"*That's my story, I can't change it*"

Living on Licence:

An Exploration of the

Learning Experiences of Life Sentence Prisoners

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to gain an understanding of the learning processes of life sentenced prisoners. The research explored how life sentenced prisoners learn to live with a re-defined identity (by self and others), what they learned during their imprisonment and the impact of this learning on their ability to re-integrate into the community. It looked at how living under extreme conditions such as life imprisonment has the potential for transformative learning for the individual and can open up new understandings of what it means to be human.

This study takes a constructivist grounded theory approach to discover the narratives of learning of eight participants who have been convicted of murder and sentenced to a mandatory life sentence. The law makes a very strong statement when someone is convicted of murder; it states that the person knowingly and intentionally took the life of another individual.

> *a murder conviction carries a unique stigma which highlights the gravity of the offence and arguably acts as a deterrent (Law Reform Commission, 2008, p6)*

The stigma of a murder conviction is a deliberate one and is enshrined in the law. The current research study explored the impact of that deliberate stigma on the identity of the eight participants. It applied a learning lens to their stories of life before, life during and life after their life sentence. The learning focus that was grounded in the narratives of the participants resulted in the study looking at the interconnectedness between Jarvis' theory of adult learning and '*becoming*', Ricoeur's concept of identity and Maruna's definition of a redemption script and how these concepts applied to the learning stories of life sentence prisoners.

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I also want to thank my mother for her support throughout the process and her willingness to be of assistance in any way possible. Her empathy and compassion for people have always been an inspiration to me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Our experiences do not merely link us to the outside world; they are us and they are the world for us; they make us part of the world (Jacob Bronowski, 1971)

1.1 Introduction

'That's my story and I can't change it' was not the original title for this thesis but as the stories told in this thesis became stronger and clearer, the need for a different title became clear too. This research study presents the stories of eight men who have served or are currently serving a life sentence. Their stories have many different aspects to them; they include their aspirations, their hopes, their shame, their guilt and their reflections on what they have learned from their time in prison. Their stories are told through the lens of learning; a learning that has been driven by their hopes and their desire to do better, to become better people. This narrative of redemption runs through their stories and has been a key motivating factor in their learning, in their desire to understand - *"I knew I wanted to find out what was wrong, what exactly was the problem"*.The desire to learn about themselves was also motivated by the need to "do no harm" – "*I mean my intention in life is to never physically hurt anybody again".* All of the participant's stories were told in the context of the following acceptance - "*If you take a life it's forever, you can't take that back and it's a very hard thing to live with."*

Given the reality of the participant's crimes, the narrative of redemption, of 'becoming', that their stories are striving for, is very important for them. Their stories presented an opportunity for the often marginalised and silent voices of life sentence prisoners to be heard. These narratives are multi-layered and are presented along with critical reflection and analysis by me as a researcher involved in the prison support system. This critical reflection on the men's stories extends the existing body of research on prison narratives by bringing a particular lens. As a researcher, I bring the lens of learning to the narratives and the learning that is presented throughout the thesis is grounded in the stories of the participants. The learning implications of their stories for PACE (Prisoner Aid through Community Effort), my place of

work and the fields of prison, education and adult learning theory are important learnings which can contribute to growth and understanding in all of these fields.

The stories present the participants' attempts to make sense of their lives to date and to talk about what they have learned and how they have learned during their imprisonment. They show the complexity of adult learning, the roller coaster journey that learning can involve and the challenges of retaining and sustaining learning in difficult environments. Their stories gain in significance as they were told at a key point of transformation for several participants as they prepare for release into the community. They represent their active reflection on their lives and their hopes for the future. The participants' stories also represent the narrative choices that they made as these were the stories that they chose to tell and they wanted to have heard.

A research study such as this makes a unique and important contribution to the field of adult education in terms of theory and practice. It does this by applying a learning lens to the experience of life sentence prisoners and co-creating a dialogue of learning and transformation. The research highlights the importance of learning in the process of transformation in an unexpected and challenging context. From a theoretical perspective, the research applies a theory of adult education to the prison context and examines the challenges of putting the learning into practice for life sentence prisoners as they make their way through the prison system and the transition to community life. The key practical and theoretical implications of the research will be drawn out further in the findings and discussion chapters using this learning lens.

Prison as a Learning System

The learning experienced by the men participating in the current research has occurred both within the context of the formal education system within prison and also through their individual experiences of being in prison. Therefore the learning of which they speak covers the totality of their experience within prison, highlighting the complexity of adult learning as well as their capacity to learn in unexpected places. In the context of this research, the prison

represents the learning system for these eight men and for their learning stories.

> Learning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further more easily. (Bruner, 1960, p17)

Each of the men who participated in this research trusted me with their stories for various reasons. My experience in working with prisoners and ex-prisoners meant that they presumed that I shared their assumptive world (Kauffman, 2002). Therefore, they trusted that their stories were safe with me as a result of that shared world whilst each of them had their own individual reasons for wanting to tell their stories. Their reasons tended to fit somewhere along a redemptive and transformative spectrum. Some of them wanted to tell their stories so that others may learn valuable lessons from them without having to follow the same path; thereby redeeming themselves by helping others. Some of the men told me their stories so that the system could listen to their voices and learn from their stories and their experience of being a life sentence prisoner; thereby redeeming the system through their stories. Some of them told me their stories because they stated they simply wanted to help me do my research, thereby providing a transformative learning opportunity for me whilst redeeming themselves at the same time. For whatever reasons they chose to tell me their stories, I was privileged to listen to the stories of these eight men.

> Human beings are storytellers by nature….. We expect much from stories……We also expect stories to tell us who we are. When it comes to human lives, storytelling is sense making. I cannot understand who you are and what your life might mean unless I have some sense of the story you are working on— the way you see your life as a plot enacted over time….. More than anything else, stories give us our identities. (McAdams, 2005, p77)

This encapsulates three central concepts of this research: stories, time and identity. The narratives of the stories that the men told me described their lives before the crime, their experience in prison and their hopes for their lives post-release. Therefore, the concept of time is central in each of their stories, both in the sense of ‘doing time’ for the offence but also in the sense

of their stories moving through time by reflecting on the past, talking about the present and imagining the future. The concept of identity was also a key one in the stories that the men told. They spoke about who they were before the crime, how they took on a "lifer" identity with their imprisonment and how they see their identity continuing to grow and change post-release. Finally, I can only hope that I have "made sense" of the men's stories in a way that is meaningful for all. The men's stories are significant stories. They offer important insights into the experience of imprisonment, the challenges of release, the possibility of redemption at both an individual and institutional level and the learning that is available within the prison system. Their stories have been told to be heard and also for the prison system to listen to. The participants' desire to be heard by the system means there is an undercurrent of policy issues and learning for the system that runs throughout the research. However, the primary focus of this research is about the participants learning journey through life imprisonment, how they reflect upon their life before imprisonment for life, during their imprisonment and their hopes for their life after life imprisonment.

The meaning of Life

The concept of life and what it means is something that we usually reserve for philosophical discussions in our more earnest moments with friends. Yet it is the basis of my day-to-day work with men who have received a life sentence. I accept and understand the contradictions inherent in the fact that "life" does not mean "life in prison" and work in the context of preparing men for life after the life sentence. I also understand the complex and contradictory nature of imprisonment where the balance between care and control is always shifting. Working with men who have experienced lengthy prison sentences has taught me much about myself and my views on life. It has also taught me that I work in the grey areas; that my work is very rarely located in the black and white rigid world that the media likes to present when it comes to serious crimes. Right and wrong, good and bad, the binary opposite poles of behaviour still exist but they become contextualised as I seek to separate the act from the person in order to be able to work in a constructive way with men who have committed serious, violent crimes.

I have always worked with groups who are seen to be socially excluded and marginalised, especially homeless people and people who have been to prison. These groups of people existed prior to the "Celtic Tiger", their situations did not improve with the boom years and they are once again on the periphery of society now that we are in an economic downturn. In undertaking a Doctorate in Education, my research focus was always going to be on the area that I work in. Therefore, I chose to focus on the experience of life sentence prisoners; a context that would not ordinarily spring to mind when talking about education and learning. Yet much of the work that we do in all the projects in PACE, the organisation of which I am Director, focuses on learning and the ethos of PACE is very much based on a learning model. This learning however is not just the formal learning that occurs in the classroom. Instead I wanted to focus very specifically on the informal learning processes and the impact on the identities of life sentence prisoners as they seek to reintegrate into the community upon their release. Therefore, the focus of the research is on how the men identify themselves before, during and after the life sentence, what they have learned as a result of their imprisonment and how do they use this learning after their release.

As mentioned earlier, my research interest in life sentence prisoners extends from my work experience with prisoners in general. As a substantial minority within the prison system, life sentence prisoners have a particular story to tell about who they were, who they are now and who they desire to be. They have an opportunity to use prison as a learning system that other shorter sentence prisoners do not. In addition, they have a lot to offer those of us who work with them in terms of our own learning on the impact of prison on identity change and transformation within a closed, secure setting. Life sentence prisoners have a unique story to tell about time and how time can pass in prison when they have no release date for which to aim. They can also tell us about relationships and the impact of the perception of others on our own identity development, they can tell us about what it means to be a "Lifer" and how the label is attached to them from the moment of conviction. They can tell us about stigma, shame and the wider theme of recognition and how they have learned to manage these issues whilst in prison.

The emphasis on learning within the research is not only about what the men have learned as a result of their experience of being a life sentence prisoner. The learning on offer in the stories that the men have told is also about what we can learn as professionals who work with life sentence prisoners, as I outline in section 1.2.1 on PACE. These are stories that deserve to be told and deserve to be heard. As with all stories, these stories are not told in a vacuum but are positioned in a very particular time and context.

1.2. Rationale for the study

As a narrative based study, the theories, literature and discussion within the thesis are all grounded in the participants' narratives and their stories. This study is not a policy document although there are areas that the men highlight throughout the findings that can have implications for policy makers as outlined above. Instead the focus was on listening to and presenting the participant's stories as clearly as possible to enable their voices to be heard. So any policy issues that are raised in the research are raised by the participants because they want to affect change within the prison system. At times this can mean that there are two messages running concurrently throughout the thesis:

1. What the men have learned as life sentence prisoners and
2. What they want those of us who work in the sector to learn.

The research question is most simply put as follows: what have the participants learned from their experience as life sentence prisoners? The context of this learning is the criminal justice system, in particular the specificities of the Irish prison system. Therefore it is necessary for me to briefly explain my work context and the various systems within the Irish criminal justice system so that the context of the men's learning is explicit from the beginning of the research. Learning does not happen in isolation.

1.2.1. PACE

My work with life sentence prisoners takes place in the community in the context of my work as Director of PACE a voluntary sector agency that provides a range of accommodation, training, education and other support services for people leaving prison. PACE works with people who have

experienced different lengths of imprisonment and been imprisoned for a wide variety of crimes. Therefore, we work with people who have served multiple shorter sentences, who have chronic addiction issues as well as working with people who may have only committed one crime of a very serious nature and they have been imprisoned for substantial periods as a result. A large part of our work focuses on providing support for life sentence and other long-term sentence prisoners on a phased pre-release basis. To this end life sentence prisoners attend the PACE Training for Employment project on a day-release basis to participate in training and education programmes as part of their pre-release programme. In addition, they also stay in our residential project on a phased overnight basis again as part of their preparation for release. The work that takes place in PACE is about assisting the men in learning how to live successfully in the community after serving an indeterminate sentence in prison. PACE is the only voluntary sector organisation in Ireland that provides this range of support for life sentence prisoners in the community. As the narratives will show, life sentence prisoners face many obstacles on the road to full release and PACE is strategically placed in terms of assisting the men in overcoming those obstacles.

PACE has learned a lot from working with people and we witness the difficulties that some of the men have in transferring the learning that has taken place in prison and in our projects to their life in the community. Over the years I have seen many life sentence prisoners appear to manage the release process successfully until the point of full release where a number of them have struggled with the reality of release and been returned to prison. I have also seen prisoners choose to return to prison because of their isolation and inability to cope with the responsibility of release. This is an experience that I have seen repeated frequently and was one of the reasons that I was interested in researching the learning experiences of life sentence prisoners.

The learning for the men in this research is an uncaptured story which has rich insights for education at this transition stage for the men. It is for these reasons that I chose to look at their learning processes and their identities as they prepare for release rather than undertake the research at an earlier stage

of their imprisonment. As mentioned earlier the research question focuses, not on the policy sphere, but on the learning stories told by the men who as life sentence prisoners have come to be identified as Lifers. What have they learned from their experience of being life sentence prisoners?

1.3 Context of the research

While this is a narrative research study focused on the learning journeys of life sentence prisoners, the context of their living and learning is different to many other studies that focus on the learning experiences of adults. Very few other adult learners live in a controlled environment as their place of learning for extended periods of time and are unable to leave. Therefore one of the contributions of this research to adult learning theory is to present what that experience is like from the perspectives of those who have been sentenced to life.

The reason for the focus on male participants is that the majority of life sentence prisoners in Ireland are men. A second reason for the focus on men was the challenges of protecting the identity of any female life sentence prisoners as their numbers are too low, at the time of writing there were only five women serving a life sentence in Ireland. Therefore, this necessitated a focus solely on the male experience of the life sentence where there is the possibility of being transferred between closed prisons into a semi-open or open prison. This system does not exist for women as there are only two prisons for women. A woman's experience of imprisonment for a life sentence is therefore not reflected in the current research.

The findings of the current research highlighted the fact that the criminal justice system and in particular the prison system has been the participant's home and their physical location for substantial periods of time. Being sentenced to prison is a very particular experience and presents substantial challenges for the participants especially when they have no idea for how long they will be in prison. Being locked inside a cell that is locked inside a wing that is locked inside a secure building changes how you view the world (Crewe, 2009). The participants' stories show that their immediate experience of imprisonment is of their world shrinking into a very focused

and specific location; their liberty is lost and their ability to make decisions that impact on their world is minimal (Appleton, 2010).

As these systems have such a major impact on each of the research participants and are their locus of learning it is necessary to outline them briefly. In the following section, I provide a brief outline of what a life sentence means, a description of the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Parole Board and their role with life sentence prisoners. Further detail on all of these is also available in the appendices.

1.3.1 The Life Sentence and Lifers

As a narrative study it is not appropriate to have an in-depth critical review of sentencing and the pros or cons of having an indeterminate life sentence as the mandatory sentence for murder. In the context of the research therefore I have summarised the pertinent facts about the nature of the life sentence in order to assist your reading of the findings chapters where various elements of the sentence are discussed by the participants. A fuller description of the life sentence in Ireland is contained in Appendix 1. As you will see in the findings chapters, one of the greatest challenges for the participants in serving a life sentence is its indeterminate length which means there is no fixed date for release from prison. A life sentence prisoner has no automatic right to release within the Irish prison system and no defined minimum sentence length. Therefore the expectation and process of release from prison for life sentence prisoners is completely different to the expectation and process of release for a fixed term sentence prisoner (McCutcheon and Coffey, 2006). However, while there is no guarantee of release for a life sentence prisoner and they are also ineligible for standard remission, the practice is such that people who are currently sentenced to a life sentence do not stay in prison until the end of their life.

Therefore the impact of a life sentence is that their sentence is indeterminate and their release is;

- not guaranteed,
- viewed to be of a temporary nature,

- referred to as being "on licence",[1]
- under the supervision of a Probation Officer,
- requires the individual signing on to the prison/Garda station,
- based on certain individual conditions,
- subject to recall to prison for an undetermined period of time if any of the release conditions are breached.

The decision to release a life sentence prisoner is made by the Minister for Justice and Equality based on the recommendations of the Parole Board. All of these aspects of the life sentence were discussed by the participants as they told their stories of their experience of imprisonment and the learning journey that they have been on during their imprisonment.

Lifers

As the findings chapters explore, the stories the participants told about themselves before they were committed to prison were defined by many things including their family status or their job. Once sentenced to life they became defined within the prison system by their legal status; they became Lifers. The participants refer to themselves as Lifers, as do the services that work with them and I include myself in that list. In society we like to have labels and boxes to put people into as it makes things seem simpler particularly in a work setting but what impact does that have on the person who carries the label?

From the simplest perspective, to be a Lifer in an Irish context means to be serving a life sentence in prison. What the participants' stories can tell us is how or if the Lifer identity carries forward into the community when they are released. As Lifers the participants have spent substantial periods in prison and they tell their stories of coming out to a world that has changed vastly since their imprisonment. As a result, the participants have many things to come to terms with both in their physical, external environment but also

[1]The term 'on licence' refers to the transfer of the life sentence from the prison to the community where there are various conditions that the individual has to comply with in order to maintain their release in the community. In many ways the on licence conditions represent the 'life' element of the sentence.

personally and emotionally. Life rarely remains static for any of us and the men who have been removed from the community can experience the dynamics of all the change that has happened in their absence in many different ways. I will explore later the learning implications of this transformation.

1.3.2. Irish Prison Service

A defining aspect of the participants' stories has been their experience in the different prisons that they have lived in for substantial periods of time. There are currently fourteen prisons in Ireland nationally with seven of them based in Dublin.

Out of the 14 prisons nationally, the breakdown is as follows:

- one high security prison,
- eight closed medium security,
- one closed, medium remand prison,
- one semi-open low security and
- two open low security prisons (Irish Prison Service, 2012).

Within each prison there are various services provided for prisoners. Some, like education, are provided by external agencies such as the Vocational Education Committees. Other services such as health and psychological services are provided by the relevant professionals being employed by the Irish Prison Service.

As can be seen from this brief outline, the prison estate currently has a strong emphasis on security with the majority of prisons in Ireland operating as closed, medium security facilities. From the context of the research the impact of the emphasis on security on the life sentence prisoners' learning processes is explored. There are many wide-ranging and current policy issues pertaining to prison and the use of imprisonment that fall outside the scope of the present study, a summary of these issues is presented in Appendix 2.

1.3.3 The Probation Service

The role of the Probation Officer, as will be seen in the findings chapters, is an important one for life sentence prisoners as they contemplate release into the community. The function of the Probation Service is to provide support, supervision and assessment to offenders and ex-offenders and to facilitate the integration of ex-offenders into the community (Probation Service, 2012). All life sentence prisoners receive assessments, reports and other services within the prison from the Probation Officer prior to their release. As mentioned previously life sentence prisoners release into the community is temporary and is subject to the supervision of a Probation Officer. The role of the Probation Officer both in enabling the release of the life sentence prisoner from prison and then in maintaining that release in the community is an essential one. Therefore the relationship that the Probation Officer has with the individual is an essential one in ensuring that the release process goes smoothly. This will be discussed further in the findings chapters and more detail on the Probation Service as an agency is available in Appendix 3.

1.3.4. The Parole Board

One of the most important aspects of the participants' stories was their experience of the Parole Board. The Parole Board is a voluntary committee operated and supported by the Department of Justice and Equality. It does not have any statutory powers. The Parole Board consists of individuals appointed by the Minister for Justice who work alongside representatives from the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service in making recommendations about the release of long-term sentence prisoners. In this

context long-term sentence refers to prisoners serving eight years and more. Further information on the Parole Board is available in Appendix 4.

1.4. The research process

This brief summary of the context in which the research took place brings me back to the beginning of the research process, to the learning stories of the participant's experience of life imprisonment. I am conscious of my role as co-creator of these stories by my presence as the audience, as the instigator of the story-telling process for the participants and as the narrator of the stories. The participants told me their stories not just at my request but also with guidance and prompting from me in terms of questions that I asked them based on what they were telling me. My own narrative as a learner and as a professional working in the field influenced the particular points of their stories that I wished to explore. There were also many aspects of their stories that resonated with me on both a personal and professional level. The same stories told to a different researcher working in a different discipline would have had a different emphasis.

One of the primary challenges for me as a researcher was reminding myself of the focus on learning throughout this research whilst resisting the urge to veer too far off course into a sociological or criminological study. This was a balancing act for me as research on the experiences of life sentence prisoners lends itself naturally to being studied through many fields such as sociology, psychology, criminology and anthropology. The education slant brought with it different demands and a different approach for me as a researcher. Overall there were more benefits than challenges to this approach and it will add to our ability to understand the nature of how transformation and learning occurs even within challenging physical environments. Undertaking a research study on the experiences of life sentence prisoners through the lens of education naturally focused me as a researcher on their experiences of learning. Therefore, the research question was what have the participants learnt overall and, if they have learned from their experience, has this learning impacted their lives?

While the focus of this thesis is on the learning experiences of life sentence prisoners, it is not the purpose of the thesis to mitigate the crime of murder and the impact that this has on the families both of the victim and the offender. Nor is it the purpose of this research to re-try any of the men or to pass further judgement on them because of their offence. This thesis will not represent the views of the media or the general public on the experiences of life sentence prisoners. Nor is it a tool to advocate for sentencing issues for murder. There is no political agenda behind this research.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The current chapter, Chapter 1, outlines briefly the context and the rationale for the study. The context of this study as discussed is the criminal justice system and the focus of the research is on the experience of life sentence prisoners in this setting and the learning processes that they have undertaken as such.

Chapter 2 focuses on relevant literature to the study of the learning experiences of life sentence prisoners. The literature review covers literature from a wide range of fields including education, philosophy, criminology, sociology and psychology. This breadth of literature gives different insights which inform and deepen our understanding of the various issues and themes that arose during the course of the research.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodological approach, processes and analysis that I undertook in the research process and outlines why I felt this approach was the most appropriate one given the specific context and sensitivities of this research. The ethical processes that I underwent to gain consent for this research are also explained in detail.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the findings, analysis and discussion of the findings of the research. To organise this breadth of the findings I structured them into the following three areas:

- Life before life
- Life during life and
- Life after life

This structure enabled me to organise and present the findings clearly using the temporal structure that is core to these participants' experiences.

Chapter 7 focuses on the conclusions and recommendations arising from the research. The conclusion brings all of the preceding chapters together, summarising the main points of the research and making recommendations for the next steps.

1.6. Conclusion

The purpose of an introductory chapter is to set the scene for the research and to set the tone for the rest of the thesis whilst instilling an interest in the topic at hand in the reader. In this chapter, I have given a brief overview of the context in which the research took place and also outlined the narrative nature of the research. During the course of this chapter, I have highlighted the learning focus of the research and the identity issues that the learning focus raised by participants throughout the research. It is the voices of the participants that are at the heart of the research and that provide so many articulate answers to the questions that I had as researcher. These are the voices that I still have in my head as I write this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.
(Helen Keller)

2.1. Introduction

The objective of the present study is to understand the learning experiences of life sentenced prisoners both in prison and as they reintegrate into society through an analysis of their learning narratives using interviews. The research explored how life sentenced prisoners learn to live with a re-defined identity (by self and others) and to re-integrate into the community and daily living. It looked at how living under extreme conditions such as life imprisonment has the potential for transformative learning for the individual and can open up new understandings of what it means to be human. The research looked at all of these issues through a narrative approach to the participants' learning stories.

As a narrative study the themes and the literature that are discussed in this chapter are taken from the findings of the research and the stories of the participants. Therefore, the literature reviewed here is grounded in the narrative stories of learning that the participants told during the course of the research. I mentioned in the previous chapter the two messages that came from the narrative; the personal stories and the policy focus. These two narratives will continue to run throughout the thesis and at times have presented a challenge for me as a practitioner-researcher in terms of knowing which voice to listen to first.

The structure that I chose to present the findings again came from the participants' stories and was part of my method of managing the two narrative messages. It was also a way to recognise the importance of time for anyone who has been sentenced to life and the relentless passing of time regardless of the, at times, static nature of life imprisonment. Therefore, the findings are structured along a continuum of life before, life during and life after life imprisonment. Each findings chapter will have a different emphasis between the personal stories and the policy issues that the participants wished

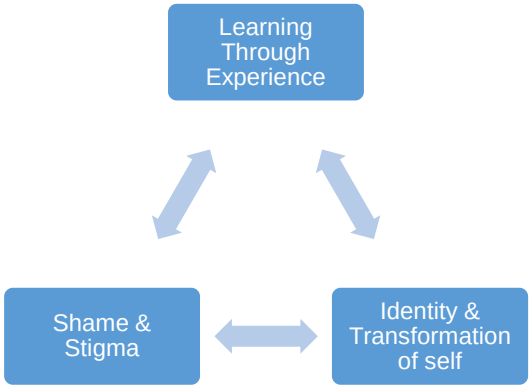
to be heard. Learning is at the heart of all of the participants' stories and their stories show the complexity of adult learning and highlight intense moments of learning for them. Their stories also highlight the unevenness of their learning as adults and these are the elements of learning that we need to consider as we progress through the literature and the findings chapters.

While this isn't a policy document, it is necessary to take cognisance of the current discourse on life sentence prisoners. The discourse on life sentence prisoners very rarely enters the education domain, instead as mentioned previously life sentence prisoner narratives tend to be seen as fitting within the criminal justice context. Therefore the current research represents a unique opportunity to contribute to the area of adult learning theory through the focus on the learning experiences of life sentence prisoners. The current discourse in the criminological sector is primarily in the area of desistance from offending. However, very little of this discourse has focussed on life sentenced prisoners and their new identity as lifers (Appleton, 2010). While various criminologists have looked at the narratives of repeat offenders to examine how that narrative changes over time with a reduction in the frequency of offending (Maruna, 2001, Healy, 2010), the focus of the debate around lifers is more on security and risk assessment. Yet, most life sentence prisoners don't see themselves as fitting the model of standard prisoner and repeat offender or as presenting a risk of re-offending (Appleton, 2010, Milner, 2010). The stories of the participants in the current research will support that perspective.

2.2. Themes embedded in the research

The literature and themes that will be reviewed throughout this chapter come from the findings and analysis of the in-depth interviews with the research participants. Eight life sentenced prisoners were interviewed as part of the research process. Their stories were all very individual and while they had themes in common, their stories were uniquely their own. All of the participants were interviewed at different stages of the release process and as such they each presented with different experiences and different concerns. While there were many themes that arose during the course of the interviews,

the literature reviewed in this chapter focuses on the following areas as these were the strongest themes for each of the participants:



These themes are the focus of this chapter because of their interconnection to each other and the recurring nature of them in all of the interviews. Learning through their experience is an overarching theme and the narratives of the participants are narratives of learning. Identity comes up time and time again both in the literature review and also in the findings chapters. Shame was also a recurring theme throughout the interviews though in different ways for each of the participants. Again shame and identity have an interconnection that will be discussed further below.

Any research that focuses on prisoners will naturally come across the themes of power and institutionalisation and they did arise within the interviews with the participants. However, the learning focus of the research combined with the emphasis on the concepts of stories, time and identity as discussed earlier meant that it was not possible to delve too much into the themes of power and the purpose of prison and institutionalisation.

2.2.1 Identity and transformation of self

There are various theories of identity and identity development that could pertain to the current research. The concept of identity crosses the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology and philosophy with theorists such as Erikson, Habermas and Mead all having different views on the meaning of identity and whether it is a social construction or a more personal means of defining oneself.

> Self and identity are not simple concepts. They are, instead, words that have been around for a long time in both popular and scientific discourse. They have also been used in a bewildering diversity of ways and have fostered a large number of compound concepts (e.g., objective self-awareness, identity salience). To make matters worse, the same word or phrase is sometimes used in very different ways, and different terms are sometimes used to refer to what appears to be the same phenomenon. (Ashmore & Jussim, 1997, p5)

Having immersed myself in the various aspects of the literature on the definition of identity, I came to the conclusion that the complexities of the debate about the history of identity and the various definitions of identity are beyond the scope of the current research. Instead, I looked at identity as a dynamic and evolving concept that outlines the way in which the self is represented and is therefore subject to change and development over time (Ecclestone, 2009). I focussed on how the participants perceived themselves and if they identified with the identity that has been imposed on them by their imprisonment – the Lifer identity.

> …the state monopolizes, or seeks to monopolize, not only legitimate physical force but also legitimate symbolic force, as Bourdieu puts it. This includes the power to name, to identify, to categorize, to state what is what and who is who. (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p15)

The issue of power that is implied in the above quote will be explored briefly later in this chapter.

In light of the findings of the research, the concept of identity used in the current research study is one that sees identity as "*running stories of the self*" (Presser & Kurth, 2009).This is based on Ricoeur's theory that identity is a narrative construction that is a product of a reflective process.

> Narrative identity constructs a sense of self-sameness, continuity and character in the plot of the story a person tells about him-or herself. The story becomes that person's actual history. (Ricoeur, 1988, p247)

The conceptual framework for the current research is very much grounded in the narratives of the participants. This means that all the theory discussed in this chapter has been identified based on emergent themes in the data and then been applied to a theoretical framework rather than the other way around. This approach meant that I approached theory after analysing the data and that I sought the theoretical framework that best fit the data. In this context, Ricoeur's definition of narrative identity was identified as an appropriate definition for the data and the discussion on identity that came from the data. Ricoeur recognized that we can look at our lives in the same way we look at narratives and by doing this we can come to a better understanding of our identities. It also presented a more interesting way for us to look at ourselves.

> Do not human lives become more readily intelligible when they are interpreted in the light of stories that people tell about them? And do not these 'life stories' themselves become more intelligible when what one applies to them are the narrative models—plots—borrowed from history or fiction (a play or a novel)? (Ricoeur, 191, p188)

According to Ricoeur, telling stories about ourselves enables us to configure (and re-configure) our human experience of time and life into narrative identities (Ricoeur, 1991). This narrative capacity is particularly pertinent in the current study, where life and time are defining concepts for the participants, as it allows them to make sense of their human experience in time.

> Narrative identity is coherent but fluid and changeable, historically grounded but "fictively" reinterpreted, constructed by an individual but constructed in interaction and dialogue with other people……..It is common to develop new self-understandings as issues are "thought through". (Ezzy, 1998, p246)

Ricoeur's view is that events are configured from a pre-figurative state into a cohesive and communicable form of narrative. Over time the configured narratives will always be subject to re-interpretation and reconfiguration, in the light of new experience. The human capacity to narrate is central to the creation of identities that are coherent and fluid, stable and shifting. This

capacity to narrate is particularly important for people who end up in prison as it assists their ability to adapt to their imprisonment, particularly for those who would never have envisaged that prison would be a part if their life. Their identities become defined by their legal status and their ability to narrate their new identity is core to their survival of the prison system (Liebling, 2011).

Another important contribution of Ricoeur's work was his understanding of the significance of time. His discussions of the structures of temporality, the human experience of time and narrative as the mediator between the two provided the foundation for his view of narrative identities. For Ricoeur narrative identity is an outcome of human experience of meaningful actions and intentions. The concept of time and the sense of time as something that can be imposed on prisoners is an important message within the current research. The lack of a timeline within which their prison sentence can be served threatens the ability of life sentence prisoners to manage their time well and it undermines their attempts to develop a non-prison based identity in the lead-up to their release.

In addition, for Ricoeur the concept of identity is not one that is developed in isolation from others, none of our stories develop in isolation. Instead the role of the other in the developing and maintaining of our identities is crucial for Ricoeur and the social element of identity is central to his theory. This is particularly pertinent when discussing identity with prisoners whose social world is perceived to be one of confinement and control. It can also be lacking in 'others' who can view us in a positive and constructive way. Ricoeur argued that there is "*no self without another who summons it to responsibility*" (Ricoeur, 1992, p187). Therefore this speaks to the importance of the interaction of people in prison with each other, not just other prisoners but interactions with the prison staff. The relationships that the participants developed in prison will be explored in further detail later, however it is important to flag this now in the context of the narrative identity of the participants. The presence of the 'other' is also an important dynamic in the development of shame so I will discuss later the interconnectedness between shame and identity. Ricoeur's concept of a narrative identity that is

shaped over time by our interaction with others and consists of stable, unchanging aspects of identity, *idem* or sameness, and also has more fluid components that he referred to as *ipse* or selfhood provided a scaffolding for the current research to build on. The fluidity of the concept of identity and the potential for growth and change was an important aspect of the research but it is important to note that there is a further aspect to identity construction that builds on the work of Ricoeur.

The people that are present in our everyday lives, the external 'others', whilst an essential element in our identity construction, are not the sole audience that we construct our identities in front of.

> …a great deal happens inside…on a private stage in front of a very exclusive audience. The story is told and retold, revised and affirmed in the presence of a cherished, venerated and maybe even feared 'Inner Other'. (McAdams, 2005, p92)

The inner audience can provide us with the self-consistency that is interrupted by imprisonment when the social world of the prisoner is turned on its head and he is removed from the familiar relationships that influenced the construction of his identity prior to imprisonment. The inner audience for the participants can be the voice inside their heads that tells them that they aren't a '*bad person'* that they have just committed a '*bad act'*.

> The inner audience can be harsh and unforgiving, as Freud knew. But in our darkest and loneliest moments, a supportive and affirming inner audience can see us through to redemption. (McAdams, 2005, p92)

Therefore, we can see that not only are our identities formed through the stories that are told about us and the stories we tell about others, but our identities are also formed through the stories we tell about ourselves. In the end, the stories we tell about ourselves may be the most essential ingredient for change.

Impact of imprisonment on identity

Asking the participants to speak about themselves in the past, present and future provided them with an opportunity to narrate their story and their

identity in a continuous way. According to Ezzy, this continuity is important in maintaining our identity because:

> The sense of self-continuity in identity is a product of narratives of self-consistency through life's changes. (1998, p 245)

The nature of the crime for the participants interrupted their previous 'self-consistency' of identity as none of the participants would have seen themselves as capable of such an act prior to the offence. Therefore, the crime represented a major fracturing of identity and self-perception for the participants. This was then inevitably followed by the trial and conviction for murder resulting in the imposition of a life sentence on the men.

> ...while the rippling shockwaves of being sentenced and incarcerated might be every bit as mortifying as much of the 'pains of imprisonment' literature suggests, the traumatising impact is not necessarily permanent or long-lasting.....many prisoners serving life sentences find that, after a period of resistance and readjustment, they are able to reconstruct their narratives of self. (Jewkes, 2005, p375)

The life changes that long-term imprisonment brings with it were imposed on the participants and they have little control over what happens to them once they are sentenced (Crewe, 2009). Yet as will be seen in the findings chapters, prison was somewhere that they adapted to being and they all found ways to maintain a continuity of 'narratives of self' during their incarceration. The ability to "reconstruct their narratives of self" was an essential part of the participants' ability to survive their imprisonment but it occurred on a different time-frame for each of the participants.

When it came to speaking to the participants about how they viewed themselves prior to imprisonment my interest was primarily in terms of what identity the participants had upon their imprisonment. In my work practice, the men often speak about taking on a prisoner identity and this has been supported by other research (Jewkes, 2005, Crewe, 2009, Liebling, 2011, Hockey, 2012) so I was also keen to see if the participants spoke about an identity being left at the gate when they were imprisoned for life.

> ... references to inmates 'leaving their identity' at the prison gate to be 'picked up' again on release – although, of course the indeterminacy of 'life' makes the 'pick-up point' a very unpredictable affair. (Jewkes, 2005, p373)

After serving a life sentence, what identity is left for them to pick up on the way out the prison gate? What have they learned about themselves, what have they "thought through" during their time in prison and how has this learning occurred?

While I am speaking about the concept of identity separately in this section with regard to how they viewed themselves before the life sentence, it is a recurring theme throughout the research findings. Therefore, identity will also be discussed in terms of how they view themselves throughout the life sentence and how they see themselves upon their release from prison. For me as researcher the concepts of identity and learning are very much interlinked and have been throughout the research process as the findings chapters will explore.

Transformation of self

A recurring theme throughout the interviews with each of the participants has been the transformation of self through the committal of the offence, the resulting pain of imprisonment, separation from family and the learning journey that they have had whilst in prison. Imprisonment placed the men in their '*darkest and loneliest moments'* (McAdams, 2005) and yet each of them at different points of their sentence found the inner audience and some of them also found the external other that placed them on a different path.

The emphasis throughout the interviews for each participant was that not only is he a different person now, he is a better person than he was when he committed the offence. He has taken on a narrative of reform.

> Reform narratives enable ex-offenders to acknowledge, yet disclaim, previous behaviour through positioning the self as another. (Appleton, 2010, p137)

Each of the participants spoke about their lives before the offence and recounted what led to the crime from their perspective. They also spoke about

how they see themselves as having been transformed by their experience in prison.

> Transformations of core identities require substantial shifts in self-understanding as well as significant effort in renegotiating interpersonal interactions. (Veysey et al, p3)

This transformation of self has not come easily for the participants as you will see in the findings chapters but it has been part of their learning about themselves whilst in prison. It has at its heart a learning focus. For a number of the participants, their reimagined identity has also not been tested as they have yet to experience full release but regardless of that they see themselves as being different men now. They have a certainty and a conviction about themselves as changed men. The participants' stories and sense of actively redeeming their lives post-offence have echoes of Maruna's model of the redemption script. Following the constructivist grounded theory approach, the emphasis on redemption comes from the data and Maruna's work on the redemption script provided a constructive theoretical framework for this aspect of the data. According to Maruna (2001), the redemption script for persistent offenders:

> …begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator…. the narrator becomes ensnared in the vicious cycle of crime and imprisonment. Yet, with the help of some outside force, someone who "believed in" the ex-offender, the narrator is able to accomplish what he or she was "always meant to do". Newly empowered, he or she now also seeks to "give something back" to society as a display of gratitude. (Maruna, 2001, p87)

The challenge with looking at the redemption script model is that not all of the life sentence prisoners in the current research fit the persistent offender profile. Just one man out of the eight participants interviewed defined himself as someone who was a persistent offender prior to the life sentence. The redemption script works well with him as he has re-written his narrative and is intent on giving back to society in some way upon his release so that others may learn from his experience. He hasn't reached the point of being a "*wounded healer*" (Nouwen, 1979) where he can work with other offenders and use the 'wounds' of his experience of imprisonment to

'minister' to them in some way. However, it is something that he aspires to when he is released.

> …this redemption script allows the person to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life…"making good" involves more self-reconstruction than amputation. (Maruna, 2001, p87)

While the other participants didn't identify with having a delinquent past and an offending lifestyle as this particular crime was their first offence, the redemption script can still apply in terms of turning a negative experience into a positive. This will be discussed further in the findings chapter.

The prison environment presents a major challenge to life sentence prisoners who are willing to undertake the necessary work to change their core identity. The indeterminate nature of the life sentence is something that impacts on their ability to manage their time in a meaningful way as there is no timeframe within which they can work and begin to manage their lifer identity or to begin the process of re-writing their story.

> …identity is available only through the pursuit of meaning…Feelings of meaningfulness help humans to survive and flourish. Lack of meaning and purpose, on the other hand, is soul destroying…and is associated with suicide, addiction and aggression. 'Life-trashing sentences', as Simon (2001) has called them, make meaning and identity extremely difficult to create or sustain. (Liebling, 2011, p540)

Having no clear pathway out of prison, can seriously undermine a life sentence prisoners' ability to navigate the prison system. By this I mean the physical, confined, structured environment as well as the attitudes of staff and other prisoners which can be unconducive to producing an atmosphere that is supportive of change.

> Successfully changing one's life in such circumstances requires a tremendous amount of self-belief, and this is made hugely difficult, if not impossible, when everyone around him or her believes they are likely to fail. (Maruna et al, 2009, p34)

Prison does not always support the development of the interpersonal interactions that will support this changed identity and enable it to be sustained in the community (Crewe, 2009). The expectation of a prisoner's

behaviour in prison can be quite low and the need to comply with all the rules often encourages the prisoners to develop a compliant prisoner identity that can be at odds with their core identity (Jewkes, 2005, Liebling, 2011).

> …hundreds of different studies have found confirmation for the idea that one person's expectations for the behaviour of another can actually impact the other person's behaviour. (Maruna et al, 2009, p36)

Therefore, the negative environment of prison can produce more problematic behaviour than it prevents. In the findings chapters, you will read that many of the participants feel that they changed because of their own actions in spite of the negative expectations that others had of them.

> The narratives of change for formerly incarcerated people point to the crucial role of personal agency in creating fulfilling lives and sustaining necessary changes. (Christian et al, 2009, p27)

This sense of personal agency will hopefully sustain them in maintaining the positive change upon release. Release from imprisonment will expose the men to the reality that the wider society does not always support someone who has served a life sentence regardless of their declarations of a transformed self.

> We don't give any credit – moral credit – for the prison experience. People released from prison have done their time but have not, and indeed perhaps cannot, pay their debt to society. As things stand that debt lasts a lifetime. (Johnson, 2002, p320)

This is particularly the case for life sentence prisoners where the public discourse can be more about 'life meaning imprisonment until death' and the concept of release does not make sense to the general public (Dublin People, 19th August, 2013, The Cork News, 2012, The Telegraph, 2007).

> While the non-criminal public believes and acts as if this (criminal identity) is the sole master status, those who possess this status resist identifying with it. Instead, they provide explanations of how and why they were involved in criminal behaviour while claiming other problematic identities. (Christian et al, 2009, p28)

The stigma of the life sentence remains regardless of how the individual has changed and according to Veysey et al "*stigma discredits the individual and reduces trust*" (p4).

This discussion on identity, the transformation of self and the challenges that the participants may face upon release in proving they have changed brings me to the concepts of shame and stigma. Both of which arise from the findings and will be discussed in this chapter with regard to the literature and the participant's voices on the issue of shame and stigma will be heard in the findings chapters.

2.2.2. Shame and stigma

What is shame?

In any narrative research that explores the stories of life sentence prisoners, the concepts of shame and stigma are always present either on the periphery of the stories or in the main narrative and the current study reflects that. The learning lens that is applied to the current research however looks at these concepts in the findings slightly differently. The focus is on what the participants have learned about shame and stigma and how they have learned to manage these concepts whilst in prison. As you will see their learning on these concepts represents the very personal aspects of their narrative identity.

As a practitioner-researcher, one of my assumptions was about the presence of shame and stigma being primarily post-offence phenomena for the men. However, there wasn't quite as clear-cut a time delineation as I assumed there would be. One of the challenges I have found as I have explored this concept further is the dual aspect of shame and stigma, their interlinked and sometimes convoluted relationship with each other and the connections between shame, stigma, guilt and remorse.

As shame appeared to be the starting point for many of the participants, I have been guided by their experience in structuring this section and will begin with a brief review of some of the literature on shame. As with the concept of identity, an exhaustive review of shame and stigma is beyond the scope of this study. This section represents a sampling of the literature that I perceived to be the most relevant for the current research.

During the interviews the participants spoke about their experience of feeling shame and what they have learned about their experience of shame. As mentioned previously, for many of them, their experience of shaming was prior to their offence. In this context, shame was a dominant, unrecognised emotion for them. Their childhood experience of shame is most aptly reflected by Sartre when he defines shame as:

> …..a non-positional self-consciousness, conscious (of) itself as shame…it is a shameful apprehension of something and this something is me. I am ashamed of what I am. (1969, p221)

This is the starting point for Sartre in his definition of shame which begins very simply with shame of oneself. He then further explicates this by bringing in the primary concept of shame existing mainly when we are seen or we act in front of another person. The importance of the Other for Sartre is one of the interconnections between shame and identity construction. For Sartre, the Other is the primary catalyst for shame.

> Shame therefore realizes an intimate relation of myself to myself. Through shame I have discovered an aspect of my being….. it is in its primary structure shame before somebody. (1969, p221)

Giddens in contrast to Sartre emphasises the affective nature of shame that doesn't require the presence of the Other. He states that:

> One might feel shame while entirely alone; indeed shame may be a persistent and very deep-lying form of affect, which signs that are visible to others do no more than trigger. Shame depends on feelings of personal insufficiency, and these can comprise a basic element of an individual's psychological make-up from an early age. (1991, p65)

The importance of the Other in the triggering of shame as an emotion will become clearer in the findings chapter where one of the participants speaks about how his awareness of the perception of how his family appeared to others resulted in his first experience of shame.

> I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other…..Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me. (Sartre, 1969, p222)

Shame was a difficult topic at times for the participants to talk about in their stories and according to Kaufman, shame remains a taboo subject and in his view as such it is under-researched. For Kaufman one of the reasons that shame has been difficult to tackle as a research topic is:

> The lack of an adequate language with which to accurately perceive, describe and so bring into meaningful relationship this most elusive of human affects. (Kaufman, 2004, p4)

While Kaufman may see it as an under-researched concept it is one that straddles many disciplines. In my search for literature on the topic of shame to understand what the participants had learned about shame, I found myself delving into a range of disciplines including philosophy, theology, sociology and psychology. Each of which had their own particular slant on shame. However, all of them had a common starting point when discussing the concept of shame and all began with looking back to the Greeks and to how shame existed for them. In Bernard Williams' work, *Shame and Necessity*, he explores the beginnings of the recognition of shame in early Greek plays. Much of his detailed discussion falls outside the parameters of this research but he remains an important theorist in the discussion of shame. He also builds on the definition of Sartre in recognising the importance of the Other in the evolution of shame. He begins by reiterating the same basic premise as Sartre.

> The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition. (Williams, 1993, p80)

Williams' then takes Sartre's definition one step further when he warns that shame isn't just about 'being found out' by an actual Other. Instead he states that:

> The silly mistake is to suppose that the reactions of shame depend simply on being found out, that the feeling behind every decision or thought that is governed by shame is literally and immediately the fear of being seen…..If everything depended on the fear of discovery, the motivation of shame would not be internalised at all….Even if shame and its motivations always involve in some way or other an idea of the gaze of another, it is

> important that for many of its operations the imagined gaze of the imagined other will do…..To overlook the importance of the imagined other is what I just called the silly mistake.(p82)

So for Williams' shame exists whether you are seen by an actual Other or by an imagined Other. The 'imagined other' in my reading is similar to Giddens view of shame being part of the psychological make-up of an individual from an early age. Shame is pervasive and real either way. This is particularly relevant for the participants who spoke about the presence of shame as an emotion during their childhoods and the influence that shame had on their developing narrative identity. Their learning about shame supported that view. The concept of 'naming and shaming' was a powerful one for all the participants when it came to the offence and the committal of the offence. Over the years in prison the participants have learned how to come to terms with the shame and public nature of their offence. This learning is explored further in the findings chapters.

Williams' goes further to outline the importance of the recognition of the legitimate authority of the Other and the impact that this has on the development of shame. We experience shame more powerfully when the Other is someone that we respect and recognise.

> Shame need not be just a matter of being seen, but of being seen by an observer with a certain view. Indeed, the view taken by the observer need not itself be critical: people can be ashamed of being admired by the wrong audience in the wrong way. Equally, they need not be ashamed of being poorly viewed, if the view is that of an observer for whom they feel contempt. (1993, p82)

The importance of the view of the 'respected and recognised' Other becomes more relevant in the current research when the participants talked about their crimes, how their crimes impacted on their families, how their friends, the media, the courts and the general public perceived them. The impact of the Other on their actions in terms of how they perceived themselves to be seen by the victims also potentially became a catalyst to their crimes. The majority

of the participants in this study had personal relationships with their victims prior to the offence, heightening the legitimacy of their audience and the power of shame in each case. Throughout the interviews, the reflections of the participants show that shame was a factor in the offence, whether they recognised it as such at the time or not. This view is supported in the literature as can be seen below.

> For nothing stimulates homicidal rage more powerfully than the experience of being shamed and humiliated, and nothing is more shameful and humiliating than to be rejected, especially by someone to whom you have made yourself vulnerable. (Gilligan, 1999, p43)

This is not to place any responsibility for the crimes on the victims but instead to highlight the perceived impact of shame on the participants. This will become clearer in the findings chapter where the participants talk more about shame and their crime and what they have learned about this during their imprisonment. It is also necessary to highlight that there were other factors involved in the crime namely that each of the participants were under the influence of alcohol at the time and that will be discussed later. Braithwaite (1993) also states that:

> ...much crime, particularly violent crime, is motivated by the humiliation or stigmatization of the offender and the offender's perceived right to humiliate the victim. (p503)

As you will see later, for the participants shame and humiliation became a potent force in their lives prior to the offence. They have learned now about what led to the offence and are able to see the path that they were on at the time.

> The beaten, humiliated individual, whether defeated by a brutalizing parent or defeated by a dead end career or marriage, has been defeated by shame, has endured it until it has broken the self. If unchecked, shame can engulf the self, immersing the individual deeper into despair……Shame is without parallel a sickness of the soul. (Kaufman, 2004, p22)

This '*sickness of the soul'* is something that the participants have learned to recognise and to manage whilst in prison. The challenge as they progress

towards release is retaining that learning when they move into the community. The power of shame in the participants' lives and the part that it played in the crime required me to explore further the part that shame plays in people's lives.

What shame does:

The difficulty in tackling shame in a research setting was reflected by the participants' difficulty in recognising shame and the role that shame played in their own identity and conscience development.

> Shame is an emotion associated with damage to one's self-image and self-esteem. The characteristic response is to want to withdraw, to hide. Sometimes, shame may be associated with guilt and remorse. (Borgeaud & Cox, 1999, p138)

Yet as we have seen shame was a dominant emotion for the participants and caused harm to themselves and others. It was a source of '*wounds*' for the men.

> Shame wounds not only the self, but also a family, an ethnic or minority group within a dominant culture, or even an entire nation. (Kaufman, 2004, p7)

For the participants who learned that they had shame as a causal factor in the violent crime, the situation is then further complicated by the stigma of being a lifer combined with guilt and, at times, remorse to create a complex emotional stew of negativity. All of which the participants had to learn to deal with while also learning how to cope with their imprisonment.

> We can feel both guilt and shame towards the same action….*What I have done* (emphasis in the original) points in one direction towards what has happened to others, in another direction to what I am. Guilt looks primarily in the first direction…….Shame looks to what I am. (Williams, 1993, p93)

Therefore, according to the literature, guilt is by far the healthier emotion of the two; shame is the more toxic and hence more damaging emotion. As shame is "*concerned with the overall tissue of self-identity*" and the "*exposure of hidden traits which compromise the narrative of self-identity*"

(Giddens, 1991, p67). Shame speaks to the type of person that you are, guilt refers to regrets over your behaviour. The awareness of this difference is something that I advocate in my work as all staff members are told to separate the behaviour from the individual. In frontline work it is necessary to see the person first and the offence second.

> If we think of guilt as focusing on the commission of an act that violates a rule or law, we can see shame as focusing on traits or the entire person. Shame also can be triggered by aspects of oneself not within one's power to control; here also there may be a contrast with attention on the victims of the wrongful acts done rather than on the nature of the self that has done these acts. (Arneson, 2007, p38)

Therefore to feel guilt for action that has caused irreparable harm to others is seen to be a healthy and functional emotional response because the guilt is about the behaviour and not the person. Guilt can drive identity change in a more effective way than shame can, shame or seeing yourself as a 'bad person' limits your capacity to change that narrative identity. Guilt on the other hand with its focus on behaviour can drive the change in order to prevent that behaviour from being repeated. You will see in the findings chapter that the participants speak of both guilt and shame with guilt having a broader meaning at times. This is primarily because guilt gets to multi-task as according to Borgeaud and Cox,

> Guilt may be an objective and/or emotional state. People are 'de facto' guilty if they transgress a law or other edicts of a given authority. However, they may only *feel* **(**emphasis in original**)** guilty if they accept the legitimacy of that authority…(1999, p138)

The complexity of guilt as both an objective and emotional state will be discussed further in the findings chapters when the reality of the offence, the trial and the various plea options chosen by the participants is discussed further. However, the reality of the emotion of guilt remaining with the participants at every stage of their life post-offence is something that becomes incorporated into their ongoing narrative identity.

> The most primitive experiences of shame are connected with sight and being seen, but it has been interestingly suggested that guilt is rooted in hearing, the sound in oneself of the voice of judgement; it is the moral sentiment of the word…….In my experience of shame, the other sees all of me and all through me……and the expression of shame….is not just the desire to hide, or to hide my face, but the desire to disappear, not to be there….the wish that the space occupied by me should be instantaneously empty. With guilt it is not like this; I am more dominated by the thought that even if I disappeared, it would come with me. (Williams, 1993, p89)

Having discussed shame and guilt, I will now briefly explore the concept of stigma as it relates to the findings of the current research.

Stigma

The term stigma tends to be inextricably linked in our minds with the term shame. When we talk about shame, we also talk about stigma as a consequence or a result of shame. According to Nussbaum,

> Social notions of stigma and shame typically link the two rather closely together: whoever does not do what most people do is treated as disgraceful or bad. (Nussbaum, 2004, p.218)

Stigma as a concept has a long history that stems back to classical times and is in fact a Greek word that means 'this mark', a visible mark. Goffman used the term stigma "to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (1963, p13).

Goffman also goes further to distinguish between the unstigmatised or "normals" and the stigmatised and he states that

> by definition, of course, we believe the person with the stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. (Goffman, 1963, p15).

Prisoners remain one of the most stigmatised groups in our society and life sentence prisoners even more so**.** A criminal record is a powerful stigma due to the three core elements that come with a criminal conviction - a criminal credential or social status, the name of offender and a formalised degradation

ceremony i.e. the trial (Maruna, 2012a, p78). People with a criminal record of any nature but particularly life sentence prisoners become re-defined by that stigma as will be evidenced in the findings chapters.

One of the challenges of dealing with stigma is this interlinking of stigma with identity. Yet the stigma of imprisonment, whilst seen as a "*blemish of character*", is also a stigma that can be more easily hidden than other more visible stigmas (Goffman, 1963). The, at times, invisible stigma makes it easier for someone with a criminal record to pass as "*normal*" and to believe that they are "*normal*".

> The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do; this is a pivotal fact. His deepest feelings about what he is may be his sense of being a 'normal person', a human being like anyone else, a person, therefore who deserves a fair chance and a fair break. (Goffman, 1963, p17)

However, the invisible stigma of a criminal record also raises the challenge or risk of exposure along with the responsibility of disclosure (Goffman, 1963, LeBel, 2012). The issues become 'to whom?', 'how much?' and 'when?' As will be seen in the findings chapters the issue of disclosure can be particularly difficult when the stigma that you carry is that of being sentenced to life for murder.

> The criminal conviction and the imposition of the sentence themselves constitute a stigma, a visible mark of reproach. This stigma marks the convicted felon to the end of his days. An appropriate response on the part of the convicted felon is guilt at the harm he has done to others and also shame at the person he has become. (Arneson, 2007, p48)

Arneson links stigma with guilt and shame in a way that is potentially destructive of anyone leaving prison. The weight of such a stigma combined with guilt and shame can become an additional burden that someone leaving prison has to cope with and can undermine their attempts to establish a post-release identity that is not defined by their prison experience (Burnett & Maruna, 2006). The perception of being stigmatized as an ex-prisoner (and in this research as a Lifer) has also been shown to have an impact on self-esteem and the quality of life of ex-prisoners, while it is possible to be an

ex-prisoner, it is never possible to be an ex-Lifer (LeBel, 2012). The sense of eternal damnation that such a stigma carries can bring with it a sense of pointlessness and a loss of hope for the future that can undo any attempts at redemption of self. The management of the stigma, shame and guilt is something that can be learned but it requires a lot of insightful support for this to happen within a confined environment. It is an ongoing challenge for all ex-prisoners and for the research participants in particular as they attempt to reintegrate into society and to find their place in the community.

> Released prisoners find themselves "in", but not "of" the larger society….A person can be released from prison, then, but not from the taint of being a prisoner. Instead of marking one's exit from the status of "criminal in need of punishment" followed by one's entry into the status "a citizen who has paid his debt to society", release from prison seems to have no positive connotations at all! One simply becomes an ex-convict, with the emphasis on convict (Johnson, 2002, p319)

With the stigma of being a life sentence prisoner comes the experience of discrimination (LeBel, 2012). This is a particular challenge for life sentence prisoners in a country as small as Ireland where for high-profile cases it can be difficult to live anonymously in the community post-release. Throughout the research interviews the participants spoke about the difficulty of being recognised and photographed when they were on day release and the pressure that this brings when they are trying to manage the release process. They also spoke about the ease with which photographers could find them and the sense of being pursued by the media and the lack of recognition of them as something other than a murderer. Learning how to manage the discrimination that comes with being followed and photographed is something that the participants can only do through experience and peer support. In addition to the possible media attention, the nature of the offence often means that life sentence prisoners cannot return home thus heightening the social isolation and sense of stigmatisation that they can feel upon release.

> Formerly incarcerated people face systemic barriers to their full integration into society such as laws limiting where they can live and the types of jobs they can hold as well as labelling that leads to stigma and rejection. (Christian et al, 2009, p.12)

The participants also spoke about the additional challenge for life sentence prisoners in re-establishing themselves in the community and the need to find accommodation, employment and constructive social supports in an area that they are unfamiliar with and have no connections with whilst managing their stigmatised lifer identity (LeBel & Maruna, 2012). The challenges that managing that identity can bring tend to be exacerbated for those who did not have a previous history of offending prior to their conviction and sentencing to life imprisonment.

> …individuals who have been recently stigmatized lack the strategies of self-protection that membership in a stigmatized group can provide. (Crocker & Major, 1989, p618)

As you will see when you read their stories, prison was not part of the pathway for all of the participants or something that they saw as an inevitable part of their lives. Therefore, their "prejudicial" views of prisoners and lifers prior to their offence make them particularly sensitive to the power of the stigma and vulnerable to low self-esteem especially when the reality of life after their release kicks in.

In addition to the stigmatised lifer identity, you will see that the men have other combinations of multiply stigmatised identities such as ex-prisoners, addicts and people with mental health problems (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010, LeBel, 2012). In Ireland there are no legal methods to remove these stigmatised identities or to assist the process of redemption that may have begun for the participants in prison. Therefore, we run the risk of ever-increasing the numbers of people who have been stigmatised by their experience of imprisonment without providing the means to ever de-stigmatise them. The reality of this lesson has been learned by the research participants who have been fully released while the men who are in the pre-release phase of their sentence are only just beginning to learn the true nature of their stigmatisation.

For a life sentence prisoner, the stigma that they carry doesn't necessarily mean that they will re-offend and the participants didn't express any concerns about their possibility of re-offending (Braithwaite, 1989, O'Donnell et al, 2009, IPS, 2013). It can however condemn them to having a very low quality of life post-release. One of the reasons for this is their struggle to start again in locations where they have little or no social capital.[2] They don't necessarily move towards the "*criminal subculture*" in the same way that more persistent offenders do but they may find themselves not quite belonging anywhere (Braithwaite, 1989). In this case the life sentence really does mean '*for life'*.

As you read further you will see that the impact of shame and stigma on the participants in the research has been far-reaching and multi-levelled. For the participants carry the shame of the crime, the shame of their imprisonment, and the stigma of their removal from society for substantial periods of time. These are the concepts that were of interest to the participants and this will be discussed further in the findings chapters. This section of the literature review has explored the definitions and application of shame and stigma as they relate to the current research.

2.2.3. Power and the purpose of prison

Having discussed the concepts of identity and shame, I will now briefly reference the concept of power and the purpose of imprisonment. The grounded, narrative nature and learning focus of the research meant that the power and purpose of prison are discussed here as they relate to the participants' stories and their learning experience of long-term imprisonment. Each of the participants had to learn how to manage the various levels of power within the prison system. In a narrative study such as this it is not possible to fully explore the complexities of the prison as a system of power yet it is important to note that prisons have long been considered exemplary places for the study of power (Sykes, 1958, Foucault, 1977, Sparks et al, 1996, Carrabine, 2004, Crewe, 2009) as they have a

[2] Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p119)

contained population of people that have not chosen to be there and whose every movement is managed by others.

> ….in any one prison, order is not achieved homogenously. Power is deployed in multiple ways and different prisoners are addressed, engaged and provoked by different components and combinations of power. (Crewe, 2009, p93)

The issue of power and control varies from prison to prison as will be seen by the participants' different experiences within different prisons. One of the initial learnings for the participants was how to cope with the manifestations of power within the prison. While power is not a major theme within the research it is necessary to explain the concepts of power in this chapter in order to set the scene for the discussion on power that arose in the findings chapters.

Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish* was one of the first works to look at the development of prison as a means of punishment and to outline a theory of power. According to Rhodes (2001), Foucault offered the prison as the originary ground for the analysis of power. Key to this theory is what he referred to as 'capillary power'; power that reaches into individuals so deeply that it influences who they are, it also suggests that power migrates from the margins of society to the center (Alford, 2000). Foucault, 1977, saw power as a set of forces that establish positions and ways of behaving that influence people in their everyday lives. He introduced the concept of power in his analysis of the genealogy of various forms of knowledge and nondiscursive practices; he claimed that power is productive of knowledge and practice (Kelly, 1994).

> Power consists in complex relations: these relations involve a set of rational techniques, and the efficiency of those techniques is due to a subtle integration of coercion-technologies and self-technologies. (Foucault, 1993, p204)

It is clear from reading *Discipline and Punish* and other works of Foucault on discussing alternatives to prison that he did not see prison and disciplinary power as existing only on the margins of society, instead he saw it as extending in various ways through all of society. With the development

of the prison, Foucault sees the new penal procedures that were put in place to replace torture and executions as having a different kind of rationalities and logic for understanding and responding to illegal acts. He saw the old feudal power as being replaced with the 'micro-physical' power and he associated this with the concept of discipline. For Foucault the prison emerged as a central institution in society because it was a place in which the coercive force of disciplinary power could be used in a direct and overt way.

In my reading on Foucault, I was very struck by his thoughts on the alternatives to prison debate where he stated the following:

> The question of an alternative to prison typically brings to mind the scenario of a choice between different kinds of punishment, for example, when asking a child to choose between being caned or being deprived of dessert as punishment. It is a false or at least a loaded question since it in effect asks people to take for granted the existence of a penal regime that grants to particular individuals the right to punish people for particular things, and to consequently think about which system of punishment should operate: imprisonment or some other form of punishment?..... So, you understand my qualms in speaking about this subject of an alternative to the prison, especially when it is framed by the idea of its failure, since I believe that, paradoxically, far from the prison failing, it has been succeeding pretty well. (Foucault, 2009 p.14)

I found his view of prison as being a success, one that is greatly challenging as I would have initially perceived of the prison system as being an abject failure in terms of keeping society safer or acting as a deterrent to crime or preventing recidivism. Yet Foucault refers again to the question as to what is prison for and the answer to this question is the reason that he deems prisons to be successful. In Foucault's view the prison is a success because it is designed to produce better, more professional criminals. It is not designed to rehabilitate people or to prevent further crime. He highlights the fact that prisons run as a micro-system within the larger society and for prisons to operate they are based on a number of illegalities being core to their function. He states that:

> ...one can find in the very functioning of prisons the evidence for this idea that the penal system, in spite of the orders it assigns to itself, is not really an apparatus for suppressing crime but is in fact a mechanism for the management, the differential intensification, the dispersal of illegalisms – a mechanism for the control and distribution of different illegalities..... Even more, one should study all the illegalities that are necessary for the prison to operate..... The prison is surely the most efficient and productive of all the institutions that foster illegalities.....One should recall that the internal rules of the prison are always absolutely contrary to the fundamental laws that in the rest of society guarantee the rights of man. The space of the prison is a fearsome exception to right and to the law. It is a place of physical and sexual violence; it is also, as we know, a place of ceaseless and necessarily illegal traffic amongst the inmates, between the inmates and the guards, the guards and the outside world.... (Foucault, 2009 p 19)

Whilst Foucault was writing of the prison system in the 1970's much of the points raised in the above quote are relevant to the operation of the prison system today. My knowledge of these 'illegalities' would come from my experience of speaking with ex-prisoners about their experience of imprisonment. The issue of illegalities and the use of illegalities to run any system leads Foucault back to the question of power and how it is used, which warrants further research in the Irish context.

> The questions to pose to power are not about when it is going to abolish these ugly institutions; rather, they should be directed at challenging power's rhetoric about the law, about respect for the law, and ask it instead to explain how it puts illegalities to work. The real problem, therefore, concerns the differences that people in power make between different illegalities, the different ways of dealing with their own illegalities as opposed to those of other people: how are different illegalities managed in order to serve different ends, what profits are derived from them? These are the questions about the general economy of illegality that one must ask of power, and, since one cannot expect an answer, the point is to analyse these questions. (Foucault, 2009 p24)

In reflecting on these questions it is possible to understand how Foucault evolved from studying systems of power relations in his earlier work to

studying the creation of ethical agency in his later work. Foucault's focus raises the issue of the role of power and is worthy of further consideration.

For people in prison this power can be seen to exist in four forms (Carrabine, 2005, Crewe, 2009).

1. Coercion – this includes physical constraint, force, threat
2. Manipulation or inducement – the appeal to self-interest
3. Habit, ritual or fatalistic resignation – sense of there being no alternative
4. Normative justification or commitment (Crewe, 2009, p84)

In the above typology, coercive power is seen to be a 'hard' power and all prisons are basically coercive institutions at their heart "*even if naked power is not immediately visible in their everyday operation"* (Crewe, 2009, p80) as the prisoners are there because they have been sentenced to prison.

However, as the participant's experience highlights the predominant forms of power that they encountered could be seen to be the 'soft' aspects of power – manipulation, habit and normative justification – that are always backed up by the existence of coercive power. It is the everyday aspect of imprisonment that in many ways renders the prisoners powerless (Foucault, 1977). The participants spoke about their days being structured for them and the routines of prison life that required a high level of adaptation and compliance, particularly from life sentence and other long-term sentence prisoners, to survive their lengthy imprisonment. According to Foucault the external power systems that focus on compliance and control become internalised within the individual prisoner and get carried beyond the prison to be internalised into their sense of self and expressed in their engagements with wider society. The prisoners' sense of powerlessness to alter their situation of imprisonment is "*not a pessimistic resignation but is an entirely realistic and pragmatic assessment of their situation*" (Carrabine, 2005, p905). Their sense of powerlessness is a very basic fact of their lived experience of prison. The initial adjustment to prison life involves learning how to live with this powerlessness and this will be discussed further in the findings chapter 5. However one aspect of the power relations within the prison system that

Foucault doesn't cover in-depth is the methods that prisoners undertake to manage the power relations and to play the system as they strive to survive lengthy periods of incarceration. All of these system management strategies can prove to be very unhelpful when the prisoner has to re-enter the community and this requires them having to make the shift to a learning perspective Foucault links power with knowledge and practice.

2.3. Learning through life experience

The learning lens that the participants' stories were told through presented them with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in a different way, in many ways this is the heart of the thesis. The research viewed the prison as a non-traditional and informal learning environment. The lessons that are learned in such an environment tend to be very personal, wide ranging and at times hard earned. The conviction of the participants, their experience of imprisonment and their experience of the release process captured intense key moments of transformation for the participants. Some of the ways that we can understand these moments better is through the lens of adult learning theories. As you will see the participants' stories show the uneven, non-linear learning process that they experienced as adults learning both formally and informally in a prison environment. Their stories represent an important contribution to adult learning theory. However, before discussing these theories, it is necessary to give a brief overview of how formal education works within the Irish prison system.

While this is a narrative study, this snapshot of the structure of formal education within the prison will provide you with the context of their formal learning in the prison system. Each of the participants availed of the formal education provision within the Prison Education Units. The education remit within the Irish Prison Service is provided in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills. In practice, the provision of education for prisoners has traditionally been undertaken within the auspices of the Vocational Education Committees[3] in the catchment areas within which the prisons are

[3] Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) are statutory, local, education boards that are responsible for the running of second level, post-leaving certificate level and other adult education programmes. VEC's report to the Department of Education and Skills.

based. While there is an Education Co-ordinator within the Irish Prison Service, the teachers are employed by the VEC's and they report to the Head of the Education Unit who are also employed by the VEC's. The Open University[4] (OU) provides distance learning opportunities for prisoners who wish to access third level programmes. Yet in 2011 only 38% of the prison population engaged with the Education Units in the prisons with only a quarter engaging in a more intensive and meaningful way. (Irish Prison Service, 2013). The purpose of education in prison is manifold and the subject of much debate both in the education sector as well as in the prison sector. The model of prison education in Ireland has traditionally been based on an adult education ethos (Warner, 2002b). The focus of this model is a holistic one where the prisoner is an adult learner first and a prisoner second. The adult education ethos focuses very clearly on the principles of participation and choice. As adult learners they get to have a say in what they learn and how they learn. The model was developed to mirror the adult education available in the wider community. However, this can present huge challenges when the model is applied to the prison system where the focus is on compliance and control (Warner, 2002b). This will be discussed further in the findings chapters where the participants talk about the tension brought about between what they are learning and how they manage that learning and the opening of their world through their learning within a secure environment.

> Firstly, the education of prisoners must, in its philosophy, methods and content, be brought as close as possible to the best adult education in society outside; secondly, education should be constantly seeking ways to link prisoners with the outside community and to enable both groups to interact with each other as fully and as constructively as possible (Council of Europe, 1990, p. 14).

However, it is important to note that there is now an ongoing battle to retain the focus of prison education on the whole person rather than to follow the English and American models where they have narrowed the focus of education programmes to an offending behaviour focus or a skills only focus

[4] The Open University offers a flexible approach to third level education and offers a wide range of programmes on a distance learning basis.

(Warner, 2002b). The view is that by narrowing the perspective of prison education and taking a neoliberal approach that focuses on skills rather than learning for learning sake devalues what prison education has to offer prisoners. A neoliberal approach to education in the prison would have undermined the transformative learning of the research participants by being too narrowly focused on skills.

> A problem of narrowing in education clearly exists in the wider world beyond prisons, as when people are seen mainly in labour market terms. This reflects a social outlook that can dovetail with the punitive trend in penal policy. (Warner, 2007, p171)

The reality is that while education in prison can have positive outcomes for many prisoners, it does not operate in isolation and many of the negative effects of imprisonment can work against the positive benefits of education. As mentioned earlier, education within the prison clearly has to comply with the security requirements of the prison and does not happen in isolation.

> Even in the best of scenarios, education can only be a small part of the totality of impact of the prison on a person incarcerated….The presumption seems to be made that we can measure the impact of programmes because the rest of the prison regime is neutral in its effects. But such a presumption seems naive in the extreme, for it is clear that prison, far from being neutral, is generally in itself criminogenic - by the very act of imprisoning someone you add to the chances that he or she will commit further crime. (Warner, 2007, p173)

This discussion is an important one to note for this research but further development of the pros and cons of this perspective is outside the scope of this research. While the current research has learning through life imprisonment at its core, the learning that the participants spoke of was of a more individual, therapeutic form. Therefore the focus of the research is on that individual, informal learning experience rather than their experience of prison education and the prison education ethos as a whole. This is also influenced by my role which exists outside the formal prison education sector. However, it is an avenue that would be worthy of further exploration. This is a brief summary of the educational setting that the participants experienced during their imprisonment. There are further educational issues

that impacted on the participants in the research and some of these are outlined below.

Literacy was an important issue for some of the participants in the current research as a number of the participants had limited literacy skills prior to imprisonment. Previous research on the literacy levels of prisoners shows that educational disadvantage and literacy problems are strongly linked to specific types of crimes, with people convicted of violent and property offences having higher rates of literacy issues than other types of offences. It also highlights that early school leaving is "*a critical event in involvement in crime*" (Morgan and Kett, 2003). This literacy survey detailed the extensive literacy needs among all the age groups within the prison and evidenced the vast differences between literacy levels within the wider community and literacy levels within the prison system. In addition, while 64% of all early school leavers are men, research has shown that they are under-represented in literacy and basic education programmes in the community (OECD Education at a Glance, 2000, Owens, 2000) so their participation in prison education and literacy programmes takes place in this context.

Many of the people within prison, including the research participants, have had poor experiences of the formal education system prior to their imprisonment and have left school early with poor literacy levels and no qualifications (O'Mahony, 1997, Warner, 2002a, O'Donnell et al, 2007). All of the available research shows that low educational attainment remains an indicator both of *persistent poverty*[5] and *persistent at-risk-of poverty*[6] (Maitre et al, 2011). Poverty remains a huge issue as prisoners in Ireland are twenty-five times more likely to come from (and return to) a seriously deprived area

[5] The official Government approved poverty measure used in Ireland is consistent poverty, developed independently by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). This measure identifies the proportion of people, from those with an income below a certain threshold (less than 60% of median income), who are deprived of two or more goods or services considered essential for a basic standard of living. (Dept of Social Inclusion, 2013)

[6] The 'at risk of poverty' indicator identifies all those (households or people) who fall below a certain income threshold, which in the EU has been set at 60% of the median income. It does not, however, measure poverty as such, but rather the proportion of people below a certain income threshold who may be 'at risk of poverty'. (Dept of Social Inclusion, 2013)

(IPRT, 2013, O'Donnell et al, 2007). The relevance of this statistic will become more evident in the findings chapters where some of the participants speak about the impact that poverty had on their lives and their ability to learn.

> Those in households where the HRP (household reference person) has no qualifications account for 63 per cent of the persistently poor, twice as high as their representation in the general population (31 per cent). Almost nine in ten persistently poor households are headed by a person with less than higher second level education, i.e. Junior Cert or lower. The very strong impact of the education variable on poverty outcomes provides evidence of the high level of precariousness for those living in a household where the HRP has a low level of education. (Maitre et al, 2011, p21)

The reality of the interconnectedness of poverty and educational disadvantage is not unique to prisoners and is by no means a new story as it is also the experience of many who return to education as adult learners (Nolan & Whelan, 1999, Lynch, 1997, Kelleghan et al, 1995). For prisoners and other adults who return to education following early school leaving, there can be many obstacles to overcome (Warner, 2002a, Warner, 2007).

> Much learning is not educational. Many of my students tell me how family and schooling experiences have subdued their natural curiosity and knowledge-creating capacities. They say that they have to unlearn some of the learning from these early experiences in regaining their natural exuberance and love for life and learning. (Whitehead, 2009, p107)

Learning, in the context of the current research, was a broader concept than the formal learning structure that has been provided by the Irish Prison Service and much of it took place outside of the classroom and through contact with non-education staff. Therefore, the learning at the heart of this thesis is non-formal and informal learning in nature.

Before moving into the rest of the thesis it is necessary for me to explore some of the various theories of adult learning and to outline the one that I believe can be best applied to the learning experiences of life sentence prisoners. I am conscious as I begin this exploration of the breadth and depth

of the field of education in general and of adult education in particular. In a narrative study such as this that has a focus on a specific population within the adult learning spectrum it is not possible for me to delve too deeply into the foundations of adult learning. This decision is also influenced by my position outside the formal education spectrum where my professional role is that of Director not of teacher. My position and the findings of the research have strongly influenced the theoretical framework of the thesis. Instead this review of the literature represents my search for the scaffolding on which to build my understanding of how the participants learned from their experience of imprisonment.

Adult learning

The learning lens that applies to this study was one that looked at the prison environment as a source of learning, where some of the lessons that the participants learned could be more challenging than others. The way that the participants learned was also of interest to me as a researcher as well as exploring their application of anything that they had learned in prison upon their release. It also sought to explore what contributions a narrative study of the experiences of life sentence prisoners could contribute to the field of adult education and adult learning theory. As I have mentioned previously, the participant's experience will show that learning for life is messy and complex. While the participants did learn as adults within the prison system, they went down a very uneven and complex path to their learning.

As adults the participants came into prison with a particular and personal experience of learning. They also brought their individual capacity and methods of learning with them to prison. The experience of being sentenced to life imprisonment transformed their lives for good. It transformed their identity to prisoner and lifer and provided a specific focus for learning through their experience. As I searched for definitions and explanations of learning I focused on the ones that had the transformation of the individual at their core. These definitions were the ones that had the most relevance for the participants' stories about how and what they learned. The findings chapters will show the individual nature of their learning and while much of

their learning did take place in a classroom setting the learning that had the most resonance with the participants was the learning that had occurred on a one-to-one basis with different professionals within the prison system.

In my exploration of this area of learning, I focussed on the field of experience based learning as the participants had spoken about how they had learned from their experience. Therefore, it made sense for me as a researcher to explore if their learning could be theoretically located within this field. The first definition that I looked at was from Kolb who defines learning as:

> ..the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. (Kolb 1984:38)

This definition has been further expanded by other theorists in the field of experience based learning. According to Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993), experience based learning (EBL) is based on a set of assumptions that:

- experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning
- learners actively construct their own experience
- learning is a holistic process
- learning is socially and culturally constructed
- learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

These assumptions formed an important part of my understanding of experience based learning as I sought to construct how or if the participants had learned from their experience. One of the challenges of a narrative study that focuses on learning from experience is the fact that experience by itself has been found to not be sufficient for learning to take place. According to Dewey, "*all genuine education comes about through experience [but] . . . not all experiences are genuinely or equally educative*" (Dewey, 1938, p25). This is particularly relevant when you look at the context of imprisonment that the participants in this research found themselves in after their conviction. The reality of imprisonment with the resulting confinement, loss of liberty and stigma of imprisonment is generally accepted as being a negative experience. It also presents a very specific context within which the learning can take place. Therefore the expectation could be that the experience of imprisonment is a negative one and is not an educative experience. Yet the stories that the participants told about their experience had a strong learning

focus. The learning focus was an important one for the participants as they struggled to make sense of their experience and to make meaning of their lengthy incarceration. It is not to say that prison was a necessary step to learning yet learning through their imprisonment became a necessary step for the participants as it gave them something positive to focus on and it turned a potentially destructive experience into something more meaningful. They had to learn something out of their experience in order to survive it. They didn't just cope with their imprisonment; they learned something because of it. When this was explored with them it became clear that a lot of the learning came not just from their actions but also from reflection on their experiences and their learning to date. The ongoing discussion about the interaction between action, reflection and learning is not a new one in the field of adult education and has been contributed to by all the great theorists within the field including Freire who stated that:

> Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating `blah'. On the other hand, if action is emphasised exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism . . . Men are not built in silence, but in words, in work, in action-reflection. (Freire 1973:66, 75–76)

The concept of action-reflection was an important one for the men as it widened the areas of learning for them. It moved them from the formal education sphere within the prison setting into a non-formal learning sphere. Their reflection on their actions took place with professionals other than teachers, with the psychologists, Probation Officers and some Prison Chaplains playing a large role in encouraging reflection and supporting the reflective process. The findings chapters will discuss how this process worked for the men in more detail. As a theorist of adult education Freire's work was an important starting point for me in my journey to find the appropriate conceptual framework within which to ground the research findings. However it became clear to me at an early stage that the focus on

transformation and change that was coming through very strongly in the findings was not developed enough in Freire's theory of adult education for my theoretical research journey to end with him. The core of Freire's theory on action and reflection leading to learning, while being a central tenet of any learning theory but without taking into consideration the context and ability of learning to transform the participants' lives, I found that his theory alone was not sufficient in which to ground the findings of the current research.

As transformation was a key concept within the research, I also explored the work of Mezirow in the field of transformative learning. Initially, as a researcher I thought that the work of Mezirow would have the most appropriate fit to the findings as his focus is on transformation through learning.

> Transformative learning is defined as the process by which we transform problematic frames of references (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) - sets of assumption and expectation - to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. (Mezirow, 2009, p92)

His work explores the changes that adults go through as they undertake a formal or non-formal learning process and he also states that the most significant adult learning occurs in connection with life transitions. However, as I explored his work further, I found that the fit between Mezirow's theory of transformative learning and the learning that the participants spoke of was not there. The focus of Mezirow's work on transformative learning appears to be on the role of the adult education facilitator and how they can best enable the transformation within the adult student. Thus my position outside the formal role of an adult education facilitator meant that in the current context it would have been difficult for me to apply Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to the research findings. The focus on the role of the adult educator is outside the scope of the present research. While Mezirow's theory discusses individual learning and this individual theoretical focus fits with the current research, his theory is a transformative learning theory of an individual nature that does not address the systems within which the learning takes place. In the context of the current research the prison system as a learning system was very important as it influences the way that learning

occurs and can reduce the impact of learning and hence I needed a theory of adult learning that would enable me to both focus on the individual nature of the participants learning and the system within which the learning occurred.

As this is a narrative study I was focussing on the learning experiences of the participants from their perspective. I wanted to look at the learning that occurred outside of any classroom or formal education setting, the holistic learning, the "*communicative learning that involves intentions, values, feelings and moral decisions*" (Mezirow, 2007, p14). I also wanted to understand how their learning occurred through the personal development work that they undertook and the relationships that the participants developed in prison as these were the areas that were mentioned most in their stories of learning. The participants' stories also presented a strong narrative piece on the relationship between learning and care and this will be shown to be a significant finding of the research. While there were elements of all of these definitions in particular Mezirow and Freire that resonated with the research my initial sense when analysing the findings was that they weren't exactly the definition that seemed to apply to the current research. As a narrative study the theoretical scaffolding needed to be grounded in the participants' stories. The learning that the participants spoke of was individual and more personalised and this focus guided me away from the theories of Mezirow and Freire. As mentioned previously, if the research had been undertaken from the perspective of a classroom based educator then the theories of Mezirow and Freire would have been more relevant. However, in my analysis of the findings it became clear that I was going to have to widen my search for a theory of adult learning that could make sense of the participants' learning stories with their focus on their individual, personal experience of learning in this unique context of the prison-community transition.

Therefore, my search for a more appropriate theory of adult learning for the current research brought me to Jarvis. Jarvis defines human learning as:

> ...the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then

> transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing or more experienced person. (2009a, p25)

Jarvis' definition of human learning is a very inclusive definition and is particularly pertinent when applied to life sentenced prisoners in the current study. I felt that it was the most appropriate and applicable definition of adult learning as it not only look at the nature of individual learning, it also considers the system within which that learning occurs. As a researcher, I am aware that one of the criticisms of Jarvis' definition of adult learning is that it could be described as a discourse within adult learning that is limited to an individual and therapeutic model of transformation. Yet this was the aspect of his definition that most appealed to me as a researcher and that fit best with the findings of the current research. The participants spoke very clearly about the personal nature of their learning and while they could list the courses that they had undertaken in a classroom setting, the learning that had the most meaning for them was the more personal learning that occurred on an individual basis and was not subject focussed or skills based.

The more formal classroom based learning was valuable and important for the participants with a number of them talking very positively about that experience and learning how to read for the first time as an important skill. Yet it was not seen to be the most valuable learning, instead it was part of a continuum of learning experiences for the participants. As you will see in the findings chapters, this learning took place through different methods and primarily on an individual level. The individual and personal nature of the participants' learning aligned naturally with Jarvis' view of learning as a holistic process that includes formal and non-formal processes.

In addition to the individual, therapeutic, holistic focus, Jarvis' definition also allows for the messiness of adult learning where the temporal flow is uneven and where various levels of disjuncture can provide a source of profound learning. It recognises the capacity of adults to learn over their life-time, through different processes and experiences, and in adverse circumstances. Upon being convicted, the participants were removed from society and

placed in a context that they did not choose; they had to adapt and learn how to manage that experience of imprisonment. They then had to learn from that experience at different points over the duration of the sentence and to somehow apply that learning to the life that they will live post-release. The life sentenced prisoners have been moved from what Jarvis refers to as our '*taken for grantedness world'* to a world where they are forced to ask questions and forced to learn to live differently i.e. from harmony to disjuncture. These are two conditions that for Jarvis (2012) are fundamental to learning. All prisoners are forced to ask questions to navigate the prison system and forced to learn to live differently, so ironically enough the prison as a learning setting provides enough disjuncture to promote learning from experience. Within the prison system social interaction is controlled, limited and defined by the status of the prisoner and yet within these confines as you will see in the findings chapters the capacity for learning still exists.

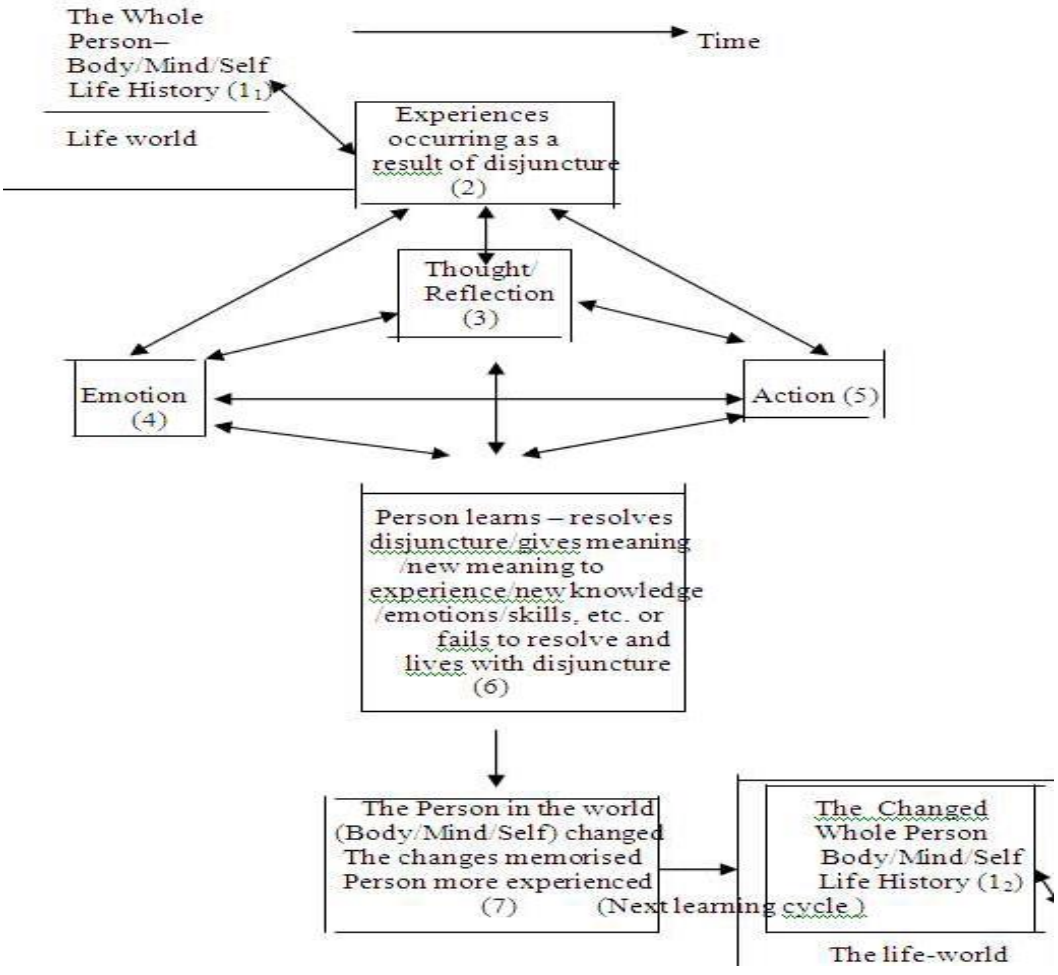
> There is a sense in which learning occurs whenever harmony between us and our world has been broken, so that the relationship between our present understanding and our experience of the 'now' needs to be established, or re-established. In other words, learning begins when we recognise that we are in a state of ignorance but a great deal of our everyday learning occurs at such times as the disjuncture is so slight that we barely notice it.(Jarvis, 2012, p12)

Obviously the initial disjuncture when someone is sentenced to life could not be referred to as being "*slight*". However the process of adaptation that each prisoner must go through in order to adjust to imprisonment and learn to manage their sentence implies that a certain level of "*harmony*" is restored. Prisons are recognised as being places of tension and disharmony yet the very nature of people is to seek to find a way to restore harmony so they can live within the confines of prison. The challenge that the prison as a learning setting presents is one of contradictions. Using Jarvis's theory, prison provides the disjuncture and opportunities for learning to take place yet the requirements of the prison, as a secure, living environment, to have compliant prisoners to maintain order undermines the learning opportunities that it provides. The process of 'restoring harmony' in the prison environment is discussed further in Chapter 5 where the participants talk about the process

of acceptance that they went through. Previous criminological research has found that "*most can and do adapt to incarceration in active and reasonably effective ways, although adjustment typically remains an ongoing and often arduous affair"* (Johnson and Dobrzanska, 2005, p36).

This adjustment means that the aforementioned "*everyday learning*" that Jarvis refers to can occur even in a somewhat unexpected learning setting. The prison system as a learning setting is an unusual concept but the men's stories highlight the complexities that are involved in learning from their experience in such a specific and restricted setting.

By seeing the person as a whole, Jarvis is drawing on the theories of many different disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, philosophy and psychology to formulate his model as presented below.



Jarvis's model of the transformation of the person through learning (2009a, p29).

From this model, we can see that the final result of learning is a changed person and so according to Jarvis it is "*only in being can we become and in learning we experience the process of becoming....can conclude that learning involves three transformations: the sensation, the person and then the social situation*" (2009a, p29). Each of the participants experienced all three transformations that are involved in learning immediately upon their imprisonment. All of them also spoke about being a '*changed person'* as a result of what they have learned during the course of their imprisonment. Jarvis' focus on the transformation of the person through learning is very much interconnected with Maruna's redemption script which also has the transformation of the person at its core. For Jarvis the transformation is less from one binary pole of behaviour, from bad behaviour to good behaviour. It isn't about the recognition of past deviant behaviour as a necessary step to the redeemed narrative. Yet Jarvis does build on the learning that has occurred in previous stages of the cycle that enables the individual, with reflection, to continually "*become*" a better person. The focus of the change for Jarvis is not on redemption in the same way that Maruna describes but it shares the focus on the change of the whole person over a process of time. Both theories speak about a transformation that had an external catalyst and a positive outcome for the individual. Both theories have meaning making at their core as each narrative is about making sense of their previous experience, good and bad, and constructing it in a meaningful way so that it serves an overall purpose.

In many ways the experience of imprisonment represents a very steep learning curve as the learning has to begin straight away. Being imprisoned is very much a sensory experience and the men spoke about the sensations involved in their first night in prison. As you will see, they could recall the noises, the smells, the physical experience of being locked into a cell for the first time. So the physical reality of prison meant that the men's social situations and sensations were immediately transformed. Within a very short space of time both of these transformations had taken place, the act of imprisonment for life changed not only the men's social situation but it also presented an assault on their senses. Thus imprisonment managed to provide

two out of the three transformations that are involved in learning. By connecting learning with identity change and development, Jarvis builds on the work of Ricoeur that was discussed earlier. This interconnection will be discussed further later after the findings have been outlined.

The third transformation that Jarvis refers to is the transformation of the person. In some ways the transformation of the person that occurs is also immediate as the free man becomes the prisoner. So one aspect of the person is immediately transformed. The complete transformation of the person, however, takes place after more learning has occurred and can be the slowest and most painful transformation involved in learning. Every time we move from one status or role to another in life, we have to learn what the new role or status demands from us and the experience of becoming a prisoner is no different, it too requires substantial learning from prisoners in order to survive the prison system. (Jarvis, 2009a).

The transition from prison into the community also requires learning what living on licence demands from life sentence prisoners. According to Jarvis, (2009a), "*we are still becoming for as long as we continue to learn and practise what we learn*" (p192). The sense of "*becoming*"[7] being an ongoing process dependent on learning and the application of that learning is a key concept for this research as it connects with the previous discussions on identity, shame and stigma. The concept of becoming through continual learning enables the redemption script to be both written and played out, it also assists the identity shift that occurred upon imprisonment and enables the transformation of identity that starts in prison to continue upon release with the transition into the community. Without learning, none of that would be possible.

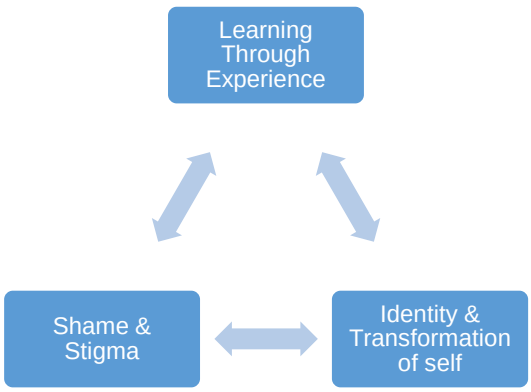
As you will see in the findings chapters, the participants' stories are about who they were, who they became and who they hope to become upon their release. Their key moments of transformation incorporate the three elements required for learning that Jarvis referred to – sensation, the person and the social situation. The participants' process of becoming has been an arduous

[7] According to Jarvis, (2009a), "becoming…carries with it a sense of time i.e. that time is linear and we continue to develop throughout the whole of our lives" (p198)

one and as the stories will show their learning is ongoing, inconsistent at times and the process of becoming is far from complete. The narrative of learning that is presented in the findings is a strong one and for the men their learning is at an individual level. Within the thesis, there runs a second narrative of learning that is about the institutional learning that the men want to see take place. How this learning occurs is a more challenging area to explore and would be an interesting research question at a later date. Tied in with the institutional narrative of learning is the narrative of redemption or transformation that the men speak about on a personal level that can also be applied to the institutional and social setting that the men find themselves in, inside the prison. All of these areas will be explored further in the findings chapters where the men speak about their learning experiences within prison.

2.4. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature that is relevant to this particular study. The challenges of a narrative based study such as this one is the breadth of literature that can be applied to the learning stories of life sentence prisoners. The process of listening to the participants' stories and then reflecting and analysing the stories resulted in the literature being focussed on the following broad themes as discussed earlier:



Each of these themes are interconnected and influenced each other greatly throughout the research. Learning through experience is at the heart of the thesis and as such it is the one consistent message that you will hear as you progress through the rest of the thesis. The breadth of the research meant that there was no one overarching grand theory that could be applied to the stories. Instead as the stories emerged it became clear that the overall story that the

participants wanted to tell about their learning through their imprisonment was the story of change, of making amends, of becoming a new person, of doing no harm, a story of redemption and "*becoming*". In addition to their stories highlighting their own learning, the participants were also clear about what they want the prison system to learn from their experience. These two aspects of learning will continue to run together throughout the rest of the thesis.

As you will see, the discussion on literature is not confined to this chapter and as the findings chapters develop you will see how other themes that are not discussed here are explored in the literature in relation to the findings from the data. The power of the participants' stories remains and the impact of the literature reviewed in this chapter will be explored further in each of the findings chapters.

Before discussing the findings, the next chapter will outline the methodological approach that I took to the current research and the rationale behind the methods chosen.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Human beings are storytellers by nature….. We expect much from stories……We also expect stories to tell us who we are. When it comes to human lives, storytelling is sensemaking….. More than anything else, stories give us our identities. (McAdams, 2005, p77)

3.1. Introduction

In any narrative research that focuses on the stories of people who are marginalised and whose stories can easily become distorted, the challenge for the researcher is in remaining true to the stories and representing them as clearly as possible. For me, the role of the narrative researcher is not to translate the stories of the participants for the rest of the world to understand but to co-create the research in dialogue with the theoretical literature and the participants' stories.

> Narrative is discourse, and the prime rule of discourse is that there be a reason for it that distinguishes it from silence. (Bruner, 1996, p. 121)

The stories that life sentence prisoners have to tell are ones that involve many emotions for the participants and the reader and a few concerns for me as a researcher. The stories that have publicly defined the participants have been negative ones because of the offence that they committed that resulted in their imprisonment. The challenge for the participants as they tell their story is how to make sense of what led them to the offence. Also how do they incorporate that aspect of their story into any future stories that they will tell about themselves to unknown others as they make the move from the prison into the community.

> Narrative identity links together episodic memories and future goals to define an adult life in time and social context. The story tells us who we are, even if in its details and scenes it is not exactly "true". This is perhaps the key point about the stories we live by: They are not objective replays of the past. (McAdams, 2005, p86)

The context that the participants told their stories in is an important aspect of their stories and influences the way the story is told. Some of them told their stories at a mid-way point in their lives as they are coming to the end of one aspect of their sentence and are preparing to move on to a new phase of their

lives. This context gave them an opportunity to reflect on their past and to tell the story of their imprisonment and what they have learned as well as to talk about their hopes for the future.

None of us wish to be defined by the worst thing that we have done. For the majority of us the whole world rarely gets to know about the worst thing that we have done, we get to learn how to live with it privately. The nature of the offence that the participants have committed means that they are continually exposed to the public nature of their crime and punishment and therefore always subject to being reminded of their worst offence.

Before proceeding to the findings chapters and the words of the participants, it is necessary for me to first briefly outline my epistemology before moving on to outline the methodology that I used in the research and the reasoning behind this choice. I will also highlight why research of this nature is important and discuss the challenges that I faced as a practitioner-researcher undertaking the research and analysis of the data. Due to the vulnerable nature of the client group I will discuss the ethical procedures that I went through and the ethical implications of the research and having a dual role within the research study. The methodology discussion will also include a section on the benefits of qualitative research with a particular focus on the narrative approach and constructivist grounded theory approach that was taken. The limitations of the research will also be discussed in this chapter.

3.2. Research Question

As the objective of the research study was to understand the learning experience of life sentenced prisoners I explored their views on their life stories before their crime, their imprisonment and the release process and their hopes for their lives post-release. The questions of narrative identity and learning from their experience were at the heart of the research. In order to answer these questions effectively I undertook a qualitative research study that focussed on the lived experience of life sentenced prisoners at different stages of the release process.

3.3. Research Approach

One of my core beliefs is in the ability of people to learn from their past mistakes/actions and to transform their lives based on that learning. This simple belief has been the bedrock of my professional work. This transformation, when the individual is motivated, can take place in and be supported through the informal and formal education systems but education alone is rarely sufficient for the transformation to be sustained. Life changes don't happen in isolation and need to be supported by others in the individual's social world. This can be challenging when the education and personal development occurs within a prison setting where change will not necessarily be supported by other prisoners or staff.

My philosophy is informed by elements of a social constructionism and interpretive paradigm. This approach opened up my field of research immensely as I knew I was not seeking the sole answer to my research questions. It was also influenced by my work experience with people who are homeless and have addiction, mental health problems and have been to prison. My philosophy and experience of working with marginalised people influenced my decision to take a narrative based approach to my research. Through the narrative approach, I sought to present the voices and stories of the participants in my research and the need for a universal truth in this context does not apply.

My positioning as a researcher was aligned with my work values and beliefs in social justice, social inclusion and the importance of listening to the voices of those who are marginalised in society. My experience as Director of PACE and my previous work experience has shaped how I understand the prison experience and the impact that long-term imprisonment has on people. It has given me a particular insight to the world of prison as I don't work directly within the prison but work on the periphery in terms of being able to come and go within the prison system whilst working directly with people who continue to live in prison. I have heard many stories from prisoners over the years so the research was another opportunity to sit and listen to the participant's stories and to learn more from them. This shared experience of the prison world meant that I understood the language that the participants

used when they spoke about their experience. I also knew some of the people that they referred to during the course of their interviews. My work experience also influenced the theorists that I chose to draw upon to aid my understanding of the findings and to fully develop the research. I was naturally drawn to the work of Jarvis for example as his therapeutic and individual focus had resonance for me given my previous training in counselling. My values as a researcher reflected my work values and integrated my ontology with my epistemology. My dual role meant that I had to bring a research reflectivity to my role as researcher and to set aside the personal reflectivity that my work experience has brought with it. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

As mentioned previously, due to the nature of the research questions a qualitative research design was the most appropriate method to undertake the present study. Qualitative research is defined as *'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world'* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p3). It involves an

> … interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world....attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p3).

In line with my own philosophy, qualitative researchers take an interpretist approach; they interpret how various participants in social settings construct the world. Qualitative research sees the world as being socially constructed, complex and ever changing. The main aim of qualitative research is to find the insider's point of view, their story and their perspective on the life events that have shaped them. It is to view events, actions, values etc. from the perspective of the people who have experienced them. According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research stresses

> the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. (2005, p22)

As the main aim of qualitative research is to find the insider's point of view, description rather than measurement was the main method of gathering information. The insider in this research context is the life sentenced prisoner

who has spent a substantial period of time within the prison walls. As a qualitative researcher I wanted to understand the experience of being a life sentence prisoner, what effect had imprisonment had on their lives and identity, what they had learned from this experience and how they had learned.

Qualitative inquiry is foremost about understanding before explanation and therefore was the most suitable approach to a research study on the lived experiences of life sentence prisoners (Thomas & James, 2006). Another important aspect of qualitative research for me was that it tries to contextualise experience rather than generalise findings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). For me this was very important as the context of the participant's experience is very specific to the Irish prison system and to the communities that they will be released into. While the emphasis on contextualising experience has been highlighted by some as a weakness of the qualitative approach in that it fails to provide the typicality or generality of the situation being described. However in my research I was not seeking to have a universal truth that can be applied to all life sentenced prisoners. I instead wanted to present the stories of a specific number of life sentenced prisoners and therefore I was not concerned about the lack of generality in my research. Using a small research group meant that the stories would always be representative of the participant's individual experience rather than being something that could be applied to every life sentence prisoner in Ireland. Therefore the focus of the research was on the narrative identity of the participants rather than a policy-driven research study.

I was also conscious of the gendered nature of my research as my focus was exclusively on the stories of men who have been sentenced to life and that there are no stories from women who have been sentenced to life in this research study. The small number of women sentenced to life for murder, at the time of writing there were five women serving a life sentence for murder, meant that it would be impossible to undertake a narrative study such as this one and to maintain the anonymity of the participants. The process of release for women is also different as day release is more difficult to get within the Dochas Centre (women's prison) due to the infrastructure and the security

concerns. Therefore, the current research has an exclusively masculine approach due to the larger numbers of men who have been sentenced to life imprisonment and the structured process of release.

My qualitative approach came from elements of a narrative inquiry methodology and incorporated elements of constructivist grounded theory data analysis methods. Constructivist grounded theory and narrative inquiry are both part of the interpretive tradition and as such are consistent with my philosophy as a researcher.

Narrative Inquiry

My research study was inspired by the many aspects of narrative inquiry that had resonance with me as I searched for the most effective way to research and present the stories of a small group of life sentence prisoners. However, I do not view this research as a pure form of narrative inquiry rather as a narrative inspired research study.

> Narrative inquiry was an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is a means by which we systematically gather, analyse, and re-present people's stories as told by them, which challenges traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood. According to Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, narrative inquiry moves between the internal and external world of the storyteller, across time, and within their environments. It is this movement that allows the story to change over time and to be different based on the time and context within which it is told and who it is told to. This was particularly relevant in the current research where the participants were being asked to look back over long periods of time to talk about their experience. The benefit of a narrative inquiry approach is that it communicates the point of view of the person who has had the experience, it describes what happened, it expresses emotions, thoughts and interpretations and is socially situated and interactive. The story of the

participants in this research is very much told from their perspective and it is their interpretation of important events in their lives.

The narrative focus of the interviews enabled me as the researcher to hear the participant's struggles to make sense of the past and create meanings as they told me what happened to them. I found that the narrative was also influenced by me as the researcher and the questions that I asked as well as the interpretations that I developed as I sought to find ways to present the stories that I have been told. I was always conscious of the power that I have as a researcher in terms of what I choose to present in the findings and who the audience was going to be.

> (Researchers) develop their own voices as they construct other voices and realities; they narrate the 'results' in ways that are both enabled and constrained by the social resources and circumstances embedded in their disciplines, cultures and historical moments; and they write or perform their work for particular audiences. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p657)

Storytelling is a particularly important research tool for research with ex-offenders as this type of narrative approach gives people who have committed serious crimes:

- the ability to distance themselves from their crime,
- the space and opportunity to provide reasons for their crimes,
- assistance with putting the past behind them and moving forward into the future, and finally
- it also humanises the speaker.(Presser & Kurth, 2009)

One of the most important things for me to remember as a researcher was that the knowledge gained through narrative inquiry is situated, transient, partial and provisional. It is also characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings and by the choices that the participant made in what they presented as their stories.

> Our stories are partly determined by the real circumstances of our lives….. But we also make choices, narrative choices. The challenge of narrative identity calls upon our deepest sources of imagination and creativity. Living life well, with meaning and

> purpose, is as much an act of imagination and artistry as anything we ever attempt. (McAdams, 2005, p99)

In order to analyse the stories of the participants, I chose to use the analytical methods and tools that have been developed under the constructivist grounded theory approach which will be discussed briefly below.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded theory can at times be seen as a contentious method and has in recent years diversified from its origins which would have been objectivist and positivist in nature. The earlier objectivist grounded theory would not have been suitable for my research due to its positivist nature as it *'attends to data as real in and of themselves and does not attend to the processes of their production'* (Charmaz, 2006, p131). The more prescriptive leanings of the earlier grounded theory would not have worked in the type of research that I undertook and the rigidity of objectivist grounded theory has been much critiqued and challenged. Grounded theory whilst having its critics has according to Denzin become '*the most widely used qualitative interpretive framework in the social sciences today'* (Denzin, 1994, p508). Grounded theory's popularity can be explained as it is seen to offer a solution to the challenges of data analysis that are presented by qualitative research in general and presents a method of developing theory from qualitative research. Grounded theory as a method has been further refined over the years with a move away from the objectivist grounded theory approach into a constructivist grounded theory that relies more on interpretation and less on rigid formulae to interpret and restrict the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Constructivist grounded theory methods were attractive to me as a researcher as they complement other approaches to qualitative research and can be used in combination with other qualitative methods. An additional attraction was that the data gathering approach was influenced by the emerging participant responses and that any contribution to knowledge or development of theories would come directly from the findings. It therefore allowed for a flexible and intuitive method of knowing which worked with my own approach to the research and with my dual role as a practitioner-researcher. With the

development of the constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz (2000, p510) has stated that "*We can use grounded theory methods as flexible heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures*." These flexible strategies provided me with the necessary scaffolding to analyse the data and gave me the confidence that I needed to immerse myself fully in the data and the data analysis.

> A constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data.....constructivists study how – and sometimes why- participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations. (Charmaz, 2006, p130)

It was this focus on how participants construct meaning that complemented the narrative based approach. I will outline the technical elements of data analysis later in this chapter.

3.4. Ethical Research

Dual role

Traditionally, ethical researchers have been expected to think about informed consent: the right to information concerning the purposes, processes, and outcomes of the study, the right to withdraw at any stage, and confidentiality (to protect the right to privacy) and do no harm: related to codes of ethical practice. For me to undertake this research in my current role as Director of PACE, I also had to reflect on the dual role that I would be holding as both researcher and Director of PACE. I had to ensure that I had given due consideration to the power dynamics at play within the research process and that the participants were viewed as a vulnerable group due to the length of their imprisonment and the nature of their offence. In considering this I used the four principles for guiding qualitative research outlined by Bourdeau, 2000. These are as follows:

1. Respect for the autonomy of the research participants
2. Nonmaleficence – to basically do no harm and cause no distress to the participant
3. Beneficence – to strive to work for the benefit of the participant

4. Justice – to not use the research to the benefit of myself to the detriment of others

My research proposal was to undertake this research with participants from PACE. The participants were service users of PACE services but were not my students or employees. My role as Director of the organisation is an operational and strategic role and I am not involved directly in the provision of front-line services. The men's participation in the research project was entirely voluntary and had no impact on the services offered to them by PACE. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

In preparation for the research I had distanced myself from all new life sentenced prisoners who had been referred to the organisation so they did not have experience of me as a PACE employee. While the power dynamics of my Director role in PACE may give rise to some concerns, my role was very clearly outlined to the participants and that there would be no advantages or disadvantages to them if they chose to participate or not. This dynamic was actively monitored throughout the course of the project to minimise, in as far as possible, any tensions or imbalance that could occur in the research. My approach to the interviews and to the research was benefited by my role in PACE as there was a relationship of trust established between the participants and the organisation and they trusted me in my role as Director and they also then trusted me in my role as researcher. The trust was evidenced by the openness of the participants and their willingness to tell me their stories, including aspects of their stories that they stated they hadn't previously told to anyone. My previous training as a Counsellor assisted me in establishing a rapport with the participants during the interviews and in keeping the interviews as open as possible. There was at times a therapeutic tone to the interviews due to the personal nature of the stories that the participants told and some of them became emotional at various points in the interview. Whenever this occurred the participants were given the opportunity to stop the interview and to withdraw from the research if they wished but none of them chose to do so. Instead they appeared to value the time and the opportunity to tell their story in a non-judgemental environment.

Interestingly, it became apparent that some of the participants who participated in the interviews appreciated my dual role and saw it as a benefit to them as it gave them a direct line to the what they perceived to be the 'source of power' in PACE. At one point post-interview I had one of the participants approach me to see if I could get him into our residential project sooner than planned, he wanted to know if I had any influence with the Residential Services Manager. Another participant later asked me if I could get him released fully seeing as he had helped me with my course and he wanted me to have a word with the Minister for Justice about getting him out fully. Needless to say I explained to him that there was a limit to my power! Having survived the prison system by building relations with staff, the research process showed that some of the participants clearly had transferable skills in navigating systems in the community.

Support systems

PACE has a well-structured support system for all clients. PACE also has a well-structured complaints procedure that the clients can use in the event of them being unhappy with anything in the organisation which could also have been applied to the research process. In addition any issues that came up for the participants during the research process that fell outside the remit of the research could not be addressed by me as Director, instead they were referred back to the participant's Keyworker with the consent of the participant to ensure that the supports could be put in place to address the issue. This was particularly relevant as mentioned previously some of the participants found the interviews to be very emotional for them and while this had a therapeutic component for them it was important that they could avail of additional support once the interview was completed. As Director of PACE I report to the PACE Executive Committee (Board of Management) and they also oversaw the research process.

My primary responsibility as Director is to ensure that all PACE clients receive the supports that they need to assist them in the process of reintegrating into the community. Therefore it is my responsibility to ensure that PACE clients including the research participants do not come to any harm from any of the actions of PACE staff including myself. As

PACE clients they already had an established relationship of trust with the organisation. As such they were in receipt of daily support from other PACE staff members and each PACE client has an assigned Keyworker who works with them to ensure that they have the support they need to manage their release and other issues appropriately. Therefore this was the safest environment for this research to take place in as they had access to an ongoing support system and to an organisation that understands the complexities of their release and works actively with them to sustain their release. As discussed above, careful consideration was given throughout the research process to ensure that this ongoing PACE support system was responsive and adaptive to the participants' needs in the context of the research.

Anonymity

One of the greatest challenges in undertaking research with a group of people such as life sentence prisoners is the potentially high level of media interest in their stories. Their stories and headlines about their crimes sell papers on a regular basis even many years after the crime took place. An additional challenge with regards to the identifiability of the participants is the small pool of life sentence prisoners in Ireland. Therefore, the research approach taken necessitated the de-identifying of all the participants so that no markers remained that could be used to discover their identity. This meant that each quote had to be gone through in a very detailed way to ensure that no identifying information was left in the quote. In practice all place names, people names, family details, geographical details, employment details, age details were removed from any quote to ensure that they couldn't be merged with other quotes and be identified that way. This was an essential task even if some quotes became un-usable as once all the identifying pieces were removed they didn't make sense.

Prior to the interviews taking place I had spoken to the participants about changing their names and ensuring that they didn't discuss anything such as place names etc. that could identify them throughout the recording of the interview. Whilst the participants initially agreed to this as the common sense approach, it all went out the window once the interviews started and they told

their stories which included all the identifiers that I had hoped would be excluded in the recordings. As all of the interviews were digitally recorded this then meant that it was necessary for me to personally undertake the transcribing of all the interviews in order to maintain the anonymity of the men and to protect the data. This added greatly to the time taken by me in completing the research as the transcribing process was a lengthy and tedious one. However it meant that I stayed very close to my data at all times and my intense familiarity with the data assisted the analysis stage of the research. All of the interview material was maintained securely throughout the research process and will be destroyed at the end of the research period. In the write up of the findings all of the participants have been given pseudonyms.

All of the participants are acknowledged to be men who have committed the crime of murder and/or manslaughter, have been sentenced to life and have served their sentences within the Irish prison system.

The issue of the potential impact of the research on the families of the victims and the families of the life sentenced prisoner was also borne in mind due to the emotive elements of the crime. In addition to the above measures it is necessary for me to restrict access to the thesis once it has been completed to ensure that the thesis is not made available in ways that may be destructive to life sentence prisoners as a group or to victims of homicide. The risk is not that the thesis will cause harm but that quotes from the research participants could be misquoted and taken out of context and therefore have a negative impact on life sentence prisoners and other people who have been affected by the crime of murder.

Ethics Committee applications

For my research it was necessary for me to make two separate ethical applications. As the prisoners that I wished to research were life sentenced prisoners it was necessary for me to receive ethical approval from the Irish Prison Service Prisoner-based Research Ethics Committee (IPSPREC). In addition, it was necessary for me to seek ethical approval from the NUIM

Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee. Both of these applications were successful.

As I began the research process I had some concerns about how it would proceed, how open the participants would be and was hopeful that the men would volunteer to participate.

> I would worry most if I stopped worrying, stopped suffering for the disjunction that occurs when we try to tell the Other's story. To be uncomfortable with this work, I think, protects us from going too far. It was with our anxiety, dread, guilt, and shame that we honour our participants. To do this work we must contain these feelings rather than deny, suppress, or rationalize them. We must at least try to be fully aware of what we are doing. (Josselson, 1996, p70)

It was my intention at all times to undertake this research in an ethical manner and to maintain the anonymity of the participants and the integrity of their stories at all times.

3.5. Research design

As outlined in the previous section, the research design was based on an narrative approach using constructivist grounded theory data analysis methods. This methodological approach was the most appropriate approach for this research project as it combined simultaneous data collection with analysis. This enabled me to build on the early data gathered and focus the data gathering based on the early analysis. Using this approach the theoretical framework for the study emerged during the first point of analysis. It also kept the research grounded in the experience of the participant's at all stages of the research and analysis.

Research participant selection

For the purposes of the current research study, the primary method of data-gathering was a semi-structured, conversational style interview with the research participants. In practice this meant that while some prompts were used to guide the interviews for the most part the interviews were unstructured. Taking this approach also meant that the participant's stories were not challenged or verified in any way. I invited all active PACE participants who are life sentenced prisoners at various stages of release to a

meeting to inform them of the research. At this meeting, I explained my role in PACE and my role as a researcher. I outlined the goals of the research, the voluntary nature of the research and the time commitment that would be involved if they volunteered to participate. I went through the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 3) and answered any questions that they had. I outlined the procedure involved in the interviews and explained the process of giving consent. I also explained the procedures that I would undertake to ensure that they remained anonymous in the writing up of the research. I gave them time to consider if they wished to participate in the research. I hoped to have a group of between 5-10 life sentenced prisoners at different stages of release who would volunteer to participate in the research. I wanted men at different stages of the release process so that the stories of the life sentence prisoners would cover the various stages of release and the challenges that they experience both within the prison during the release process and in the community once they have been fully released.

At the end I had eight men who agreed to participate in the research process. They included men who were current PACE participants and former PACE participants. Of the eight participants interviewed three had been released fully for varying lengths of time from around one year at the time of interview to over ten years. The other five participants were still within the prison system and experiencing various levels of release.

Three other men who have been released for over three years also agreed to participate in the interviews. Whilst agreeing to be interviewed, one of the men expressed some concern about doing the interview before Christmas as he felt that it might upset him as he stated that he doesn't like to talk about his imprisonment. He suggested doing the interview after Christmas but I advised him that it wouldn't be necessary as I didn't want to upset him and given his stated concerns it would have been unethical for me to proceed with the interview. A second man had agreed to be interviewed and he had a heart attack the week before the interview. While he was willing to reschedule, I again refused as it would have felt unethical to interview him under the circumstances. The third man suffered a bereavement around the time of the interview so I did not pursue it any further after that. These additional

interviews would have added to the chapter on life after life imprisonment but I made the decision as a practitioner-researcher that it would not have been ethical to interview them in spite of their agreement. It was important that I prioritise their welfare over the needs of my research study.

Once the process of selection was completed I arranged a time to meet with each of the participants on an individual basis to begin the research interviews. With the participants' consent, the interviews were digitally recorded and were stored in a secure environment.

Interviews

The interviews took place on PACE premises for those who are PACE clients and for the other participants the interviews took place in a convenient, suitable location. As mentioned previously, I chose to use a semi-structured interview as the primary research tool. The reason for this was the structure allowed for a conversational discussion of the participants' experience of life sentence imprisonment. It allowed a positive, trusted atmosphere to develop between myself as researcher and the participants and enabled me to establish a good rapport with the participants. The semi-structured interview also encouraged the participants to participate fully in the discussion and to emphasise various areas that were important to them. In addition, it encouraged them to share their thoughts in a conversational manner that included discussion and questions. I felt strongly that a fully structured interview would have been a potentially uncomfortable experience for the participants given their previous experience of being questioned and investigated for the offence and this was a situation that I was keen to avoid. It was important that the participants trust me as a researcher in addition to my role as Director and the semi-structured interview style was part of that process of trust building as it gave control of the interview process to the participants as they could direct the path of the interview with some steering and questioning from me as the researcher. The semi-structured nature of the interview meant that I was able to follow the participants' thoughts and feelings through the interview process while also being able to address the areas that were important for me as a researcher (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, Chase, 2005).

Initially I anticipated that all of the interviews would take approximately an hour however this was not the case. I found that the participants were more than willing to share their stories and valued the time that they were given to do so as part of the research. They trusted me with their stories. This and the semi-structured interview format resulted in the interviews being very lengthy and providing very rich data. The interviews were also quite emotional for some of the men as they discussed their life stories, the impact of their crime and their imprisonment on themselves, their families and their victim's families. The very personal nature of their stories heightened their emotions during the interviews and there were some aspects of their stories that they were telling for the first time. Some of the participants were able to connect with their grief during the interviews and to name the emotions that had been hidden from them for so long.

Each of the interviews began with the participants being welcomed with a handshake (physical contact was important as it equalised the researcher-participant dynamic and recognised the importance of the participant) and thanked for volunteering. The purpose of the research and the necessity to record the interview was reiterated. Once the participants were comfortable and after some small talk the interviews began with a very open question asking them to 'Tell me about themselves'. The use of appropriate humour was an important tool throughout the interviews and was used both by the participants and myself. At one point during one of the interviews one participant spoke about learning to be a good listener whilst in prison before joking that I wouldn't have noticed as he had done nothing but talk since he sat down. Therefore, my priority as a researcher was to create a relaxed, safe environment in which the participants felt comfortable in sharing their stories and in which they felt listened to. The overall mood of the participants was generally positive with moments of introspection during the interviews and they were very open in discussing their stories. The interviews also ended with the participants being thanked and the exchange of another handshake.

The structure of the interviews allowed the participants to share their story in the way that made the most sense for them and in a way that felt safe for them. The interviews therefore also had a therapeutic component for some of

the participants. Not all of them connected with the emotions involved in their stories, one participant was very detached from any emotion in spite of his difficult story and he chose not to engage with the emotions involved and he stated this during the interview. Their reasons for participating in the research were varied but the men predominantly stated that they participated to enable others to learn from their experience as a life sentence prisoner. They also saw the research as providing them with an opportunity to impact on the system and to voice their frustrations with the prison and parole system as they see it.

The length of the interviews ranged from the shortest interview being one hour in length to the longest interview of two and a half hours. Taking all eight interviews together, three interviews were over two hours long, two interviews were over an hour and a half long, two interviews were one hour and twenty minutes long and the shortest interview was one hour long. The shortest interview was with the participant who had been released the longest. As a result he spoke less about his life before prison as his focus was on his experience of release and the impact of living on licence.

In addition to the twelve hours of individual interviews, data was also gathered from a focus group on the parole process consisting of eleven PACE participants including five of the research participants. The focus group was attended by the Chairperson of the Parole Board and myself and it focussed on the participant's experience of the parole process. This group lasted for one and half hours and was also digitally recorded with the consent of all the participants. The focus group came about due to the common frustration that each of the participants expressed with the parole process. Each of the participants had been advised that if necessary a focus group discussion could be held on a theme if it was found to be common amongst the participants. A focus group as a research method for this part of the research process was chosen as the most effective way of facilitating a discussion on a common theme between the participants (Morgan, 2002). The focus group eventually became an outcome of the research in addition to being a research tool as the participants were given an opportunity to meet with the Chairperson of the Parole Board and myself in my dual role (as researcher and Director of

PACE) and to discuss their experience of the parole process. This was an experience that they found to be productive and empowering as they were able to speak directly to the Chairperson of the Parole Board in an informal setting and to advocate for change in the parole system without having any concerns about individual repercussions.

In addition to the participant's interviews, there were also professional interviews that took place with the Director General of the Irish Prison Service, the Regional Manager for the Prisons area of the Probation Service and the Chairman of the Parole Board. My approach to these interviews was one of professional collegiality where I used my position as Director of PACE to support my researcher position and to access people in positions of power in the Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Parole Board. Again I used a semi-structured interview process with each of the professional interviews as it was important that I be prepared for the interviews and that I could raise with them some of the issues that were arising for the participants that were apparent from the early data analysis. Each of the individuals interviewed were known to me in a work capacity prior to the interviews and this enabled the interviews to proceed in an open, trusting and constructive manner. All of these professional interviews have again added further depth to the data gathered for the research. The professional interviews did not undergo the same level of analysis as the interviews with the participants and these will be discussed in the final findings and discussion chapter.

In reading the findings chapters you will note that the different voices of the participants appear at different times and intervals throughout the chapters. Some of the participants spoke more about themes that were present in their life before imprisonment and therefore they have a stronger presence in that chapter than in later chapters. Some of the participants only focussed on their life in prison and their experience post-release so again their voices are absent in the first findings chapter but present in the last. Therefore, there isn't a balanced use of quotes from the participants in each aspect of the findings chapters, part of this was the emphasis that they placed on different themes

in their own stories and part of it was the decision I made to not use certain data as it would have rendered the speaker identifiable.

3.6. Data analysis

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis meant that the data gathering and analysis process occurred simultaneously. Analysis occurred throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection. Analytical codes and categories were constructed from the data, starting with a line-by-line coding approach, moving to focused coding and onto memo writing and theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). Having initially started to manually code the data, I then switched to using the MAXqda software, a qualitative data analysis software programme, in the analysis process. The depth of the data meant that the software could expedite the coding and analysis process. The software greatly assisted me with the coding process and as I was using a constructivist grounded theory approach to the data analysis, the initial coding approach was the in vivo coding mechanism within MAXqda. In vivo coding meant that the codes came from the words of the participants rather than being pre-assigned by me.

The first part of the analysis process was to convert the transcribed interviews from MS Word to RTF format in order to be able to import them into MAXqda. Once this was done each interview was set up as a document on MAXqda and the line by line coding using the in vivo coding tool took place. This process resulted in over 5,000 codes being produced, slightly more than I had intended and more than was manageable. Upon reflection I found that I took the concept of line by line coding too literally and when I was pulling the codes together I had snatches of sentences for the themes rather than usable quotes. The over-coding meant that I lost the flow of the narrative. This made the re-grouping of the in vivo codes into focussed codes and axial codes a very important piece of work. I then had to regroup the codes into broader themes that maintained the sense of the narrative. Clearly if I was to undertake coding of this nature again, I would not be so diligent in breaking apart the data.

Upon completion of the initial open coding, I then undertook a process of focussed coding and then axial coding to understand the relationship between the open codes. Memos and comments were added to the codes throughout the analysis process. The individual codes were then grouped under appropriate themes and the structure of the findings began to slowly emerge. All of the coded segments were then exported for the relevant quotes to be used in the findings chapters of the thesis.

At each stage of the process, I reflected upon and engaged with the stories of the participants and the data gathered. I also ensured that the data met the following criteria for constructivist grounded theory studies in social justice inquiry:

1. Credibility
2. Originality
3. Resonance and
4. Usefulness (Charmaz, 2005, p528)

All of the analysis of the data was guided by these principles and was checked to ensure that these standards were maintained. The focus of the analysis was on developing an understanding of the stories presented by the life sentenced prisoners through the interview process. The tools provided by a constructivist grounded theory approach enabled me to focus on the details of those stories and of emerging themes from each story that may resonate with the story of another participant.

In addition to the constructivist grounded theory approach the narrative approach showed that stories can be viewed as a window onto a knowable reality and analysed using concepts derived from theory e.g. thematic analysis, or concepts derived from the data e.g. grounded theory i.e. '*analysis of narratives'* (Etherington, 2011). A reflexive researcher does not simply report facts or 'truths' but actively constructs interpretations of his or her experiences in the field, and then questions how those interpretations came about (Hertz, 1997). This was particularly relevant for me as a researcher when it came to writing up the findings of the research.

3.7. Challenges involved in writing up the findings

One of the greatest challenges for me in writing up the findings of this research has been in dealing with the sensitive nature of the topic whilst maintaining the anonymity of the participants. Life sentence prisoners can continue to attract media attention for many years post-sentencing and this often increases when the media becomes aware that someone sentenced to murder is on the pathway to release. Of course how the media becomes aware of such details was not something that I could explore in this research but it remains an ongoing problem for prisoners and ex-prisoners as they start the reintegration process. The media interest is rarely one that can be justified in terms of public safety and public protection as recent research has shown that those convicted of homicide in Ireland have the lowest recidivism rate upon their release from prison (Irish Prison Service, 2013).

The need to maintain the anonymity of the participants meant that in practical terms there were many issues that they discussed that could not be presented in the findings. This was due to the uniqueness of the individual circumstances of the participant that could result in him being identifiable regardless of his name being changed and no other identifying detail being included. I had to present the data very carefully to ensure that pieces of quotes could not be put together like a jigsaw and end up identifying an individual prisoner, victim or family member.

An additional challenge for me was to ensure that I did justice to the words of the participants and that I presented their stories in their words and did so in an appropriate and ethical fashion. I came to this research study as a practitioner first and a researcher second. It was important to this research that I reverse this, setting aside the expectations and assumptions that my experience in working with prisoners and ex-prisoners has given me in order to hear the participants' voices clearly.

The data analysis process was also challenging due to the depth of richness in the participants' stories and I had to ensure at all times that I was focussing on the appropriate aspects of their stories and letting the data speak for itself. The write-up was also a challenge as at times I felt that it was more

appropriate to let the participants' words stand without any comment or analysis from me as researcher due to the powerful nature of the content of their words. Yet I was also conscious that I had framed and selected the quotes that I used. There were times when I felt that my analysis detracted from the quotations and yet as a researcher I am required to have my voice heard as well so this was a continual balancing act for me to know when to remain silent and when to let my own voice be heard.

This brings me to the final challenge which was the need to always be conscious of the silent victims in the research, the men and women who have lost their lives as a result of the actions of the participants. The narrative approach meant that the stories of the participants were what they chose to tell me and were unchallenged by me. They were accepted by me as their stories. Whilst none of the participants were in any way disrespectful about the victims, it was important that I maintained the awareness that the victims voices were missing from the stories. I considered many ways to address this and considered speaking with groups that represent victims of crime but in the end decided that was outside the scope of the research. Instead I chose to include the participant's perceptions of the impact of their crimes and to keep their perspective at the center of the research at all times.

3.8. Limits of the study

The research on the experience of life sentence prisoners takes place in a very specific time and place in Ireland. As the sample size was small the results of the research cannot be generalized to apply to either the general prison population nor to the rest of the life sentence prisoners who are currently serving time in the Irish prison system. The decision to focus solely on the experience of men who are serving a life sentence also limited the scope of the research. While the decision was made for ethical and practical reasons the story of the small number of women who are sentenced to life remains untold.

All of the research participants had already served substantial sentences at the time of the interview. Three of them had been released and the other five participants were at various stages of the release process at the time of the

interview. Therefore this research has captured their earlier experience of imprisonment from a reflective perspective rather than from a current perspective. This perspective was of course limited by the memories of it and also effected by the following years of imprisonment and the normalization that follows any long-term experience. As a narrative based research the focus was on the prisoners' perspective and the perspective of the professional interviewees that participated also offer a very specific prisoner focused insight.

As a practitioner-researcher, I understood the limitations of the research and I accepted that there is no one, absolute truth about the experience of men who are sentenced to life imprisonment. Throughout the research process I looked at the existence of multiple realities and was faced with partial accounts of these participant's experiences, told to me from their perspective in a particular moment in time.

3.9. Conclusion

Within this methodology chapter, I have outlined the research area that I researched and detailed the theoretical approach that I followed. I have outlined the research design and my desire to use elements of narrative inquiry within the research combined with the data analysis tools provided by constructivist grounded theory. In addition I have described the ethical approach that I took and the steps taken to maintain the autonomy and dignity of the research participants. Finally, I have given a brief overview of the steps involved in the data analysis within the research finding and the challenges that encountered undertaking the research and writing up the findings. I have only presented a brief summary of my own epistemology in this chapter. This is not because I think that my identity and experience is irrelevant to the study but ultimately, my identity is not what this study is about. The research also highlights the voice of the life-sentenced prisoner as he struggles with the effects of long-term imprisonment and being fully released into a world that has changed dramatically.

The following three chapters on the findings of the research will now provide the participant's voices with the opportunity to be heard clearly as they speak about their learning through their imprisonment. This learning includes learning how to live with a re-defined identity and also highlights how living under extreme conditions such as life imprisonment has the potential for transformative learning for an individual.

As discussed previously, the findings of the research have been presented in three separate chapters. This structure recognises the importance of the findings in the current research and the necessity of giving enough room to the participant's voices so that their stories can be fully told. Bearing in mind the importance of time to the life sentence prisoners and also to myself as researcher, I chose to present the findings in a linear temporal fashion that focuses on the participant's experience before their life sentence, during their life sentence and after their life sentence. There are many overlaps between the chapters and the themes of identity and learning run through each chapter. The constructivist grounded theory approach to the research allowed the important themes to emerge from the narratives. The research took a broad approach to constructivist grounded theory and as such the research methodology is able to make a contribution to the field of constructivist grounded theory.

Having set the context, reviewed the literature and outlined the methodology that I used, I will now move on to the heart of the thesis; the three findings chapters. These chapters will show how the themes and the theoretical significance of the research have emerged from the data. They will also highlight the significance of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The first findings chapter will now explore the stories that the participants told about their lives before they were sentenced to life imprisonment.

CHAPTER 4: THE LIFE OF…- LIFE BEFORE LIFE

We recognise ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves. (Paul Ricoeur, 1985, p214)

4.1. Introduction

As a narrative research study, the concept of story has been central to the current research as has the concept of time. The participants were asked to share their stories and their experience of life imprisonment with me and they agreed to do so. The stories of the participants were seen to be "*data with soul*" (Brown, 2010). Due to the reflective nature of the interviews, a copious amount of data was produced that covered the participants lives to date and not all of which could be explored in-depth. During the process of analysis it was necessary for me to find a coherent structure within which I could present the relevant findings. Given the emphasis on time and how the participants manage their time in prison, it made sense for me to use a temporal, linear structure that supported the concept of time and the participants learning experience being across time. Coming from a grounded theory approach the themes presented in the next three chapters are the important themes that emerged from the narratives.

The purpose of this chapter and the following two findings chapters is to present the participants' stories in their own words as much as possible. Their stories have given them an opportunity to make sense of their experience and to reflect on what it has meant for them to be a life sentence prisoner. The time taken to tell their stories has also given them an opportunity to talk about their hopes and plans for their lives after release and provided them with another learning experience (Jarvis, 2009a). Learning has been at the heart of their experience within prison and they have learned about themselves in both expected and unexpected ways. The challenge for all of us, not just for the research participants, can be in seeing what has actually been learned and holding on to that learning as circumstances change.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, eight participants were interviewed for this research study. Each of them have had very individual experiences of imprisonment and of facing the reality of the challenges of serving a life sentence. Therefore, in my discussion on the findings of the research I will not attempt to generalise from the experience of one or two of the participants.

> The knowledge developed from narrative inquiries is textured by particularity and incompleteness; knowledge that leads less to generalizations and certainties (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007) and more toward wondering about and imagining alternative possibilities. (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p14)

A qualitative study such as this one does not look for the general experience, rather I have sought to present the stories of the eight participants in their own words as much as possible. As was discussed earlier, my work focuses on the transitions between prison and the community and the learning about this process, particularly for long-term sentenced prisoners. Therefore, the focus of this research is on a very specific group of life sentence prisoners who were at differing stages of that transition process.

As mentioned previously I have presented the findings in three different chapters. The aim of this structure is to present the findings as clearly and simply as possible and to focus on the learning elements that the participants have highlighted at each point of their sentence. Over the course of the following three chapters the learning emphasis will become stronger as the participants progress through their sentence and reflect on their experiences and learn more about themselves and others. To a certain extent the structure represents the interaction between action and reflection that results in learning (Freire, 1973). The three chapters will build on each other to form an overall picture of the participants' experiences of life before, life during and life after the life sentence.

The learning that will be highlighted throughout all three findings chapters will ultimately be a source of learning externally, not just for me personally but also for others that work within my organisation and hopefully within the prison system as a whole. In order to achieve this external learning, it will be

necessary for me to present the findings of this thesis to policy makers within the criminal justice system in Ireland. The issue of dissemination is a sensitive one given the nature of the research. Therefore the research will be summarised and re-written so that it can be presented to policy makers whilst protecting the anonymity of the men. Learning in this context is not just about what the men have learned about themselves but also about what we can learn from their experiences in order to improve the ranges of services offered to them and to provide appropriate support.

This chapter focuses on the first part of the findings of the current research the issues that were of importance to them prior to them being sentenced to life. The pathway that led them to the life sentence - Life before Life.

4.2. General background information

This section will give some general background information on the participants and has been written to deliberately blur their exact ages etc. in order to protect their identity. The eight participants were all very different characters coming from different backgrounds. At the time of interview they ranged in age from their late 30s up to mid-60s and came from a mix of rural and urban backgrounds, with the majority of the participants coming from rural backgrounds. In contrast to the standard profile of prisoners, (O'Mahony, 1997), six of the participants had been continuously employed in various areas prior to the offence. In terms of areas of deprivation,[8] only two of them were from areas that would fit the category of being "most deprived", the rest were from the "least deprived areas"[9] (CSO, 2000, Haase, Pratscke & Gleeson, 2012). Two of these had been self-employed for a number of years prior to the offence. Only one participant had a serious

[8] Deprivation being defined "as an absence – of essential or desirable attributes, possessions and opportunities which are considered no more than the minimum by that society". (Coombes et al, 1995)

[9] The most commonly used index in the Republic of Ireland is the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (Haase & Pratschke, 2012). This index using census data measures three dimensions of social disadvantage: Demographic Decline, Social Class Disadvantage and Labour Market Deprivation and then combines them to form a measure of Overall Affluence and Disadvantage. In addition to this, percentage data for the area is given under the following categories:

- Population Change
- Age Dependency Ratio
- Lone Parent Ratio
- Primary Education Only
- Third Level Education
- Unemployment Rate (male and female)
- Proportion living in Local Authority Rented Housing

history of imprisonment and offending behaviour serving a series of short sentences from a young age prior to being sentenced to life. Another participant spoke about being involved in petty stealing to support his drinking but he was continually employed and had never been charged with any offence. The youngest participant to receive a life sentence was in his late teens with the eldest being in his late forties at the time of the offence.

Being arrested and charged with murder was the first contact with the criminal justice system for seven of the participants. Similarly their first period of imprisonment was being remanded for trial. Some of the participants were released on bail pending the trial and the others served time in prison or at the Central Mental Hospital on remand prior to the trial.

At the time of interview the participants had served approximately between 16 to 22 years of their sentence behind bars. Three of them had been released at the time of interview with two participants being out for around a year and a third participant having been released for over a decade.

In terms of educational attainment prior to imprisonment, two participants had achieved their leaving cert. Another participant had completed his group cert and left school to go to work after that. The others were all early school leavers having left school between the ages of 12 and 16 without any certification. Two of the participants had literacy difficulties as they had received little or no education as a child.

In terms of personal relationships, three of the participants were not in a relationship of any sort at the time of the offence. The other five participants were either married or in a relationship at the time of the offence. Four of them were separated from their wives/partners and were not living with their children and had established new relationships at the time of the offence. Five of the participants were fathers at the time of imprisonment and their children ranged in age from new born up to adulthood.

The life sentence impacted on their immediate families by further removing the fathers from the children and also impacted on the families of origin in terms of requiring parents and other family members to step into a more supportive role.

As you read through the findings you will see the voices of the participants presented throughout the three findings chapters. The findings have been broken down into three sections: life before life, life during life and life after life. All eight of the participants spoke in differing lengths about different aspects of their stories so therefore their voices are not always heard evenly throughout these chapters. For example, one participant focussed on life after life with minimal discussion of his life in prison and very little discussion on his life prior to prison so his voice is quietest in the current chapter. It was never going to be possible to have an even representation of each participant in every theme as the interviews and the individuality of the stories did not allow for that. Each of the participant's names have been changed in order to protect their identity and sensitive quotes that could be potentially identifying will not be attributed to any particular individual. While this may affect the flow of your reading it was a necessary step to ensure the de-identification of the participants.

4.3. Identity before life imprisonment

As discussed in Chapter Two, the concept of identity used in the current research study is one that sees identity as *"running stories of the self*" (Presser & Kurth, 2009, p74). This dynamic concept of identity is also supported by McAdams who stated that "*Our identities are made and remade through conversation"* (McAdams, 2005, p91). McAdams builds on the making and remaking of identity through conversation by introducing the concept of the power of the internalised audience for whom we tell our story.

> …..we all have our own internalised audiences for our life stories and these audiences indicate as much about who we are as the stories themselves. Indeed, I believe that the audience cannot be separated from the stories, because it is for these very audiences that the stories are ultimately made. (McAdams, 2005, p92)

Therefore the definition of identity that can be applied to the current research is a dynamic and evolving identity, one that covers the story that we tell about ourselves to ourselves and also the story that we tell about ourselves to others. The definition of identity through story-telling also has a learning element at its core as according to Jarvis, 2009, "*in telling our story we are imposing,*

or constructing, meaning – or reflective meaning – on these past experiences". The presence of the Other, both the external Other that we tell our story to or the internal Other, is an important factor in identity development and redevelopment. As was mentioned previously, Ricoeur emphasised the social element of identity development and this will be highlighted in the findings that follow here.

In this section of the findings the focus was on what and who had influenced the development of the participant's identity prior to their imprisonment. My interest was in talking to the participants about how they perceived themselves to be before the offence and if they see themselves differently now. In my work practice, the participants often speak about taking on a 'prisoner' identity and this has been supported by other research (Jewkes, 2005). The primary reason for this 'prisoner' identity appears to be a protective one. It can be a necessary step to survive the experience of being in prison (Crewe, 2009). Therefore, in this context I was interested to see how the participants spoke about their pre-offence and pre-prison identity.

While I am speaking about the concept of identity separately in this section with regard to how they viewed themselves before the life sentence, it is a recurring theme throughout the research findings. Therefore, identity will also be discussed in terms of how they view themselves throughout the life sentence and how they see themselves upon their release from prison in the other later findings chapters. For me as researcher the concepts of identity and learning are very much interlinked and have been throughout the research process as these findings chapters will explore.

4.3.1. Childhood Identity

The interviews began with a general "Tell me about yourself" question. This question generated different responses with some of the participants starting with their current age and legal status and others going back to their status within their family of origin. Therefore, the concept of identity prior to life imprisonment was quite a broad one so I have broken it down further to look at the various aspects of their identities that the men discussed.

The importance of their childhood experience varied between the men with some of them starting their story from their childhood perspective and some of them beginning their stories as adults in the few years prior to the offence. Some of the participants never referred to their childhood identity and for some of them their childhood was a short part of their story.

> *Well, first of all I'm an only child, I've no brothers or sisters, like and we were very poor, my father worked with [job], I left the national school, primary school and went to the technical school in [hometown]. I rode a bicycle to there for three years, never missed a day and got my group cert and then I started serving time with this company that started up and there was about eight people employed with it..... (Brian)*
>
> **********
>
> *Before that I lived with me parents in [hometown], I've [some] brothers and sisters. Growing up was good you know there was never really any problems. No problems at home. Me parents didn't drink or smoke, they gave up smoking a long time ago. Yeah it was good we got holidays and things like that other kids didn`t. I was lucky in that part. (Alan)*

For Alan and Brian their childhood represented a time of stability and they perceived their experiences to be of a happy, normal childhood. The emphasis for both of them was on the role that their parents played in providing a stable environment for them as children. They felt that their childhood was at least as good as if not better than some of their peers and this was due to the stability that their parents provided for them. Both participants were very clear in crediting their parents for their upbringing. So their childhood identity was one of stability and 'normality'.

For the three participants whose childhood identity was a dominant theme, the focus was on how they had seen themselves reflected in others and what they had learned about themselves as a result. The 'other' is an important element in both identity development and in the development of shame as an emotion as discussed in the previous chapter. This is highlighted in the following representative quote from Graham.

Graham:…that's my point, now when I look at it you're scarred as a kid, when the old bill would come along and say "He's only jail bait", you start to conform to that.

L: Did somebody tell you that?

Graham: Definitely yeah, at a young age……10 or 11 years of age, when you'd be hanging around you'd be told by the old bill "You'll be off to jail, you're only jail bait" subliminally you are taking it in, you become that, you're playing a role unconsciously you don't know you're doing it but you do, it's so true that you do fall into that role.

Graham now recognises the negative impact that his labelling by others had on him as a child. This labelling by external authority figures was compounded by difficulties at home.

He was an alcoholic and he was a [job] by trade, he was never at home, he was always at the [job] and when he was at home he was drunk, a violent drunk... you know it was that kind of instability, and my mother reared [several] kids on her own in a house where showing love was 'fuck off' (laughing), you know what I mean, there was no such thing as please and thank you's and it was a volatile kind of…a lovely atmosphere but volatile ...so volatility to me was normal (Graham)

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Ferdia: well, I was born in [hometown]. I was raised in the schools, in the industrial schools[10] and when I got out of the schools I started drinking and fighting.

L- What age were you in the schools from?

Ferdia: I was in the schools from two until I was [mid-teens].

[10] Industrial Schools were established in Ireland under the Industrial Schools Act of 1868 to care for "neglected, orphaned and abandoned children". In recent years evidence has shown that large numbers of children were systematically neglected and abused, sexually, physically and emotionally in these schools over a substantial period of time. In 2000 a Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA) was established. In 2009 they produced a five volume report that concluded that "*Physical and emotional abuse and neglect were features of the institutions. Sexual abuse occurred in many of them, particularly boys' institutions. Schools were run in a severe, regimented manner that imposed unreasonable and oppressive discipline on children and even on staff…. It is impossible to determine the full extent of sexual abuse committed in boys' schools. The schools investigated revealed a substantial level of sexual abuse of boys in care…. Perpetrators of abuse were able to operate undetected for long periods at the core of institutions"* (CICA, 2009)

As can be seen from the above quotes from the data, each of the participant's experience of childhood and of family was very different. While Ferdia's childhood identity was much defined by his experience of being institutionalised at a very young age for a lengthy period of time, from his perspective the experience of being separated from his family didn't fracture the bonds that he had with his family.

> *Ferdia: I still had a good bond with my family-- I have [several] others... [several] other members of my family were in the schools but we were all separated into age groups.*
>
> *L -Would you have known about your family when you were in the schools?*
>
> *Ferdia: Oh, yeah. We all went to the same place first and then they were shifted into different groups and things like that and we were given numbers and stuff like that--never called by our name. Your number would come up and that part of life was hard do you know what I mean, growing up in schools and being bullied and bullying others and stuff like that.*

Identity can become a more ruptured experience when your name is replaced by a number and you are separated from family members. However, Ferdia managed to retain his sense of family in spite of being separated forcibly from them. The focus on his family became a source of strength and resistance for him during the time in the industrial schools.

> *Ferdia: When I was in the school, we were sent to people and if they wanted to adopt us and stuff like that, that was a hundred quid for the nuns. But because I wouldn't call any people Ma and Da because I knew me parents.....*

In that institutional setting you are required to become something 'other' than who you are. In Ferdia's case he was a child with a number who became silent and became a resource to be exploited and used both physically and sexually.

> *I wasn't able to read and write and the education I got was actually working on farms for the community from the place, we were rented out to farmers. (Ferdia)*

Sadly, his experience of institutionalisation was intergenerational as his mother had also been institutionalised.

> *My mother was in an industrial school because she had a child out of marriage and the child was taken away from her. She went through the Magdalene sisters[11]…(Ferdia)*

These experiences challenge the development of identity and makes retaining a sense of continuity of self even more important once you have moved out of that setting (Chen et al, 2010) This is particularly evident in Ferdia's account of his mother's experience of also being abused in an institutional setting, his family were particularly impacted by the culture of control that existed in Ireland at the time of his mother's institutionalisation (O'Sullivan & O'Donnell, 2007).

> *L: So your mother had all her children taken away and you say this was because she was in an industrial school herself?*
>
> *Ferdia: Yeah, she was in a school herself but she suffered. She was raped in the schools by three priests or brothers whatever they were at the time. They used to come in to say Mass during the week and at weekends, one of the girls would be taken to them and that's what happened her. She ended up suffering with her nerves and like, and she ended up eventually schizophrenic.*

For Ferdia his childhood identity was particularly painful and his ability to manage it was limited when he drank. He spoke about his ability to suppress the feelings and memories that came from his experience in the industrial schools.

> *The history, like the history I have is all bad, you know what I mean that part of life was bad and because I was able to suppress it from the schools without drink, once I got drink in me the feelings were there and the anger and I just can't… so the best thing*

[11] The Magdalene Sisters refers to what is commonly known as the Magdalene Laundries. They were established in Ireland from the mid-18th Century and were run by the various orders of Catholic nuns. Women were sent to the Magdalene homes for various reasons including pregnancy outside marriage and other sexual transgressions. They had a coercive reputation with strict regimes. In recent years, survivors have come forward with many stories of abuse and violence at the hands of the nuns and staff who ran the Magdalene homes. (O'Sullivan & O'Donnell, 2007, McAleese, 2013)

> *for me to do and I have done, it's nearly twenty years now since, I haven't drank since the night that thing happened with your man. (Ferdia)*

Ferdia's experience of childhood institutionalisation was then echoed by his experience of imprisonment as an adult. Between the years that he spent in the industrial school and the years that he had spent in prison, Ferdia now faces substantial challenges in establishing himself independently in the community after three decades of institutionalisation. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

Ferdia wasn't the only man who had a parent who struggled with the effects of the industrial schools. Graham's father had also been through the industrial school system and according to Graham this impacted on his ability to parent his children. Graham's insight on this is supported by the international research that is available on the intergenerational[12] effects of industrial schools (Lewis Harter et al, 2000, Partridge, 2010, Stout & Peters, 2011).

> *but as I said my father was an alcoholic you know, I only found this out in later years, and it gave me a deeper insight into where I'm at, he was actually raped and abused in [name of industrial school] (Graham)*

For Graham learning about his father's experience of being abused as a child helped him to make sense of his childhood. The learning about his father's experience was transformative for Graham and enabled him to let go of blaming his parents for the lack of nurturing that he had. Through one-to-one counselling with the prison psychologist Graham was able to understand the violence that he had been exposed to as a child and to see his father as a victim of institutional abuse. His father's abusive childhood left him ill-prepared for the challenges of family life and parenthood and he didn't cope

[12] "Intergenerational … trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as "normal" when we are children, we pass on to our own children. Children who learn that ... sexual abuse is "normal", and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so. This is the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools." Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999:A5

with any of the demands that life placed on him. It also helped him to understand his own experience of violence as a child.

> *…you could see where I was let go, no fault of my mother or my father because they had their problems and didn't know how to deal with them socially and so on but…. a woman with [several] kids, she have no money and she had cleaning jobs ...I remember that was when I first had shame.. (Graham)*

As can be seen from the above extract Graham's experience of shame was an early one and one that he didn't recognise as shame at the time. Through reflecting on his childhood he was able to recognise the emotion finally and to come to terms with the impact of shame on his life. Yet his experience of shame became more dominant throughout his childhood and became a defining tenet in his identity development.

> *Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess and one he can readily see himself as not possessing. (Goffman, 1963, p18)*

The poverty and violence of his childhood home was a source of shame and stigma for Graham, His family needing help from strangers was something that was shameful to him without recognising the emotion as shame he was extremely conscious of how his family and himself appeared to others. He felt stigmatized by the poverty of his family in the sight of others. His experience of shame reflects the view of Sartre that was discussed earlier where he stated that "*I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other….."* (Sartre, 1969, p222)

> *The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives. These are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of the unrealized norms that are likely to play upon the encounter. (Goffman, 1963, p164)*

Graham eventually learned about shame through his interactions with the psychology services within the prison system. This learning was part of the recognition process of the part that trauma has played in his life and offending behaviour.

Shame and stigma are important themes in the current findings chapter and will be discussed further later. Before moving fully into shame, it is necessary to look first at the impact that trauma and traumatic events had on the participant's lives before imprisonment. The discussion on shame has to be interrupted as for some of the participants the shame that became prevalent in their lives was as a result of traumatic events that they experienced as adults.

4.4. Traumatic Events

There are many differing definitions of trauma that can be applied to different events. In the context of this study I am using the following definition of trauma:

> Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (SAMHSA, 2013)

This definition of trauma is most suitable for this research as it covers both once-off events and a series of events and allows for the harmful impact of these over a period of time. According to this definition of trauma an event can become a traumatic one based on the experience of the individual. Therefore, an event that is traumatic for one person may not be experienced as traumatic for another individual. In addition the adverse effects of the traumatic event vary for each individual and can include:

> An inability to cope with the normal stresses and strains of daily living; to trust and benefit from relationships; and to manage emotions, memory, attention, thinking, and behavior. In addition to these more visible effects, there may be an altering of one's neuro-physiological make-up and ongoing health and well-being…..In short, trauma is the sum of the event, the experience and the effect. (SAMHSA, 2013)

The participants experienced traumatic events at different stages of their lives. For some of them the defining trauma that they experienced was in their childhood, for others the trauma was limited to their adulthood and for one or two they experience traumatic events as children and as adults. For

the purpose of simplicity and clarity I have split the discussion on trauma into the following two sections:

- Traumatic events in childhood
- Traumatic events in adulthood

Traumatic events in childhood

The first few extracts from the data will talk about the participant's experience of traumatic events in their childhood. Their childhood identity seemed to be more to the fore for the participants that had experienced some poverty and trauma during their childhood. This trauma as can be seen from Ferdia's story seemed to stay with the participant in some way many years after the event and this is further outlined by Harry below.

> *We were reared in a three bedroom house in a council estate. In the 1980s he [his father] got cancer--I was [in my early teens] at the time……. He died [two years later]- he committed suicide….I was [age]years old, I turned [mid-teens]three weeks later, so we were left with that and my mother was pregnant. (Harry)*

Harry had initially gone through the trauma of his father being diagnosed with cancer and was then doubly traumatised when his father killed himself two years later. Harry reflected during the interviews that if his father had the same cancer today that it would have been treatable. He also did not feel that his father was terminally ill at the time of his suicide, he saw his death as the result of a loss of hope in the face of limited treatment options and the cost of the disease.

At all times during the interview, even when discussing very difficult subjects such as the suicide of his father, Harry remained factual and un-emotive. He told his story without ever delving into the emotions of his story and shut things down to ensure that the interview would remain factual and un-emotive. He spoke about emotions but had no connection to those emotions at the time of the interview. The lack of connection was partly due to the length of time between the events that he was describing and the interview. I also saw the lack of connection as being a protective strategy for him to ensure that the research interview remained a research interview

and that he maintained control of his story at all times. Harry had also had the benefit of substantial interventions with the psychological services throughout his imprisonment so there was no need for him "to go there" as he has already done this with the psychologists.

As the eldest child in a large family, the suicide of his father left him feeling that he had to be responsible for his siblings, to model good behaviour for them and to help his mother provide for the family. Harry went from school straight into working.

> *I would have given a lot back into the house you know in terms of rent and in terms of looking after them. I would have always, even from when I was young, have had a grá [love] for my brothers and sister.... I just looked after them and I looked out for them and showed them the right ways and things like that. I always had them with me anywhere I was at, whether it was at football matches, hurling or boxing or whatever, I always had them with me and it stood to me to be fair over all those years in prison, as they've stayed very close to me and it's helped me. (Harry)*

It is clear from the extracts from each of the participants so far that the role that their families have played in their lives is a central one to their identity development. The importance of their family to them as they experience imprisonment and approach release becomes clearer in the final findings chapter when the theme of the family will be discussed in a more cohesive way than is possible in this chapter.

As can be seen from the above section and the section on childhood identity three of the participants spoke at length about their childhood and the shame and trauma that they experienced as children. This now brings me to the discussion of the trauma that the men spoke about experiencing as adults.

Traumatic events in adulthood

As each of the participants spoke about their identity and how they see themselves prior to the crime and how they see themselves now, their stories began to unfold in similar ways whether they started from their childhood identity or from a number of years prior to the offence. Each of the

participants spoke about experiencing traumatic events during their lives prior to their imprisonment. The role of traumatic events in their own lives was identified by the participants as something that they had learned about in prison as being significant in them losing the sense of themselves as people. As has been the case throughout the research the participant's experience of different events in their lives varied and the impact of trauma on their lives also varied. In the following extract, Evan talks about the trauma that was part of a whole string of traumatic events for him.

> *and I came home one night and her mother was after dying just two months after we getting married, she was a young woman, [in her fifties], I had a great relationship with the woman…….so I missed her as well, but obviously my wife missed her terrible like, especially just two months after the wedding. I came home and she [his wife] was after taking an overdose……. She left a letter there for me, saying that she couldn't go on anymore ….. (Evan)*

For Evan, the loss of his mother-in-law and attempted suicide of his wife was something that he didn't deal with emotionally at the time. These events were then followed by further trauma and loss as he explained below.

> *A lot of things went on within a couple of, number of years, you know what I mean, I got married [in late teens], my daughter was born in [1990s] my Dad died [a year later] and my son died [the following year] my… and I never...., I never grieved you know……I just never ever, just didn't bother, like you know, my way of grieving was just to blot everything out, the alcohol done that to me, you know (Evan)*

Upon reflection, Evan has learned that he didn't grieve for any of the losses that he experienced. Evan acknowledges now that he "blotted" everything out with alcohol and this became a pattern for him as he progressed through his life prior to the offence. He can recognise now the methods that he used to avoid dealing with his emotions. This will be further explored as we build on the findings of the participant's experience during and after their life sentence.

Sexual abuse was an issue that a number of the participants had in common, either through their direct experience of it or the indirect experience of the

abuse of a parent or sibling. For Alan this experience emphasised the helplessness that he felt in learning what had happened to his siblings and seeing no consequences for the person that he felt had caused pain in his family.

> *Yeah, I felt he [a family relative] was getting away with it at the time and I didn't think it was right and there was still a lot of pain in my family and even I was in pain and I wasn't abused but I'd seen my brother and sister being hurt. My sister's relationship, her marriage broke up. My brother he was in a few different relationships, they broke up, you know, I put it down to that… He came over and admitted what he'd done and said he was sorry like but that was it, his wife, family, I don't think that they knew and I don't think that was right… (Alan)*

These events upon reflection proved to be identity defining for the participants in terms of the effect that they had on them. However, they were not recognised as such by the participants at the time. For Alan, it caused him to look back on what he viewed as a happy childhood and to see his experience from a different perspective knowing the sexual abuse that had been perpetrated on his siblings by a trusted relative.

The traumatic events also had an impact in terms of setting some of the participants on the pathway to their offence as their offence was directly related to the trauma experienced by the participants.

> *…an argument happened between my [family relative] and her fellow... and my [family relative] sent for my brother, and my brother sent for me, so when I was walking up to my [family relative] house.. at the time, my mate that was selling the hash for me spotted me and came up with me and an argument happened, a knife got produced and I got stabbed in the head and my mate got stabbed in the heart.. I kind of... he died in my arms... when he died I took the ...I never grieved...I didn't know how to, I didn't know what bereavement was, to show tears was shameful do you know what I'm saying, so I didn't, I never grieved him and bottled it all up (Graham)*

As can be seen from Graham's account, shame is a recurring theme for him both in adulthood as well as childhood. The traumatic event of being stabbed and having his friend die in his arms is compounded by his view of grief as

shameful. Thus his grief gets redirected and combined with shame to become anger (Braithwaite, 1989). Some of the traumatic events were stand-alone events involving the loss of loved ones and, as can be seen from the quotes used, for others the traumatic events were more ongoing and long-term.

For Ferdia the trauma was a prolonged one that involved his being separated from his family at a young age and being raised and sexually abused in the industrial schools.

> *But when I got out of the schools I was grand and then I started drinking and then like everything in the schools, through counselling I've gone through this, and I know where the anger is.....(Ferdia)*

Ferdia brings up the theme of coping with traumatic events by drinking. As you will see as we progress through the participant's stories that the use of drink as a coping mechanism becomes more apparent.

For another participant the trauma was the unravelling of his marriage due to the revelation of his ongoing affair and his perception of the resulting loss of status that came with that having previously viewed himself as a "*pillar of the community*".

> *…We were going out for years and years like on the quiet. Hiding it and all that….She left her husband for me to move out and I never moved out. And then I actually started you know having second thoughts, I wanted to get out of the relationship…..because I knew the consequences for my family, my business and everything and at the same time I wanted [the affair partner] you know (Brian)*

Whilst he was fully engaged in the affair he stated that at no time did he wish to leave his wife. His wife was eventually told of the affair by his affair partner thus resulting in his wife separating from him. The separation however only appeared to result in the affair becoming more difficult as his affair partner did not want him to have any contact with his wife and children.

> *Yeah...and then the same thing was happening everywhere we'd go with the kids she'd [the affair partner] be watching, I'd meet the kids… and my wife would bring them in and [the affair partner] would be parked a hundred yards down the road to see if I was talking to my wife, she'd be watching in the car...*

> *…one Sunday… I looked up and here was [the affair partner] standing in the doorway about 50 yards away. "Ah Jaysus" I said to myself. I didn't let on to see her so I said goodbye quick and walked away and she ran down after me and I just turned around and she hit me an all merciful belt across the face and the kids seen it. My wife rang me later that night to ask me what was going on as the kids had seen it and were very upset (Brian)*

Through the decisions that Brian made in terms of having an affair and remaining in the affair his life began to escalate out of control. Brian is another man who spoke about his drinking increasing during this turbulent time in his life. This will be discussed in more detail shortly.

As can be seen in the quotes used in this section, the traumatic events experienced by the participants varied greatly. Some of the events were external ones that were forced on them and other events were the results of their own poor decisions. There were two common themes throughout the individual stories about the traumatic events experienced by the participants. These themes have been referred to briefly in this section and will now be discussed in full below. The first theme that had resonance for the participants with regard to their experience of trauma is the theme of shame.

4.5. Shame

While I anticipated that the emotion of shame would be an issue for the participants, I expected it to be more explicitly present for them post-offence. However, shame for the participants was a dominant emotion prior to the offence and was discussed as such by them during the course of the interviews. Shame in this context is according to Williams, 1993, "*the experience…of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition"* (Williams, 1993, p80).

> *I lost my teenage years, I didn't do what other 16, 17 and 18 year olds were doing, smoking or drinking and things like that. I boxed as well and I'd go mad with any of my brothers and sisters for doing stuff like that and I'd be saying to them, 'we've enough to overcome". (Harry)*

****

> *a young man, a young kid that didn't have proper nurturing, so you could see why you would become an unstable, volatile or whatever you know what I mean, you could see where I was let go……well I blamed the system, I remember when we were younger like, the Vincent de Paul would come because obviously a woman with [several] kids, she have no money and she had cleaning jobs ...I remember that was when I first had shame. A sense of shame but I didn't know really what shame was. (Graham)*

As can be seen above both Harry and Graham speak about the impact that "*being seen*" had on them as children. For Harry it translated into a desire to perform well and to not bring further shame to his family following his perceived shame of his father's suicide. For Graham, his shame led to an unwillingness to deal with any negative emotions and a desire to fight the system that he was shamed in front of. For both participants the presence of the Other resulted in them feeling shame and led to further negative emotions.

> I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other…..Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the Other sees me… (Sartre, 1969, p222)

The central irony in this findings chapter is that shame is defined by Sartre as being "*by nature recognition*" and yet the emotion of shame was not recognised by the participants as having been present until much later in their lives.

This lack of recognition meant that the challenge for the participants was in naming the emotion that they felt as shame. Research has shown that people who were traumatized early in life may often disconnect from their emotions.

> Trauma, by its very nature, renders us emotionally illiterate. Life events that we experience as traumatic can feel senseless…hard to pin down, elusive and strange so that we don't integrate them into our normal context of living, (Dayton, 2000 p3)

The challenge that this disconnection and lack of recognition of negative emotions such as shame brings is that the emotions become distorted, displaced and stifled. By numbing or disconnecting from difficult emotions through drinking, the participants also disconnected from their capacity to

experience more positive emotions. This disconnection further impacted on the participants' ability to cope with stress later in their lives. Overall, they struggled to cope with the adverse situations that they found themselves in and lacked resilience in the face of those particular situations (Rutter, 2006). Resilience according to Rutter, 2007, is not a psychological trait with each of us potentially being resilient in different physical, environmental and psychological circumstances. However, the "*mediating mechanisms giving rise to resilience might be in personal agency, or coping strategies-that is, what individuals* ***do*** *in order to deal with the challenges they face*" (Rutter, 2007, p205). For the participants having a shame-based identity may have contributed to their inability to cope with stressful situations that they later found themselves in.

As life sentence prisoners they have now learned to recognise the emotions that they felt as shame. With this learning, they could name it in reflection but at the time they were just conscious of feeling bad in some way. Their learning about shame has come about as a direct result of their experience within prison where they have had the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences prior to imprisonment in order to understand what led to the offence. Shame turns out to be a complex emotion for the participants and is very much interconnected with drug and alcohol use as a mechanism to cope with their sense of shame.

> *That's my point, because I didn't know how to handle my feelings then, I would shun away or try and escape from that...so I ended up sniffing glue or drinking…. I didn't know how to feel shame, I didn't know what shame was but I knew it didn't feel right (Graham)*

As can be seen from the above quote the non-recognition of the emotion of shame had a limiting effect on Graham and the other participant's ability to manage their shame. He tried to escape from his shame through substance abuse. Graham can now "see" the shame that he felt then for what it was, he has learned how to name it and to understand where it has come from. However his (and the other participant's) previous inability to recognise and to manage their shame limited their ability to learn how to deal with these emotions in a constructive way. This then laid the foundation for other

emotions such as anger to build on.

Along with shame the participants spoke about the emotion of anger and anger management being an issue for them as they coped with the traumatic events that they had been exposed to.

> *….once I got drink in me the feelings were there and the anger and I just can't…. so the best thing for me to do and I have done, it's nearly 20 years now since, I haven't drank since the night that thing happened with your man. (Ferdia)*

Their experience of shame leading to anger is supported in the literature which refers to men experiencing a shame-anger loop. This occurs when shame is not acknowledged and discharged, it refuses to subside; one can be ashamed of being ashamed, and so on, a shame-shame loop, which leads to withdrawal. But an alternative route is a shame/anger loop: one can be angry one is ashamed, and ashamed that one is angry (Scheff & Retzinger, 1997).

In the context of the current study the concept of shame is an important one because of the role that it plays in the formation not just of our identity but also in the development of our conscience. According to Kaufman no other emotion is more central to the development of our identity and no other emotion can be more "*deeply disturbing*" of our self or as Kaufman puts it *"like a wound made from the inside by an unseen hand, shame disrupts the natural functioning of the self…Shame is the affect that is the source of feelings of inferiority"* (p5, 2004). The role of shame in identity development is particularly relevant for the participants whose childhoods were dysfunctional and involved sustained exposure to abusive behaviour by adults.

For me the interesting connection in this research is between loss, shame, anger, addiction, alcohol misuse and what the participants have learned about this as a result of their imprisonment. The learning significance of their experience as life sentence prisoners will be explored further in the next chapter on findings - Life during Life.

4.6. "*Just blot everything out…"*

For all of the participants the pathway to not coping was exacerbated by increased drinking. All of them were drinking heavily prior to the offence. Five participants would now identify themselves as alcoholics and recognise that they were alcoholics at the time of the crime. Their naming of themselves as alcoholics has come about as a result of the learning about themselves that has taken place in prison.

> *there was times like that before I went to jail—jeez- what am I doing to myself- ah sure this is the only life you have so you may as well keep on doing it you know so I might as well keep doing it, you know what I mean……(Alan)*
>
> **********
>
> *I can't drink I am an alcoholic, so I didn't hide the fact. Sometimes you have to say these things (Evan)*

So while the participants initially appeared to cope with the various traumatic events in their lives there was a gradual unravelling of their lives and their ability to manage their lives properly. This unravelling happened over different timeframes for each of the participants.

> *….Basically, I lost the head. I left there and then, I walked out and I never went back and I suppose that's really...I started drinking then, I started drinking then. Well, I had always liked a drink, but I was never one for going on the drink or anything like that. I could sit down and have two or three pints but I would have two or three pints every night… then some nights it all depends on who could be there, some nights you could have 6 or 7 pints and on the weekend it could be more and I suppose the drinking increased gradually and gradually. (Harry)*

Alcohol as a theme in the research will be discussed in more detail in the next two findings chapters. It is named here as an issue but not explored in depth in recognition of the timeframe within which the participants began to develop an understanding of the role of alcohol in their lives. Alcohol is also strongly linked to the men's experience of depression prior to their imprisonment and this will now be discussed.

4.7. Depression

One common denominator for all of the participants was that they were now identifying themselves as unhappy and/or depressed in the lead up to the crime. This narrative identity is based upon their reflections on themselves in the lead up to the crime and has been developed based on what they have learned about themselves and the concept of depression within prison. Given their learning within the prison system, the participants now recognise their experience as being about depression. This learning has also been reinforced by both psychiatric and psychological assessments and diagnoses. However, the participants would not necessarily have identified themselves as unhappy and/or depressed at the time. Each of them spoke about behaviour that could be identified as a lack of coping skills in terms of the situation they found themselves in.

> *I walked away from everything...That was the start of my depression and I didn't realise it—the depression and the alcohol came together…. I never coped with everything, I thought I was but I wasn't and I just thought 'fuck it, I'm going to get out of this and start again', nothing was working for me, but I thought I could get out of it then. (Harry)*
>
> **********

> *…it turned out that that I was diagnosed as a child with border line depression. You know—you don't get that (hand gesture for steady line), you're up and you're down and when I'm down I don't eat, stuff like that and when I'm up I go spending money and things like this. (Ferdia)*

Part of learning about our experiences and from our experiences is asking the 'what if?' questions. When anyone looks back on their story and identifies moments that they may have missed the significance of at the time, it is natural to wonder what may have occurred if that moment or emotion or event had been recognised as significant and handled differently. The participants are no different in their wondering "what if?"

> *Yeah, I mean I was a heavy drinker and I didn't recognise the onset of depression, as such I mean I could have done something the year before about it…. and I didn't do it. Going back to when I was at school, I remember a career guidance counsellor*

> *sitting down with me… and we sat in her office one evening after school and she told me I had to get angry with my father and I couldn't understand why she wanted me to get angry with someone that I loved so much, you know you've no understanding of that [as a teenager], you just don't or where they're coming from or anything, you think you have all the answers and you don't. Now kind of like years later, I've often thought about what she said to me, I've often said you know "God what would have happened if I had got angry?" (Harry)*

For Harry part of his misrecognition of his depression and drinking he now believes came from his having moved away from home for work and the resulting isolation that he felt. He now sees that he didn't have the same level of support or access to support that had previously been available to him when he was working at home. His experience again highlights the importance of the support of family members in our day-to-day lives.

> *The big thing again and it was inside that I realised it, I was isolated. I had no family around me, whereas when I worked at home and when I was at home, I could come home from work every evening at 6 o'clock and go in and sit at the kitchen table to have a chat with my mother just like 'how was your day?' and that sort of thing and really what you would do would be you were dumping everything, you didn't probably realise that you were whereas when I went to England I never had that, even in relationships that I was in, I never done that stuff...(Harry)*

In prison Harry learned to recognise the extent of his isolation from family and friends and the impact that this had on him. Each of the participants spoke very clearly about the path they were on that led to their offence and the unhappiness that was in their lives at the time. They also spoke about their increased use of alcohol in the lead up to the crime and their inability to manage the stresses that life was throwing at them.

> *Prison saved my life and that's the way I put it ehmm.....I messed up big time, I was going downhill for a very long time, I didn't know how to stop ehmm....I killed [victim] and that turned everything around…..I probably didn't know how far I was going to go....I don't know if there is anything worse than what I did to [victim] but that is what stopped me. (Alan)*

> *It's just that looking back Lisa I can't even think about it or even know what was going on in my mind as I must have been unbelievably bad you know because the way I was behaving, my behaviour, just drinking and getting no satisfaction out of it and looking for help and not being able to get it, no one that I could really... even though I had rakes of friends but I was never one to go asking someone for help..(Brian)*

For each of the participants, shame is a factor in their crimes, one man talked about the shame of co-operating with the Gardaí as a witness to a murder and his sense of anger when the individual was charged with manslaughter and given a short sentence. Another participant spoke of problems with his business and an increased dependency on alcohol in the lead up to the crime. A different participant identified himself as an alcoholic at a very early stage in the interview and then outlined the impact that drinking had on his life. A fourth man spoke about a relationship that was increasingly volatile and his inability to cope with that.

4.7.1. "*Somewhere along the way I lost that….."*

The time between his father's death and about two years before he committed the crime were presented by Harry as him being his 'ideal self', a self he wants to return to at some stage to replace the lifer identity with the pre-offence identity somehow. For Harry, this self represents his goal of redemption (Maruna, 2001).

> *I have to get, back to who I was, who I was when I was at 17, 18 years of age, with the morals, with the good principles, with the kind …. I never did any harm growing up on anybody, I lived properly, I cared for my brothers and sisters and my mother, I worked hard, I never stole, I didn't hurt anybody, I was always honest in my dealings, somewhere along the way I lost that. (Harry)*

The loss of self has been a common theme throughout the interviews and the shock that comes from committing a violent crime enhances the sense of loss of self. It also causes the participants to question who they were at the time of the crime and how they got to the place where they didn't stop themselves

from being violent. This is a theme that recurs in the later findings chapter where their learning about this is discussed further.

It is this loss of self that is particularly poignant for Harry as he strives to define who he was before imprisonment and who he can be upon release. He spoke about his strong work ethic and his success in his work prior to the offence.

> *I'm the guy who reared [several] brothers and sisters and had go-carts with him everywhere he went and had the young ones always with me and things like that, that worked hard and never missed a day's work and things like that and they knew and they have remembered that and that's kind of....all those things stood to me in terms of now having a job to go to.. (Harry)*

The desire to reclaim his 'lost self' was strongest in Harry during the research interviews. The other participants spoke about how they have changed since their imprisonment and how they like their current self better now.

> *You know I just felt that I could do what I liked you know that kind of thing. Kind of an arrogance about it you know...err....I don't know. There was a good side of me at that time but there was also another side of me that looking back at it now I wouldn't like to see in others. And that's the way I compare it, if I see someone else the way I was I wouldn't like them for it & I wouldn't like to see any of my family that way. So like that's the way that I compare myself to what I am now to what I was. I suppose that's a good thing that I have changed. The family see a massive change in me from their part. (Brian)*

Looking back on the themes arising in the first section of findings it is clear that there are some patterns emerging in terms of the life experiences and learning experiences of the participants prior to their imprisonment. It is also clear that the concepts of time and identity as outlined earlier by Ricoeur are dominant themes. The recognition of his loss of self was a key learning moment for Harry as was the recognition of their changed identity for the other participants. Each of the participants spoke about loss and trauma and the resulting shame that occurred in their lives that wasn't recognised or

acknowledged as such prior to their imprisonment. They also spoke about stable, happy periods in their lives prior to a period of unravelling and increased alcohol usage as a coping mechanism. Regardless of when the trauma occurred, the stories unfolded along the following lines:

Childhood identity → stable phase → unravelling phase → offence

While this was an individual process it didn't just occur on an individual level. As such it needs to be placed in the broader social and institutional context as the findings chapter and the concluding chapter reveal. The unravelling phase prior to the offence where alcohol misuse and depression were increasing for each of the participants links back very strongly to the criminological literature on the causes of violent crime (Braithwaite, 1989). The crime itself was evidence of the participants' inability to cope with the circumstances that they found themselves in and the unrecognised shame that each of the participants had in different ways resulted in the act of violence that cost someone their life.

4.8. "*If you take a life it's forever…*"

The following section has received a lot of consideration as to whether it should be included in the findings but as it formed an integral part of the participants' stories, I felt that I couldn't exclude it. Each of the participants has already been tried and sentenced for their actions and the research is not part of the judicial process nor is it part of the punishment, instead the research aims to inform the reintegration process. It is in this spirit that the findings and comments below are presented.

During the interview process, the participants had the choice as to whether they wanted to speak about their crime, what they felt led up to their crime and what insight they have into their crime at the time of interview. Seven of the participants chose to speak about their crime and the lead up to their crimes as they felt this was an important part of their story and that they have learned from their behaviour. Two participants' descriptions have been left out as it was impossible to protect their identity. Their lives before the crime forms an integral part of their story and gives us important insight into the pathway to their crimes and how they saw themselves then. It also helps contextualise how they define themselves now and how they hope to define

themselves in the future. In every instance the participants stated that the crime could have been prevented by them, that there were decisions that they made every step of the way that resulted in the loss of life of another person that could have been made differently. They have learned now the lessons that could have prevented the crimes.

> *I took a life one night after a row when I had… there was a lot of drink involved, I was highly addicted to alcohol at the time, things got a bit heated, I wasn't thinking rationally at the time…(Participant A).*
>
> **********
>
> *Well, you see it was a row and the thing about the row is,...it is [over 20] years ago on [date] and [over 20] years ago I could give you 20 or 30 good reasons why it happened but.....there's none of them reason enough. (Participant B)*
>
> **********
>
> *yeah the idea was to commit suicide I was just desperate, I was all over the shop but the gun was in the back of the car and I was shaking that's the last thing that I can remember and at that stage I was crying and I was like that (shaking) and then I got the gun and put it in and just shot… (Participant C)*
>
> **********
>
> *The person I was minding drugs for I was also minding a gun for…… [an event happened] and ehmm two years later I shot him. (Participant D)*
>
> **********
>
> *Yeah so we went from there up to the man's house. What I'm going on is the statements as I can still remember everything from the statements I just can't remember the night totally and well I…, was fighting with your man…. and he was struck …. and died instantly from it. But er like, well the way I seen it, I'd love to remember the night and say, right, it was me, or it wasn't me who did it. (Participant E)*
>
> **********

> *Yea, drinking more arguing with her, going off with the lads ...and then I made my mind up one day I said, I can't keep doing this, this is fucking crazy I can't live like this, so it's kill or be killed, and I choose to kill (Participant F)*
>
> **********
>
> *Well, I met a [woman] and we went back to my house and in the heel of the hunt… an argument ensued….and I strangled her. Now in the middle of strangling her I realised what I was doing and I stopped and I went to try and revive her and I couldn't. Shortly afterwards I was arrested and I went to prison.... (Participant G)*

As can be seen from the above, the crimes according to the majority of the participants were not thought through or planned in advance. One participant was convicted of premeditated murder as he had made a conscious decision to kill someone who was threatening to kill him. The other crimes occurred in the heat of the moment. All of the participants had drink taken at the time of the offence. Two of them took responsibility for the crime immediately and turned themselves into the Garda Siochana. The other participants were arrested within a short timeframe as a result of their crimes.

Each of the participants now take ownership of their actions as can be seen in the extract below.

> *Now I look on it different than [at the time] ago, now at different stages of each event with the work that I've done on it and things each different stage, every decision I made that night led to a worse decision and led to a person losing their life. At any time no matter what the row was and no matter what had caused it, I could have walked away and I didn't. The next decision I made was just worse and worse and worse and it just spiralled and as you say a person lost their life. There's one or two things like that I can't remember and there's a few things that come back to you.*

The ownership of his actions and the statement that he could have walked away at any point show a huge level of learning for this participant that has come about through the work that he has done on his crime and the factors involved in his crime within the prison system. He wasn't the only

participant to raise this issue. Another participant struggles with the reality of what he has done and wonders who he was at the time that he was capable of killing someone.

> *Ahh it was, it's not me, it's really not me, I must have been in an awful state to have done that looking back on it, I take full responsibility, I have no qualms, I don't blame anybody a lot of the stuff I'm after telling you I've never even told the psychologist as I don't want to make justification for my crime I don't want to go down that road where I get the feeling or give anyone else the feeling that [the victim] was doing this and I had a reason, had anything to do with the crime. It was my responsibility, I had plenty of time to walk away from that relationship if I wanted to and I shouldn't have done what I done regardless of how bad things were. Yeah that's the reality of it….*

The work undertaken by psychologists with life sentence prisoners will be discussed in more detail in the next findings chapter.

4.9. Conclusion

The purpose of this first findings chapter was to introduce the voices of the participants and to present their stories of themselves prior to imprisonment. Their experience of life before both the offence and the life sentence provides an important guiding light to their experiences during the life sentence and after they are released from prison.

In this chapter, the participants raised the issue of their childhood identity and how they defined themselves as children and young adults prior to their imprisonment. Shame has also raised its head as a theme in the research at this early stage. This shame is linked to childhood and their childhood identity and in this context does not pertain to the crime. They also spoke about traumatic events at various stages of their lives prior to their offence and these events included stand-alone events as well as a longer term process of being exposed to abusive behaviour as a child. Alcohol and depression were two further issues that the participants discussed when considering their life before the life sentence. In every case the alcohol and depression were untreated and unheeded by the participants and the trauma that they suffered at different points also went unheeded. Their recognition of these factors in

their lives represent important moments of learning for the participants.

Finally the participants talked about the crime and what had led them to becoming violent at that particular moment in their lives. Each of them spoke about what they have learned about themselves since that time and this learning will be discussed in more detail in the next two chapters. As will be seen more clearly in the next two findings chapters, the research highlights the fact that much of our learning is not educational, that we learn lessons about ourselves and others in many formal and informal learning settings.

Research in a criminal justice setting such as this serves to highlight the potential for learning of everyone regardless of their circumstances. It also highlights the importance of choice and opportunity in learning and will evidence that much of the learning that people need to be able to function in society happens in informal contexts and through lifelong learning. As is evidenced in the literature review, this finding is supported by the literature on informal learning and the impact that it has on shaping our lives and transforming our identities. Therefore the findings of the current research are significant not just in terms of the criminal justice sector with regard to the learning needs of life sentence prisoners but also in the field of education.

The next chapter will now look at life during the life sentence. The final findings chapter will focus on life after the life sentence and will also include a full discussion and analysis of the findings.

CHAPTER 5:

THE MEANING OF LIFE – LIFE DURING LIFE

You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life. (Albert Camus)

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the emphasis is on the learning experience of the participants during their life sentence. As in the previous findings chapter, this learning encompasses the formal learning that has taken place in a classroom setting for those who undertook education programmes during their imprisonment. It also encompasses the broader aspects of informal learning about self and the opportunities that prison has presented for them to be able to reflect on themselves and their experiences and how they ended up in prison in the first place.

This chapter focuses on the reflections the participants have on their initial experience of imprisonment as well as their overall experience and learning within the prison system as they begin the release process. Therefore the findings and quotes used here start with their initial acceptance of their imprisonment and how they learned to accept their sentence.

For the participants, prison has become part of the restructuring of their identity process. Imprisonment requires that they make the necessary changes to their identity for it to incorporate their new imprisoned status. It provides an opportunity for learning and connection in a way that their previous experiences didn't. The question remains as to who are we when we commit a serious crime, who do we become when we become a 'lifer' and who will we be when we are released, how much of the lifer identity will remain once they are on licence in the community.

5.2 Identity during a life sentence

5.2.1. "This is the road that I am on"

The first thing that each of the participants had to do upon their imprisonment was learn how to come to terms with the fact of their imprisonment and their being sentenced to life for murder. The learning journey involved in the process of acceptance was as individual as each of the participant's stories.

> There is no simple model of prisonization. Like a fairground mirror, imprisonment exaggerates some aspects of identity and behaviour, while obscuring and suppressing others. But these distortions occur in different ways. (Crewe, 2009, p 458)

Their journey to acceptance also had to incorporate the *"suspension of their pre-institutional identities"* and the temporary construction of *"an inauthentic identity that masks the true self"* (Jewkes, 2012, p46). The adoption of an "*inauthentic identity*" is a common strategy to manage their imprisonment. In a restricted setting, it often felt safer to put on the mask of compliance and accept the legitimacy of the authority of the prison staff rather than to risk being seen as troublesome by questioning what was happening around them. This Foucauldian approach of internalising and self-disciplining one's identity to the prison regime was implemented by a number of the participants to manage their prison experience.

> Prisoners did not talk of losing their identity but of having to reshape it, in certain circumscribed and prescribed ways. They were faced with new existential problems (their permanent rejection, in their current form) and had to change. (Liebling, 2011, p543)

Acceptance of their responsibility for the crime and for the imprisonment was one step in the '*reshaping*' of their identity as lifers. In Evan's case the life sentence was his first experience of being in prison and acceptance was a challenge. He was drinking heavily prior to his imprisonment and this didn't change when he first went to prison.

> *Well, I think for me for the first couple of years it's a matter of trying to get your head around it and it does take you a while to settle down and I think, for me, I might have been a little bit rebellious, I was drinking and I was taking a few drugs and that, where I was blocking a lot of stuff out, and I was saying if this is it I am going to try and make it as comfortable as possible for myself (Evan)*

Evan needed to block out the reality of being in prison, not just because of his external environment but also as a method to manage his emotions with regard to the crime. Increased alcohol consumption and first time drug usage became the tools that Evan used to cope with his imprisonment for the first ten years. This is a significant finding for those of us who work in the field as Evan went into prison with no previous drug usage and yet he was able to not only sustain his drinking whilst in prison but to start using drugs for the first time. Therefore, managing his addictive behaviour through continued usage in the prison context was unproblematic for him.

Brian was also still in shock when it came to the trial and sentencing. Again this was his first experience of being in prison.

> *the first two and a half, three months was a very bad time for me as I couldn't get my head around what had happened, how I could commit such a crime, ehmm what I'd done to my family, to my victim's family and to society itself and my standing in society. Everything just crumbled down around me and for that first two and half, three months things were very bad for me, and I didn't know how I was going to get through it actually… (Brian)*

The reality of the committal of the offence and the shock of imprisonment represented another different sort of trauma and loss for each of the participants as discussed in the previous findings chapter. The learning that occurs with being imprisoned for the first time can be immediate and traumatic. It is necessary to learn very quickly how to manage the prison system but some of the participants took years to adjust to their imprisonment. Derek outlines his experience below.

> *It took me three or four years from the time that I got the life sentence, it took me about three or four years to get settled in, after that then it's like outside 'Bye, Bye' you're forgetting everything…..you have to make your own life for yourself and that is it. It's up to yourself. There's no use going to Probation Officers or prison officers 'cos they don't want to know. (Derek)*

Ferdia also initially struggled to accept the life sentence but for different reasons as he couldn't remember the crime.

> *….so it took me three years in prison to accept it you know what I mean, I was trying to work it and I wasn't doing anything I was sitting in my cell thinking this, that and the other. I wasn't doing anything, I was dwelling on it and I was thinking about my kids and all and basically I went into a sulk for 3 years ……and during the 3 years it was like I was in Limbo but one morning I just got up and said "Right, get your head together and get started". That morning I turned around and said 'right, accept it' I was there, I could have done it, simple as. (Ferdia)*

His eventual acceptance of the sentence was connected to his new openness to learning within the prison system. This is referenced below and will be discussed in further detail in the section on learning in prison

> *when I woke up in the third year, I said I have to start doing something so I started going to workshops, I started going to school, I started learning to read and write..(Ferdia)*

The acceptance of the sentence and the reality of their imprisonment impacted the participants in various ways. Those that were able to accept the situation sooner, seemed to adjust to prison better and prison became part of a positive experience rather than a negative one. This is supported in the literature where research has found that prisoners who adjust quicker to imprisonment manage their sentence better (Johnson, 2002).

Prior to his conviction for murder Graham had experienced multiple periods of imprisonment from his teens before being sentenced to life in his early twenties. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, he was identified as '*jail bait'* at a young age by the Gardaí. This 'self-fulfilling prophesy' is also

discussed in the literature chapter on the links between shaming behaviour and crime. This was an identity that he took on and learned to live with prior to his life sentence.

> *when I came into jail for the life sentence, they had a system, and because of my body language to their reaction of me, I was born and bred for it, to be honest with you, do you understand….I came in "bring it on" you know what I mean, little hard man…I didn't come in with any fear of prison (Graham)*

Graham entered the prison system for the life sentence as the angry '*little hard man'*. This raises the question as to how does he or anyone else manage their imprisonment with all of this anger. It also raises the question about the politics of managing incarceration. The expectation that the prisoner be able to manage the psychological and emotional aspects of their incarceration can be an unrealistic one as the reason they are in prison tends to be that they have not learned how to manage their anger previously. Therefore, the expectations that the prison system has about the prisoner managing their own behaviour and complying with the demands of imprisonment immediately can be very unrealistic when the context of their imprisonment is taken into consideration. This is an important question to note and is beyond the scope of the current research.

> *L: So were you in a lot of trouble when you came into prison first?*
>
> *Graham: I was, for the first couple of years I was arguing with the screws, and fighting the system and using [drugs]*
>
> *L: So you got lots of P19's? [Disciplinary warnings]*
>
> *Graham: No, I beat them, they'd beat me, no P19's*
>
> *L: The guards beat you?*
>
> *Graham: Yeah...it's not ok but that's the way it was, if I gave one of them a few slaps they'd give me such a beating they couldn't put me on a P19, because…..*
>
> *L: They'd have to record the beating?*
>
> *Graham: Yeah, exactly and a court case and so on. Like that happened and ... I actually grew up in prison……*

Therefore the issue for Graham was less about accepting the fact of his imprisonment, he had already learned as a young child to expect that prison would be a part of his life, the issue became more about fighting the system and learning to survive it. Graham's experience of violence in the prison was one that continued throughout his sentence and his story had many anecdotes of the beatings that he received. He also developed a serious drug addiction in prison. He accepted that violence was part of his experience and took responsibility for also being violent towards the prison officers. His experience of violence being perpetrated by officers on prisoners is not unique and is a common theme through much of the literature that pertains to the experience of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958, Cohen & Taylor, 1972, James, 2003, Liebling, 2004, Irwin, 2009, Crewe, 2009, Liebling, 2011). Following an intervention from his mother, as will be seen in the next findings chapter, his focus shifted to learning more about himself in order to manage his anger, his addiction and his sentence in a more effective way.

There were various acceptance strategies employed by the participants. I have summarised them as follows:

- Blotting out the experience of imprisonment through continuing with and widening their addictive behaviour
- Facing a crumbling sense of identity as they dealt with the shock of their situation
- Experiencing a numbness to the experience but not reverting to drinking
- Fighting the system
- Turning to religion and
- Adopting the prisoner persona to protect the vulnerable aspects of their identity

All of the participants' initial responses were eventually followed by a final acceptance of their imprisonment and a period of adaptation followed by the decision to engage with services within the prison. The variety of responses and the length of time taken to adjust to imprisonment are strongly supported by prison literature with each man coping with the adjustment to

prison in different ways (Bonta & Gendreau, 1990, Crawley & Sparks, 2005, Jamieson & Grounds, 2005, Johnson & Dobrzanska, 2005, Crewe, 2009, Appleton, 2010, Milner, 2010, Richardson, 2012).

> The offender's response to the offence usually begins with a period of numbness and disbelief. This may last hours, days or years and it may develop into a state of frank denial, such that the patient says that he did not commit the offence at all. The stage of denial gives way to a partial acceptance in which the patient gradually acknowledges more clearly and accurately what he did. (Horne, 1999, p27)

In many ways it is unrealistic to look at the participants at the crisis point of imprisonment and expect them to adapt well to prison (Crewe, 2009). At the period of imprisonment for the participants, there was no induction into prison, no sentence management and as Derek mentioned earlier there was a very strong sense of having to just get on with it by yourself. This reliance on the individual men to manage their adjustment to prison without input from the prison system challenged the resilience and resourcefulness of the participants at a vulnerable time. However, there has been a recognition by the Irish Prison Service of the need to manage the committal to prison process better and new procedures are now in place to do so.

First night in a cell

One of the many challenges with imprisonment is the need to construct an identity that can survive prison whilst keeping your core identity intact somehow. While the '*little hard man'* identity that Graham referred to above can be seen as a mask to protect the vulnerability that he couldn't show, it also became a way of life both before prison and during all his previous sentences.

> *I remember my first day in prison…and it was the day after my [teenage] birthday, and the judge gave me eight months and I said fuck you….and going in the squad car from the court to the barracks… I was the hard man, spitting at the guards and abusing them. Then down to the holding cells, they threw me back in… but I remember being in the back of the paddy wagon that evening and we are going up to Pat's that evening at 6 o'clock and into the wagon and there is*

> *two or three old bill there, big farmers… I remember passing out of [hometown]…the reality kicked in, you're heading to Dublin… and as you got towards 20/30 mile outside [hometown], then it started kicking in and the child within you is getting vulnerable… and you get further and further away and it's getting darker and you arrive above in Pats about 12 o'clock and you're going in and the smell of the prison, down into the basement the four man cell, the hairy blankets, but all you are is a child, screaming to be loved and cuddled and you're inside in the prison where you have to man up now, but if the truth be known, the child within, all you want is nourishing… (Graham)*

Part of the acceptance and adaptation process is the reality of the men's first night in prison. Graham has outlined his first journey to prison in the above extract. For Alan his first night in a cell came immediately after his arrest. His experience of imprisonment very much involved the sensations of learning and the shock of the physical environment in which he found himself.

> *..The first night they put me in this little room, they took all my clothes, all I had was boxer shorts or something, and they gave me this blanket, it was a square blanket (small) and it was heavy, really heavy and I put that around me and I sat down and I just remember sitting there thinking 'That's it, this is the rest of your life, this is how it's going to be' 'cos I hadn't a clue about prison and the next day they opened the door and the prison officer came in and gave me back my clothes, so he told me to get dressed, me clothes were outside and he brought me over to another part which was the base. They put me in a room with four beds- two bunk-beds and there was one other chap there and he said "Take your pick" and I just sat on a bed.. (Alan)*

Alan's description has echoes of the degradation ceremonies referred to by Braithwaite (1989) and Goffman (1961) where the 'inmates' are stripped of their identity at the point of entry.

While Alan's first night in prison taught him very quickly that the experience of prison was going to be about deprivation in a number of different ways, there is learning in his experience for those of us who work in the sector about how remand prisoners are treated.

> Experiencing imprisonment as a kind of bereavement for oneself and confined in environments, which can be volatile and disorientating, it is unsurprising that rates of self-harm and suicide are far higher in prisons than in the community. (Jewkes, 2012a, p21)

The experience of imprisonment is a traumatic one and the reality for the participants was that it was a further trauma and loss to be added to the unmanaged traumas that they had experienced prior to the offence.

Being sentenced to life was also Harry's first experience of imprisonment. His way of learning to manage the imprisonment started at the point of his arrest.

> *The night I was arrested, I was in such a bad place in every way, mentally, emotionally, physically, I was in such a bad place and when they took me after measuring me and injecting*[13] *me and all that stuff they put me into the cell and they closed the door behind me and the hearing of that closing, all of a sudden I was alone and I'll tell you one thing it doesn't half sober you up ….. I was like really in the darkest place I've ever been in in my life. And I knelt at the toilet in the corner, an aluminium toilet, and I knelt and I prayed like I never prayed before and I just said "God if you can get me through this, just get me through this, I'll live my life as honestly as I can for the rest of my life'… (Harry)*

Harry's faith has provided him with an important source of sustenance throughout the sentence and it also helped him to accept his sentence and put him on the path outlined by the redemption narrative referred to in the literature review from the earliest point of his arrest (Maruna, 2001). It helped him to make sense of his experience and to find meaning in his imprisonment (Maruna et al, 2006, Liebling, 2011).

> *So what having faith did for me was, it just reinforced the strength I have inside myself that it comes from somewhere, that this is somebody's plan for me and I think and, I don't know if I've said this to you but I've said it to psychologists and different people and different courses on where I've been on, and for a long time I would have looked at the life I would have*

[13] The injections that Harry refers to were the taking of blood samples for alcohol and drug testing following his arrest.

> *had, what I'm missing out on. Now actually I don't look at it like that, I don't see it anymore that I've missed out or anything because this is the life that I have--I don't have another life. There isn't another road. This is the road I'm on. (Harry)*

His faith also provided him with further opportunities for learning about himself as he sought to understand why he had behaved the way that he did. For now I want to highlight that this learning experience gave Harry the following insights to the process of acceptance.

> *1. You have shame, 2. You have guilt and both of those are very, very hard things to live with and then you're going into an environment where a lot of people may not accept what you have done and everything you've read or saw on television beforehand tells you that they're not, though you're trying to block it out and put on the brave face and shoulders out wide and you're living in a shell because you're trying to be something that you're not for the first while until you actually find your feet and you really do have to find your feet in it...ehmm you don't want to accept the responsibility in it for a number of those reasons, you know,… I did eventually accept and to be fair it didn't take me that long to fully accept what I did was my fault. I never believed I was sitting in prison solely because of what I committed on that night. I was in prison because of a number of things had happened along the way- that I hadn't resolved. (Harry)*

As can be seen in the above quote, part of Harry's experience is about the physical shifts that take place in your body as you prepare to live in prison, the physical embodiment of imprisonment. The '*brave face'* and '*shoulders out wide'* references are important in terms of identity and have echoes of what Goffman (1959) referred to as the '*fostered appearance and reality'* and I am reminded of the '*precarious position'* that the risk of the fostered appearance being exposed brings to prisoners. Yet this adaptation to the prison environment is essential for all newly sentenced prisoners.

> For newly admitted inmates, then, there is a need to learn from others the rules of prison (both formal and informal) and assimilate into the culture as quickly as possible. (Jewkes, 2012b, p51)

The physical adjustments that Harry spoke about are also supported by Bourdieu who in a different context spoke about the concept of habitus which

he developed to demonstrate the ways in which not only is the body in the social world, but also the ways in which the social world is in the body (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu, the habitus

> Is a socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world-a field-and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world. (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81)

Harry's experience of incorporating the social world of the prison into his physical body is represented by his description above of the '*brave face'* that he put on before going out to be seen within the prison. Harry's quote about acceptance emphasises what he has learned about himself throughout the course of his imprisonment. It is this learning that he hopes to build on as he progresses to full release.

The indeterminate nature of the sentence was mentioned by the participants as being an obstacle to acceptance of the sentence. It can be difficult to get your bearings in the prison system when you have no idea how long you are going to be there.

> *You don't have any particular date you know what I mean…..I think when I started, when I decided to go to school, I was encouraged to go, I think then that I...teachers said "Evan this will all stand to you in years to come, when it comes up to your release" and you don't know...when somebody else says that to you and you begin to say to yourself "Evan, maybe yeah in 14/15 years' time, 16 years' time I might get out"….it is a long, long time away yeah, but we talked about acceptance, I knew why I was there and I suppose I accepted that as well, from the very, very start as well, I was never in denial over it. (Evan)*

So the experience of accepting their sentence was different for each of the participants and the length of time varied ranging from three months to three to four years. For those using drugs and alcohol within the prison system the process of acceptance was substantially lengthened as the drugs and alcohol impacted on their ability to process their sentence. Their prolonged usage of drugs and alcohol also impacted on their ability to learn within the prison system. This will be discussed in detail further in this chapter. The next issue that arose in the findings was the labelling of the participants as 'Lifers'.

5.2.2. "You're a Lifer", that doesn't stop me from being human"

From the moment the participants are convicted and sentenced to life they become defined within the prison system by their legal status, by their status as life sentence prisoners. They take on the lifer identity. It is not a learned identity rather it is an identity that is imposed on them by the state.

> *that morning (of the trial) when I went out, I was in a double cell and when I came back a prison officer came up to me and said "you're moving into a single cell of your own now". I said 'why?' and he said 'because you're a Lifer, that's why, you get what Lifers get'. I said 'alright, fair enough' so I was put into a single cell and that was even better (Alan)*

While, as can be seen from the above quote, this meant an initial improvement in prison conditions for those participants who had been in a remand prison prior to sentencing, the lifer identity was a double edged sword. The labelling was also an instrument of social control and it established the boundaries of the prisoner role immediately for the participants (Goffman, 1961). The Lifer identity also further removed the participants from society at large and from the social supports that they had established prior to their imprisonment. It is an example of the embeddedness of power within the prison system, in the way that Foucault saw power as a set of forces that establish positions and ways of behaving that influence people in their everyday lives. The ordinariness of the way that the participants were informed of their status emphasised how the power was embedded in the system. It also emphasised the expectation of compliance by the prisoner with the prison regime.

Goffman (1961) describes the process of stripping prisoners of their non-prison identity as a "*series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified*" (p14). So with the 'privilege' of single cell accommodation came the disempowerment of being stigmatised as a Lifer. The participants learned immediately upon their imprisonment how they were now identified and how the stigma would work in practice.

> ….. two phases in the learning process of the stigmatized person… his learning the normal point of view and learning that he is disqualified according to it. Presumably a next phase consists of his learning to cope with the way others treat the kind of person he can be shown to be. (Goffman, 1963, p101)

Therefore, with the Lifer identity comes the need to learn how to cope with being a lifer as well as learning to cope with imprisonment. One challenge with a deliberate stigma such as this is the sense of the prisoner still being the same person that they were prior to the offence, to them still being 'normal'.

> The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do; this is a pivotal fact. His deepest feelings about what he is may be his sense of being a 'normal person', a human being like anyone else, a person, therefore who deserves a fair chance and a fair break. (Goffman, 1963, p17)

The sense of powerlessness that comes with the label of Lifer was palpable at times during the interview. The powerlessness was combined with the knowledge that in a different context and setting the power imbalance represented by the officers labelling the participants as Lifers would be redressed.

> *the screw telling me 'sure you're a lifer', so you think you can talk to me with a heightened or raised voice and I can't say nothing because I'm a prisoner, fuck off, you know what I mean, that's what I'm saying, so if I was outside in the community ye wouldn't talk to me like that because I'd pull the head off them out there… (Graham)*

The use of the term lifer is something that the participants learned very early in their sentence. They tended to use the term 'lifer' more when talking about how other people refer to them rather than how they refer to themselves. They also used the term when talking about other life sentence prisoners. They have absorbed their new Lifer identity and taken on the language of the prison system as their own. Jewkes refers to this as "*adopting an insider's perspective on the prison world"* (2012b, p51).

One of the issues that arose for the participants during their imprisonment was the desire to know "*where they stand as Lifers*". By serving an

indeterminate sentence, the participants have no defined date, exit strategy or guarantee of release in place. Therefore they are dependent on others within the prison system to provide information as to their progress.

> One of the problems with prisons is that 'the dignity of man is based on his (sic) freedom' (Frankl, 2000: 80) and that this is by definition taken away in the act of imprisonment. This is painful and damaging in itself. But there are degrees and varieties of freedom, different types of deprivations of liberty and different experiences of their loss. (Liebling, 2011, p546)

This dependency only serves to emphasise their powerlessness to impact their own lives in any way. It also impacts on their attempts to redefine their identity and to look to the future release date as it doesn't exist.

> *You know that's the one thing I want that's a bit missing in the system at the moment, there's times you don't know where you stand as a lifer you know what I mean. It's not programmes; it's the not knowing you know what I mean (Brian)*

This 'not knowing' can be a source of immense frustration for the participants particularly as they get into the double digit length of their sentence. This becomes more difficult to learn how to deal with when the men have served substantial sentences and have no sense of an ending. Yet they feel powerless as their attempts to get a sense of their progression or otherwise through the system can be met with a brick wall in terms of information. This is an important finding in the context of the current research.

> *and that's my problem....talking with this officer, I was telling him exactly what I told you, and I said "Look Mr X if I challenge this and win it I can tell you now I'll win it", and he says to me "Sure, aren't you a lifer?" and I says "Yeah, but what has that got to do with anything?"....in other words you're not entitled to anything, who the fuck are you to challenge ...he didn't say that, but that's what he was saying, that's what he meant (Graham)*

The sense of frustration at their inability to effect change in their own lives or to be seen as a self-directed human being was palpable in some of the participants during the interviews. It also presents further challenges for them when it comes to navigating the prison system. This is something that they

have to learn quickly in order to manage the system.

> *Graham: It's how to question authority that is beneficial and not negative, so it's finding that balance*
>
> *L -and that's a tough one really*
>
> *Graham: Definitely especially for a lifer on licence, as that scooby[14] said "you're a lifer" that doesn't stop me from being human*

Again, Graham struggles with the ordinary everyday aspects of power that are endemic within the prison system. The sense of powerlessness of life sentence prisoners is in many ways compounded by the concept of the "model prisoner". While this is presented as a positive concept, the participants learned that it is another way to control their behaviour and to give them something to lose if they don't live up to the 'model prisoner' label. The 'model prisoner' label belongs to the category of 'soft power' referred to earlier in the literature review where the prisoners are manipulated to conform to authority (Crewe, 2009).

> *It didn't go down well, but at the same time they told me I was a model prisoner, keep going the way you're going, what I heard today [at the focus group], I was going to respond but I don't want to be putting negative thoughts in there [focus group], -you know what I mean. What happens to one person may not happen to another. (Ferdia)*

Even though it would be viewed as a form of soft power, the pressure of being a 'model prisoner' can become too much for the participants at times. Particularly when it is used as a way to refuse them access to family at times of illness and bereavement. This was the case for Ferdia where he wasn't allowed to visit either of his parents when they were ill and dying in hospital as the Governor told him they were afraid of him getting angry.

> *Yeah again they turned around and the Governor said to me "it's the same reason, Ferdia, you see you are a model prisoner and everything is going well for you and we don't want you getting upset and coming back and doing something stupid." (Ferdia)*

[14] 'Scooby' is short for 'scooby doo' which is another slang for 'screw' which is slang for prison officer.

Whilst the concept of a model prisoner may be presented as a positive label, it is very much linked to the powerlessness that the participants feel and is another method of control and of enforcing compliance with the prison regime. This practice fits within Foucault's theory of power as discussed earlier where compliance is a key control technique within the prison system. In this example, the previous level of compliance exhibited by Ferdia within the prison bore no weight when it came to making a decision based on control about whether or not he be able to visit his dying parents. The decision was made for him and presented to him as being in his own best interest. As Foucault explained *"Power consists in complex relations: these relations involve a set of rational techniques, and the efficiency of those techniques is due to a subtle integration of coercion-technologies and self-technologies"* (1993, p204). The model prisoner concept is a good example of the complexity of power relations within the prison system as it highlights the internalisation of power relations and the powerlessness of the prisoners in their day-to-day living within the prison. No matter how much of a 'model prisoner' they may be, they are still life sentence prisoners with no right to release.

Ferdia offered the following key learning into his experience of prison.

> *Ferdia: Prison is designed to make you fail anyway, you know what I mean, it is designed that way. If you're down you'll be kicked when you're down that type of way you know what I mean. If you let yourself be vulnerable, you leave yourself open, things will happen and they can go drastically wrong.*
>
> *L- So prison is designed to make you fail?*
>
> *Ferdia- Yeah, but it is actually designed to make you fail, because you are told by everyone you are doing great, that you are a model prisoner, this and that and the other, and yet something goes wrong, like the off day and everything, the model prisoner thing is gone out the window.*

Ferdia's view of prison being designed to deliberately make you fail echoes Foucault's view of prisons however Foucault viewed prisons as a success.

In Foucault's view the prison is a success because it is designed to produce better, more professional criminals. It is not designed to rehabilitate people or to prevent further crime. He highlights the fact that prisons run as a micro-system within the larger society and for prisons to operate they are based on a number of illegalities being core to their function. He states that:

> ...one can find in the very functioning of prisons the evidence for this idea that the penal system, in spite of the orders it assigns to itself, is not really an apparatus for suppressing crime but is in fact a mechanism for the management, the differential intensification, the dispersal of illegalisms – a mechanism for the control and distribution of different illegalities..... Even more, one should study all the illegalities that are necessary for the prison to operate..... The prison is surely the most efficient and productive of all the institutions that foster illegalities..... (Foucault, 2009, p19)

While Foucault's focus is slightly different, the sentiment is much the same. According to Foucault, the prison system does not want people to rehabilitate and does not have a pro-prisoner focus. The prison system is about compliance and control and not about rehabilitation or about redemption. Yet the current research contradicts that view with a more complex story as the participants spoke very clearly about their key learning moments and their transformation through the course of their imprisonment. This rehabilitation occurred in a controlled atmosphere that has an emphasis on compliance and each of the participants complied with the prison regime in their own way. But they were also each able to find meaning and learning about themselves through the course of their imprisonment. Rehabilitation is about learning from past mistakes and making the necessary changes to ensure that the same mistake is not repeated. Foucault's emphasis on compliance for compliance sake misses the potential for change within each prisoner even when they are just 'playing the system' to survive their experience of imprisonment. For Foucault, the compliant behaviour discussed in the data by some of the participants evidences an internalised form of the control exercised by the prison. However, for the participants their awareness of some of their strategies to survive the system shows a genuine ability to assess and navigate the system and to selectively comply with the rules in order to gain something

for themselves. Their compliance comes with a healthy dose of self-interest, hence the use of 'soft power'.

What Foucault failed to discuss was the capacity for people to genuinely change as people to "*do better, to become better human beings*" as the participants mentioned previously. The desire to change and to do no further harm is missed by Foucault in his focus on the complex relations of power within a prison. The current research shows that for some of the participants their compliance was about managing the prison system in a proactive and safe way, in a way that would have the most wins for them as individual prisoners. Given the lack of a clear pathway and signposts out of the prison, a certain level of compliance is essential to ensure that the prisoners move through the system smoothly. The use of soft power within the prison highlighted the need for compliance to avoid negative consequences or hard power. For some of the participants, the compliance was about surviving the system, for others it was a representation of the change process that they underwent within the prison system. This particularly applies to those who fought the controls imposed on them by the prison system. Therefore Foucault's view of power is limited as it doesn't allow for the element of variation, change and rehabilitation within individual prisoners. Looking at the participants' behaviour in prison through a learning lens and the conceptual frame of a redemptive script can also change how the participants view the concepts of shame, stigma, guilt and identity formation. As the participants learned to understand these concepts and the negative impact they had on their lives previously, they were empowered to view them as tools for change and redemption rather than as a toxic impediment to change. From a Foucauldian perspective, the participants' imprisonment would have been about becoming a better criminal and staying stuck in the behaviour that resulted in their imprisonment. Instead, the participants' experience of imprisonment has been a catalyst for learning and for change.

All of the complexities of being a life sentence prisoner and serving an indeterminate life sentence require good coping skills from the participants. I will now briefly discuss the topics of coping and resilience as they pertain to the current research.

Coping with being a Lifer

Transformational coping is defined by Kent and Davis (2010) as the ability to transform the meaning of events and particularly negative events in a positive manner. In the context of the current research, the emphasis on the transformation of negatives into positives was an important aspect of the concept. The concept of transformational coping builds on the concept of mature coping as:

> …dealing with life's problems like a responsive and responsible adult, one who seeks autonomy without violating the rights of others, security without resort to deception or violence, and relatedness to others as ,the finest and fullest expression of human identity. (Johnson, 2002, p83)

This is particularly important when you look at how the life sentenced men adapt to their imprisonment and manage their time in prison. The 'pains of imprisonment' can vary depending on how the men cope with the reality of their situation. The literature shows that those who cope best with long periods of imprisonment are those who accept the limitations that being imprisoned imposes on them. This acceptance of the situation as discussed earlier in this chapter enables them to adjust better to confinement and the loss of autonomy that comes with being confined within a prison indefinitely. By choosing to accept their situation and that they are in prison because of their own actions the participants are able to have an "illusion of control". According to Johnson (2002) this sense of control over elements of their lives enables the participants to adjust better to prison.

> The ability to make choices, even choices that offer only the illusion of control, is a fundamental human need that counters institutional dependency and fosters autonomous thinking. (Toch, 1998)

For Johnson adaptation to the prison environment involves the following adjustments:

1. The acceptance of the limits of being imprisoned
2. Choosing not to resort to violence and staying out of trouble,
3. Developing empathy, mentoring others, caring for other prisoners connections to family, relationships reduce loneliness

This is particularly pertinent when the participants speak about what they have learned from being in prison and how in some cases they see the imprisonment as having saved their lives.

The concept of resilience is also an important one to consider when talking about life sentence prisoners. According to Zautra et al (2010), resilience is best defined as the outcome of a successful adaptation to adversity. The available research outlines the various pre-existing conditions that seem to exist both internally and externally and are factors in having a resilient response to adversity (Bonanno & Mancini, 2010, Bonanno, Galea et al, 2007, Kent & Davis, 2010). Interestingly, the participants did not identify or label themselves as resilient but during the interviews they discussed various factors that helped them to manage their time better in prison. They also seem to have been less resilient in terms of coping with stresses prior to prison and have learned further resilience through the course of their imprisonment. This would support Rutter's (2007) view of resilience that states that people are not necessarily resilient in every situation and every setting. The sustainability of that resilience has also been untested for the participants who have not been fully released. Therefore any in-prison built resilience that the participants developed may not transfer to the community and may be a 'prison-specific' resilience.

Not all prisoners cope well with prison, not all prisoners see why they should cope with being in prison. It is clear when we look at the literature about institutionalisation etc. that people experience events in different ways. All of the participants sought to find some control in their lives upon their imprisonment.

> The life sentence prisoner may define his or her own individuality in terms of cultural conformity or resistance to the prison regime. .....Whether chronically ill or incarcerated, the individual retains an area of self-control via the active self. (Jewkes, 2005, p381)

This discussion now moves me on to the input from the participants on their concept of time as life sentence prisoners.

5.3 Concept of time as a lifer

One of the challenges with a life sentence is learning how to manage the sentence when the length of time to be served is indeterminate. Time as a concept for life sentence prisoners can become overwhelming when there is no sense of an ending to the prison sentence. Time is no longer a commodity to be used as the participants choose.

> But they have been given someone else's time. Their own time has been abstracted by the courts like a monetary fine and in its place they have been given prison time. This is no longer a resource but a controller. It has to be served rather than used. (Cohen & Taylor, 1972, p89)

In order to manage the way that they '*served time'* whilst coping with the indeterminate nature of their sentence, the participants very quickly learned to fix a timeline for themselves in order to make the sentence manageable. Ten years was the time length that a number of the participants spoke about as being a target timeframe within which they felt they could manage the sentence.

> *L: You were saying that you felt you could do 10 years; that 10 years seemed manageable.....*
>
> *Alan: Yeah, yeah, I thought I could do it. I don't know why I thought that but I just thought that I could. Maybe it's because I was only on remand for eight months and it went quick, you know what I mean. I got to know people in jail, I was getting on alright with both sides, prison officers and lads in jail*
>
> **********
>
> *Then after about three months I just made a conscious decision to set aside ten years for meself as that was the length of the life sentence at the time… I said to meself that if I'm not out in ten years then I wouldn't be a hundred miles away from it… so that was kind off the way that I looked at it, that was the target that I set for meself....I kind of never looked back from then on (Brian)*

This expected time frame helped them to cope with the indeterminate nature of the sentence. Yet the changing political climate in the late 1990s and early 2000s meant that in reality their time served has been much longer than the ten years that they originally envisaged.

> *Yeah, I always had hope and I think having that ten years was another thing too, I said 'sure I'm only going to be here for 10 years' you know what I mean and I'm half way through my second ten years sentence now. (Alan)*

The reality of being locked up for an undefined length of time was a lesson that the participants learned repeatedly as they attempted to manage their time in a constructive way. They looked at different ways to distract them from the indeterminate nature of the sentence and to pass the time.

> *I remember my first laptop, I cried to the Chief for a laptop, an ACER laptop in about '96 and I said 'Please if I got this laptop it would answer....being locked up wouldn't be a problem' and I cried for this laptop for ages and the Governor eventually said 'Okay, you can have a laptop'. And it cost me £1,600 for this laptop, right. It was a lot of money. And the first night I got the laptop in my cell I cried believe it or not and I said to myself like 'No matter where.....that laptops' not going to change my life, no matter how much or what I have in this cell, I'm still locked up'.... (Ciaran)*

Each of the participants found their own way to cope and establishing a routine of sorts in terms of accessing education programmes or working within the prison was an important aspect of managing time. Research has shown that long-term sentence prisoners who develop a routine adapt better to their imprisonment (Appleton, 2010, Johnson & McGunigall-Smith, 2008). None of the participants were released after the ten year period that they had originally set themselves. As was mentioned previously the length of time served as part of a life sentence has lengthened substantially in the past twenty years.

5.3.1. Lengthening sentence

Unlike other jurisdictions, the crime of murder in Ireland is punishable with a mandatory life sentence without there being any room for recommendations from the Judge about minimum tariffs or lengths of time to be served. This means that decisions about release are completely separate from the sentencing process. Release decisions are made based upon the recommendations of the Parole Board with the final decision to

release resting solely with the Minister for Justice. The decision to release life sentence prisoners lies in the political sphere and there is no right to appeal if the Minister decides not to release the prisoner or if the Parole Board doesn't recommend release. As life sentence prisoners their release into the community will always be considered to be temporary and be subject to licence conditions and supervision by a Probation Officer. A result of the political input into release decisions for life sentence prisoners has been the dramatic increase in the length of time served prior to release for life sentence prisoners over the past twenty years. This political setting has been the lived experience of the research participants.

> *L: How do you manage the concept of time? You were saying when you went in first it was seven or eight years for life, now obviously it's over twenty years later?*
>
> *Ciaran: When I went in first it was very hard looking forward and thinking 'Jesus how am I going to do this?' but now when I look at the seven years and your first review. So when I got to seven, I was knocked back for two. Two isn't too bad 'cos you're after doing seven anyway. So when I get to that two, I was knocked back for three, or I was knocked back for one which was great as I was on my way to the Training Unit, I was ready to go and then I was knocked back for three and then after that three then I was recommended for release. So it doesn't seem so far ahead. Like if you're knocked back for twelve months, you say to yourself 'Well, I've done seven or eight years so twelve months is not going to kill me, you know'. So you don't feel the years actually going by you know, twenty years just flew in.....*

Each of the participants had to learn to cope with their expectations of being released after ten years not being realised. With the benefit of hindsight as can be seen from Ciaran, a number of the participants feel that the time in prison has passed quite quickly, especially now that they are actively on the pathway to release.

> *Yeah, back then it was fifteen years, so I remember saying that's a long time off but now hind sight, you know what I mean (clicks fingers) it's gone like that, then again I was on drugs for ten or twelve years you know what I mean (Graham)*

One participant's experience was such that every time he seemed to be at the point of release the Minister for Justice would increase the length of the tariff and he would once again miss out on the opportunity to be released. Ferdia was initially due to be released after seven years and had been informed that he would be released at that stage. Changes to the release structure at that time meant that he did not get released at that stage. This experience was repeated until he ended up serving eighteen years as a result of different Ministers for Justice deciding to lengthen the time served.

> *…..and that would have brought it up to ten years then. I was guaranteed I was getting out at ten years and then when I got to within a couple of months, a couple of weeks of ten years, I was told the life sentence had gone up and I'd have to spend twelve years in prison, you know what I mean, an extra two years on top of what I had already spent……..But when I got to twelve years and I was actually a week away from there and I was told it had gone up to fifteen years….because when it got to fifteen years, it then went to seventeen, and then another six months to get the paper work sorted for getting out (Ferdia)*

The uncertainty about release dates and the continual lengthening of the sentence was potentially very damaging for the participants. Particularly as other research has shown that "*with the prospect of release, most prisoners will revert to an outsider's view in the final months of their sentence*" (Jewkes, 2012b, p51). When dates of release are moved or non-existent the individual will remain with the '*insider's perspective'* and this can impact on their ability to adjust to the '*outsider's view'* upon their release.

The concept of time and keeping track of time becomes something that life sentence prisoners tend to have to learn to let go of in order to manage the time. This experience isn't unique to the current men as other research has spoken about long-term sentence prisoners including life sentence prisoners managing their sentence one day at a time (Johnson & McGunigall-Smith, 2008).

> *when you're doing a life sentence, it's like, a day becomes a year, you don't keep track of anything, dates, birthdays….I do often have to question myself, how old am I, you know what I mean, you have to go back to your date of birth and "oh my God am I that age?" (Graham)*

Learning how to structure the time through attending school or working is particularly important for the participants who are sentenced to life. This now brings me onto the findings about the participant's experience of prison.

5.4. Experience of prison

5.4.1. Prison as a life saver

One of the lessons that some of the participants learned during their time in prison was the role that prison had played in maintaining their lives and preventing them from unravelling even further than they had at the time of the crime. In some way the point of imprisonment can be defined as the intervention of the "outside force" that Maruna refers to in his definition of the redemption script that was discussed earlier in Chapter 2. Prison as the "outside force" often provided the "*someone who believed in the ex-offender*" and provided them with the impetus to "*re-write their shameful past"* (Maruna, 2001, p87). This view of imprisonment as a life saver and impetus for a change in identity narrative, contradicts the experience of one of the participants in the research whose original experience of imprisonment as a teenager confirmed his "*deviant identity*" rather than disrupted it (Maruna, 2001, p139).

As was discussed in the literature chapter, prison often intervenes in lives that are already marked by "discontinuity". The discontinuity can be brought on by family factors or as in the case of some the research participants by increasing dependency on drugs or alcohol. This is particularly obvious in Alan's story where he talks about prison saving his life.

> *Alan: Prison saved my life and that's the way I put it ehmm.....I messed up big time, I was going downhill for a very long time, I didn't know how to stop ehmm....I killed [the victim] and that turned everything around.*
>
> *L: So you were out of control by that stage?*

> *Alan: Probably worse, I probably didn't know how far I was going to go....I don't know if there is anything worse than what I did but that is what stopped me. I haven't had a drink since the day I shot [the victim] and that was the first year, [in the 1990s], and I gave up smoking a couple of years later and I was never really into hard drugs, I dabbled in hash and E's and stuff like that but nothing heavy*

For Alan the crime was a sign of how far gone he was in terms of drinking and loss of control of his life. His story is one in which unmanaged anger and shame led to violence (Braithwaite, 1993, Gilligan, 1999). Prison very quickly became his home and a point of stability for him. He adapted to his surroundings and learned how to make the most out of his time in prison.

> *It was very stupid, but it still saved my life and it made my life better even though I've been in jail for most of that time but I've had some really good times in jail. (Alan)*

Alan's view of prison as a life saver is not unique to him and was also shared by Harry who stated that he would be dead now if it wasn't for prison. This view is due to the amount of alcohol that he was consuming prior to his imprisonment.

> *Ah, I'd say I'd be dead, I believe I'd be dead, yeah I think if I did not come to prison I would be dead by now 'cos I don't think there was anything there stopping me drinking myself into a grave (Harry)*

As was discussed in the previous findings chapter, he did not identify himself as an alcoholic prior to the crime. This is something that he has learned about in prison and learned to come to terms with during his life sentence.

> *…I was isolated you see and away from my family and about myself I could care less. Things had gone so wrong in the year before it happened, to me they couldn't get any worse and I wasn't wishing for death and I didn't want to die. I did not have a death wish, it's only afterwards when I look back I think 'gees do you know what if I actually stayed going the way I was going I would have over-flooded my liver or something, I would have died in my sleep, choked on vomit or something. (Harry)*
>
> .

An increasing dependency on alcohol was the common denominator between the four participants who stated that they saw the intervention of prison in their life history as being a life-saving intervention. However, this intervention came at a price.

> *L: When you look back, do you see prison as being a positive experience?*
>
> *Evan: I have to say yeah, thinking about it I have to say yeah, but it was a pity, pity I had to learn about life that way....that's what I always say… I suppose it has saved me, it has given me a life, it has given me something to focus on, it's given me a crutch, but it's a pity that it had to happen this way that I found out ...that I learned about myself, it's a pity that a life had to be lost*

Even the participants who don't see prison as being a life-saver, also don't see being in prison as being at "rock bottom".

> *I always thank God for what I have and not what I don't have. I always look at the bright side of everything and here I was so I hit rock bottom that time and even though I was in prison I wasn't at rock bottom then, I had already hit rock bottom before then.....so prison was never rock bottom for me even at the worst times, even that first couple of months. (Brian)*

Much of the reason that prison was perceived as a life saver was the opportunities that it presented for learning and primarily learning about life and self.

5.4.2. Learning within the prison system

All of the participants spoke at varying lengths about the learning that had taken place within the prison. Within this they included the learning that had taken place within the education units, as well as the learning that had taken place through availing of psychological services and interactions with prison staff and other prisoners. Education within a prison setting serves a number of purposes for prisoners. It can provide an opportunity to catch up on what they have missed out on in other educational settings. It can also provide a positive, constructive way to manage the time in prison (MacGuinness, 2000, DuGuid, 2000). By providing a means of passing time for the prisoners, education in the current research study helped the participants to survive the

prison environment and the lengthy sentence as well as assisting them in learning about themselves.

> Education… constituted a way of coming to terms with making sense of a long/life sentence by being able to set determinate markers and running a kind of parallel time track. (Worth, 1994, 38)

Their experience of learning in prison was one of '*becoming*' a different person as Jarvis would say. It was developmental as the reality of being imprisoned caused disjuncture in their social world and created a learning opportunity for the participants. As mentioned in the literature review, not every prisoner learns from their experience but the research participants were able to apply a learning lens to their experience.

The traditional focus on learning in prison occurs formally within the Education Units where each of the participants were encouraged to participate in education in a proactive way.

> *I went to school and I was doing different courses, you know FETAC's, Computer Courses, I think the first exam I did was me Technical drawing in Junior Cert and I passed it and then I just did one subject a year...I did Maths one year, I did English I think one year....another lad decided he wanted to do his leaving cert and me and him did five subjects and ehmm we got it. We passed it and we were delighted and after that it was like 'Let's go and do an OU course' because we had the confidence but we dropped out after a while because it was just too much and I didn't want to do it, you know (Alan)*

The Prison Education Units as mentioned previously are run by the VEC's and as such operate within an adult education ethos. This was particularly important for the participants who struggled in school as children and had literacy issues. The participants were able to benefit from a non-formal model of education in comparison to their formal experience of education as a child.

> *L: How different was your experience because you said that you didn't like school when you were a child so then as an adult how did you view it?*
>
> *Alan: Yeah, I think it was because we were all adults and were mature and weren't going on like kids and stuff like that but the classes were a lot smaller, the*

> *most you'd have in a class was probably six you know what I mean and the most you'd have in a class as kids was probably thirty.*

As life sentence prisoners the participants were all encouraged to take up any learning opportunities that the Prison Education Units presented to them. These opportunities have value not just because of their intrinsic learning value but also as a time management strategy. Without having a structure on a daily basis, the sentence would pass very slowly (Johnson & Dobrzanska, 2005).

> *I was lucky, I always felt I kept my head on when I was in prison. I done a good bit. I done the government savings scheme for four years and I done loads of things that would keep me going, I done me leaving cert, I done like loads of courses to keep me busy over the years and I always kept up to date with things. I always read papers, I always watched telly and things like that to keep up to date with things (Ciaran)*

One the first things that Ciaran learned in prison was how to use his time well and to keep in touch with the outside world. Ciaran never disconnected from the outside world and was as active as it was possible to be in keeping up to date with the changes that were occurring in the external environment. The introduction of television sets into prison cells represented an important tool for prisoners, not just in occupying their time but also in keeping in touch with how the world outside looks.

> *I never took sleepers or medication or anything like that so I was lucky like to have my wits around me. If I couldn't sleep I'd get up and write a letter, so I used to write 5 or 6 letters a day when I first came in before mobile phones came along like er...tellies as well before tellies were in the cells, I'd done all exams and then these tellies arrived and I never got an A since! (Ciaran)*

Ciaran wasn't the only man to comment on the introduction of televisions to the prisons. A number of other participants spoke of the importance of televisions in maintaining a visual connection to the external changing world as well as also helping to pass the time in the cells in the evening.

The range of courses available within the Prison Education system is enhanced by a wide variety of programmes that prisoners can avail of through the Open University.

> *Harry:….When I came here it wasn't a huge problem and when I went to the [prison name] I threw myself into Education and my degree is done, I have now got my degree.*
>
> *L-Was that through the Open University?*
>
> *Harry: Yes, I've a BSc.*

As mentioned earlier, only two of the participants had completed second level education prior to their imprisonment. For one of the participants his experience of prison education was his first formal learning experience.

> *….and when I started going to school, I started to learn reading and writing and basic, very basic you know....(Ferdia)*

The Prison Education Units provided Ferdia with an opportunity to build further on those skills throughout his sentence.

> *….but at the end of the day I said 'well I'm going to have to get through this sentence' and I got focused, I ended up actually doing junior cert, leaving cert and part of a college course. (Ferdia)*

Therefore education within the prison walls was a more productive and positive experience for the participants than their childhood experience of education had been. This experience of adult learning being more positive than childhood learning is not unique to prisoners but it is more predominant within the prison population. As is the higher levels of literacy and numeracy problems (Morgan & Kett, 2003). The participants who experienced the highest level of literacy problems were the same participants that had been exposed to the challenges of poverty and persistent poverty as children. The difficulties that they experienced in school were compounded by coming from poor homes or being institutionalised at a young age and being exposed to violence and abuse. Their level of risk of academic failure was substantially increased because there was more than one risk factor present for all of the participants

concerned (Leroy & Symes, 2001). Some of the factors related to poverty that may place a child at-risk for academic failure are:

- very young, single or low educational level parents;
- unemployment;
- abuse and neglect;
- substance abuse;
- dangerous local communities;
- homelessness;
- mobility; and
- exposure to inadequate or inappropriate educational experiences. (Leroy & Symes, 2001, p46)

Therefore, the persistent poverty and trauma such as regular violence that some of the participants were exposed to as children affected their capacity to learn. The fact that these at-risk factors were not addressed as children means that the approach taken by the teachers within the prison needs to be sensitised to the opportunities that were missed by previous educationalists. These issues were discussed previously in the literature chapter and the experience of Ferdia, Graham, Derek and Alan in particular support the literature.

5.4.3. "I wanted to find out what was wrong"

One of the major motivations for learning for some of the participants during the course of their imprisonment was their desire to understand why they committed the crime. The need to learn the reasons behind the behaviour is part of the acceptance process for some of the participants who sought to address this very early in their sentence (Johnson, 2002, Toch, 2010).

> *Harry: Because I had all the services in [prison name], I did two years in a therapeutic community... I did Anger Management, I did alcohol awareness, Counselling, I did one to one counselling with a psychologist… I did my writings and stuff like that I got involved in the prison magazine. [Prison name] was a good prison and you could play sport and things like that*
>
> *L- You used your time well.*

Harry: Yeah I knew I wanted to find out what was wrong, what exactly was the problem. Was it drink, was it a mentality thing, what was it, was it an emotional thing?

****

Brian:….you know relationships, dodgy, dodgy.... you know but I had gone through the relationship thing with the psychologist and all that so I learned a lot of things, a lot from it

L: So you have a good understanding now

Brian: yeah, a lot of stuff that I didn't really understand and with three different psychologists, I've gone through three different psychologists through the years…. So I've kind of done a lot, I wanted to get to the bottom of it myself....

L: You wanted to understand?

Brian: Well I knew, I know deep down that... the kids often say to me especially [the eldest two] because I would be very open with them two in particular and they'd say 'Daddy you're not a bad person' you know what I mean and 'We know you're not' so like....but I have to convince myself of that if you know what I mean..

****

I know that's not the real Evan...I'm not trying to justify it but I know that's not the real person, I know the real person sitting down in front of you, I know the real emotional person sitting down in front of you has feelings, is a person that has a conscience, a person that knows wrong from right, I know I can never change what I have done, I'd say the majority of people would change if they could… (Evan)

As can be seen in the above quotes, the challenge presented with the lifer identity is the struggle to absorb the moral realities that the offence brings with it and learning how to live with the lifer identity and the reality of having taken a life. With that learning comes the concept of remorse as "*a perpetually interim, never-to-be-satisfied restless state…the re-biting of experience following a doing which cannot be undone*" (Cox, 1999, p16). For the participants who killed someone that they were close to the remorse is compounded by their need to grieve the death of the victim, a grief made

more complicated by their role in the death of the person (Horne, 1999). This is particularly pertinent in the current research where only one of the victims was completely unknown to the life sentence prisoner.

The interviews at times were very emotional for the participants particularly when they talked about their previous relationships with the victims and the victims' families. One man spoke very poignantly about being forgiven by the victims' mother at a very early stage and the impact that this had on him.

> *I found that very hard to accept in the beginning, how somebody could forgive me for what I done....that's hard to get around, you have to get that into your head too...I'd say how could she do that ...but it did help further down the line…I have accepted it...it was a big help... but it doesn't make it any easier (Evan)*

The participants managed their remorse in various ways, some of them by praying for their victims every day.

> *I don't like me for what I done either. It's not like I think it's a great thing that I done. I'm ashamed of what I done, you know what I mean and it's a hard thing to live with because if you take a life its forever, you can't take that back and it's a very hard thing to live with. I mean I pray for my victim every night and every morning I think of her. (Ciaran)*

****

> *Well you know I look at the bright side of things...because you know what I mean there is nothing that I can do about the past. For a good few years this guilt was getting…. and I still have this inferiority guilty complex, an inferiority complex, it's there the whole time but at the same time you know I'm not going to be able to change things. I'd love to be able to contact [victim's] family and say I'm sorry and I'd love to be able to do all that but a lot of those things are not realistic. Ehmm, I pray for [victim] on a daily basis, I do whatever I can within the limits of what I'm allowed and what I can do consciously or any other way that's as far as I can go. (Brian)*

Others by holding onto the feeling of guilt for their crime as a constant reminder of what they have done and that in spite of what they have done they are human. Guilt as we saw earlier is about the behaviour rather than about the person, it says "I did something bad" not "I am bad".

> *…when I was young, doing the counselling, the Counsellor, said "We've gone as far as we can". As I said to her, "I will always have this bit of guilt", it's something I can never get rid of, but, it's a bit raw today, but it's a bit of guilt, it's a healthy bit of guilt, that's what I call it. It's the bit of guilt that.... keeps... me…safe and I have a conscience as well, you know what I mean, and it goes to show that I have a conscience cause if I didn't have that bit of guilt I'd say "Where is it gone, a conscience?" (Evan)*

One of the participants spoke about not having remorse for the victim as he felt that the victim's actions had contributed to the offence. Instead he had remorse for the family members.

> *L: So there wasn't any shame attached to the murder itself because of why you did it?*
>
> *Alan: No, not for me and sometimes I think my family understands why I'm not ashamed of what I did and the remorse thing as well, like I said it was a long time before I had remorse and I think the reason.....I did have remorse at the beginning I had remorse for [the victim's] children*

In Alan's case he claims that he has no remorse because of the reason behind the murder that he didn't just kill someone for the sake of it. For Alan that differentiates his act from the crimes committed by other life sentence prisoners that he knows.

> *L: So you feel it's different to an 'ordinary' murder, there is no stigma or shame for you in what you have done?*
>
> *Alan: No, you should be ashamed for stuff like that and maybe I am, okay, I don't know, I don't feel it and I'm not going to say I am, I don't really feel it. I don't like what I done, I'm not proud of that but at the same time if I didn't do that I was going downhill, and I might have ended up dead. So is that being selfish?*

So Alan has learned how to manage his lack of remorse and shame for his crime through his ten years of counselling with the psychology services. While he has no remorse he also states that he doesn't like what he did, so there is an internal conflict that he has to learn how to manage as he looks to the release process.

As was discussed both in the previous findings chapter and the literature review, shame has been a recurring theme throughout the course of the men's imprisonment. The shame that the participants feel about their crime was discussed in different ways by the men in the interviews. Brian in an earlier quote spoke about "*having gone through the mill*" in terms of dealing with the offence. He was also very clear about being "*embarrassed*" and "*traumatised*" by what he had done.

> *L: So it was a traumatic experience for you even though you weren't the victim as such?*
>
> *Brian: Oh God, yeah it is I can't even explain it to you. It still is even when I talk about it; you know it's traumatic for me. When I think about it the whole…. there's times when I find it hard to believe that... It's kind of embarrassing for me because I never thought that I could do something like that...*

Grappling with all of the emotions and moral issues that arose with the offence can be challenging in a prison setting. Therefore, the role of the psychologist was of primary importance in assisting the participants in learning how to understand what had led to the crime and how to handle the feelings of guilt, remorse and/or shame that resulted from their imprisonment.

5.4.4. Role of staff

While prison can present for some prisoners as an isolating experience where they have been removed from their families and people that they would choose to spend time with, the real challenge of being in prison on an indeterminate sentence is that you are constantly surrounded by people; other prisoners and prison staff.

> There are two contrasting truisms relating to prison life: first, that prison is full of tension and conflict; and secondly, that prison life is all about relationships. (Liebling, 2004, p258)

The following section looks at the importance of the relationships between the participants and the prison staff. Their ability to manage these relationships was a defining experience in how they perceived their imprisonment. This section won't go into any in-depth discussion on the relationships that the participants spoke about with their fellow prisoners.

Only two of the participants spoke about having a trusted friend who was also a prisoner and they emphasised the rarity of this friendship and the difficulty in trusting another prisoner because the nature of the prison setting is such that it breeds distrust between prisoners. The participants preference was to focus on their own time and to not seek to develop friendships with other prisoners.

Psychological support for life sentence prisoners

Life sentence prisoners can avail of one-to-one support as well as a peer support group facilitated by prison based psychologists and/or Probation Officers.

> *I started interacting with psychology and it was through drugs that I started interaction, going through withdrawals and sick of the 'them and me' and the no hope… I copped on to psychology doing reports around the thirteen/fourteen year mark and I just threw my cards on the table being open and honest about my addiction, and being open and honest about my life, putting shame out of it, you know what I mean, because anytime I was in the blocks or in dark places I done loads of reading then and deep thinking. (Graham)*

The language the participants use when they talk about their engagement with the psychology services is very active and presents the participants as active agents in the search to understand their offence. They talk of '*interacting*' or '*working*' with psychology rather than learning. Part of the language choice of the participants may be the reality that they felt that they had very little choice about their engagement with psychological services. The psychologist contributes reports to the Parole Board, therefore making it an essential step in order to leave prison.

> *Alan: Yeah, I think I got to the stage where I didn't really want to be working with the Probation anymore because there was nothing more to do or say or tell or whatever you know. Now I did a lot of intense work with the Psychology service for a good ten years*
>
> *L- Was that one-to-one counselling?*

> *Alan: Yeah and I didn't have a choice in that, you do it or you don't do it. If you don't do it you just don't get anywhere you know.*

In addition to receiving psychological support around their offence and the parole process, the participants were also able to talk to the psychologists about issues from their childhood. Their most important learning throughout their imprisonment took place in the one-to-one sessions with the prison psychologist.

> *Yeah, you know what I mean but I learned a lot about myself in prison. I learned enough that you know what I mean, I learned enough not to go back there. I don't want to go back in there. (Ferdia)*

It also helped him to learn about the role that drinking had played in relation to his anger. Through the counselling sessions, he was given space to learn about himself and to accept himself in a way that hadn't occurred previously.

> *L: Was that the first time you had counselling--after fifteen years?*
>
> *Ferdia: Yeah, that was fifteen years and I was two years with it, let me see, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years, yeah nearly two and a half years, up to the day I got released. I used to see her every week, then it was every second week and then when I was coming up for a parole hearing and she said to me "Ferdia, you are going to be released so we might just step it down to once a month" and then it was a month and a half and it was gradually stepped away from it.*

As can be seen from the above, the interaction with the psychologists provided the participants with substantial areas of growth and learning.

> *I was told by psychologists in the prison that when I don't drink, I'm able to suppress everything, but when I drink, it all comes out - like false courage you know what I mean it just comes out and it ended up that, I got into a fight with a fella and he came at me then when I was drunk. Then I came back at him again when I was drunk, and that kind of thing. (Ferdia)*

One of the primary areas that the psychologists worked on with the participants was the offence. This work focussed on learning what factors

were involved in the crime and building on protective factors to reduce the risk of any other similar offences occurring in the future.

> *Drink was a factor, it wasn't the reason. The reason was my train of thought, my thinking, drink was a factor and I've worked on all the factors in my case and to make that not happen again I had to learn things not to do so I don't drink because drink was a factor so it's not the reason why it happened but if I cut drink out of my life it lowers the percentage of it happening again along with other things (Ciaran)*
>
> **********
>
> *….lifers are all different because there's so many different variables in lifers. You know you have the crime itself, the remorse, the guilt, what you've done since you came in, have you p19's, I never had a p19 since I came in, I have worked in various areas in psychology. Psychologists decide whether you're going to get out or not like so I finished with psychologists last year actually over a year ago nearly 2 years ago now. I finished with the psychology... (Brian)*

The learning wasn't only about the risk factors that related to the offence but also about dealing with the emotions that are involved when you take a life. One of the most predominant emotions that the participants spoke about during the research is the shame that relates to the crime itself.

Overall, the participants view of and experience of prison based psychologists was a positive one, in contrast to how prison based psychologists are perceived in the UK and internationally. In Ireland the Prison Psychology Service operates from a therapeutic, client-centred model of therapy. They combine this model of therapeutic care that is designed to assist prisoners in coping with their imprisonment and any mental health issues that may arise as a result of their confinement, with an examination of risk factors and this is a requirement for all life sentence prisoners. Therefore, they work in a therapeutic way with life sentence prisoners on a one-to-one basis. The focus of this therapy is on developing insight and assisting the individual prisoners' in understanding themselves and their crimes. Access to the prison based psychologists tends to come later in the sentence for life sentence prisoners and as such it is not

something that occurs straight away. While they make written reports to the Parole Board that include recommendations on release that are based on the one-to-one counselling sessions that they hold with the prisoners, they are viewed as a source of positive support by the participants even if it is a requirement to attend if they want to be released someday.

In addition to their work with the prison based psychologists the participants had constant interactions with other prison staff, particularly the prison officers. The next section outlines the participant's experience of interactions with prison staff including the officers.

Prison Officers

All of the participants have spent substantial periods of time in prison. Therefore the relationships and contact that they have with prison staff forms an important part of their experience of imprisonment and identity development as discussed earlier. Other research has highlighted the importance of staff-prisoner relationships in terms of the atmosphere that is created within the prison and the overall well-being of the prisoners.

> Prisoners describe stark differences in the moral and emotional climates of prisons serving apparently similar functions. The 'differences that matter' are in the domain of interpersonal relationships and treatment, and the use of authority, which lead to stark differences in perceived fairness and safety, and different outcomes. (Liebling, 2011, p532)

The experience of the participants in the current research supports the findings of Lieblings' research as they have all been in more than one prison and could speak about the different treatment that they received within each of the prisons. The participants contact with people who work within the prison system was constant and provided them with lots of different experiences and opportunities for learning. The experience of the participants was very mixed with some feeling they were treated better than expected and also experiencing great compassion from prison staff.

> *I found generally that prison officers there, it all depends like, and if you were giving them respect they'll give you respect back that was my experience of staff...I'd always be polite to them and they'd*

> *always be polite back to me… but genuinely speaking, I got on very well with them, they all treated me with respect, none of them ever mentioned "you scumbag" you know what I mean, no one (Evan)*
>
> **********
>
> *To be fair, I was never treated badly anywhere I've ever been, of course I've bumped into bad officers and bad governors but in terms of being abused or even mistreated no, that's never happened to me. (Harry)*
>
> **********
>
> *Yeah they were good to me and I think it was good to me because I was being good. If a prison officer came up to me and said "Jump" I'd say "How high?", that's it…. I didn't have any trouble with the prison officers, I got on with most of them and the ones I didn't get on with, I didn't go near again. (Alan)*

All of the participants were very conscious of their treatment by prison officers being a result of their compliance or non-compliance with the rules. Their experience of the nature of their compliance and control within the prison echoes Foucault's argument about power within the prison and the internalisation of control. Their compliance is a learned behaviour that results from the participants living in a controlled environment.

While a number of participants spoke about being well treated, they are clear that this was because they weren't troublesome prisoners and that they did what they were supposed to do. The participants expressed their awareness of other prisoners being treated violently by prison staff and were always aware of other prisoners who may have been treated more favourably. For life sentence prisoners in a confined environment and sharing landings with the same prisoners for years on end, it was very easy to see who was being perceived to be treated more favourably.

> Concepts of trust, relationships, fairness, legitimacy and safety have emerged at the core of prison life dynamics, reinforcing the argument that questions of interpersonal treatment are among the most important matters of being human as well as the most important aspects of prison life. (Liebling, 2011, p544)

Some of the other participants spoke about individual officers taking a positive interest in them and the difference that this made to them managing

their time in prison. This included being transferred to other prisons at the request of prison officers. Brian talks about his experience of this in the following extract from the data.

> *Brian: There was a Chief there and I got on well with him and I was there for a while anyway and he got shifted. He got promoted to a three bar in [Prison B]. And Jaysus after about two or three weeks of him being up there.....this ACO (Officer) came in to me, I was listening to the races one Saturday, in those days there were no televisions and the next thing the door opened and the ACO came in with a black bag. I looked at him and said to him "You're joking me" and he said "No Brian, I'm not" and I said "Am I being shifted?" and "Yeah' he says and I said "So where are we going?" and he said "You're going to [Prison B]". "So what did I do wrong?" that was the first thing I said....he said "Brian, I don't know why you're being shifted, I haven't got a clue" so...I got my stuff packed and I went down to this other ACO Mr X and I said to him did he have any idea why I'm being shifted and he said you can thank (the Chief officer) for it; he wants you up in [Prison B]…so I said "Feck (Chief Officer) anyway I like it here" and they said "Look if you don't like it in [Prison B], we will always take you back, the door is always open" so I was in [Prison B] the next morning and I never looked back, that was the best move ever and he was really good to me there...*

Brian attributes his positive experience of imprisonment to the interest that this particular prison officer took in him. The officer ensured that Brian was transferred to the same prison that he was in and also ensured that Brian's skills were put to good use in the prison.

> *Yeah he made an awful difference, his interest in me was kind of a life changing experience for me because he seen something in me probably, positive, you know and I be also a good example... but I have something there, I don't know what it is and it is nothing to brag about but I have something in me that means I can be an influence on others, I can influence a landing for example.... (Brian)*

The officer seeing something positive in Brian was an important factor for Brian as he sought to re-establish his identity as a life sentence prisoner and helped him to find the good in his negative experience.

> Major setbacks in life can challenge a person's assumptive world, but benefit-finding can help to reconstitute that world by specifying an anticipated redemption sequence wherein bad events are expected to give way to good outcomes. (McAdams et al 2001, p476)

It also assisted him in learning how to deal with other officers who wouldn't have looked on him in such a positive light. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Ricoeur argued that there is "*no self without another who summons it to responsibility*" (Ricoeur, 1992, p187), therefore the role of others is crucial in the construction of a positive identity. Brian's positive experience was not unique. Ciaran also spoke about the friendships that he has established with prison officers over the years.

> *Yeah and when the Minister found out I was driving the prison van, he wasn't too happy but the Governor was like Bill Cullen "You're fired" but he didn't blame me, he blamed Mr X (officer) but Mr X done more for me in terms of rehabilitation than anybody else like...(Ciaran)*

Others felt that their experience of prison officers was more negative during their imprisonment. However they have learned about the part they played in the negative relationship with prison officers. Graham spoke very clearly about his "*little hard man*" identity that he carried into prison with him. This identity was physically embodied by him at the start of his imprisonment for life.

> *…when I came into jail for the life sentence, they had a system, and because of my body language to their reaction of me, I was born and bred for it, to be honest with you, do you understand, because I didn't come into prison like you know (scared)…I came in "bring it on" you know what I mean, little hard man… (Graham)*

Graham has learned that his attitude to his imprisonment and the anger that he carried into prison with him resulted in his experience of imprisonment

being a particularly violent one.

> *But I ended up knocking out two of the screws in [Prison A] and they beat the hell off me and I got barred out of [Prison A] then. There was a conflict of interest because of the fights there, I'd antagonise them and they'd beat me again…. I ended up getting took to [Prison B], then thrown back down to [Prison A], and I got broke up, then thrown back to the [Prison B] then to [Prison C]. Then from [Prison C] back to [Prison B]… (Graham)*

He has also learned that his violent and provocative behaviour in prison was a survival mechanism that he had learned at home by witnessing violence as a child. Graham's behaviour in his view now was also triggered by the attitude of some officers as well as the similarity between prison officer uniforms and Garda uniforms.

> *Yeah, the blue uniform, ask me something, don't tell me anything, and so when I got my goat up they got their goat up and bang, and things came from it, who am I to dig them, you know what I mean, they beat the head off me and "we can't charge him 'cos we'd be charged"… (Graham)*

Another issue that was seen by another participant as being antagonistic towards prisoners was the introduction of the practice of strip-searches in the Training Unit. The first strip search in which Ferdia was asked to participate was within his prison cell. This was something that was too much for him to cope with as it felt like an invasion not just of his body but his living space.

> *Especially when you have three men there- you have one man standing behind you and two men, one man this side of you and one man the other side of you and they're telling you to strip and stuff like that, you know what I mean… But as I said that was the first time where I did kind of lose it, when they came into my cell to do it.....it's your home, in there your cell is your home because I'm living in it, I'm sleeping in it, I'm keeping it clean and at the time first, when I first arrived there I was actually eating in there at first, you know what I mean.. (Ferdia)*

Ferdia's reaction to the strip search resulted in him being brought before the

Governor. However the support that he received from a prison officer during this highlights the complexity of the line that a prison officer has to walk, where security has to be balanced with humanity and compassion.

> *I was called down to the Chiefs office and the Chief says to me "you were told you were going to have a strip search today" and I said "I wasn't told I was going to have a strip search, or I would have told them the same as what I told them, I wasn't taking my clothes off", but I wasn't being as polite as that about it.....but ehmm, he turned around and said "why?" and I said " go down to (psychologist) and ask her why, my business is my business, it's not yours".... and one of the screws at the time, that's the way I was feeling, I was calling them screws and this and that and the other at the time, turned around, one of them that was actually going to do it said "it's because he was in the schools, that's why he wouldn't.." (Ferdia)*

Whilst the search caused extreme distress for Ferdia, his refusal was understood by the Governor. In addition, it was one of the prison officers who was tasked with undertaking the strip search that offered the explanation for Ferdia's hostile response. Thus highlighting the complex narrative of care and control that Ferdia experienced within the prison.

Other participants also experienced prison officers providing emotional support for them. Evan struggled with the support that was offered to him by female officers as well as other female members of staff.

> *..it was actually a nurse that mentioned it (counselling) to me one time, I was going down to the kitchen and I just passed by the nurses' station and she just called me in one day and said....I actually had been talking to her a good few times anyway and she's retired now and I had been talking to her a good few times, X was her name and she was originally from my home, well not from my home town but from my county, so we used to have the banter you know what I mean we used to have just general conversations and then one day she just said this to me, she said "Evan, get your counselling through the HSE you can talk about whatever you want, your drinking or whatever you want to talk about she might be a help, would you like to see her?"... (Evan)*

The role that staff play within the prison is a vital one in terms of their

interaction with life sentence prisoners. The opportunities for learning through these relationships are immense and can be seen in the participant's experience of prison. It was some of the prison staff who were active in assisting the participants to process and accept their sentence. They also were proactive in providing a listening ear to help the men to deal with their sentence and to learn from their experience and to prepare for release. Some of The staff working within the prison also played a vital role in naming addiction as an issue for many of the men in the research. They also played an important role in encouraging the participants to engage in education and to look forward to release at some point in the future. This experience is supported by prison based research in the UK that found that:

> Prisoner well-being was higher…. where prisoners felt treated with respect, suggesting that prisoners feel better when their future is being considered. There are good empirical as well as moral arguments, therefore, for aiming for re-socialization and decent treatment, and for holding prisons to account on those objectives. (Liebling, 2011, p535)

I am conscious that in a narrative based study such as this one it isn't possible to undertake an in-depth review of the role of the prison officer within the prison and how they manage the power that is embedded in that role. However, it is important that the participant's experience of prison officers, both positive and negative is named as a central part of their stories.

5.4.5. Addiction in prison

While prison provided a respite from drinking immediately for six of the participants, it took the rest a number of years to get to a place where they no longer wanted to abuse alcohol or drugs.

> *Well, my experience when I got sentenced first, it took me a good few years to just to get my head around everything, you know, it wasn't something, well actually, I have to mention it as well…When I was in [Prison B] I was making homebrew. I learned how to make homebrew so,… my addiction was very, very strong, my attraction to...how will I put it, to get high, to get away, to block stuff out in prison and I got caught several times as well and I got P19's and that, you know what I mean.. They didn't bother me, I'd go back and I'd make it again. (Evan)*

Evan continued drinking in prison and getting caught for a number of years. As a life sentence prisoner, the P19's[15] had no deterrent effect on his need to consume alcohol within the prison walls.

> *Obviously I had nothing to lose, I mean a P19 is not going to make much difference to me like, but eh between the counselling and going to AA I found it tough and I found it moving like ... I could talk to members and they understood me as well. I cried in AA meetings as well when I was talking. (Evan)*

The turning point for Evan was the intervention of a Probation Officer who asked him if he was an alcoholic. Again highlighting the positive role of staff based in prisons whilst noting that it took ten years for someone to ask him.

> *Well, I was nearly in about ten (years) at that stage between the remand and stuff but I was actually coming up to my first parole hearing, and I was talking to a welfare officer, and it was him actually that said to me after interviewing me and asking how I was getting on, doing his reports and he just said to me "Evan, can I ask you a question - are you an alcoholic?" and I cried and I said I was ...I think there is some part of me always wanted ....something, somebody to tease it out… and I said, "I am", without hesitation I said I was… (Evan)*

Addiction was the greatest area of learning for the participants whilst in prison. With the acknowledgement of their addiction, comes the opportunity to learn more about it and themselves.

> *So then I started going to meetings. I started to educate myself a bit as well you know and I could see people were more willing to talk to me as well even staff you know what I mean. (Evan)*

This learning was through a number of areas including the psychological services and education units. In addition there was substantial peer support available through the in-prison AA[16] groups.

> *But I'll tell you I look back at it, at the time it was going slow but I got up to a lot of things, there were classes going on and I got to go and I just heard them*

[15] A P19 is a formal disciplinary form on which all transgressions by prisoners are recorded and warnings issued to prisoners for breaches of various rules within the prison.

[16] The model that AA meetings operate on is based on two principles; Anonymity and learning from the experience of others.

> *shouting AA and I banged on me door and said 'is there AA?' and they said there was AA so I went to AA continuously for eight-nine years. (Alan)*

In the community, the anonymous element of AA is easier to maintain than in a closed environment such as a secure prison. However this didn't present as a concern for any of the research participants who availed of AA whilst in prison.

> *I went to the counselling for the two years and I talked through stuff like that, I had actually started going to AA meetings then as well… I never even thought of AA (before prison), I never thought I had a problem until I went to AA meetings and I started listening to other people, started listening to their patterns. (Evan)*

Not all of the participants described themselves as alcoholics even though drink was involved in all of their crimes. Two of the participants stated that they don't drink and won't drink upon release but they don't see themselves as alcoholics. All of the participants will have conditions around alcohol usage upon their release.

> *I had been drinking but I hadn't got a...I suppose the person with the problem with drink is the person who says he hasn't got a problem with drink but I didn't over-drink, I drank a fair bit but I didn't crave drink. I mean I don't drink now and that's not due to going to any things I've done courses and awareness of drink. (Ciaran)*
>
> **********
>
> *Brian: I was a drinker you know but I wasn't… it's only in the last few months that I agreed with that...*
>
> *L: So you wouldn't have seen yourself as an alcoholic?*
>
> *Brian: No, no, though I had to say that I'm an alcoholic and I go to AA meetings and that, as it's part of my conditions but I know deep down that I'm not because I was just a weekend drinker. Now I might go out for the night I'd go out for the night, I'd be last out of the pub but that's not to say that I'd get up the next morning looking for a drink or anything like that. I'd be no worse than anybody else…*

As can be seen, Brian's admission to being an alcoholic is a strategy to manage the Parole process rather than a genuine insight into his behaviour.

The learning applied to those dealing with drug addiction as well as alcohol addiction. Drugs have remained a problem within the prison system in recent years. Graham spoke very clearly about being introduced to heroin in prison and becoming a heroin addict as a result of his imprisonment.

> *I'd never seen heroin in my life, not till I got to [Prison E] and I remember being in [Prison E], looking at lads, fucking hell how's that, for something that small... I could never get over it, couldn't understand it, I'd nothing to do with it for years and I remember one day one of the lads, and the funny thing about it was I didn't need it, I was young and I was strong, into training, healthy… I ended up getting a smoke off one of the boys, I got sick, fuck that, I wouldn't touch it again but I huttle on this for so long, trying to make me think of what made me have the second smoke, and I can't, I can't think of it, why, it must have been just a social thing, I had me second smoke and now in hindsight I can see exactly where it started spiralling, it became from once a month to once a week, and then I was always a regular… (Graham)*

His drug usage escalated when he was transferred to Prison F and he described a system of bartering with other prisoners in terms of maintaining his supply. Graham learned very quickly that one of the effects of drug usage was that they numbed him to the pain of imprisonment. His drug use became so apparent that eventually the prison Governor intervened with him.

> *So the Governor says to me "do you want to go on the 'phy*[17]*'?" I was in denial you know what I mean, I wouldn't take that stuff, and yet I'm selling in his prison, you know what I mean, and strung out to the back bone and my mother comes up to visit me and says "look son, I'm not coming up to you no more", and I says "why?", and she says "you're fucking dying in front of me". (Graham)*

Eventually Graham sought assistance for his addiction and whilst the medical services initially refused to give him medication to address his addiction, the intervention of the Governor ensured that he received the treatment that he needed.

[17] 'Phy' is short for physeptone, a synthetic opiate substitute that is given to heroin addicts under medical supervision to assist them withdrawing from heroin.

> *I went into the medic and asked them for phy and they wouldn't give it to me but I went into the Governor because he had asked me, and he got it for me… the Governor offered a way for me out of it, and like for me it was put my cards on the table, help me, you know what I mean, and they did, and because I'd seen a lot of discrimination with people with phy down there… medics would treat them like a second class citizen and come in to the landing 'anyone for the green diesel' like you know (Graham)*

This however did not always go smoothly. Graham reacted violently to his treatment being referred to as "green diesel".

> *but it happened this time and the governor and them called me in, gave me P19's this and that and "yes, I'll do it again" , I said, "listen, if I was dying of cancer, you Governor", I said, "you got me physeptone because I wanted off heroin, and for me to admit I was on heroin was a lot, now I come for help and you treat me like that, no wonder your fucking prison is fucked up", I said, you know what I mean, "don't ever fucking treat me like that, if I was dying of cancer" I said, "Would you treat me like that?" (Graham)*

Graham saw his addiction as a legitimate illness and wanted it respected as such. The reaction of the medics to the treatment of heroin addicts connected strongly with his experience of being shamed as a child hence making his response more volatile. It also highlighted the all-powerful position of the medics within the prison when it comes to prescribing medication, a situation that isn't unique to Irish prisons (Goffman, 1961). The use of power by staff in various sections of the prison is an important source of learning for those who work in the prison system.

> *No, I did it myself to get off it, but the fact is, the way they treated me nearly shunned me off it because the shame that comes with people that are on gear or a junkie mentality, the 'phy' heads, the lack of, you know, the humanity that people can give themselves and because of the deceptive lifestyle that goes with drugs, the heroin anyway (Graham)*

He has learned very early in his life that the only way to be heard was to be violent. Now that he is drug-free Graham has learned how to manage his anger without resorting to drugs or violence. His outlook has also changed

and he feels that he has learned a huge amount from his experience of being in prison.

> *This is what I've learned, you know that ...it would be very easy for me to go...to leave prison, and sow my wild oats…. I done that, now for me, having experienced heroin, cocaine and the volatile life that goes with it, to even...contemplate that, I'm better off shooting myself in the head, because it's not sustainable, you know what I mean, it only leads the one road… you're going to the grave or back to prison. Now to have gone through that and learnt lessons and seen it, why would you spend half your life in prison and want to continue in that role, you know what I mean.. That's my massive lesson, massive lesson and a good lesson, you know what I'm saying… (Graham)*

The lessons that the participants have learnt in prison in terms of managing their addiction and learning about themselves have also affected the participants who were parents when they first went into prison.

5.4.6. Parenting in prison

Not all of the participants had children at the time of the offence and imprisonment. While the participants spoke about their relationships with their children, their experiences were wide-ranging from no contact with their children to feeling as actively involved in their children's lives as a prison sentence can allow. Some of the participants have learnt a lot about themselves as fathers and spoke about this, others had not prioritised this area during their imprisonment. The issue of parenting from a prison setting is one that has a lot of potential learning for those of us that work in the sector particularly for educationalists. It is an under-researched area and one that is worth exploring further (Murray, 2005)

Five of the participants had children ranging from infants to adulthood at the time of their father's imprisonment. Of the participants who had children at the time of imprisonment, most of them were separated from their children's mother and not living with their children at the time of the offence and imprisonment.

> *…maybe the daughter got slagged going to school I don't know, "Your daddy is a murderer". I don't know… (Evan)*

Evan can only guess at the impact on his daughter as he has had no contact with her during his imprisonment. The stigma of imprisonment does not attach to the prisoner alone but also to their family members.

> ….the individual who is related through the social structure to a stigmatized individual – a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one. Thus….the daughter of the ex-con….are all obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized person to whom they are related….The problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity. (Goffman, 1963, p43).

Three of the participants whose children were very young at the time spoke about feeling an emotional disconnect between themselves and their children and of a lack of involvement in the rearing of their children. The first of these was Graham.

> *Graham: Yeah, she always visited me for years, every month or every couple of weeks, when she was a kid, but the last two years or three years I've seen her once*
>
> *L: So she's slipping away?*
>
> *Graham: Yeah, she's a different child now, she's a young woman...and it sounds sad but I have no emotional attachment to that*
>
> *L: So you don't feel any loss?*
>
> *Graham: I don't feel like her father.....*

During the interview with Graham I was struck by his statements about not feeling "like her father" and I explored this further with him.

> *yes, I can't be worrying about her insecurities that I did not install in her, now because I don't feel like her father, because the prison relationship and the father relationship is different.....I don't know her, I don't know her favourite music… (Graham)*

Graham has learned the impact that being in prison has on his role as a father, however he has no insight into the impact his being in prison had on his

daughter. This ‘feeling’ of not knowing his child is echoed by Ciaran who stated that:

> *So [eldest son] lives in [abroad 1] now at the moment and [second son] still lives in [abroad 2] with his Ma. But I haven’t seen [second son] in about 4 years...6 years and the reason that I don’t see him is he was younger when he went to [abroad 2] and that is his life now where [eldest son] kind of came back here for a year and then he went back and then came back for a year..... (Ciaran)*

Not all of the participants were visited by their children during their imprisonment. In Evan’s case he had separated from his wife prior to the offence and hadn’t been in regular contact with his daughter prior to his imprisonment.

> *I wasn’t there when she was growing up I don’t know anything about her, how she got on in school, I don’t know what she’s doing now, or what happened to her down through her life you know what I mean (Evan)*

The issue of re-connecting with children on their release from prison was one that had mixed reactions from the participants, ranging from a strong desire to see his daughter and to get to know her from Evan to a more pragmatic view from Graham. Two different attitudes formed in some part by their experience of parenting in prison and the distance that this placed between them and their children. Evan may get the opportunity to re-connect with his daughter now he’s released but is aware of the complexities involved in trying to build a relationship with a daughter that he hasn’t seen in a substantial period of time. He has a desire to learn how to manage that before ever initiating any contact with her. This is contrasted with Graham’s statement below with regard to the reduction in visits from his daughter.

> *Graham: .....look as I said... when I’m out and sorted and settled and in a good place, she’s more than welcome to come and ask me anything she wants*
>
> *L – but that’s a few years away yet*
>
> *Graham: preservation of my sanity, my sobriety and my life, for now, I have to be cruel to be kind, she knows she can get in contact with me, she knows where I am, it’s not as if I can go anywhere...*

Graham has a clear need to prioritise managing his sobriety during the release process and his relationship with his daughter is not a priority in that context. In addition, Graham sees his daughter as having more autonomy than he has as she can choose to either visit him or not when he is clearly "not going anywhere". Graham also compared the experience of his daughter to the experience of the victim's child.

> *Like...the bloke that I killed, his daughter…. will never see her father, she never knew her father, never will know him, my daughter does… she had the chance, she met me all her life, she knows who I am, she knows what I look like...and...She knows where I am, she should be grateful for that and that's sad but you know what I mean...that other girl will never see her father… (Graham)*

One of the challenges that some of the participants spoke about with regard to parenting in prison is the issue of having young children visit them. This raises practical issues in terms of cost of travel and limited time for visits as well as other issues such as the impact on children of knowing why their father is in prison.

> *yeah so you have to be careful what you say to children so I remember one time my son was acting up on the visit and I said to him '[eldest son] give that over or I'll kill you' I said and he knew I was in prison for killing someone and he wouldn't come back for six months. He was about eight at the time and he knew. (Ciaran)*

> *Oh yeah, that's one thing about my ex-wife. She brought them up regular. She'd bring them up three times a month and then I actually said to her once a month or once every two months would do... because of the expense and the aggro. Like she was getting the train up and she was getting the separated book because I was in prison, if she was getting the prisoners book she would have lost a lot of money on the prisoners wife book. (Ferdia)*

The learnings that the participants spoke about in terms of parenting in prison aren't something that they are in a position to consider too much at the point of release. Instead the focus at this stage for those who did not stay in contact with their children during the imprisonment is more on finding their feet in

the community first before considering what role if any they can play in their children's lives. In order to fully address this they must first of all consider how they manage any feelings of shame that relate to the crime upon their release.

5.5 Preparing for release

As discussed in the first chapter of the thesis the life sentence is indeterminate and there is no automatic right to release. However, each life sentence prisoner is released at some stage. As has been seen the length of time served has increased substantially in recent years. Therefore each of the participants must learn how to cope with the release process as well as how to live within the community upon their release.

> *It's highly frustrating but you wouldn't be human if you didn't feel that ...as much as I scream for freedom and normality, my life will never be normal, because I'm a lifer on licence and have to live a life of normality with a licence. (Graham)*

Freedom for life sentence prisoners whilst not merit based is perceived to be earned by them during the course of their imprisonment and comes with various conditions and restrictions. Freedom can also only be granted through undergoing the review process with the Parole Board and it being recommended by them and granted by the Minister for Justice.

5.5.1. Parole Board

Each of the participants spoke at length about their experience of the Parole Board. There was a high level of frustration expressed by the participants when it comes to the length of time that it takes to be seen by the Parole Board and to find out about their recommendations.

> *The IPS [Irish Prison Service] and the Parole Board don't have to tell you anything. It's all in the paperwork and it's up to the Probation Service if they want to tell you and they don't always want to tell you (Alan)*
>
> *We [Lifers] have lived with a certain amount of uncertainty and then the nature of the offence makes us different as well and everything but basically what*

> *I was getting at there was that we have no choice about going underneath the Parole Board... (Harry)*

One of the lessons that the participants learn early in the process is how to manage the Parole Board process as we saw in the discussion on alcohol with Brian in the previous section.

A bad report from any service can impact on the recommendations that the Parole Board makes about a prisoner's release. The lack of an independent advocate to support the participants through the parole process can be a stumbling block making the men vulnerable to the bad days where they have a falling out with a staff member who has to submit a report to the Board.

> *....as the Parole Board as an entity in itself I have no problem with it because to be fair to them anytime I've ever been at a Parole Board where I've been heard and where I've been interviewed, I've been heard and been interviewed fairly, I haven't always liked what they said to me or the way that they questioned me but I have always been dealt with fairly and that's all I ever ask of anyone that you deal with me fairly. The prison service then is a different animal. It's like you have three things coming at you but there is no connect, nowhere are they tying the whole thing in together and that for me would be the biggest problem that I can see. (Harry)*

The lack of connection between the Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Parole Board is the biggest source of frustration for the participants as this impacts directly on them on a day-to-day basis.

> *[The Governor] won't give me a straight answer or telling me they're waiting to hear from the parole board before they'll give me anything which is bullshit because there is lads around who were waiting on stuff from the parole board and they're all getting something and I can't afford to go to court and challenge that again to prove discrimination, I could prove it… (Graham)*

> *You know that's the one thing [information] I want that's a bit missing in the system at the moment, there's times you don't know where you stand as a lifer you know what I mean. It's not programmes; it's the not knowing you know what I mean. (Brian)*

A recent position paper by the Irish Penal Reform Trust (2012) has made a number of recommendations about changes that could be made to the Parole

Board that would improve its effectiveness as a Board. These include the establishment of the Parole Board on a statutory basis and the removal of the final decision about release of life sentence prisoners from the Minister for Justice.

5.5.2. The Training Unit

As the residence for five of the interviewees the Training Unit was a topic that they discussed at length during the course of the interviews. The participants have been in the Training Unit for varying lengths of time. For those who haven't been released yet, they had been in the Training Unit for between two-three years.

The participants view the Training Unit as an important step towards release and have expectations of such that have often been promoted by the prison staff within the closed prisons. The Training Unit is a very important step on the pathway to freedom. It represents both the end of one process of the sentence and the beginning of another.

> *When we were in [Prison B], when I was in [Prison B] and I'd look for anything or anything like that I always got the answer, "When you get to the Training Unit, then you'll see things moving", but it's not like that. So when I got to the Training Unit, I was like "Aah yes everything is going to happen now" and it didn't…Although it didn't take sixteen years or fourteen years, it took two years but I still thought it would be a lot quicker and even though when you go to the Training Unit now you're put into a double cell, you have to wait a certain amount of time for a single cell to become available and that was hard going because I'd been in a single cell for thirteen years so that was hard. (Alan)*

Alan learned very quickly that whilst he was in a semi-open facility that progress to release was going to be slower than he'd anticipated. The challenge of moving prisons is further exacerbated by a deterioration in prison conditions due to over-crowding where the prisoners went from having a single cell for the majority of their sentence to then having to share cells as they prepare for release.

All of the participants actively expressed their frustration with the length of time that it takes to progress to day release once they are residing in the Training Unit and the lack of structured activity that is available for them in the Training Unit while they are waiting for any day release programmes to start.

> *There is one workshop, a metal workshop. There is nothing else there, there's an art class which is there only when it suits her, there is one or two classes that are there… (Graham)*

****

> *The Training Unit, if you have nothing to do is a very boring place, I didn't really want to get back into education but I was going down and using computer shops just for my own thing and then I got the tuck shop job and that was three or four days a week, you'd be working one full day but the rest of the time..... (Alan)*

These frustrations about the lack of opportunities for activity are compounded by the lack of information that the participants have from the Prison Service as to a programme plan or a time table for release. Each of the participants spoke about their desire to learn about what their release plan or timetable was.

In addition to the lack of information about the individual participant's plans, there is also a lack of information about what the Training Unit is, how it works and what is a realistic time-frame to expect day release etc. within the Training Unit.

> *…I was led to believe, again, never told anything about the training unit other than it had this and it's there for integration, you go to work and all this but it's nothing like that, not a thing like that, it's a fucking joke it's a shambles inside. (Graham)*

****

> *Brian: Well, in [year] I was brought into the office and Gov. X and Mr Y from the IPS were there and they told me I was going to the Training Unit the following week.....*
>
> *L: So you were given a weeks' notice?*

Brian: Yeah....and they were setting up a programme for me and ehmm I said that's great

So whilst the Training Unit is seen to provide a space for preparation for release into the community, the participant's experience shows that some further preparation and information prior to transfer would ease the transition from a closed prison environment to the semi-open Training Unit.

The participants learned very quickly that while they may have been transferred to progress their release that the Training Unit is run as an individual prison. Therefore, the participant's experience shows that any change of prison within the system can result in a loss of progress made in other prisons and the need to start again. This is an important learning point for the prison system as the stagnation in the Training Unit can undo the positive work that has taken place in other prisons and undermine the motivation to maintain drug and alcohol-free statuses prior to release.

> *Everything is very slow. I think the whole process to be honest with you is a disaster. The system, the whole system is crazy in a way, you know, there's no straightforward way. Like when you come to the Training Unit I think you should have a programme within three months there should be a programme put in place - you're going to PACE, you're going to get an escorted day out, you get a second escorted day out, then you get a day out on your own, then you get an overnight and then you start going out on weekends you know, have a gradual process, so you know where you stand. When I went to the Training Unit first as I said to you I was getting a day out every eleven-twelve weeks in [Prison B] and when I went the Training Unit I was there three months and there was still no sign of a day out so I went to the Governor and said "look I'm going backwards here...." and she said "oh I want to get you out to PACE, you won't get a day out until I get you out to PACE." So Governor X was down there at the time so I went back to the chief and said "look I'm going to go back to [Prison B] if this carries on" so he said "leave it with me". Two days later I was out on the lawn when Governor X came along and said "you're looking for a day out Brian?" I said "yeah" and he said "you're going out on Sunday". (Brian)*

A number of them were then incredibly frustrated in how they perceive the Training Unit is being used by the prison system to manage over-crowding

rather than developed fully as a pre-release facility for long-term sentenced prisoners.

> *It's an illusion that goes on, why does a fellow need to be rehabilitated after two years in prison, come on like, there's people inside in that system for twenty years in jail and they are screaming for the Training Unit and they can't get it, but they give it to the people with twelve months...ah it's a joke and then we are in there, long termers, I'll be honest with you if I wasn't here (in PACE) I wouldn't stay in the Training Unit I'd be gone because you're dealing with people that are coming to the training unit, just to fill the void from the vacuum of Mountjoy. (Graham)*

The concerns expressed relate to the drug-free status of the Training Unit. The current prisoners are eager to maintain the drug-free status.

> *…and when they come over they'll give clean urines, proven to get over there, on the whole belief to get stuff to go back or to stay there and have a party, take drugs that doesn't show up in urines. They're taking 'zimovanes' that doesn't show up in urines, they're taking the mock weed that doesn't show up in urines, there is so much denial there (Graham)*

They are keen not to have it undermined by short-term prisoners. Their concern is that short-term prisoners are more likely to abuse the semi-open conditions than long-term prisoners. Their concerns raise an important point as to the management of prisoners within the prison system as a whole. The motivations of different categories of prisoners vary from group to group. In an overcrowded prison system, drug-free areas are undermined. When numbers increase the emphasis becomes on number management rather than rehabilitation. As the Irish prison system has only one semi-open prison, the integrity of the Training Unit as a pre-release centre for lifers and other long-term sentence prisoners needs to be protected.

> *They know this, why the fuck are you allowing it happen, that's of no benefit to anybody on drugs, and what it's actually doing is...it's fucking up the Training Unit, the people that are over there, that are fully integrated after a long time in jail, are being accused...are being curtailed in their progress because of this, and they are dealing with young fellows that are screaming for PACE and screaming*

> *for TR (temporary release) and they haven't even done a bit of jail, would ye ever fuck off and do a bit of jail, morning, noon and night they are at the counter, 'Miss, I'm looking for a day out, any chance you'd pay us' do a bit of jail and get a life you know. (Graham)*

They also highlight the importance of the Training Unit for the participants residing there and the hope that movement to the Training Unit gives them that there is the possibility of release in the near future. Many of the participants would have chosen to go to the Training Unit rather than to an open prison because of the options offered through the day release programme to PACE. The participants' experience of the Training Unit is an important source of learning for those of us who work in the sector.

They also talked about the difficulty in sharing cells in the Training Unit after having been in single cell accommodation in more secure prisons prior to their move. The challenges that this presents are manifold both for the participants and for the prison system. The perception of the participants is that once they get to the Training Unit, the process of release will be sped up and instead many of them found that they actually lost days out as a result of the transfer and had to fight to get them back.

While the Training Unit plays an essential part in the release process, from the participant's perspective the experience is more stressful and challenging than they would have originally anticipated it to be. The move to the Training Unit provides opportunities for the participants to continue learning how to manage the challenges of being a life sentence prisoner, as we continue to explore in Chapter 6.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter covered the experience and learning that has taken place for the participants during their life sentence. It addressed the issue of learning a new identity by starting with the process of accepting the sentence and the reality of their imprisonment for life. This then moved onto the concept of time and how life sentence prisoners learn to manage their time in prison. The issue of time then was followed by a discussion on the participant's experience of prison that included the view of some of the men that prison was a positive

factor in their lives. This section also highlighted some of the various lessons that the participants have learned through their imprisonment as well as looking at education within the prison system. It also considered what the participants have learnt about addiction and parenting within the prison system.

The concept of remorse, shame and guilt in relation to the crime was also highlighted in this chapter as was the learning that the participants need as they begin to prepare for release and their experience of that process to date.

The final findings and discussion chapter will now focus on the learning that they will bring with them as they make the transition from life sentence prisoners to living on licence in the community.

CHAPTER 6

ALWAYS LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE OF LIFE – LIFE AFTER LIFE

The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it. (Henry Price Thoreau)

6.1. Introduction

In this final findings chapter the focus is on how the participants identify themselves as they look forward to living on licence in the community and how they will make sense of the transition from long-term imprisonment into the community. To some extent, this chapter represents the bigger picture of their experience as it contains the hopes and frustrations of the participants who have not yet been released matched with the real experience of the participants who have been fully released. This represents what was once the '*unthinkable future'* for the men (Cohen & Taylor, 1972). The future that has sustained them through their imprisonment is now inching ever closer and time once again has slowed down for the men as their anticipation of that future increases.

With the focus on life after life imprisonment, the voices of the three released participants emerge strongly in this chapter. So now that the other five participants are on the cusp of release, what have they learned from their time in prison? How will they make the next identity shift from serving life sentence prisoner to living on licence in the community?

6.2. Identity after life imprisonment

6.2.1. "That's my story, I can't change it"

The on licence aspect of the life sentence covered in this chapter is the portion of life after the life sentence. For some of the participants they view this step into the community as a "second chance".

> *I have an awful lot to be grateful for. I am getting a second chance and I am going to grasp it with both hands, this is the last chance I'm getting, nor do I want another chance (Evan)*

This second chance is also teamed with the ability to turn their experiences into something good. In spite of the length of their incarceration, the men have been able to name the good that has come from their time in prison, to enact the 'redemption script' that they have written for themselves (Maruna, 2001). This "good" has been what they have each learned (consciously and unconsciously) about themselves and the opportunities that they had to participate in education. These findings support Jarvis's view on learning being synonymous with consciousness yet we are not always aware of the learning that occurs in our lives (Jarvis, 2009a).

> *And the good thing that came with it is the fact that I had no education, the fact that I've educated myself, I can read and write you know what I mean, I have the intellect to be able to have a conversation with anybody on any subject. I've read so many different books… (Graham)*

The learning has both been formal and informal and has required the active participation of each of the participants. By seeking out and engaging with education and other services within the prison the participants have retained a sense of agency and responsibility for their development and their management of the time in prison. While Graham did not undertake any certification in prison, he still chose to read widely in areas such as sociology, psychology and philosophy. As mentioned in the previous chapter much of his reading took place in "*the blocks or in dark places*" and he actively educated himself in this manner.

> *It's been a good experience, over something that I done that was bad, that was wrong, simple as and to turn it into something good and it's actually changed my way of thinking and stuff like that. It actually worked, it has actually worked..... (Ferdia)*

There is a poignant irony in Ferdia's statement about his imprisonment being a good experience and having something "*good*" come out of something "*bad*". This is similar to the reflection from Evan in a previous chapter where he stated that while he had learned about himself "*it's a pity a life had to be lost*". In spite of his earlier view that "*prison is designed to make you fail*", Ferdia now states that prison worked for him. For Ferdia it was through his own sense of agency that he managed to turn it into a good

experience. He sees himself as having been an active agent in his own transformation. His transformed identity post-release is now that of a man who can read and write with a good education and transferable skills. Ferdia moved from the powerlessness of institutionalisation and imprisonment to actively taking back his power and redefining himself through education (Jarvis, 2009a).

> *For me, I turned it into something good that I can walk away knowing that I'm after coming out of prison educated, a lot wiser to the world, and I am able to stand up.... I used to back away when I was asked questions and stuff like that, back away.....you know what I mean and I am able to answer people when need be. So a lot of the time I'd just leave it go and so on but for the skills, the people skills, and stuff like that and other skills, I've done all sorts of courses in there, and they were good, simple as, working with officers there were thinking skills groups and alternative to violence. I've done a lot of that you know what I mean.... (Ferdia)*

Brian also sees himself as a different person because of his imprisonment and can name the good that has come out of his imprisonment. For Brian his learning has been more personal.

> *You know, there's times, and this is the truth I've often said what happened with me a lot of good has come out of it. It's not a nice thing to have to say that I had to do something like that but if I didn't, if this didn't happen to me you know I would be a different person & I was very materialistic in my ways and probably egotistical and selfish in many ways too like and there's no use saying I wasn't, but I'm a totally different person now. (Brian)*

The participant's desire to name the 'good' that has come out of the 'bad' experience is supported in the literature as it demonstrates their attempts to make sense of their experience. It also relates to the concept of prison as a life saver that was discussed in the previous chapter.

> Major setbacks in life can challenge a person's assumptive world, but benefit-finding can help to reconstitute that world by specifying an anticipated redemption sequence wherein bad events are expected to give way to good outcomes. (McAdams et al 2001, p476)

The participants have transformed their time in prison into a positive experience, in my view this strategy of turning it into a positive is a way for them to maintain some sense of control and direction over their lives (Mezirow, 1997). It also makes sense of a senseless act and finds meaning in what could have been a meaningless and potentially destructive experience. By being able to name the good that has come out of their time in prison, the participants are re-claiming their lives and their identity as they move towards freedom.

In many ways they are following their own redemption script where prison has intervened as the outside force that provides the catalyst for change as discussed in Chapter 2 (Maruna, 2001). The ability to redeem themselves through their experience of imprisonment was different for each of the participants as was seen in the previous findings chapter where the men spoke about their different experiences of imprisonment. Some of them saw prison as an opportunity to learn from an early stage in their sentence. While two others took a substantial period of time to get to a place in their addiction and themselves to manage their imprisonment positively.

The data highlights the importance of learning about ourselves and developing insight into our behaviour regardless of our external circumstances (Jarvis, 2009a). The data also shows how learning can enable the participants to adjust to very challenging circumstances and how they have the resilience to survive those circumstances. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

> *I have more insight into myself, I know when I do something wrong like even small things. I mean my intention in life is to never physically hurt anybody again, you'll always hurt someone be it emotionally or differently by something you say or something you do without realizing it but to physically hurt anybody is terrible but that's my ambition in life like and I avoid situations, you know... My focus is to stay out to be honest… (Ciaran)*

The importance of staying out of prison and living in such a way as to ensure that happens is clear in the above extract from Ciaran. He wants to live differently now. All of the participants want the stories that they tell about

themselves going forward to be different from the stories that have already defined them. The person that they are now is the person that they want to be seen and known by others. Their new identity as a changed or reformed person is how they define themselves.

> *People see you for who you are, you know what I mean, sometimes I'd be looking at them and I'd be saying how can people be so nice to me after what I done.....I have a very gentle side to me that I didn't even know I had it, it's just when, you know, the older you get the more mature you get, you can see then the work you do on yourself....you'd always be the last person to see how you've changed...other people will see it before you ever will (Evan)*

For Evan his changed identity is something that is visible to others. The visibility is evidence of his learning in practice.

Yet with all of the work that the participants have done on learning about themselves, for some of them there is still that lack of recognition of themselves or identification with the person that committed the crime. The one thing that they have learned to do most in prison is to separate their past mistakes, their crime from their 'real self'. The 'real self' whose goal is to do no harm.

a) Doing good/doing no harm

For me as a researcher these two concepts were very strongly interlinked throughout the interviews with the different participants and they also had a very strong moral undertone running through them. While there is a difference between the active agency implied in the statement 'doing good' versus the more protective stance implied in 'doing no harm', both of these are discussed in this section. The notion of 'doing good' is to counterbalance the 'bad' that they did with the original offence. The literature that exists in the realm of morality and debating the concepts of good and bad is very wide ranging and I do not have the scope within the current research to delve too deeply into it. I was therefore guided by the beliefs of the participants who had come to their views of good and bad from a Christian perspective. This resulted in a very culturally bound view of morality based on Christianity

that would not necessarily apply if the same research had been undertaken in a different cultural context.

Each of the participants spoke about one or both of these concepts. As with everything throughout the research the participants differed as individuals and the need to do good was more apparent for some of them than for others. Ultimately, the participants see themselves as basically good people who did something bad - "*Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either*." (Lewis, 2002). At no point did any of the participants refer to the crime as an 'evil' act, yet my search for definitions of 'bad' that could be applied to the research kept ending up back with definitions of evil. Knowing the participants, it's a word that seems too strong in some way to describe what they did and yet it is regularly applied to the crime of murder. Baumeister defines evil as "*actions that intentionally harm other people",* there is also a subjective element to Baumeisters definition as he also states that "*evil is in the eye of the beholder*" so if the victim feels the intention to harm was there then by this definition the act was evil (1997, p8). The 'intention to harm' once again places us back in the legal sphere as the charge of murder relies on the 'intention to harm'

> *I am not that type of person, I know that if I could help somebody I would help somebody, it's not that I am looking for any praise for giving a helping hand, I think I have done a good bit of help since I stopped drinking you know what I mean, I don't mind giving my time to people now (Evan)*

The desire to do no harm was linked to a need to give something back to society where possible. This desire fits into their redemptive narrative where they want to claim a new identity based on their redemptive actions such as helping others rather than being defined continuously by their identity of murderer or lifer. A redemptive narrative (Maruna 2001) as discussed in the literature review is a common theme amongst serious and violent offenders. While the participants cannot undo what they have done, they can redeem themselves by living differently in the future, by helping others, by "making good".

> *I do chairs now and again at the AA meeting and that can be fairly brutal as well, like I can go in there and tell them a brushed up story but that's not being honest... some people will look at you strange but that's my story I can't change it. (Evan)*

The process of doing good and helping others started for some of the participants during their prison sentence where they volunteered with different programmes such as the AA or the Listener scheme to help other prisoners. By working to help others the participants also learned that they had something to offer to others. Brian took the opportunity in prison to develop his listening skills by undergoing training as a Listener as part of the Prisoner Listener Scheme run by the Samaritans. All of this training has helped him as he sought to establish his changed identity as a helper of others. This is particularly relevant given his inability to get help when he was at a point of desperation before the crime. His time in prison has been made meaningful by his voluntary work and taking on a fatherly role with younger prisoners.

> *You get calls from lads and maybe their fathers don't care about them and their mothers and maybe their grandmother's after dying and that was the only person in their whole life that cared about them and that's where you know what I mean...I've had three cars stolen outside over the years and at the time if they threw away the key on the fella that stole them I couldn't have cared less, it would have been good enough for them but now I see things differently I know now when I see it that there is always a reason behind those things. Why people take drugs, why people rob, it's all for a reason and I'm not saying it's the right thing to do but a lot of them know no different, that's the culture...(Brian)*

Helping others has become the cornerstone of Brian's new identity and one that he intends to maintain post-release.

> *Because that is a big thing for me, if I can improve someone's life in some shape or form, I'd given back something to society and that is a big area for me… (Brian)*

Part of the redemptive narrative for the participants has to do with helping their family members and recognising in some way the support that they

received during their imprisonment. This in turn changes how their families view them and reinforces their new positive changed identity.

> *Because before I was taking me family for granted, you know, I was in jail and if I need this or need that they were always there for me. Now my Da needs help, he can't do what he used to do so I have to help out so I want to be there for them. (Alan)*
>
> **********
>
> *For donkeys, that's my point, my mother has been visiting me for years, she's a rock, and you could beat yourself up for what that woman has had to put up with… she's after being there through murder trials and hard times like… (Graham).*

The imprisonment of the participants for a life sentence had an impact on their families over the years. The role of family within that experience is a vital one and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The participants see value in what they have learned whilst in prison and want to do good by working with people to share their learning in some way. They perceive that they have gained insight and wisdom not only into themselves but into others and this is something that they see as having value for society.

> *…now I'm a product of that but I am not going to become it. I've experienced it, I've spent most of my life in prison, and the causes of what puts you there and what doesn't put you there and I say "What can I do now?" ...do you know...do I let that go to waste, do you know what I'm saying… because I don't want to be going around angry, blaming them and us because that's what got me there… I can get a piece of the pie and become one of them services that is needed in bringing reform in this rather than becoming an aggressive problem for the prison. (Graham)*

Graham's redemptive narrative focuses on how others can learn from his experience and impact on changing the system at the same time. He very much sees himself in the "*wounded healer*" role whereby he can use the wounds that he bears as part of his life experience to heal the wounds that similar lifestyles inflict on others. For Graham, his belief that he has a role to play in preventing others going down the same path has become an important

objective to be achieved upon his release. Part of that giving back process included participating in the research process.

Two thirds of the participants stated that their reason for participating in the research was that their experience could be of benefit to others and their learning could prevent someone else ending up in prison. Having learned so much about themselves whilst in prison, the participants can now make sense of their experiences in a way that eluded them before. Sharing this learning is a way to make their experience more meaningful and to show that their lives in prison have not been wasted but have been purposeful in some way.

One of the challenges of living with the lifer identity is defining yourself upon release. A large part of this new identity is their desire and decision to "do no harm" ever again. This is not just about repairing the wrong that has been done, it is about preventing themselves from committing further wrongs. For the participants it is a strong, moral imperative and in their view shows that they are not 'bad' people in spite of their crimes. By constructing their stories with a "do no harm" focus, the men are working for a sustainable behavioural change.

> *and I mean I'm not perfect and I know I'm not, you know I'll swear a hundred times a day and I'll do things I'm not supposed to do, at the end of the day am I sorry? Yeah, I am but for the main part I try to live as good as I can. I do no harm to anybody. I'm respectful to anybody I come into contact with, I'm polite where I can be, if I don't like somebody I just don't have anything to do with them and if they don't like me, I don't have anything to do with them. (Harry)*

The drive to "do no harm" is very much linked to the participant's desire to be seen to be a "good person". It is part of the reconstruction of their identity as they prepare to leave prison and to face the challenges of life after the life sentence. It is also a statement of choice as they move forward and away from their experience of imprisonment.

> Our stories are partly determined by the real circumstances of our lives….. But we also make choices, narrative choices. The challenge of narrative identity calls upon our deepest sources of imagination and creativity. Living life well, with meaning and purpose, is as much an act of imagination and artistry as anything we ever attempt. (McAdams, 2005, p99)

The attempt to redefine their identity as "good" and the offence as "bad" can become consuming and it requires a consistent focus for the participants particularly when addiction is part of their story.

> *A bad act, yeah....that's enough like to have to contend with you know what I mean… but you're trying to, you're trying to compensate for that as well...trying to be an extra good person to compensate for that... (Brian)*

The recognition of the changed identity is important for the participants as they look at life after the life sentence. All of the learning and effort required to change needs to be recognised particularly by those closest to them.

> *I just want to be respected because I am a good person and not because I'm a man here (in prison), it's hard at times because you have to live with what you've done. Some people will always see me as a scumbag, unfortunately but that is life you know but then I have very good friends and very good family, so I don't really worry too much about that, about anybody outside of that, that is. (Harry)*

The question about identity change for the participants has been quite a complex one with some feeling very strongly that they have changed and the expectation is that others see that too. It is important for me to note that identity change is hard to prove particularly for someone still in the prison system. Primarily because their confinement has not always provided visible, external opportunities to prove that change. This now moves me to the next phase of the sentence, the on-licence component where the life sentence is basically transferred from the prison into the community.

6.2.2. "Until the day you kick the bucket"

As mentioned previously the life element of the life sentence is represented by the participants living on-licence in the community following their

release from prison. At the time of interview, three of the research participants had been released on licence. The data highlights the difference between the 'anticipated' release of five of the participants and the reality of release for three of the participants. This means that the extracts in the following section will be dominated by the participants who have been released and the quietest voice to date will now be heard.

Transitions such as the one from long-term imprisonment to the community can be immensely challenging for the participants (Appleton, 2010). It presents moments of frustration and of clarity for them as they progress from the prison into the community. One of the participants who has been released for a substantial period of time spoke very clearly about the anxiety he felt in the lead up to his release.

> *L: In terms of your release, what was the hardest thing for you?*
>
> *Derek: Getting out (laughs). Yeah, I couldn't wait to get out and then when I was told and when it was getting closer and closer, I was down in [open prison] and I used to be out in the garden at 5 o'clock in the morning walking the garden. I couldn't sleep at all….. Then I went up to the medic and said "Have you anything for the auld head?" I said to the officer "I can`t sleep thinking"....he said "Come back down to me this evening and I`ll get you something". He got me - what--- valium... it helped me get a great sleep, I was on that for a week getting closer and closer.*

While it is something that is longed for by most, release and freedom brings unexpected challenges, including the desire to return to the security of prison for some.

> *It took me nearly two years to get settled back in because when I came out first I used to say "Jaysus, I wish I was back inside"… 'Cos you had to get used to doing things for yourself where before you could just go up and get your dinner whereas this time you had to do things for yourself (Derek)*

The Temporary Release (TR) sheet that each life sentence prisoner is given on the way out the prison gate outlines the release conditions for each man and must be carried with them at all times to be shown if they are stopped

by the Gardaí. For Graham who is not fully released yet the concept of living on licence is a difficult one as he views it as restrictive and a reminder of his lifer status. Others are more optimistic about release and less frustrated by the idea of the temporary release conditions.

> *I can't see that (on licence) being a big deal in the sense that I was never in trouble before I came to prison and if I live a normal life, I mean it's not like I was on drugs before I came in. I was a drinker you know but I wasn't (an alcoholic) (Brian)*

****

> *Well, I'm not delighted with it (licence) because you can't be delighted with it but it's not something that I'm afraid of. I look at the positive sides. It's there for us as much as it's there not for us... I know it's their way of actually hanging on and keeping control of us but the thing about it as well is if I'm going to work it's not going to be a big deal for me … (Harry)*

The detailed licence conditions outline the requirement for sobriety and where the participants can reside. The licence requires that the participants sign on at the prison at various intervals. Initially the period tends to be weekly and this reduces over time. However, as an administrative process it doesn't always go smoothly. Even with infrequent signing on dates, it can remain a stress point for the participants as experienced by Derek.

> *L: Does being on licence and having to sign on every 6 months impact on your life plans?*
>
> *Derek: Yes and no… The way they're gone messing with the signing on, you don`t know what they are going to do, are they going to take you back in or not.*
>
> *L: And that makes you anxious around signing on, does it?*
>
> *Derek: yeah, 'cos I know a few other lads even said it, they are afraid.*

The transition from prison to the community has provided the participants with a point of reflection as they look back on their prison experience. Signing on at the prison is also seen as a constant reminder of their lifer status.

Derek: Yeah, I mean, how can you forget about prison when you have to go back every so often?

L: They told you when you were released to forget about prison?

Derek: Yeah, but how can you? Whoever's out on a licence can't forget about prison because he has to go back. The Parole Board said that but sure "I can't" I said when I have to keep going back, sure you can't ever forget. It's always going to be there even if you sign on every twelve months, it's always going to be there… until the day when you kick the bucket.. You have to accept it but the threat is always going to be there from the department anyway. (Derek)

As life sentence prisoners living on licence in the community, the challenge to prove that they have changed is about the media and the public perception of them not just about proving it to family.

Yeah, well I got photographed yesterday, I got caught yesterday outside the prison, going back into the prison after the weekend....so it's...there's nothing you can do about it but I just think that it's very unfair if you are trying to get out and because of it because every time you appear in the paper it means someone won't make a decision on you.

****

Brian: You're always going to have the... I wouldn't say its fear but you're going to have the negative side of every… some of the papers writing about you or something like that. Now I would never encourage it, I won't be driving around in a flashy car or...

L; Seeking attention....

Brian: yeah, I won't be seeking attention... if someone wants to... It's par for the course in a sense, if someone wants to get you, if they want to write about you...

The perception of others and the presentation of life sentence prisoners in the media will be something that the participants may face upon full release. It goes back to the earlier discussion on stigma (Goffman, 1959, 1963) Not all of their cases have attracted media attention in the past and this is the way that they would like it to stay. This now brings me onto how they will use what they have learned in prison to live on licence in the community.

6.3. Lessons learned

During the interviews the focus of much of the conversation was on what the participants have learned from their experience in prison. Now looking to the release phase of their sentence, they can reflect fully on this experience and see what learning they bring with them as they move out into the community. They are able to make sense of their experience within prison and to find meaning and purpose in their lives within prison. Again the participant's ability to make meaning out of their adverse circumstances is supported in the literature discussed earlier (Frankl, 1984, Maruna, 2001).

> When people find some positive meaning amid adversity, they tend to show better adjustment and health down the road. Reconstructing the autobiographical past in terms of redemption sequences is a narrative strategy that is similar to benefit-finding in the face of adversity… he or she is interpreting past difficulties and challenges in such a way as to conclude that good things can come from very bad events in one's life. (McAdams et al, 2001, p483)

The ability to find positive meaning in their imprisonment will hopefully also assist the participants to be resilient when they face the challenges of release (Rutter, 2007).

With regard to the findings, Ferdia was very clear on the fact that prison had educated him and everything that he had learned during his lengthy incarceration would be of benefit to him now that he has been released fully.

> *Ferdia: At the end of the day it's for me to accept that I had to be there, for me to accept like every time you're knocked back that you are able to get up and keep going and stuff like that and the skills that you actually pick up and the biggest thing for me was education, believe it or not because then you're into schools and that but it's like when I went into prison, prison educated me you know what I mean.*
>
> *L: How did prison educate you?*
>
> *Ferdia: It actually woke me up to what I was doing myself, where I was going wrong, and I was selfish, I*

> *took everything in and I learnt and it was a good thing being selfish, it's not too bad that way so I mean.....*

His eventual acceptance of the sentence was key to him realising his potential through education. So whilst Ferdia learned to read and write and developed other life skills in prison the learning that was of most importance to him upon release was about managing his anger and dealing with his abuse as a child.

> *Yeah, you know what I mean, but I learned a lot about myself in prison. I learned enough that, you know what I mean, I learned enough not to go back there. I don't want to go back in there. (Ferdia)*

Ferdia wasn't the only man to focus on the very personal nature of his learning.

> *You know the more I learned about myself, the more I...I got older and through age and looking back you know what I mean but a lot of it was through the work[18] that I done (Harry)*

Alan's learning related to what he had learned about himself and his relationship with alcohol. His focus throughout the research has always been on what he has learned about his drinking.

> *L-What is the biggest thing you've learned from your experience?*
>
> *Alan: I don't need drink to live... I don't need drink and I don't need other people telling me how to live me life, I can do that for myself. But I need people's help to get me there. You know I'm just trying to be myself, my own self- be me own person. I'm not always right in everything I do, but I'll try my best.*

The initial lessons that the participants referred to here can be summarised as "*learning how to be a person in society*" (Jarvis, 2009a).They reflect back to the literature where Jarvis talks about the processes by which people learn throughout their life time. The concerns that the participants have in terms of learning and transferring that learning is about the person that they have learned to be and the relationships they will have in the community.

[18] In this context, the 'work' that Harry refers to is the therapeutic work that he did with the psychological services. This is common terminology for the men when they talk about learning they tend to phrase it as 'work'.

a) Relationships after release

The issue of relationships post-release was a subject that the participants explored during the interviews. This is something that they have given much consideration to during their imprisonment in spite of their restricted contact with women over the years. Relationships also raise the issue of disclosure of their past and the potential challenges that this may bring. As mentioned earlier, the stigma of imprisonment can be an invisible one and the participants have the potential of '*passing as normal'* (Goffman, 1963) thus the decision to disclose is a very personal one.

Two of the participants were in relationships at the time of their imprisonment. One of the participants chose to end it three years into his sentence and another participant's marriage ended after he had served about ten years. Therefore, all eight of the participants spent the bulk of their sentence as single men. The women that they have had the most contact with during their sentence have been the professionals that they worked with inside the prison. This included the psychologists, teachers, nurses, Probation Officers and prison officers.

Yet in spite of the limited contact with women, three of the participants interviewed had begun new relationships whilst in prison.

> *I met (new partner) first in the Training Unit. We were friends first and I met her through a friend and when I went to (Prison G) first, I didn't like it so she used to come up on a Sunday to make sure I was alright and that and then we kind of just started seeing each other then… (Ciaran)*
>
> **********
>
> *We grew up together in [hometown]…it's gas really, we were going out with each other when we were kids and then years and years passed by, I clocked in with her again through my sister and she started visiting me and she was there at the beginning when I started getting off drugs, she knows the story, she knows well about the drugs. (Graham)*
>
> **********

> *I met her through her brother, I used to go out with her when I was in X....and the two of us did get on.....she knew everything and I didn't have to explain anything. (Ferdia)*

The participants see these relationships as having a positive impact on their lives and being a source of hope as they look forward to being fully free. They represent the possibility of a more 'thinkable' future than was possible earlier in the sentence (Cohen & Taylor, 1972).

> *… it gave me hope, I denied myself for years, I wouldn't have a relationship, yeah, for that reason, emotional attachment, how can I be emotionally attached when I'm living in here and there's life going on around me, I'm on standstill but life is happening, ye don't do that, well I didn't anyway, whether that was preservation on my side of my sanity.. (Graham)*

The reality of beginning relationships with women who either knew them prior to their imprisonment or else met them whilst they were in prison means that these participants have not had to address the issue of telling a new partner about their story. This has made it easier for these participants to establish the relationships as a source of support post-release.

> *She knows my background, you know what I mean because the way I was, I would have left it alone. I wouldn't even consider a relationship with someone because I wouldn't be able to tell someone.....I would have to tell all about myself. I'd be able to say it and walk away, you know that way but if you were actually getting on with someone and things were going well and then you turn around and "Oh by the way, I've something to tell you" you know what I mean....., but because she knew my background, she knew more about me than I did, put it that way. It makes things easier. (Ferdia)*

The hope for a relationship is still there for the participants who remained single and it is something that they have discussed with the psychologists as part of their learning on how to live in the community after release.

> *I'd give more of myself now I suppose. Marriage would have been something I would have always desired and always wanted. Now actually I'd be quite happy to know somebody and to have somebody to date, to go out and do things with... (Harry)*

****

> *I would, yeah, I'd like to.....now the parole board asked me the same exact question and I said, now I might as well be honest with you (laughing), I said "No, I've no interest in another relationship. I was in two of them" says I "and that was enough". But deep down I know myself, it's not a priority right now being honest with you but if it happened and I met someone nice, I wouldn't mind. (Brian)*

Their view and expectations of relationships have changed dramatically during their imprisonment. For those who were single at the time of their imprisonment, they had let go of any hope that they may have had for marriage and children even though many of the participants will be in their forties leaving prison. By being incarcerated at a young age, prison has redefined their potential family configuration by disrupting their ability to marry and become parents (Codd, 2008).

The other participants who have remained single throughout their incarceration now will have to learn how to disclose their offence to any future partner. Anyone choosing not to disclose runs the risk of being exposed and undermining the entire relationship as a result.

> ….a false impression maintained in one of his routines may be a threat to the whole relationship or role of which the routine is only one part, for a discreditable disclosure in one area of an individual's activity will throw on the many areas of activity in which he may have nothing to conceal. (Goffman, 1959, p71)

This is a complex matter for them as the challenge is knowing when to disclose and to whom and yet all of the participants spoke about their need to be honest in any relationship.

Well, if I meet somebody I have to be honest with this person, of course I'd love to have a relationship, I'd love to share my life with someone, now that I am the person I am now...a relationship.. It's not just all about drink or just to go to bed with each other it's a friendship which is built in thing, sharing things you know what I mean... (Evan)

****

Well, I haven't written off the problem but I'd be very honest about it like ehmm... where I've been, who I am, I'd be very, very honest about who I am and things like that with anybody and I wouldn't get into a... one thing I definitely would never do, whatever about having a couple of dates with them I would never actually sleep with somebody before telling them about my past. (Harry)

****

You should tell yourself anyway because I don't think it is fair, you know what I mean, especially where there is children, I wouldn't go with a girl who had children probably again, if (new partner) had had children, we wouldn't be together … Because I don't think it is fair to bring someone else's kids into my life because it's complicated enough, you know what I mean. Unless their kids were older in their twenties or something (Ciaran)

Part of the learning that the participants have had during their imprisonment involves them behaving differently in relationships than they did before. The redemptive narrative also applies to how they would now behave in relationships versus how they previously behaved. This learning has come about through a combination of being older and wiser and the personal development that they have undertaken in prison. Maturation is as much a factor in their view of relationships as it would be in their desistance from crime (Maruna, 2012b).

So with release comes challenges in terms of new relationships and putting their learning into practice and doing this in a world that is substantially different than the one they were familiar with at the start of their sentence.

6.4. Changed world

Having served lengthy sentences from 16 years to over 20 years at the time of interview, the participants find themselves beginning the process of release into a world that has changed substantially over that time.

> All prisoners, not only lifers, are held in a kind of suspended animation, the social equivalent of a coma, while the rest of the world changes and evolves. The free world is dynamic, the prison world static. By its very nature, the free world offers hope for change. Prison, by its very nature, isolates the offender and holds hope hostage until the offender is released (Johnson & McGunigall Smith, 2008, p12)

Ciaran summarised the way the world was when he was imprisoned in the following extract from the data.

> *When I went to prison, George Bush's father was the President, Boyz to Men was number one with 'We belong together', and The Bodyguard was number one in the box office. Gulf War one had only started, Saddam Hussein was still alive, Albert Reynolds was the Taoiseach, John Major was the British prime minister, and fifty pence would get you on the bus to Tallaght. (Ciaran)*

Twenty-first century Ireland is a very different place to the Ireland that existed when the participants were first incarcerated. The world has also changed dramatically in the past twenty years as can be seen from the above extract. Change happens both personally and externally and is a natural part of life.

> *when I came out of prison at first I found it very hard--- especially going into shops---cos you didn`t know if you were giving too much or too little…I had to look up and down…For the traffic…. and everyone was running. (Derek)*

The challenge for the participants is learning how to live in the changed, world having been removed from it for so long. Part of the challenge is that the skills needed to survive their imprisonment are different to the skills they need to live in a different social world (Goffman, 1961, Jewkes, 2005,

Crawley & Sparks, 2005, Crewe, 2009). This is something that Alan feels he didn't get to learn in prison and that he didn't feel fully prepared for.

> *Well,- just going out into the world again and learning how to use the world again, getting used to people around you even to –no disrespect- but women around you. I've been in an environment where it's just men and the only women I'd see there would probably be some of the staff so getting used to being with everyone really, from all different walks of life. Just ehmm. I suppose how you talk to people and how you see people and things like that I think you could have learned that in jail. (Alan)*

****

> *Because having spent years in jail, deep contemplation, and watching how society can change within ten years, twenty years you know what I mean… you're inside in a box watching the world pass you by, but you feel like you're not ageing… (Graham)*

There can be a sense of unreality for the participants when they first experience being out of the prison on day release. The world has potentially 'passed them by' so they must learn how to catch up as society hasn't waited for them. The disorientation that they feel is also an effect of long-term institutionalisation (Goffman, 1961, Sykes, 1958).

One of the other participants spoke about the changed nature of the external world and the impact that it had on his senses. His experience is supported by the literature.

> *Ireland is a much more modern place than it was before, ehmm...so the big change I found and I couldn't put my finger on why I was having such difficulty, not difficulty in shops but I couldn't make things out… there's all this colour right… and it's just one day it hit me and I was in with the psychologist and I said "I have this apprehension about going out and this, that and the other" and I said to her I finally figured it out… and you see colours in prison are very flat… but you go into a shop and there is thousands of different colours hitting you from everywhere. There's no square shops anymore, they're all going off in this direction or that direction, or you go into them and they're all in corners or they're round or whatever but there's shelves of everything... (Harry)*

While the on-licence element of the sentence brings challenges in terms of coming to terms with the restrictions that living on-licence brings with it, the men have also learned that it is a second chance to live in the community without causing any harm. It is a second chance to be with their families as well as to establish new relationships and to begin again with everything.

6.5. "Backbone of support" – Family

The participants spoke about their families throughout the interviews and the support that they had received from them. The role that family members play in providing ongoing support to life sentence prisoners cannot be overstated. The families of life sentence prisoners serve a sentence in a similar way to the participants except they have the challenges of living in the community and raising other children whilst supporting their son or partner in prison. As can be seen in the previous section on relationships, imprisonment clearly alters existing family relationships and has a serious impact on the future marital and parental prospects of single men (Ewald & Uggen, 2012).

The impact on families is the 'invisible punishment' of the life sentence and one that isn't always apparent to the men at the time (Ewald & Uggen, 2012). The stigma of imprisonment is felt not just by the men but also by their family members (LeBel & Maruna, 2012). As Goffman stated *"the problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity"* (1963, p43). According to Codd, 2008, the effects of stigmatisation tend to be felt when the families interact with official agencies and visit the prisons as the family becomes redefined as a 'criminal' family.

> Feelings of shame and stigmatisation may be most in evidence when visiting the prison…. Families often feel they are being made to feel like criminals themselves just for visiting a prison. (Codd, 2008, p59)

As outlined by the participants the impact of their arrest and conviction on their families was immediate.

> *My parents visited the whole time… it broke my Ma's heart, definitely and my Da's heart. I never heard my Da cry in my life till I rang him from the police station to tell him I was after being arrested so it's very hard on them. Like they moved to X and it wasn't really over me but it was just kind of a fresh start you know and it was very hard on my Ma and Da. (Ciaran)*

****

> *When I went to prison first, Lisa, my mother wrote to me, she didn't come to see me for the first three months nor did I expect her to, nor did I want her to, I didn't know how to face her, and she wrote me a letter and believe me you wouldn't write a letter to your worst enemy like she wrote, she wrote it from the heart as well… she was very angry with me, she said "God help that poor woman, she lost a lovely girl over you Evan. I don't know how that woman is coping with what you done". I was put on suicide watch for a while after that...'cos I was in bits after that letter... (Evan)*

Regardless of how upsetting their parents initially found the sentence, each of the participants spoke about their parents visiting them and being supportive throughout their imprisonment.

> *I was lucky with my family's support, I was getting visits of my parents once a week, sometimes twice a week. I`d see me [siblings] an odd time and that'd suit me fine you know what I mean. I say an odd time, I'd see them three/four times a year and that was grand. (Alan)*

The imprisonment of the participants was a source of trauma, shame and pain for all of their families (Codd, 2008). In many cases it became another traumatic event to be added to the list.

> *I've had horrible things happen in my family- like losing a father of (large number of children), at [young] age and leaving a young family and a widow behind him with no money really. I've had a younger brother die, - the most innocent young fellow you would ever come across in your life, beautiful, a gift from God really, you know to lose him was savage you know, for me to go to prison for the rest of my family, for my mother, my mother never deserved this. (Harry)*

The participants had the support of parents whilst they were in prison in a way that some of them never felt they had as children. The support of their parents became a touchstone for them throughout their sentence with some of the parents as in the case with Graham's mother refusing to continue visiting him if he didn't stop taking drugs.

> *…I was strung out to the back bone and my mother comes up to visit me and says "Look, son I'm not coming up to you no more", and I says "Why?", and she says "You're fucking dying in front of me". (Graham)*

Two of the participants lost their parents while they were in prison. Neither of them got to see them before they died for different reasons.

> *I didn't get to see my mum before she died, I was supposed to go and see her, I had been passed to go,… and she was taken back in overnight, something else was wrong, so I wouldn't go in [to the hospital] with handcuffs on me and I wasn't long into the sentence, and they told me "Evan, it's going to have to be handcuffs" and I said "No, I'm not going to embarrass my mother", so then I wrote her a letter...I thanked her for being a great mum and stuff like that...how sorry I was for the hurt I caused in her life, the shame I brought to her, the embarrassment we just talked about... I just told her she was right about everything...she came to see me when I was in prison as well, it wasn't easy for her, all she used to do from the beginning of the visit to the end of the visit was cry…(Evan)*
>
> **********
>
> *…my father died when I had four years done. My mother died the next year and that was the hardest because I thought I'd be out before that, you know what I mean but it ended up that because of the way things went with the Parole Board and stuff like that. But I got through that because they let me down to the mortuary, I wasn't allowed to attend the funeral (Ferdia)*

In addition to how supportive they were during the sentence, family becomes even more important for the participants as they get closer to release. Yet the release process can challenge the families in the same way

that it challenges the men as the expectations of parents can be that there is some reciprocation.

> *I cope with it alright 'cos I need to look after my Da but my Ma can be a bit wicked at times like. She'll say it to you like "You fucking ruined everything" or something like that, she'll curse at you and things. But she er.....she has a lot of anger built up inside her, yeah and sometimes it'll fly at me but I don't mind her like, if that's her release then that's her release. (Ciaran)*

For the adult children of the participants, the response to the release can be different.

> *Yeah, it's everything, if I hadn't that, that's the backbone for me like, for getting out and not just the backbone of support but having a family that loves me to bits you know what I mean. (Brian)*

None of the participants spoke about having any awareness of the negative effect of their imprisonment on their children. Brian and Evan spoke about their suppositions of the impact in terms of their children being stigmatised and ostracised but they had no real knowledge of their children's experience of their imprisonment. For Evan, this was because of their estrangement prior to his imprisonment. I am unsure if there was any specific reason for Brian's understanding of the experience of his children. As Brian wasn't living with his children at the time of his arrest, this may have reduced the direct impact of imprisonment on them. However, it would not have diluted any stigma that could be attached to them or reduced their concerns about how Brian was treated in prison.

Whilst the effects of imprisonment on families has only been studied in a limited way, the research suggests that *"imprisonment can have devastating consequences for partners and children*" (Murray, 2005, p442). The research that does exist focuses on the partners and children of prisoners rather than the parents. In this study the participants included the impact on their parents as not all of the participants were parents or had partners at the start of their imprisonment. The reality of release for four of the current participants is that they are coming out to aging parents and there is an expectation from their siblings that they take more responsibility for their parents upon release.

These family expectations don't always match the desires of the participants to establish new relationships themselves.

6.6. Discussion

Having completed the initial findings it is now necessary to look back at the findings as a whole to summarise what the participants' stories have told us about their learning experiences as life sentence prisoners. I gave the findings chapters a timeline structure of life before, during and after life. Time has been such a dominant concept for me as a researcher and for the participants who are serving an indefinite period of time as life sentence prisoners that it made sense for me to look at the findings through the lens of time. In my in-depth analysis of the data it became clear to me at a very early stage that there were discourses within the data that would surface at each point of the timeline. The discourses on power, shame, stigma and identity were present for the participants constantly. As a narrative inspired study, the findings represent the stories that the participants chose to tell me at that particular moment in time. It is through these stories that the interplay between power, shame and identity was drawn out.

6.6.1 Power and powerlessness

The predominant learning that came from the findings was the real sense of helplessness that the participants have as they navigate the complex process of release. This helplessness is compounded by the indeterminate nature of their sentence and the lack of a clear pathway out of prison which adds greatly to their frustration and fragility as they try to work their way towards release. As we have seen in the findings chapters and in the literature review, prisons are central sites for the operation of disciplinary power and they are built on a web of complex relationships (Foucault, 1977, Crewe, 2009). The complexity of the power systems at play within the prison system is highlighted by the research where the participants talk about the 'push/pull' of the power systems at play. This emphasises their inability to influence their pathway out of prison where even when they are told they are a 'model prisoner' they still remain powerless to affect their release in a positive way. Yet they have the contradiction of being able to completely undermine their

route to release with any negative behaviour. Therefore, they are powerless to even express any anger or frustration at the lack of communication between the services within the prison and the lack of information provided to them as that would reflect badly in any report to the Parole Board and could prevent them progressing further towards release.

Liebling (2004) defined power in prison as *"the actual or perceived use of control, influence or authority by prison staff; the degree to which prisoners have the capacity to exercise control over their own time, treatment, and lives*" (p347). According to this definition, the participants who were still in prison at the time of the interview were in a completely powerless position and were still subject to the direct and indirect operation of power within the prison. How power operates within the prison has changed over the past number of years. The presence of a 'hard' coercive authoritarian form of power has been replaced with a more bureaucratic, 'soft' form of power that relies on inducements, manipulation, compliance through the internalisation of the prison timetable and the threat of coercion to manage prisoners. These changes are not experienced by the participant as a lessening of power they are simply just another form of discipline and control, "*ones with complex psychological dimensions*" (Crewe, 2009, p115). As seen previously the literature shows that the participants' experience of the 'soft' power at play within the Irish prison system is not unique to Ireland and research on different prison regimes in the UK provides evidence for the shift from the use of coercive power to a more manipulative use of power (Johnson, 2002, Liebling, 2004, Crewe, 2009, Liebling & Crewe, 2012). The shift to the softening of power mode of operations does not make the prison environment feel any less controlled for the prisoner. Instead it seems to just blur the boundaries about what exactly is controlled and what is acceptable behaviour and this can be more stressful for the prisoners as it appears easier to unknowingly transgress in such an environment and more difficult to retain any control over their own pathway to release.

Each of the participants spoke about their individual process of adapting to prison. Part of this adaptation included learning how to manage the prison system and learning what power systems were at play within the prison, both

amongst the staff as well as amongst the other prisoners. Their learning included finding their place within the prison system and retaining some limited sense of control over aspects of their lives in a confined environment. Their experience of this is not unique and is supported in the literature that focuses on the lived experience of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958, Crewe, 2009). What makes their experience different from those outlined in the literature is the Irish context and the indeterminate nature of their sentence. As Lifers they are well-known within the Irish prison system and this emphasises the personal nature of their imprisonment which somehow increases their sense of powerlessness. The indeterminate sentence is one that is defined by uncertainty for each life sentence prisoner. In their attempts to reclaim some of their own power to manage their prison sentence, each participant spoke about setting their own goalposts in terms of the length of the sentence. However, this was continually undermined by the system when they continued to remain in prison many years after their self-defined time limit had passed and with no alternative timeframe being provided for them. The passing of time for the participants was a continual reminder of their powerlessness within the prison system.

During the interviews the participants gave many examples of their encounters with power in the prison. Of the eight participants, only one man had experienced violence at the hands for prison officers. For the others the possibility of the coercive use of power was enough to ensure their compliance with the prison regime. The beatings that Graham received on a regular basis are an extreme form of coercive power where violence by a prisoner is met with more violence from the prison officers. The violence that he experienced was systemic as it was not limited to just one prison as he was moved from prison to prison during the course of his sentence and experienced violence in most of them. Again his story of being beaten regularly by prison officers is also a personalised story as his reputation would have preceded him with all the prison transfers that resulted because of his violent behaviour. The prison transfers only served to strengthen his determination to fight the system and to maintain his “little hard man” identity and served as a catalyst for his addiction to heroin as he had never

used heroin prior to his life sentence. His story of the powerless being beaten by the powerful in an institutional setting is not a unique one and has been the experience of many prisoners before him (Sykes, 1958, Cohen & Taylor, 1972, Liebling & Price, 2001, Crewe, 2009). The use of violence on prisoners is at the core of coercive power and yet as Foucault sees it power is not just about "*pure violence or coercion*". It is more complex than that as Graham demonstrates with the full effects of the use of coercive power. Within the complex power relations at play in each of the prisons that Graham was sent to, the prison officers had a choice about what type of power they could use in response to Graeme's violent behaviour. They consistently chose to respond with violence, violence that was never reported. The nature of such a violent response by prison staff would support Foucault's view of the prison system as a micro-system run on illegalities and producing more hardened criminals as a result. The violent behaviour of the prison officers would result in prosecution and possible convictions for assault if the acts were perpetrated on anyone else in society and outside the prison walls. Yet this illegal act was seen to be acceptable by both the prison staff and by Graham himself because it took place within the confines of the prison. Graham's experience could be seen to support Foucault's view that "*the prison is basically a permanent centre for intensive illegalities. The prison is surely the most efficient and productive of all the institutions that foster illegalities"* (Foucault, 2009, p19).

However, the prison was a much more complex place than that as it not only fostered 'illegalities' by the use of coercive power, it also fostered learning and the possibility of redemption and rehabilitation for the participants. This is an area that Foucault never explored in his examination of power within the prison, his focus was on domination and the experience of the participants in the current research shows that prison is about a lot more than just domination and control.

The complexity of the power relations in the Irish prison system was once again demonstrated by the introduction of strip searches in the Training Unit. This was discussed by Ferdia earlier and is another example of a form of direct, coercive power. Ferdia spoke about his reaction to three officers

entering his cell and demanding that he remove his clothing. His refusal was met with him being physically restrained before being brought to the Chief Officer. Ferdia was very clear in his view that the strip searches were a show of power as he talked about other non-invasive methods that the prison could use to conduct searches if they wished. Again this echoes Graham's experience of the choices that the prison staff make in terms of the implementation of power where coercive power is chosen as the preferred option. The coercive use of power serves to remind the prisoners very visibly of their powerless status. It also remains in the Foucauldian territory of domination through visible and at times forceful use of power where the possibility of coercion remains a real reality with the knowledge that other prisoners have been strip-searched. The semi-open nature of the prison means that there is a sense of dissonance for the participants to be in a less secure environment in order to prepare for full release into the community and to be subjected to random strip searches upon their return from day release. The strip searches also ensure that the prisoners never get complacent about their day release as it creates a tension and uncertainty about their daily return to the prison environment. In the prison system, security is the unquestionable, trump card and the rationale for all kinds of behaviour, this is just one example.

Indirect power

The participants also spoke about the less visible, more indirect forms of power that operate within the prison system, They spoke about prison officers and probation officers claiming not to know anything about their release plans, about paperwork going missing on numerous occasions and release plans being delayed as a result. They spoke about being encouraged to plan to attend college on a day release basis, being released to attend the interview for the course, being accepted and then being refused permission to go the day before they were due to register for their course with no explanation given. They spoke about not hearing back from the Parole Board about whether they had been recommended for release and if not, why not. They spoke about the continual self-advocacy needed to find out anything about their release timetable and to get any days or nights out and their sense that

without that self-advocacy their release process would grind to a halt. They spoke about false positive results in their random urinalysis when they had no history of taking drugs and resulting in them being sent back to a closed prison where they re-took the urinalysis and got written proof that their sample was clean. They spoke about not being released for day release programmes because the prison wanted them to do maintenance work within the prison instead. They spoke about not being released to attend their parents' funeral as they were a 'model prisoner' and the prison was concerned they'd get upset and undermine their model prisoner status. They spoke about being transferred from one prison to another with no notice. They spoke about the discretionary nature of the system where they saw other newer prisoners benefiting from days out while they were told that they couldn't be given any because the Parole Board had to clear it first. While they know that this isn't the case, they felt powerless to challenge the inconsistencies of the operation of power within the system. The list of examples that the participants provided of the indirect operation of soft power within the prison system is extensive, at times as a researcher it felt endless and it is not unique as the literature has shown this to be the experience elsewhere (James, 2003, Liebling, 2004, Irwin, 2009, Crewe, 2009).

Yet this use of indirect power within the prison system can have devastating and debilitating consequences for life sentence prisoners as it undermines their resilience and their ability to cope with the slow, uncertain and lengthy process of release as they seek to make the shift from a 'prisoner identity' to a released man's identity (Jewkes, 2005). It deliberately keeps them in limbo and reminds them of their powerless lifer status. Not everyone can cope with the uncertainty, the lack of transparency and the lack of accountability that such a use of indirect power encourages where the responsibility for the prisoner's release doesn't ever seem to rest with anyone other than a nameless, faceless individual. During the course of the writing of this thesis, one life sentence prisoner (not a research participant) attempted to kill himself because he couldn't cope with the inconsistencies of the release process combined with the lack of information and a timeframe for release. He lost his sense of hope about being released and was overwhelmed by his

powerlessness to influence his release. Ironically, while he barely survived the suicide attempt it meant that he lost any possibility of release in the near future as he was removed from the Training Unit and sent back to a closed prison as the prison system couldn't risk him killing himself whilst he was on a day release programme. Decisions made by an inaccessible, faceless system and relayed in a careless manner have consequences whether we choose to acknowledge them as such or not. In this instance this man will be seen to be responsible for his inability to cope rather than the system being seen to have any role to play in undermining his ability to cope by constantly changing the goalposts of release for him. Incidents like this remind me as a practitioner/researcher of the challenges of having a dual role and working within the system that I am researching. It also serves to highlight the importance of research such as this where the voices of life sentence prisoners need to be heard in order to effect change in a system that is clearly not working from their perspective. In addition it echoes Liebling's work on the moral context of imprisonment and the pressures that exist on prisoners that result in them taking their own lives, one of these is the length of sentences and the indeterminate nature of a life sentence (Liebling, 2011). According to Liebling "*feelings of meaningfulness help humans to survive and flourish. Lack of meaning and purpose, on the other hand, is soul destroying…and is associated with suicide"* (p540). A major challenge for life sentence prisoners occurs when their ability to feel meaningful is constantly undermined by the uncertainty of the release process, a process that they are unable to challenge or influence in any meaningful way.

The nebulousness of the operation of soft power makes it difficult for the men to recognise it as power, to name it as such and to challenge it. For example, the reason that the prison officer doesn't know about their release is that a 'faceless, nameless' someone, somewhere else hasn't told him rather than it is information that he has that he is refusing to share and so on. The question for the participants in the face of the indirect use of soft power is, as Graham puts it: "*how to question authority (in a way) that is beneficial and not negative?"* Authority when it is presented in such a deflected manner is hard to question and harder to challenge. As the findings show, it creates

further problems for the prisoners and exacerbates their sense of helplessness especially when combined with an indeterminate sentence (Crewe, 2009).

> The combined effects of long and indeterminate sentences, a more controlled and secure environment….high levels of institutional anxiety about security and low levels of trust in the prison in general…have combined to leave prisoners feeling more trapped, vulnerable and hopeless than they were; and so 'tightly' confined (Crewe, 2009) that they feel unable to protest even the most minor infringements. (Liebling, 2011, p537)

From the participants' stories it is clear to see that their time in the Training Unit has been one of uncertainty and increased powerlessness. There has been a lack of information and clarity about what the plan for each of them is. Their expectations of progressing through a structured release programme once they get to the Training Unit have not been met. Their expectations were based on information that they had received from prison officers in the closed prisons where each of the participants reported that they'd been told "*once you get to the Training Unit, then things will get moving*". This was not the case. Each of the five participants at the pre-release stage had spent nearly two years in the Training Unit prior to qualifying for the day-release programme in PACE. In practice this means that they will probably spend a minimum of four to five years in the Training Unit before being fully released. Their life sentence continues to be defined by its indeterminate length even at what many of the participants expected to be the end stage of their sentence. The stress incurred by the ongoing uncertainty of the release date is compounded by the lack of information on the release process and the continued sense of powerlessness that being a life sentence prisoner engenders. The literature highlights the damage that indeterminate sentences do to prisoners and the experience of the research participants evidences this (Crewe, 2009, Appleton, 2010). The lesson of their powerlessness as life sentence prisoners continues to be repeated even as they begin to take steps towards release.

Power through relationships

One of the findings of the current study is the loss of perceived progress by the participants upon their transfer from a closed prison to the semi-open prison. A number of participants spoke about having had supervised days out whilst within the closed prison and how these disappeared once they were transferred to the semi-open prison. This was something that the participants had to fight to get back as there was no initiative from the semi-open prison to reinstate them or to draw up a schedule of planned supervised days out.

A strategy that emerged from the findings that the participants used to manage their sense of powerlessness in the prison was through the development of positive working relations with prison staff. This was an important tool for the men as it humanised them in the eyes of the prison staff and gave the embodiment of power in the prison a face and name for the participants. The necessity of developing positive relations with prison staff has also been highlighted in the literature as mentioned previously and the atmosphere created by staff within the prison can go a long way to creating a constructive or destructive environment for the prisoners (Crewe, 2009, Liebling & Crewe, 2012). Life sentence prisoners are a small cohort within the prison system and as such tend to be well known by prison staff at different levels of authority, up to and including the Governor. Being a known face within the prison was important for the participants as it gave them some sense of recognition as a person and also helped them to navigate the complex systems within the prison. The participants mentioned in Chapter 5 the positive impact that some of the prison staff had on the management of their lifer identity, the structuring of their time in prison and dealing with the challenges that a life sentence brings. The role of prison staff in making indeterminate and other lengthy sentences 'survivable' or not has been discussed at length in prison literature (Sykes, 1958, Liebling, 2004, Crewe, 2009, Liebling & Crewe, 2012). Yet it has taken the Irish Prison system a long time to view the prison officer staff as a resource in terms of the development of a positive ethos within the prison. The current Director General has stated his intention to utilise the skills of the prison staff in

creating a 'moral' prison system and this is a positive statement but may come too late for the current participants.

For some of the participants, the transfer from the prison that had been their home for the substantial portion of their sentence to the semi-open prison brought with it the loss of those positive relationships as well as the expectation of release. Moving to a new prison environment meant that they had to adjust to that environment and work on establishing positive relationships with the prison officers, probation officers and Governors. They left behind the staff who had been on their side and were willing to watch out for them and advocate for them where necessary and went into a new environment where all the faces of the staff were unknown. The participants stated that there were many times when the transfer to the Training Unit felt like a step backward rather than a step towards full release.

The findings show that the lack of information about the process of release was a major source of powerlessness and frustration for the participants. At no point did they receive a clear timetable to release or map that showed them how best to navigate the new system that they now found themselves in. They also experienced the various power-plays between staff of different disciplines that can happen in any institution. One of the participants reported the slightly surreal situation that arose for him when the Probation Officer wouldn't sanction his overnight release for un-named reasons and he was told by the Governor that "*No Probation Officer will tell me who I can let in and let out of my prison*" and he was released for the overnight on a weekend night when the Probation Officer was off but he was then penalised by the Probation Officer when she refused to let him out for his planned mid-week night then following week.

Each of the participants spoke about the need for better communication between the Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Parole Board. The participants found that each time they asked someone in the different services about what was happening with their release they were told that they didn't know because of one or both of the other services. The participants saw themselves at times as being '*kicked from pillar to post'* as they sought clarity on their progress or lack thereof. Their lack of power is linked to the

indeterminate nature of the sentence where they have no right to release and no voice with the parole process. In this context, the release process and decisions made about release are something that 'happen to' the men. It is not something that they have any control or active input. This situation does appear to be unique to the Irish prison system which is a smaller system than others covered in the international literature where individual personalities can become entrenched in unproductive and unconstructive behaviour which is about their issues with the system rather than about the individual life sentence prisoner.

The end result of the current system is that it actively disempowers the participants at the very point in which they should be becoming more autonomous within the system as they prepare to be released into the community. This disempowerment impedes their ability to make the necessary identity shift from imprisoned life sentence prisoner to released lifer (Jewkes, 2012b). In Chapter 5, the participants spoke about their struggle to adapt to the embedded power of the closed prison system and the impact that this had on them. Now having gone through that initial adjustment and established some sense of self-autonomy and limited control within the closed system, they find themselves having to navigate a different system as a result of the prison transfer and dealing with different rules as the power for release shifts to the Probation Officer who has to supervise the release. To some extent the power system in the Irish Prison Service can be like a Russian doll, where it is very easy to see the big, obvious and external faces of power in terms of the walls, fences etc. but contained within that larger Russian doll are the smaller, numerous self-contained microsystems of power that are deeply embedded within the system. The participants have to learn to navigate and survive each system separately and to do this from a place of institutional powerlessness. This brings me back to the concept of shame and stigma as another recurring theme in the findings.

6.6.2. Key moments of learning

Shame

One of the primary learnings for the participants during the course of their imprisonment has been about shame and the impact that this had on their identity formation and lives prior to the offence. The challenges that the participants faced in addressing their original shame was compounded by their offence and the stigma that being sentenced to life brings with it. They became both victims of shame and a cause of shame for their families. The persistent theme for the participants has been how they are perceived by others and shame is part of that process of 'being seen' (Williams, 1993). Tied in with their understanding of shame is their learning about recognising and managing other emotions especially anger. The prison system can be a hard place to undertake this learning as the helplessness experienced by the participants can lead to feelings of anger and shame. Yet Graham spoke very clearly about having learned how to manage his anger in the prison. This learning about shame and managing anger within prison has been a positive outcome in terms of providing a catalyst for Graham in terms of the redemption script and developing a narrative of rehabilitation. This perception changes how he views his understanding and experience of shame and it has provided him with the ability to move from a shame-based, angry identity to a "wounded healer" identity, where he can make something good come from something bad (Nouwen, 1979, Maruna, 2001). The ability of Graham and others to learn enough to be able to redeem themselves through their imprisonment reveals a deeper complexity in Foucault's concept of the power apparatus within prison as mentioned earlier. It also shifts how we view the concept of identity within the prison system.

Identity

As discussed throughout the three findings chapters, the concept of identity has been an important theme in the participant's stories. From the very beginning, they looked at how they saw themselves prior to the offence as well as how they perceived themselves during their sentence. Their main concern with their identity post-release was how others would see them and

how they would manage the 'spoiled' identity that being a life sentence prisoner brings with it.

Each of the participants were keen to not be defined by their offence and legal status and they also wanted to separate their past mistakes from their 'real' self. The process of accepting responsibility for their actions was complicated by their sense that the person who committed the offence wasn't their 'real' self. This need to separate their actions from their core identity is not unique to the research participants and it is a protective strategy on their part to maintain some sense of identity that they can live with following such an act.

> [Offenders] will acknowledge that, from society's point of view, they are criminals. But no one really regards himself that way. Every [offender] believes that he is basically a decent human being. (Samenow, 2004, p160)

The current findings support this view where each of the participants defined themselves as good people who had done something bad. They see themselves as different people now and they have learned how to manage their offence and to incorporate it into their narrative in a way that isn't destructive. At times there was a fragility to this narrative as the participants struggled to manage the stresses and complexities of the release process whilst holding on to the skills they have learned to manage their new identity in stressful settings.

The redemptive narrative was very important for each of the participants as they spoke about their desire to do good and to do no harm. As was seen in the findings some of the participants had started on this path at a very early stage in their imprisonment while some of the others had unmanaged addictions to deal with before being able to take on a redemptive narrative. The research shows that those who can turn a bad experience into a positive one will do better in terms of managing their way out of the bad experience (McAdams et al, 2001). The concept of resilience wasn't as prevalent throughout the research as I thought that it might have been. The participants coped with their prison sentences in different ways and there were some elements of resilience present in terms of the agency that some of them

showed in engaging actively with education, work and therapeutic opportunities within the prison.

Addiction

All of the participants were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offence and all of them stated at different points in the interviews that the offence would not have happened if they had been sober. Therefore, the theme of alcohol and addiction has been an important one in the current research. The issue of drug misuse in the Irish prison system is not a new one and there have been various reports over the past ten years that have highlighted the problem (Hannon et al, 2000, O'Mahony, 2000, Dillon, 2001, O'Mahony, 2008). Therefore, it was not a surprise to hear the stories of the participants that told of their experience with drugs in the Irish prison system. The exacerbation of addiction by increased usage within prison has been the focus of much policy research and discussion over the years. The time that the participants were in prison represented the prison system's failure to address the drug issues and Graham's and Evan's experience of having drugs and alcohol freely available within the various prisons they were in would be a different story now.

For both of the participants who spiralled into increased addiction while in prison, the turning point for both of them was the intervention of an external party. In one case it was the participant's mother who told him she would no longer visit him as he was dying in front of her. In the other it was a Probation Officer recognising his problem and asking him if he was an alcoholic. Both of these learning moments were transformative for the participants and gave them the impetus to address their addictions with all of the challenges and difficulties that involved. The embedded nature of power came into play during this process for one of the participants when he felt that the medics were being disrespectful of his addiction (Crewe, 2009). His experience highlighted the importance of addiction being treated as a disease within the prison medical units and having no stigma attached to it. He wanted to be treated the same way as anyone with an illness such as cancer would be treated and when this did not occur he reacted violently. The violent reaction occurred because Graham was once again being

shamed because of his addiction and he had sought help and that had been a risky move for him because he saw his addiction to heroin as something shameful. Therefore, his identity was once again under threat when the medics were dismissive of his attempts to get help and refused to believe that he was a heroin addict.

Addiction within the prison system is a challenging issue both for the prison service to manage and also for prisoners to navigate. The participants experience of addiction and, for some of the participants, an increased addiction whilst in prison is a mixed experience. Six of the eight participants stated that they never drank or used illegal substances whilst in prison. One of the participants acknowledged his addiction at the point of conviction and immediately sought out AA meetings within the prison when he was convicted. Two others do not see themselves as addicts or alcoholics even though alcohol was a factor in their crimes but would have attended AA meetings as it would help their release process. Another man eventually acknowledged that he was an alcoholic after going through a therapeutic programme. As can be seen the experience of managing an addiction within the prison system is as varied as the other aspects of the individual participants stories.

6.7. Conclusion

The purpose of the current chapter was to outline the findings that pertain to the final aspect of the life sentence, the transfer of the sentence to the community through release on licence.

This chapter represented the bigger picture for the participants as it provided them with an opportunity to consider how they will put all the various lessons that they have learned into practice once they are fully released. It also showed the voices of the participants who are not yet fully released and have all of their expectations about release yet to be realised along with the voices of the participants who have been fully released for various lengths of time. The reality of release can be very challenging and this can be forgotten in the participant's desire to get out of prison and to begin their lives anew.

The moral thread that has run through the previous two findings chapter became fully unpicked here as the participants spoke about their decisions to live good lives and to do no harm. This has become their mantra as they prepare for life outside the prison walls.

Having discussed the findings of the research in the three findings chapters, the next chapter brings the thesis to its final conclusion.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

"The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing." (Henry Ford)

7.1. Introduction

My Doctorate in Education journey started off as a journey to widen and deepen my own learning and to explore one aspect of my work in a more in-depth way. I chose to focus on the learning experience of life sentence prisoners as I have seen many of them struggle with the indeterminate nature of their sentence and the lengthy release process. I wanted to understand this experience from their perspective. The narrative research focus was an important focus as it legitimises my knowledge and what I have seen in my work experience because knowing intuitively is different to knowing systemically. Yet my own desire to learn and to focus on one aspect of my work seems so simplistic and naïve upon reflection as I come to the conclusion of the largest part of that journey. I am left with a sense of incompleteness as I know that the learning journeys of the research participants are still ongoing and I feel that there was so much more that I could have explored, other paths that I could have travelled if I had the time and the space to do so. There is so much more to the participants' stories than I have had room to explore here and there is a lot to learn from their stories.

This thesis sought to co-create in dialogue with the eight life sentence prisoners their stories and to outline what they felt they had learned from their experience of imprisonment. Earlier chapters presented the research question and the rationale for this research. They have also outlined the context that the research took place in, discussed some of the relevant literature and the methodology that I chose to explore the learning experiences of life sentence prisoners. The relevant findings of the research have been discussed in the three findings chapters and the logic of the findings structure has been outlined. All of the findings of the research have been grounded in the narratives of the participants. I now come to the concluding chapter, which takes me back to the beginning of the research process.

In Chapter 1, I spoke about the individual nature of the participants' stories and the subjective context of a narrative research study such as this one, through two messages that ran concurrently through the findings:

1. What the participants have learned as life sentence prisoners and
2. What they want those of us who work in the sector to learn.

The overarching theme of learning was a consistent presence throughout the research. Prison as a learning setting was very significant, as was the use of a redemption narrative as a learning outcome. The concepts of resilience and recognition were key. The temporal nature of the research and the importance of time for the participants was an ever-present concept even when the participant's didn't discuss it directly, it was always present. These are the messages that I will now reflect on in this final chapter.

This research makes a unique and important contribution to the field of adult education in terms of theory and practice. It does this by applying a learning lens to the experience of life sentence prisoners and co-creating a dialogue of learning and transformation. The research highlights the importance of learning in the process of transformation in an unexpected and challenging context. From a theoretical perspective, the research applied Jarvis' theory of adult learning to the prison context and it also explored the links between Jarvis's theory of 'becoming' through a learning process with Maruna's redemption narrative and Ricoeur's concept of a narrative identity. Each of these theories have movement at their core and an individual focus which made them the most relevant scaffolding upon which to hang the narratives of the participants. A further key implication of the research is the application of Maruna's concept of a redemption narrative to serving prisoners and this adds a further layer to the redemption script by seeing its development whilst the participants were in custody. In addition the research looked at Foucault's concepts of compliance and control in a prison context and how these concepts can help to problematize the redemption narrative. My work around the redemption narrative focuses on the individual nature of redemption and highlights that there are core problems with the institutional and cultural aspects of redemption and how the culture of the prison undermines the possibility of redemption and transformation for life sentence prisoners.

The research focused on the concept of learning through being imprisoned for a life sentence rather than the more traditional criminological concept of 'coping' with imprisonment .The learning focus provided a more proactive basis for transformation and sustaining of learning up to and including the point of release. To cope with their imprisonment is sufficient for some but the participants spoke very clearly about what they had learned from their experience and what that learning meant for their lives post-release. The learning offered within this thesis is not just the individual learning of the participants. The research also highlights the need for the system to learn from the experience of the participants and that the concept of redemption can be applied systemically as well as individually. The research also examined the challenges of putting the learning into practice for life sentence prisoners as they make their way through the prison system.

7.2. What the participants have learned as life sentence prisoners

Prison as a learning setting

In looking at the prison system as a learning setting, the research provides additional insights on the experiential nature of adult learning, enhancing Jarvis' discussion on '*becoming*' (2009). The narrative approach of the research supported Jarvis' theory on how we learn and learning through experience.

> In telling our story we are imposing, or constructing, meaning – or reflective meaning – on these past experiences. It may be that the very act of constructing the story becomes a learning experience for the agents. We actually construct a meaning or explanation, since we are bringing to our consciousness tacit knowledge that has been stored away as a result of previous experiences and we are enabled to learn from it. (Jarvis, 2009, p159)

The interview process where the participants had the opportunity to tell their stories became a learning experience for the participants, another source of narrative knowing. The participants' narratives of learning were embedded in the prison as a cultural context and also within a specific timeframe. Their stories were of the moment and fit within Ricoeur's dynamic concept of identity as '*running stories of the self*' (Presser & Kurth, 2009). The

interconnectedness of learning and identity and the participant's ability to change has been a recurring theme throughout the research. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, the research applied Jarvis' definition of human learning to the experience of life sentence prisoners. Jarvis defines human learning as:

> ...the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing or more experienced person. (2009a, p25)

Jarvis' conclusion that learning results in a '*continually changing or more experienced person'* sits well with Ricoeur's concept of identity as a narrative construction that is shaped by a reflective process. The changing potential of identity is an important element of Ricoeur's definition of identity. The fluidity of identity allows the individual to change based on their experience and to continually reconfigure the stories that they tell about themselves. Continual change is an important element both of Jarvis' definition of learning and Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity. By focussing on Jarvis and Ricoeur as theorists in the area of learning and identity the current research highlights the changing and dynamic nature of their definitions of learning and identity and applies them to the prison setting. I chose both Jarvis and Ricoeur as the theories complemented each other and allowed for the growth and change that the participants spoke about through their experience of learning within the prison setting. These theorists also allowed for the individual process of meaning-making that each of the participants spoke about. The findings highlighted the shifting nature of the participant's identities from their pre-prison identities to their 'lifer' identities to their hoped-for post-release identities and the preparations that they make to take on each shift in identity. For the participants, Jarvis' process of '*becoming*' was an ongoing one with moments of transformation coupled with moments of moving backwards as well as moments of stasis. Each of the participants

experienced key moments of change within the prison system. For some of them this change meant a shift into heavier drug usage and depression before moving over time to their own narrative of redemption. Their process of '*becoming*' and moving towards a redemptive narrative escalated once they moved past the ten year period. The findings also highlight the importance of time in the process of change and learning as each individual participant began a learning and change process at different times in their sentence.

The prison setting is the participants' lived environment and is a restricted, static environment (Crewe, 2009). As such it is experienced by prisoners as an unchanging and rigid setting for learning. Therefore, the contradictory expectation that prisoners will learn and change in a static environment that is structurally unsupportive of that learning and change presented an ongoing disjuncture for the research participants (Warner, 2007). As life sentenced prisoners they are encouraged to learn and to change within certain sections of the prison through the provision of education and psychological services. The participants are also required to learn and change by the parole process if they wish to be released from prison. Yet the setting for that change and learning does not reinforce the change and learning, instead it can actively work to undermine it as was seen in the findings. In short the prison as a learning setting presents continuous tension between the desire and need to learn and the restrictions placed on the application of that learning. The research makes an important contribution to the view of the prison system as a learning system as it highlights the possibility for transformation in spite of the restrictions placed on learning and the imbalance of power that is inherent in the prison system.

The participants' experience of imprisonment and learning from that experience highlights the complexity of prison as a learning environment. This complexity was evidenced in the findings by the participants who stated that prison had saved their lives. Again this view contains contradictions as the participants who had this view saw their prison experience as an intervention that stopped them completing the self-destructive journey they were on. By the simple act of imprisonment, their lives were saved. Yet prison provided more than a physical intervention. The prison environment

serves to provide the most intense learning environment there is where the prisoners not only participate in educational or work activities where available and if they choose, they also have to learn how to manage their addictions, mental health issues and the reality of their imprisonment on a day to day basis. They have to learn to adapt to the different identities and perspectives that the different stages of their sentence require (Jewkes, 2012b).

The learning lens provided by Jarvis and Ricoeur's conceptions of narrative identity unlocked the framework within which I could make sense of the lessons that the participants had learned. The findings highlighted the interconnections between learning and identity development. For some of the participants this interconnection between learning and identity led to the development of their personal redemption script (Maruna, 2001). Therefore the research has highlighted the redemption narrative as a progression from the participants' initial learning through their experience of imprisonment and the shift in identity that occurred when they became life sentence prisoners. However, for the redemption script to be possible the participants had to first of all develop some resilience to their experience of imprisonment.

Fragility of resilience

Tied in with the narratives of learning and identity is the concept of resilience. From the participants perspectives they feel that they are more resilient as a result of their learning in prison yet this is untested for the participants who have not yet been released from prison. There are two elements to resilience:

- Recovery - how well people bounce back fully from the challenge,
- Sustainability - the capacity to continue forward in the face of adversity (Zautra et al, 2010)

The participants' capacity to recover from the challenge of being imprisoned for life was seriously undermined by the lack of an induction into prison and the findings showed that the participants all struggled with their initial imprisonment. The reality of the offence means that the participants were not resilient prior to their imprisonment and that they did not cope well with the

stresses they faced. Therefore, they needed to find a way to learn how to be resilient whilst in prison. The prison setting provides a context where educational and psychological opportunities can be provided to potentially foster resilience and yet any resilience that is developed is often undermined at an institutional and social level. This contradictory context can challenge the participant's capacity to both become resilient and then to sustain their resilience. The untested aspect of resilience for the participants that have yet to be fully released is the transferability of any prison developed resilience into the community. The supportive role of family members was also an important factor for the participants in surviving their imprisonment. Whilst the participants showed limited awareness of the full impact of their life sentence on their families, they all acknowledged the importance of their families' support and their regular contact and visits. The support from their families was an important factor in developing their resilience to prison.

The discussion in Chapter 5 showed that resilience can vary from situation to situation that just because you have shown resilience in one area, you may not be resilient in another (Rutter, 2007). I am conscious that I am talking about the prison system as a whole but it is important to note that there are variances within the cultures of different prisons within the system. Some of the participants found that different prisons were more supportive of personal change than others.

Resilience is a particularly important concept for life sentence prisoners as they need to be resilient to successfully navigate their way out of prison. The resilience that they presented in the findings appears to be fragile in nature and context based. There appears to be little to no resilience or capacity building for the participants and conditions in prison are not being created to foster resilience. Again we are reminded about the complexity of the prison as a learning setting where resilience can be built up at an individual level through psychology and education but it can then be undermined at an institutional and cultural level. The findings show that while prison provides a learning setting it also consistently challenges any learning for life that takes place whilst in prison. The question that Graham raised in the findings about how to question authority as a prisoner is an important one and it

remains an unanswered question. The narrative approach taken in this study has highlighted the complexity and unevenness of learning on many different levels including the personal level and the institutional level. The in-prison resilience is not necessarily sustainable and there is no guarantee that the participants will show resilience in the community.

Redemption narrative as a learning outcome

A further contribution that the thesis makes is the locating of the redemption script within a prison setting. The in-prison context of the research demonstrates that the concept of the narrative of redemption can include an institutional or cultural narrative of redemption in addition to the focus on the redemption of the individual. The participant's stories show that the process of making meaning and making sense of their experience started in prison but at different points for each of the participants. The findings also show that the personal narrative of redemption for the participants comes about through a learning process. This learning occurred through a combination of educational processes, psychological and therapeutic processes, maturation processes and learning through their relationships with others in the prison.

The process of change required sustained effort on the part of the participants and it meant managing their addictions, any mental health issues that they had and engaging actively with all of the services in the prison including education, psychology and probation. The research shows the dissonance that occurs when a prisoner sees himself as having transformed and undergone a redemptive process when that process isn't recognised or matched by a change of approach within the structures or culture of the prison. The lack of recognition from some of the prison staff of the changes in the participants and their permanent identification as lifers challenges the sustainability and transferability of that change. Yet for some of the participants their experience showed that there were staff within the prison who were catalysts for the positive change. This again highlights the complexity of the prison environment and the importance of the relationships between staff and prisoners. This is also highlighted in the literature as mentioned previously (Liebling, 2004, Crewe, 2009).

Some of the participants' narratives of redemption focused on how they have changed and what they can contribute to society through that change (Maruna, 2001). The findings of the current research highlighted the individual nature of any narrative of redemption. It also showed that the participants with the strongest focus on their redemption script were the participants who have not yet been fully released. Of the three participants who had been fully released, the participant with the strongest redemption script was the man who had been released for the shortest period. There was no sense of the '*wounded healer'* identity or the redemption script from the two other participants. They had elements of the conviction to do no harm but that didn't extend into anything further. Their focus instead had moved to the more personal elements of living in the community. This included managing relationships with partners and family members as well as paying bills and all the other elements of everyday living that tend to occupy us. It is not possible to compare how or if they would have presented with a redemption narrative prior to their release, which would constitute interesting further longitudinal research.

A redemption narrative is an individual matter and not something that everyone who goes to prison experiences (Maruna, 2001). What the research does highlight is the tenuous nature of any redemption narrative when it faces the reality of release. It shows that it can be easier to talk about transformation and change and giving something back to society from within the prison walls than from a position of full release where all the stresses of life have to be managed by the former prisoner. Priorities change when people are released from prison and sustaining the redemption narrative in total can be a challenge. Yet one of the fully released participants was still fully engaged with his sense of redemption and was focused on doing good where he can whilst managing the everyday ordinariness of life. For him his need to redeem himself was connected to his ongoing remorse and guilt for the crime.

Other participants had a redemptive aspect to their story without necessarily focussing on giving something back to society. Instead they presented as changed men who were more inward looking and focussed on how they could live as productive members of society without causing further harm to

people. As life sentence prisoners their focus was on getting out of prison and ensuring that they stayed out.

The narrative of redemption in the participants' stories showed their ability to learn and to "*have something good, come out of something bad*". It provided the participants with a sense of purpose and a sense of meaning that sustained them through their imprisonment and will hopefully sustain the redemptive narrative when they are fully released (Barlow & Maruna, 2012).

While the research demonstrates learning on an individual level, the participants' experience also shows that there appears to be little learning on the larger scale of institutional or cultural narratives of redemption and rehabilitation. This potentially strains and undermines the individual transformation that occurs as many participants describe. Narratives of redemption exist not only for individuals but also permeate the rehabilitation ethos and discourse of prisons. However, these principles of rehabilitation and redemption were often undermined by the working culture and institutional practices of the prison services (such as the changing release policies, dependency on individual officers' goodwill, and different practices across prisons). In this sense, the narrative of redemption can also be perceived as operating on an institutional and cultural level in prison which often undermines the personal commitment to redemption. There is the beginnings of an acknowledgement of this discrepancy with changes within the Irish Prison Service in the past year and the emergence of a clearer commitment to changing how the prison service works. This brings some hope for the institutional level of the redemption narrative and most pertinently, the reintroduction of recognition and respect for the prisoner in the prison system and culture. In my interview with Michael Donnellan, Director General of the Irish Prison Service he stated that:

> …prison officers have a very important role to play in terms of the relationship and the change agenda and in involving prisoners in activities and involving themselves in prisoners activities so I think that the whole incentivised regime that we've introduced introduces the class officer in a relationship with the prisoner that is based on normal activities….twisting and turning the whole emphasis about what prison is

> about, yes it's about security but it's also about rehabilitation. It's about safety, it's about safe space, it's also about respect and dignity and that's what we're trying to do is reintroduce that respect agenda back in to the prison service and to the prison system, not just from the prisoner to prisoner or prisoner to prison officer but from the prison officer to prisoner and manager.

The recent introduction of incentivised regimes that are respectful of prisoners and provide prison officers with a more structured role is a potentially positive one. But for the rehabilitation narrative to take hold within the prison system, it must never lose sight of the prisoner as a whole person and not focus exclusively on their offending behaviour in the same way that incentivised regimes have operated in the UK. Incentivised regimes in other jurisdictions have had a mixed impact on prisoners with many prisoners speaking about taking on an identity of compliance in order to manage their sentence within an incentivised regime. According to Liebling (2011), "*prisoners….were preoccupied by achieving an acceptable new public identity (for freedom), as well as by adopting an acceptable (partly covert) identity for their immediate survival in prison"* (p543). This is an important point to note but a more detailed discussion of this is beyond the scope of the current research and highlights the need for future research in the Irish context.

Recognition as a learning outcome

It was clear from the findings chapters that one of the most life changing lessons learned in prison for some of the participants was the recognition of shame as an emotion that has defined them. The misrecognition of shame as an emotion in their lives had a restrictive and at times destructive impact on the identity development of some of the participants. It also was discussed as a factor in their crimes. The challenge with learning to recognise shame as an emotion within a prison setting is that it creates a vulnerability for the participants. The very rawness of the emotions that some of the participants presented with during the interviews highlighted their vulnerability within a prison setting. Sometimes learning about the self and identity and the part that shame played in the participants identity development in a closed setting

presents further challenges for the participants as they learn to manage these emotions in a confined environment. The experience of imprisonment as demonstrated by the stories of the eight participants is not uniform. Their stories support the earlier statement by Crewe that:

> There is no simple model of prisonization. Like a fairground mirror, imprisonment exaggerates some aspects of identity and behaviour, while obscuring and suppressing others. But these distortions occur in different ways. (Crewe, 2009, p 458)

The distortions occur on different levels and in different ways and this is evidenced in the findings where the participants spoke about their different experiences and perceptions of prison. The challenge with a narrative study such as this one is the complex nature of imprisonment and the lack of a '*simple model of prisonization'*. The participants' stories highlight all the contradictory aspects of their imprisonment. On one hand their imprisonment meant their loss of liberty and a downward spiral into depression, addiction and violence. On the other hand, their imprisonment intervened in a pre-existing downward spiral that resulted in the offence and saved them from completing their self-destruction. On one hand, prison was a degrading experience full of rituals of degradation and reinforcement of their powerlessness and lifer identity (Appleton, 2010). On the other hand, prison was a place of learning and achievement where they received positive reinforcement for their change from educational staff, psychologists, Probation Officers and some prison staff. The contradictions of the prison system as a learning setting as highlighted in the findings are many and show the complexity of the experience of imprisonment.

7.3 What the participants want the system to learn

As a practitioner-researcher, one of the challenges that I had throughout the research process was balancing the following:

- What I know from my experience of working with prisoners and ex-prisoners
- What the participants wanted to share about themselves in their narratives of learning, and

- What the participants wanted us to hear and learn from their experience.

As mentioned previously, there were two messages running through the research. One message was very clear - the personal stories of change and learning through adversity. The second message that focused on what the participants wanted the system to learn always felt like a policy-orientated message. This policy focus felt that it belonged in another thesis whilst at the same time it fitted with my own experience of working with prisoners and ex-prisoners. I struggled with the two messages and trying to balance them within a narrative research study. While the personal narratives of learning and redemption are the core focus of the thesis, I couldn't ignore the second message either as the main reason that many the participants took part in the research was to have their views recognised and voices heard.

There are lessons in this research for all of us who work with life sentence prisoners both in the voluntary and the statutory sectors. There are aspects of our work that we are doing very well and there are aspects that we can do much better. The participants wanted us to know that the current release process does not work from their perspective. For some of the participants the release process has been as challenging and demanding as the original adjustments that they had to make to their initial imprisonment. In some instances the release process has been the hardest part of imprisonment. The participants become more vulnerable once they have a sense of hope about being released and setbacks or a lack of progress can be a huge source of frustration and have a devastating impact. This occurs because there is no clear pathway for their release and no obvious way of achieving release. They find themselves to be disempowered at the very point when they should be regaining some power and autonomy in preparation for making the transition to the community. They are disempowered but at the same time they have to have the capacity to advocate for themselves within the prison system without having any clear signposting as to how to do this. This presents a further challenge to their resilience and redemption script.

> Governmental policy can influence how long you spend in prison and as we can see over the past ten years that's broadly what has happened. So I think that is the biggest challenge because if you go in, you need to know how you get out and what the mechanism is and what's the system and what you have to do also because as you know when it's fluid, it's moving and over the last decade, the last two decades, the goalposts have moved to actually make it more difficult to get out (Michael Donnellan, Director General, Irish Prison Service)

The current system with its "*moving goalposts*" also requires the prisoners to manage the complex relations between the prison staff, the Parole Board and the Probation Officer. This is a challenge when the best of relations exist between these services but this can vary when relations between Probation Officers and prison staff are individual rather than governed by institutional cultures or processes. Consequently, the life sentence prisoner ends up having to personally navigate the system by negotiating with individual personalities in the Probation and prison staff while trying to make their way to full release. The poor relations between an individual Probation Officer and prison staff is not the case in every prison but it is evident in the findings. This adds to the pressure of the release process. The practical issues about communication between services with whom the life sentence prisoners have to interact are essential to the smooth navigation of the systems in which the prisoners live. For those who have no power within a system it is necessary for those who are in powerful positions to ensure that they are working inclusively with each other. It should not be left to someone who has no voice within a system to have to advocate on his own behalf in order to survive the system. As we saw earlier in the research there is no place in the parole process for independent advocates who can represent the life sentence prisoner and ensure that the decisions of the Parole Board are communicated to the appropriate agency and the prisoner.

The participants' experience show that the individual relationships that they build with the prison staff, (and by staff I am including all personnel who work within the prisons not just prison officers), can make the difference between surviving prison and thriving in prison (Liebling, 2011). Greater

reflectivity about the significance of transparent relationships and working processes in prison settings needs to be developed at an institutional level. My interview with Michael Donnellan indicates that this is the intention of the Irish Prison Service. The current research has shown the difference that individual officers, Governors, teachers, psychologists, nurses and Probation Officers made to the participants. The emphasis has been on the role of staff rather than other prisoners as this was the focus of all of the participants' narratives. While two of the participants spoke about having a close, trusting friendship with one other prisoner for a portion of their sentence and one prisoner was a Listener[19] so had volunteered to help other prisoners, their focus in prison was on the prison staff and the role they played in their narratives. A prison is made up of far more than bricks, mortar and bars. The values that individual staff bring to their work must be recognised and capitalised on to ensure that the prison system remains humane and respectful of the people who end up within its walls. The experience of the participants shows that being treated as human beings by the staff was essential for their survival of the life sentence. The literature supports this when we look at the impact of the Other on the development of shame and identity (Williams, 1993, Ricoeur, 1992, McAdams, 2005). Unfortunately, not all of the participants could speak about positive relations with staff but those who experienced positive interactions with staff were able to build on the reflection of themselves that was presented in those interactions.

The primary message that the participants wanted the system to learn was about the importance of recognising them as people and not just lifers and also relating and communicating with them and with the different agencies within the prison system in a more transparent manner.

7.4. Living on licence

The research captured people at a very specific point in their release journey and in their experience of imprisonment and is unique in its focus on that snapshot of imprisonment and release. The transition from long-term imprisonment to full-time release on licence in the community is a

[19] The Listener programme is run within the prisons by the Samaritans. Long-serving prisoners volunteer to be trained as Listeners by the Samaritans to help other prisoners who are in distress.

particularly vulnerable time for life sentence prisoners. It is very easy to stumble and fall on the pathway and end up back full-time in prison with the hope for making that transition again being a long way away. Therefore to succeed in getting out of prison the first time that you are released requires a huge amount of learning both for the life sentence prisoner and for the system as a whole. This is the reality of living on licence, knowing that even if you make it to full-time release and you become established in the community, one misstep can result in you being recalled to prison and having to begin the journey again (Appleton, 2010)

The reality is that release for a life sentence prisoner can be a tenuous one and requires the individual to have the capacity to sustain his release by maintaining a positive working relationship with the Probation Service in the community and not coming to the attention of the Gardaí. Freedom has limits and for some people these limits include geographical limits (Appleton, 2010). This means that they have to live somewhere completely new upon release as they cannot return home due to the proximity of the victim's family and/or the nature of the offence. Even without the legal restrictions many of the participants feel they can't return home due to the potential impact such a return would have on their family.

While there is no denying the seriousness of the crimes that the men committed and the life changing impact of their crimes on the victim's families, the men too have been changed by their own actions. The punishment has been substantial yet nothing can ever give back the life that they have taken. This is something that the participants will always have to live with.

7.5. Conclusion

While the research took place at a very specific point in each participants' experience of imprisonment, they were able to reflect back to their childhood, their early adulthood, and their life before prison and see who they were then and see the path that led them to a life sentence. The participants' stories could have had many lenses applied to them or been told through a sociological or criminological discourse. I chose a learning lens to look at the

stories of the participants as a learning lens provided a different perspective on the experience of life sentence prisoners. I wanted to explore what they had learned from their experience and how they had learned.

The learning that is encompassed in this research is learning of the broadest type possible. The participants spoke at all times about what they had learned and how they had learned. While they were able to list the learning that had taken place in the classroom or in their workplace, the learning that had the most meaning for them is what I refer to as "life lessons" or as Jarvis (2009a) more eloquently refers to it as "*how to be a human in society*". Through their experience of the life sentence and the prison as a learning setting, the participants had undergone a process of '*becoming*' (Jarvis, 2009a) that had set them on the path to the redemption narrative (Maruna, 2001). Their '*becoming*' process was an integral part of their redemption script, it was a dynamic process that represented their capacity for continuous and holistic learning that was about becoming a better person rather than about getting qualifications.

The lessons that they have learned through their imprisonment and their experiences before that have been hard learned and will hopefully be easily remembered. Different experiences brought them on different journeys and they caused pain to others in these journeys but in that they are not unique. Prison has presented them with many challenges but it has also presented them with opportunities for learning some of life's harder lessons. Prison made a difference in these participants' lives. For some of the participants it saved their lives, for others it caused them to spiral downwards further into their addiction before having an intervention that halted the downward slide and encouraged them to manage their addiction and to look forward to the possibility of release. The research shows that people can learn in the most unexpected places and during the most challenging times. It shows that it can take some people a while to get to the key moment of transformation where they recognise the importance of learning and regaining their lives. The research also shows the lack of a linear timeframe to learning and that a learning journey undertaken in a prison setting is a complex and messy one.

It is a process that has moments of success, affirmation and transformation as well as moments of vulnerability, struggle and relapse.

The participants learned about themselves through their interaction and engagement with the formal education units within the prisons. But they also learned about themselves through their interactions with psychologists, prison officers, nurses, Chaplains and probation officers. The relationships that the participants had with the various staff that work within the prison provided both the catalyst and the framework within which their learning and their redemption script took place. Having examined the experience of eight men who have served or are serving a life sentence the research has found that each of the participants' experience of imprisonment and release is varied and individual, that the prison was a learning setting that presented challenges in terms of consistency of learning but it also presented the participants with learning opportunities that they had previously missed out on. They have learned how to manage the prison system, they have learned about themselves and how to recognise their emotions and their triggers. They have learned how to live and hopefully they have learned enough to enable them to get out of prison and to stay out.

None of the participants would have chosen to learn so much within a prison setting and behind all of their learning is the reality of the price that others have paid. As Evan stated: *"…but it's a pity that it had to happen this way that I found out …that I learned about myself, it's a pity that a life had to be lost."*

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Appendix 1

Life sentence

Unlike other jurisdictions, the crime of murder in Ireland is punishable with a mandatory life sentence without there being any room for recommendations from the Judge about minimum tariffs or lengths of time to be served. This means that decisions about release are completely separate from the sentencing process. The life sentence for murder is one of the few mandatory sentencing practices in Ireland where anyone convicted of murder over the age of 18 years receives a mandatory life sentence.

> Ireland retains a highly discretionary system of sentencing and, unlike some other common-law jurisdictions, has so far refrained from introducing any form of guidelines or tariff to structure judicial sentencing decisions. Apart from murder which carries a mandatory life sentence and a small number of drug trafficking and firearms offences which attract presumptive or mandatory minimum sentences all other serious offences are governed by maximum sentences expressed in terms of imprisonment, fine or both (O'Malley, 2008, p1)

As the participants progress through their life sentence different statutory agencies come into play. For the first number of years of their sentence the participants would have had very little to do with the prison-based Probation Officer, however after seven years once they are eligible to go before the Parole Board they start to meet with the Probation Officer who draws up the reports for the Parole Board to make decisions about the release of the participants.

Appendix 2

Prison system context

1.3.2.1. Rehabilitation in the Irish prison system.

The biggest change in Irish penal policy took place in the 1960's when the principle of rehabilitation took hold and was driven by politicians. It was also accepted as valid by the public and the media. In this context rehabilitation is defined as a penal concept, a penal practice as well as the process of being rehabilitated or an outcome (McNeill, 2009). The concept of rehabilitation became written into legislation with the passing of The Prisons Act 1970. The purpose of the Act was outlined as follows:

> To enable the Minister for Justice, for the purpose of promoting the rehabilitation of offenders, to provide places other than prisons for the detention of persons

It was under this legislation that the first open prison was developed and it paved the way for the development of the semi-open prison. It put the focus firmly on prison as a place of rehabilitation not just a place of punishment. It was also in this rehabilitative climate that PACE was developed in 1969 to provide accommodation to homeless men leaving prison.

Other measures were introduced during this time that recognised that prisoners were people with various problems, not just perpetrators of crime. An example of this was the introduction of temporary release (TR) under the Criminal Justice Act 1960. At the time it was primarily introduced for compassionate reasons to allow prisoners leave to attend family funerals or be with a dying or ill relatives etc. In addition to the humanitarian aspects of the temporary release provision,

> Temporary release was advocated as a benefit to long-term prisoners to prepare them for release and possibly employment. (Rogan, 2011, p.93)

In more recent years temporary release (TR) has been perceived to be used primarily as a mechanism to alleviate overcrowding and thus can be seen by many to be a contributory factor in the "revolving door" phenomenon. Looking back there were very different views on prison and the place of prison in society in the 1960s than exist today.

Numbers of life sentence prisoners

On the 30th November 2012, there were 4,269 people in custody in Irish prisons. Of this number there were 291 prisoners serving a life sentence. This represents 7.9% of the prison population. During 2012, there were 22 people sentenced to life out of the 13,526 people sent to prison in that year (Irish Prison Service, 2013). The average daily prison population in 2012 was 4,318 (including remand). Life sentence prisoners represent a small percentage of the overall prison population and this has remained consistently the case over the years. The 291 figure includes mandatory life sentence prisoners as well as a small number of discretionary life sentence prisoners. For example on the 30th November 2010, of the 286 life sentence prisoners in prison, 273 of them were serving a mandatory sentence of life and the other 13 were on discretionary sentences. Also on the 30th November, 2010 there were 5 women serving a life sentence in Ireland (Irish Prison Service, 2011). In addition to the numbers of people in prison sentenced to life there were 65 other lifers living in the community on licence at the end of December 2011. (Probation Service, 2012)

a) Rate of imprisonment

When discussing the Irish prison system and the numbers of people in our prisons it is important to have a sense of where Ireland stands on the use of prison internationally. Ireland currently imprisons people at a rate of 100 people per 100,000 of the national population. (World Prison Population list, 2012). This represents a substantial increase on our previous rate of 78 per 100,000 in 2008. As a country we are now imprisoning more people than we have ever done previously. To put our rate of imprisonment in a European context, we imprison more people per 100,000 of national population than the following countries:

- Germany, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Slovenia, Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Iceland, Sweden and Northern Ireland.

The only other country in Europe that has increased the use of prison more than Ireland in recent years is Greece. Our rate of imprisonment has increased

by 54 per cent since 1999 and Greece's rate of imprisonment has increased by 84 per cent in the same time period. (O'Donnell, 2012). The participants have been directly affected by the rapid increase in our prison population in the past ten years. This means that the staff resources are less available than they would be in a less overcrowded setting.

Overcrowding

The most recent figures available at the time of writing show that on the 5th September, 2013 the prison population was 4,046 with 665 prisoners on temporary release. (Irish Prison Service, 2013). The introduction of the Community Returns programme where prisoners are released under TR to reside at home whilst completing work and training programmes has impacted on reducing the numbers in prison. The daily prison population has been at or over the 4,300 mark since 2010. While the high numbers have been consistent, the capacity for the prisons in Ireland on a daily basis is substantially below this number and overcrowding remains an ongoing issue within Irish prisons. Additional capacity has been built into the system in the past two years but this has been through doubling up of cells rather than any new buildings. Overcrowding in practical terms for prisoners means that cells are shared continually, often with four people sharing a cell that has been designed for two people.

Appendix 3

Profile of prisoners

The profile of prisoners has remained fairly consistent since the 1997 study undertaken by Paul O'Mahony on the sociological and criminological profile of prisoners in Mountjoy Prison. This study found the following to be the profile of a prisoner in Mountjoy:

- 80 per cent came from a working class area of Dublin,
- 94 per cent had a father from the two lowest socio-economic classes,
- 90 per cent came from a family with 4 children or more,
- 76 per cent lived in rented accommodation,
- 80 per cent had left school before the age of 16,
- 77 per cent had never sat a public exam,
- 88 per cent were unemployed prior to imprisonment
- 86 per cent used cannabis,
- 71 per cent used hard drugs,
- 81 per cent were never married but,
- 72 per cent had children. (O'Mahony, 1997, p135)

All of these deprivation factors remain relevant today and the profile of prisoners has changed very little. In addition to the above only 58 per cent of prisoners had been raised with both parents to the age of 16 and more than half grew up in a home where either no parent worked or else only the mother worked in a menial job. A more recent study by Seymour and Costello (2005) found that 70 per cent of prisoners had left school before the age of 16 with 27 percent having left school between the ages of 7 and 13 years. There remained high levels of unemployment amongst prisoners with 53 per cent being unemployed at the time of committal. The variation in this figure from the earlier O'Mahony figure can be explained by the wider range of prisons included in the 2005 research.

Appendix 4

Brief historical overview of the Irish prison system

In order to fully understand the current Irish prison system it is useful to look back a bit further to see how it has developed. Unlike other jurisdictions, the prison system in Ireland, since Independence, has not developed along rigid ideological lines. Instead prison policies in Ireland have developed in various different ways and ethos and ideology has not always been to the fore of penal policy. At times penal policy appears to have been more driven by economic factors and the cost of imprisonment rather than by ideologies. According to Rogan (2012), Ireland inherited the legislation that characterised a penal-welfares approach to imprisonment at the foundation of the state. As we are aware prisons at the time were just one of many institutions that incarcerated people based on how society viewed their behaviour. People incarcerated in prisons at the time were generally there due to their having committed various crimes; this was not the case with the other institutions.

The prison population was also quite small in the early years of the state, but slowly it started to increase. In 1958, the average number of people in prison on a daily basis was 360.To put the 1958 low prison population in context the number of children detained in the 3 reformatories and 51 industrial schools in 1950 was 6,000, this figure dropped to under 4,000 in 1960 and to 1,270 in 1970. (CSO, 2000) Also in 1958 there were 20,000 patients in psychiatric institutions. By 2007 this number had dropped to 3,000 people who were inpatients in psychiatric hospitals (O'Malley, 2008). It is quite shocking to realise that in this current age of an overcrowded prison system that the numbers in prison today are still substantially lower than the number of children who were in institutions in the 1950s.

By 1970 this has increased to an average daily figure of 749. Ten years later this figure had nearly doubled with 1,215 people being the average prison population per day in 1980. Fast forward another 10 years and the average

daily prison population was 2,108 in 1990 and by 2000 the figure has again risen to 2,948. (National Crime Council, 2007).

> In 1988, this trend in increasing committal rates was ascribed by McCullagh to the 'increased punitiveness of the judiciary'. He suggests this began in the late 1970s, arguing that the 'unhampered operation of judicial discretion has produced a penal crisis', and that the judiciary should be subject to some external control in making sentencing decisions. His warning went unheeded. (Bacik, 1999)

The first ten years of the new century saw another dramatic escalation in the numbers of people being imprisoned with the average daily prison population now standing at 4,313 (Irish Prison Service, 2011).The prison population has increased by 32 per cent since 2007 alone when the average daily prison population was 3,321.

> It is also worth noting that our prison population has more than doubled over the 20-year period since 1990. This is obviously a cause of concern because of the risk of serious overcrowding in prison institutions some of which are now operating greatly in excess of capacity. (O'Malley, 2010, p1)

All of this represents a massive increase in the numbers of people being sent to prison on a daily basis. The focus of this increase has been on how sentences are imposed by the judiciary and the broad role of prisons in our society.

Appendix 5

The Probation Service

The Probation Service is an agency within the Department of Justice that operates within the prisons and also in the community providing supervision to prisoners, ex-prisoners and to offenders. The Probation Service is run on a national basis both within the prisons and in the community.

> During the year the Service dealt with 14,845 offenders in the community. The total number of new referrals was 9,347. Of that number 13.5% were women. (Probation Service, 2012)

In recent years the Probation Service has rolled out a risk assessment model for the service and all referrals to the service are now risk assessed. On the 30th December 2011, the Probation Service was working with 3,030 offenders in the community, 90 per cent of whom were classified as being in the moderate to very high risk of re-offending categories. The Probation Service also provides a range of reports to the courts that assist with deciding what the sentence should be, these are referred to as pre-sanction reports. In addition to the court reports and post-release supervision, the service also provides a range of alternatives to custody including the Community Service projects.

For the first seven years of their sentence their contact with the Probation Officer would have been limited but once they have served eight years they are eligible to go before the Parole Board and the Probation Officer role becomes more active at that point. The work of the Parole Board is supported by the reports on the prisoner by the various agencies within the prison including the Probation Service. To assist the release process the Probation Officer will also undertake a family visit prior to release to ascertain the practicalities involved with the release of a life sentence prisoner.

The release of life sentence prisoners is under the Criminal Justice Act 1960 and the Criminal Justice (Temporary Release of Prisoners) Act, 2003. Upon their release from prison the life sentence prisoner is assigned to a Probation Officer in the community who takes over the supervision of the individual.

Appendix 6

The Parole Board

The Parole Board was established in 2001 to consider the release of life sentence and other long-term sentence prisoners. The Parole Board replaced the Sentence Review Group (SRG). As a non-statutory body the Parole Board makes recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality about the release of long-term sentence prisoners. The final decision about the release rests solely with the Minister and there is no obligation on him to accept the recommendations of the Parole Board. Therefore the recommendations of the Parole Board are not legally binding and cannot be implemented without the final decision being made by the Minister for Justice.

According to a report by the Irish Human Rights Commission it is the very process mentioned above that has placed the Irish system of managing the release of life sentence prisoners at odds with the European Convention on Human Rights.

> Firstly, the question of release in Ireland is an executive matter whereas the European Convention of Human Rights guarantees a right of review by a court or "court like" body. Secondly, the Parole Board is not a "court like" body, as that concept is understood in European human rights law. The Parole Board's role is merely advisory but the Convention demands that the review body has the power to determine cases. (McCutcheon and Coffey, 2006, p3)

The Parole Board's recommendations are influenced by the reports that they receive from various agencies within the prison including the psychological services, if the prisoner has engaged with them and the Probation Service. The prisoner is invited to attend a Parole Board meeting after they have served a specified period of time and depending on the nature of their sentence. All life sentence prisoners have to go before the Parole Board in order to be released. For those prisoners who are not recommended for release by the Parole Board, there is no appeal process nor do they have the right to have legal representation when coming before the Parole Board. If the prisoner is not recommended for release in the first instance, they are

given a timeline for their review, this can either be on an annual basis or every two or three years. (IPRT, 2012)

The Irish Human Rights Commission has also recommended the establishment of a statutory based Parole Board in order to ensure that the mandatory life sentence for murder complies with all human rights standards about the implementation of the sentence.

Appendix 7 Information Letter

Dear _____

I am writing to you to invite you to take part in a research study that is being undertaken by Lisa Cuthbert, Director of PACE.

The research study is titled 'That's my story, I can't change it: Living on Licence' and is focusing on the experience of life sentenced prisoners as they prepare for release into the community. You have been invited to participate in this study as you have served a life sentence, been released and are living within the community.

The aim of the research is to develop a better understanding of the process of release, to explore the work that is done currently and to understand how we can make the transition from prison into the community better. I am very interested in talking with you as part of the research and to have your experience inform the research and the practice within PACE.

I am undertaking this research as part of a Doctorate in Education that is being run through the Education Department and Department of Adult and Community Education, NUI Maynooth. The research will result in the production of a thesis on completion of this Doctorate programme. The research will primarily consist of one/two in-depth interviews with me and will be done on an anonymous and confidential basis. All participation in the research is voluntary and the interviews will take place at a convenient location. The research has been ethically approved both by the Irish Prison Service and NUI, Maynooth.

As such it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

If you agree to participate in the research study, I will contact you to arrange a time to meet with you to undertake an interview that will be audio recorded. The interview will take approximately an hour. The audio-recordings and transcripts from the interview will be stored securely and will be destroyed at the end of the research. The transcripts of this interview will be anonymised. All the information collected during this research will be kept confidential (within legal limitations) and your privacy will be maintained at all times.

I appreciate you taking the time to read this information sheet. If you wish to participate in the research study you can contact me at [phone number] to let me know and I will arrange a time to meet with you to go through the consent form and to answer any questions that you may have about the research.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Cuthbert
Director
PACE

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019.

Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Appendix 8

Sample of coding applied to in one paragraph from the data

Temporary Release Conditions -look at positive - Control - On licence - Planning - Drink not an issue - Start to relax - Different Probation Officers	Well, I'm not delighted with it because you can't be delighted with it but it's not something that I'm afraid of it's actually, I suppose I look at it more than anything, I look at the positive sides. It's there for us as much as it's there not for us, it's there for us too at the same time. I know it's their way of actually hanging on and keeping control of us but the thing about it as well is if I'm going to work it's not going to be a big deal for me, it takes me twenty minutes to walk from the unit to the [place of work] right so if I have to come and sign on it's a matter of saying to my boss 'look I'm not going to be here Monday afternoon from 2pm I have to be in the TU for 3pm say' you know what I mean, it's about making all those, in terms of the conditions, my conditions probably won't be that much different to they are on my TR form at the moment anyway. Drinking is not an issue, sober habits yeah, you know, keeping the peace, well I don't break it anyway at the moment and in all fairness, going to work, yeah I can do that, I've no problem getting up and doing a day's work, come back on time well I'm not going to have to do that once I get out fully, if there's a curfew there saying you can't be out in after 12am at night on a Friday night or Saturday or Sunday, yeah fine, you know and I know those conditions and I know after a few years they start to relax and you know and then in all of this there is going to be a frustration with this too because one Probation Officer will give you enough rope that you can go down the country, another one won't give you anything and you won't get down the end of the avenue so it will change too....