about my own mothering availability as a result of the additional demand on my time the PhD created. As much as I felt guilty if I was too busy to chat, I would also feel guilty that I **could** talk to them whenever I wanted to (within reason), but that the mothers in my research couldn't talk to their children. Writing in January 2017:

*"It's been a long time since I wrote in this diary, it's strange how doing a PhD about motherhood can make you feel so guilty - I feel dreadful how often near deadlines, I say to my kids , (aged 27, 36, 37!), that I'm busy, (obviously after I've established that it's only chatter they want me for) – god I am even justifying myself to my diary - this is ridiculous, why am I even whining I can actually speak to them all when I want to, the prison mothers can't!"*


In reality, and in hindsight and reality I wasn't neglectful at all, but I felt it - even though I spoke to my three adult children almost every day throughout, (as is my norm), yet the guilt persisted. Reminding me of how hard it is to shake off the shackles of mother guilt.


Note 2. My being an ex-practitioner also had some bearing on how this research journey has progressed. The balance of my personal and professional selves afforded me an unusual advantage in relation to the undertaking of this study and the ability to establish a rapport with the

women. I was close enough and similar enough to the mothers and their world, for them to trust me, but also professional enough to be afforded a professional trust, i.e. worthy enough to speak to, and for the research value to be appreciated and trusted and, importantly, applied. My work and my research became 'bigger' than the PhD. As an ex-practitioner I was often torn between 'just listening' as a researcher, and 'doing' or problem solving. I discussed my concerns about crossing boundaries with research colleagues and my supervisors and was reassured that research activism was considered 'ok', as was supporting participants (in line with ethical care and feminist principles).

*'discussed with supervisors my move into activism and to supporting the mothers with accommodation and into voluntary work and employment – I was nervous about being seen as crossing boundaries – even though I think it embodies feminist principles of empowerment- they described this as 'the acceptable fluffy boundaries of the PhD'. I was relieved. This need to 'do' something has affected my relationship with the research. On a micro level I gave some of the women advice and guidance in relation to avenues of support (a part of my ethical care anyway), but others (if I was able or they asked directly) I physically assisted in locating and accessing support services or volunteering opportunities, utilising my contacts and past practitioner experience. Additionally, I maintained contact with participants who wanted to remain in touch. I have done and will be working alongside some of my participants in the future and this includes publishing with some of the mothers from the study''.*

Appendix 21 - Front Page of Guidance for Supervisors written by the author and hosted on the National Probation Service intranet

 HM Prison & Probation Service

National Probation Service 

## SWSC – ‘lite bite’ Supervising mothers

### Supervising mothers

This ‘Lite bite’ seeks to support supervisors in their supervision of mothers and reminds Offender Managers of the significance of motherhood and maternal emotion, to desistance and rehabilitation. It is to be used in conjunction with the ‘lite bite’ relating to women and trauma.

Women under supervision, whether on licence or post release from prison, are often also mothers. For many mothers, their children are their ‘primary concern’, and maternal issues and emotions may be affecting a mother’s ability, (and willingness), to fully engage with the supervision process. For many mothers, whether they have the care of their children or not, their maternal emotions, particularly in relation to criminalization, (e.g. guilt and shame), may have an impact on them; in relation to afore mentioned ability to engage, focus on rehabilitation, additional trauma, substance misuse, (and therefore offending to fund their addiction), relationships, and psychological wellbeing. Offender Managers need to think about maternal issues when supervising women who are mothers, and to be aware of the potential challenges she faces and the relationship those challenges may have to her offending or desistance.

Being completely preoccupied with challenges in terms of mothering and maternal emotion can affect women’s responses and can lead to behaviour that presents or is perceived as aggressive/volatile, or angry, or disengaged or mistrustful. Offender Managers need to be mindful of possible past trauma as well as mother related trauma and to consider how these could link to her offending behaviour, (past present or future). It will also encourage consideration to support mothers through this process and what effective rehabilitative interventions are suitable.

Evidence suggests that gender specific, trauma informed interventions tackling the areas of motherhood, mothering, and maternal emotion, mental health, substance misuse, good family contact, pro-social identity, being in control of daily life, resettling and building social capital is the best way to address re-offending and keep women safe. When interviewing please consider exploring these areas with the individual, including reflecting upon vulnerabilities and any trauma and for maternal challenges/circumstances experienced. The current guidelines for, and expectations of Court reports are that they explicitly consider the specific needs of the offender, including childcare, and supervision ought to be no different.

### Evidence from post-supervision mothers- why motherhood matters

*I have five kids and I’d been away for four years – yet no one ever asked me what it was like being home, what it was like as a mother whose been to prison, how was I coping, ... All I was focussed on was being a better mum, so at probation I just used to say yes, no, yes no, they weren’t interested in what mattered most to me so I just didn’t talk to them’ (Ursula)*

*I’ve lost my kids, they’re gone, social services took them, maybe rightly so, but how was I meant to stay clean now? I hated myself even more for losing my kids, what kind of mother does that make me? so no I couldn’t stay clean and then obv’s I had to thieve to pay for it ... but then I just felt more sh\*t and lost any chances at all getting them back ... this is it for me I think now, maybe if I’d had someone to talk to about what it felt like it might have been different – but the drugs were easier and no one ever asked me how I was as a mum – I tried to speak to my probation officer once, you know to try to get help before I went bad again, but she just said it was nothing to do with her and I*

## Appendix 22: Example Images of Open and Closed Prisons

Women's prisons are not categorised as A, B, C or D in relation to their security level and risk of harm/escape of the prisoner (A is the most secure, D the least); instead, women's prisons are classified only as 'open' or 'closed': the level of movement and freedom within the prison varies according to their status. Despite most women in prison being classified as 'low risk of harm' and being guilty of minor nonviolent offences, 10 out of the 12 UK women's prisons are 'closed' establishments, thus meaning that most women in prison are held in closed conditions. This classification severely affects the prison rules around visits, time spent out of cells, the type of cell or room provided, the ability to be released on temporary licence (ROTL), the women's freedom of movement within the prison, and their access to each other. Examples of the difference between classifications would be that in most closed-prisons, children are not permitted to sit on their mothers' knees and mothers are not allowed out of their seats during visits. In an open-prison women are more likely to have rooms rather than cells and are more likely to have the freedom to mix with each other freely and independently of officers. Several women's prisons were 'inherited' from the male estate and were designed with men in mind. The closed-prisons may have more imposing and secure structures, such as higher fencing and more locked gates, and generally are more 'prison-like'; whereas some of the women's open-prisons look a lot less like a prison with rooms instead of cells, and stone walls and trees instead of barbed iron fences, which arguably is more appropriate to women's risk levels.

### Askham Grange Open prison



### HMP Downview Closed prison

