Learning Beyond and During the Probation Service: An Ethnographic Study with Women Offenders in England

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to explore women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in England. Through ethnographic research in a Community and Rehabilitation Company in England, I investigate women offenders' learning experiences - past and present - and how these experiences shaped their lives. The data was collected over seven months through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and informal conversations with women offenders and staff in the probationary company.

Employing conceptual tools around informal learning, communities of practice, identity theories and gender violence, I explore how women offenders' identities were shaped by their previous learning experiences and relationships and find out the significance of gender violence on women offenders' perceptions of their lives and on their learning.

By investigating women offenders' informal learning experiences in a diversity of spaces, the study offers insights into the women offenders' broader learning, including learning experiences emerging on probation and their earlier learning on how to commit a crime. The findings reveal the significant impact of relationships formed during the probation period on women offenders' lives and their multiple and shifting identities. The study uncovers the differences between the reality of relationships on probation and those intended by policy, and explores the offenders' learning experiences of provided programmes, in this case the women's group sessions.

The thesis concludes with the importance of acknowledging the new communities created through the probation process, whilst also considering the impact of past and present communities on women offenders' learning. Such understanding is necessary for providers to respond directly to the women offenders' voices, their perspectives and needs.

Access Condition and Agreement

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ABBREVIATIONS

CRC   Community Rehabilitation Company

HMPPS   Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service

MoJ   Ministry of Justice in the United Kingdom

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

RO   Responsible Officer

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Crystalizing my aim

"Joining Women's Group Sessions [on probation] made me feel my worth, I am actually worth something, I am not just an offender"

Trudy- 2018

After hearing this statement from Trudy, one of the participants in my study, I wanted to pause the recorder and hug her, to express how I felt hearing her words. I could not imagine how it would be to feel constantly stigmatized in every single social situation that women offenders like Trudy find themselves in, including their families, and I was in awe of her ability to keep fighting it. This exchange took place early on in the research process. I realised that giving a hug to one woman offender would not provide support to all the other women offenders nor enable them to talk for themselves. This then became my research aim: to share a detailed picture of their learning journeys, in the hope that providing an opportunity for these women offenders' voices to be heard, thereby generating more understanding about their lives and needs.

1.1. My journey as a researcher: how did I end up researching women offenders?

In this section, I will present my own experiences of learning, empowerment, constantly fighting to make my voice countable and being the permanent 'black sheep' of my family which is similar for some of the women participants in this research.

I was born in Turkey. After I lost my father at the age of 16, it was not easy to survive in a family that was run by my grieving, widowed mother and elder sister. The social pressure around my family was quite high and it was difficult to make my voice heard even by my family. My mother is a person who has always till today respected society's traditional perspectives on women in Turkey. According to her, this has been the most logical way to survive as a single parent. Even in my extended family, I have

been seen as the 'black sheep' of the family: I have always fought to make my own decisions, which were often contrary to social customs. The first of these was to leave my mother's house when I was 17 to study at a university in another city. Since then, I have been making my own decisions and standing up to all the consequences and challenges by myself.

Several key events influenced my interest in offenders' learning, starting with a visit to Norwich Prison (as part of an MA course) to observe classes that the prison provided for male prisoners. A few months later, on a visit to Turkey, I met a woman at the hairdresser's who had recently been released from prison because of prostitution. We ended up in conversation and she told me how she was getting ready to go back to work on the streets. She told me about the conditions in women's prisons and the lack of programmes that could have encouraged her to change her life on release. The next key event in my journey was a visit to a women's cooperative in the Philippines as part of my master's research exploring women's empowerment. I was surprised when, in the first interview, one of my participants chose to introduce herself to me as an ex-offender. This led me to speculate on how long a woman would carry this 'offender' identity. I started honing my questions in this direction, focusing on the identities and learning of women offenders as a general theme. When there was an opportunity to engage in more in-depth research in the form of a PhD, I decided to explore women offenders' learning. My overarching question became whether women offenders could be empowered through learning to make their own decisions about changes in their lives. This then led to the research aim for my doctoral research; exploring women offenders' perspectives on learning and change in England.

1.2. Why Research Women's Education in the Probationary Service?

I believe it is important to begin with some statistics to acknowledge the offender population in England and Wales: in 2019, there were 82,990 offenders in England and Wales (MoJ, 2020). Females represent 4 percent of this offender population. The probation population is three times higher than the prison population (247,759) and statistics from 2020 shows that 8 percent of those on probation were women. The probation population consists of two types of offenders; the people coming out of

prison to serve their residual sentences on probation, and the people who committed crime and serve their sentences on probation without going to the prison. The statistics also show that more first-time offenders were women and reoffending rates were also higher among women (Ministry of Justice, 2020).

My first intention to research education for offenders in a women's prison in England had to be abandoned due to problems with access. Thus, I switched to the probation context, something that I had not planned but which turned out to be extremely fruitful in terms of the themes I was interested in. Conducting research in the probation setting was very different in that while offenders are still offenders, having several restrictions based on their convictions, they also have some freedoms too. In terms of my interest in identity and learning, I found it to be fertile ground: offenders were in a kind of limbo in between prison and a future as a free citizen.

I found out there was a lack of literature about women offenders on probation in England. Although there are many studies focusing on prison education, few studies focus on learning during the probation period. Recognising this gap, I begin with research on the prison context, first presenting a historical account of offenders' education in prison within the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales before moving to examine the different approaches to offenders' education through the literature review. I consider it is important to understand the history and development of prison education as these approaches have influenced the kind of educational provision on probation and the learning experiences of women on probation some of whom were previously in prison.

1.2.1. History of prison education

This brief history of prison education in England begins in 1992, when privatisation was introduced with the intention of improving prison education. This process of privatisation was mirrored in the probation service which I present in the next chapter. Education played a key role in the prison system in many countries since the 18th century (Nichols, 2016) whereas in England, prisons had been simply a place for short-term accommodation where criminals waited to be hung for major crimes like robbery and murder or to be transported to the colonies of the British Empire (Ignatieff, 1978) for minor crimes like debts or not paying their fines. At the beginning

of the 18th century, questions related to fairness in punishment had been raised in public, in particular why the punishment for all crimes was the same (Radzinowicz, 1948). More lenient attitudes towards punishment led to a new problem, that of overcrowded prisons and some began to question the physical conditions of prisons and its purpose.

In 1777, the prison reformer John Howard was sent to investigate the conditions in European prisons with the view of improving the prisons in England. Howard's recommendations were that prisoners needed religious and moral education. According to him, education would help both the governors and prisoners while conditions in prisons were overhauled (the 1779 Penitentiary Act aimed to make prisons more habitable places than before but until the 1839 Prison Act in the UK, there were no specific changes related to the Penitentiary Act). Inspired by Howard's report, in 1789, Clergyman William Rogers of the United States suggested that education should be introduced in prisons. At that time in the USA, the church viewed prisons as places of punishment, where 'sinners' redeemed their souls. From their perspective, prison education (in which morality was implicit) would prevent re-incarceration and help sinners to find the religious way of life (ibid).

By the 19th century, by which time punishments and length of incarceration began to reflect more systematically the crime, moral education became popular among prisoners in the UK (Nichols, 2016). A pioneering development in the history of women prisoners' education was a programme to teach women prisoners and their children how to read, introduced by the prison reformer and philanthropist Elizabeth Fry. Fry's ideas had a significant influence on prison reform, on how prisoners were viewed and on prison education particular.

The Select Committee on Home Affairs first suggested privatisation for prisons in 1986. As a result of a visit to the USA in the late 1980s, a prison system was proposed that would be better for taxpayers (Nathan, 2003). This resulted in the emergence of 'for profit' prisons in the UK and the government was monitoring those 14 prisons and their status in terms of the extent to which they meet the standards of their contracts (Grimwood, 2014). Privatization brought with its private providers of education programmes. Although there were set achievements which were decided by the Ministry of Justice for prisons, the delivery methods could differ from one another

and the choice of programmes was based on each private agency's decisions. As with the probation service in England, privatization enabled providers to design their own vocational training programmes or hire third-party agencies to provide specific skills programmes, in the light of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service recommendations. Privatization of prison and probation services in England might have had positive financial effects, but for education, competition among providers has intensified the focus on meeting certain targets, thereby sacrificing quality for quantity. Once can see how the need to analyse the effectiveness of this range of private services has led to an over-reliance on statistical data. On the other hand, the increased number of women offenders shows the effectiveness of the chosen learning programmes' approach, which was one-size-fits-all.

Since the 19th century, the power of education to prevent or reduce crime has become globally accepted (Ruess, 1999; Vacca, 2004). There is certainly evidence that prison education programmes help to reduce the number of recidivists (Hrabowski and Robbi, 2002). The belief that prison education helps reduce the reoffending numbers of women by preventing reoffending is shared today also by the probationary service and influences the emphasis on educational interventions. According to Allen and Watson's briefing paper for prison population in England and Wales (2017), "the annual average female prison population in 2016 was 3854" (p.5), and for the first six months of 2017, the female prison population had increased to 3944 (www.gov.uk). Although this was not a dramatic increase, Allen et al. (2017) pointed out that it was more than the total female prison population in the 1990s. It was thought that enhanced education opportunities would help to reduce these numbers and the risk of incarceration.

1.3. Previous research on prison and probationary education: identifying my research direction

My aim is to define how my research focus and research approach evolved and how this differs from previous studies in this area.

There is also a clear gap in the literature in terms of investigating the contribution of informal learning experiences on offenders' lives and my research is designed to address this gap. Schurrah (2008) investigated offenders' learning experiences in

Tasmania by conducting case study. One of her research focuses was exploring four male offenders' informal learning experiences by conducting semi structured interviews. I decided to focus on women rather than male offenders because I realised there was little research that focused specifically on women's learning experiences and even fewer that adopt a qualitative approach. Underpinned by my combined theoretical framework that includes informal learning, communities of practice, identity theory and the concept of gender violence, this section examines prison education from five perspectives: the prison education literature on impact evaluation; offenders' attitudes towards prison education; literacy in prison; ethnographic studies on prison education; and gender issues.

1.3.1. Impact evaluation research of prison educational programmes

The large body of research that focuses on the impact of education programmes in prisons can be divided into three strands: studies that evaluate a whole programme, studies that look at one specific part of a programme or studies that evaluate a new programme. Impact evaluations have become the most prevalent approach to assess the outcomes of programmes or policy in prisons. In impact evaluations, researchers try to establish what has changed as a result of the intervention of particular education programmes in prisons. For example, Silber (2005) attempted to discover the impact of a prison choir on social harmony among women prisoners, while Tett et al. (2012) used art and literacy to examine the impact on male prisoners' attitudes towards learning. de Guzman et al. (2010) and Giles et al. (2016) both discussed the effects of different kinds of art programmes on male prisoners.

There are similarities in the findings of these kinds of studies. Silber (2005) found that the women's choir programme improved the psychological state of women prisoners, including their ability to build positive relationships with other inmates, thereby improving anger management, empathy, trust and self-esteem. Similarly, de Guzman et al. (2010) concluded that the programme they had run in 'Pani making', i.e., palm leaf folding while creating art, promoted inmates' self-esteem and gave them the pride of knowing they had something to teach their grandchildren. Self-esteem is one of the most common outcomes of evaluation studies. Influencing attendance at other classes positively is another common outcome, as Giles et al. (2016) discovered. According

to their findings, 74 per cent of art class attendees also enrolled for Adult Basic Education classes. In the same vein, Tett et al.'s (2012) findings indicate that art sessions integrated with literacy, changed prisoners' negative attitudes towards learning.

Self-esteem and increased eagerness to learn are two outcomes which interest both researchers and policy makers. So instead of asking 'what has changed', researchers ask questions related to self-esteem or eagerness to learn. In another example, Furlong and Yasukawa's study of whole education programmes (2016) found that only three out of five offenders indicated that one of the reasons for attending education classes was to develop their self-esteem. Researchers nevertheless put more emphasis on self-esteem than on other characteristics. It would seem that an assumption is made that lack of self-esteem and lack of motivation to learn are common to all prisoners. When reading this literature, I questioned where this assumption comes from and whether prisoners really share those two characteristics. The problem with these studies is that such assumptions appear to shape their findings. In my research, I wanted to look at women offenders' learning experiences as a whole, rather than focusing on one specific programme or activity. This helped me to avoid deficit assumptions about offenders' motivation and self-esteem. Instead, using the notion of performed identities (Butler, 1988) I wanted to focus on the identities that women offenders performed while on probation and how they presented themselves in different communities. This would generate, I believed, findings about the lives of women offenders that more accurately captured their perspectives and how their perceptions of society's expectations combined with their personal beliefs.

Alongside the impact of educational programmes in prison, policymakers also monitor the number of incarcerated people. Hull et al. (2000), Steuner et al. (2001) and Vacca (2004) state that prison education has a huge positive impact on reducing prison population through reducing recidivism. Although education, age, race, gender and marital status are important factors connected to recidivism, 'more directly, education as a tool for recidivism reduction offers a more viable path through policy changes' (Hall, 2015, p.11) as according to the publications from Ministry of Justice (2008, 2018) education is one of the seven main pathways to reducing recidivism. Esperian's (2010) study presents data collected by different researchers from the United States over a twelve-year period to support the assumption that 'educating

prisoners contributes significantly to reducing recidivism' (p.323). Interviews that Esperian carried out with the US Prison Education Department staff found that this was a commonly held belief, supported by their own anecdotal observations. Before starting my fieldwork, this literature fed my assumptions related to learning during the probation process, which I assumed had a significant role in reducing reoffending while supporting change in offenders' lives.

Given the social and economic aspects of crime, it is not surprising that governments are keen to know the effects of prison education programmes on recidivism (Lichtenberg and Ogle, 2006; Esperian, 2010; Bazos and Hausman, 2004; Schirmer, 2008). Bazos and Hausman (2004) investigated the effect of education in prisons from a different perspective. They measured its effectiveness by examining the cost of education activities in prison against the number of re-offenders. In other words, they researched the cost-effectiveness of education programmes in prison and concluded that 'correctional education is almost twice as cost effective as incarceration' (p.9). Schirmer (2008) examined this impact from a community perspective and offered to provide post-secondary degrees with counselling and assistance to reduce the levels of incarceration. These studies revealed some pertinent questions for me. Can education be used as a tool to reduce incarceration rather than redicivism? Also, the studies on education in prison rarely posed more conceptual questions such as, whether the kind of education provided was transformative or instrumental. There was also no mention of the prisoners as individuals with potential for empowerment and agency. In light of these questions, I aimed to focus on women offenders' learning needs, to discover what would support them as they prepared for life after prison.

Besides research on incarceration and recidivism, other studies have investigated prison education programmes in terms of their effects on future employment. Only 20% of employers in the Los Angeles area (Holzer et al. 2007) were willing to give jobs to ex-offenders, despite the government promoting the recruitment of ex-offenders. Cho and Tyler (2010) explored the impact of the Adult Basic Education programme's effect on the labour market in Florida. They collected data across an 8-year period, including prisoners' prior employment, attendance of courses in prison and employment status post-release. With similar assumptions about the positive effect of prison education on post-release employment, Abrams and Lea (2016) conducted research in two men's prisons in the US. However, rather than examining

the outcomes of prison education, they focused on the individual life skills the prisoners acquired and whether it supported potential employment opportunities.

To summarise, the impact of education in prison is of interest to researchers, governments and policymakers. These studies, wherever they are conducted, are underpinned by two main assumptions: firstly, that prison education will reduce the levels of incarceration and secondly that prisoners will invariably have low self-esteem. These ideas also apply to development of the education and learning programmes that are provided during probation in England . Although I followed this kind of research approach while writing a report (see Appendix 1) for the Community and Rehabilitation Company, my research focus differs in that I did not attempt to evaluate the impact of the Women's Group Sessions.

1.3.2. Offenders' attitudes towards education in prison

Researchers have also looked at offenders' attitudes towards education programmes as their interests play a critical role in both attendance and effectiveness of education programmes (Tett et al., 2012) and are also therefore of concern to policy makers. Rocks (1985) investigated male prisoners' attitudes towards participation in education programmes in Belfast, and Uche and Harries-Jenkins (1994) examined inmates' vocational interests in six different prisons in Nigeria. No significant correlation was found between attendance and attitude to education in Rocks' research and education level, age or previous occupation were found to have no significant impact on prisoners' vocational interests in Harries-Jenkin's study. Based on these studies, it would seem that attitudes and interests may be affected by aspects other than attendance or demographics. Porter (2009) identified school experiences as critical: bad experiences of schooling had a significant impact on attitude towards and attendance of educational provision in prison. In one qualitative study, an offender from HMP Winchester described how his initial school experience affected his life as 'my mind remained closed to learning for the next forty years' (Furlong and Yasukawa, 2016, p.207). This suggests that finding out about school experiences might help to understand attitudes and interests related to education programmes in prisons, a key issue when providers are establishing new programmes.

1.3.3. Literacy studies and ethnographic research in prisons

Literacy is extensively discussed in the prison education research literature. Most of this research is conducted adopting quantitative methodologies, presenting statistics about prisoners' reading and writing skills. From the point of view of policy makers in the prison education department, literacy is mostly described as a skill (an autonomous approach as I will be explaining in Chapter 4) and is mentioned in terms of Adult Basic Education (ABE), which includes reading, writing and numeracy skills. The prison education curriculum seems to be predicated on passing ABE assessments as the pre-condition for attendance of courses in prison, both vocational and artistic, so researchers have focused on these aspects of literacy (Schirmer, 2008; Hobbler, 1999).

Morgan and Kett (2003), Joseph (2012), Shippen et al. (2010) and Shutay et al. (2010) aimed to explore prisoners' literacy levels in Ireland, Nigeria, Alabama and Indiana respectively. Though conducted in different countries, the findings are similar: prisoners were identified as having low literacy levels. Finding a correlation between poor literacy skills and crime activities (Morgan and Kett, 2003) supports the need for literacy programmes as a way of empowering prisoners' lives (Joseph, 2012) and, as cited in Shippen et al. (2010), 'increasing literacy skills has the potential to improve quality of life' (p.10). Studies that emphasize the low literacy levels among prisoners are important in that they identify the power dynamic between education and crime, which supports the idea that formal education programmes prevent crime. On the other hand, low literacy levels as an explanation for why a person becomes a criminal is very problematic. How does education prevent crime? In other words, can education alone prevent criminal activities? The focus on formal education programmes excludes the informal learning and literacy that happens in prisons for the majority of the time. And might a focus on learning and literacy rather than formal education, reveal a different picture? I have raised these questions here as they reflect the development of my thinking in the early stages of my research.

By its nature, ethnographic research does not make such assumptions, rooted as it is in the perspectives of the participants. Wilson (1997) conducted in-depth ethnographic

research on literacy in prisons using a social practice approach by exploring literacy activities beyond the classroom setting. She investigated literacy activities such as letters, poems, graffiti and notes as well as official documents that prisoners were required to complete, often with the help of a mediator. Wilson found that prisoners were using literacy for their own purposes: 'People in prison strive to socialise their personal spaces' (p.162): in other words, literacy helped to make them feel 'at home'.

Like Wilson (1997), I look at literacy as more than certain 'skills'. Adopting an ethnographic approach, underpinned by an understanding of literacy as a social practice (Street 1984), I was interested not only in classroom activities but also in the everyday lives of the offenders. Although I was not able to explore literacy classes in the probation setting, I set out to observe the constructed power relations through literacy practices. These could arise, for example, through having to comprehend written legal documents and to understand and sign a range of official documents. By conducting ethnographic research, I was able to explore the learning and literacy practices of the everyday, so as to create learning journeys into and in probation.

1.3.4. Gender issues in prison education

Gender has only recently become a focus in prison research literature, especially when considering the reality of living in a restricted place as a prisoner. Insights into gender differences, such as the role of the father or mother in the family/community, have contributed to new discussions and an interest in addressing gender issues in prisons.

As cited in Porter (2009), women prisoners pay a double penalty: one for the crime they have committed and one for being incarcerated in a prison environment that has been created in all aspects, including the education programmes, for male prisoners. Porter (2009) also focused on gender discrimination in his research. Corston (2007) has also highlighted the need for different approaches in prisons with regards to gender, arguing that having the same education policy in both women's and men's prison is a 'death by basic skills approach' (p.304). He found that most vocational learning addressed mostly male needs, except for those that were aimed at improving women's domestic skills. The same curriculum is used for both male and female prisoners, without catering for the differences in gender needs and gender roles in society. For instance, although training related to construction can be beneficial for

both females and males, potential job opportunities in construction is highly gender bound as are jobs in the beauty industry. This lack of consideration for gender was apparent during my research: the vocational programme provided for women offenders was not as varied as the vocational programme offered to male offenders.

1.3.5. Defining my research niche

I have stated that most research on prison education focuses on self-esteem, reading and writing levels and the impact of these factors on reoffending rates. My explicit focus on informal learning is underpinned by the belief that offenders have the capacity to change their perspective on life and improve their situation. This belief was my starting point. I decided that the ethnographic approach would enable me to create a more nuanced and contextualised picture of offenders' learning journeys. I have discussed that there is far less research involving women offenders and although the proportion of males in the Criminal Justice System is significantly higher than females, the latest report shows the reoffending rate for women is higher than for men (Allen and Watson, 2017). I therefore decided to conduct this research in a probation setting to explore women offenders' learning experiences, outside the prison setting, but during the probation period.

In terms of theoretical gaps, I draw on literacy as a social practice, theory of learning in communities of practice, identity theory and the lenses from informal learning and gender violence, which I explain in more detail in Chapter 3. While exploring my overarching research question - what are women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in England? - I formulated the following sub questions to guide the research:

1. What are women offenders' experiences of learning?

2. How did women offenders' experiences of learning support or hinder their transition through probation?

3. How are women offenders' identities and relationships shaped by the probation process?

4. What kind of changes could be made to enhance women offenders' learning provision in the probation service?

In order to investigate these research questions, I developed an ethnographic research design which involved seven months field work in one of England's probation companies. I conducted participant observation, interviews and one focus group discussion session with thirteen women offenders, seven responsible officers from the company and two third party agency workers who operated solely as facilitators. At the request of the providers, I also conducted a mini evaluation of the women's group learning session, intended to feed directly into policy and practice and wrote a report for the probation company (see Appendix 1).

1.4. Thesis Outline

In the next chapter, I present the context of my study and the specific field in which I conducted my ethnographic research. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical concepts and debates which shaped the analysis. In Chapter 4, I describe my methodology and the methods I used in the field. I also explore my various roles in the field and address the ethical considerations and protocol. In Chapters 5 to 8, I present my analysis in relation to women offenders' performed identities as well as their relationships during their time on probation. I explored the women offenders' perspectives on change and their learning experiences in different communities, past and present. In Chapter 5, I discuss the different identities that the women offenders performed during my data collection. I present these identities in three distinct categories: survivors, victims, and worriers. Chapter 6 discusses the different relationships that I observed among in the probation setting, focusing on the power relationships among the participants of this research. In Chapter 7, I examine different perspectives of change by investigating how women offenders, facilitators and Responsible Officers working in the community rehabilitation facility talk about change in the context of probation and beyond. I also explore change-related discourse by analysing the group session materials. Chapter 8 deals with the four learning communities that women offenders can be seen as having been part of: their school communities; their home/family communities, street and work communities and finally, the probation community. Drawing on theories and theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter 3, Chapter 9 discusses some of the key themes to emerge from the findings. To conclude, in Chapter 10 I synthesize the data in relation to my research questions. I summarize the findings and discussions of each chapter, presents the contributions my thesis makes

to ethnographic research and knowledge and discusses implications for policy, practice, and further research.

1.5. Summary

In this chapter I introduced the central aim of my research, which is to support women offenders' for their voices to be heard. I explained how my interest in offenders' learning developed and how several key events led me to my overarching question: what are women offenders' perspectives on learning and change? Due to the lack of literature in the probation setting, my starting point was to review prison education history in England and examine the assumptions that have underpinned formal learning in prisons. The literature on offender education shows a clear gap in terms of exploring informal learning experiences. Within this literature, education and primarily literacy, have been underpinned by fixed notions of what literacy is and learning is conceptualised as essentially a set of skills. Through adopting an ethnographic approach, I set out to focus on what learning might look like from the perspective of the women offenders. Using a framework based on literacy as a social practice and a concept of learning that includes informal and incidental learning, I set out to construct a picture of learning and change that was closer to the realities and aspirations of my participants rather than one driven by the more instrumental needs of government.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.0.   Introduction

This chapter has two voices. The first one represents a woman offender who is on probation in England, and the second one is the researcher. The first voice emerged from my understanding of the experiences of women offenders through analysing the ethnographic data that I collected over seven months in one of the Community and Rehabilitation Companies in England. The latter voice speaks to present my/ researcher's perspective when there is a need for a specific background information about the UK Government Probation Service where I conducted my research: the system, process, staff and issues that the woman offender mentioned.

The chapter starts with the woman offender's voice, the description of the company that accommodated my research from the woman offender's perspective, and then moves to the literature about probation system. I believe presenting the context from macro level to micro level enables me to explain my local context within the bigger picture which is the criminal justice system. As the probation service has faced so many changes over the years (being privatised and renationalised), I briefly explain this process with the specific terminology that I think useful for understanding the context. The office space at the Community and Rehabilitation Company is explained from the woman's offender's perspective just before my definitions of the officers that I worked with during my research. The women's group session which was the main field that I collected my data during my research, is the last place that you will read from the woman offender's perspective in this chapter. I explain the objectives of the women's group sessions and give examples from one of the sessions.

One of the responsibilities of the Home Office is "reducing and preventing crime, and ensuring people feel safe in their homes and communities". To achieve this duty, the Home Office targets to "cut crime and the harm it causes…". This target parallels with Sustainable Development Goals 17, that set by the United Nations "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". The Ministry

of Justice has been developing various strategies to improve her strategies related to offenders in England.

The two strategic priorities of the Ministry of Justice are "a prison and probation service that reforms offenders" and "a transformed department that is simpler, smarter and more unified." Different from the Home Office in the UK, the Ministry of Justice perspective is more focused on crime and reducing crime activities. In this chapter, as the focus of my research is on offenders' time on probation, the related documents published by the Ministry of Justice are used to explain my research context.

2.1. My First Steps on Probation

The Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), with whom I conducted my research covers one county, and the company assigned me to one specific office in that county for my research. It was not prohibited to work with other hubs, but my main gatekeeper, the manager, was working at this office. Before talking about the people working at the office or the women offenders, let me picturize the environment in which I was working as if you are a woman offender on probation with this company.

After passing the court, I see the main police station. I might feel a bit anxious as it was not long ago that I was in custody at a police station like this one and a big court, Her Majesty's Court, where the judge decided my charge. I keep walking and I see two entrances in one building, which is not as spectacular as a nearby big, tall council building, but which just sits in the middle of the other buildings around. This unremarkable building also belongs to the council and is for people who need help and support. As I'm an offender I use the right door as it leads to the Community Rehabilitation Company's Office, whereas the left door is for youths and their families. As I walk up to the second floor, where the office is mainly based, I need to pass through the first floor which is for young offenders. This construction and its stairs are like a simulation of my life. I started life as a vulnerable person then became involved in crime in the early years of my life which has now ended in probation.

At the end of the stairs, I face a big door which makes me feel as if I am entering the council office but shortly after passing the door, I realise this office is different. On the other side of that door is the toilet, elevator and security door. To pass this security door, I need to ring the bell. All this security makes me feel uncomfortable because it is as if I am entering another type of police station or court which all have at least

two levels of security that one has to pass to enter. But I continually ask myself why these places always need such big doors, and multi-level securities. Yes, I am an offender, but I am here to serve my sentence and not to make more trouble, but I don't know how the authorities see us. I ring the bell, if there is no reply, I try to see inside from the small screen on the door, but this is difficult because I am not tall and have to stand on tiptoes. If I am lucky, the receptionist will notice me, if not, I keep looking through the small window and wait to be seen by someone who is inside. Today is a lucky day, as the receptionist opens the door, and I am inside. First, I must register. The receptionist writes down my name, my probation officer's name and the time of my arrival. Then I may sit down and wait for my meeting in the waiting area; sometimes I have to move to a separate meeting area. These areas are divided by ply board walls, so it is not easy to be seen while I am inside these meeting areas, but it is easy to be heard. While waiting for my probation officer I often think about how I found myself here, on probation.

I made a mistake that cost more than my daily mistakes, and I went to court, because this mistake is defined as a crime. The judge, at my court hearing, decided that I should serve my sentence outside the prison; that means I am now subject to probation and I am on licence. I was lucky as this was my first conviction and the crime that I committed was classed as low-risk. If the judge had decided on a longer sentence, such as longer than twelve months, I would have had to serve half of my sentence in prison and the other half on probation. So, I am on probation and the court set some targets that I have to do during this probation time. I got both Rehabilitation Activity Requirements (RAR) and voluntary community work. On my court order next to my Rehabilitation Activity Requirements was a number which I knew referred to the number of days I have to do for my Rehabilitation Activity Requirements. So, to complete these days, I have to come to the Community Rehabilitation Company, in this case, this office where I'm now sitting. I also have to come to the Company once a week to see my Responsible Officer.

I remember my first meeting with her. It was set by the court and I was given all the details about the meeting at the court. I was lucky, as my Responsible Officer welcomed me at the door, and I didn't have to pass through all that security thing as I do now every time. We moved to one of the ply board cabins and we discussed which groups I wanted to attend to fulfil my Rehabilitation Activity Requirements days and

what specific voluntary work I should do. My Responsible Officer told me that I could ask her for a one-to-one meeting in any special area that I thought might help me. She also said that she could arrange meetings for me with some specialists if I wished. I asked her what these meetings were for and she said if I felt depressed or had some mental problems that made me feel uncomfortable especially around other people in the groups. Or, if I had some family problems I wanted to talk about in private. She also told me that I could have a one-to-one meeting if I have experienced domestic violence and want to learn my rights in relation to any of these problems. I was happy to know that these meetings were also counted as RAR days.

At this point I shall change hats: to revert to my role as an educator and researcher in order to present the literature in relation to the probation service, including how it has changed in the last decade.

2.2. What is Probation[1]?

My research into the UK probation service revealed the need to understand the probation service from the educators' perspective. Probation is defined as serving the sentence while the person is not in prison. Offenders can be placed on probation in two ways: either they can serve their sentence as a community order and are released with a licence after serving part of their sentence in prison: or the alternative is that they can serve the whole sentence on probation, without any time in prison. The Ministry of Justice also explains that probation is a period when prisoners can do unpaid work, attend and complete education and training courses, get treatment for any addictions and have meetings with their probation officers, known as Responsible Officers. My research investigates a group of women offenders in both types of probation settings as well as providers from the Community Rehabilitation Company; therefore, explaining the probation service is the next essential step.

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[1] The Probation Service in England will be renationalised after June 2021, and this decision was announced in June 2020. The planned changes will be briefly mentioned in the last sub section of this section while the context below represents the probation service in 2018, when the data was collected.

2.2.1 How the probation service developed and changed over the years

Senior (2011) describes the early days of probation service from when it started in 1886, with a form of probation service for young offenders. In 1907, with the Probation of Offenders Act, the earlier form of today's probation service was introduced. "it is expedient to release the offender on probation, the court may, in lieu of imposing a sentence of imprisonment, make an order discharging, the offender conditionally on his entering into a recognizance, with or without sureties, to be of good behaviour and to appear for sentence when called on at any time during such periods, not exceeding three years, as may be specified in the order." (Probation of Offenders Act, 1907, p16-17). The core idea of probation service today in the UK is still based on the Probation of Offenders Act, 1907.

However, some changes have been made since the Act was redrafted, the Probation of Offenders Act 2014, such as the probationary process is to be no longer than two years. Additionally, Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) was first introduced in Probation Offenders Act 2014. The UK Probation Service identifies required activity days to address the rehabilitation of the offender before sentencing. These required activities report as a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement in the court order. After sentencing, the Offender Manager (Responsible Officer) decides the activities in cooperation with the offender with the aim to stop his/her reoffending. The diagram below illustrates the emergence of privatization of the probation service in England from 2014-2020.
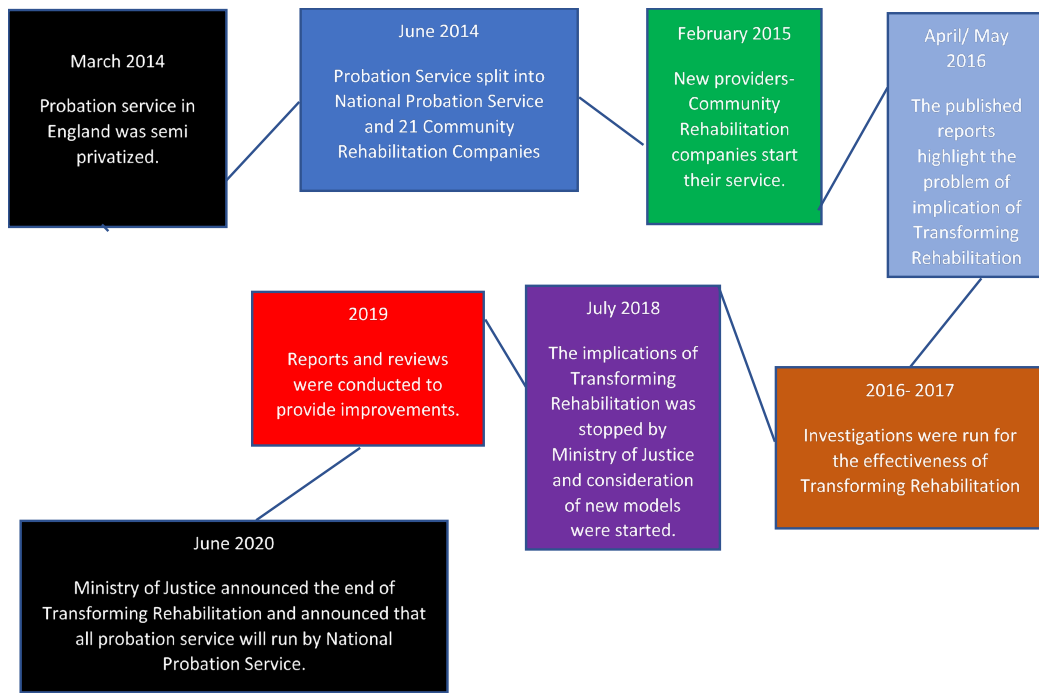
Figure 1. The brief history of privatized probation service in England (Webster, 2020)

Privatization of the probation service in England came to the scene after the Ministry of Justice published the document "Transforming Rehabilitation: A revolution in the way we manage offenders" in 2013 which introduced the government's plan to reduce reoffending. According to the plan, the government aimed to improve the supervision that was provided for offenders in the low-risk categories. It was believed that the privatization of probation would enhance the quality of the support services which it was hoped would result in reduced numbers of reoffenders. In the light of this document, in June 2014 the probation service in England was semi-privatized to handle all categories of offenders except the high-risk offenders which remained in the hands of the National Probation Service. The probation service split into 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies and National Probation Service and, following this in February 2015, the private Community Rehabilitation Companies started their services. The assessment of privatization of the probation was presented as reports in the following year and these reports led to evaluations of the implications of Transforming Rehabilitation until July 2018. The Transforming Rehabilitation was not as successful as expected, the Ministry of Justice offered funding to the companies to improve the delivery model. Although in 2019 the reports and the reviews presented

an improved service of the Community Rehabilitation Companies, in June 2020 it was announced that the probation service in England would be renationalized, in other words, to be run by the National Probation Service only. The Community Rehabilitation Company that accommodated my research started their work after the privatization. However, they recruited Responsible Officers who had experience in working with National Offender Management Service, as well as recruiting the new staff.

2.2.2 Understanding of the probation process

My understanding of the probation process is based on shadowing probation officers (responsible officers), employed by the private Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) that hosted my research, for one month. The following is drawn from my notes of that time. The process of probation begins at the court by setting up the local probation services to work with the offender through a specific computer programme, which CRC called Delius. This is a National Probation Case Management System which is an open source and helps the system to manage the offenders' rehabilitation efficiently. The assigned responsible officer finds the cases in their CRC Delius [2]homepage. These cases are constantly being sent from the CRC hub to the relevant responsible officers' accounts on the National Delius application [designed and used for managing national probation service cases]. The responsible officers are responsible for carefully reading the case documents, court reports, the action plan for the offender and other pertinent documents as well as writing up their notes after every meeting with the offenders. Especially after the first initial meeting, the responsible officers need to write up a plan for their offenders and do regular follow-ups on these plans as to how and whether the offenders keep on track. During this first session, the responsible officers define the needs of the offenders regarding housing, livelihoods, education or family by asking them to fill in a questionnaire, developed by the private CRC, while considering the expectations of the National Offender Management Service.

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[2]CRC Delius is "an intuitive interface allows the Community Rehabilitation Company to manage caseload, allocation, scheduling, monitoring and reporting" (Gov.uk, 2020).

The offenders' court reports set specific tasks such as unpaid work or attending core skills training courses as a Rehabilitation Activity Requirement. For these requirements, different sections of the company are assigned to support the offenders. To find unpaid work, the offenders would work with Intervention Officers, to get advice for applying for jobs or writing their CVs, or to accomplish the core skills training. Before offenders can attend sessions related to their skills, their responsible officers must first make a recommendation to the programme facilitator.

The offender must attend the required training and meetings with their responsible officers; the frequency of which would vary. During the first three months of probation, the offender is obliged to attend the meetings once a week, after which the responsible officer would decide the required frequency; potentially to once a fortnight or less. For instance, most of the women participants of this research attended these meetings once a fortnight.

2.3. Licence, a new term for me

The term licence for different areas of life in the UK was a surprise for me as a Turkish researcher, who was used to hearing the term in relation to driving! When an offender is released from prison without completing their full sentences, they will be on licence. This licence period is the same period as the probation. The length of the offender's licence period depends on the length of the sentence when they were convicted, and any extension licence period given by the court.

National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) describes the standard licence conditions as follows. The offenders are expected to display good behaviour and not reoffend again. The offenders should give permission to their Responsible Officers for home visit and attend all appointments with these Officers. The offenders should live at the address that is approved by their Responsible Officers and if at any time the offenders wish to stay elsewhere, this stay should only be done after their permission has been sought. Furthermore, the offenders are not allowed to travel outside the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man without this same permission (2016). The licence also allows offenders to undertake paid or voluntary employment with their Officers' approval.

Additionally, the offenders could be subject to other requirements, which would have been explained during the initial meeting with their Responsible Officers. These additional requirements include: 'Attending appointments with health workers, reporting to a police station to give details of any car the offenders use, staying at home between certain hours (also known as a curfew), informing their responsible officers if they start a new relationship, attending polygraph test sessions, taking part in a sex-offender programme, not to be in contact with ex-offenders, not to enter a certain place, restrictions on activities the offenders can do, restrictions on using the internet, restrictions on using mobile phones and cameras' (NACRO, 2016).

If the offenders breach their licence conditions, the court will recall the prisoners to serve all or the remainder of their sentences in prison. The period of this imprisonment depends on the type of recall, whether it is a fixed-term recall, standard term recall or emergency recall. These types of recall are set by the Responsible Officers. However, my field notes show that when an offender breaches one of the licence conditions, they are not always recalled by the court because I observed that some Responsible Officers waited two to three weeks for the offenders to appear for their appointments without taking any action including informing the court about the 'no-shows'.

2.4. Engaging with 'Others' on Probation

Changing hats again: I am going to ask you to once more to play the role of a woman offender before you experience one of the women offenders' group sessions within the office environment in which these sessions were held.

Okay, where were we last, yeah I was waiting at the reception area. I have my court order, have had my first meeting with my Responsible Officer and how I have agreed to do my Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) days, so I'm ready to attend the women's group sessions and all of the other meetings that I have agreed with my Responsible Officer, including the regular meetings.

I'm waiting for one of the women's group sessions. I want to tell you a little about the office where I go for these sessions and my meetings. As I walk through the reception, on my right is the kitchen, where we can all go, and the meeting rooms and at the end of the corridor are the toilets for both men and women. On the left, is another meeting

room and security door. This door opens to the office, where I can find Responsible Officers, managers, coordinators from outside the Company, office materials and printers. The office is an open area and I can see that the staff sit together in different groups; I can see the managers and other top people sit on the left, while the outside officers sit in the middle and, on my right it looks like the Responsible Officers are sitting in groups with their friends. As this is an open space area I can hear when the Responsible Officers are laughing. I don't go into the office very often, only when I need to see my responsible officer and I have to have a good reason to be invited in. Whenever I go in, I feel invisible until I see a familiar face that smiles at me. There is a big paper hanging on the wall that says "We're not here to judge" which makes me feel uncomfortable because it has the word 'judge' which I don't want to think about anymore. If I think about what I hang on my walls, it's a picture to remind me of happy days, or my dreams, pictures of my kids, or post-it notes on my fridge to remind me of food I need to buy. I hang things on my walls to remember so do these officers need to remember not to judge us, as it is written in bold letters? I think they are judging us unconsciously, which is why I feel uncomfortable going to that room.

I shall change hats for a short time: to revert to my role as a researcher in order to present the Officers who were involved in my research.

2.5. The Officers

Although staff are appointed to various roles in England probation service settings, I explored/ observed three specific roles while conducting my research. These Officers' duties are outlined below from my field notes:

Intervention Officers: These Probation officers were appointed to intervene in offenders' education and employment status by considering relevant training opportunities for the offenders. It was up to them to decide the level of intervention that was needed for each offender and what kind of support was needed in terms of education. Their decisions were based on their observations and conversations with the specific offender. Based on my observation, the most crucial duty of these officers was providing support for offenders' disclosure rights, beside finding job opportunities. They were also running CV workshops to support offenders to reintegrate into society. Similar to other probation officers, these officers were entitled

to write feedback for Rehabilitation Activity Requirement about the education/vocational programme that the offenders had taken.

These observations of this job description disturbed me in two ways: namely, the use of the terms 'intervention' and 'reintegration'. The former appeared to signify an aggressive approach to the offenders' lives which enhances the officers' already powerful position and may seriously reduce the offenders' self-esteem and confidence to take decisions about their own lives. Furthermore, if such decisions have to be made, then they should be made via consultations with each offender by several different qualified parties. The latter term, reintegration signifies the stereotypical discrimination that exists between offenders and society. In other words, the establishment decrees that by committing a crime the offender is expelled from society and only after serving the sentence they allowed once more to become a member of society. Again, the decision-making power lies in the hands of the authorities, and not the individual offender.

Programme Facilitators (tutors): I met two types of Programme Facilitators during my fieldwork. The first, I only interviewed where they explained that they were appointed by the Community Rehabilitation Company and were responsible for providing core skills' training courses. These were written by the National Offender Management Service and indicated all the steps that the facilitator had to follow in delivering the courses. These training courses included anger management, building better relationships, thinking skills, drinking-impaired drivers and building skills recovery. However, although the National Offender Management Service presented detailed instructions, if programme facilitators had questions about the course structures, they indicated that the manager of the company was responsible for solving these. They told me that they had to write up their notes after every group session and write post-programme reviews for the court system.

The second group of programme facilitators, whom I not only interviewed, but also observed were simply called Facilitators, and they were assigned by the third-party agencies. These agencies were hired by the Community Rehabilitation Companies to run the courses that their Programme Facilitators could not provide. Similar to programme facilitators, this second group were also responsible for running the courses and following the course guidelines, but, different from the programme

facilitators, the course handbooks that they were using had been designed by the third-party agencies. It was not clear how the facilitators solved their problems about running these courses. Although the third-party agencies' facilitators were not only responsible for writing up their notes after every group session but also recording the register of the day, it was not their responsibility to write a post-programme review for the court system.

From my closer interaction with this group, I noted that the provision of courses in this predetermined handbook were far too generic and tended to be divorced from the offenders' immediate basic needs. For instance, instead of running sessions on avoiding sexually transmitted diseases which they already knew, they wanted information about the process of applying for council housing.

Responsible Officers: These probation officers are responsible for supervision of offenders beside recording the offenders' process in terms of fulfilling their Rehabilitation Activity Requirements and attendance. These officers have access to the National Delius System and are entitled to fill the forms that are related to offenders' court orders. Responsible Officers are supervising offenders for several issues, such as mental support, counselling, personal skills programmes, social care services, health and safety programmes, drug rehabilitation programmes, unpaid work replacement, budget plans and warranted benefit and debt groups.

This group was the second challenging group that I observed after women offenders. Understandably, there was not a standard procedure related to Responsible Officers' attitudes, except not being judgemental toward offenders. I noted that this variation enabled offenders to have different feelings to their Responsible Officers. Once the offenders came together, they always asked who their Responsible Officer was, and if the offender gave a popular Responsible Officer's name, the other offenders would instantly start to tell her how lucky she was. On the contrary, if the offender gave a non-popular Responsible Officer's name, the offenders would give her with pity eyes. This difference among Responsible Officers was quite visible not only in my observations but also among Responsible Officers. Once, I asked the reason for different attitudes to one of the popular Responsible Officers, and she highlighted the capability of making empathy which I will cover in my findings chapter.

2.6. Welcome to the Women's Group Session

I decided to attend Women's group sessions, of course after my Responsible Officer suggested. I came to the Community Rehabilitation Company this morning to attend this group session. Today's my fourth or fifth time- I need to check with my Responsible Officer- at the class. Belinda- who is the teacher- came to the reception area to tell me that I am okay to go in. I follow her to the classroom. This is a big room at the end of the corridor, closest room to the toilets. The room is full of sunshine, I hardly see the inside when I first enter the room, then my eyes get used to the light and there is a big table surrounded by chairs. I sat on the chair close to Belinda. There is an unwritten rule among us, women offenders. We always sit on the same chairs every week, and if there is a newcomer, her seat is always the one on the other end of the table, in front of Belinda. I think we are five or six, if there is not any newcomer.

The big table is made up of two rectangular tables. Once I arrived earlier than others and Belinda let me in before the class time. I saw she was redesigning the room by putting the tables together and surrounding the table with chairs. There is a small board as well next to the table, facing the chairs, lots of papers hanging on it, but I rarely saw Belinda use it. Belinda asked me if I want a cuppa. I follow her to the kitchen and make coffee together while talking about my week. There is still time before the class, so I asked Belinda to have a smoke before we start. Good that she came with me. The smoking area is a long narrow pathway between the Company and the police station. It is not easy to see around while I am here, I have to raise my head to see the sky, the walls are too high. While we were talking about council houses the other women offenders appeared and joined us.

Today's session is about Mental Health and Stigma. Belinda is explaining what mental health is, but most of us were already diagnosed with one or two. Every week I find myself discussing one of our problems. Sometimes we ask Belinda's opinion, she is trying to help us. Sometimes she takes notes to ask Responsible Officers, and sometimes she stays with us after the class to find a solution. I enjoy being here, while sharing our worries, even our convictions. The other unwritten rule of this class is no matter what we never ask about our conviction. But if any of us want to share it we listen silently, without asking anything further. If you ask me what I learn from the

women's group, I can tell that I learn that I am not alone anymore. I know that there are others who have similar troubles like mine, and others who understand me, listen to me without judging.

I shall ask you to change hats last time: to revert to my role as a researcher.

2.6.1. Women's Group Sessions - looking at the learning dimensions

The curriculum for the women's group session was already designed by a third-party agency. According to their curriculum these were the topics that planned to be covered during these sessions and some examples from their facilitator leaflets.

Session 1- Skills for Better Relationships; There were three objectives of this session, understanding the difference between I and You statements while acknowledging the different communication styles and exploring common communication roadblocks.

Session 2- Managing Anger in Relationships; The three objectives of this session were: identify problems caused by unhealthy expressions of anger, understand differences between healthy and unhealthy anger expressions and explore personal strengths in anger management.

Session 3- Focus on Self-Esteem; There were three objectives that this session was designed to achieve: defining self-esteem and being able to discuss the value of self-esteem, reflecting on self-esteem and personal strengths and goals after completing the inventory that provided for offenders and having a better understanding of behaviour patterns that can develop low self-esteem.

Session 4- Managing Your Emotions; The two objectives for this session were: exploring how thoughts affect our feelings and behaviours and considering challenging the harmful behavioural patterns while considering a strategy to cope with negative thinking.

Session 5- Mental Health Session; There were more complex objectives for this session than the others. This session aimed to increase women's understanding of mental health, to increase awareness of stigma messages and to encourage personal wellbeing activities. This session also aimed to encourage women to define mental health by themselves and identify an action to protect their mental health.

Session 6- Sexual Health and Physical Wellbeing; This session was designed to increase awareness of sexual health and encourage women offenders to do healthy changes in their lives.

Session 7- Domestic Violence; This session was not designed with objectives. The main purpose of the session was to increase the awareness of domestic violence and encourage women to talk about their experiences.

Session 8- Women's Rights; This session was designed to increase the knowledge about women's rights.

These sessions' documents were designed in an interactive way that encouraged women offenders' participation. On the other hand, the sessions were not long enough to cover all the subsections (The expected time for each session was two hours, including break). For instance, during my fieldwork I had to run a few sessions as a substitute facilitator as there was a lack of facilitators and instead of postponing the sessions, the third-party agency asked me to run the sessions. One of the sessions that I run was on Mental Health and Stigma which I describe in the next chapter. Even though the instructions for the facilitators were introduced step by step in the handbook, there were still confusions during the facilitation. The materials of each sessions were various, but the allocated time for each session was not enough to cover all the materials. On the other hand, there were no specific teaching approaches that the facilitators were encouraged to use, instead they were trying to follow the steps in the session handbook.

Conducting these sessions as a facilitator made me realise that I was not wrong in analysing the programmes as one-size-fits-all while reviewing the literature on offenders and recognising the limitations in approaches to learning, as I presented in the earlier chapter.

2.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to describe the context of being on probation in England from two perspectives. The women offender's perspective on probation has not finished yet, as I am going to focus more deeply on all the women offenders who participated in this research in subsequent chapters, starting from Chapter 5.

I explained the brief information about probation in England and how the privatization of the system evolved over the years and ended renationalization. The women's group sessions that run in the Community Rehabilitation Company were my base while collecting data. In the light of this, I explained the women's group session from the women offender's perspective and gave the detailed example about one session and supported by pictures, specifically to underline the particular aspects regarding facilitating the session.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the theories and frameworks that I used in this thesis and how they shaped the investigation, data collection, analysis and writing up of the research.

CHAPTER 3

Researching the women offenders' informal learning experiences: theories and lenses

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presents the context of my research while in this chapter I aim to discuss the concepts and perspectives that guided me while I was developing this study. I decided to look at the literature on informal learning because not only my overarching research question (what are women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in the UK?), but also the base of my sub questions, for instance exploring women offenders' learning experiences, were related to learning, specifically informal learning. The women offenders' learning experiences were not limited to the probation setting, so to investigate their different learning experiences, I was keen to talk to them about the communities that they were members of, which allowed me to analyse whether those experiences support or hinder their lives. Identity was another concept that I analysed with the relationships on the probation process. These perspectives support me to find out women offenders' and providers' point of view on learning, which I interrogated through the lenses of gender violence and education. In this chapter, firstly I aim to present the interaction between these concepts in my study before moving to discuss some limitations that I encountered.

3.2. What is learning?

This study, in part, aims to explore women offenders' learning experiences and how those experiences support/hinder the transition through their learning. To achieve this aim, I will first briefly review different conceptualisations of learning, before moving to the next section, where I present informal learning in particular from my observations and interviews based on women offenders' informal learning activities. I aim to analyse in detail definitions of informal learning to explain the concepts that inform my research and later analyses of data.

3.2.1. What is learning in my study?

I found the concepts of informal, nonformal and formal learning a useful starting point to explore the women's experiences both within the formal programme and their everyday lives.

Learning is a lifelong process which starts from birth and ends when we die. While Ozkalp (2003) indicates the only condition for learning is that it should be observable as he states, "acquired behaviours and skills in learners' behaviours must be observed" (p.3). In contrast, Howe (1977) maintains that observation does not play a vital role in learning; individuals do not need to perform their new knowledge to an audience. Howe has suggested that "Trying to acquire proof of learning in the absence of behavioural evidence is rather like attempting to assess the quality of a gramophone record without listening to it" (ibid, p. xiv). Although Howe (1977) Ozkalp (2003) defines learning in its different aspects such as observation and performing., this study acknowledges learning from broader perspective, similar to howe (1977)'s.

Learning has thus been described (Gates, 1968; Erturk, 1972; Lefroncois, 2000) as changed behaviours based on experiences. Rogers (2014) emphasizes the process of learning as a continuum when he identifies learning as "a set of ongoing processes which bring about changed practices in the lives of individuals" (p.27). He highlights the way this change is involved in relation to three forms of learning; that is formal, informal and non-formal, which he posits bring about "changes in all four domains, knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, if it is to be effective in changing behaviour." (p.28). The literature on policy discourses tends to categorize learning into these three discrete forms: formal, non-formal and informal with a clear distinction among them; for example, the OECD (1996), distinguishes formal and informal learning in relation to the individual's intention. Formal learning, it claims, is always "organised and structured, and has learning objectives" in contrast to informal learning which is "never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint" (ibid). The OECD does not set parameters for a definition of non-formal learning but indicates that it is "midway" between formal and informal learning. This acknowledges that learning can be seen as a set of skills, whereby no two forms can be observed at the same time. As the OECD sees learning as linear, the term "midway" relates to the point where formal learning finishes, before informal learning starts. To conclude, specific ideas

from authors above, fed into this study while informing my understanding of learning in this study. With this concern my understanding of women offenders' learning was based on their statements, and how those learning changed their perception of lives and their lifestyles and even their life choices.

3.2.2. What is Informal Learning?

In this section, I focus on informal learning because informal learning is central to my research problem, exploring women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in the UK. In 2009, UNESCO defined informal learning as the learning which "results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but, in most cases, it is unintentional" (UNESCO 2009a, p.27). UNESCO updated the above definition in 2011 stating that informal learning is "intentional or deliberate ... not institutionalized … less organized and structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, in the workplace, in the local community, and in daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis" (UNESCO, 2011). UNESCO's definitions of 'informal learning' have changed from 2009 to 2011. Although in 2009 UNESCO defined informal learning as either intentional or unintentional and unstructured, in 2011 this definition changed to state that informal learning is now only unintentional and less structured than the other two forms of learning. In the latter definition UNESCO acknowledged the learning environments that can stimulate informal learning, including for the first-time communities. However, it still does not explicitly identify the informal learning that occurs in institutional environments such as prisons and the probationary service, the possible sites of learning in my study.

In contrast to the OECD's point of view, Rogers' (2014) perspective on learning blends the three forms of learning into a continuum which emphasises that learning occurs through humans living their lives. He neither limits this form of learning to specific learning environments such as classrooms, workplaces, and training centres nor addresses learning as discrete categories of formal, informal and nonformal. He emphases that the flexibility of learning appears any time, moving from formal to informal learning. He rather believes that informal learning happens all the time, sometimes in an embedded form during formal learning activities as well as during

daily life. Drawing on Colley et al (2003) "it is not possible to separate out informal, non-formal learning from formal learning settings" (p.iii). Rogers (2014) indicated that any such separation could lead to learners' misconceptions about how and when they learn and where that learning can take place. For example, from my interviews the women offenders only considered they were learning when they were in an educational setting with formal learning activities. In my research I was particularly interested to find out how the women participants talked about learning and whether this was only about formal educational settings.

3.2.2.1 Types of Informal Learning

Informal learning in the past was seen as any learning that was not formal, whereas today this form of learning, which is the prime focus of this study, has been broken down into different types. For example, Rogers (2014) indicates three types of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental (task conscious) learning and unintentional learning. While he illustrates the continuum of learning, he separates the learning continuum into four dimensions as can be seen in figure 7 below.
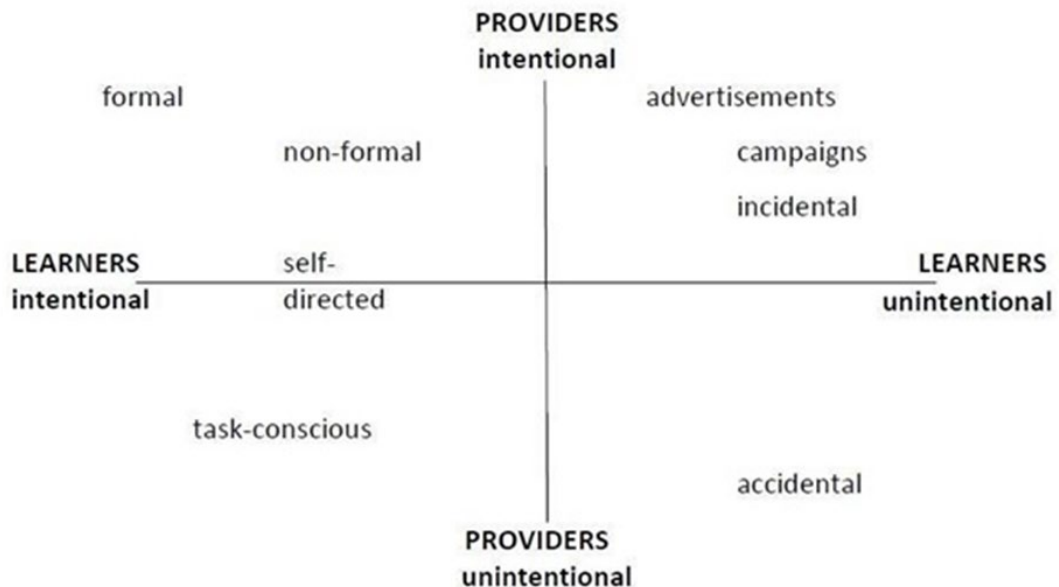
Figure 2- Rogers' (2014, p.9) Matrix of intentionality

He states that in self-directed learning, individuals "adopt the identity of a 'learner' who deliberately "plan and control the learning activities", and achievement is assessed in terms of how much they have learned. Rogers maintains this is "(largely) conscious learning" (p.17). In other words, individuals aim to learn, organise the process of their learning and assess their own progress. Thus, in self-directed learning, the process of learning focuses on individual learners in the broader concept of 'Learner Agency'.

Livingstone (2001) explains self-directed learning by indicating the individual's intention to learn and explaining the concept's links with the environment. According to Livingstone, the learning does not happen simply as an act of intention; there should be some interaction with environmental factors to stimulate the learning, which includes "collective learning" (p.3) and "tacit learning by doing" (p.3). Brookfield (2009) also puts importance on collective learning by stating "learners can work in self-directed ways while engaging in group learning settings" (p.2615). In my research there are several environments where the participants engaged in self-directed learning, such as during the women's group sessions. Although women's group sessions are designed by third party agencies after looking at the women offenders' current needs in terms of their changed circumstances, the women offenders also set their own learning targets. For instance, the curriculum of the women's group session is not designed to introduce employers' rights in the UK, but there is a possibility that this issue may arise during the class, and the facilitator may not answer the questions about women offenders' employment rights. Whereas the women offenders learnt through the interaction with other participants of the session, as learning about employers' rights would support them while tackling their problems.

Although Livingstone (2001) and Rogers (2014) tend to define self-directed learning by focusing on the full responsibility of the learner during the process, they do not mention the reason for the learner's intention. Most definitions (Merriam, 2001; Livingstone, 2001; Rogers, 2014) highlight how individuals set targets for themselves, but do not discuss why they feel there is a need to learn to achieve these targets. This question leads me to discuss Rogers' (2014) second category of informal learning: incidental (task-conscious) learning. He states that this type of learning happens when

individuals are involved in "some purposeful activity" (p.8). In this type of learning, Rogers states that while the prime focus of the learner is on the task, learning takes place incidentally. He underlines the difference between self-directed and incidental learning by pointing out the different purposes of the assessment process at the end of each type of learning. While in self-directed learning, individuals assess the learning itself, in incidental learning, the focus of assessment is on the learners' ability to complete the task through which the learning takes place. He summarizes this by stating that achievement is not assessed in relation to how much the individual has learned but in terms of the individual's mastery of the task. However, in so doing, he suggests that individuals "have learned a lot in the process" (Rogers, 2014, p.18).

Other definitions of incidental learning in the literature are similar to Rogers but differ in certain respects. For instance, Jarvis' (2004) analysis of incidental learning focuses on the learning provider, whether that is the learner or the planner of the activity when there is no stated intention of learning. Eraut (1999) stresses the incidental manner of most informal learning activities that result in the "accomplishment of new knowledge" and which is only visible after accomplishment of the task (see Livingstone,2001, p.25). However, all the researchers above highlight a difference between incidental learning and self-directed learning with the assessment process whereby the former assesses task accomplishment while the latter assesses the learning. Although a continuum of learning can be seen from these definitions, the focus can vary. For example, self-directed learning may happen during the incidental learning, as in some circumstances the task can only be accomplished after new learning has been acquired and during the assessment process the learner may assess not only the learning but also the task accomplishment.

When learning becomes less formal, there is a high chance it happens in an unplanned and unintentional way (Dodge, 1998). This "unplanned and almost always unconscious" (Hager and Halliday 2009 p 172) learning occurs without the individual "ever being conscious of it" (Rogers, 2014, p.18). In figure 7 this is shown as unintentional learning: Rogers' third type of informal learning. As stated above, if learning is seen as a continuum which happens in daily lives, most of this learning therefore appears as unintentional learning; that is, unconsciously. This learning often occurs to answer personal needs, to survive in new communities or to feed people's curiosity. Hence, when learning is not a targeted outcome, it can result from activities,

including experiences and observations which is often visible in communities. I thought that looking at learning as a continuum in my study could enable me to identify when/how the women were learning intentionally or unintentionally and how learning became formalised through participation in the programme.

Informal learning is one of the main prime foci of my research. While Rogers' (2014) research was my main starting point to explore definitions and types of informal learning, I have shown in this account how his research builds on and is enriched by ideas from earlier researchers and the resulting discussions. Therefore, adopting Roger's lens on informal learning enabled me to analyse the different kinds of learning that women offenders engaged in. In my research, I do not set out to evaluate women offenders' formal learning outcomes, because I am interested in how the overall programme in the probation process influences women offenders' informal learning experiences. In presenting the distinction between different kinds of informal learning, such as self-directed and incidental learning, it is particularly crucial that I show the continuity of learning by exploring the learning that happens in women offenders' everyday lives. In relation to incidental learning definitions, it would not be possible to identify what kinds of learning had occurred until they had completed their probation as conducting this research from the start and end date of women offenders would not be feasible.

3.3. Theory of Communities of Practice as a Social Theory of Learning

I decided to take Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice from his social theory of learning as a key lens within my research study because it brings together my focus on learning, especially informal learning, identity and communities. Wenger (1998) proposed a social theory of learning which, although not aimed at replacing other social learning theories, had its own emphasis which is "what matters about learning and as to the nature of knowledge" (p.4). His theory, with its four components, is presented below (Figure 8).
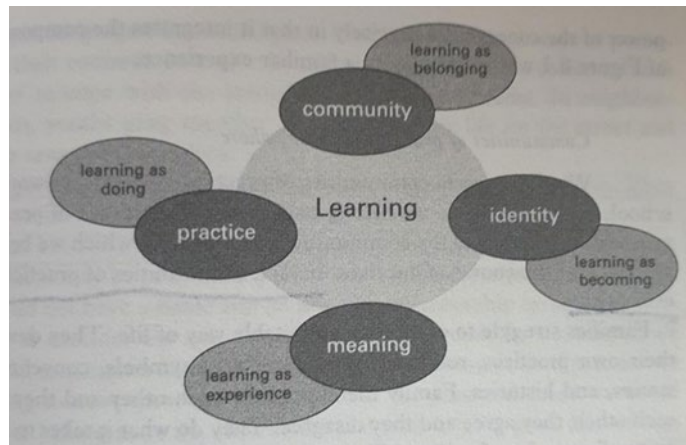
Figure 3. "Components of a social theory of learning" (Wenger, 2019, p.5)

Wenger claims (1998) that although learning is shown as central, the components interact with each other, and any of the other components can move to the central position. In other words, if the focus is on identity, identity moves into the centre and Wenger's theory still retains its efficacy. Although these four components work as separate concepts, his theory shows the four working together. Wenger (1998) defines his four components as follows: 'Practice' asks the question what individuals learn through doing, while the component 'meaning' asks what individuals learn from their experiences. The component 'community', he argues, is what individuals learn from belonging; whereas the component 'identity' questions what individuals learn as they are becoming. The latter he defines as people develop their personal histories within communities.

I take Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning in terms of how it relates to my research questions mainly in relation to the community and practice components. This is because they became the focus while I was analysing my data concerning the different communities the women offenders belonged to, in the past, and who were members of during my study. In this way I set out to explore the type of learning that the women offenders experienced in these different communities and how these experiences supported/hindered their lives. This led me to understand that, despite some formal learning via the compulsory programmes the women offenders had to attend, the major form of learning from/ within communities of practice was informal.

Wenger (1998) chooses apprenticeship to explain his theory of communities of practice, which concerns the relationship between master and student; the latter representing the apprentice while also underlying the importance of the relationship between student and student. He maintains that much learning does not take place in the direct relationship between master and student, but, instead, the apprentice finds another apprentice with whom to engage and learn. The apprentice may veer away from seeing the master as a source of knowledge because the master tends to be seen as an imposing figure in the community. Wenger (1998) calls this way of learning among apprentices as a community of practice. He states that "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p.1). His definition of the theory of communities of practice shows the importance of peer learning, which appears in intentional informal learning settings.

To distinguish his term communities of practice from other communities, such as neighbourhoods, he identifies three characteristics (Figure 9). The first characteristic is domain, which "has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest" (Wenger, Wenger-Trayner, 2013 p.2). Community is the second, where the "members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information" (ibid). This characteristic also identifies the mutual learning of community members, and the importance of feeling oneself to be a member of a community. The last characteristic is practice which he defines as learning to do something in a better way over a long period of time through interaction with community members, involving resources.
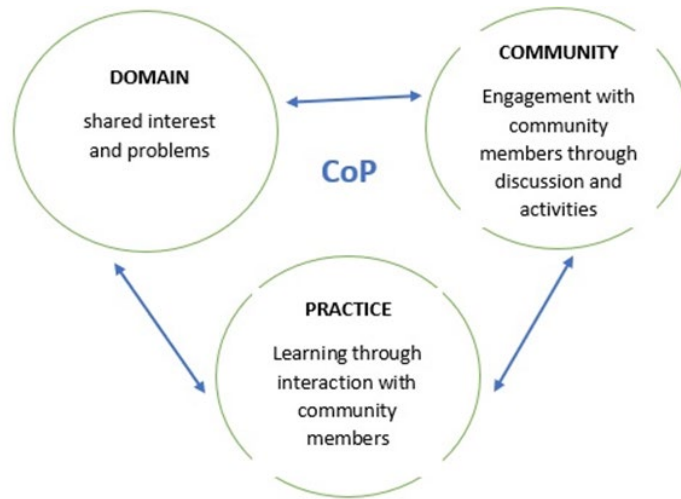
Figure 4. Characteristics of the Theory of Communities of Practice (CoP)

He emphases that "the primary focus of communities of practice theory is on "learning as social participation" (Wenger, 1998, p.4). He defines social participation in two ways. Firstly, it involves not only participating in an activity but becoming an active member of the community. In communities of practice, all members are supposed to engage in a variety of ways including developing resources, experiences, tools and sharing stories. His second definition of social participation is that it "involves both participation and non-participation" (ibid, p.164) and individuals' "identities are shaped by combinations of the two" (ibid). He explains non-participation as a newcomer entering a community of practice whereby their non-participation might be an opportunity for learning. For instance, in my research, I was interested to look at …when women started to live on street, they spent certain period of time while observing their new community, and learning from their observations while making links with their needs at that time. Wenger (ibid) claims that learning is embedded in practice, because as individuals become involved in many activities, they learn by engaging with others in different communities. Thus, individuals can be members of different communities with different aims, and in some of the communities of practice, individuals are "core members", while in others they might be temporary members.

Wenger (1998) situates learning in the centre of his theory of communities of practice as he sees "learning as an experience of being alive" (ibid, 2013). He defines learning as an experience of meaning, and the ability to interpret the world in a new way. Several social researchers (Davies, 2008; Abadzi, 2010) draw on Wenger's (1998)

perspective of learning, including Rogers' (2014) with his theory of continuity of learning.

The social aspects of learning that Wenger (1998) contributes through his lens enriches my perspective on learning when I combine this with Rogers' lens on informal learning, which enables me to analyse women offenders' learning experiences in a community. Applying this communities of practice lens to my study enabled me to explore the different communities of which the women offenders were members, and the circumstances in which I can identify a community as a community of practice. This identification helps me to extend Rogers' (2014) concept of learning as a continuum, as the women offenders' learning was not only limited to classroom settings, but also included streets where specific informal learning took place, as Wenger's (1998) notion of domain in Community of Practices support that learning happens within the communities. This extended perspective enables me to find out women's learning experiences and to explore the social networks and power within different communities.

3.4. Theorising Identity

The identification of different communities that women offenders were members of encouraged me to explore their different, shifting and multiple identities. One part of this study aims to explore how women offenders' identities, relationships and social networks were shaped by the probation service. To analyse this research question, I shall introduce how identities were theorised in the literature and which lens I take while analysing and discussing my data.

Social identity theory has been guiding social science researchers over the decades. Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as 'the individual's knowledge that he (sic) belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership' (p.31). His description was grounded within a group, which is constituted of two or more individuals who distinguish themselves from the others that belong to different social categories (Turner, 1982). The social identity theory, that was developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), underlines the importance of groups, as the identity appears and exists within groups while states that depending on being members of different groups which might be in different social contexts, multiple identities can appear in people. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979),

perceiving oneself as a member of one group creates "us" and "them", which results in three steps: social categorisation, social identification and social comparison. Firstly, with assuming that a person acknowledges the categories that she belongs to, she categorises people. In this research, the women offenders' categorisation was already existed by looking at the court orders. Abrams and Hogg (1990) state that "Social categories' refers to the division of people on the basis of nationality (British/French), race (Arab/Jew), class (worker/ capitalist), occupation (doctor/welder), sex (man/woman), religion (Muslim/ Hindu), and so…" (p.13), in this research the social categorisation would identify as criminals. During this step, the person decides whether she has commonalities with these people and perceive herself as she belongs to that social category, that does not appear in isolation and only appear with contradiction with other categories (ibid). Social identification follows social categories when the person adopts being a member of a group and starts to act as a group member. The last step is social comparison, that happens after the person identifies herself as a member of the group and acts in a harmony with other group members. Comparing the group that she is in with the other groups which may results in discrimination and prejudgement in societies. Being outside the women's group session regular attendants automatically defined a person as them, especially the ones working for the Community and Rehabilitation company. The discussion of being a group member and how this situation shapes the identities, social identity theory enables me to explore women offenders' different identities within different group settings. Women offenders tend to present different identities when they came across with a member of other group (in this case "them", represents the stuff or the facilitator). This identity performance was similar to all women's group session attendants, not disclosing the negative incidents, avoiding mentioning their problems related to family, addiction and living conditions.

Different than Tajfel and Turner, Goffman (1959) conceptualised his identity theory based on dramaturgical account of human interaction how he argued as humans display a series of masks to others in acting roles with controlling of how they appear and act and considering to be perceived as their best selves. From his point of view, he did not distinguish the individual from the group as the interaction, what he calls audience, is still a crucial aspect of his theory. Still, he took the individual as a central point not being a group member. His theory shares similarities with social identity

theory such as the existence of different identities in different social contexts. Because I set out to observe the women offenders' in only one setting (during the probation), I decided to take Goffman's lens while identifying different identities and exploring the different 'audiences' that women offenders were performing for. Although the women offenders mentioned about many different settings such as home or early life, I believe observing these identities would be more valuable than hearing about that. Having this aim, I decided to analyse women offenders' performed identities in the probation setting. The integration of social identity theory and Goffman's identity theory enables me to explore women offenders' multiple and changing identities, as while with having social identity theory the individual performs within the group setting, in Goffman's theory, there is no need to be a member of group to perform as long as there is audience. As Goffman puts the importance of individuality up front by theorising the identity based on individual's perceptions Goffman's theory guided me while exploring the different identities that performed by women offenders for similar audiences, for different reasons.

Goffman (1959) unfolded his theory with an analogy of a theatre stage with a holistic approach. He argues that "social life is a performance carried out by teams of participants in three places: front stage, backstage, and off stage" (Cole 2020, para 2). He also mentions the importance of the setting and the audiences. From his perspective, the front stage, where the individuals perform with concerning their perceptions about the situations/ settings that they considered while they were at the backstage, is where the identity appears to audiences. In my study, I research women offenders in probation setting, which can count as a front stage. Taking an account of certain understanding of how offender should behave during the probation process, it can be said that there was already stage that enable women offenders to perform. According to Goffman (1959) "A performance is socialised, moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (p.44). He also mentions the off stage, which is not identifiable due to having no audiences and no interaction. In my context, this might represent the time that women offenders do not have audiences, and the time that they stay by themselves without any interaction. Burke and Reitzes (1981) identity theory support this invisible true-self-identity as they state that identities appear during interaction with others.

Goffman's (1959) perspective on "setting" shares similarities with "domain", one of the aspects of Wenger's (1998) theory. Shared interests and problems are identified as "domains" by Wenger, similarly, the audiences from Goffman's (1959) theory would not be in the same environment with the performer if there is no similarity between their interest, aim or problem. In my research, I see audience as representing women offenders, probation officers and myself. Whether this set of audience looked as if they did not have any commonalities, there was in fact a shared interest around the problem - namely, crime. Goffman (1959) specifies this interaction as underlying the importance of society's expectations on the performance. "A performance is socialized, moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (p.44). Cooley (cited in Goffman, 1959) reasoned this idealization as a way to improve oneself "to show the world a better or idealized aspect of ourselves". Overall, the main aspect of the performance should answer the expectations of the audiences while meeting their criteria of stereotypes.

Because of the nature of my research, researching women offenders, I want to explore Goffman's (1963) stigma theory within his identity theory.

3.4.1. Goffman's Lens on Stigma

Goffman (1959) describes Stigma as something that spoils the identity with its origin from ancient Greece, a mark on the body. Stigma appears itself when there is an interaction with other people as this idea raises with regarding other people's opinions about "normal". This enlightens its origin; stigma comes from other people's perception and appears during the interaction between the role performer and audiences. Goffman (1963) states that stigmatised people are always stigmatised in relation to normal people. This raises questions of the decision makers of the society for the definition of "normal people", which may cause polarization in the society.

Goffman's three broad categories of Stigma, which are physical deformities, blemishes of characters and tribal Stigma, supports the society's Stigma to offenders. Two out of three of these categories points out offenders. Having prison made tattoos can be count in the first category within the concept of having any marks that distinguish people from others, and in character defeats, with having an addiction and being convicted. For instance, in my research when women offenders applied for a

job, which does not require them to state the past conviction officially, they preferred to not talk about their situation from fear of losing the opportunity.

Goffman divides people into two groups with relation to Stigma, one of which can be visible from his definitions of Stigma, "attribute that is deeply discredited" (1963, p.3). According to him, people have either discredited Stigma, that they already performed and identified with a stigma or discreditable Stigma, that has a destroyable impact on people's performances when it's identified. In other words, women offenders are holding the Stigma of "offender", which is discredited Stigma, whereas a person who committed a crime but is not being convicted has discreditable Stigma, as her conviction has not being recognised by the law force and not yet identified/ performed as an offender. Becker's (1966) labelling theory supports the nature of being stigmatised as similar to stigma, this is not inherited and based on society's decision on whether the behaviour posit as a deviance. According to him, "deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an offender" (cited in Slattery, 2003, p.135). He identifies the deviant, who is labelled and the deviant behaviour, that society decided as a reason of the label. Becker also discusses society's decision on deviant behaviours that can change in different circumstances.

Applying Goffman's identity theory and his lens on Stigma to my study enabled me to explore the different types of identities that women offenders performed during my fieldwork. This perspective helps me to look at women offenders' lives from a wider perspective, as they were not just holding one stigma, offender, but also performing different identities in different social contexts.

Another performed identity in my research is being a woman, which I decided to analyse through Butler (1999)'s work on gender. Butler (1999) supports the reason of gender performativity that happens not because of the nurture of human being but to meet the expectations of the society. She claims that there is no gender from the start of human lives, but as gender performers, people assume that gender identity describes who they are. She also underlines this culturally formed gender identities cause discrimination against people who chose to perform different genders than the assigned ones by the society.

Although in criminology literature Becker's (1963) labelling theory has widely used by the researchers, because of the nature of my research, which enabled me to research with women offenders, I chose to use Goffman's stigma theory. In Goffman's stigma theory, the stigmatisation happens during the individuals' performance of the identity, whereas in Becker's theory, labelling happens in audiences' thoughts based on society's expectation

With the light of the theories related to identities, social identity theory and Goffman's identity theory, with considering the expectations of societies for the stigmatised discredited identity of offenders and other expectations of audiences, I explored women offenders' identities that they perform in the probation setting. These observed identities were also present the relationships and the women offenders' perceptions related to the audiences' expectations, which I later discuss in the Discussion chapter.

3.5. Gender Violence and Informal Learning

While exploring women offenders' identities and their learning experiences, it is crucial to explore gender violence. Because of the nature of my research, working with women, gender violence appears in several areas of my research. For example, during the interviews when I asked the women about their education, gender violence at home showed itself, or while the women were drawing a river of life, gender violence appeared again but this time within the family.

The literature offers various frameworks for investigating gender violence among adult learners. World Health Organisation (WHO) defined violence in the World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH) as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (WHO, 2002) This definition focuses on the action and its results, whereas Parkes' (2015) approach is more holistic, as she focuses on the environmental factors that feed the violence. "Our definition of violence is multidimensional, and refers not just to acts of physical, sexual and emotional force, but to the everyday interactions that surround these acts, and to their roots in structural violence of inequitable and unjust socio-economic and political systems and institutions." (p.4). Parkes' (2015) perspective supports my findings,

withholding the interaction of violent acts within the women offenders' communities, including home. Pells et al. (2015) specified violence that being observed at home "variously and interchangeably as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, interpersonal violence or family violence" (p.68).

While exploring the adult learners' process of learning basic skills, Duckworth (2013) explores her participants' class, gender and perceptions of themselves during their learning journeys while highlighting "the intersection of class and gender on their pathways onto basic skills programmes and their subsequent trajectories" (p. 1). She developed a critical framework based on Bourdieu's theory on forms of capital and employed concepts from the literature to be able to explore her participants' progress, particularly the impact of symbolic violence on this progress. Duckworth's (2013) approach connects with the theory on learning for instance, reflects the creation of new social capital by investigating its impacts on new membership in groups that relate to Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice. Similar to Duckworth (2013), Parkes (2015) explains the importance of symbolic violence while explaining the power differentiation among social groups.

Although Parkes'(2015) perspective shows similarities with Duckworth (2013) while explaining the symbolic power, her work explores the dynamics of power. Parkes' (2015) framework (which is widely used in global south) offers an approach for analysing gender violence in poverty context and consists of three layers, inequalities, norms and institutions and interpersonal and personal relationships. Although Parkes' (2015) research is mostly conducted with young people, to analyse how the women offenders' experiences of violence shaped their decision-making process in their adult lives, it is crucial to integrate some aspects of this multi layered framework to discuss my findings.

Butler (1988) describes gender as performativity, but in gender violence context, gender mostly refers to women. Parkes (2015) chose to use gender "as a conceptual lens for examining structured power inequalities" to be able to examine how these inequalities show themselves with repeated practice in everyday lives and end with acquiring gender roles. Parkes (2015), Leach and Mitchell (2006) "take the view that violence is always linked in some ways to norms, structures and subjectivities associated with gender, as well as other dimensions like ethnicity, religion, physical

appearance, sexuality and ability". Taking this perspective, Parkes (2015) underlines the importance of understanding that violence should not be described as boys as perpetrators and girls as victims, and her viewpoint enables me to enlarge my horizon to gender while examining the violence.

Horsman (2000) explored the link between literacy and violence in her research in Canada and underlines that violence has an impact on education at all levels. She emphasises on literacy while discussing the effects of violence, specifically violence on women. From her perspective, "literacy takes learners back to their failure to learn to read well as children" (p.5), and this might also trigger learners' childhood memories including "violence at home or school" (ibid). This experienced violence or abuse may result in being a successful learner. In contrast, there is a possibility of "the erosion of sense of self, self-esteem and self-confidence" (Horsman, 1995, p.207) which becomes a barrier to be a successful learner. She explains this erosion with the need for a getaway. The woman who was a victim of violence is highly possibly lost her self-esteem and confidence, so this follows up with stop believing herself even for small tasks in her life. "When students do get to programs, it is often hard for them to believe fully enough in themselves to manage to attend regularly and continue long enough to see progress" (Horsman, 2006, p.183). This idea enables me to explore whether women offenders were victim of violence and how far this influenced their learning and attendance to the women's group sessions that held in the Community and Rehabilitation Company.

My aim in reviewing the literature on gender violence and its effects on informal learning in adults' lives is to expand the research focus while exploring whether the learning provision during the probation process support or hinder the women offenders' transition. While designing this research although I did not consider these hidden impacts, during the interviews that held with the women offenders, the women's negative experiences related to education programmes in their early lives drove me to explore lenses to analyse these findings. Duckworth's (2013), Horsman's (2000) and Parkes' (2015) ideas on gender violence and learning encouraged me to look at how gender violence shaped the women offenders' experiences of education in their early lives and to understand the full picture of women offenders' learning with reason behind their inconsistent attendance habits.

3.6. Conclusion

While exploring women offenders' learning experiences and how those experiences support/hinder their transition through learning, I drew on Rogers' (2014) concept of informal learning to identify different types of informal learning such as incidental and self-directed learning. Combining Rogers' (2014) concept of informal learning with Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice enables me to recognise the different communities that women offenders were part in and how informal learning, most significantly peer learning was playing a crucial role in their lives. As informal learning happens without the limitation of time, place, age and structure, while exploring women offenders' informal learning during their lives, the learning through the different communities that they were members of came to the light with the help of these two concepts. Thus, these concepts shall help me in exploring women offenders' learning experiences.

As far as investigating women offenders' learning experiences, discussing Goffman's (1959) identity theory and Butler's (1988) perspective on gender identity enable me to find out different identities that women offenders perform during the probation. Acknowledging these different identities supports me to understand their perspectives on learning while recognising different relationship that arises in the probation where power relations may appear. However, both Becker's (1963) and Goffman's (1959) theories are based on society's norms, what society acknowledge and identify as normal, as I research with women offenders not their audiences, using Goffman (1963)'s stigma theory helped me to recognise these different identities as I was also a part of audiences, which women offenders performed for. Thus, by combining Rogers' (2014) lens on informal learning with Goffman (1959), I shall seek to analyse women offenders' identities, relationships and social networks that shaped by the probation service.

To explore providers' and women offenders' perspectives on learning, acknowledging the concepts of informal learning within different community settings and different identities that exist during the probation is not enough to investigate perspectives in detailed, specifically women offenders' perspectives. Combining Duckworth's (2013), Horsman (2000) and Parkes (2015) ideas on gender violence in informal learning settings enables me to explore these perspectives in detail. Parkes' (2015) holistic approach on defining violence, multidimensional and importance on everyday

interactions around violence, Duckworth's (2013) lens of symbolic violence and the connection that she reveals between the symbolic power and labelling in school environments while highlighting its effects on adulthood and Horsman's (2000) argument on how experienced violence impacts on the learning process of individuals encouraged me to explore the backstage of women offenders' perceptions of lives and themselves while understanding women offenders' perspectives on learning. These concepts shall help me in exploring whether women offender' experiences of learning support or hinder their transition while understanding their perspectives about themselves and specifically on change.

In the next chapter I will present my methodological and research orientations.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.0. Introduction

I start this chapter by discussing my research paradigm and methodology, focusing on ethnography. I also explain my research design, as well as how unforeseen circumstances affected the field in which I chose to conduct the research. I discuss the methods that I used while conducting my research and the different roles that I performed during my fieldwork. I then reflect on how those performances influenced the way in which I interpreted my data. The final section of this chapter discusses the limitations that I encountered during my research.

4.1. Research Paradigm

This research is guided by various philosophical beliefs. My overarching question: "What are women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in England" was informed by my philosophical stance. Ontologically, constructivism explains the importance of interaction while individuals seek out the meaning of their lives (Creswell, 2018) and highlights the characteristics of a constructivist researcher:

"Constructivist researchers often address the process of interaction among individuals. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and worked in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participant" (p.6).

Creswell's position is consistent with Wenger's (1998) communities of practice theory, which highlights the importance of interaction within communities during/ for learning. Rogers' (2014) concept of informal learning adopted in this thesis and discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter 3, resonates with a constructivist ontology and my epistemological stance in exploring women offenders' past and present learning experiences in different communities and their perspectives of change, is interpretivism. I share Bryman's (2018) view regarding the distinctiveness of human beings. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) describe this distinctiveness by considering "differences such as cultures, as well as times leading to development of different social realities" (p. 41)

The axiological stance that I adopted during my study enabled me to emphasise "authenticity, trustworthiness, balanced viewpoints (fairness), reflexivity, rapport and reciprocity" in my research as Mertens (2010) states (cited in Killam, 2013). Trustworthiness of the data and the aim of making sure how I represented women offenders remained central to my axiological stance during the data collection, analysis and writing up.

4.2. Methodological Orientation

Through exploring women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in England, my primary purpose was to provide space for the voices of women offenders while also presenting multiple perspectives (women offenders, responsible officers and facilitators) on the learning programmes and learning activities. The methodological approach best suited to address this aim, taking into consideration my research paradigm outlined above, is ethnography.

4.2.1. Methodological Approach: Ethnography

When I planned my research, my prime motivation was to give voice to women offenders and, by exploring their learning experiences, perspectives, and identities, provide a more holistic picture of what it means to be a woman offender in England. Gregory (2005) suggests that ethnography enables the researcher to make "visible the lives of people whose stories are not often told, it gives a voice to all of us who are nothing special" (p. ix). Fetterman (2010) highlights the way that ethnographic accounts given voice to people by "relying on verbatim quotations and a thick description of events" (p.1). Pole and Morrison's (2003) description of ethnography is as an approach that guides the researcher to collecting data while sharing the experiences of those who are the focus of the research. However, Pole and Morrison's (2003) broad description is rather general when it comes to the features of those experiences. Fetterman (2010)'s definition of ethnography describes this crucial aspect as: "the art and science of describing a group or culture, which is covering as much territory as possible about a culture" (p.11).

A few decades earlier, Geertz (1973) identified the interpretation of cultures as central to the ethnographic endeavour, making a distinction between emic and etic perspectives from the researcher's perspective: "Emic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is a member of the community being studied "and "etic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is an outsider to the community being studied" (Naake et al., 2010, p.1). The discussion about the impact of the researcher's outsider perspectives (etic) on their insider (emic) perspectives (Headland et al, 1990) continues to this day. In my research, I adopted Agar's (1986) funnel approach when collecting the data and identifying the themes that emerged during my fieldwork, which Agar describes as "breakdown").

Street (2009) identifies three fundamental concepts when defining the ethnographic experience: "epistemological relativity, reflexivity and critical consciousness" (p.93). The first concept, epistemological relativity, describes the ability to acknowledge the researcher's own assumptions by being open minded while observing the culture. This concept enables the researcher to make meanings of incidents within the specific cultural knowledge. The second concept, reflexivity, refers to the ability to reflect incidents within the studied cultures and the final concept, critical consciousness, refers to the researcher's ability to be critical and conscious about their position, especially when considering "the values and perceptions of the group" (p. 94).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) describe the main purpose of the ethnographer as "to investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied, and this includes finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves" (p.3), that brings out 'reflexivity' that Street mentioned as one of the three fundamentals of ethnography. In my research, I engaged in critical consciousness in my endeavours to understand the 'culture' of the probationary service. Epistemological relativity enabled me to find out about the different learning experiences of women offenders, including the informal learning that had led them to the crime.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007)'s definition of ethnography refers explicitly to the methods that are associated with it:

"Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening

to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry. Generally speaking, ethnographers draw on a range of sources of data, though they may sometimes rely primarily on one" (p.3).

By adopting a variety of methods within ethnography as the overarching methodology, I was able to explore a specific community of women offenders on probation in relation to their perspectives on learning and change, past and present learning experiences and performed identities and relationships, while also shedding light on women offenders' perceived gender roles. By conducting ethnographic research, I hoped to become accepted like member of the women offender community as Gregory (2005) suggests. I became a member of their community by building rapport, sharing experiences, listening and understanding their worldview and values, engaging in what Street calls 'critical consciousness'.

4.2.2. My Research Design

Through the initial stage of the research, which included conducting a literature review and discussions with my supervisors, my overall aim became the exploration of women offenders' informal learning experiences whilst on probation and their interactions with the probation services. I proposed to employ Rogers' informal learning framework to analyse and understand these learning experiences in this specific context. While researching the literature on prison literacy, I realised that women offenders' learning experiences had seldom been researched through ethnography and that studies tended not to take into consideration the effect of previous learning on their present experiences and previous experiences on their present learning. Through this study, I seek to contribute to literature in the field of adult education by integrating the informal learning framework and the notion of communities of practices, whilst bearing in mind that offenders are likely to have witnessed and/or subjected to with to gender violence and that this shapes women offenders' identity performances and affects their future learning. In this regard the overarching question of this research is: What are women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in England? Thus, I decided to employ

Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, Goffman's identity theory and Duckworth's framework around gender violence to analyse my data and to be able to provide a holistic account of women offenders and their experiences.

As noted in Chapter 1, my sub-questions, which involved analysis of offenders' learning experiences, their expectations related to learning programmes and the perspectives of different actors within probation services, guided me through the research. These sub-questions were as follows:

1.   What are women offenders' experiences of learning?

2.   How did women offenders' experiences of learning support or hinder their transition through probation?

3.   How are women offenders' identities and relationships shaped by the probation process?

4.   What kind of changes could be made to enhance women offenders' learning provision in the probation service?

Framing a research study as qualitative or quantitative depends not only on the research problem but also the reviewed literature and the questions that emerge while designing the research (Creswell, 2014). Based on the reviewed literature, the research questions that I presented above, as well as my philosophical stance and methodological orientation, this study adopts a qualitative design. Conducted in a Community and Rehabilitation Company in England, I decided that ethnographic research in prison settings would provide me with a sense of what it would be like to conduct research with offenders. I knew I would not be able to conduct research in a prison setting but there were similarities in terms of the participants I would focus on. In the next section I discuss how ethnography as a methodology has been used with offenders in prison settings before describing the fieldwork site.

4.3. How ethnography fits into prison research literature
Richie et al.'s paper (2004) discusses a number of ethnographic studies conducted in women prisons in the USA to find out about the role of prisons in society. Specifically, their focus was the continuities between women prisoners' behaviours before and after

prison and the way women inmates create a social order in the prison environment. These studies demonstrate "how incarcerated women make meaning of their lives" (p.448). In Mahan (1984)'s ethnographic research on women prisoners in the USA, she describes the prison environment culturally, providing "a dynamic explanation of women's prison" (p.358). Moreover, she explores the particular meanings of the language used by prisoners, such as "play and doing my own time" (ibid). Mahan (1984) used observations and interviews in conducting ethnographic research in prison. Participant observation and interviews are the two main methods that I used (see section 3.5 for a full discussion). Gobo and Molle (2017) emphasize observation as an essential method of collecting data in ethnographic research. The nature of my research setting, the fact that the probation periods of each woman offender were different, and that attendance of group sessions was inconsistent, meant that I could not observe all of the women offenders during my fieldwork. However, an ethnographic approach helped me to identify changes during the group sessions and from one group session to another.

A literacy as a social practice approach has been used when investigating prison life. For example, Morgan and Kett (2003) used a social practice approach to investigate male and female prisoners' reading and writing habits in their everyday lives. Wilson (1998) used a social practice approach to reveal the creative dimensions of literacy activities in a Scottish prison. Wilson's longitudinal study (seven years) used several methods: research journal, literacy diaries, researcher activated letters and prisoner activated letters. She provided "socially-oriented activities and practices" (p.337) related to literacy to change the perception of prisons. While describing her research, she explained that: "I have shown them [prisoners] to be creative, articulate, emotional and literate in the conventional and radical readings of literacy" (p.337). The long data collection period enabled Wilson not only to collect a lot of data: it also gave her time to build a relationship with offenders. By contrast, I had limited time to collect my data, and it was not easy to control the continuity of women's group sessions, as there were several new attendants every week and familiar faces often missed sessions after late-night events. Nonetheless, by conducting ethnographic research, and adopting a social practice view of the activities I observed, I believe I managed to explore the women's perspectives on informal and formal learning.

In the United States, Boudin (1993) conducted her research as both a prisoner and a teacher. Her ethnographic research comprised the development of a literacy programme following Freirean principles, whereby learners use their own realities and issues as materials of their learning process. Because she wanted to link the literacy programme and women prisoners' life experiences, Boudin used AIDS as the main issue, since she had observed this to be a big concern among the prisoners; the literacy programme was developed around this. After lengthy discussion and learning sessions, a play related to AIDS was written and performed by the women inmates. The programme and subsequent performance not only raised awareness of AIDS, this action-oriented research also empowered the women prisoners. Boudin illustrates this point by quoting one of the participants: "I never thought I would be doing this. I never even did it on the street. I never thought I would act in a play and here I am reading everything. I can go home to my kids and say I've done something!" (p.231). Boudin's research shows that research can play a part in empowering research participants. The value of the confidence gained through performing is immeasurable. When I started to plan my research, I simply thought about focusing on formal education programmes in the prison setting. I did not think about collecting data related to women offenders' life experiences, because I might possibly not be able to think so widely. On the other hand, in contrast to some of the literature I wanted to be unbiased when entering the field, without any assumptions about the women offenders' perception of themselves.

To sum up, I was able to learn from ethnographic studies conducted in prisons and this literature influenced my methodology. Wilson (1998) and Boudin (1993) influenced my methods, especially the interviews. A key difference between their studies and mine is that Wilson's research was participatory: participants were asked to write poems and letters and therefore became active agents in the research. Boudin (1993)'s research was action oriented and the performance itself had a huge influence on the participants. While my research cannot be defined as action-oriented, I did use action-oriented techniques while running focus group discussion and facilitating sessions (see section 3.5).

In the prison literature, ethnography is described as "succeeding in illuminating the shadows" (Jewkes, 2015, p.14). The data collection methods within ethnography proposed by Bryman (2004) are very relevant to the closed prison community but also

to the probation setting: becoming a member of the community; interacting with people in the community by listening to them and asking questions; observing their daily lives. Using an ethnographic strategy in this research allowed me to understand a specific community of women offenders on probation, their routines and practices, the hierarchy among them and their learning activities in detail, beside probation officers' and facilitators' perspectives on the programme and on learning. I was also able to get insights into the women offenders' concerns and expectations for their future on the one hand and the aims and understandings of the providers on the other.

4.4. My research fieldwork

4.4.1. Before

At the start of my PhD journey my initial idea was to explore women offenders' learning experiences in a prison setting. However, my request to conduct research within a women's prison was turned down by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services. This was an unexpected setback. I then found myself having to urgently negotiate access to a probation setting. In early December 2017, I met with the CEO of a Community and Rehabilitation Company in England. I was invited to conduct research within their services because they happened to need an evaluative report at the time, of the group sessions offered to the women offenders. Thus, I went into the field with a specific agenda, that of producing a practice-orientated report. This evaluation report was to be based on an analysis of women offenders' opinions of the group sessions and the probation officers' perspectives on their working environment in relation to these sessions. However, the task was not limited to the evaluation report about the group sessions, but I also sought to collect and analyse data that would shed light on women offenders themselves: their previous learning experiences, identities and the relationships that I observed during their probation period.

4.4.2. Entering the Field

My initial visit to the probation company was in late December 2017, when the probation officer invited me to attend a Christmas meeting for the women offenders. This invitation sounded innocent enough, but I soon realised that I was the one who was being observed by the probation officer. I had been given access by the company's managers but the branch that I was planning to work with had limited

information about me: all they had been given was my name and my research topic and the fact that I had a studentship. Understandably, they wanted to check me out. When I arrived, I was greeted by the responsible officer and invited to introduce myself and the purpose of the research. We were seven at this meeting, including me and the responsible officer. At first, I was concerned that I would not have sufficient participants for my PhD research: my hope had been to conduct my research with between eight to ten women offenders. However, I then realised that a smaller number of participants would make it possible to explore in more detail what was going on in these women's lives. At that point I did not know that continuity would be a significant problem, which meant that I would be interacting with different women nearly every week but also an advantage in that it enabled me to interview different women offenders with different probation experiences.

I was invited to shadow a responsible officer before attending the group sessions for women offenders. This seemed to me a sensible suggestion. Beginning in February 2018, shadowing responsible officers for a month enabled me to understand the concept of probation and the responsible officers' working process whilst also giving me the opportunity to build rapport with the responsible officers. That rapport helped me to gain access to other responsible officers that were working at other branches and other facilitators who were running a range of sessions with offenders. While the manager had been the gatekeeper to the company, during the fieldwork, it was the responsible officers who were the main gatekeepers by facilitating these referrals.

I was initially very aware of the coexistence of two different cultures within the probation service. This was most noticeable in the language use of the probation officers on the one hand and the women offenders on the other. When probation officers spoke, their language was littered with legal terminology and formal language derived from criminal law and various relevant Acts. The women offenders, on the other hand, used a lot of slang. This contrast that I noticed early on underpinned my subsequent awareness of the distinct culture the two participant groups belonged to.

4.4.3. In the Field

My data collection officially started in February 2018 and ended in December 2018 when I presented the report that I had prepared, to the probation company (please see appendix 1 for the report). This included some initial findings. As this evaluation

report was a condition for me being allowed to conduct this research in the Community and Rehabilitation Company, it has influenced the direction of the thesis. I was asked to investigate the women offenders' views of the group sessions and while collecting data for the specific report, to interview responsible officers about their views of the group sessions and their working environment. Both activities enabled me to understand the probation setting in depth.

I then attended the group sessions on a regular basis as a participant observer. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, these group sessions are one of the interventions set up by third party agencies to facilitate women offenders' "reintegration" into society, with the aim of supporting women with personal skills, relationships and sexual health. While observing these sessions, I was also shadowing the facilitator. I attended all the group sessions and one-to-one meetings with the facilitator at different locations. I attended another group session on a regular basis to build rapport with my participants but was unable to use it for data collection as it required high confidentiality because of the issues that were discussed.

I conducted informal interviews with women service users and facilitators and observed the Women's Group sessions. At the end of my observation period, I also had the opportunity to interview some of the officers and women offenders who were attending different support programmes. Although I had planned to conduct several focus group discussion activities with women offenders and responsible officers, this was not possible in the end. However, I managed to organise one focus group discussion with women offenders that provided me with some background information about the women.

Overall, I observed 41 group sessions at the Community and Rehabilitation Company; I attended 11 one-to-one meetings held between the facilitator and the women offenders; I observed 12 group sessions designed for both male and female offenders. I interviewed 13 women offenders and 6 members of staff (Table 1). The women offenders that I interviewed shared experiences about the support programmes provided by the probation company. All of the providers (responsible officers and facilitators) I interviewed had experience of facilitating at least one of the supports

programmes that the company runs

		Pseudonyms of the women offenders	Participation in Group Sessions	Participation in other Support Programmes provided by the probation company
Research Participants	**Women Offenders**	Karen		✓
		Alex	✓	✓
		Cynthia		✓
		Sarah		✓
		Johanna		✓
		Jessica	✓	✓
		Rachel		✓
		Patricia	✓	
		Mary	✓	
		Olivia	✓	
		Kerri		✓
		Trudy	✓	✓
		Patricia	✓	
	Member of Staff	Pseudonyms of staff members	Women's Group Session Facilitator	Other Support Programmes Facilitator
		Grace*		✓
		Frida*		✓
		Arianna		✓
		Hannah *		✓
		Iris*	✓	✓
		Belinda	✓	

Figure 5. Participant sample[3]

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[3] * indicates that the member of staff that works as a responsible officer in the Community and Rehabilitation Company and beside this role, they also facilitate group sessions

4.4.4. Being a Researcher in a Probation Setting

When seeking ethical approval for my research, my identity seemed to be one of the biggest challenges. I am a Turkish woman who moved to the UK in my late twenties for educational purposes. Although I worked in Turkey after graduating, my studentship status never changed: I can describe myself as a lifelong student, who has always been in formal education, while working as a professional in different areas such as university research assistant facilitator of hygiene sessions and adult life skills for high school students.

Getting ethical approval from the institution that one is enrolled in is the first condition when applying to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS). The sensitive nature of my research setting and research participants as well as my chosen methodology required meticulous explanations and justifications. I was able to satisfy my faculty's rigorous ethics committee but when my proposal was rejected by the HMPPS, I started to feel like an outsider within my academic environment. The grounds of the rejection were unclear. It seemed that my adult education background was not sufficient to conduct research with offenders, even though the intention was to purely focus on their educational journey. I knew that shifting from insider to outsider and back again is an inevitable aspect of conducting ethnographic research (Naaeke et al., 2012), but I did not expect to experience the 'outsider' role before I even entered the field. Conducting research with an "unusual" sample (women on probation had not been the focus of many prior studies) perhaps exacerbated the feeling of being an outsider during the preparation period, as did my outsider position vis a vis the UK context (I had only lived in the UK for three years at the time I applied for ethical approval). However, my identity as an outsider became a significant advantage when I started to collect data in the group sessions. Women offenders were always offering me their support, as according to them, as a foreign student in their country, I was the one who needed endless support to survive being so far from my home.

The notion of "outsider" and "insider" arose when I entered the field as well. There were two main groups that I wanted to explore, women offenders and the probation officers that worked with the offenders. Sub questions 2 and 3 (How did women offenders' experiences of learning support or hinder the transition through probation? How are women offenders' identities, relationships and social networks shaped by the

probation process?) required an understanding of the wider institutional environment and I hoped to gain that understanding by talking to the probation officers.

My first month in the field, as I indicated earlier, was spent shadowing probation officers and I used this time to become an insider from the company's perspective. However, this method of shadowing did not give me access to the responsible officer's group: I needed to interact with them more extensively and to become familiar with key cases in discussion in the UK at that time. Although I have an interest in criminology, I spent hours reading legal documents such as the Criminal Justice Act, and newspaper articles, to build up my knowledge about the two 'hottest' topics in the office at the time: the James Bulger case and the Stephen Lawrence case. At this point, I was very aware of the gaps in my cultural knowledge due to not having spent my childhood or my youth in the UK. I was not familiar with how parents would fear leaving their children alone in public places or with the experience of growing up in a culturally diverse area. I hoped that immersing myself in these crucial incidents might help me to become more of an insider in the probation company. Conversely, I also aspired to be accepted by the women offenders. When I first attended the women's group sessions, I was there with my researcher/ ethnographer identity. I knew I was an unknown for them. They stared at me, observed me, asked me personal questions to assess my sincerity. I had recently stopped smoking when I started my fieldwork, but when they asked me to smoke with them, I could not say no, and I joined them. This was the first step of my unofficial acceptance into the women offenders' group.

"It is like changing my skin whenever I enter the big office"

(fieldnotes- March-2018)

I come from an education background, having graduated from the teaching faculty and got my first MSc in teaching. The first thing that I learnt at the Faculty of Education about how to be a teacher was about positionality. The teacher should be transparent when she enters the classroom: she shouldn't have a political view, race or opinion but should position herself in the middle of everything, on the unbiased ground. I found echoes of this when reflecting on my positionality as an ethnographer,

especially when first entering the field. Hammersley and Atkinson (2010) discuss the stance of an ethnographer as developing "an alternative view of the proper nature of social research" (p.6), and ethnographer's research field: "the social world should be studied in its natural state, undisturbed by the researcher" (ibid, p.6). Fetterman (1989) emphasises the importance of being open-minded to collect as much data as possible from the community with the perspective of an insider.

Being accepted by the community of women offenders did not mean that I became an insider. There was still a process to go through in order to become an insider and being open-minded was not enough. I was aware of the Community and Rehabilitation Company's rules for working with offenders: never ask a question about their offence. This turned out not to be necessary since the participants of women's group sessions were silent about this topic, which was a relief at first. I believe that not asking any questions about their offence helped me a lot while becoming an insider in their community, as everyone around them at the probation company was only interested in their offence and the time that they had to spend on probation.

Robinson-Pant (2016) highlights insider and outsider positionality in ethnography as "the main source of" researchers' "own learning", while indicating the limitation of this positionality in terms of enhancing "intercultural understanding" within the research setting (p.50). My insider and outsider positionality not only shifted from outside the setting to inside the setting but also shifted according to which room I was in and from whose perspective. When participating in the group sessions, I was an insider but then when I came across responsible officers during the breaks in the company of women offenders, I believe I was an outsider from the responsible officers' point of view. I believe women offenders were aware of my positionality as when I was with them, they criticised the company without hesitation. At other times, I would be sharing office space with the responsible officers, for example, having lunch with them. At those times, I became an insider in their environment and when women offenders came into the office area, I sensed that they were well aware of the shift in my role. As an insider of the responsible officers' community, I was treated very differently.

Aware that dress code is a strong cultural signifier, I chose a basic t-shirt, a blazer and dark coloured jeans. I wanted to wear something that was acceptable to both the

groups since the big office used by the probation officers was on the same floor as the classrooms, which meant that the offenders and the responsible officers constantly crossed each others' paths during breaks.

4.5. Research Methods

In the light of the theoretical lenses that I adopted (see Chapter 4) and the ethnographic orientation of the research, I chose the following methods which I discuss below, namely, participant observation, interviews, focus group discussion and daily conversations.

4.5.1. The Never-Ending Research Method: Participant Observation

The women's group sessions were at the heart of the design and because of this, participant observation was the main data collection method of this study. I was a participant observer both as a researcher and a substitute facilitator. Observation allows the researcher to find out about the realities of the participants' environment and "is a powerful data-collection strategy that is essential to transformative work" (Mertens, 2009, p.241). Through conducting participant observation, I wanted to understand the realities inside the women's group sessions with regard to learning activities, supplemented by probation officers' perspectives of the learning programmes. Hammersley and Atkinson (1994) suggest that "participant observation is not a particular research technique but a mode of being-in-the-world characteristics of researchers" (p.249). Burgess (2000) described the aim of this method as understanding the meanings of participants' behaviours in their natural environment. It also enables the researcher to become a member of the community (Mulhall, 2003) and to be in the field as both an observer and an observed. As ethnographers "are less interested in knowing exactly what comes next and more taken with understanding of what just occurred" (Agar, 1986, p.16), participant observation and interviewing are used to gain broader understanding of the field and specific "breakdown" is undertaken through the resolution process by the support of theories and concepts.

4.5.1.1. Being a participant observer as a researcher

I followed three stages during the participant observation phase of my research. The first stage was getting into the location. The women's group sessions ran twice a week, on Thursdays at one location and on Fridays at another location. I attended women's group sessions in both locations. The second stage for participant observation was building trust with the participants. This means that they had to accept the observer as someone who they can "be themselves" in front of (Guest et al., 2013, p 76). Building rapport within an ethnographic approach requires trust between the researcher and the participant, similar to the second stage of participant observation. To facilitate this, although I started to attend these group sessions in February, I did not conduct observation until March, because of the delicate topics that we were talking about during the first sessions. Sharing my decision not to collect data in these sessions with the women participants also helped to build rapport and trust and, I believe, helped them to see me as one of them during the sessions. The last stage of participant observation was to spend an extended period of time with the participants which I tried to do during the seven months of data collection.

Participant observation has been described as "connect [ing] the researcher to the most basic of human experiences, discovering through immersion and participation the hows and whys of human behaviour in a particular context" (Guest et al., 2013, p.75). Participant observation enabled me to: understand women offenders in-depth; be accepted by them into their community and; make meanings of their participation through understanding their perspectives.

The group sessions were provided by a third-party agency. Before attending the sessions, I sought consent from the facilitator, I explained how I was going to be a part of the session and asked the participants for their consent. As a participant, the experience was not so different from being a member of a women's group. As the other women, I asked questions, learnt, listened and shared my experiences. When sensitive subjects were being discussed, I tried to avoid taking up a position by giving vague answers when asked. I always asked for support from the facilitator when there was a question raised and I did not know the answer.

During my observation period, I avoided taking long notes during the session, but I wrote my notes in full after every session and recorded my notes in my mother tongue. I also did not use a digital recorder during those sessions. Using a digital recorder

would affect the classroom environment in a negative way and would distract the participants, so I chose to take my observation notes after every class.

The company asked me to facilitate sessions for women's group as there was a lack of facilitators and me running sessions sounded more attractive to them than postponing the sessions indefinitely. I believed that postponing the sessions would affect attendance and I also thought that this might be a great opportunity for me to give back to the community in some way. On the other hand, I was concerned that such a significant change in my role in the middle of data collection would be detrimental to the research. It was a hard decision to make as by that point I felt that the women offenders had accepted me as part of their community and this strong power shift might negatively impact my ethnographer role. To overcome this issue, I asked the women offenders to run the sessions with me, as they had already attended the sessions at least twice before I entered the field, and their knowledge about the content of the sessions would be greater than mine. When I asked them to facilitate the session together with me, I noticed a sparkle in their eyes: it was the sparkle of being recognised and I did not have to wait long to get an answer; they accepted my invitation whole heartedly.

Below is a thick description of the session that I both observed and facilitated. It provides insight into the context and the materials, whilst also indicating women's attitudes towards these sessions.

4.5.1.2. Combining the roles; participant observer and substitute facilitator
There was a note for the facilitators in the handbook that warned us that in the first sentence, the word "recovery" can trigger discussion among women offenders as they might see recovery from different perspectives. On the contrary, I found that it was not 'recovery' that triggered the discussion: it was 'mental health'. Women discussed how mental health was being undermined, especially in the society that they were part of. During the course of my fieldwork, I attended this specific session five times, sometimes with the same women offenders, sometimes with different women, but every time the discussion was about mental health instead of the expected one on recovery.

The second activity (out of seven activities and two handouts) was about exploring emotions. (Figure 6)

> **Activities 1 & 2 Exploring Emotions**
>
> **Activity 1**
>
> **Aim**
>
> To introduce the concept that everyone has a state of mental health and that ups and downs are usual.
>
> **How it works**
>
> Place emotions cards around the room. Give everyone a sheet of coloured stickers. Invite people to put stickers on each emotion they have experienced over the last few days or week. Alternatively use the Exploring Emotions sheet to tick the emotions experienced – this is better suited to large groups.

Figure 6- Activity Instruction

Instead of placing the emotion cards around the room, I placed them all on a big card. One of the women offered to draw the emotions on card and asked women to put stickers on the emotions that they had experienced recently (Figure 6). After this activity, I placed two emotion cards (Figure 7) and asked them to put stickers on what caused them to feel that emotion. I prepared this activity so as to prevent discussions about their daily lives, as this was the biggest challenge of these group sessions. It was impossible to prevent these discussions. On the contrary, this activity stimulated the discussion as women wanted to share the reason why they felt a particular way and that inevitably led to a discussion about their daily problems.
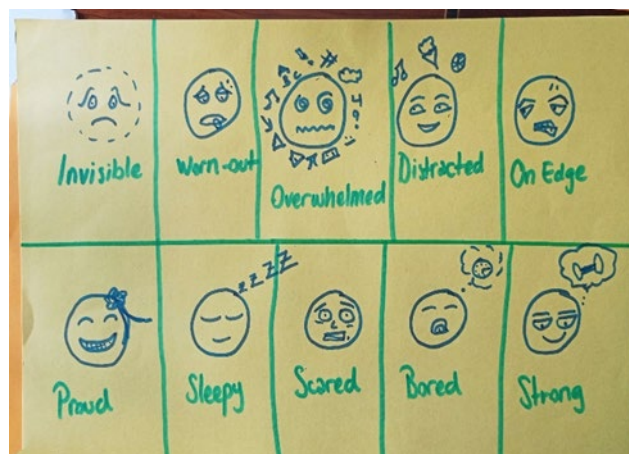
Figure 7- Women offenders' statements about their emotional state.
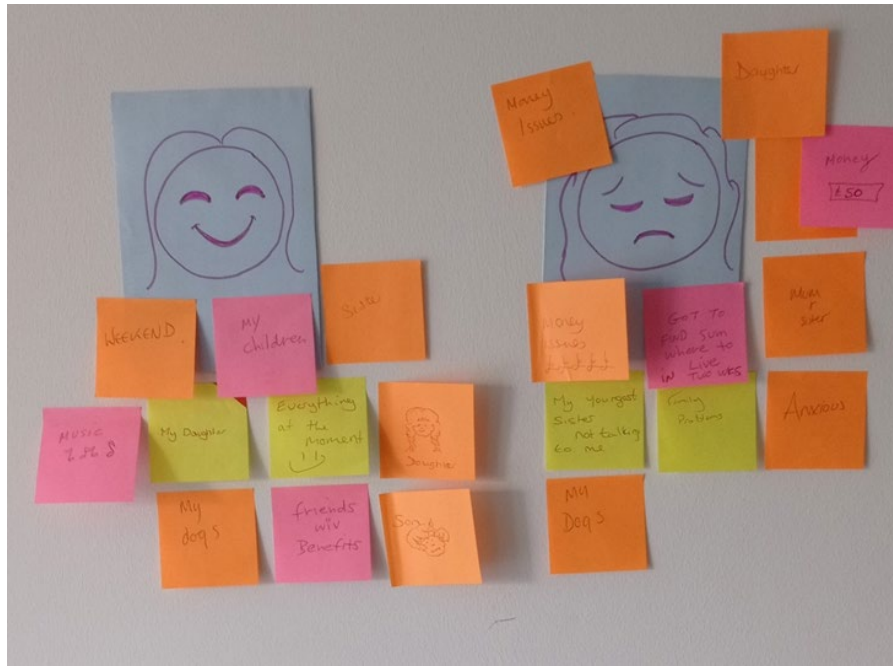
Figure-8 Women offenders wrote the reasons behind their emotional state.

It was not easy to get women's attention when they were deep in discussion, but I managed to move them on to the next activity, the Ladder Game. The handbook suggested that I should divide the class in groups, but there were only five women offenders, so I decided to conduct the activity as a whole group. I asked the women to place the diagnosis and trigger words in a vertical shape. The bottom of the list presented the most serious while the top was the least serious. I aimed to encourage discussion about different types of mental health problems. I gave 20 cards to the women (Figure 8) but instead of placing the cards in a vertical shape, they chose to pick pairs of most and least serious mental health diagnoses and triggers.
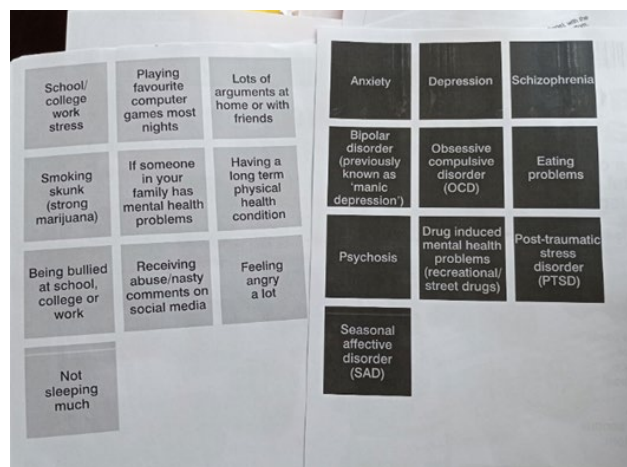
Figure-9 Mental health diagnoses and triggers cards.

They chose 'being bullied' and 'anger' as the most serious triggers for mental health problems and schizophrenia and bipolar as the most serious diagnoses. Receiving negative comments on social media and work stress were the least serious triggers while anxiety and drug related mental health problems were the least serious diagnoses. I found out that the way that the women offenders categorised the seriousness of diagnoses was shaped by their experiences: while deciding as a group which diagnoses were most serious, they shared their experiences of people who had been diagnosed with those conditions. Unsurprisingly, given that none of them had work experiences to draw on, work-related stress was not seen as a crucial trigger leading to mental illness.

4.5.2. Interviews- the small room talks

Participant observation was complemented by in-depth semi-structured interviews which enabled the research participants to express their opinions more fully. These interviews were intended to address my main research question since interviews have been described as "a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meaning, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (Punch, 2014, p.144) and the best way to understand people's reality (Jones, 1984). In the literature related to offenders' education and support programmes, Gundersen, Crewe and Darke (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with a policymaker, governor and ex-prisoners. I aimed to adopt this kind of approach in order to get the perspectives of both providers (facilitators and responsible officers) and women offenders.

While I was planning my research, I envisaged that the interviews would take between twenty-five to forty minutes but once in the field, I adopted a more flexible approach. Some women offenders wanted to tell me their life stories and as there were no time constraints, interviews in reality took up to an hour and I also conducted several follow-up interviews, particularly with those who attended the focus group discussion. I conducted these interviews in small rooms in different locations in the company building. Although conducting an interview in a small room sounds uncomfortable, I found these small places helped me to build rapport. The small room was used for work interviews so none of the women participants that I interviewed in that room familiar with the room. I believe that having no experience of a space is better than it is having negative associations. The other small rooms that I used for the interview were designed for one- to -one meetings. There were some women offenders that I

met just before the interviews, as I wanted to get a whole picture and wanted to hear other women offenders that had attended different programmes on probation, and by conducting an interview in a small room, enabled me to observe their mimics and behaviours clearly while they were answering the interview questions, which I believed helped me a lot specifically while I was interpreting the data. The only disadvantage of the small rooms was that the recorders was very visible and some of my participants were clearly unhappy about seeing the machine. Whenever I realised that they were staring at the recorder, I always asked them again if they were happy to be recorded, even though I had explained the consent at the beginning of the interview. I only continued with the interview if they explicitly confirmed their consent to do so. One woman offender changed her mind in the middle of the interview and told me that she did not want to be recorded, but that I could take notes. I believe that her change of mind was due to the recorder being in the middle of the table, which made her uncomfortable.

4.5.3. The River of Life- Focus Group Method

Bryman describes the focus group discussion as a method that "emphasize[s] a specific theme or topic that is explored in depth" (p.501) and considers the interactions within the group during the discussion. To find out about women offenders' learning experiences in depth, I employed a participatory rural appraisal tool, the River of Life. Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques place the "emphasis on empowering local people to assume an active role in analysing their own living conditions, problems and potentials in order to seek for a change of their situation" (Sontheimer et al., 1999). I used the River of Life to find out the pivotal points of the women offenders' lives and the descriptive dates related to their formal education journey (Jere, 2014). This activity asks the participants "to draw a line to represent the river of their life and to show the high and low points in their lives by making the river go up and down" (ibid, p.275). Whilst Jere (2014) recommends using coloured stickers to represent the times that participants' "schooling had been directly affected" (p.275), women offenders chose to indicate those times by writing explanatory notes around the lines.

Conducting the River of Life activity and the focus group discussion on women's drawings was a participatory way to facilitate life history interviews. Moreover, the

questions that women offenders asked to understand each other's' drawings and compare experiences, was both informative and enlightening.

4.6. Transcription and Data Analysis

4.6.1. Managing the Data

Analysis and identifying some initial findings began while I was still in the field. This helped me to engage with my data, and in some circumstances, to create new strategies to collect more comprehensive data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In aiming for a holistic portrayal of learning experiences, I took notes about various events that occurred within but were incidental to the group sessions and also recorded fieldnotes. Before I started to analyse the data for the thesis, I typed up my recorded field notes and transcribed each interview. I began with my interviews with responsible officers and facilitators' interviews which I needed for the evaluation report. However, transcribing the interviews with the women offenders proved to be hugely time consuming. The informal language they used, along with colloquialisms, slang words and sometimes swear words, made it very challenging for me to decipher despite my relative fluency in English. I kept a small notebook that I used as a slang dictionary while transcribing the women offenders' interviews. While providers used professional language that I could mostly understand, having immersed myself in the probation context, the women offenders not only used colloquialisms but also made cultural references that were entirely alien to me. The interview transcripts had to be edited by a native speaker before I could extract quotes for my findings chapter because some of the words that women offenders turned out to be unsuitable for publication.

To be able to "give a more detailed and balanced picture" (Altrichter et al., 1996), of the women offenders' perspectives, data triangulation was applied to the research data through participant observation, interviews, focus group discussions and field notes. Pattan (2001) states that "triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods" (p.247). Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that "being in the field solicits evidence because researchers can check out the data and their hunches and compare interview data with observational data" (p.128).

4.6.2. Analysing the Data

While making thematic links across my data, I used the notes that I made in the margins of my transcripts and tried to make links with my field notes and observation data. At first, I found this manual coding fruitful: as Creswell (2014) suggests, this manual analysis helped me to familiarize myself with the data without the "intrusion of a machine" (p.240). However, by the end of the data collection, this coding by hand was no longer manageable so I used NVivo. I used the codes that I created while hand-coding my data and grouped them using the software to investigate the repeated themes. The programme helped me to group the codes into the following key themes: identities, communities, gender violence and informal learning experiences. The analysing of the data continued even during the writing process of the empirical chapters of this study. Although I refer to several dimensions of women offenders' lives to explore their perspectives on learning and change, I do not always include their voices in my interpretations of the data.

The nature of ethnographic research raises concerns related to bias (LeCompte and Geetz, 1982; Monahan and Fisher, 2010) specifically on research participants' behaviours during the data collection which might be influenced by the presence of a researcher (Wilson, 1977). Conducting ethnographic research over a long period of seven months enabled me to make more distinction between 'acted' and 'natural' behaviours of the participants, as Agar (1986) highlighted; "after a period of time, one becomes-sometimes- part of the woodwork" (p.36). Becoming a part of the women offenders' group caused me to identify and question inconsistencies regarding some incidents. For instance, in Chapter 8, I highlight Jessica's explanation for her existence in the women's group session. Although she introduced herself as a volunteer at women's group session, to assist the facilitator, later in my fieldwork, I found out that she had to attend the session to fulfil the probation requirements.

Furthermore, beside acknowledging the participants' biased behaviours, I am aware of the phenomenon of researcher bias. LeCompte (1987) discussed the source of researchers' bias under two headings, "personal experience and professional training" (p.44). I presented my personal and professional background in the first chapter to define my stance as a woman researcher in the field. Though I tried to be neutral during the data collection, my personal experiences as a woman and professional interest in researching with/for women offenders might influenced this research.

4.7. Ethical Considerations

I would argue that conducting an ethnographic research with women offenders is more demanding compared to other participant groups. On probation, women offenders have little agency: agreeing or not to participate in this research was one of the few decisions that they would take for themselves without the supervision of the responsible officers. All participants received a consent form providing the information about my research, the potential use of data and the right to withdraw from the research.

I first asked the potential participants' consent for observation, and after my observation started, I asked my potential interviewees for their consent. Before delivering the consent forms to the potential participants who wanted to participate in my research, I explained my research aim orally, which then turned into an opportunity for further discussion. The women offenders asked questions related to what kind of information I would collect, how I would use the data and why it was important for me to support women offenders. They then started to share their daily life problems, and some of them chose to share their solutions for each problem. Because of the nature of the women's group sessions, there were newcomers most of the time. Before the facilitator started the session, my attempt to describe my presence at the session was always interrupted by one of the women offenders. There was always a woman offender who wanted to explain my role to the newcomer. In addition to their explanation, I always filled in the missing parts, specifically the section on any situations when I would need to inform the authorities.

In some instances, although I had the consent of women offenders, there were sessions in which I could not collect data because of the personal issues that were discussed. I also chose not to record some incidents that occurred during sessions that I attended as a learner, but because the sessions were attended by both female and male offenders and distinguishing between male and female offenders would have been impossible. On the other hand, there are incidents that had happened, and I needed to inform the authority after informing the woman offender about my planned action. For instance, in Patricia's case in the Discussion Chapter, due to the nature of the incident, that she was involved in an abusive contact with her ex-partner and ended up with a visible damage, I informed the facilitator about her condition after Patricia accepted my offer to pass this information to the authority.

The transcriptions were shared with those participants who had ticked the box related to reviewing their own transcripts, and their reviews were taken into consideration by editing out certain sections. Although women offenders did not want to review their transcriptions, the responsible officers and facilitators reviewed theirs. On the other hand, I shared my initial findings with the women offenders during our conversations, which was then followed by them highlighting the crucial problems that needed to be solved immediately. I present their ideas and views on the problems and possible solutions in the Conclusion Chapter.

I maintained confidentiality and did not use any personal information or experiences that might put my participants at risk. I stated earlier that I never asked my participants about their convictions. Nonetheless, details of their convictions did emerge indirectly when asking them about their lives but for ethical reasons, I do not share these details in my thesis. Nevertheless, I am aware that the women offenders would want me to add more about their lives by sharing those specific information in my thesis, but due to the necessity of keeping my participants anonymous, I did not use the identifiable details in my thesis.

4.8. Challenges and seemed like challenges

During fieldwork, I experienced various challenges such as power dynamics, shifting roles and strong emotional responses. While writing up this study, I came to the conclusion that many of these challenges actually had in fact played a supportive role in my research rather than being obstacles to overcome. For instance, one shift in power dynamics was that a form of equality developed between me and the women offenders. From an ethnographic perspective this was fascinating to observe and was also very unexpected.

Power: At the beginning of fieldwork, I had the power as the one who was observing, interviewing and making notes. It was crucial for me to downplay this power dynamic as I believed that otherwise, I would not be seen as a real insider. However, an incident occurred in the third week of my fieldwork which I think dramatically changed their perception of me as the privileged university student. I had a serious health issue, which meant that I suffered unbearable pain for two weeks. When I attended the class with that condition, they showed me great sympathy and kindness. Suddenly, they saw me as someone far from home having to overcome their problems alone. The first

time I felt like an insider was when one of the women offenders came to the class with a cup of coffee that she had made for me and gave me a hug. I believe that this incident showed them that I was just a human being like them with my own problems and challenges.

Shifting Roles: One of the biggest challenges for me was the need to continually shift my position as a researcher depending on who I was with. When I was attending the women's group sessions, I wanted to be seen as an insider but when I left the class, I wanted to be an outsider making meaning of what I had observed as an insider. On the other hand, when entering the responsible officers' workspace, I wanted them to accept me as an insider. I felt like I had different skin: my offender skin and my responsible officer skin: every time I entered their territory, I changed my skin so as to be able to collect data that reflected what was going on in these different settings from an insider perspective.

The shift in roles did not end when I finished collecting the data as before writing up my PhD I had an evaluation report to produce for the company. Some of my findings were included in the report and some of the data was not relevant to my thesis, for instance, responsible officers' perspectives on their working environment. Thus, I had to work with two chunks of data, the first one was for the company and the second one for my research. I reconciled these two purposes by firstly identifying themes common to both and then identifying those that pertained only to the evaluation report or thesis.

Emotions: Reading prison-related research had prepared me for the emotional challenges of conducting research in prisons (Sloan and Wright, 2015; Drake and Harvey, 2014). Researchers are urged to keep their emotions under control and avoid reacting to whatever they have "seen, heard and sensed" (Wacquant, 2002, cited in ibid). On the other hand, the ethnographic approach allows the researcher to be in the field for long periods so that these challenges can be overcome with time. Before I started my fieldwork, I had thought that the only emotional challenge would be hearing about women offenders' offences. I discovered that their offence was only the tip of the iceberg. It was often the experiences leading up to the offence, particularly from earlier in their lives, that were not easy to hear. Having to transcribe and analyse this 'data' meant that I had to revisit these terrible stories again and again.

4.9. Conclusion

This thesis explores women offenders' perspectives of learning and change through their identities, relationships and learning experiences. Based on this aim and my philosophical stance, I chose ethnography as my overall methodology. I conducted participant observation, interviews and focus group activity methods combined with daily conversations and kept a field diary. While conducting my research, I performed different identities such as researcher, group participant, group facilitator and as myself, a woman from Turkey. The biggest obstacle was that there was no button I could press to turn off one identity and move to the other. There were several incidents where I found myself questioning my role in the field. For instance, while with the responsible officers, they told me of a serious incident related to one of the women participants. As myself, I would put distance between me and the woman offender and take things slowly until I built rapport. Although I did not find it easy to shift between identities, especially given that women offenders and the responsible officers in the Community and Rehabilitation Company shared the same area, these shifts in identity also helped me to maintain multiple perspectives when interpreting the data.

CHAPTER 5

IDENTITIES BEYOND THAT OF 'OFFENDER'

5.1. Introduction

In this part of the thesis, I am moving to present the findings from my ethnographic research with the women offenders. I begin with this chapter which introduces the participants and their life stories, exploring their identities through the lenses introduced in Chapter 3. In the next chapter, I will present the relationships in the probation setting while investigating the hidden relationships, those have crucial impact on women offenders' lives. In Chapter 7, I will explore the women offenders' and providers' perspectives on change to be able to understand the full picture that women offenders were part of. In Chapter 8, I am going to explore women offenders' learning experiences in different communities through my data collected through interviewing and then conducting a focus group session.

In this chapter, I introduce the seven women offenders in depth through their voices and their stories while employing the concepts that I discussed in Chapter 3. Some of these women offenders will reappear in consequent chapters. While introducing women offenders by exploring their identities from the life stories they narrated during observation and face to face interviews, I also employed a participatory rural appraisal method, River of Life, in order to gain a deeper insight about my participants. Moreover, by exploring their identities, I believe this will help to understand women offenders' needs and their expectations from the probation services. "Offender" is the main ascribed identity of all the participants in my research setting; however, in this chapter I will explore the women offenders' multiple identities that emerged when performing different roles during their probation.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, identities appear during interaction with others which explain individuals' role performances in everyday life (Burke and Reitzes, 1981; Goffman, 1959). "A performance is socialized, moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (Goffman, 1959, p.44). Individuals tailor their performances according to the expectations of

their audiences. In my context "audience" refers to responsible officers that women offenders had contact with while on probation, the other women offenders at the women's group sessions and myself. In doing this, they also acknowledged the other roles that they undertook in their lives. For example, the women offender performed several identities including an "offender" identity whilst on probation, during their interaction with others. She was likely to be aware of other identities such as "mother" and "woman".

5.2. Women Offenders' Identities

When I analysed the data, I found three distinct categories of identity and thus I have decided to structure the chapter around these categories as a way of introducing the reader to the women offenders' lives holistically, in their own words. In the next chapters, I will explore specific aspects in more depth, such as informal learning and the complexities of the women's lives. Larsson (2014), in her research with women offenders she categorizes her participants under three headings, which supported me while developing my own categories. This chapter has three sections that aim to explore the three identities that women offenders performed, rather than the given (ascribed) identities such as "offender", "woman", "mother", and "daughter". The first category relates to three women offenders who persevered in order to survive, that is, they chose to keep fighting and were willing to change their lives from the beginning of their journey on probation. I have called these women "Fighters". The second category of identity was the ones who had experienced physical, verbal and /or sexual abuse, and at the time of my research did not consider taking any action to seek help that was available. These women chose to give more detail about these incidents and lay the blame on their social environments while pitying themselves. These women offenders I called "Survivors". This decision of mine was not because of how I see those women, it was because of how they chose to perform the survived victim role within the probation community. The third identity, whom I have called "Worriers" was the women offenders who were continually anxious about their families, especially those with child custody issues. They would not jeopardise losing custody of their children or the pride of their social status of being a parent.

Some of the participants will be mentioned in more than one category as Burke and Stets (2009) underlined the possibility of observing multiple identities in one

individual in either different or similar environments. After these detailed insights into their multiple identities, the subsequent chapters will each explore different aspects of women offenders' lives and experiences on probation.

5.2.1. "Fighters"

The three women offenders, Alex, Johanna, Mary, who frequently performed the fighter role, consciously chose to make this identity visible to other group members while sharing their stories about how they had tackled their difficulties by changing their lives or making new plans about their futures. I have described this identity as survival, based on my understanding of how these women handled the 'ups and downs' in their lives and how they kept moving with their lives after being found guilty by the court. Alex is the only one who demonstrated her battle with life's misfortunes with a River of Life activity (Fig.1). Although Johanna and Mary did not draw their life stories in focus group activity sessions, I felt their verbal expressions presented similar patterns of survival skills; that is, a determination to overcome their life difficulties.

5.2.1.1. Alex

Alex is the eldest of three sisters, who all grew up with a single parent mother and her boyfriend, who verbally abused her when she became a teenager. Her family life was not the only problem she had to handle, she also had to confront bullies at her secondary school. She described herself as from a Gypsy family and maintained that her skin colour was the main reason why her classmates mocked her mercilessly. Although she emphasised her dark skin colour, I hadn't realised that it was any darker than the others in the women's group sessions: frankly I thought she had a light skin colour. However, she saw it as an important part of her identity, but it wasn't recognisable for me, so I didn't perceive her as "gypsy young woman from Essex" (this was how she called herself at the beginning of the interview).
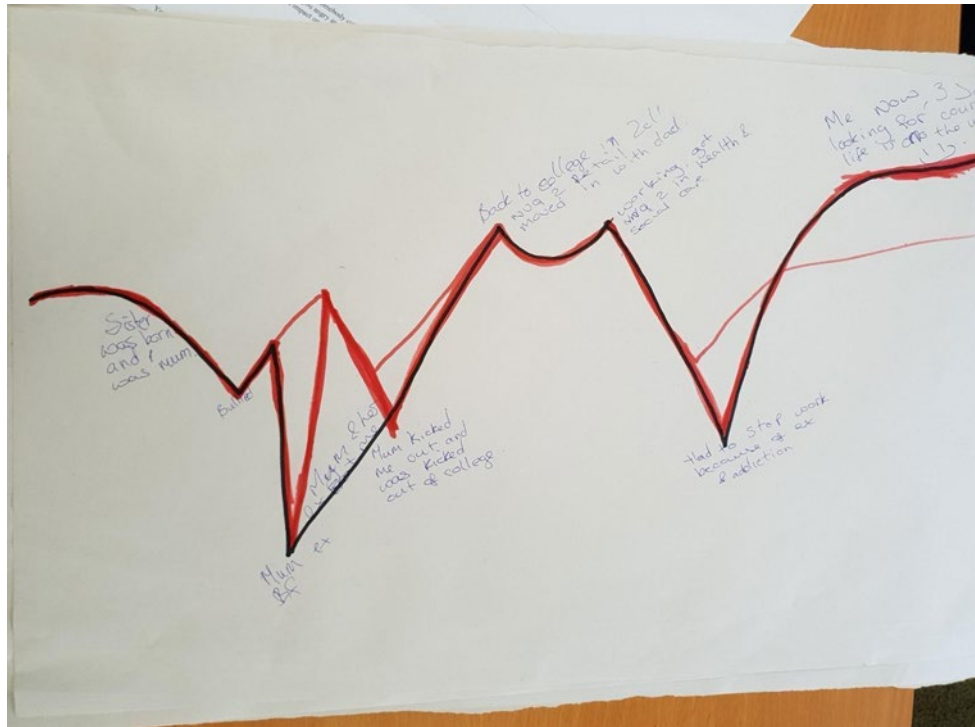
Figure 10 Alex's River of Life diagram

(Although the common perception might be to present the positive experiences of their lives with the upper lines and the negative ones with the lower lines, Alex chose to draw the river first and then wrote the explanation above or below the lines. When I asked her the meaning of using black and red pens, she told me that she could not decide which colour is appropriate to use for this exercise.)

She went back to college, worked hard and got certificates for several subjects, such as retail and health and social care plus completed training in Morse Coding and dementia care. She then started to earn her own livelihood, standing on her feet, but then everything changed again when she met with her first boyfriend.

"I met an older bloke when I was sixteen. We were together for six months. I had a lot of mates, good mates, when I was young, when I left school and when I was at my dad's - a lot of good mates, but then my first boyfriend stopped me seeing all of them."

Things did not change after she split up with him. About four weeks after their breakup, she met a new guy, who was older than her, and she described the effect of this new relationship with another man who was older than herself in these words: *"that's when the shit hit the fan!"*. This new relationship introduced her to a very different life, more different than anything she had experienced before. She stopped

contacting her friends, and some of her family members, such as her mother. She was living her boyfriend's life. They were living together, socialising with people that he wanted, and earning their livelihoods in ways that put their freedom in danger. This is where she started to use drugs, became addicted, enacted illegal activities that resulted in her appearing in court.

It appears that she seeks male figures who will find her attractive and desirable given her background of bullying which was focused on her physical attributes. She, as several other women offenders, has had no father figure, no stable male parent relationship during her family upbringing but instead her mother had relationships with men which may have socialised her to adopt a similar female role to her mother; that is, to want to be sexually attractive to the male.

Alex's probation order only recommended that she should attend Women's Group sessions. She came every Friday morning for 10 weeks and was being tested for using drugs every week. By now, she was twenty years old. After she finished her mandatory court order period, she decided to keep coming to the Women's group, because it had become more than court order for her, which showed Alex's determination to change her way of living. *"If it weren't for the women's group sessions, I don't think I'd be where I am at this stage right now."* This is how she signified the importance of these sessions for her in terms of trying now to lead a different way of life. Alex's dedication to moving forward with her life was further illustrated when she attended another support group to meet and guide other young female teenagers involved in the criminal justice system; even voluntarily joining some of their sessions in different locations. Alex's survival skills were evident most of the time I spoke with her as whenever she talked about her progress, she was always upbeat, hopeful about her future. Thus, while she was drawing her River of Life (Figure 10), she drew the highest line for the present and wrote "me now, applying for jobs, and looking for courses, life is on the up☺". This desire to survive and take her life in another direction, despite the past challenges, showed me she was struggling purposefully to rebuild her life, but this time with a different framework. This changed outlook was presented to me by her words from the focus group discussion activity where we were discussing women in the criminal system.

"We (as women) wouldn't have the same rights as men, and we can't have the same rules, regulations and policies as men in prisons because we are very different in terms of why we do what we do. The men, they just think 'oh yeah, I am bored today, let's just go out and stab someone'. The reason behind their actions is just that - boredom. But we've got kids to look after, we have been forced into addiction and we've got to go out and rob."

This statement was key for me as although she blamed men for her past actions which constituted her low points, she was able now to analyse and reflect on her past and then take responsibility for trying to take control back for her future. This was, for me, the mark of a fighter. However, when the circumstances change, she may change her idea back, especially if she meets another guy, who wants to take control of her life.

This statement had also another important aspect, which was presenting her perception about men, and in Alex's case, how she perceived men as others. This might be because of her past experiences, especially gender violence that she was subjected to during her childhood, and her reasoning for her crime. She learnt how to commit a crime while living on the street from her boyfriend, and according to her it was their only chance to survive. Additionally, lack of father figure during her upbringing might have supported her perspective to men, as how she described them as others.

5.2.1.2. Johanna

Another fighter among women offenders was Johanna. She was in her late twenties, a single parent with three children. Before attending the probation sessions, she was suffering from anxiety and anger. I first met her on one of these programmes, which was entitled "Who am I?" which was run by the third-party agency. She was not attending those sessions for her community order, but she was there to support the facilitator as she was planning to start working for the organisation as a facilitator herself, and at that time she was trying to gain enough experience to apply for the role.

Johanna's life was changed by her parents' divorce when she was fifteen. Her mother, who Johanna described as an "independent woman" was the bread winner of their house and at that time she decided to move to another country for her business. Although she took Johanna with her, it was not long before her mother gave custody of Johanna to her father, so she had to return to the UK to live with her father. Her life

was then not the same as it had been before she had moved away, and now in addition she was being physically abused by her father.

"I lived with my Dad ultimately and I didn't really have a choice but to live with my Dad. I lived there for a year and I wasn't very happy. He used to hit me a bit. Well, I say a bit, but he used to hit me quite a lot."

Johanna decided to share this problem with her mother, but her mother never believed her, as she had never witnessed her ex-husband physically abusing anyone. According to Johanna her mother said she was inventing the violence stories just to gain her mother's attention. Johanna managed to put up with her father's behaviour for one year and ended up on the streets when she was sixteen.

"My mom, I think she thought I was exaggerating or just making it up so I wouldn't have to live with my Dad. One day, I packed and went and lived on the streets"

As Johanna did not want to live with domestic violence, she decided to be responsible for her own welfare and so she left home. Her life changed when she met a man who took care of her, so she felt she had a family while they were both living on the streets. This was the time that she learned about criminal activities on the street and started to become involved in these activities to support the man, who "treated "her "as family". Some years later she found herself on probation, which is where I met her.

To highlight her fighter identity, I want to explore how she described herself before the probation, what she achieved during this period and how she perceived her success. I was one of the attendees on the 'Who Am I?' programme, like other offenders, and she was assisting the facilitator. She welcomed me warmly when the facilitator introduced me to her, and sat next to me, close to the facilitator and the whiteboard, but still not on the chair next to the facilitator, at the table. Johanna's probation journey had started with her attending the Thinking Skills Programme, which is an accredited programme mandated by an injunction from the court. This programme is "a cognitive skills programme which addresses the way offenders think about their behaviour associated with offending "(Ministry of Justice). According to Johanna

"Thinking skills programme is actually like mind training to teach you to think before you talk which is to say I don't do too often."

This sentence shows her humour, and the fact that she was recognising her shortcomings and trying to see how she could take this advice on board to improve the way she engages with other people.

She mentioned that before she started this programme, she did not have any idea of what she would get from this programme or how it would help her while she was moving her life from probation to a crime- free life, and now to a volunteer life.

"I've never been on probation or nothing like that, I just did not know what to expect. Since my old days, I've known a lot of people that have come out of probation and prison. You just don't know what it's really like until you're there yourself."

This indicates that she is now aware that second-hand experiences even if shared in detail are nothing like the reality of personal experience and it was such a shock that she has determined to change her life.

Johanna had a warm personality, but on the other hand according to her she was not a good communicator, as she was not good at filtering her ideas while she was presenting them verbally. *"I'm terrible at that, words just fall out of me "Oh no Johanna (she is talking to herself) I heard that, did you just say that?" This happened today during the session."*

During the session one of the male participants was sharing his opinion about how to treat a woman. According to him as long as he buys expensive gifts for women, there would not be any problem in the relationship. Johanna couldn't control her reaction and she responded in an uncontrolled way and ended by swearing at the man. This demonstrated that an emotional response was much more likely than a rational reasoned one and perhaps particularly in relation to gender issues. This reaction may signify that she has strong negative feelings towards men with gender stereo-typical views because of her past life experiences. Her passionate emotional response resembled that of Alex in relation to similar gender issues. She seemed to be unable to control her emotions easily and therefore anger or frustration management programmes were found to be useful.

"I didn't even think while I was talking with him. This is the closest time that I've ever been to work (as she is preparing her documents to become a volunteer at the NGO who was running "Who am I" programme in the probation company) ... *I said this will be my first job. I said to myself that I've got to learn not to do that. But initially, if I got a problem the first word is violence and aggression. Sitting here (she means being on probation) teaches you to take that out of you. Teaches you how to fight. Teaches you to use the front core of your brain..."*

This shows how she motivated herself by repeating to herself that this was the first time that she had had an opportunity for a job, and this was the closest she had been to starting the professional life she had always wanted. Additionally, by consciously seeking the new learning from her probation journey to guide her now, Johanna was aware she needed to change her attitude when she felt an emotional rush fuelled by anger or frustration.

Although she mentioned, in her statement, that she was trying to control her behaviour and most importantly her reactions, she did not show this control during the class with the above male participant. While she was expressing how she controlled herself now better than before the probation, she chose to explain it metaphorically, which was like this, *"I'd say if you've got a problem, feel free to make a "vocal triangle"* [this is one of the methods that I believe had been used on The Thinking Skills Programme], *and then the problems already solved. Obviously, then you can look at that and use it in your life. If I'd done better and if I'd written that triangle plan, it would have actually worked."* Johanna was happy about her progress, how she managed to change herself and how she got the positive reaction from the facilitator and ended up with getting an offer to become a volunteer on the programme. *"it's obviously because I've absorbed so much of it* [Who am I programme] *that they* [the third-party agency] *decided to take me on. They were looking for someone not afraid of things that I need to consider moving on to the professional side of probation. Because my conviction does not limit me to work with children or families, I am a good candidate, it's quite good that nobody tells me to know more to work with them"* [she meant there was no requirements that she needed to meet, as the agency did not raise any requirements for becoming a facilitator]. Although Johanna was happy that she didn't have to take any course, or training to become a volunteer with the agency, she had already decided to go to college in September, the coming semester.

She decided to stop seeing the friends, that she had been seeing before the conviction, and having a possibility of a job was one of the biggest motivations. Although after her first conviction she needed more support from her social circle, this decision shows how determined she was to change her way of life.

"When I started on TSP- the Teaching Skills Programme", I was still associating with people that I just shouldn't have. And I was still there dabbling in cannabis and things like that. Being here [joining the programme as a potential voluntary facilitator] has made me look at life a little differently and think I can't even hang around people like that if I wanted to do this job. Because I didn't even know what I was doing actually if so, I wouldn't do that [she is referring to hanging around with people who have addiction and smoking marihuana]. *And I thought yeah so, I've had to like take a step back from life* [her previous life] *and change things to obviously benefit this. And then in the long run the mere change is, affect me in my financial situation, and the children and everyone's happy."*

Johanna explains how her new knowledge that she gained during her probation journey and the possibility of having a position as a facilitator had changed her choices about how she lives. Although she saw her previous life, which was getting high and drunk while hanging around with her friends and involved in criminal activities, as "life", she decided to give up that lifestyle because of her urge for change.

"I didn't know what to do now but I was actually on the course, I was just sitting there like I was in charge getting the pen and writing on the boards and I would be the first one to volunteer."

Johanna had not only understood what her new identity as a "facilitator" entailed but was able to adapt herself to perform the role. it also demonstrates a real understanding of "professionalism", which she detailed as follows:

"I'm so proud of me as I will be the first one who becomes a facilitator right after the probation. Oh, I need the lanyard. So, I've got a whole different mindset when I'm there so I'm aware that I'm professional. When I go home, I speak a lot nicer at home than before, because I am on that mindset, I try not to swear at home, and I'll sit on that mindset and I'll find that I speak a lot nicer at home. Because I'm not trying to swear still."

Johanna clarified her perspectives on how to be a facilitator, a professional person. During this interview, Johanna repeated "lanyard" several times which had become a symbol for her. According to Johanna, if someone carries a lanyard, she/he has a job, so having a lanyard means having a job, being professional and enjoying a happy life. Johanna, with her new mindset, was careful not to swear and to speak in a presentable way, which also proves her improved literacy skills that she had learnt during her probation journey as to improve her speaking she started to read books.

During my fieldwork, Johanna never stopped trying, even when she was feeling down, or when she missed to attend the class. While we were talking about her plans after that upcoming voluntarily job, she said that she doesn't know as the facilitator decided for her. At first, I thought I misunderstood, and then I paraphrased what she said, but she repeated the sentence, and explained to me. When she was attending the class, it was the facilitator's idea to recommend Johanna as a facilitator, and also it was facilitator's idea to make Johanna enrol the college for the coming semester, but the facilitator did not share with Johanna, her specific future plan.

Then this made me ask, how we decide to perform new identities? Like Goffman (1959) says, it is a role performing, mostly shaped by society's expectations but what about our personal expectations? Johanna was keeping going, keeping fighting, and sharing her experiences to inspire others, but was this role really what she wanted?

Johanna had changed her whole mindset for herself and her children, while generating her new identity, "facilitator". She was doing more than learning the aspects and practice of new identity. She showed her tenacious characteristics, never giving up and always fighting for her children and herself, while quitting her old habits prove she was a fighter.

5.2.1.3. Mary

Mary was a young single mother in her early 20s when I met her. She came from a big family and her grandparents were always in her childhood memories. Unfortunately, this scene did not end with good memories, as there were always problems at home between her mother and father which ended with their separation. She always hesitated to talk about these memories as she was always feeling down whenever she started to talk about them. Mary was a tiny little woman when we met.

Whenever she talked at the women's group, everyone just stopped talking and provided her a full silent space to express herself - this happened randomly without any announcement because to hear what she was saying, there had to be silence as her voice was never loud. She always appeared to be hesitating when trying to express herself and her ideas.

She had home-schooling as a first stage of her education life, but things became worse when she started the mainstream school, as she was attending a school in a remote area of the UK, and they did not have different teachers for each different subject.

"I don't think my education was great in school, mainly because of the school…No one really taught me anything even though I wanted to learn. I always had substitute teachers never proper teachers because of my classes. I did well in maths, and in social, as these two were the only proper teachers that I had in school"

The problem was not just about having substitute teachers, it was also about being bullied constantly by her classmates, and other students at the school. And this bullying turned physical, where she got physically injured.

"I got pushed down the stairs once, it hurt, and I had not done anything [she didn't report the bullying until that moment] *until that happened and then they* [staff at the school] *just stuck me in the office during certain times to keep me protected but didn't actually do anything about the bullying."*

She experienced such bullying until the end of her school life, but she did not share her problems at home, especially with her mother. She did not ask for help because she had not had practical help when she had reported the bullying, instead she had been safeguarded and no legal action had been taken to prevent the bullying at the school.

This uncomfortable situation did not stop her from going to school, as school provided an escape from her home life, with so many bad experiences. She was happy when she was at school, even though there were problems. Literally it meant bullying was much more bearable than her family setting.

"I did have friends in school, I enjoyed seeing them, I enjoyed Maths and health social. I enjoyed some of my classes, I always saw school as an escape from home, it was my main reason. When I wasn't at home, it was right."

The bullying was out of the picture when she started to go to college, and studied one year in childcare, where she found out that her dream job was to be an "infant's teacher".

"I wanted to work with children. I love children until [she went silent here, and stared at the recorder, and here she is referring to her conviction, as at this point we both know that because of the nature of her conviction, she will never be able to work with children] Yeah, I did want to, I wanted to become a teacher, infant's teacher…See I love kids. I love young kids, I couldn't teach high school and secondary, it would be too much, too much for me, but I love children, just teaching them."

This was the moment that she did not hesitate to share her regret about the crime that she committed. She acknowledged that she had to give up chasing her dreams about working with children. This quote doesn't only show that she has a fighter identity, but also that she was brave enough to face the consequences of her behaviours and taking the responsibilities. Although she always hesitated to disclose her conviction during the women's group sessions, at the time of this interview, while recognizing that it was recorded, she did not hesitate to talk about it, and she was brave enough to talk about her regrets beside her dreams.

Just two months after she finished college, she fell pregnant with her daughter. She was working part- time at the time but then at the seventh month of her pregnancy she lost her job and then decided to focus on her pregnancy. The father of the baby's mother became one of her biggest supporters both during her pregnancy and while raising her daughter, beside her grandad and grandmother.

After she gave birth, she didn't think of going to work, as the baby's father's family kept their support, until her conviction. When I first met Mary, she was working many hours for a fast-food company while trying to accomplish her community orders. According to her, she was not enjoying the working environment because of the attitude of her manager and colleagues. Although she had worked part time when she was pregnant with her daughter, she had never experienced a full-time job before and whenever she came to the Friday class, she always looked tired as she was working night shifts on Thursdays. However, she told me that when she asked her manager to change her Thursday shifts because she needed to attend classes on Friday mornings, her manager just ignored her request. Here she presented her fighter identity very

strongly as although she could easily have applied for benefits, she chose to work because of her daughter's custody issue to prove to the court that she could earn her own livelihood and was therefore capable of looking after her daughter. She was always staying calm and accepting the situation with trying to change it and trying to get as much benefit as she could get from the probation process.

The distinctive part for fighters were not only they kept fighting to change their lives to start a crime-free lives, but only their perception for gender roles. Because they all were subjected to gender violence during at least one part of their lives, and the situation in their upbringing showed the lack of male figure, their acknowledgement for gender roles was different. Alex was making specific distinction between men and women while describing the reason of committing crime, such as men commits crime because they want, but on the other hand women do because of the needs of their families. Being subjects of abusive relationships might have impact on their perception of gender roles. Although these three women's behaviours in the probation community were not similar, such as Alex was presenting outgoing personality whether Johanna was always hesitated to talk with people outside the classroom. Similar to Mary, chose to keep her opinion to herself during the conversation, their previous experiences taught them how to stand in the communities.

5.2.2. "Survivors"
Under this heading I present the women participants who actually expressed themselves as survived victims while narrating their life stories, including the reasons why they were convicted. It was not because they were all victims of abuse, but because that was the way they perceived themselves while they were on probation. They viewed everything that had happened as a result of their bad luck including their convictions.

5.2.2.1. Jessica
Jessica was in her late thirties, the eldest child of her family. She did not mention much about her mother, in contrast to her father, who was a carpenter. She portrayed herself as a 'daddy's girl' and the black sheep of the family. According to her mother, whatever she did was not good enough nor as good as the way Jessica's sister did things.

"I've got many strings to my bow. I'm not a master of anything, that's what annoys my mum is the fact that I can do everything, but I don't have a career."

However, she described herself as a 'black sheep of the family', this statement shows that her mother had expectations from her to do her best, she did not give up on Jessica.

"I have a sister who lives in the States. She's got two girls, Elma and Victoria. They're eleven and thirteen or I think they are. I don't actually know how old they are, how bad is that? My mum's 70 this year so we're supposed to be going away on a holiday but it's always about my sister. We were always in competition. She has to be better. If I say, "Oh I've done this!" And mum says, "Oh well done." My sister will say, "Well I've done this." And it's always something a lot better than what I've done. So, I just give up and say at the end of the day, "Nice, it's not competition. I'm not trying to fight for my mum's appreciation."

There may be several effects on having sibling, especially while feeling like Jessica, as a black sheep of the family. Her statement indicates that based on her perception, the relationship between her and her sister was rivalry and competitive, while her sister was the favourite child of the family.

She told me that she still thinks and talks about the old days when she was with her father, how her father supported and encouraged her.

"My dad was always supportive. But because of my past with my exes being the way they were, I lost contact with my family a lot, but my dad's support was always there."

After she lost her dad, it seemed to me she started to perform the survived victim role as when she was telling me how she was bullied both in primary and secondary school, she did not mention it in the same victimised manner as she relayed her life as the black sheep of the family after her father's death. Losing her father was one of the traumatic events of her life that you can see from her drawing (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Jessica's River of Life

When an incident was shared during the women's group sessions, she was always supportive of the victims of these incidents; she would advise them how to proceed legally while explaining that she should have done that when the similar scenario had happened to her. Even while she was giving advice to other women offenders, she was always underlining that she was a victim, bad luck had brought her here that is to be on probation. On the other hand, when a facilitator gave her opinion, she always hesitated to take the advice and would challenge the facilitator; reminding her that they, the women offenders, do not have the same rights as others; 'others' was the way in which she referred to non-criminals. This attitude was far from pitying herself, but rather accepting her reality as being that of a criminal. She considered she had been in contact with the wrong people and had had no support from her family after she lost her father, thus she was embracing her reality as a sufferer because of her bad luck.

One of the significant incidents that happened during my fieldwork was in relation to her neighbours. While discussing how her neighbours treated her badly, she again gave no reason for this except to say it was how life treated her which was "not fair". When she spoke of her boyfriend, who was convicted as a sex offender, this was because her boyfriend had not been lucky nor clever enough to ascertain that the girl, he was texting was thirteen. According to Jessica, this young girl's family were

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responsible for keeping their teenager away from the screen and monitoring what she was doing online. Thus, Jessica viewed her boyfriend as a victim as well.

Jessica carried this "survived victim" identity proudly, not because she wanted people to pity her, but rather she wanted others to acknowledge her as a victim. She was convicted for selling drugs and when she narrated this situation, she always explained it as necessary because her life condition, at that time, was to sell drugs to survive.

She had a new family when I met her: her boyfriend's mother and father. Although she was getting on well with them, she still saw herself as a victim, as the man's family's expectations of her were high. This meant she needed to take responsibility for his life, she needed to monitor what he was doing, and she needed to control their money

She was always concerned about taking care of others, including her boyfriend, while at the same time she performed the survived victim identity. That is, someone that lives her life for others, always concerned regarding others' needs and expectations before her own needs, but because she saw herself as a victim, so she did not take action to solve either her own or others' problems.

During my fieldwork, nearly the end of my fieldwork, due to misunderstanding with the new facilitator, I was not able to attend the women's group sessions. Due to the nature of the women's group sessions, all the women offenders had my contact details, and interestingly all of them texted me asking the reason why I stopped joining their classes, except Jessica. She had texted me before the incident happened but after that she cut the communication. This incident gave me further insight into her "survived victim" identity, as victims tend to not speak out or question a changed situation. In this case, Jessica chose to stay silent, as she saw herself as a victim, and therefore was unlikely to take an action that, in this case, might question an authority's decision.

5.2.2.2. Trudy
Trudy was in her forties, the mother of four children and she was married on paper when I met her. Her identity as a survived victim was always on the scene whenever I talked with her, or whenever I observed her while she was interacting with the other women offenders at the women's group sessions or with the responsible officers from the probation company.

Didn't want to Go school & learn. coz of things happening at home

my mum Bullied + Beat me

I WAS ABUSED by Grandad + uncle + mum

my Dad in & out of prison all my childhood.

Foster care x2.

EX-husband mentally Physically & emotionally abused & Beat me & our children
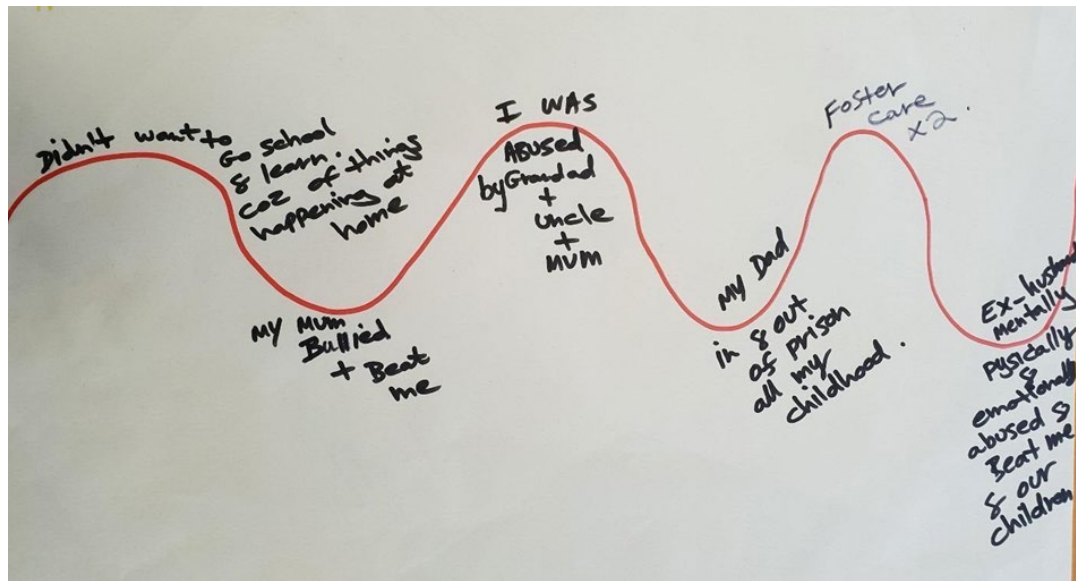
Figure 12. Trudy's River of Life

While Trudy's River of Life illustrates the tough life she had had, at the same time, it shows the type of challenges she wanted to highlight in her life story. Trudy's parents were only fifteen when she was born, and her father was always in and out of prison.

Trudy never talked about why her mother saw her as a reason for her father's convictions, but when she related that her childhood clothing had been stolen, it could have explained why her father was always in prison; that is, to supply her basic needs. She saw herself as "Daddy's girl", which she said meant she did not have a good relationship with her mother, which I gathered from her statements about their relationship. For example, she said her mother would party with strangers and have affairs while her father was not around, possibly while he was in prison. The violence, she explained, was an ongoing issue even as she grew older

"I got two stitches. When my mum smacked my head ten times, because I wanted to try a cigarette. My mum threatened me into not saying anything, so I kept this a secret. I have got permanent knee damage from another argument with her because she hit me so badly."

Trudy's relationship with her mother was not only imperfect, but obviously abusive as these alleged frequent beatings sometimes left her living with permanent injuries. Although it seemed her school journey went badly as a result of the domestic incidents, she saw school as an escape area, a gateway from the troubles that she was experiencing at home. However, hiding what was occurring at home from her

classmates and teachers became such a burden for her that she finally dropped out. Unlike Mary who did not give up going to school, and who had a similar perspective on school as an escape from an unhealthy family environment, Trudy chose to accept this identity, that of a victim, a victim of her life and drop-out from school.

While she was a teenager, Trudy had had to handle sexual abuse from both her grandfather and uncle alongside her mother's physical abuse. When I met her, she had been married twice, with four or six children from these two marriages [She never mentioned the exact number of her children, and always stated different numbers. I assume this was because of her children have two fathers]. According to her, the marriage with her first husband, meant she had become a victim of emotional abuse. It was not just all parts of her story. On one of her visits to the prison to see her father, he revealed his feelings to her.

"My dad told me that he has feeling for me…Why is it with my family? I can't take my mum's place."

When she complained about the above situation, she interpreted her father's closeness as his desire for her to replace her mother in his life. Thus, while Trudy was performing a victim identity, she did not always pity herself as Jessica did, because she appeared to be also performing another identity; that of a woman as this sentence might be evidence of how she sees herself as an attractive woman, more than her mother, as her father chose her. During the women's group sessions, she always enjoyed discussing her sexual life with other women offenders, and she seemed always proud of being sexually active.

5.2.2.3. Patricia

Patricia only appeared a few times at the women's group sessions. The first time I met her was at the celebration for International Women's day, which she attended with her friends. During the fair she met with the facilitator of the women's group session whom she asked looking very worried about the women offenders who were participating in the group. I believe she was not sure if the other women offenders would accept her. This may be because of her social class, the way that she presented

herself was she belong to the middle-class family. However, although a court order made it mandatory to attend the women's group sessions, she did not look like she considered it to be an obligation for her, nor acceptance that attendance would prevent her from going back to prison and thus losing the custody of her children.

Patricia performed the "survived victim" role from the first day when she attended the women's group class. Firstly, she hesitated to talk or share her opinions, she might want to portray herself as 'better' than the other women from a lower socio-economic class and then after she disclosed her background, her victim identity appeared strongly.

"Patricia comes from a wealthy family or this is the image that she wants to portray. She always comes to the class in designer items, and we would spend at least five minutes while the other women talked about these accessories; touching and trying to analyse how genuine each product might be"

(Field notes)

This wealthy image that she drew, underpinned her victim role, as according to her it was bad luck to get caught for one little mistake and to find herself in court. Her story began after she went to visit her family who were living abroad, in an Asian country. She had left her three children with their father in the UK for three months. When she came back, she found that her husband had started to use class A drugs; those that are the most dangerous. Although she said she tried to convince him to stop using drugs, sometime later she found that she herself was also using them daily. This addiction brought its consequences, the first one was they had to sell their sports car and soon their money problems led to domestic violence and ruined her family life.

When Patricia talked about her old lifestyle, she was always pitying herself as she saw herself as just a victim; something went wrong, and after her tiny mistake she was the one who was convicted, not her husband. She seemed to embrace this identity, and thus it prevented her from taking any action to change her situation which even deteriorated in the period of my observation.

"Today, when Patricia came to the class, she looked different, no fancy clothes, no designer label accessories. She was trying to hide half of her face while listening to the other women in the women's group. After Alex asked her about her week, she

started to shake as she talked. She said she had spent her whole week in the car, she had started to live there as her husband, who she shouldn't have been seeing, according to the court order, kicked her out from their house. She had not only lost her home, but had been suffering from pain, as half her body was covered with bruises."

(Field notes)

Although Patricia looked very unhappy as a result of her current situation, she kept repeating to us that she was a victim as life never treated her well. Unfortunately, after this appearance of her, I had never seen her in women's group, and did not hear anything about her from her responsible officer as she stopped coming to the probation company.

The victims were performing their roles by starting blaming others for their current situation. I mostly heard that it was the bad luck that brough them here in the probation. While Jessica and Trudy presented dominant characters in the women's group sessions, Patricia was presenting this dominancy by not participating the class, but by staying silence and showing off with her labelled accessories, as according to her the probation was not her place, after living a wealthy life she should have not been in that position. When you look at the classroom environment, you would see how uncomfortable she was in her chair, but that feeling was not because of uncomfortable chairs, but because of the group that she was part of during the women's group sessions. Although performing dominant characteristics is not expected for victim roles performances, it was understandable why they choose to blame others for their current situation in the probation, not taking the sole responsibility of their decisions.

5.2.3. "Worriers"

The three women offenders, Olivia, Mary and Trudy who frequently performed the worrier role, consciously chose to make this identity visible to other group members while sharing their stories about how they had handled, or had not handled, all the consequences of their convictions in terms of access and custody of their children. I have described this identity as worriers, based on how these women presented

themselves, while performing this identity how they put their roles forward, and made this identity more visible than other roles they presented. In other words, for instance, this was the major role that Olivia performed during my interviews with her as she constantly referred to her concerns regarding the loss of custody of her children. While Mary was performing this identity, the impression she gave me was that she was doing everything to regain custody of her daughter. Mary's worries about this led her to take outside employment, rather than being on benefit because this would go in her favour with regard to regaining custody. Trudy was another worrier I identified in my fieldwork. She performed this role in a strong and dominant manner: she looked as if she was having a hysteria attack as her voice was always extremely loud whenever she spoke about access to her children. This identity may be linked with the psychological health conditions, about which she spoke to me, and the addictive behaviours that I observed during my field work which may have meant she suffered from an anxiety disorder.

In this next section, I will investigate Olivia's "worrier" identity, and then move to illustrate how Mary and Trudy also presented this identity alongside their other identities; that is, of a 'fighter' or a 'survivor' respectively. I aim to explore Trudy's and Mary's "worriers" identities in this section, focusing on their various choices of emphasis as they presented their stories, which for me, clearly demonstrated multiple identities.

5.2.3.1. Olivia

Olivia was in her early twenties, the youngest child of her family. She had a rich vocabulary while I was interviewing her and even before we started the interview, she taught me a new trendy swear word that she thought I should have known. Her use of swear words may have been related to stress management or if habitual use she may have been demonstrating that she belonged to a specific group or even as a substitute for frustration or a response to pain.

Until she moved out from her parents' house, she didn't have good relationships either with her father or older sister.

"I didn't have a great relationship with dad, he was horrible, he was violent. He used to hit me, he even pushed me while I was pregnant, he used to swear at me and

everything. And that weren't just in private either he'd do it in front of his mates thinking it was funny. So, I fought for just over a year to get off of child protection."

Olivia was a victim of domestic violence, but this violence showed itself strongly when she was sixteen, when she got pregnant from her ex-partner. She managed to escape from being sent to foster care, as her father was not treating her properly, and sometimes domestic violence was followed with emotional abuse, when her father made fun of her when he was with his friends. This may have decided to find a gateway to rescue herself, and her ex-partner looked to be the best choice for her, a saviour. As following this statement, she said that; *"I managed to do it* [escape from living under child protection] *with the help of my ex-partner, my youngest boy's dad."*

Similar to some women participants that I explored earlier in this chapter, such as Jessica who described herself as a "black sheep of the family", Olivia did not have good relationship with her sister either. This might be because of she thought that her sister had got away with bad behaviour.

"I don't like her very much; I think she's very stuck up. She is a very stuck up girl, and because it was "oh, look at me I'm perfect" sort of thing when it's really no you're not. She was worse than me. I never raised my hand to my mom ever. I've never raised a hand to my mom. That's one thing I will never do. Cause if you can raise your hand to your mom, you can raise your hand to anybody. That's the way I see it. My sister used to beat my mom up when she was younger, but she never got charged."

When I was interviewing her, she showed incompatible feelings towards her sister. Although her career choice was shaped by her sister, she appeared unaware of how this choice had been shaped. When Olivia was 10 years old, her sister practised her hair dressing skills on her.

"My sister became my hairdresser when she turned 16. She's six years older than me, and I've always looked up to her."

However, while on one level admiring her sister, she found it hard to accept that her sister hurt their mother and did not charged for this behaviour. The unfairness may be grounded at this point, as according to Olivia, she was charged for smaller mistake than her sister done. Olivia had charged without considering her other identity

"mother", but on the other hand no one had reported her sister because of her behaviours.

Olivia always had a good relationship with her mother who was always supportive of Olivia. For example, when Olivia fell pregnant, at the age of sixteen, she had to drop out from the college.

She started smoking at the age of nine and drinking when she was fourteen. After she had given birth to two children and had taken the responsibility of her partner's child, she got convicted for ABH (Actual Bodily Harm).

"It's been up and down. My children have been very, obviously, unsettled. I moved four times last year. So my children have been very unsettled. Their behaviour became difficult for me to cope with, in myself, I was struggling to cope with everything. Even just to leave the house. I never really did. I only really ever left the house if I was coming here, which obviously I have to do. This is something I have to do, which is why I've done it. It's built me up as a better person. I can cope with my children now."

However, although she sounds like she is a fighter, as she kept fighting to stay in control of her life, her main motivation was always her children. She was doing everything for her children as her biggest fear was to lose custody. It was not just because she did not want her children to grow up with their father, it was because she acknowledged that the father of the kids would not take the custody and her children might end with going to foster care, which she had broken away from when she was 16. This fear was a strong motivator for her to keep battling on and which became one of her biggest fears.

This is how Olivia performed her "worrier" identity, and this opinion was reinforced with these words.

"It's only because I went downhill last year that I ended up getting arrested, but you'd never see me in that state again. Never, I couldn't do it. If I buy alcohol it sits in my fridge for god knows how long. Then I end up offering it to everybody else just to get rid of it. It's just mad. I'll open a bottle of beer, I'll go "oh, I fancy a beer", so I'll have a sip of this beer and open it up, I don't really want it now, put it back in the fridge and then it'll sit there for a couple of days or maybe a week and I'll end up tipping it down the sink. Pointless me even buying it now. But I buy it because, obviously, I have

people come around that do drink. And that do fancy having a nice cold beer in this weather. But it's just not for me, I'd rather sit having a joint in all fairness. It mellows me out, I can focus, I am 100% when I'm under the influence of weed. But I'm giving it up because it's not healthy for me, it's not healthy for my children."

She chose to quit drinking because of her children, and she acknowledged that smoking weed was also not helping her while she was looking after her children. Honestly, she was still seeing smoking weed from the bright side of it, especially while she was saying how it was helping her to relax and focus. Although relaxing and focusing are two endpoints of consciousness, she was seeing them in the same context. At her last sentence, it is visible that she wanted to quit just because of her children, even though she mentioned that it wasn't good for her, after mentioning its positive effects on her, I was not convinced how honest she was while saying that weed was not good for her.

*"I asked for that help. I asked for social services, I asked for family solutions when we were working with them. I asked for everything. Everything that could build me up. Because I know I was in a bad place and I know my kids needed me better. And more back then than they do now because they were more vulnerable back then. They weren't on the move as much, they weren't talking, and they weren't feeding themselves obviously. But now, they're all up and about trashing my house. Honestly, don't have children? [*she is asking me if I have children] *No, they are lovely.*"

The second half of this conversation shows how her sentences were full of opposite contraries. She asked for help to become a better mother, where her worrier identity appeared strongly. But on the other hand, while they were more vulnerable, she did not choose to ask for help.

"In general, in the past six years, I probably tried to kill myself about seven times and it is always a photograph in my head. It is always something I want to do. But I just look at my children and they keep me alive. It's the only reason I am alive. If they are what keeps me alive, then they are what can build me up and make me a better person."

This one was another moment that I observed how she contradicted herself. Even she was thinking that her children worth trying and keep going, she constantly tried to

commit suicide. I observed her worrier identity during the interview, but she was performing different identities as well during her daily life. This part of our conversation may give an idea of an identity that she was performing during the suicidal behaviours which might be her beliefs of not worth living.

"When people tell me I'm a bad mom I look at them and I'll be like "shut up, no I'm not". Because I know I'm a bloody good mom for what I've been through and what I'm still going through. I'm doing bloody well for three children under the age of five…I can't do anything more. I just do some housework and be a mum. If I'm not in the college, I'm just being a mum. People look and say just a mum but "just a mum" is difficult. Its 24/7 job, compare to 9 to 5, so it's hard work."

This statement made me question why we perform different roles, is it only because of society's expectations? Here, Olivia explains other people's opinions, and that might be another reason why she started to perform "worrier" identity and built up her new life mostly around this identity. While she was identifying herself "I'm just a mum", this also explains how she put this identity in the middle of her life, and let this identity dominate others while becoming one of the major one especially while making decisions, such as quit drinking or considering to stop smoking weed.

"Because I know I made some bad decisions, but I'm also now making the right decisions for me and for my children. And that's all that matters to me. As long as me and my kids are happy and safe and healthy and getting the best start that they can in life, then that's all that matters to me."

This last statement shows, how she was consistent about carrying "worrier" identity for her children. It was not just being a mother, it was worrying about her children, their health, safety and happiness. While she was worrying about what other people think and say of her and justify her life choices. Even though, she had shown much strength in the way that she was behaving at the time of my data collection, her victim identity always met with a lack of confidence.

5.2.3.2. Mary

Mary was another offender who presented a worrier identity alongside her fighter identity. During my observations, especially the ones in the women's group sessions, her 'worrier' performances were always visible although she usually appeared as the introverted one among the women in the group. Her 'worrier' identity was firmly

grounded in her concern as to whether, given the nature of her conviction she could ever regain custody of her daughter who was, at the time of my fieldwork, living with her ex-partner's parents.

She began looking for a more beneficial permanent job, but she appeared quite worried as she mentioned at the group session that she was hesitating to apply for any job because of her conviction. Some of the other women offenders in the class recommended that she seek legal advice about whether or not she should disclose her conviction. that was the moment that I realised that in the absence of the facilitator's interaction, this was how the women offenders gave support to help each other with their worries in the classroom. While we were smoking, during the break, I witnessed that some of the other women recommended that she did not disclose that fact as they maintained that the company had no right to cancel a contract because of a conviction. Furthermore, they said it could push them to find reasons to not employ Mary. It appeared to me that she was grateful for the support as she interacted by asking questions and getting clarification. However, Mary never mentioned later whether or not she disclosed her conviction to the fast-food company where she was working. I believe that the nature of her conviction meant that her worries about employment were unlikely to disappear.

Mary did not find working full time easy particularly with youths who were just over 16 years old. She was always sharing her worries about whether or not she was capable of doing this kind of job, and always mentioning that she missed the opportunity of working with children which was her dream job. However, it seemed to me that her 'worrier' identity always pushed her to keep going in this job. The way that she presented this identity much more naturally than the other two offenders: Olivia and Trudy. This may have been because of her shy, introverted personality, and she did not appear to be emphasizing this identity; rather she was living it, performing it in a natural way, especially whenever she raised issues related to her work experiences and her daughter's grandparents.

5.2.3.3. Trudy
Trudy could be said to be the loudest with this "worrier" identity. While she was talking about her worries about her children, you would hear her from the next room, even from the kitchen which was opposite the women's group room. At first, the way

that she performed this role scared me, as she was shouting, and moving about in an uncontrolled manner then when I tried to hear her concerns and interpret her behaviour, I realised that this was her style of performing a "worrier" identity.

"Trudy never chose to talk about her conviction when we are in the women's group sessions. She manipulated people when they started to ask her about that. Today while we were talking about families, I think Mary's disclosure started the conversation, she mentioned that she was doing everything to regain custody of the children who currently were living with her second husband."

(Field notes)

She had been married twice and although she was separated from her second husband at this time, she was still using his surname and was worried about regaining custody of the children from the latter husband. Trudy performed her worrier identity in a different way from either Olivia or Mary. For instance, although I knew she had more than 5 children, I was never clear about the exact number or their names as her personal disclosures were few, sometimes contradictory and often lacking detail.

I believe her reason for making her "worrier" identity visible, I thought, was to ensure her providers (responsible officers and facilitators) were aware that she was always concerned about her children, and she wanted to be a good role model for them. During the break of one of the other programmes that I attended where Trudy was present, this is how I noted what happened

"She received a phone call from her son who is in prison as he has a connection with her conviction and told her that he was being bullied by other prisoners and was seriously worried to such an extent that he told Trudy that he wanted to kill himself. Trudy began shouting asking, "How am I going to save my son? They're going to hurt him; they're going to rape him. He is not like other lads, he is a good boy, this is how I raised him". I was terrified about what I had just heard about her worries after I had started the conversation by asking them the usual question: 'How is your week going?' Thankfully, the facilitator of the session approached and explained the possible legal actions that she could take to protect her son. Suddenly Trudy appeared to calm down and acted less emotionally before going out to smoke in the break."
(Field notes)

"A little later we had another Trudy hysteria episode. I don't know why she always raises these issues during the Tuesday classes, not the Friday women's group sessions. It's again about her son. This time she said he was going to run away from prison to kill his father and uncles. a few weeks earlier on the way to the Friday class Trudy came across her sister-in-law and was terrified that the sister-in-law may try to kill or harm her because of the nature of her conviction which related to her husband's family. she came to the class white-faced and shared her worries about the possibility of her being harmed. When she shared this unexpected meeting with her son, that was when he decided to run away to solve his mother's worries. This sharing of her worries aloud accompanied by hysterical gestures ended when the facilitator recommended that she should talk with her responsible officer and share this information with the police force."

(Field notes)

Different than the other women participants I had an opportunity to participate two classes with Trudy. She was attending Tuesday's classes as well which aimed to support male and female offenders while exploring themselves. Trudy's worrier identity which presented itself through this emotional behaviour may have been presented on Tuesdays, not Fridays, because the facilitator on those days appeared to be more dominant and capable of offering legal advice to Trudy's concerns. She may also have exaggerated her worries through her emotional outbursts in order to gain the facilitator's attention. I have reported what I heard and observed on these occasions, but I have never been totally convinced that they were completely accurate. The lack of a facilitator in the environment never changed her worrier identity performance, even when she was performing to me, the audience that she also performed her other identities on Fridays.

Olivia, Trudy and Mary's worrier identities were performed based on society's expectations. As I did not spend much time with Olivia, just for the interview, I believe instead of analysing my expectations for her identity, she chose to perform the worrier identity based on her previous experiences, which also shows the people's comments on her parenting skills. Different than Olivia, Trudy and Mary performed their worrier identities alongside with their other identities. I observed that Mary's worrier identity was always appeared when the women's group session topic was related to children.

On the other hand, Trudy did not show any pattern of performing. But Trudy's approach while performing worrier identity was different, as two women were explaining their worries related to their children, Trudy added the crying element to this performance. This might be the result of her earlier learning about society's expectations, in this case, she was aware of how an offender mother of an offender son was expected to perform. In addition to this, Trudy's choice of approach might have been to increase the attention to her case.

5.3. Conclusion

Through the life stories of these seven women introduced above, the reader has gained an insight into the complexities of their lives both before and after their conviction. The prevalence of violence in the home, substance abuse and getting into bad companies through their lives will be investigated in the subsequent chapters. Women offenders, like every other person, have multifaceted characters and thus perform multiple identities according to the context, which for these women is probation, their personal circumstances, which is restrained by court orders, and their most current issues which they may have difficulty handling as a result of their characters and / or the above. They might not present themselves as 'fighters, survivors or worriers' while they are with their children, husbands, families or social groups, but these are the roles I observed these women offenders on probation performing in women's group sessions during my field work. The three categories that I have explored in this chapter and assigned to the women offenders come from their primary performances as I was observing and interviewing them. That is, it was the main identity that I observed, but as I have explained above this was not the only identity I noted.

The different performances of identities also show the importance of relationships on the probation and this is an aspect that I will explore in the following chapter. The women offenders' identities were mainly based on their earlier learning experiences through the communities and the relationships. By building up relationships, it was possible to acknowledge the expectations from the identity performance. For instance, as I did not have earlier built relationship with Olivia, she chose to perform the worrier role, as that role was suitable for society's expectation from her (according to her). While she was performing worrier role, she mentioned her children in detailed,

especially how they spent time together and showed me their pictures. On the other hand, there was a relationship between me and women's group session attendants, in this case Jessica, Mary, Trudy and even with less attendees by looking at those three Patricia. The relationship might have shaped their acknowledgement about people's expectations for each identity. I believe it was easy to shift between different identities when they were performing for me, because I was considered to be close to them and not having judgemental attitude. And this might be the reason why I was able to observe multiple identities performed by the women with whom I built relationships.

In the next chapter I will explore intended and existing relationships on the probation process.

CHAPTER 6

EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PROBATION SERVICE

6.1. Introduction

While relationships between responsible officers and offenders in the context of probation services are referred to in policy documents by the Home Office (1962), until the 1990s, relationships between offenders and staff as a focus of research was generally neglected. One exception is Eshelby (1962) who criticised the term 'caseworkers 'as used in the Probation of Offenders Act 1907. According to the Act, caseworkers were there 'to advise, assist and befriend' whereas Eshelby argued that the role had a disciplinary element (p.126) that was not simply based on a good relationship.

Then Boswell et al. (1993), in a report commissioned by the Home Office, exploring the desired professional skills and knowledge required in the probation services, described 'relationship making' as a vital component in the role of responsible officer. A decade later, the relationship between responsible officers and offenders was referred to by Burnett and McNeil (2005) as 'a core condition for changing the behaviour and social circumstances associated with recidivism' (p.221). 'The caseworker's first task is to win the confidence of the person needing help, and often that of his family, since only with their cooperation can the full picture emerge…rare sensitivity may be needed in establishing and developing the casework relationship at this stage, and sympathetic interest must be matched by objective and critical analysis of the data obtained' (Gelsthorpe and Morgan, 2011, p.212).

In 2018, a consultation document presented to parliament in the UK, recognised 'the importance of positive relationships between the offender and the responsible officer in supporting offenders from reoffending' (p. 15), supported by research about recidivism (Burnett and McNeil, 2005; Boswell et al, 1993). The document (Strengthening probation, building confidence consultation document, 2018, p.15) described in detail the role of responsible officers, stating that 'Probation staff must foster a relationship of trust, establish clear boundaries, and then kindle in the offender

a sense of optimism for the future, a commitment to change and the resilience to overcome setbacks. As a response to this consultation, in 2019, government published a response document that emphasizes the importance of effective relationships between responsible officers and offenders:

'We want to ensure delivery arrangements place a stronger emphasis on the quality of relationships between offenders and probation officers; that offenders secure access to the range of statutory services and referrals to wider provision that will together support their rehabilitation, promote access to employment, secure accommodation and reduce reoffending.' (Response to the consultation, 2019, p.17).

There is recognition that the relationship that forms between responsible officers and offenders can have a positive influence on offenders' aspirations for the future and can reduce reoffend rates. Relationships was a major theme to emerge in my fieldwork. But while policy documents refer solely to the relationship between the responsible officer and the offender, I found many other relationships to be equally important. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the women offenders' life stories of informal learning experiences are usually told with reference to a significant relationship. In this chapter, I present the theme of relationships within the probation service between responsible officers and third-party agencies, relationships between responsible officers and offenders, facilitators and offenders and relationships between offenders. I explore the power relationships between responsible officers and offenders. I consider the changing structures in the probation services which includes collaborative work between the responsible officers and facilitators from third-party agencies. I also discuss how one of the facilitators learnt to run women's group sessions. Policy documents focus on what relationships should be or are expected to be like. I used participant observation to gain insights into how relationships are constructed and what they mean to the people who have them.

6.2.   The importance of relationships among providers (responsible officers and facilitators)

The vital role of responsible officers in probation services is described in policy documents. My fieldwork confirmed that by far the most important relationship was indeed the one between the responsible officer and the offender. This is the first step whereby an offender might start to feel that she belongs to a community and that there

is someone looking after her. It might also be the first step she takes in taking responsibility for herself and her actions and considering the changes that she would like to apply to her life. I was interested to find out the characteristics of the successful responsible officer- offender relationship in the complex reality of a probation centre.

6.2.1. Developing relationships from responsible officers' perspectives

According to women offenders I spoke to, Grace was one of the best responsible officers. If your responsible officer was Grace, women offenders saw you as the luckiest person in the building: you were privileged. On the face of it, I saw little difference between what Grace did and what other responsible officers did. Like others, she had 'one-to-ones', she called offenders about their appointments, did referrals and wrote reports after every meeting. But what made her the most supportive responsible officer was her attitude towards the offenders. She described her approach in one sentence: "*You need to invest in that person*". She explained that when she first meets an offender, she does not think of them as a person with a criminal record. Nor does she take too much notice of the relationship as described and planned by the probation services when building relationships. What struck me was that rather than following a template, she had a simple and authentic approach. She told me: "*we might have a service user who isn't trustworthy either, but it's about building a relationship… If you say you're going to do something, just do it. If you can't explain why and say, sorry, I don't see anything wrong in saying sorry… I say sorry all the time because if I am late if I can't do something, I always say sorry. Even if I went off sick, you know, there's nothing wrong with saying, sorry, nothing wrong. We are human and we make mistakes and so do they. So you communicate and don't lie. Just communicate, so it doesn't need to be difficult. It's a very difficult job as it is. You don't need to make it any harder for yourself by, by not communicating*". In other words, while she was very professional, she was also entirely personal and brought her entire self into the process of building relationships with offenders. During fieldwork, I witnessed her so many times apologising to the women offenders because she couldn't make a meeting, or because she couldn't offer better options to improve women's living arrangements, such as housing and benefits.

The different attitudes that responsible officers had towards women offenders and their varying abilities to develop good relationships were very evident for all to see.

And for every time a woman offender praised Grace, they did not hold back their low opinion of other responsible officers. As participant observer, I too could not fail to witness the variations in attitudes. During the shadowing, I would also overhear snippets of conversation between responsible officers as they left their desks to go to a meeting. While some chose to leave their desk silently, others would share significant incidents related to the offenders they were about to see. The policy documents tend to give the impression that there is a single approach to relationship-building but in practice this is clearly not the case. People had personalities and attributes, attitudes and strategies that meant they approached tasks and relating differently. While one responsible officer might pursue every avenue available to them to support an offender, another spent the meeting just asking the questions and recording the answers. They did not appear to be aware of, or provide, any information about the additional support that the offender might be entitled to.

For Grace, empathy is central to the role of responsible officer: "*So as long as you can handle that, I think you need empathy. I have no interest in someone if they don't work with empathy. I think we all should have empathy in our approach and kindness. I think we're not here to be horrible people. I think we need to show kindness and the fact that we we're all human, people make mistakes. We need to be assertive and strict, but we need to be kind.*" However, she also acknowledges that empathy cannot be taught: "*I don't think you can make someone be responsive. I mean managers can tell you to be more responsive. But I think it needs to come from the heart. I think offenders, they're only human. They can sniff it out if it's genuine or not. We're all animals and that's exactly what we are.*"

I observed numerous interactions as women moved through the probation process. Many of them were so mechanical. Just a few minutes were allocated to answering the responsible officers' questions. Based on my observations, most of the time, the offenders gave evasive answers and both parties seemed keen to end the meeting. This appointment should be the one that deter offenders from reoffending. Yet the offender is not asked about her life, the struggles she has faced and/or overcome or questions about probation. I was troubled by this and wondered how a bridge could be built between the authority and the offender, without knowing about any developments in her life.

6.2.1.1. Peer support among responsible officers

The legal and policy documents for England and Wales (2014; 2018) outline the expected (intended) relationships between responsible officers and offenders on probation. However, these documents do not refer to the relationships among responsible officers which is a key element of their professional work environment. One example of this is peer support. Although it is not explicitly stated, it has a strong impact on shaping the attitudes and practices that these officers adopt in their work with offenders.

This support was evident in many forms during my fieldwork. one of which was the re-assignment of cases to other responsible officers. Hannah, a newly authorized responsible officer, described the re-assignment of some of her cases: "*if it's a case I can't quite cope with, or if I think it needs hiring someone else to look at it, I pass cases to the more qualified probation officers, or to my manager for re-assignment, but if you feel like you need the case to move on, most of the time we can normally work it ourselves and not pass it to other people*".

Another form of peer support I observed during my fieldwork was supervisions, but also more informal conversations related to specific cases. These communications were based on shared experiences, in other words, similar cases that various responsible officers had worked on. These conversations served to build professional relationships among the responsible officers. According to my observations, one key aspect of this was to develop the confidence of the responsible officers, like Hannah, who were not sure about the best approach to adopt with a particular offender. Hannah explained, "*I think we're a very close team here so talking to your colleagues is very, very important. So, I definitely talk to everyone about different cases. If anything's bothering me, or if I keep thinking about something, I'll get their advice. My manager is always very good to talk to about anything, and I will talk to her if there's anything I'm concerned with. We have regular supervision, and so I can go through my cases and talk about anything I'm concerned with.*"

These conversations also provided the responsible officers with opportunities to take a fresh look at each case. Dealing with similar case situations day after day can result in a loss of interest, which, in turn, can lead to adopting a rather mechanical approach to a case. In reality, every case is unique because every offender is. Looking at every case afresh is critically important in order to provide adequate support for offenders.

Hannah spoke of how easy it was to make easy connections between seemingly similar cases and of the importance of avoiding "*normalizing them*" so that appropriate action was taken in each individual case: "*I think we need to be careful not to get some decent ties to things because it can be something that you hear so many times, so you say it's not a big problem. But to them (the offenders), it is a big problem, so you need to make sure that you don't look for these ties for any cases, and you still treat everything as an individual issue as they have brought it to you. I think just talking to people (other responsible officers) about it works*".

"*I think I'm used to leaving work at work and I know I can't do anymore. I know I have done everything I could at the time and then when I leave, I'm leaving work behind.*" Thus, Hannah underlined the importance of *"leaving work at work"* as a way of dealing with the pressures of work while enabling her to keep her fresh perspective on the cases.

Similar to Hannah, Grace also mentioned "*leaving work at work*" with giving her reasons of this.

"*I'm used to leaving work at work and that sounds really bad, but, I'm used to. I'm used to dealing with hard cases. So, listening to stuff and then just, I just don't take it home with me. I can't, because otherwise I'll be at home upset or angry.*" one of the offenders that she was taking care of, died during his probation, so Grace was still under the effect of this lost even this incident had happened a few months before I met with her. "*Sometimes I think about things. I mean, one of my service users, he died, and to this day I'm still quite upset about it. So I think there's some things which don't leave you but just have to. You just have to find a way. I went for a long period of time where I was taking my laptop home and it was not good for me because the stories and the things, I was hearing was all of a sudden in my house. So now I'm very strict. I leave my laptop at work and my home is my home and my work is my work and you just have to have that discipline. I don't know how you do it, you have no choice because otherwise some things have taken home with me. Some things have got upset about.*"

"Leaving work at work" was one of my biggest challenges while conducting this research in the Community Rehabilitation Company. However, at first, this challenge seemed as my personal challenge, during the fieldwork it came to my mind that this

could be learnt through peer support. The responsible officers' social environment was supportive and open to share the tactics with each other about how to distance themselves from the serious incidents that happened at work.

As expressed above, peer support helps to building stronger relationships among responsible officers which in turn helps them to provide appropriate support to the offenders. However, this did not always work. During my fieldwork, the most heart-breaking incidents concerned housing issues. Housing is a well-known problem for the probation services and there have been several attempts and plans to overcome this issue through policy papers (Female Offender Strategy, 2018; Strengthening Probation, Building Confidence, 2018). However, housing continued to be problematic and highlighted the lack of cooperation between responsible officers' team raise the tensions between responsible officers and offenders. The incident I witnessed happened in the middle of April, at the end of a group session. I was preparing to leave when Trudy, one of the women offenders who had attended the session, approached me at the entrance of the building. As the weather was cold for spring, I was putting on my gloves while trying to understand what she was telling me with tears in her eyes. She told me that she had only two days left in the accommodation she had been allocated by the court for the duration of her bail while being monitored digitally with a curfew tag. After those two days, she had nowhere to live. Her responsible officer was on leave for a month. The responsible officer who was on duty that day was also off sick. No arrangement had been made for her in terms of her housing. As a result, here she was crying, in front of me. I accompanied her to the welcome desk at the entrance of the building and she asked the receptionist if she could see a responsible officer. Luckily, one of the most experienced responsible officers was passing by at that moment, on her way to the next appointment, and she stopped to ask what the problem was (it was impossible to pass the entrance without noticing Trudy's tears and look of panic). The experienced officer listened and gave her the phone number of an organization that would help her to get a place until the council could arrange new accommodation for her. As every single step has to be scheduled in the offenders' probation file, I wondered whether her status had been checked and if so, why no one had approached her with this information earlier, rather than two days before her present accommodation expired. Or was she expected to handle it by herself? How could this happen if Trudy's responsible officer had

engaged in peer support conversations and treated Trudy's case as an individual? Surely, she should have made arrangements or passed her case on before going on leave? This shows that existence of peer support in the working environment might cause some delays in assigned cases, as I was able to follow this incident up, and found out that her responsible officer had thought that as her colleagues knew about Trudy's case, they should have supported Trudy at the time she needed.

6.2.2. Relationships between responsible officers and facilitators: tensions and hierarchies

Relationships within the probation service also included facilitators from third party agencies. These agencies, according to the policy documents (2014, 2018), are expected to support the private probation companies with the responsible officers' heavy workload. Facilitators not only run groups but also take attendance, hold one-to-one sessions and report back to the manager of their agency, who, in turn, would report back to the company. Thus, there is a degree of overlap between the responsible officer role and the facilitator role, making the relationship between facilitators and offenders an important one in terms of supporting the offenders. It also means that a collaborative relationship between facilitators and responsible officers is also important, yet the role of the facilitator is not recognised in the legal and policy documents. To investigate these relationships, I carried out observations and tried to ask similar questions during my interviews with both parties. I found that responsible officers were willing to share their opinions and feelings about working with these third-party agency staff. The facilitators, by contrast, were unwilling to discuss their relationship with responsible officers; thus, my findings regarding this theme are only from the perspective of the responsible officers.

Although the primary reason for engaging facilitators from third party agencies was to ease the caseload of responsible officers, some responsible officers willingly undertook extra tasks that could have been passed on to the facilitators. Grace, for example, was keen to work with women offenders. She was not only running sessions for offenders and attending daily meetings with them but also took charge of developing new courses for these women offenders. She described herself as a "perfectionist" and this was a trait that had shaped her perspective on working with facilitators. She indicated that she was not happy with the work of the facilitators.

As I observed the interactions in the centre, I noted that responsible officers seemed to be keen to make the facilitators aware of their hierarchical superiority and this did not encourage collaborative relationships. For example, on one occasion I accompanied Grace and one of the facilitators when they were organizing an international women's day event at the city council. Grace was asking the facilitator's opinion on some specific cases and the interaction that ensued had some similarities with the peer support conversations I had witnessed among responsible officers. However, these conversations differed in that Grace's questions required mostly yes/no answers. During our interview, it transpired that Grace's views of facilitators had been greatly influenced by hearsay. Grace told me: "*I've heard good feedback (from the offenders), not excellent feedback, but if something is not excellent for me in terms of service delivery, if it's not excellent, I don't see it as good. Although some responsible officers may see it as good, I only see the merit. I don't think the third partner agency work is very good*". When I heard this, I remembered the interaction I had observed and wondered whether I had misinterpreted Grace's intentions. Perhaps she was in fact assessing the skills of the facilitator with this type of questioning.

Several responsible officers did have positive experiences of working with facilitators from different agencies. Frida for example, told me that the quality of facilitators varied depending on the agency, but that "*I think some of them are great, like we've just started working with agency x and what they're doing sounds promising and hopefully it will carry on that way.*" Hannah underlined the benefits of having sessions run by third part agencies: "*I think group work can be good. So we did one through X agency, wilderness project, and one of my service users stayed for the whole thing. I think it was 10 sessions, she stayed for all of it and she got so much from it, it just boosted her self-esteem. She gets to meet new people, just made her feel better. She actually enjoyed going in the end and learn some new skills so I think doing group work can be beneficial for some of the offenders.*"

Iris welcomes the contribution of third-party agencies and sees the relationship with facilitators as a positive one as long as there is recognition that the responsible officers understood the offenders better than the facilitators do: "*I have to say I like the diversity. There's lots of leaflets around offenders where you can signpost them somewhere else. I like it personally, but maybe it doesn't really suit other people. Sometimes I'd like to think that facilitators could do it all themselves, but I'm not of*

that mind. I don't think I can do it all myself. And I know other organizations/agencies, people have other expertise, don't they? Um, I'm, I'm hoping that they will understand that they have their manual to have their expertise so do we, and perhaps we understand their mentality sometimes better than they do. So, they're quite often surprised at certain things or they seem to be quite surprised and actually certain ways of doing something. So, I think I would like to think that they would be open to tapping into our expertise. I think it happens, I think it's a new experience for us/ responsible officers, and probably new experience for them as well...It's a fledgling relationship, but I'm all for outside agencies. As long as we know where the guidelines and boundaries are, I like it."

Iris recognises that responsible officers and facilitators have different expertise that can be complementary if each party recognises what the other can contribute. Just she was aware of the lack of skills that showed itself when she observed that the facilitator surprised during the session, and Iris underline this with stating, "*we/ responsible officers understand their/ facilitators' mentality better than they do*".

Equally, Iris recognises that responsible officers do not have the same expertise as the facilitators when it comes to running groups: "*It can be challenging; the responsible officers are not used to working in groups. They may know their material in the manual, but they don't know about group dynamics, because that's not our/ the company's problem, that's their problem with a delivery.*"

Iris seemed to suggest that while responsible officers had the expertise to deal with individual behaviours, she was unwilling to take any responsibility for difficulties that might arise in the group, stating that it was up to the third-party agency to send facilitators who are prepared for working in the context of probation services.

The main criticism was directed at the agencies rather than the facilitators. I was told that agencies often fired facilitators, leading to inconsistency which impacted negatively on the offenders. For example, Frida told me, "*Agencies, such as [y], had about four different facilitators for women's sessions in the last year. The agencies should be consistent and it's this consistency when you refer an offender to attend a session and then the facilitator changes or the appointment doesn't get picked up for weeks and weeks or you don't know when the offender's next appointment is and if they miss it. So, it's just knowing that the agency is reliable because you don't always*

want to run after them - it's kind of having to rely on other people to update you and let you know if they're doing that work". Grace was also critical of the frequent change in facilitators: "*The fact that there's been a lot of staff changes with X agency hasn't helped because a lot of women have lost their confidence and faith in the service.*" She compared this provision with the initial session I had been invited to join by the company before I started my fieldwork: "*I had better feedback from the session me and you ran in December where it was more of an open discussion about real life stuff and just goal settings. It served a purpose.*"

Another criticism of third-party agencies was that offenders' absence was not always recorded. This had consequences for the responsible officers, as Iris explained: "*I think it'd be great if you get other agencies into running other groups because it would lighten our case load. But it doesn't really work like that.*" Third party agency provision in the form of sessions was supposed to leave more time to responsible officers for writing reports or meeting one to one with offenders. In reality, in some cases the involvement of third-party agencies generated more work for responsible officers: "*That's why sometimes it does force responsible officers, it does fall to people like me or my colleague who are running the group at the moment because you can't really rely on [the agencies]. There was one [the agency] that they were doing, and it wasn't really doing much for people*". Due to the dysfunctional work that the agency run, responsible officers were running some sessions on top of their daily jobs. It was not clear that this dysfunctional work was due to the lack of staff or expertise in the third-party agencies that worked with the Community and Rehabilitation Company.

6.3. Responsible Officers and Offenders: Shifting Power Relationships

While analysing my data, I thought a lot about power relations in the probation service. The power between offenders and responsible officers appears how it has been presumed, and going in details, would not give a new perspective on this relationship. On the contrary, when I found out the power was built on other way round, I decided to cover this relationship to make the picture of probation clearer.

In this section, I explore how responsible officers viewed their relationships with offenders. Through sharing my observation notes, I aim to give a more nuanced account of the more hidden power dynamics that play out in this context. As suggested

by their role title, responsible officers are responsible for offenders' behaviour, choices and 'changes'. They are also responsible for writing the reports that are sent to courts and used to make decisions about the conviction period for every offender that passes through the service. Along with an offender's attitude in court, these reports have a major influence on sentencing.

Responsible officers I interviewed were very aware of the important role they played, not only as writers of the report but also as facilitators of the relationships offenders had with their families, police, etc. and the wider social environment. As Grace stated, "*We're in such an influential position. There's no room for error. There's no room for weak delivery. There's no room for weak material and fluffy material. We're here to sort people's lives out.*" Grace saw herself as being in a powerful position. The relationship with the offenders was not so much about support but more as problem solver, almost saviour of offenders. She also saw herself as providing a "role model" for the offenders.

Frida's description of how she saw her relationship with offenders was more nuanced:

"*We get them to put people into positive and negative influences. So even relationships with police, probation, family members or of that kind of stuff, we get them to generally think, where would you place people and then ask them personally, do they think they spend more time with the positive people or they spend more time with people who are in drugs and we'll kind of bring out a good side of them and who's spending time with who, etc.*"

In a sense, Frida recognises the importance of all the relationships in an offender's life and seems to want to help offenders to see that they have a choice, in other words that, even if they do not have power as such, they do have agency.

These accounts are a reminder that whatever this central relationship is intended to be according to regulations and policies published by the Ministry of Justice, in practice, each relationship is unique, just as each individual brings to the relationship a unique set of circumstances, personality and a past which also change over in various ways over time.

From the offenders' point of view, the relationship with the responsible officer was not necessarily the most important. During my fieldwork I discovered that for many

women offenders, the facilitators of the group sessions were in some ways more important because they would see them at least once a week, whereas some only saw their responsible officers once a month. As a result, they were often up stronger relationships with the facilitators and these relationships could lead to a shift of power in the relationship between offenders and responsible officers.

I describe an incident that occurred during my fieldwork illustrate this. Patricia, who was in her mid-40s (see profile in Chapter 5), started to attend group sessions as a requirement of her court case. At first, I observed she was very reluctant to attend and kept her interactions with others to a minimum. However, during the third session, she decided to share her story with us, the reason why she was there and the problems she was going through in her personal life, with a husband who abused her both mentally and physically. One of the conditions of her probation was that she would not see her husband. One day, she turned up with a lot of bruises on her body which were easily visible when she rolled up her sleeves. It turned out that not only was she still seeing her husband, but she was also staying with him in the same house. All the attendees told her to talk with her responsible officer about this incident, but she refused. I had to take action, as I was not sure if she was putting herself in a dangerous situation. So, I informed her that I would have to inform the facilitator, who would have to submit a report to the probation company through the agency. Much to my surprise, Patricia appeared to entirely comfortable with the idea of me telling the facilitator. She said that the facilitator would understand her better than her responsible officer. Choosing to withhold information from her responsible officer and to disclose to the facilitator instead shows that offenders do have agency within the service and that within the relationship with their responsible officer they have more power than is immediately apparent.

According to the responsible officers, their relationships with offenders were based on role modelling, trust and providing offenders a social environment conducive to making positive choices about who they interact with outside of the service, rather than keeping up with friends that belonged to their pre -offending lives. Patricia's choice suggests that she places more trust in the facilitator than in her offending officer, perhaps being more able to see them as a fellow human being rather than seeing a role and a uniform. This incident also suggested to me that in the context of probation, the learning spaces created for group sessions provided an opportunity for

peer learning and support, reflection, and empowerment. It was also an opportunity for women offenders to share their experiences with their responsible officer, which could also involve learning.

6.4. Exploring relationships from facilitators' perspectives

In the first section, I explored the responsible officers' perspectives of facilitators and third-party agencies and reported that they often saw agency staff as not having sufficient knowledge and skills relevant to the probation context and work with offenders. In this section I discuss the perspectives of the facilitators, their accounts of their training before coming into the probation service to run group sessions.

Before becoming a group facilitator in the probation service, Belinda, a psychologist by training, had worked with men in one of the rehabilitation centres. She described how she ended up working as a facilitator at the agency after she decided that the job at the rehabilitation company did not meet her expectations and she no longer had desire to work with them: "*That job* [Facilitator at the third-party agency] *found me. I was working at the other place and I knew my contract was coming to end. So, I was applying for loads of jobs and it wasn't happening, so I put out on my Facebook status, did anyone know of any jobs around and one of the supervisors of the agency, who was my classmate when we were undergraduates wrote and told me about the agency. The job was sold to me, as the job description required more psychological engagement with offenders. Actually, in practice, it wasn't. There was a lot more managerial, admin and etc. ...When I asked the manager how much of this work is going to be groups and one to ones, and how much is going to be management and admin, he said seventy and thirty percent. I knew that my background in rehabilitation will be good and I would be suited to the role. I always worked with men before, so I was looking for something different. When you are doing a similar kind of job, you want to keep changing your CV. I didn't want to work with men, I didn't want to work with brain injuries, so I thought, it will be positive. I knew it was going to be something different. I knew it wasn't something that I was used to but I thought it would be a lot more suited to me than my previous role.*"

Neither the supervisor nor the manager of the third party agency were able to explain what the requirements of the role were for working with offenders, holding a degree in psychology was seen as sufficient, even though her previous work experience was

very different. Nor was Belinda offered any specific training to prepare for the role, other than to shadow the supervisor during a session with women offenders:

"*There was a mandatory training where we had basic training you would expect from any company like health and safety, fire. There wasn't a lot of training to be honest. My training was when I was out with the supervisor, when I observed a couple of groups and one to ones. I was shadowing her for four days, I think. I was with her Tuesday Wednesday Thursday and Friday and then the following week, I was running the women's group session by myself. In my first group, I can't actually remember how I felt. I was just hoping that they like me because obviously, I was aware that it was going to be a different group of people and I was aware of it being with women and I think my confidence was with running men's groups... running groups with the boys was easier because you could just mess around but with women, I wasn't sure how to be with them. I was quite self-conscious about how I was coming across…*"

Belinda went on to tell me how she felt about her first session:

"*I thought it went better than what I expected. It was easier than I had been told to expect. I feel quite positive and like the group... Actually, one of the women that comes is particularly challenging. If I had had someone challenging right at the beginning, I might have gone, "oh my god, what I have let myself into" but two women came, and it wasn't too bad. But I think I could have done more training about the goals, the targets of the agency, ways of doing paperwork [she described the structure of the reports that she had to send to the agency]. I wasn't trained well enough I think and what was mandatory* [writing up reports about every offender attending the sessions] *wasn't explained well enough.*"

Belinda did not adopt any specific approach in the group sessions. Instead, she explored the best way to approach every woman in the classroom. This exploration was evidence of her own informal learning journey, as every week she was presented with different attitudes and coping with the different situations that each individual woman offender brought into the session. She was also very flexible with regards to the content of the sessions and clearly did not leave the job at the door of the probation centre. For example, during the session on skills for building better relationships, an offender complained about housing. The following week, Belinda handed over a piece of paper on which she had written down the contact details of specific charities that

provided shelter to people who had housing issues. This was an evident of how she was paying attention to women offenders' troubles and tackling individually.

6.5. Conclusion

As in other contexts, practices do not necessarily conform to policies. I observed significant differences between the intended and existing relationships in the probation service. Although the legal and policy documents refer to the role of relationships between responsible officers and offenders as a vital one, they make no reference to the importance of peer relationships between responsible officers. Nor is there mention of the role groups facilitators play in probation services, both in terms of their relationships with responsible officers and women offenders. The impact the third-party agencies might have indirectly on the service in general and the learning experience of offenders in particular, through the training they provide or not to their staff who facilitate the sessions, is also not addressed.

These hidden relationships can be supportive, as in responsible officers learning from one another, giving advice or stepping in when needed. The relationship between responsible officers and facilitators can be seen as complementary on both sides. Because of the nature of the role, responsible officers' views about third party agency facilitators varied. Some were happy to work with facilitators as it meant a reduced workload, but others were critical of the provision in these group sessions and concerned about what they saw as under skilled employees who needed a lot of help to run sessions for this target group. Responsible officers who had positive views spoke of a collaborative/complementary relationship. The interactions of those responsible officers who were critical, on the other hand, tended to talk at the facilitators, raising issues such as boundary setting and subtly assessing the facilitators by asking Yes/No questions. which I observed at the hierarchical working environment in probation services. In these relationships, responsible officers were keen to underline that they were the ones with the expertise and that it was only a time issue that stopped them from running the group sessions themselves.

It is only through conducting fieldwork that I became aware of the importance of the offenders' relationships with the facilitators as well as the responsible officers. This was a 'hidden relationship' in the sense that it was not one that was acknowledged in policy documents. What also emerged was the gap between the perception responsible

officers had of the relationship with offenders and the perception of the offenders themselves. The interaction I witnessed when Trudy had a housing crisis and Patricia's choice to withhold vital information about her living arrangements from her responsible officer, suggest that more needs to be done to strengthen the quality of relationships between offenders and probation officers. In Trudy's case, one might ask why more was not done to help her access "the range of statutory services and referrals to wider provision that will together support their rehabilitation", secure accommodation, given that there are detailed case files for each offender containing all the changes related to their detention process. Given that the importance of secure housing is recognised with regards to reducing recidivism, more information should have been provided in this regard. Yet on one occasion, as I described, it was the facilitator who provided that information.

In other ways too, I observed that the relationships between offenders and the facilitators were stronger than the relationships with the responsible officers. The relationships with responsible officers begin with the court case: a responsible officer is assigned a case, and this automatically leads to a relationship with an offender. The responsible officer has a significant influence on what happens to each offender in a legal sense. In other words, it is an imposed relationship with a strong power dynamic. Perhaps this is why the relationships with facilitators are more likely to foster trust. In the learning environment of the group sessions, offenders share their experiences and tell their stories. Patricia did not want me to disclose that she had gone back to her abusive husband, but she was comfortable with sharing this with the facilitator. The offenders' relationships with the facilitators were based on shared experiences and trust. These differences may be caused by their roles and identities on probation services which I explored in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER 7

TENSIONS BETWEEN THE WOMEN'S AND THE PROVIDERS' IDEAS OF 'CHANGE'

7.1. Introduction

Like 'relationships', 'change' is mentioned repeatedly in documents published by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services. In the light of what I found through ethnographic observation, both relationships and change are challenging the dominant discourse in the policy documents. Unlike 'relationships' which are defined more clearly in the documentation, references to 'change' in The Female Offender Strategy, released in 2018, remain undefined. In the first section of the strategy paper, their agenda for "meaningful change" for female offenders is not expanded on. Then in the commitment section it is referred to in relation to its impact on women offenders but again, the 'changes' are not made explicit: "We consider that the availability of intensive residential support options, both at the point of sentencing and on release, is key for achieving the changes we want to see" (p.8). Although decision-makers from the Ministry of Justice aim to support these desired changes through the services that they provide, they do not specify the change that they want to see. Instead, it is assumed that anyone reading the document will understand what is meant by 'change'. The same document concludes with another reference to change in relation to its strategy of delivering "meaningful change for female offenders…" (ibid, p.43). As I stated in Chapter 1, how education being associated with reducing reoffending, 'change' has the similar mission as education in crime-free lives.

This lack of an explicit description of what change might mean in this context led me to think about an ongoing project, run by the National Offender Management Service since 2012, called "Changing Lives Together". The booklet of the campaign describes the kind of change that is considered desirable by using quotes from the providers involved in this project. The aim of the project is to support offenders who want to change; in other words, the campaign targets offenders who have been convicted, but cannot forgive themselves and move on in their lives by supporting these offenders with rehabilitation and recovery. This statement frames the providers' agenda for

"change". The latest annual report of HMPPS urges the enabling of positive changes in offenders' lives by providing a "supportive and rehabilitative culture" (HMPPS, Annual Report, p.25) on probation. Moreover, as of 1 March 2019, the HMPSS announced a new agency in the Committee (AMC) "Change, Strategy and Planning".

The business plan for the probation service (2018) also refers to "change" in offenders' lives while "addressing the distinct needs of women in the justice system to help them to turn their lives around and stop offending. "(p.16). This led me to wonder why decision-makers think women offenders have "distinct" needs and what these needs are. Similarly, in a female offender strategy handbook (2018), the implementation of the supposed framework is justified as addressing "the complex needs of the female offender cohort" (p.35). Although these references show that the authority's understanding of female offenders includes complexity and distinctness, there is no specific description of these needs.

Meanwhile, while the community rehabilitation companies focus on "change" in terms of the authority's agenda, offenders themselves have their own agenda for "change". When analysing the interview data and session materials, "change" emerged as one of the most significant themes. This chapter explores these different perspectives while investigating the contribution that probation programmes make to the women offenders' lives in terms of learning. Bringing together these different constituents of the probation's understanding of "change" while comparing different perspectives, enabled me to understand this contribution in some of its complex and interrelated detail. In particular, focusing on the changes that women offenders would like to achieve, has helped me to understand women offenders' perceptions of "change".

While analysing and collecting the data, I kept an open mind with regards to my understanding of change and held back from formulating a specific definition. In other words, I did not approach the notion of change in the way that HMPPS does, which is predominantly measured in terms of reducing reoffending rates among women offenders in the UK. While I was researching, I noted offenders' attitudes do change as does their perspective; it is within this broader understanding of change that this chapter is written, underpinned by the belief that when an individual realises that she can change, this also enables her to get control of her life while realising her

responsibilities. This awareness may guide the offender/individual during decision-making.

In this chapter, I will explore the perspectives of three sources of data in the probation process: women offenders, providers and session materials (designed by the third-party agencies according to the published documents of HMPPs). To illustrate each perspective and how such a perspective might translate into practice, detailed quotations are included from the participants in the three sub-sections.

7.2. Offenders' Perspectives on "Change"

I did not begin my data collection with an intention of focusing on change. Instead, in conversation with both male and female offenders, I found that when we started to talk about their probation process, all of them, regardless of gender, talked about change. While some of them described this change as a turning point, a gateway for moving on to another life, some of them talked of change in relation to their addictions and how in probation, they were able to quit their addictions and change their lives as a result. A sub-theme that emerged was "change in group settings"; several offenders referred to the "power of the group", contrasting being alone to being in a group setting and being a part of women only group sessions. For the offenders, support came not from the probation environment in general but very specifically, through participating in women only groups. The power of these groups was that this was a space in which the women were able to share feelings of isolation with other women offenders and through that, benefit from mutual support, solidarity and understanding.

Exploring changes from these multiple perspectives enabled me to see connections between change and informal learning activities. As Rogers (2014) explains, informal learning can be understood as a combination of incidental, accidental and experiential learning. Marsick and Watkins (2001) refer to informal and incidental learning as occurring "when people have the need, motivation and opportunity" (p.29). This research recognizes women offenders' learnings apart from the non-formal learning settings as informal learning. Similarly, the changes women offenders referred to were experienced as happening incidentally, with no particular trigger (see 7.2.4).

7.2.1. Probation/Turning point

Probation is expected to change the lives of offenders through the service that HMPSS provides. Although the women I interviewed described change as a turning point, their perspective went beyond the specific crime that had brought them into the probation system: they spoke of change in relation to their personal experiences and journey up to that point, the change in their awareness and needs, using a far broader notion of change. While probation documents refer to changing offenders' lives, offenders located the change as needing to be within themselves.

Karen defined her probation experience as a turning point in her life. Karen, a presentable young lady in her 40s, did not fit the common stereotype of how women offenders look or indeed, how most of my participants looked. I would have shared a cab with her on a Saturday evening without any hesitation. She came to the interview with a handful of bags, coming from grocery shopping. It was clear that she was not expecting to meet a researcher who had casual clothes on, as she smiled at me after realising that I was the one who wanted to interview her, not the lady in a suit standing next to me. At the same time, I felt that Karen was not comfortable. She appeared to be worried and nervous. Possibly, she was not comfortable with being treated as just other offender or perhaps the fact that we were meeting in an open plan area, being hearable but not visible by others as the area was divided by panels.

As with all my participants, I did not ask Karen about her conviction and she never referred to it. After introducing myself, I asked her opinion about the probation and…she described probation for her point of view.

"For something that was such a bad experience in my life, something that I feel so guilty about, I've got so much positive out of it…for me personally. It has been a turning point in my life, that's true."

She went on to describe how she was being given the help that she did not even know she needed before probation. Although Karen never joined the women's sessions I observed, I heard a lot about her from Belinda, the group facilitator, who was also conducting one to one meeting with her. "*She is far beyond where she started*", Belinda told me. Their one-to-one meetings took place in Karen's home or in a coffee

shop, as Belinda had realised that Karen was uncomfortable with meeting at the Community and the Rehabilitation Centre. After her conviction, through engaging in counselling and community service, Karen was a new person. From Karen's point of view, her change on probation defines her starting point, and now she is moving forward while changing her habits: "*Seeing* [counsellor] *for my alcohol addiction is helping me with the underlying reasons why I drink, and why I offended in first place. And it has been really really helpful.*"

The probation process was also a significant turning point for Johanna, who I presented in Chapter 5. When Johanna arrived for the interview, I was a bit surprised by her appearance. I had attended the "Who am I" sessions with her. During a period of eight weeks, I attended as a participant rather than an observer with the aim of building rapport with potential participants who were not enrolled in the women's sessions and to understand the probation process from a different point of view. As a participant, I had become a member of the group and Johanna always chose to sit next to me, so I was already familiar with her lively charm. However, for the interview, she had put makeup on and wore a lovely black dress; I had never seen her with a dress on. She was clearly taking the interview very seriously and moreover, was taking the opportunity to be heard very seriously too. She talked about the different perspective that she had gained as a result of her experience in probation and her desire to make changes. For example, she had found herself questioning her social habits. As I presented in Chapter 5, the probation process made her realise that her social environment has negative effects on her addiction and lifestyle, which she decided to change during the probation. She also felt that the probation process was helping her to understand what she had done "wrong" and to take responsibility for her actions. From our daily conversations while I was attending "Who am I" group sessions, it emerged that before probation, she had tended to blame her mother for her conviction without thinking about the consequences of her sentence, blaming her mother for having been found guilty. The support that she got through the experience of being on probation changed the way that she looked at her life and her actions.

While Karen and Johanna perceived the probation process as generally positive, for Olivia who I recruited as a participant through her responsible officer rather than through group sessions, the experience had both positive and negative dimensions. I introduced Olivia in Chapter 5 as a single mother of three, one with special needs, in

her early 20s who seemed to fall into the "worrier" category in terms of her identity. Olivia appeared to be a confident young woman, proud that after splitting up from her partner, she has managed to stand on her own two feet while expressing regret that she had been convicted of ABH (Actual Bodily Harm):

She was diagnosed as suffering from bipolar illness/disorder during the mental health check that the court recommended for her, and as she had suffered from severe anxiety during her childhood, she was happy to know the reason for her mood swings ('ups and downs'). She never presented a denial mode to me; instead, she always acknowledged what she had done wrong, and tried to enhance her situation.

"When we split up, I got arrested for ABH. I'm not proud of it. I do regret it. But then if that didn't happen, I wouldn't have gotten the help that I needed. Because I wouldn't be here, and I wouldn't be getting all the help from all the services that I get help from".

She describes the changes as both positive and negative: "*If that didn't happen last year I definitely wouldn't have been here today. I say, I do regret it. But, it changed things for the better, but also for the worse. It's been up and down*". Although the probation service experience has enabled Olivia to find out how she can get help and empower herself, she is aware of the negative impact it has had on her family. As an offender, childcare services took over the care of her children. Now that she is in the probation process, she has to pay more attention to her children; her life is now built around her children and Olivia sees this as a positive thing, although after my interview with her, in a more informal conversation, she complained about having no time for anything, as she is a full-time mother. Having no one to support her family made her see the negative impact of being in the probation process. Since her conviction, she is not as free as she was before, as social workers visit her house regularly to check the children. On the other hand, any missed class at nursery would put her in a worse situation, so she was obeying all the rules of childcare service.

Being on probation has changed Karen's, Johanna's and Olivia's perspectives on their crimes, and has supported them to change in positive ways with the help of counselling, one to one meeting and in Johanna's case, through attending two learning programmes. In this context, rather than being an outcome, cha 'change' has been a process, starting with taking responsibility for their convictions. Part of Johanna's

changing perspective of her new version of herself is to see her previous social network as 'those people'. This also shows that, based on Goffman's theory, Johanna was maintaining her framework of stigma by distancing herself from her old friendship circle.

7.2.2. The Power of Groups

My participants viewed the group sessions as bringing about change, not in the terms set out by the HMPPS concept of "change" or those explicitly mentioned in the strategy documents. Rather, being in a women's group led them realise to feeling they were not alone on this journey and this helped to change the way that they thought about themselves. In an environment where they feel they can express themselves without any concern of being judged, women offenders also identified and found ways of addressing their needs.

For example, Mary, who I presented in Chapter 5, in her early 20s, and a single mother, described these group sessions as non-judgemental, which increased her self-awareness: "*I think women groups made me realise that I have done quite a lot in the women's group and I feel like it's made me feel better about the idea of people talking to court houses and solicitors and my family and we've all done that.*" Participating in the women's group sessions where she could discuss everything, even her court case, changed Mary's feelings about attending the sessions as she was reluctant before. "*They're* [people outside] *all judging by the court case, being judged by my sister and I just listen and nod, but honestly family, they will charge you because of what you did. But I think it's nice to be in a group of people that are not judging because there's been the same things that we are all running through, so they don't judge and it's really nice.*" Seeing her ability to change through participating in the women's group also helped Mary to believe in herself again. In contrast with her family, who blamed her for her conviction, surrounded by other women offenders, Mary realised that they had been through similar experiences and that in this group she would not be judged.

For Rachel, sharing a common experience with other offenders in the women's group has not only helped her to feel better about herself but crucially, has made her feel less alone: "*Earlier on, we felt lonely because we all thought that we was isolated, but the story that all of us was the same story, just different names. We were all going through that court, going through the stage of having to do this, and it's exactly the*

same. But it's how each individual deals with it, but it made me go home thinking "do you know what? I'm not on my own here. Everyone else has got their problems" and just by being in that group, for them two hours, gave me a bit of reassurance that I'm not going crazy. I'm not going mad. It ain't just me that's going through this. Everyone is, but as I say, it's how you deal with it". Like for Mary, knowing that others shared her situation and were going through a similar process of blaming parents, being seen as guilty by other family members, being the social outcast, was reassuring for Rachel.

Alex associates the non -judgemental environment with the ability to change: "*You can see how they've changed [other women in the group] over the sessions. I think it's where we're all open and honest and we don't judge. I think that's the main thing 'cause we're all in the same boat at the end of the day*". As discussed in Chapter 2 while a big white paper hanging on the wall as one enters the staff room announces that "We are not here to judge", women offenders refer very specifically to the group environment as non-judgemental rather than the wider environment of the probation centre.

Some women were very aware that attending the women only sessions per se was not enough to bring about change. Rachel, in her early 30s, acknowledged the benefits of attending all the group sessions but also knew that change also required a commitment to herself: "*So that's why the groups as well ... it's good to sort of get that and to see and when you sort of listen to other people's situations, you realise that your life is not that bad and that things can change, and you can turn it around. You can take a negative and do it into a positive, but it all depends on you as a person and where you sort of ... because you can sit there and go "I want my life to change. I want to do these groups. I want to do that. I want to do this." And everyone chucks everything at you and helps you and does whatever. But you could just be talking the talk, but you don't really want to walk the walk. You're just saying that to make people think "she's all right. She just wants to get better," but really, they're just saying that to cover up.*"

Interviewing Rachel led me to think about what 'change' might mean for offenders in detailed. There was clearly a pressure on the women to demonstrate their willingness to change in order to meet the expectations of the probation authorities, by stating that they wanted to attend the programmes that the probation company provides for them. However, in this context, it would seem that 'change' was whatever the Community

Rehabilitation Company wanted for them rather than the change that the women offenders might want for themselves. Furthermore, while in the context of HMPPS documents, change is assumed to be positive, I wondered whether the relationship between women offenders might bring about negative changes, by pushing them towards the attitudes and behaviours that had led them to being convicted in the first place. The group sessions enable women to find a place for themselves in a new community in which they do not feel judged and feel less alone. But might the friendships that are made in this new community also trigger old habits?

In the next chapter, I will discuss the positive and negative impact of peer groups within the communities on people in the probation environment. The power of groups is another aspect of the peer groups, modelling bad behaviours. All four women offenders shared that being a part of a group that shares the same problems meant they felt less alone, less isolated. But then outside of these women only group sessions they were again alone and therefore tended to form friendships with other women in the group that could be pursued outside of the centre. These social gatherings could potentially trigger their addictions.

I also witnessed the tension between support and collusion in friendships. Alex spoke about the mutual advice and support she derived from her friendship with Trudy: "*Like for instance I see Trudy outside 'cause she's my mate. So, it is like that, right, because you understand each other, you have similar problems. Maybe they would give you advice or I don't know. Or you are giving them advice and support*". In other instances, however, I was aware that women would go out together and have a drink without thinking of the ones who have addiction problems. I also witnessed that they would support each other for not reporting their partners' abusive behaviours, as this was seen as evidence of loyalty and the love, they had for one another.

7.2.3. Change for herself

The previous sub-sections have explored the importance of group participation in the probation context in relation to change. I have suggested that change is largely delineated by the changes the authorities want to see and expect the probation services to deliver. In this sub-section I focus on how the need to change arose for the women themselves and how they defined what this change might look like.

For Jessica, that I presented in Chapter 5, the realisation was very sudden: she decided to come to the probation one morning, after criticising her life. Jessica does not fit the stereotype of a typical offender in that she comes from a wealthy family. However, she describes herself as the "black sheep" of the family and her boyfriend is on the sexual register. His situation is another reason why she has put a lot of effort into changing or certainly convincing others that she has changed, because she was trying to put a good role model for her boyfriend.

"During the break with Jessica, she mentioned the dynamics of her relationship. She is trying to enhance the circumstances at home for her boyfriend, by showing her support and guiding him through his life. At first, I thought she was talking about house chores, but then she told me that the reason behind her guidance was to help him to change his life."

(Field notes)

Personal relationships can trigger the desire to change, as with Cynthia whose motivation to change is driven by her commitment to being a mother. Since her partner was convicted since she has been on probation, she has changed her priorities and re-designed her life around her child. Redesigning her life as a single parent pushed her to do some changes on her life, as there was a risk of losing custody of her child. Different than the other women participants of this research, Cynthia's journey of change was mentioned by her responsible officer.

Jessica and Cynthia were very conscious of the need to make changes, but I witnessed other participants changing without necessarily realising it or articulating it themselves. In particular, I witnessed their attitudes to learning changing. This attitude change was not something that I could define but I could sense it in the way that they expressed themselves over time. Sometimes it emerged during informal interactions outside the group sessions. For example, on one occasion, I was standing outside the building with a group of women during a break, talking and smoking. When it came time to go back, Jessica beckoned me over to update me on a difficult situation she had told me about before, involving her hostile neighbours. She told me how on a more recent occasion she had been able to talk with her neighbours, without getting angry and controlling the tone of her voice. She told me that this approach had worked well and led to a reduction in hostility. I asked her why she had decided to change her

attitude. She responded that she wanted to have a peaceful life, so she decided to change.

7.2.4. Women are changing

As discussed in previous chapters, HMPPS mostly focuses on ensuring that ex-offenders' transition to crime-free lives and this transition is expected to be occur through changing their lives. I believe that by referring to 'transition' there is an implicit that 'change' is not a an outcome or situation but a process; I have referred to it as a journey. Karen, Johanna and Olivia started their journey by owning their convictions instead of blaming the people around them. This change in their perspectives was a result of several activities that they engaged in during probation, such as attending learning programmes, one to one meetings and counselling.

Attending the women only group sessions appeared to be particularly powerful in motivating change. In these sessions, women felt themselves to be part of a non-judgemental group where they could talk freely about themselves, their convictions and particularly their difficulties during probation. It is true that in some instances change could be negative, in that it could trigger behaviours that had led to offending in the first place, such as addictions. And while it should not be forgotten that women may simply talk the talk of change, most women offenders that I observed did undergo change that was for themselves, whether or not they recognised the change within themselves.

7.3. Providers' and Facilitators' Perspectives on "Change" in women offenders

The providers' perspectives on change were mainly shaped by the expectations of the authorities. This translated into various 'assessment' points in relation to change, during the initial meeting, at the end of specific sessions and at the end of the probation period. Providers also asked a series of questions to offenders to establish whether or not they wanted to change. For instance, during the initial meeting, the responsible officers are entitled to fill the chart with offenders that covers desirable outcomes for people in the criminal justice system. These topics are mentioned under ten headings: accommodation, living skills and self-care, mental health and well-being, friends and

community, relationships and family, parenting and caring, drugs and alcohol, positive use of time, managing strong feelings and a crime-free life. The scale that the offenders need to fill ask several questions to offenders whether or not they are ready to change.

Change from this perspective means moving away from life assumed to be crime full to a crime free one. When I interviewed Arianna, she had been working with offenders for a couple of years but had been running sessions for offenders for much longer than working at the Community Rehabilitation Company. She is a good- looking lady, with high heels and well-manicured nails. She enjoys looking like in her 40s whether she is in her 70s. I observed her in the group sessions as displaying posh behaviours, particularly in her use of language, being careful not to swear, even when shocked or surprised. This was understandable because she was trying to present a good role model for the offenders. On the other hand, her profile made me think about how she presents herself in the company. Of all the facilitators I interviewed, Arianna seemed to have the most solid framework for "change". Her starting point and firm belief are that offenders want to change; she then shapes her approach based on this assumption. Talking about the first interaction, she has with individual offenders, referred to as an assessment, she explained: "*we focus on identifying what the service user is least capable of, so whether they have issues around being in a group with individuals, how they rate their relationship in terms of where they're at now, what it is that they want to change. So it was, it's an opportunity to actually talk to them about what the programme is, the different aspects of the programme and hopefully that at the end of the programme they can take away what they feel and identified as their needs away from the programme*".

Arianna's basic assumption is made clear in this statement. The programme is there to help participants make the desired changes by identifying their needs and how best the programme can meet those needs. The programme developer's point of view can be seen by reading between the lines. Arianna refers to participants taking away "what they need". On the one hand, the power is apparently in the hands of the participants, as it is focused on their needs; but at the same time, Arianna adopts a clear position of power and authority and a uni-directional relationship in terms of learning, in what she offers to them: "*If you, if you're going to start with them at the bottom, then that's where they already see themselves. For me, the fact of the matter is, I'm saying you're*

in front of me. This is an opportunity for learning the fact that you've turned up to one session, the first or the second or the third means there's hope. So, you're not at the bottom, you're on your way up. And that's how I see. So, from that moment, the dynamics between me and them has changed in that I'm showing you a level of respect. I'm enabling you to open yourself to opportunities to move forward in your life. I'm not saying there wouldn't be obstacles because I'm going to point out those obstacles. However, I'm going to help you and enable you to gain the tools you need to deal with those obstacles".

It would seem that respect is not automatic. Instead, it has to be earned by attending classes regularly, so as to convince Arianna that they want to change. By "enabling" them to open up, by providing opportunities, Arianna positions herself as having power. She seems to be inferring that without her, participants would not be able to make use of an opportunity or even recognise it as an opportunity. Although while I was attending her sessions as a participant, I was not thinking so much about her assumptions, my first impressions as recorded in my diary, indicate that her approach was quite authoritarian:

"*Most of the times I feel like I am back in primary school, maybe first grade. When the answer of ours is not the one that Arianna expected, she just corrects us and keeps going with the session, without giving any reason. I don't feel comfortable to criticise some of the topics; it feels as though Arianna is saying that we have to accept these as a fact, because she has been facilitating these sessions for a long time*".

Iris, who is in her late 50s, has a very different approach. Iris explained that she prefers to observe during the class and let participants express themselves first, without indicating the rules of the session, or listing "do's and don'ts". It is important to listen to the participants' expectations. In terms of change, she focuses on changes in behaviour and acknowledges the importance of an individual's inner motivation:

"*You have to be in the right part cycle of change you need that change you want it, you've involved in, you've invested in the idea of that change outs and um, you know, and let me see anyway, don't be, if you want to stop biting your nails, you're not going to do it. I'm not going to bite my nails down to the quick anymore or I'm not going to smoke anymore. You make that decision and mean it, it's not difficult when people change their behaviour, you know.*"

Frida runs sessions that target offenders with addictions. These sessions therefore aim for behavioural change and are based on the understanding that this kind of change depends on the individual and that her role to instigate change requires the agency of the individual:

"*You get kind of police and social care and staff who think that you can tell somebody what to do and what not to do and you can control their behaviour when actually if somebody is going to go and assault their partner or kill someone or do something horrible regardless of what you do, if they've got the capacity to do it, they're still going to do it and it's very hard to change someone's behaviour unless they're ready to. And I think that's the problem is that you do feel that you've got a lot of responsibility but a lot that you can't control.*"

Frida does not appear to focus so much on needs but on providing guidance during the process of taking responsibility for their behaviours and thinking about and understanding consequences. She believes that this approach places the power to make behavioural change in the hands of the individual:

"*So I think where you're not necessarily targeting them on a personal level and saying to them, no, you're wrong, you shouldn't be using drugs, you're more trying to get them to think about their behaviour and wanting to change it themselves.*"

Taking responsibility for their behaviours is an important aspect in court cases, particularly where children are involved. The offending parent has to demonstrate to the court that they have changed their behaviour enough to be fit parents. Offenders acknowledge the power of the facilitators in probation and those who have ongoing child arrangement orders will have to meet specific requirements ask the advice of the court the expedient behavioural change for the court to the facilitator, and during the last session of the programme the offenders are entitled to demonstrate how they have changed over the sessions:

 "*One of the things is that you have to make sure that I'm not in a position to say, well, when you do that, that and that, the court's gonna let you have contact with your child or children. I can only say this by doing this programme. What that does is to allow the judge to say, look, you've had some insight into how your behaviour can impact*

on your family, your relationships, your children, and as the individual standing there, you can say, this is what I've learned".

The change that providers refer to in this section contrasts with the offenders' understanding of change. Although, there is no specific frame for the authority's desired change for offenders, a crime free life is the ultimate desired outcome and the ability to live a crime free life is assessed based on insight about their offence and changes in attitude and addictive behaviours. While programmes designed by HMPPS include evaluation forms and a weekly reporting system for each offender, I did not come across any tool being used to evaluate the offenders' behavioural change as a result of attending group sessions. Instead, the facilitators make judgements based on offenders' behaviours and attitudes during the group sessions. This judgement has a huge impact on offenders' ongoing court case. For instance, the letter that the session facilitator provides outlining their view of the offender counts as a legal document in court. In other words, whatever the facilitator's approach, they have considerable influence in court and thus on the court decision about individual offenders.

7.4. Exploring representations of "change" in group session materials

So far, I have explored perspectives of change through official documents and interviews with facilitators and women offenders. I have argued that while providers and authorities envisage change as a crime-free life, the women offenders themselves wish for a more internal sense of change. Having looked at change from different perspectives, I wondered what notions of change might appear in materials shared in group sessions as these give insights into the providers' ideas of what 'positive' change would look like. Early on during my participation in these sessions, I noticed that 'desired change' was an important theme. In this section, I look at materials that explicitly focus on lifestyle changes, namely sexual behaviour (making 'healthy changes') and anger management in the context of relationships (what do you want to change about how you handle your anger). As I presented in Chapter 2, the women's group session involves eight classes and each class there is a specific subject that need to be covered by the facilitator. Two hours long sessions are happening once in a week

and specific for women offenders on probation. Women's group sessions are being run by third party agencies that work with probation companies. From my interviews with providers, "lack of time" has appeared as the biggest reason of why the companies work with third party agencies.

Sexual Health and You

Overall Aim:

- To discuss what sexual health means to each group member and to develop an understanding of how to maintain sexual health and improve self awareness.

Participants will:

- Understand Increase their knowledge and understanding of current lifestyle and look to promote healthy changes.

Figure 13. Extract from material used in the session entitled "Sexual Health and You"

The introduction to this session appears to be based on the assumption that participants need to change their lifestyle. Although there is reference to 'healthy changes', I couldn't find anything in the materials that set out what a "healthy lifestyle" might be or who defines whether a lifestyle is healthy or not. There is an assumption that women offenders' sexual lives need to change and that they need to be made aware of the risks their unhealthy sexual lives pose. As I mentioned in earlier chapter, there is no age limit to attending these sessions and yet there is no acknowledgement in the materials of the experience and knowledge that women bring with them. Instead, the assumption is made that women offenders will need the most basic information about sexual health such as sexually transmitted diseases.

- Before we plan how to learn to make relevant changes we need to understand what sexual health is and what we would like to achieve and protect about our own sexual health

Figure 14. Extract from session entitled "Sexual Health and You"

This sentence shows the starting point is the belief that women offenders need to make relevant changes in terms of their sexual behaviour. The use of the pronoun 'we' makes no distinction between those in authority who deem change necessary and who define what that change needs to be and how the women offenders might view change. So although there is an invitation for participants to critically analyse their lives and make decisions and choices about their lifestyle, women are not asked whether they feel that they need to change their behaviour or lifestyle. Thus, women are implicitly encouraged to take on the authorities' assumptions regarding their 'unhealthy' sexuality.

On one occasion, I was invited to facilitate a session for sexually transmitted diseases with women offenders. One participant in her mid-60s raised her hand and asked me why they want her to learn these things. I, as a teacher and facilitator, have been teaching since 2007, from middle school children to university students I am used to answer these questions, why do we learn this, but at this time the answer would not satisfy my participant, which was for learning outcomes that mentioned in the session handbook. I invited her to say more. She said: "*I have no sex life, and I am not going to use this knowledge, plus I had already gone through most of them, and seen all from my mates, so why do they want me to learn this now?*"

I observed a similar gap between the materials and the women in nearly all the sessions in that the themes arose from the assumptions of those in authority rather than from what might be relevant at this point in the women's lives. For example, in a session called "Managing your emotions", participants complained about how they can change their statements in calm way when someone offer them drugs, or when someone does not pay back the money, he/she lend from them. They wanted to hear practical examples that reflected the real challenges they faced in their lives.

The main problem with these materials is that they are based on a stereotype of an offender and do not take into account the many individual differences between women offenders, from age to lifestyle and life experience. Instead, women offenders are assumed to have "unhealthy lives", poor communication skills and emotional problems. I argue that by creating a predetermined path towards a crime- free life that ignores individual experience and knowledge will not engage women in the way that is intended. Reflecting on this session afterwards, I wondered to what extent facilitators and responsible officers are able to see women offenders as individuals. The materials support the assumption that because someone has been convicted, she must have an "unhealthy" lifestyle, does not care about her sexual health and will not be aware of sexually transmitted diseases.

Another example of the way in which materials reinforce certain stereotype of an 'offender' is in the session called "Managing Anger in Relationships". For instance, the material for exercise and discussion at the end of the session, which invites the participants to use the "Anger Solutions Map". The exercise starts with encouraging women offenders to think about change, and then start the discussion by asking what the women offenders want to change about their behaviours when they are angry. The following section of this activity recommends facilitators to raise questions to develop the solution map. The main focus of these questions is about how women offenders will manage their anger when they change.

As with the previous session, this session has been framed around change, the necessity for women offenders to change. The approach that the session guide recommends fits with the expectations of the authorities and focuses on changing behaviour without asking whether the women offenders themselves want to change or not. The content suggests that there are shared assumptions between authorities and providers in terms of what women offenders need to know and need to change in their lives. Lack of knowledge about sexual health and have difficulties controlling their anger in relationships are both part of the 'unhealthy life' that is assumed to have led to women offending. There is a strong sense in which these materials construct a certain offender identity which fails to address the needs of individuals. In my informal discussions with women offenders, they invariably stated that most of the session materials did not address their needs.

Through my analysis of different perspectives of change I have identified a gap between the providers' intentions and what the women wanted out of the probationary programme. I have argued that this is due to programmes being based on a stereotype of an offender rather than any engagement with women offenders' realities and their previous experiences. Aside from not addressing the needs that the women might have identified, this also resulted in unrealistic expectations of what changes could be made in the relatively short period of the probation process.

7.5. Change is a process or a situation?

In this chapter, I set out to explore "change" from different perspectives. Although there is no explicit description of change in Ministry of Justice documents, their framework for change is focused on the notion of a crime-free life. Fulfilling this aim is delegated to the programme providers and responsible officers. I have argued that these programmes are based on preconceived ideas of the woman offender identity and what changes are needed to make to sustain crime-free lives.

While I was analysing offenders' perspectives on change, I found that they used different terms for change. The crucial term that women offenders used while describing the probation process was "turning point". For some, the 'turning-point' was experienced as a moment of change while for others it was the culmination of a process. The change invariably involved a change in perspective or gaining insight. Attending the programmes on probation raised women offenders' awareness on embracing the responsibilities of their criminal activities. The probation process imposed certain rules and requirements, thus obeying these rules helped them to change their lives in ways that were meaningful to them, in terms of regaining custody of their children for example or more generally, helping them to feel better about themselves.

I have argued that the women-only group sessions had a significant impact on women offenders, regardless of the materials used or topics discussed. The non-judgemental learning environment that occurred during these sessions helped women offenders in rebuilding their trust in the community, in themselves and strengthening a sense of belonging. On the other hand, belonging to this new community could have a negative impact for some women, particularly while socialising with women offenders outside

the probation setting, which could lead to a return to pre-conviction habits and addictions such as drinking.

Facilitators' perspectives of change and approaches to the group sessions varied, although to some extent they were shaped by the expectations of HMPPS and the probation framework within which the programmes were designed. While Arianna used a teacher-centred approach, Iris followed a more learner centred approach. There was no space for criticising Arianna's sessions, as she thought if offenders knew better than her, why did they have convictions. When entering Arianna's class as an offender, the onus was on the offender to prove to Arianna that the commitment to change was there, primarily by attending the classes; the sense of progression was very linear and without Arianna's approval, there was no way to move to upper levels. By contrast, Iris chose to start her sessions by listening to offenders and analysing their needs based on her extensive notes. Rather than giving advice and telling them what they need to do in their lives, Iris saw her role as guiding them to find their path of living crime-free lives. Like Arianna, Iris shared her life experiences with participants but while Arianna's examples were based on her success stories, Iris's examples were mostly about her failures. This reflects their different approaches in relation to the offenders in that Arianna saw herself as being a role-model for her participants while Iris focused on building trust with offenders by showing them her fallibility as a fellow human.

The focus of the session materials was on change as an aim rather than a process, involving changing behaviours and lifestyles rather than perspectives. The materials adopted a didactic approach and were not developed to address women offenders' needs explicitly. For instance, one of the biggest challenges for women offenders on probation is housing and yet there was no session related to housing applications or job interviews to secure a livelihood that did not involve illegal attempts to make money.

To conclude, the providers (the responsible officers and the facilitators) see change as a situation that can be initiated through learning programmes and is measurable by looking at positive impact. By contrast, from the women offenders' perspective, change starts as a process, one that involves developing insight and perspective, and which comes about largely informally through peer learning, and their informal

learning experiences in different communities, which I will present in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 8

LEARNING to SURVIVE in COMMUNITIES

8.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the tensions between facilitators' and offenders' ideas of change. I also explored critically the role of the women-only group sessions from the perspective of the women offenders. I highlighted the power of these sessions in terms of changing women offenders' perspectives. I argued that significant changes in perspective and insight occurred largely through peer learning within the group sessions, despite peer learning not being utilised as part of the curriculum. In other words, the peer learning was incidental, regardless of materials and facilitators. I spoke of the non-judgemental environment that the women created for each other and the importance for them of belonging to this community. This investigation prompted me to explore the other communities that the women had been part of throughout their lives and what kinds of learning occurred within those communities.

In Chapter 3, I drew on Wenger's (1998) definition of community of practice as consisting of three dimensions; "mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire" (p.73) and I see this as relevant in terms of the group sessions. In addition, the work of Gee (2010) was useful in analysing my data. He is particularly interested in the interactional dimension, suggesting that sharing experiences can turn into a feeling of belonging. In the previous chapter, and in line with Wenger's (1998) theoretical framework, I suggested that offenders developed a sense of belonging through participating in the women only groups. Gee's (2010) view of community also led me to consider family as a particular kind of the community as well.

In this chapter, I start by categorizing the communities that my participants are a part of not only in terms of location and purpose, i.e., school community, home community, work community, but also through shared interests. I also look at the various social identities that my participants shared: they all shared the identity of 'offender' and many described themselves as "homeless". Participants could also be seen as part of a community in the probation process in the sense that they have

"shared histories of learning" (Wenger, 1998, p.86). By sharing similar experiences, going through the same probation process and facing similar challenges, they become members of a new community. Other similarities emerged in the group sessions, such as similar childhood traumas, being bullied at school or growing up in dysfunctional families. Therefore, it can be said that they have shared histories, to some extent. In this chapter, the community is defined not only in terms of geographical locations (streets, schools, etc) but also life experiences and learning.

By exploring women offenders' experiences of learning in different communities, this chapter contributes to answering my overarching research question, what are women offenders' perspectives on learning when on probation in England? This chapter aims to understand more about women offenders' informal learning in different communities, whether the learning has supported or hindered them through their life journey. I do so by focusing on four individuals, exploring what community means to them, the communities that they were part of and how they talked about these communities in the relation to learning. I have argued in these empirical chapters, that I have chosen to view the experience of being an offender as a journey, one on which the offenders have agency in terms of choices they make along the way. While drawing a picture of this journey, I also consider the choices my participants have made along the way.

In this chapter my focus of learning is on informal learning, specifically participants' unconscious learning, learning that enables them to survive in different environments while drawing on the ideas of informal learning that introduced in Chapter 3. As I mentioned there, Rogers (2014) suggests that "we learn unconsciously as we enter new roles (adolescent, student, parent, property holder, worker, member of the community, retired etc.)" (p.34). I chose to explore these roles, by looking at my participants' existence in different communities, which I presented in Chapter 5.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on learning in the school community, by giving a general perspective on women offenders' school experiences and discussing how these experiences impacted on their lives. The second section focuses on four women participants' informal learning experiences in the home /family community. The penultimate looks into various communities that women offenders were a part of, to explore their experiences outside of the school and

family settings. The final section focuses on the probation community, describing aspects of the new community such as the unwritten rules of engagement and how the new member might come to be accepted by the probation community.

8.2. Learning in the school community

School experiences emerged as an important area while I was interviewing the participants- women offenders. While discussing their educational background, it was clear that for many, the first stage of formal education did not start in a positive way. The strongest theme was the experience of "being bullied" and how this experience then shaped their identity. "Being bullied" was described as being put in a vulnerable situation in their community, being mocked for their appearance, their race or personality. Alex was bullied because of her race; Mary was bullied for being gullible and Jessica chose not to disclose why she had been bullied. Because my participants focused on the social aspects of being at school rather than classroom learning, I have chosen not to focus on my participants' educational progress but about the informal learning experiences of being in this community.

In Chapter 5, I introduced Alex whom I met with on the first day of observing the women's group sessions. Alex who is in her early twenties and describes herself as a typical "Essex girl". While I was introducing myself, she was the one who kept asking questions about my research and shared with me that she was excited to be a part of it. Moreover, she was excited to hear that someone wanted to know about women in probation and was interested in what she had to say. She described her formal education journey as a series of interruptions. From the prior conversations, I knew that she had left college, but to acknowledge whether or not she got support from her family through her education journey, I asked her to talk about her learning experiences at school. Being bullied dominated her memory of secondary school: "Because my mom wasn't doing that part, hygienic. When I went, I was smelly, and I had really bad teeth at school. And everybody was calling me "goofy". So that hurt, and I'm a gipsy as well, so they used to say I had dirty skin. Because it comes out really dark sometimes, they used to say I've never washed".

The UK Department for Education and Skills reported in 2013 that Gypsies are one of the most disadvantaged ethnic minorities in the UK. Previous reports have found

that that Gypsy children face bullying from the earliest ages of schooling and "racist name-calling and physical bullying of Gypsy/Traveller children" are common in the UK (Llyod and McCluskey, 2003, p.336). From Alex's account, questioning the social norms related to ethnicities were raised. How the school community that she was a member of determined the 'bad' ethnicities that deserved to be bullied. I asked her whether the school had any preventive measures against racial bullying, but she could not tell me. For her, the school experience had simply been terrible and had negatively the rest of her formal learning experiences.

Like Alex, Jessica, who I introduced in Chapter 5, was also bullied at school, but this seemed to have had less of an impact on her education journey. I met with Jessica, who is in her late thirties, at the first session of the Women's Group I attended. She seemed to be so confident and comfortable in the classroom setting, even offering me a cup of tea, I assumed that she was one of the volunteers who assist the facilitator or that maybe she was there to shadow the facilitator to gain experience by observing before starting her voluntary work at the charity. My assumptions proved to be not entirely misplaced. When I introduced myself to her, she told me that she was there to assist the facilitator, adding that she had attended the women only sessions for nearly a year, and even though it wasn't compulsory for her to attend, she kept coming to gain experience of how to run a session. Indeed, when a different facilitator took the class, Jessica introduced herself as a volunteer. I later learned that Jessica's attendance was not entirely voluntarily: she was still on probation and had chosen to act as a volunteer as she had already finished her sentence. She was born in England and described herself as always "here and there". During her childhood, there wasn't a constant place that she called home, but she was mainly in the East Anglia. She said that bullying was the main reason she stopped enjoying school, regardless of moving to other places: "*Education, primary school was I went to ...near my home. And then secondary school was at... I was bullied there. I had a nervous breakdown from there. I did okay in my exams but not brilliant*". In a more informal conversation, Jessica had shared with me that her school experience had not been a happy one and that she always looked forward to going home. However, as she also had troubles at home, it was the journey to and from school that was exciting for her, the time that she could be herself. Despite these difficulties, Jessica went to college to attend a hairdressing

and beautician course. She left when she had to do an internship, which I will look at in relation to learning in a work community later on in this chapter.

In Chapter 5, I introduced Mary, in her mid-twenties, was working when I met with her. From the first time I met her, I was impressed with how she communicated. She clearly thought carefully about the words she chose to use before speaking. She came across to me as fragile and others seemed to interact with her with particular care and gentleness. She was also bullied throughout her schooling:

"I was bullied from the beginning of my school life till the end. When I was a kid, I was a little more vulnerable, because there was so much going on in my childhood and I think I just got it from all angles [she was trying to tell me that she was surrounded by problems in every section of her life]. My friends knew some of my problems at home, but I never used to open up about my mum, as how she was blaming me for everything."

Nonetheless, Mary was able to complete her high school education.

For all three participants "being bullied" endured the reverse experience to belonging: they felt like outsiders in the school community. Alex did not fit in because of her ethnicity; Mary was bullied for being shy and Jessica did not want to give more detail about her experience. They all survived the school experience and managed to complete their high school education.

8.3. Learning in the home/family community

When conducting interviews with women offenders, I had not intended to ask about their families as I thought my focus should be on their educational background. However, while I was analysing the data, I realised that the informal learning that took place in the family had a huge impact on the women's perspectives on learning and education. While exploring their educational background, intergenerational learning emerged as a significant theme. In this subsection, I will draw on the narratives of four of my participants to explore how the attitudes and experiences of their parents shaped my participants' subsequent learning.

While talking with Alex about her school experience, the significant influence of the family on her educational journey, became very apparent. Alex comes from a small city, which she always described as "not like London" and she lived in a community

where most people knew each other. After her parents divorced, family dynamics changed. She decided to stay with her mum at their home, instead of moving out with her dad. She explained how she was surprised a bit when her mother had a boyfriend.

"*When my mom got her new boyfriend, that's when it really started going down because I was starting to grow up and starting to get boobs and he was like, well you'll have big boobs like your mum one day, that was really hard and then as I'm the oldest sister, I felt most protective of my eleven-year-old sister in case any of that stuff happened to her… While I was going to college, things got really violent at home with my mum and her boyfriend. He came on to me more because I was now sixteen, but my mom took his side and believed him, and then she kicked me out when my sister was only eleven*"

At the age of 16, Alex was faced with a difficult choice: whether to stay at home so that she could continue to protect her sisters or leave to live her own life and get away from her mother's boyfriend. In a session in which we were talking about different types of abuse, Alex told us that until that session, she had never considered that her mother's boyfriend was psychologically abusing her. He never touched her, but she always knew that there was something wrong about the way that stared at her and talked to her.

Through this painful experience, Alex learnt how to protect herself from her mother's boyfriend, but she also lost trust in her mother. At first when she ran away from her mother's home she lived on the streets until she got picked up by the police. She now lives with her father and gets news about her mother from her grandparents.

When I met with Trudy, who is in her late thirties, she was high on drugs. I only found this out from the facilitator who warned me to be aware. During the first two sessions she sat next to me and mostly interacted with me. During the second session the subject was abuse and she tried to support me after I shared my experience of abuse. She was present but chose not to share anything, even when we were on a break, smoking together as a whole class. The first time I saw her interact with others was during her third session. She was being very chatty with everyone, teasing other women while obviously not wishing to offend anyone with her jokes. Nonetheless, she was maybe over interacting, and her presence made running the class extremely

hard; she always had something to say and had problems needing to be solved urgently.

On one occasion, I was asked to run the sessions as I described in Chapter 4, to be able to keep the momentum of attendance. One of the sessions I ran was about women's rights. At the end of the session, I asked woman offenders to draw a river that represented their educational journey (see Chapter 5) and this is Trudy's drawing of her river of life was mostly about her childhood and family.

The group decided to share their drawings during this session and encouraged each other to tell their own stories. When I asked her to say more, Trudy said :

"*My mother* [Trudy's mother] *conceived me in a squat; they were both fifteen when they had me. I used to get hit a lot. My mum used a belt on my sister with a buckle. She used all sorts of weapons on me. I fucked her life up because my dad was always in prison. All my stuff was nicked from Mothercare. I was always hiding in the loft when the cops came. Being daddy's girl affected me badly. My mum was partying every weekend, she'd come back with a stranger and go upstairs with him and often she didn't even know their names*."

Raised in a house where a parent was in and out of prison, being an offender became a normalised identity in Trudy's life, as was being a victim of abuse, which I explored in Chapter 5. Trudy told me that was beaten up by her mother; she even has permanent knee damage as a reminder of those days. As a teenage mum, her mother was always accusing Trudy of ruining her life. There were times when her father was released from prison but not long after, he would reoffend and be sent back.

When a child come across certain experiences in family interactions, her comprehension will be shaped by these experiences and integrated into her knowledge of the world. This can be viewed as a form of intergenerational learning. Vygotsky (1978), a pioneer of learning theory, described intergeneration learning as "an interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one" (p.57). Through family interaction, Trudy's has learnt to internalise an offender identity. Prison life has become an accepted part of life due to her father's ongoing prison sentences. Trudy described her feelings about her father "being an offender" and how this shaped her opinions about her mum and granddad:

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"*...my mum was a bit of a slut ...and my grandad started to try to get closer to me...*"

There were several incidents that pull Trudy out of the school environment. I introduced the first one in Chapter 5, she was afraid to talk about what was going on at home with her teachers, and the second one was she was tired of being called a "lazy student". Despite taking all the precautions that she could think of to avoid ending up in a foster house, Trudy was housed with a foster family. This experience taught her that her mother did not always tell the truth. Although Trudy did not describe the foster experience as a positive one, she acknowledged that she was at least not subjected to physical abuse.

While I was running this focus group discussion, Trudy's father was in prison. According to my understanding, the fear of being labelled at school led Trudy to 'bunk off' school whenever she could. This can be described as a part of the hidden curriculum. Like other women offenders, Trudy learnt informally at school certain attitudes; conversely, the fear of being labelled as 'lazy' or being found out as coming from an abusive household, led Trudy to become disaffected and disengaged from formal education.

I met Rachel while attending one a group session about family relationships during probation. This course was designed for both men and women offenders who had struggled in their families and whose convictions could be largely connected with these difficulties. It was the first day of the group, and she looked like she was in a hurry and hesitant to talk. She didn't look like she was familiar with the environment, I offered her a cup of coffee while she was waiting for the facilitator to enrol her in the session. Rachel is in her early thirties, always in a hurry with a joyful persona. No matter what was happening, she appeared to be carefree, invariably had a big smile on her face and did not seem to worry about the fact that she had lost most of her front teeth. When I asked about her educational background, this is how she chose to describe it: "*My mum and dad ... when me and my sister was at school, they went through a very bad divorce. So at the time when we was at school and things, we was very much alone because they had their own issues to deal with, which for me and my sister was sort of growing up on our own sort of thing and having to sort of find our own way with the school and things. My mum was sort of more, at the time, more interested in what my dad was doing and vice versa. So, me and my sister sort of got*"

left to our own devices, which is not good really because I think at least half of that's what may be the reason why I've gone a bit down here now". Like Alex, Rachel's experiences in her family community taught her to survive by herself. She also sees her conviction as a result of her mother's poor parenting skills. Ironically, her own conviction was to do with her mothering skills, denounced by her own mother, twice. Thus, it could be argued that she had spent two prison sentences due to intergenerational learning of mothering skills from her own mother.

Olivia's learning experience in her home community was slightly different in that what she seemed to have learnt from her mother was to fight for her future and find a way to cope with the problems she encountered. At the time of this interview, social workers were regularly visiting Olivia at home to monitor her parenting skills. Olivia is in her early twenties and we met through her responsible officer. Olivia was keen for her voice to be heard by others; especially young women like her. Upon finishing high school, Olivia had wanted to go to college to do a hairdressing course. But then she fell pregnant, and her mother dissuaded her from going to college, arguing that the money would be better spent on the baby:

"*When I was 16, I fell pregnant with my first. I was 17 when she was born. My mom wasn't happy about it. She wished I had gone to college to do the course that I had chosen, my hairdressing. It was going to cost my mom £300 for me to get into [the hair dressing course at the college]. She ended up paying just over £200 for a buggy instead. So, I started this life. So, I started then a life, if I wouldn't have gone into hairdressing I went into college and done childcare level one. So I was pregnant, and it helped me out a little bit. 16 and pregnant, so I thought, yeah it did.*

All the women offenders I interviewed spoke of how their family life impacted their educational journey. Living with a newly divorced mother and her new boyfriend during her Alex's adolescent years was detrimental to her education, particularly the last year of high school. What she learnt from her family community was to protect herself, especially from both inside and outside the home. She chose to live on the street rather than be subjected to the attentions of her mum's boyfriend. Trudy saw her difficulties at school as being a direct result of a difficult home life. Physically and psychologically abused by her mother, she was a "daddy's girl", looking up to her father who was in and out of prison throughout her childhood.   From the way she

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described her father, I argue that becoming an offender, like her father, can be seen as a kind of intergenerational learning in her family community. Like Alex, Rachel also learnt to survive by herself and ended up choosing to live on the street. Olivia learnt to fight to overcome challenges and despite lack of support from her mother during her school life and during pregnancy, she managed to complete a hairdressing training and now aims to run her own business.

Through exploring participants' learning experiences in the family community, I was drawn to the examples of intergenerational learning, all be it unconventional types of learning, that featured in these autobiographical accounts. I wondered what the impact of these intergenerational learning experiences might have on subsequent learning experiences.

8.3. Learning in street and work communities

Following on from intergenerational learning within the family and informal learning in their formal education school, the other significant communities I identified were in street and work (both formal and informal work) settings. In this section I will explore what my participants learnt from their street and work communities.

8.3.1. On the street community

Although Alex and Jessica lived on the street for a relatively brief period as teenagers, they never forgot those days and the lessons they learnt in terms of survival, offending for themselves, and even sometimes, having to physically fight to defend themselves on the street.

It was not Alex's choice to leave the house when she was 16. Having confronted the boyfriend for verbally abusing her, Alex was afraid that the abuse might become physical. Her key worry that if she left the house, she would leave her sisters as new targets for the boyfriend. One day, the inevitable happened and her mother asked her to leave.

Leaving the family home had two consequences: she not only lost a place to live but couldn't provide an address for the college and couldn't afford to pay her tuition fees by herself so she also had to leave college; thus her new journey on the street began. She soon befriended other people who were also homeless like her and spent most of

her time seeking secure places to sleep. Her maternal grandfather was one of her most significant supporters. He visited her every day and did not leave her until he was sure that she had enough food and a safe place to sleep.

"*I was stubborn because I felt bulletproof and when you got all that anger up inside you, you don't want to listen to anyone... I thought I was living in luxury, living how I wanted when I wanted so yeah it was great. I smoked weed every day, mum's dad was good though; he used to come down and buy me food every day*."

I was surprised when she chose the word "luxury" to describe her life on the street but then she described what she meant by "luxury" as having no restrictions on her, no people to set rules or to tell her what to do or not to do. This for her was a life of luxury.

Access to food was not the only thing that solved her problems on the street. She also learnt how to be safe: she observed the other homeless people around her, found a corner for herself, where she was protected from the cold and from the inquisitive gaze of people. She soon learnt the value of the street community: "*If you are a part of a crew on the street, if your group is crowded, you are not afraid of anyone, others are afraid of you*".

At this point, she also met up with her ex-boyfriend which ultimately led to her conviction. The boyfriend offered her protection in exchange for what seemed to her harmless activities such as changing numbers on legal papers or duplicating benefit applications. After around three months on the street, Alex recognised that this street life was not so luxurious but in fact, was dangerous and that she needed to act to save herself. In my conversation with her, I was struck by Alex's ability to reflect, analyse and assess her life circumstances, her survival instinct and her ability to make choices in an effort to improve her life chances. It took strength of character to make the step into an unknown life with her father:

"*I was petrified at that time for my safety on the street. I think when I moved in with my dad that I had that security, it was like a weight had been lifted and I think if I had not done this, I would just have sunk into myself and drowned in self-pity*." Feeling both financially and psychologically secure enabled Alex to stop earning money

through engaging in illegal activities with her boyfriend. However, she was keenly aware of the lack of choices open to her.

Another divorced family experience also ended in homelessness. Jessica, whom I presented in Chapter 5, had also ended up homeless when she was 16. In group sessions and in the interview, Jessica was always outspoken and talked proudly about her dad. According to her, she did everything to make him proud, believing that she had similar talents. Like him, she is good at xylography (the art of engraving on wood) and is creative in woodwork generally. Nonetheless, shortly after moving in with him after her parents separated, she found herself living on the street: "*he used to kick me a bit…I ended up on the street…*". I was aware that Jessica was able to remain proud of her father despite the abuse by minimizing and normalizing his violent behaviour. This is particularly noticeable when she states that he kicked her a bit [my italics]. When talking about the family dynamics, and her father's approach to parenting, she chose to use the word "unpermissive". Namy et al (2017) indicate that violence against children in the family can be seen as a form of discipline. The child may then internalize it as a fundamental parenting skill and go on to model it, through intergenerational transmission, in their own parenting style (Wolfe, Katell, & Drabman, 1982).

Alex had also normalized her father's violence towards her. While she chose to talk about her mother's psychological abuse in group sessions focusing on abusive relationships, she had never mentioned the fact that her father kicked her.

Jessica was not as lucky as Alex in that there was no one bringing her food every day, so Jessica's survival strategies focused on accessing food. While talking about a perfect spot for her to stay, she said she chose to stay close to the bakery shops- most of the time, Greggs- because when the shop is about to close or first thing in the morning, they give away leftovers. Although Jessica got on well with the people around her who were also living on the street, she did not choose to be a member of a gang like Alex. she had just daily conversation with other people who were living on the street. Her other focus was on finding a fast way to earn money; her dream was to move to a house, a big house like her mother's. In conversation with her friends, she was introduced to a drug dealer who was looking for a new assistant. He paid well and Jessica embarked upon her life of crime. Both Alex and Jessica learnt survival

skills on the street. Alex learnt that in order to be safe she should be part of a gang, whereas Jessica chose to be alone. Based on observation, she chose her location very carefully, staying within easy reach of Greggs so that she could benefit from the handout of leftover bakery from the day before.

Unlike Alex and Jessica who saw living on the streets as a consequence of a difficult situation rather than a free choice, Johanna saw her time on the street in a more positive light: "I packed and went and lived on the streets because I'm really clever like that". She had seen living on the street as a clever choice and complimented herself on this, including how the experience had taught her to sell drugs on the streets. Johanna's use of the word "choice" emphasizes the sense of agency that she had compared to Alex and Jessica. Johanna's parents also got divorced and her mother moved to Spain, leaving Johanna with her father. Johanna did not downplay her father's violent behaviour, stating that "he used to hit me quite a lot". She had told her mother who didn't believe her: "*I think she thought I was exaggerating or just making it up so I wouldn't have to live with my dad. When, she moved to Spain, I thought, I ain't staying here, while she is not even in the country*." So, Johanna started to live on the streets. While she was telling me about this time of her life, she expressed no regrets about her decision. She still saw living on the streets as the best choice for her, even though it transpired that her mother had left an empty house here.

Like Jessica, she was introduced to a man who looked after her and through whom she secured herself a livelihood, all be it an illegal one: "*I got took in by somebody who used to be a criminal and sell some drugs and things and actually really looked after me. He actually treated me like I was family. That's it really. And then I ended up you know like I said on the streets for a few years, and this is the closest to work I've been*".

Living on the street pushed Alex, Jessica and Rachel to learn new skills, like how to choose a safe place to sleep, how to get food without picking through trash and how to make money. Both Jessica and Rachel chose the best of what seemed to be a number of bad options, which was drug dealing. Although both women ended up on the street as an escape from violent fathers, their assumptions towards violence in the family was different. Unlike others, Alex saw her father not as a reason to live on the street,

but as a safe harbour to support her while she was changing her life from living on the street to moving back into a house.

These participants learnt a number of survival skills through living on the street, observing others and building a life based on those observations. However, rather than being a free choice, circumstances drove them to see life on the street as more desirable than their home environment.

8.3.2. Learning within a work community

Although few women offenders had work experience in a formal mainstream sense, they did have work experience and had acquired skills even if some of the activities were illegal. Indeed, of the two participants who had sold drugs on the street, Rachel defined this as work experience. During my time in the field, just two of my participants discussed work experiences in detail: Jessica told me about an internship and both Jessica and Mary had experience of working for a fast-food company.

Jessica went to college to qualify as a hair and beauty technician: "*I qualified as a hairdresser, but I gave up the beauty side of it because when I did my work experience, they wanted me to work with them, they said they were gonna train me, instead they used me as a dogsbody so left to work for a different company and they did all my training, so I'm a qualified hairdresser*". However, she was still not happy with the working conditions; she was expected to work long hours without a break. This apprenticeship experience didn't stop her; she changed direction and went to work for an accountant as she was also interested in book keeping. She even began to consider enrolling on a bookkeeping course until her boss asked her to wear a costume like one of the popular science fiction movies' stars. Firstly, though she found this a strange request and didn't react. But then when she went back home, she decided not to go there again because she did not find it appropriate to be asked to go to work in a costume. She was not able to articulate her concerns and take action and so another possible avenue was closed to her.

Mary's difficulties working for a fast-food company became a topic of discussion in the women only session about women's rights. She explained that she was working six days a week; because of the summer holiday season, the company needed more

staff. She had planned to take a summer break, the first in three years, and had already requested the days off, which had been approved. When she talked about this with her manager, however, her manager behaved like she didn't know about the holiday and blamed her for taking days off during a peak time. Mary was on the verge of tears when she was talking about this because she had done everything within the rules and yet her manager was treating her badly because she was going on holiday. Mary said that she wanted "*to live in the right way*", but the situation was pushing her not to do. Mary's experience prompted Jessica to share how she dealt with a similar problem while the facilitator talked about employees' rights in the UK and offered to look at her case specifically. Whereas Mary turned down the facilitator's offer of help, she thanked Jessica for giving her ideas about how to cope with the situation. These very different responses suggested to me that Jessica valued advice from her peer far more than help from those 'in authority'. In Chapter 7, I suggested that participants benefitted most from the incidental learning that occurred through sharing their life experiences with one another in a non-judgmental setting regardless of facilitator or the topic of the session.

Jessica learned how to survive in work communities by being clear about what she was prepared to do, having strong boundaries and choosing to disengage when faced with unclear and potentially dangerous situations. In this sense, Jessica demonstrated a strong sense of agency, risking losing her job rather than complying with what she considered inappropriate. Mary had learnt to stand up for herself when bullied by her manager. Following the incident described earlier, Mary had reported her manager to the regional director. She learnt that "abuse" can exist in any communities, not just in the family but in this instance, she was able to take action, and this can be seen as an empowering experience for her.

As I have suggested in previous chapters, peer learning – incidental learning – was a central feature of the group sessions from the perspective of the women offenders. Although there was a session about abuse in relationships and about women's rights, it could be argued that the most valuable learning with regards to these topics arose spontaneously through sharing their life experiences with one another.

8.4. Learning in the new community: the probationary programme experience

Probation can be seen as a process where the laws are pushing offenders into learning. In other words, rehabilitation can be seen as having a strong learning component. According to the type of crime that has been committed, the courts decide on the programme that the offender needs to attend in order to rehabilitate them and integrate them back into the community. The justice system assumes that preventing crime can be possible when offenders become part of mainstream society and this process is facilitated through rehabilitation programmes and group sessions. In this section, I am not focusing so much on the probationary educational/learning programme (this is discussed in Chapter 4) but at how people interact within this community in the sessions but also outside of those sessions, whether in the office or in the breaks.

Upon entering the probation centre, I felt the barrier between the offenders and others very keenly through how the space was organised. Offenders waited on rather uncomfortable and institutional looking chairs which were in a line up against o the wall, next to the door. This is where they wait to see their responsible officers, then moving to the one- to- one meeting areas, which are just behind them. They had to be welcomed by the responsible officer before they could move to this second area with more comfortable chairs. There is no signposting to indicate which chairs are for waiting and which ones are for the one-to-one meeting. Instead, the receptionist asks each offender to wait there until their responsible officer comes to get them. I spent some time in this waiting area and observed that while waiting, conversations were had, and experiences shared. It seemed to me that bonds were made through this sharing of experiences and support given and received. While I never witnessed anyone asking about or discussing their convictions, asking each other how many Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) days (see Chapter 2) they would need in order to finish the process was a common topic of conversation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, most activities count as one RAR day. For instance, when the offender attends a two- hour long group session, this counts as one RAR day. When an offender comes to attend the mixed sessions, she/he has to wait in this first waiting area until the facilitator comes and tells her/him that it's now okay for her/him to go to class. As with the one-to-one meetings, offenders are not permitted to move from the first seating area until the facilitator (or Responsible Officer) invites them to

do so. I never came across any signposting related to where class attendants should wait, either verbal or written. Similarly, the receptionist did not inform the facilitator that people were waiting. The offenders learnt what was expected of them by observing others. Whenever a new offender passed through the security door, I observed them staring somewhat blankly (or perhaps bewildered) at the people already waiting and would then find themselves a chair next to others after reporting to the receptionist. Offenders' informal learning experiences had started when they entered the probation centre.

As I explained, in this section I look at the group sessions not for their content but as spaces where women offenders met one another and built community (see Chapter 3 and 7 for account of the sessions' formal learning content/approach). These sessions can be seen as a central pillar in the building of the probation community. I noticed that at the beginning of a new programme, everyone seems reluctant to talk at first but there is always someone to break the ice, make a joke that make everyone laugh. Most of the time these jokes are about their situation, about the dramatic change in their lives or refer back to a school anecdote or escapade or to how they feel about themselves. When someone new joins a pre-existing group, she is welcomed, and group members ask her how she is.

Another way that I observed participants constructing their community through sharing everyday experiences and listening to each other. They were also supportive of one another and easily attuned to each other's agendas. For example,

"*Mary's ex-husband is going to get married, and it is expected that she is going to attend his wedding and stay in the same room with her ex-mother in law for the ceremony- the ceremony was going to be in the hotel. Mary got this information this morning just before she came to the session…*"

(Field notes)

When Mary shared this with the group, everyone paid attention, perhaps particularly because whereas usually Mary was not inclined to share information about her conviction, on this occasion she decided to talk about her conviction. While she was talking, she was hardly looking at us, her eyes remained fixed on her hands and she spoke quietly as though she was almost afraid of hearing her own voice, hearing what

she had done. It turned out that the ex-husband had also been her partner in crime. I was amazed at the reaction of the women in the group. They simply listened, with no judgement, no blame, no interruption. Their only contribution was to try to stop Mary blaming herself, by saying *"everyone makes mistakes"*; *"our mistake has had big consequences"*, and *"now you are paying back"*. At times, Mary struggled to find the right words to tell her story. The rest of the group waited patiently, not making suggestions or showing any impatience but simply giving her the space to find her own words, to tell her story. The support that they gave each other was not just with words but through their facial expressions and the quality of their listening. They refrained from commenting on her conviction or giving advice. The acceptance and support I witnessed in this group really stayed with me long after my fieldwork was completed. At times, as described in previous sections, participants did give each other advice. But what I observed here was more like peer mentoring which I realised does not need to involve giving advice but can be just about listening without judgement.

Being on probation involves new learning and a new community of practice. The community that the women built during the women only group sessions became a safe place in which they could share their troubles and regrets and maybe the hardest to share, the circumstances that had led them to offending and being convicted. In this sense, the formal content of these sessions was less important compared to this hidden curriculum. Indeed, the women often rejected the knowledge being presented to them. Certainly, this form of knowledge did not have the kind of value that sharing their own lived experiences in a community in which they felt accepted, heard and valued. Furthermore, the process of sharing life lessons was as valuable to the woman sharing those lessons as it was to those listening.

From the moment an offender enters a probation centre, they begin to learn how to survive in this setting. They do so by observing other offenders and through sharing their experience. A lot of informal peer mentoring occurs where someone who is further along the probation process takes someone new under their wing. This informal mentor may be more valued by the offender than the responsible officer who is supposed to fulfil this role.

8.5. Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the informal learning experiences of women offenders in different communities. By referring to communities of social practice, I drew on Wenger's (1998) notion of community as existing "because people are engaged in actions whose meanings, they negotiate with one another" (p.73). I also drew on Rogers' (2014) notion of informal learning as happening unconsciously as a result of becoming a member of a new community. This chapter has analysed the informal learning activities that helped participants to survive in these communities and to some extent shaped their view of more formal educational activities and settings.

In the school community, all three women I interviewed felt like outsiders and this manifested most clearly in their experiences of being bullied and shaped their perspectives of education. Although they did not quit school, it can be said that they did not enjoy going to school and were not encouraged to pursue educational opportunities. Uncovering the fact that Jessica had falsely introduced herself as a volunteer attendant in the group whereas in fact attending the sessions was a court requirement, did lead me to wonder whether I should entirely believe the stories they told me. For example, might their experiences of bullying have been exaggerated as a way of getting attention or sympathy for their difficult childhoods or as a justification for why they did not choose to pursue their education?

In the home community section, I introduced the notion of intergenerational learning in terms of what participants might have taken from their parents. For example, I suggested that Trudy might have learnt that being a prisoner is normal as her father, who she admired, was in and out of prison during her childhood while Olivia may have learnt parenting from her own parents, despite recognising their failings. I also focused on how Alex and Rachel learnt survival strategies and Alex learnt how to protect herself and set clear boundaries. Olivia learnt to be tenacious in the face of difficulties, choosing to carry on with her training as soon as she could.

I have also argued that in each community that my participants became members of, they learnt certain attitudes and outlooks and embraced certain identities. Their first community was invariably the family of birth where violence was often normalised. I also realised that these early experiences might affect the way their expectations and concept of what it might mean to become a member of a community. Mary's family

were very judgemental about her conviction so she was surprised when she realised that she could talk about her conviction in the group and on one would judge her. Other communities such as their schools, the streets (when living on the street) and workplaces, shaped who they were and what strategies and identities they adopted. Informal learning experiences in the family, at school and in the workplace shaped their attitudes to learning in the probation service. While sometimes it seemed, they had no choice but to engage in illegal livelihoods, they were also able to tailor their skills to fit in with new roles and opportunities, like Jessica learning about bookkeeping while working for a drug dealer. Participants showed strength and agency in their capacity to understand and fight for their rights in the workplace.

The informal learning experiences in their school communities had shaped the way that participants perceived what learning / education might be in their adult lives. When I asked them about their educational background, most of them went silent for a minute and this led me to think about the power of the word "education"; it helped me to leave aside my assumptions and beliefs about education so as to explore my participants' perspectives on the meaning of education. When I asked one of my participants about the reason for her silence, she told me that education is not something for her because she was not good at school. This highlighted for me how education and learning can overlap so that assumptions about the word of "education" shape one's perspective on learning. This is where expanding the notion of learning beyond formal education is so important and a focus on the learning that has occurred incidentally throughout a person's life can be both affirming and empowering.

There was a clear connection between home and school communities in terms of informal learning experiences. The informal learning experiences in their home communities affected their attitude towards the school community, mostly in a negative way. Conversely, informal learning experiences in the home communities helped participants to survive in the street communities. For instance, when Trudy was hit by her mother, she was afraid that her teacher would notice this, so she did not want to go to school. When Alex decided to live on the street, her first aim was to find a safe place because her experiences in her home community had taught her to protect herself, especially from men while Jessica's first aim was finding food, because there had never been enough food at home.

This chapter has explored four communities (school, home, work/street life and the probation process) that have led to less visible learning experiences which have shaped participants' perspectives.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION

9.1. Introduction

As I mentioned earlier, the prime focus of this research is informal learning. I believe informal learning has a crucial impact on humans' lives and am taking a similar perspective to Rogers' (2014) on learning. Within this approach, learning can be seen as a continuum, which means informal learning can happen during any form of learning activities such as non-formal and formal, and in any environment. In the following section, I will start my discussion with women offenders' informal learning experiences that happened within their different communities, and how this informal learning impacted on their gender identities. In this chapter, I will discuss gender violence and informal learning, how gender violence shaped women offenders' lives and specifically their perspectives on crime and gender. When I was analysing my data, gender violence came up as an emerging theme that I mentioned in Chapter 3, and consequently my discussion about gender violence relates to two perspectives. The first one is the link between gender violence and informal learning, the second one is how the informal learning that happened during the time of women were victimised shaped their identities and their perceptions of identities.

I will present my discussion on the women's different identities on probation to show the links between my findings and the theories that I used while analysing my data. Although I start with the link between informal learning and identities and how informal learning plays a vital role of these performances, I also present the discussion on multiple and different identities in the probation setting and discuss the power of audiences. My primary approach in this chapter is analysing the specific findings that relate to the two dimensions of gender violence mentioned above.

9.2. Informal Learning as Central to Women Offenders' Lives

The overarching research question of this thesis is exploring women offenders' perspectives on learning and change while they are in the probation setting. Rogers' (2014) concept of informal learning that I presented in Chapter 4, enabled me to find

out women offenders' different informal learning experiences which I specifically presented in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. I also pointed out the informal learning that took place while exploring relationships and identities in earlier chapters. The conceptualisation of informal learning as a continuum contributed to my analysis while discussing women offenders' learning experiences.

9.2.1. Women Offenders' Informal Learning in Different Communities

As I discussed earlier in Chapter 4, Wenger's (1998) theory of learning in communities of practice raised three main aspects of the theory as domain, community and the practice. In this section, I set out to use these three concepts as a lens to help me to explore women offenders' different learning in different settings. Wenger describes 'domain' as shared interest and problems within the group. In the women's group sessions that I observed, participants had a shared interest in finishing their probation process by fulfilling the requirements that had been decided by the court. A problem that appeared to be shared was their reluctance to mention in these sessions their offender identity. This problem is raised for discussion later in this chapter. The second aspect of Wenger's (1998) theory, 'Community', includes engagement between members of the group. This engagement was observable during the sessions and also coffee breaks where participants shared their opinions in the follow-up discussions from the class in relation to their lives. The final aspect of Wenger's theory, 'Practice', showed itself during the interaction of group members, including myself. However, as Wenger mentions, the Practice aspect of the theory is not always visible from the outside, thus, non-participation can count as a practice as well. When new members came to the classroom sessions, they always took some time to observe the group settings and learned the accepted ways of doing in these settings through non-participation.

Wenger's (1998) three aspects were clearly evident from my analysis of Mary's case which shows how learning in accordance with Wenger's three aspects was achieved (Chapter 5). When Mary gave her first reason of not wishing to attend to the wedding, not to take the invitation of her former husband as she was obliged to stay with her mother-in-law at the venue, the group were confused because the mother-in-law was

caring for her child. It was only when Mary explained the real reason which involved sharing the details of her conviction, but the group were able to give her the advice she was seeking. As explained where she was in the classroom domain, engaging with her women's group session community members and sharing a problem to seek advice. This means that Mary learned she had to give full details of her situation in order to get relevant, suitable advice to help her problems. This involved sharing and divulging of her life, she had not so far told anyone in this group and nor did the others share their convictions very easily. She decided to explain her conviction and share it with the group. During this discussion, although there was a facilitator in the classroom, Mary did not ask any advice from her but focused purely on the women offenders' pieces of advice. This shows that although the facilitator was sharing the same environment with them, she was not considered as a part of the community. This might be because the group was not sharing the same domain and practice with the facilitator, so they were resistance to the idea of getting support from the facilitator as she was not seen as a member of their community.

In this case, Mary's informal learning was not limited to learning how to react to her accomplice when she saw him this first time after the court. She also learned how to disclose her conviction and face up to it when in the community. She could have learned informally how to behave within the group setting when serious issues were under discussion as the group members listened to her carefully, without staring or asking further questions about the details, but taking what she said seriously. She might have learned that this giving of information to other people, frankly, would help her to bond with her community. There is a possibility that this informal learning could happen in two directions, as the other group members might learn from Mary's experiences, even from her chosen strategy to disclose her conviction.

It was not only personal problems that were discussed during the women's group sessions. As a community the women shared their experiences and learned from each other. There were other problems in their daily lives such as the work environment. At the end of the Women's Rights session, Mary raised a problem in relation to her manager's negative response when she asked to take a holiday leave. It was Mary's first job after her conviction and she was not sure how to react to the manager because she was afraid, she might lose her job because of her conviction. Although I thought Mary would ask for advice from the facilitator, she did not; instead, when one of the

women's group members started to share her own experience about working with a fast-food company, she listened to her experience. This shared experience, one of the important aspects of Wenger's (1998) theory, also includes peer learning. Mary learned how to stand by herself, and to not be afraid to talk at her workplace despite her conviction because all her group members supported her to act in this way. Similarly, as in the previous case, the facilitator was not seen as a community member so there was no advice asked nor taken from her, as she was not viewed by these women as belonging to their community.

The women's group sessions were designed to integrate women offenders into society in line with the HMPPS requirements for offenders' "re-integration". With this aim I expected to observe some practical solutions rather than paper-based advice. For instance, the designed programme did not target to answer the needs of women offenders. However, housing was one of the most crucial problem among women offenders, during their probation process it was a challenge for them to find an accommodation and they did not know about the application process of accommodation that city councils provide for them. The structure that HMPPS developed, might be the reason why the women offenders never saw the facilitator as a member of their community. However, although the facilitator's domain was the same as the women offenders, the resources could have been used more effectively so the women would be encouraged to learn from the facilitator. This may be because the facilitator always had an attitude of holding all the knowledge, in other words, she gave the impression that there was nothing for the facilitator her to learn. This might be because of running similar sessions to different group settings and repeating the same structured programme. During the interview with one of the facilitators, she stated that it was not new for her, even the reactions that she witnessed were similar, so running the sessions were more mechanic than one to one meeting. When a member of the community, who had already decided not to be a part of learning environment, or not willingly to join, then the obvious question was how could that member become an integrated member of the group? I believe in a different scenario; women would learn more when the facilitator participates the sessions as a learner.

This also made me question my situation, as I was a member of that same community. I did not just participate in the sessions, but sometimes ran the sessions due to the lack of a facilitator, but I was aware that I was always learning, and I always shared my

learning with the women offenders and showed them how enthusiastic I was for our progress as a result of informal learning. This may have helped me to become accepted as a member of their community.

Another community in which three of the women had been members, (see Chapter 8) was the community of the street about which they shared their homeless experiences. This community differs from the other communities because of its domain. The domain, as Wenger describes it, mentions the shared problems within the group, for this group, the homeless group, the members shared the interest of surviving, in other words, surviving involved tackling the problems that they all faced on the street. The engagement within this community, Wenger's second aspect, was sharing their life stories and experiences of living on the street with the other homeless people that slept around their spots. Wenger's third aspect, practice, was exchanging and / or just receiving this information. Thus, using Wenger's theory of learning in communities of practice as a lens enabled me to analyse these three women offenders' learning. The women offenders were mostly learning informally, in informal settings, such as communities, rather than in designed learning environment like classroom.

In Alex's case, similar to Jessica's, she had to learn how to keep herself safe on the street. This she did by observing how to find a spot that protected her from the cold and out of people's sight. Her learning within the communities of practice started when she joined a community and became a member. Based on her observations she learnt that as a member of a crowded group on the street, she could secure her own place, and learn the places where she could find food and drugs. Jessica learnt that the best way to secure fresh, clean and free food, was to set herself around bakery shops. Her strategy to look after herself resembled the other women in that she became a member of a crowded street community. Three of my participants further learned to become involved in criminal activities while they were on the street; a life skill they might have learnt within their communities. This informal learning could be attributed to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which indicates people's first needs comprise physiological (food, water, shelter, rest) safety and a sense of belonging (friends, relationships). My three participants learnt to answer these needs, and then all three of them became involved in emotional relationships with people that they met in their street communities. This is also where they learnt how to commit a crime.

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In conclusion, this section has looked at different women offenders' learning within communities of practice, particularly how informal learning plays a key role in different communities. My findings point out the value of peer learning as opposed to those designed by the authorities. They also point to the importance of, empathy and of listening to the women as valued group members collaborate with sense of belonging and value of awareness raising of their informal learning which in turn contribute their self-esteem and confidence that they can make decisions for themselves to improve their lives. Informal learning does take place in communities of practice and it does relate more to people with peer interaction and hierarchical interaction as mentioned above women offenders found that more confident to communicate with their peers than with people who are in authority over them. Informal learning contributes the theory of communities of practice, moreover, has a core role of the theory, whether the outcome of this informal learning might be positive or negative. Learning through the communities with practices gives people a sense of belonging, and moving forward, most of the time up Maslow's hierarchy to another level.   The outcome from this learning depends on who the group is they are mixing with, which is not always the best social grouping given the social circumstances that women were living in.

9.3. Different Identities on Probation

I used Goffman's identity theory while analysing multiple identities that I observed during my fieldwork. Taking a holistic approach, Goffman (1959) describes his theory in relation to three concepts, front stage, backstage and offstage. This analogy also shows the importance of perceiving identities as a performance rather than ownership. Accordingly, front stage presents the interaction between the performer and the audiences, backstage represents the process that the performer decides how to behave for the specific audiences according to their expectations to present the "better aspect of" themselves. The third aspect of his theory, offstage, presents nonidentifiable characteristics of the performer as there is neither audience nor interaction. My observations mostly related to front stage, how the participants performed to different audiences, and by conducting interviews, focus group discussion and daily conversations I tried to move back to what I considered to be

their backstage (based on Goffman's theory), how they gave meaning to these performances. Although during this analysis I could not use the theory itself, I reflected on participants' stories to understand their meaning making process. I believe by reflecting on their stories, it would reveal their reason for the choices that they made in their own backstage, where they prepared to present themselves to the audiences.

In Chapter 5, I shared my findings about three different identities that I observed: fighters, survivors and worriers. The fighters category relates to three women offenders who persevered in order to enhance their living conditions, that is, they chose to keep fighting and were willing to change their lives from the beginning of their journey on probation. The second category of identity was the ones who had experienced physical, verbal and /or sexual abuse, chose to identify themselves as survived victims, and at the time of my research did not consider taking any action to seek help that was available. These women chose to give more detail about these incidents and lay the blame on their social environments while "pitying" themselves. These women offenders I identify as "Survivors". The third identity, whom I have called "Worriers" was the women offenders who were continually anxious about their families, especially those with child custody issues. They would not jeopardise losing custody of their children or the pride of their parent/s. Larsson (2014) identified three categories of women in her research which were based on women offenders' life stories and supported me to develop my own categories for women offenders that I mentioned in Chapter 5. She categorised them within three groups, fighters, survivors and good girl, which were also depicted by her participants. The two categories, fighters and survivors, were based on the change that happened in women's lives after their conviction. Fighters were the ones that redesign their destinies even they were living in tough conditions, whereas the survivors could not make much progress in changing their lives but did not give up to change. Larsson's last category is 'good girls', who were convicted because of "one mistake" and had constant support from their families. My identification differs from Larsson, as she identified her participants based on how they describe themselves during the interviews, but I identified them based not only on interviews, but also on my observations, interviews and daily life conversations (i.e., participant observation). These identities appeared during the classroom and interviews, where they were also performing offender identities.

Although my main aim to identify their presentations of identities, I also want to discuss the aspects that might has impact on their decision-making process when they are at what I saw as their backstage

The first category, fighters, that I presented the findings about relates to three women offenders; Alex, Johanna and Mary, who endured fighting changed their lives from the beginning of their journey on probation and were planning afterwards. Because this process was ongoing and involved challenges to sort out, I called this identity "fighters".

Alex performed her fighter identity during the focus group discussion activity while we were discussing women in the criminal system. She started to question criminal justice system in terms of regulations and policies that were designed for male prisoners' needs. According to her the reason behind committing crime for women was different than men, while men commit crime "because of boredom", she said that women commit crimes because of their needs, feeding their family or buying drugs as they were "forced into addiction". Alex's statements appeared during the session, but her life story gave insight of her backstage. She had grown up in a family that she experienced verbal abuse and constructed male figure by observing her mother's relationships with several boyfriends. When she ended with living on streets, she learnt how to keep herself safe beside how to commit a crime with the help of her boyfriend that she had met on the street. She was planning to move forward after the probation, planning to work with youth offenders to pass her experiences with them. I believe Alex's case is an example of survivor identity, who started to raise her voice on behalf of other women offenders and criticise the system whether it was based on statistics or not.

Not only observing women offenders' identity performances but also analysing backstage of these performances enabled me to understand women offenders' lives and their decision-making process, which had a crucial impact on their offender identities that they decided to involve in criminal activities. However, I categorised their identities into three groups, some of them exist in these groups more than once, which also shows that they performed multiple identities. These multiple identities appeared when there were different audiences. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Goffman (1959) indicates the importance of the audiences, while explaining the backstage, as

the performer decides how to perform by analysing the audiences' expectations and understanding. In addition to these expectations, the performer has a need to show the idealized and better way of herself. In my research the audiences vary according to the performance. While women offenders were performing multiple identities, the audiences were me, the facilitator and other women offenders who participated in the class. Although, I strongly felt myself as an audience, during the first week of my data collection while women offenders were performing offender identities, after we built a rapport, I rarely witnessed their offender performances especially in specific settings, for instance while they were interacting with their responsible officers. This might be because they were not ready to perform this identity. I believe they may not have been confident enough in these identities while they were around probation officers.

As I discussed above, the participants' choice to share their conviction histories with each other might be result of their needs to build up the feeling of belonging, being a part of their community on probation. Through my interviews, I sensed that the sense of belonging to the community they co-created was hugely significant to the participants. Given the importance of belonging, I wondered how this can be brought people's lives or whether is it something individuals carry it with the whole of their lives, like a bag, filling it with the outcomes of their learning experiences. Following Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, this feeling of belonging might be what distinguishes the women's group from other communities in the probation setting. Goffman's (1963) lens on stigma explained this need, as women offenders were holding the stigma of 'offender', and this stigma might be another reason that they distant themselves from other communities in the probation environment.

9.3.1 The Important Aspect of Backstage and Its Relation to Gender Violence

I presented the lenses on gender violence from the literature in Chapter 4. Drawing on Duckworth's (2013) and Horsman's (2000) ideas about how gender violence during childhood impacts on learning later in life and their life choices, I apply my interpretation of these lenses to discuss some women offenders' learning experiences. Duckworth (2013) underlines the significance of being a victim of gender violence

during childhood, and its effects on learners' adulthood, specifically on how they "view themselves, the choices they make in the relationships they form, the reasons they make for their choices and their views of motherhood, fatherhood and the family" (p.128) Horsman's (2000) lens on gender violence and its impact on adulthood in terms of engaging in a non-formal learning setting, supported me while concluding my findings. I found out the importance of Goffman's backstage concept in his identity theory while discussing gender violence.

In chapter 8, I analysed gender violence that women offenders experienced in different situations (school environment, family and on streets). Jessica's and Mary's experience on bullying at school did not help them while feeling themselves as member of their school community. Different than that, this experience affected their perspectives on education as Horsman (2000) states that the literacy environment as an adult might trigger negative childhood memories, such as bullying and violence. I observed these negative attitudes during the interviews when I asked about their educational journeys, and during the focus group discussion activity where they explained their school environments. This negative attitude was towards learning, whether they (stated) this within education, they had strong belief that they cannot learn as when they were going to school, they were failed and according to them this indicates that they were not enabled to learn. Their experience of psychological violence at school community had a role in shaping their perspective on learning, which appeared during my research.

The low attendance was not the only cause for concern during the women's programme on probation; getting appointments with their responsible officers was also a big problem in terms of attendance. Similar to school attendance, being a victim of violence would compound the likelihood of failure to attend appointments. In one of the cases that Horsman (2006) presents the victim of violence, woman, changed her mind at the last minute after she put her coat on because she convinced herself that nothing would change, and she would not learn as to how it had happened before. In Horsman's case, the woman believed that her attendance of going to classes make no changes in her life. In this regard, I would discuss that women offenders' low attendance in the sessions was not just due to their laziness, rather, it might be because of their school experiences which they unconsciously linked with their negative experiences related to violence.

Trudy's case about her house environment was different from the other women offenders. Based on her statements, she was physically and psychologically abused by her mother. Her father's unstable condition, he was in and out of the prison during their childhood, affected their family dynamics. The gender violence that Trudy experienced, might have shaped her perspective deeply, which was for her performance as a woman. She witnessed her mother's relationships with various men, and according to Trudy, these relationships were not in action behind the closed doors. Her perception about how to perform as a woman was strongly linked with sexuality. The lack of father figure in her childhood, and her mother's boyfriends might also shape her perspective on male. This was visible during my fieldwork. During the focus group discussion, she stated that even her father tried to abuse her sexually, as her father had approached her as a woman not as a daughter and compared Trudy's femininity with her mother. I believe these incidents show the link between experienced childhood gender violence and identity performances. Trudy's perception of being a woman was linked with sexuality, so if there is lack of sexuality there was no woman identity. One of the incidents that happened during my fieldwork made me question her perception in depth. While I was conducting my fieldwork, I burnt my stomach and legs with boiled herb tea. I was not able to sit on the chair comfortably during the class, so all of my participants were aware what had happened to me. One day during the break Trudy asked how I was handling with intimacy with my burnt skin condition and after I replied her that my health was my priority, she responded me with asking how I was calling myself a woman if I did not have intimacy with my partner. This question gives insights into Trudy's perception of being a woman and how she linked it with sexuality.

The learning experiences on street community was not limited to surviving skills of women offenders. These also gave an idea of their gender identities. Emily and Alex had abusive childhood, and these experiences affected their gender identity like Trudy. Different from Trudy, their woman identity was strongly linked with being dependant on men. Emily's dependant behaviour might be because of protection, to protect herself from sexual abuse as her mother's boyfriend had tried to abuse her sexually which was also reason of her starting to live on the streets. Alex's perspective might be shaped by seeking for acceptance from her father. According to Alex getting

approval from her father was crucial than anything else, and this idea may be changed its shape as getting approval from the male figure of her life.

Analysing perspectives of women offenders reveals how they perceive the world around them, and from this point, how their perceptions had shaped over the years. I believe combination of theories and frameworks might help researcher/reader to understand women offenders better, which might enable the authority to redesign the concept of learning programmes during the probation or in other words while reintegrating the women offenders into society. I shall explain how gender violence appeared as an important lens while interpreting my findings. Using Goffman's (1959) identity theory, enabled me to investigate different identities that performed during my fieldwork, even sometimes multiple identities. Goffman's idea of front stage and backstage encouraged me to critically explore the link between background-life story – and backstage. As Goffman's (1959) backstage is strongly based on the performer's decision by having a strong willing to fit in society's expectations, questioning how these perceptions had shaped enables me to link the backstage with Duckworth's (2013) and Horsman's (2000) frameworks for gender violence and Wenger's theory of communities of practice. For instance, in Trudy's case, before she performed as a survivor, in her 'backstage' she decided how to perform to the audiences, in this example the audiences were other women offenders who attended the women's group session. Her decision for how to perform was based on her perceptions, how she perceived survivors and victims, as at 'backstage' she was getting ready to perform survived victim identity. I believe her perceptions were mainly shaped by her earlier informal learning experiences specifically on this identity. While Trudy was learning within her family community and from her interpersonal and personal relationships, she built her own framework that she believed fit in audiences' expectations. Moreover, I believe her experience of gender violence during her life had constant impact on how she perceived other peoples' opinions and expectations from her, which she strongly linked with her sexuality. To conclude, this discussion underscores the impacts of gender violence in women offenders' lives.

9.3.2. Performing for Whom? The Power of Audiences

Goffman indicates the importance of the audiences, while explaining the backstage, as the performer decides how to perform by analysing the audiences' expectations and understanding. Addition to these expectations, the performer has a need to show the idealized and better way of herself. In my research the audiences vary according to the performance. While women offenders were performing multiple identities, the audiences were me, the facilitator and other women offenders who participated the class. Although, I strongly felt myself as an audience, during the first week of my data collection while women offenders were performing offender identities, after we built a rapport, I rarely witnessed their offender performances especially in specific settings, for instance while they were interacting with their responsible officers.

I shall discuss the power of audiences with an example by integrating the theories that I discussed above. The woman offender performs an offender identity on the stage, which she decided how to perform in the backstage based on her perceptions of society's expectations and her earlier experiences as an audience (her childhood experiences might have separated role in this experience). The audiences are already there to see her performance, to analyse whether or not she fits into their expectations, in specific cases affected by the stigma that they had. When you look at the stage as an outsider, you can say that the power is on the audiences, as they are deciding whether or not the performance fit in their expectations. On the other side, with acknowledging the society's stigma and expectations I believe power is on the performer. She has freedom to perform whatever she wants. She might want to perform through the expected stigma as Goffman (1963) states, or she might perform oppositely and surprise the audiences.

Being an offender in a probation setting has its own audiences, probation officers. The women offenders usually perform to probation officers, who have power on their probation process. On the other hand, there is also performances that probation officers are performing to women offenders. Different than having a stigma on offender identity, while officers are performing there is no stigma that they should consider before their performances. This might be the reason why every women participant has different expectations from their probation officers. However, the role of the officer had explained to the offender during the initial meeting, there were various opinions about probation officers.

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9.4. Hidden Relationships

The policy documents state explanations for responsible officers' roles to the offenders, the relationship between responsible officers and offenders. However, the hidden relationships in the probation service were not recognised/mentioned in these documents, it was inevitable to not observe these hidden relationships. I believe these relationships that I presented in Chapter 6 had direct and in-direct effects on offenders' rehabilitation process during the probation.

As I explored in Chapter 6, peer relationships appeared among responsible officers had two aspects, while had supportive role, there were some incidents that I observed turned into peer pressure. For instance, for the responsible officers that seek help from other responsible officers that were outside their friend zone, this was the reason of feeling peer pressure as they were not capable of running their cases. On the other hand, within their friend zone, when the support needed, there were no negative comments that I observed for the responsible officer that seek help.

Although when I entered the field, I assumed the relationship that I would observe between responsible officers and the facilitators would be an example of peer relationships, I found out this relationship was always had some unwritten rules, such as not accepting the facilitators to their friend zone. At first, I thought this might be the result of the difference of employers, as the facilitators were appointed by third-party agencies, but nearly the end of fieldwork I met with a facilitator that worked for the Community and Rehabilitation Company, and never witnessed that she joined other responsible officers in her free time. This made me question how these distant attitudes would support offenders, while responsible officers were meeting offenders at one-to-one meetings, and observing their offender performances, the facilitators were observing multiple identities of offenders that they were performing during the sessions. This distant relationship might be result of various judgements based on facilitators' performances on offenders' 'changing' journey, as it was on responsible officers' work definition that they were mainly responsible for the failure or success of offenders' probation process which made them an agent to assess the facilitators' performances indirectly.

The relationship between facilitators and offenders were the other relationship that I categorised as a hidden relationship and believe has important impact on offenders' lives during the probation. In Johanna's case, this positive relationship supported her to move away from her old social environment that had encouraged her to develop addictive behaviours, to the professional life by referring Johanna to do voluntary work. Similar to this positive impact, building trust was another aspect of this hidden relationship, which appeared during the Patricia's case, that she did not want to share that she was being abused by her ex-partner to her responsible officer but accepted my offer to share it with the facilitator.

I believe these different attitudes during the hidden relationships were mainly based on identity performances, all the performers were observing their audiences in different scenarios, such as while they were performing offender identity, responsible officer identity and the facilitator identity. But being not able to observe the women offenders' multiple identities, and just observing their offender identity, it was not easy target to support them while changing their lives and perspectives as the women offenders' lives were beyond their offender identities.

The structural and organizational issues related to the privatization of probation might have resulted in the hidden relationships on probation. Although, hidden relationships are rarely mentioned in detail in policy documents, I often recognized the power of hidden relationships during the group sessions, such as the power of the facilitator in Johanna's life, whose career plan was dawn by the facilitator.

9.5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I explored women offenders' experiences of learning by investigating their informal learning experiences in different communities. These investigations brought the importance of women's learning related to gender violence, which had impact on their perceptions of life and learning. Women offenders' specific learning experiences were two sided. One side of their learning supported their transition through their lives, especially during the probation by sharing and discussing their everyday problems and getting support from the facilitator while building crime-free lives. The other side of their learning experiences sometimes hindered their transition by learning how to commit a crime, how to hide the undesirable situations from their responsible officers and how to perform as a 'changed' offender. The probation

process has shaped women offenders' performed identities based on the authority's expectations but on the other hand, the women's other performed identities showed that this change might not engage with the reality of women offenders' lives. In addition to this, the social networks that women offenders were involved in during the probation had a positive impact on their reintegration of the society, whereas some of these networks had a negative influence on their addiction problems. The social network that women offenders created during the women's group sessions sometimes had mostly supportive role on their lives with involving listening not giving advice. On the other hand, same network was providing an environment that encourage them to continue their addictions.

In the next chapter, I will conclude my thesis and give recommendations for the future probation programmes by considering women offenders' needs and wishes to enhance women offenders' learning provision.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

10.1. Introduction

This thesis set out to explore women offenders' perspectives on learning and change through the overarching question of what are women offenders' perspectives on learning and change when on probation in England? This question has been explored via several sub questions to enable me to bring out investigate/analyse the whole experience of women offenders related to their learning before and during their probation period. Two of these sub-questions are related to women offenders' experiences of learning and whether these experiences support or hinder the transition through probation. The third sub-question asks how the women offenders' time on probation shapes their identities and relationships, before finally making recommendations as to how the probation service could introduce changes to enhance women offenders' learning provision via my final subsidiary question. The final sub question of this research was elaborated during the analyses of my data to look at not only the changes that could be made in the probation service but also from a larger perspective which encompasses women in the criminal justice system in other words while they are either on probation or prison. My double role during this research, collecting data as a researcher and writing an evaluation report for the Community and Rehabilitation Company, broadened my perspective while making recommendations for the programme.

In Chapter 1, I stated that women's reoffending rate is higher than men's in England and Wales (MoJ, 2020), and the focus of the literature is mostly on male offenders and the effects of prison education programmes on prisoners lives, specifically on their reoffending (Hull et al., 2000; Steuner et al. ,2001;Vacca, 2004). Although there are research studies that focus on offenders' literacy skills (Morgan and Kett,2003; Joseph,2012; Shippen et al.,2010; Shutay et al.,2010), their aims were to find out their literacy levels by conducting mostly quantitative research. By contrast, my research sought to contribute to the literature on offenders by drawing a contextualised picture of women offenders' learning journeys before and during the probation process. In this regard, my research has blended various frameworks to make meanings of these informal learning experiences. I employed not only Rogers' (2001) framework on

informal learning, but also blended his ideas with Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice. I also tried to present the link with Goffman's (1959) identity theory as well as adapting Duckworth's (2013) and Parkes'(2009) discursive understanding of learning and gender violence.

In the following section, I re-visit the major findings of my study. I start by presenting the reflections related to women offenders' learning while interrogating the main findings of this research. I then move to reflections on my own learning and how my assumptions (which were based on the literature that I discussed in Chapter 1) changed. I will conclude by presenting my recommendations for policy makers and future researchers.

10.2. Key Insights into Women Offenders' Experiences of Learning

In Chapter 5, I explored the different identities of women offenders that I observed during fieldwork by taking Goffman's (1959) lens on identities, while considering the earlier learning experiences that might affect their choice of those identity performances. Although Goffman (1959) describes the 'performance' as "a socialized, moulded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented" (p.44), women offenders' identity performances were mostly not for the audiences but with the audiences. In this respect, I found out multiple identities that were performed during my fieldwork, which gave insights about the women, specifically how they saw the world. Although I analysed the identities under three headings; fighters, victims and worriers, the women offenders performed those for the similar audiences, for similar purposes. Their perceptions about their audiences' expectations made them decide to perform a specific identity. For instance, while Alex performed a fighter identity by discussing gender roles in criminal lives, Jessica chose to perform a victim identity via stigmatising people who were living crime-free lives in the same environment, for the same audiences. I believe these performances were happening after/during the women building up relationships with their audiences, to find out their expectations and shape their performances.

Apart from revealing multiple identities that women offenders performed during my fieldwork, this research has established that women offenders' earlier learning experiences had a crucial impact on their choices of these identity performances. For

instance, in Trudy's case, her performed identity as a victim, might have carried the hints of what she learnt during childhood from her home community that I explored in Chapter 8. I have illustrated Trudy's River of life and how such incidents affected the way that she perceived the life itself. I established her childhood experiences that were strongly linked with gender violence, the abusive family relationship that she was subject to. These experiences had a crucial impact on her gender identity, and she later linked her woman identity with having intercourse. Unlike Trudy, Alex developed a fighter identity as a result of gender violence that she was subjected during her childhood. In her research, Duckworth (2013) found out the two crucial effects of gender violence on her participants' learning experiences at school and "carrying feelings of shame" (p.91) which then led them to "became loners" (ibid) in their social environments. I therefore, argued that Alex's positioning in her school environment, feeling distance from her peers, was not only because of the sexual abuse that she had experienced at home, but also the bullying that she faced because of her ethnicity, which ended up finding herself a new community on the streets.

In exploring relationships in the Community and Rehabilitation Company, this research revealed important aspects in Chapter 6. My research emphasises the conflicts and hierarchies among the responsible officers, between the responsible officers and the facilitators, between the women offenders and the responsible officers and between the facilitators and the women offenders. In Chapter 6, I also explored hidden relationships. Although the policy documents do not recognize the hidden relationships in this setting, those were shown to have a crucial impact on women offenders' lives. While positive relationships between women offenders and facilitators had a positive impact on women's lives, for instance in Johanna's case, it was the facilitator who encouraged her to apply to the agency to become a facilitator, the negative relationship between the women offenders and the responsible officers sometimes hindered those transitions through crime-free lives. I have shown that in some cases, such as Patricia, the women offenders tended to hide their problems due to the lack of trust.

Similar to hidden relationships, 'change' was one of the themes that presented a gap between the providers, the facilitators and the women offenders. Whilst the providers' and the facilitators' focus of change concerned the outcome of the probation programme, the women offenders' perspective was mostly about the process of

change. These two different perceptions revealed the various hidden tensions between two groups, and at the end of the fieldwork I was not sure about the accuracy of the responsible officers' and the facilitators' reports on women offenders' changed lives.

Before my fieldwork, I expected to witness several non-formal learning activities, as the main objective of the Community Rehabilitation Company was preventing reoffending through learning. However, it came as a surprise to understand that some of the women offenders' learning was not simply from committing a crime but also from learning how to commit each specific crime in a 'successful' manner. For example, one offender explained that learning to sell drugs meant she had first to acquire a certain level of numeracy which led her during her probation period to try to pursue this informal learning through a formal learning accountancy programme.

Several other unexpected findings emerged during my research; for instance, while conducting interviews with the women offenders about their learning experiences, it was interesting to note that all the women offenders thought their learning finished when their schooling finished. I expected to hear that bullying was a minor issue in schools, but the fact that each of the women offenders had been strongly bullied during their schooling was surprising. I did not expect to hear this because of my background, as a researcher coming from developing country, I expected to hear less about incidents related to bullying in school in England.

In addition to the bullying that women offenders experienced in the school communities, the gender violence that they either witnessed, or were subjected to, during their lives led me to take on board and explore different frameworks related to these two themes. These experiences of bullying and gender violence had a critical impact not only on women offenders' attitudes to the programmes run by the Community Rehabilitation Company, but also how they perceive the world and themselves. A further interesting issue that arose was related to intergenerational learning which from my perspective would have been a negative experience, but these women had normalised crime and abusive relationships; even violence which helped me to specifically understand their frameworks related to crime and violence. These learning experiences also explained their suspicion of anyone who acted kindly towards them as they tended to expect some level of abusive behaviour from any relationship. This revealed the importance of understanding women offenders' lives

from a wider perspective in order to prevent any undesirable outcome from peer support (please see Chapter 7.5). As a result, this hindered them from passing smoothly through the probation period.

Another surprising finding was the limited perspective that providers and the facilitators held on the women's group sessions. Specifically, during the implementation of the women's group session programme, it became clear that the facilitators considered the formal content instead of offenders' social process and informal learning within the groups. Thus, the power of the women's group sessions was often neglected by both the programme designers and implementers. This was because the women offenders created their own communities during these sessions so that learning occurred not only from the programme but also more strongly from peer interaction; particularly learning how to survive through the probation process. This was particularly noticeable in the way the women offenders often took control of sessions to discuss pertinent problems and offer solutions to issues that were not included in the programme. By doing so, the women offenders were challenging the limited parameters set by the providers and the facilitators.

While exploring identities and relationships, I thought that the responsible officers would hold similar attitudes and approaches to all the women offenders in their care; however, I realised that there was a division between these officers: those who treated the offenders as individual women and those who considered them differently. This was revealed through hidden power plays and different agendas, not only during my observations but also mainly from my interviews with the responsible officers.

Exploring different perspectives of change, I believe, enabled me to make meaning of the impact of these perspectives on women offenders' lives and perspectives. Although the authority's definition for change stands for "crime-free" lives for offenders, the lack of consideration for the specific needs of women offenders made this change non-organic, in a 'one-size-fits-all' model.

However, the programme developers and the facilitators made many assumptions about how change could be brought about for the women offenders. A good example of one assumption was related to the pre-prepared learning materials which had had no input from the women participants and therefore did not achieve the intended results. These false assumptions led to areas of neglect such as housing for which there

were no sessions. In addition, where sessions were held, the women offenders often knew more about the topic than was presented in the materials - such as the session about sexually transmitted diseases. Another major finding was that each facilitator and responsible officer tended to have different strategies to promote change among the women offenders during their sessions, which the women found confusing.

Beside the change of my assumptions based on my fieldwork, the framework that fed into my research enable me to make links among my findings. As I described in Chapter 4, Goffman's 'backstage' concept revealed the importance of informal learning in women offenders' lives and their perceptions. Before performing identities in the probation setting, women offenders decide how to perform at the 'backstage', where they tried to fit their behaviours into society's expectations. Specifying women offenders' learning in different communities through Wenger's theory of learning, and how this learning also shaped by their interpersonal and personal relationship with those community members brings out women offenders' perceptions explicitly.

Similarly, the women offenders' learning during their time in different communities, such as schools, on the street, families and probation communities, drew to my attention the need to reflect on different themes. I had not planned to bring out informal learning in a greater diversity of spaces at the time of planning this research. Specifically, I ended up exploring how those informal learning in different communities interacted and combined when they were performing multiple identities.

10.3. My Learning Journey in This Research Process

Before presenting my recommendations, I want to reflect on my research journey. In Chapter 1, I stated that my initial plan to conduct this research was in prison with women prisoners, however this was not applicable as my research proposal was rejected by the Her Majesty Prison and Probation Services. This incident pushed me to change my focus from prisons to probation companies, which I then realised gave me more opportunities to interact with people working at the company and the offenders, mostly with women. There were several opportunities that led me to work on new areas during my research journey. At the end of my data collection, the evaluation report that I wrote for the company got rewarded by the University of East Anglia, Faculty of Social Sciences with the PGR Public Engagement Prize (Appendix 4). Moreover, I shared my report at the Community Rehabilitation Company's

headquarters' meeting which enriched my opinions and understanding of the providers' perspective. And the last significant opportunity was running Women's Group Sessions. Even at first, I was panicked when I got the offer, as I was not sure about how to perform my researcher and facilitator identities together, yet I found a way which enabled me to collect detailed data.

Conducting an ethnographic research study could be seen as an academic way involving multiple characteristics and roles. If we have the same situation in real life, it will not be that long that someone would refer us to see a counsellor. On the other hand, conducting an ethnographic research enabled me to realise my assumptions, as day by day when I kept learning, some frameworks in my mind had changed. It was when, however I tried to start my fieldwork without any assumptions, I realised how my background learning influenced my thoughts. It is understandable that as human beings, we all have assumptions, but the pivotal point of being an ethnographer is acknowledging personal assumptions, and trying to reduce their effects on thoughts, specifically on questions. The first time when I heard about ethnography, Alan Rogers (2015) described the eagerness of six years old to learn about the world. This was always my starting point when I entered the field, "please see me as a six-year-old kid, learning by asking questions. Whenever you are annoyed, feel free to shut me up".

My research involved interacting with people in several roles, such as women offenders, facilitators and responsible officers, while exploring various perspectives on women offenders' learning. In the context chapter, I used a narrative device to engage the reader through   setting up different 'hats', one for the women offender on probation and one for the researcher. This technique was intended as a very immediate way for getting the reader into the specific context of my thesis and understanding the different perspectives involved. Although, using two voices in this way might have been an effective way for the reader to accompany me throughout my research journey, it would have been too complex to maintain through the whole thesis. This is partly because my thesis not only presents women offenders' perspectives but also the facilitators' and the responsible officers' perspectives. Thus, I decided to use this narrative device in the context chapter only as this was the point at which the reader was new to the research/probation context.

10.4. Policy Recommendations

According to the statistics collected by the Ministry of Justice (2020) the reoffending rate of women in England and Wales is higher than that of men. In other words, the possibility of female ex-offenders committing crimes is higher than male ex-offenders. This statistic might be evidence of why the government decided to renationalize the probation service in England and Wales. Additionally, the evidence from my study gives insights into how the probation programme specifically for women offenders was a one-size- fits-all approach.

Several recommendations (and earlier recommendations for the Community and Rehabilitation Company in Appendix 1) can be made while finalising my research. The most noticeable one is the necessity of prioritising women offenders' needs, and the need for programmes that provide practical solutions for women to survive in their communities, while also considering gender violence that they were subjected to during their lives. Due to the fact that the women offenders' schooling experiences were not as good as most other people, the learning environment within the classroom tended to trigger their negative experiences related to learning – resulting in them dropping out of the programme or not being willing to attend. Developing new programmes through considering these negative experiences could increase the possibility of expected outcomes of the programmes during the probation period.

This research suggests the importance of taking into account new communities that formed during the probation process. The existence of new communities during the probation period is a crucial aspect of being on the probation, as the attendants of the programmes are sharing similar problems with each other, such as family issues and how to complete the rehabilitation activity requirements, thus, building a community to share their knowledge is inevitable. By considering the impacts of informal learning through community practices, the desired outcome of probation services could become more achievable.

In earlier chapters of this thesis, I stated that not much research has been conducted related to offenders' informal learning. The majority of existing research has done through quantitative methodologies, and the lack of ethnographic research in this field has prevented offenders' voices to being heard by the authorities. For instance, the common problem for women offenders looked unlikely to be solved - housing. This

might be because of the lack of ethnographic research in this field, as without acknowledging women offenders' needs, developing a programme would not go further than ticking the box that the government recommends for the Community Rehabilitation Companies. I understand that the ethical challenges related to getting permission to conduct qualitative study with offenders might be the reason behind this current situation. Conducting more ethnographic research that focuses on women offenders would offer deeper insights to programme developers and researchers, and lead to support for providing better structures for women offenders. Conducting an action research with women offenders while pointing out the positive impacts of the edited programme on offenders' lives might encourage the Her Majesty Prison and Probation Service to support ethnographic research with offenders. I also believe that researchers who work with offenders should come from different backgrounds, as the interpretation of ethnographers are not only based on their academic understanding, but also their different life experiences and perspectives.

In this thesis, I aimed for women offenders' voices to be heard while presenting their learning experiences, in order to draw a full picture of their lives. It is unknown that whether / when one small mistake might change our life and we could find ourselves labelled as an 'offender'.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1- Evaluation Report for the Community and Rehabilitation Company

Appendix 2- Public Engagement Prize

2018

"You have got a chance"

HOW SUPPORT AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES CONTRIBUTE TO WOMEN SERVICE USERS' LIVES

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1. Introduction

This chapter explains the background of the research study through a review of the literature and policy documents. You will also find some reflections about conducting research on probation.

2. Brief Summary of Data Collection Process

This chapter introduces the reader to my research design, and fieldwork context, while answering these questions;

How many service users and staff members were investigated?

Which programmes were observed?

Where did I collect this data?

Why did I choose to examine these support programmes?

How did I choose my participants?

3. Methodology

This chapter provides information related to my methodology and data collection methods: **participant observation, interview** and **focus group discussion using visual activities**

4. Key Findings

This chapter explains my findings and examines them under three headings; Women's Group, one to one meetings and the ways of enhancing probation, drawing on the views of the participants.

5. Recommendations

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- ███████████████████ and all of the participants who took part and those that did not, I couldn't have conducted this research project without you.

Introduction

Many policy reports and research studies conducted in the criminal justice system with a focus on women do not give insights into women's specific needs and tend to take more account of men's needs. Through conducting this research with women service users on probation, I set out to reveal their needs while considering their backgrounds and expectations. It has been recognised that women's specific needs should be considered and met adequately in the criminal justice system (Worrall and Gelsthorpe, 2009; Faulkner and Burnett, 2012). To develop an objective perspective, I also interviewed some of the responsible officers.

According to Female Offender Strategy (2018), 70.7% of adult women who were released from custody between April and June 2016, reoffended within a year in the UK. This rating shows the importance of the service that is being provided by the Probation Companies. I believe that before focusing on the ways to improve the services that have been provided in the probation process, letting women service users talk for themselves, hearing their feelings about the services and their expectations from it would work effectively to decrease the number of those reoffending.

As a researcher in mainstream education for over a decade, I found that understanding the UK's criminal justice system was challenging, especially as I come from a different cultural background. This research report is part of my PhD studies, and I sometimes found it too hard to understand the legal language of specific Acts as I am coming from Education background and found myself constantly engrossed in topics related to criminal system or women offenders. I believe these challenges enabled me to look at the research participants in a different way.

Brief Summary of the Data Collection Process

Ethnography can be seen as a drawing, a special and individual drawing of a group or culture (Rogers and Street, 2012). By doing ethnographic research, as a researcher, we can draw our own picture while integrating what we understood from our participants with regard to their way of life and our own point of view about the culture or community (Fetterman, 1989).

My ethnographic study started in February 2018 and ended in September 2018. I started my data collection by shadowing some of the responsible officers. This enabled me to understand the concept of probation. Then I attended Women's Group sessions on a regular basis while observing these sessions I was also shadowing the facilitator. I was conducting informal interviews with women service users and facilitators while observing the sessions. At the end of my observation period, I also had a chance to interview some of the responsible officers and women service users who are attending different support programmes. Although I had planned to conduct several focus group discussion activities with women service users and responsible officers, this was not possible in the end. However, I managed to organise one focus group discussion activity which provided background information about women service users.

I conducted my study in several offices;

I chose the sample of women service users on the basis of their experiences related to support programmes. The responsible officers that I interviewed also had experiences about these programmes and all of them had experience of facilitating at least one of these support programmes.

Overall, I have interviewed 13 women service users and 6 members of staff.

Before the Research

Conducting a research study with women service users is a delicate issue regarding ethics. Being a Turkish researcher in the UK, also made this starting period more challenging. After several application to the Ethics Committee of the University of East Anglia, I got Ethical Approval for my research. Before observations and interviews, I obtained signed consent from the participants. All interviews transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for their reviews.

Which programmes/courses

I attended "Women's Group" and "Who am I?" programmes during my research project. These are interventions set up ████████████████████████████████████ Women's Group aims to support women in specific issues such as relationships, personal skills and sexual health. Who am I programme aims to guide service users while they are trying to understand themselves, their feelings and especially the reasons of their behaviours... (give an explanation of the programme aims and context/who is providing them). While I was able to collect data from "Women's Group" sessions, it was not possible to collect any data for the "Who am I?" programme. This was because this programme is for both men and women and requires high confidentiality because of the issues that were discussed during the programme.

The Women' s Group Programme involves 8 sessions with these subjects;

-skills for better relationships

-managing anger in relationships

-focus on self-esteem

-managing your emotions

-mental health session (1)

-mental health session (2)

-sexual health and physical wellbeing

-domestic violence

-women's rights

Where?

██

Why I chose those courses/ participants

This research study was conducted with two key aims – to contribute to my PhD thesis and to provide information for ████████████████████████████████ on women participants' views of the

support offered in their probationary programmes. My overarching question for my PhD research is: how do adult learning and support programmes contribute to women service users' lives after release from prison? Because of my ideological stance as a researcher is a combination of participatory and feminist research approaches, during my fieldwork, I focused exclusively on women. Within this aim and to contribute to the objectives for the research agreed with ████████████████████ ███████████████████████████ oup sessions and interviewed women service users. While interviewing staff members from ████████████ us specifically on women staff members. I interviewed facilitators from third-party agencies to understand their perspectives and the structures of the sessions that they were running. Interviews with staff ██████████████████ me to understand the probation process and the present situation

Methodology

The main approach that I used during my data collection was ethnography, which allowed me to understand a specific community of women service users, their routines, the hierarchy among them and their learning activities in detail. Bryman (2004) recommends several data collection methods within ethnography: becoming a member of the community, interacting with people in the community by listening to them, asking questions to them and observing their way of living lives. While I was conducting my research, I used this approach (known as 'participant observation'), along with interviews and group activities to collect my data. In this section, I will explain my methods of data collection and also explain my stance as a researcher during this data collection process.

Participant observation

Participant observation "connects the researcher to the most basic of human experiences, discovering through immersion and participation the hows and whys of human behaviour in a particular context" (Guest et al.,2013, p.75). To understand women service users in-depth, be accepted by them into their community and to make meanings of their participation through understanding their perspectives, I used the participant observation method. I attended "Women's Group" sessions that are being run by one of the third-party ████████████████ While applying participant observation method, I sometimes assisted the group like a facilitator- when there was no facilitator to run the sessions- or interacted as a peer during the sessions and was taking notes as an observer.

There are three stages that I followed during the participant observation phase of my research. The first stage was getting into the location. Locations for my participant observation were: The Women's Group sessions at ████████████████████ These Women's Group sessions are running once in a week based on ████████████████████████████ attended Women's Group sessions in ██████████████████ The second stage for participant observation was building trust with the participants. That means they have to accept you, to some extent, as someone they can "be themselves" in front of (Guest et al, 2013, p 76). There are some unwritten rules while building rapport. This meant that though I started to attend Women's Group sessions on 22nd February, I did not conduct observation until 16th March, because of the delicate topics that we were talking about during the sessions. Sharing my decision not to collect data in this session with the women participants also helped me to be seen as one of them during the session. And the last stage for participant observation was to spend an extended period of time with participa██████████████████████

What is happening during participant observation?

After I got consent from the facilitator, while I was explaining how I am going to be a part of the session, I asked consent from the participants. After I obtained consent from two parties, I attended Women's Group sessions. This attendance was mostly like being a member of a women's group. I was asking questions, learning, listening and sharing experiences like the women attendees. When sensitive subjects were being discussed, I tried to avoid taking up a position by giving vague answers when asked. I always asked support from the facilitator when there was a question raised and I did not know the answer.

During my observation period, I avoided taking long notes during the session, but I wrote my notes in full after every session. I also did not use a digital recorder during those sessions. Using digital recorder would affect the classroom environment in a negative way, and would distract the participants, so I chose to take my observation notes after every class.

Interviews

The observation was complemented by in-depth semi-structured interviews which enabled the researcher and interviewee more space to express her/his opinions. These interviews were being focused to address my research question since interviews have been described as "a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meaning, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (Punch, 2014, p.144) and the best way to understand people's reality (Jones, 1984). In the literature related to offenders' education and support programmes, Gundersen, Crewe and Darke (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with a policy-maker, governor and ex-prisoners. I aimed to adopt this kind of approach in order to get clear pictures of providers' and ex-prisoners' perspectives.

How did I conduct the interviews?

The interviews were conducted between March and August 2018. Overall, I interviewed 13 women service users and 6 staff members and facilitators from ████████████

I conducted semi-structured interviews, and a sample of the interview questions is given on the following page.

Group Activities

I conducted one group activity (the river of life) which is based on a methodology known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Narayanasamy (2009, p.18) explained PRA as an approach which enables group members to "conduct their own analysis, and often to plan and take action".

The activity enabled participants to draw a line representing the river of their life and show high and low points in their lives by making the river go up and down related to their education. Although I asked women service users to draw the river related to their schooling and education, the maps came out with their full life stories, because education could not be separated from their experiences. This activity helped me to understand my women service users' backgrounds.

Adult Literacy Behind Bars: Interview guidelines (staff)

1. Educational Background relevant to her/his occupation
-Any training or certificate, courses that attended, e.g. previous employment training

2. Learning and support programmes
-How many sessions that she is running, the reason of recruitment for this session
-How does she evaluate her teaching process, is there any central evaluation process
-How and where does she plan her sessions
-How she/he applies the curriculum, what kind of approaches that she is using and why
-Any class that she wanted to run but couldn't
-Any class that she wishes to run in the future
- Any general observations and suggestions about learning programmes
-What kind of constraints she faces
-How does she prepare/find the materials? Is there any potential to develop new materials?
-What does she think about the situation of being a staff member in rehabilitation company?

3. Perspectives on learning programmes
-How effective, the way that providers assess the outcomes/progress of learners
-How you would plan a programme for your subject?
-What assessment strategies does she use and who makes these decisions?

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1. Educational Background
-Graduated grade, the country that she is coming from, different languages used
-Any training or certificate, courses attended
-Family's educational background!

2. Literacy activities inside the prison
-What kind of literacy activities were she involved in and in which part of the prison
-Daily literacy activities like reading newspaper or letters
-Any use of literacy mediators, why and when

3. Literacy activities outside the prison
-What kind of literacy activities is she involved in and where
-Daily literacy activities like reading newspapers, letters, checking her social accounts
-Any use of literacy mediators, why and when

4. Expectations related to learning and training programmes inside the prison
- How many classes she was attending, the reason for attendance
-Any class that she wanted to attend but couldn't
-Any class that she wished to be run by the providers
-How she raised her ideas about learning and training programmes

5. Expectations related to learning and training programmes inside the rehabilitation company
-How many classes that she is attending, the reason for attendance
-Any classes that she wanted to attend but couldn't
-Any classes that she wishes to be run by the rehabilitation company
-How she raises her ideas about learning and training programmes-
- Other kinds of support programmes, such as group discussions?

6. What kind of changes would she like to make to contribute to her learning inside the prison in terms of facilities and subject areas?

7. What kind of changes would she like to make to contribute to her learning outside the prison and help to adapt to life after prison?

8.Expectations for free life
-What skills/courses have been most useful?
-Any courses or training that she has planned to attend, reasons
-The way that she found out about or applied for these programmes

Key Findings

In this section, I will examine my findings under three sub-headings including sharing some quotes from the interviews and some of my observation notes. At the end of every sub-headings, you will find some key questions in green boxes, emerging from the findings which could be considered by CRC staff and third-party agency providers.

Women's Groups

Women's Groups are run by ███████████████████ sessions, which I described earlier. These sessions are run by a facilitator, trained by ████████████████

These speech bubbles are representing the women service users' opinions related to Women's Group.

"I prefer Women's group, just being with women rather than a mixed session. Because I think men and women are very different."

"If it weren't this group, I don't think I would be where I am at this stage."

"I don't know what to expect from Women's Group"

"women's Group made me feel my worth, I am actually worth something, I am not just…"

"I feel like this group make me feel better…It is nice to be in a group that people are not judging, they don't judge, and it is really nice."

"These groups gave me a lot of confidence and self-esteem"

"Women's group is more than social gathering for me."

There are several themes emerged from the findings related to Women's Group. Most of the participants who were women service users found these sessions useful, especially while they were re-adapting to live in the community, as attending this group made them feel like they are still part of the community. In addition to a sense of belonging, this group offers participants the opportunity to question their own decisions, as indicated in my participant observation notes at the time:

Before starting every session, there are 10-15 mins catch-up talk. This short welcome chat mostly related to what we have done during one week, and also problems that we come across. The nature of the group is always non-judgemental, I learned a lot from them while just listening someone's problem without asking any question, solely listening and then if someone doesn't like the way that she reacted to her problem, without saying anything they are just moving to another person. If the issue is important- this is what the group decide without even talking- they start asking a question about the incident. This is one of the unwritten, unspoken rules of this Women's Group. (Researcher field notes, 23 March 2018)

There are several service users who have been attending this group for more than a year. This means they have finished the 8-week programme at least five times, as I noted for a conversation with a facilitator:

There are several women service users that are attending this group more than a year with repeating the same subjects several times (Observation notes-March 2018).

One of the service users mentioned that she has been attending Women's Group since last year. When I asked the reason, she said she likes to be here. Attending this group is more than learning the sessions, this is a new getaway from their social environment, what can be sometimes judgemental. (Observation notes- 16 March 2018)

Women's Groups are more than sessions that improve women's knowledge about specific topics, these groups are new social space for the women, in where they feel accepted and become more aware themselves (Observation notes- May 2018)

While responsible officers are encouraging participants to attend every session of this programme, the consistency of facilitators is a problem. Since December the group has changed facilitators three times, as I observed in my field notes:
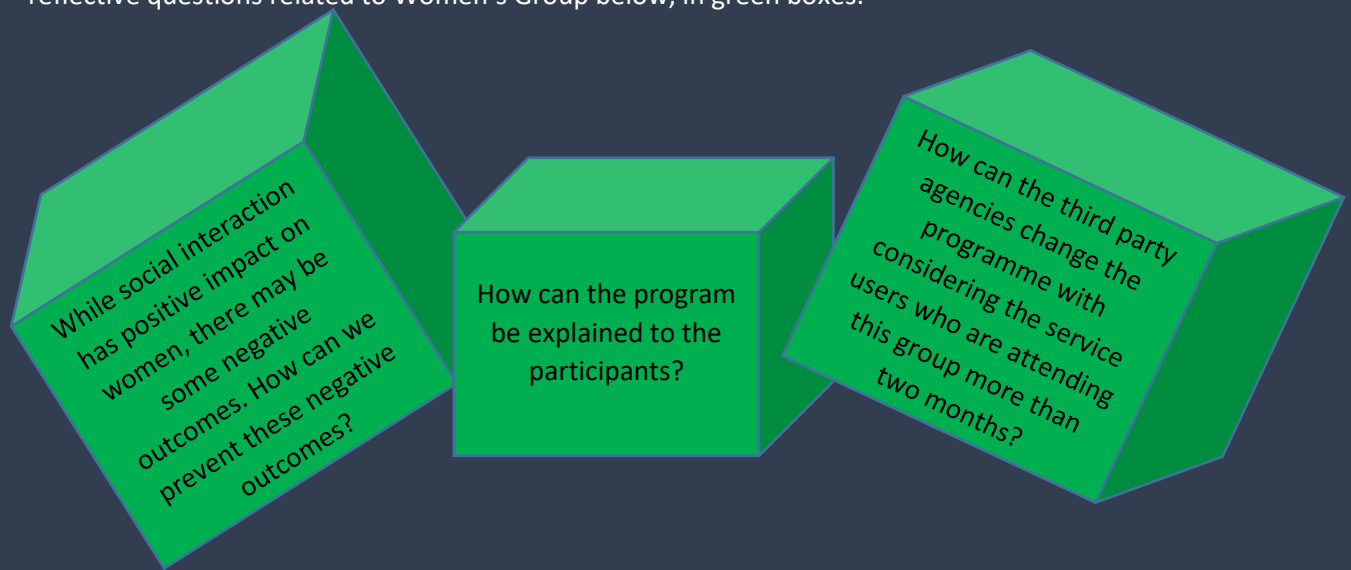
Consistency is crucial in women's group. Changing facilitator is damaging the trust relationship between the authority and participants. When there is a new group member, it takes one session for the group to accept the new member, but for the facilitator, it takes more than one session (Researcher field notes, May 2018)

Today the new facilitator attended the session. She wanted to explain the reason for previous facilitator stop coming to the session and meet with the participants. She asked us to write down our expectations from Women's Group. Girls looked at me and asked me what they should expect. I tried to give them some examples from my expectations (Observation notes, 20 April 2018)

My participant said that she doesn't know what to expect from the Women's Group. There should be some information given during the initial meeting with responsible officers, but I am not sure how detailed and clear they are. It is not easy to find yourself in a new situation, and also in a new world, surrounded by different terminology (Researcher field notes, 1 May 2018)

Briefly, women service users have a positive attitude toward Women's Group Sessions. Although they are not sure about what to expect from these group sessions, they feel that they belong to the

community that come to exist during these sessions. According to these outcomes, you can find my reflective questions related to Women's Group below, in green boxes.

While social interaction has positive impact on women, there may be some negative outcomes. How can we prevent these negative outcomes?

How can the program be explained to the participants?

How can the third party agencies change the programme with considering the service users who are attending this group more than two months?

One-to-Ones

One-to-one meetings are conducted by either facilitator from third party agencies or Responsible Officers. One-to-ones with responsible officers can be held on a weekly, fortnight or monthly basis. When there is a situation where the responsible officer thinks it would be useful to have a one-to-one with a counsellor or facilitator from third-party agencies, service users also conduct these one-to-one meetings.

Before starting my fieldwork, I had not thought about the power of one to one meeting. These meetings had been conducting in a big area at the entrance, and every meeting space did not being separated from each other with thick walls and glasses. You can find my first impression of this space in the following paragraph.

At the entrance, you see separated seats for One to One meeting. This sitting area reminds me private tutoring companies. Everyone can hear anyone if they incline their ear, but otherwise, you don't hear others while you are in one of that meeting areas (Researchers field notes, 9 February 2018).

"I prefer one to one sessions. I think you gain more from that."

"I am not proud of it and I do regret it, but then if it didn't happen, I wouldn't got the help I needed, because I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't be getting all the help…"

"I don't feel alone anymore, which is a great thing. I know there is lots of help out there if you seek it"

Findings related to one-to-one meetings show that women service users are happy to attend these meetings while acknowledging the positive impact of these meetings on their lives. The reflective question, below, indicates the responsible officers, different than previous questions.

How do responsible officers feel about supporting service users? How can we motivate them to support more?
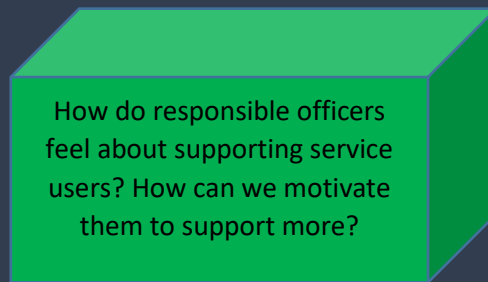
How can we enhance the probation process for staff & service users?

In this section, I will share some of my findings related to the general picture of probation. I have mentioned about service users' opinions in previous sections, so in this section, I will share some of my observation notes about what responsible officers think about probation and responsible officers' opinions on how to enhance the service.

"I think we are expected to do more process work than actually time with offenders, service users"

"I think actually it'd be great to just have, be able to do or an anxiety group or have something like that to just help people to mental health mainly think would be and beneficial for them."

"You're always doing admin and it is... It's never ending."

"We should think of what do people actually need in practical side?"

"I'd like to do something similar for the men. What is masculinity? Because so many men have such a warped idea about what masculinity is."

Without acknowledging the impact of responsible officers on women service users' lives, understanding the perspectives of women service users would not be possible. The participants' interactions with their responsible officer are crucial in most of the ways. "Responsible officers are like a bridge between the criminal justice system and service users. Most of the participants are happy with their officers, but on the other hand, I have realised that there is not any standard practice among Responsible Officers. While one of my participants was talking about how her life has changed with the support of her responsible officer- her RO guided her amazingly- my other participants have not seen her RO for a long time and did not get any help while rebuilding her free life (April-2018)."

Concerns about how to ensure quality standard practice in being a responsible officer, reducing the administration workload, enhancing the programme with considering its practical side such as adding new themes like "how to cope with anxiety or bipolar", focusing on the areas that most of the women service users are suffering from and how to facilitate new in-house training opportunities for the service users are the key points that appeared in this section.

You can find the reflective questions below.

How can we design the programmes with focusing on practical side of them?

Is there any way to standardise the practice of responsible officers?
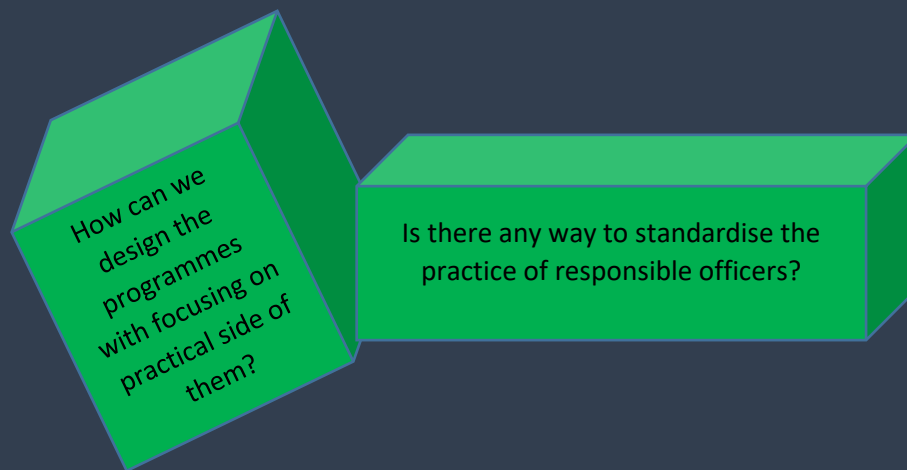
Recommendations

Reflecting on the data above, from my perspective as an outsider researcher, several key recommendations emerged in relation to the findings presented in previous sections.

Ideas about Women's Group

-Several topics need to be mentioned in more than one session in the Women's Group, and could maybe re-structure some of the courses related to women's needs.

-The consistency of facilitators has a significant impact on participants. Facilitators should be provided for at least a year based with the third-party agencies. Putting restrictions on chosen facilitators might work more effectively than with previous approaches. If the company asks the agency to run these sessions with facilitators who passed their probation period, consistency might be maintained in these sessions

- Social interaction during the sessions is crucial. This interaction enables participants to feel a part of the community again while learning from others' experiences. Should this interaction be more closely

controlled in terms of a risk that participants would negatively affect each other, such as triggering their addiction

Ideas about new courses

-There is a need for Men's Group. As a responsible officer suggested, especially helping men to understand

"masculinity"- this would also help them to understand domestic violence.

- Self-confidence is still one of the biggest issues. There are special programmes like 'Thinking Skills' and 'Who am I?' to support participants but because these groups are not gender-based women do not prefer to attend. Running a new Women's Group focusing on thinking skills, self-awareness and self-confidence may affect women positively.

- Housing is one of the biggest problems in probation, especially for women in probation. There is a high demand to get support while making an application to the council. To increase the knowledge about citizenship rights and also support them while making council applications, a new course may be run.

- Vocational training courses might be useful for women on probation while they are rebuilding their lives.

Ideas about support for responsible officers

- Make counselling obligatory for Responsible Officers. If officers need counselling███████████ for them, but on the other hand, the stories that they hear every day would not be that easy to handle. Counselling can help to make stories unfamiliar. When someone is familiar with something, she/he stops thinking about that or is uninterested in it, and when we are uninterested, then there are questions about how we can guide them precisely.

- Responsible officers report that they are spending too much time on administration work. Instead of using responsible officers' time for admin work, is it possible to have a special team just for admin?

*All visuals used in this report were taken from www.pexels.com

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