

Probation Officers: The Next Generation

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Abstract

This study is an investigation into the new world of probation. For the past two decades the Probation Service has struggled to survive in a highly ambivalent social and political climate. During this period, the training of probation officers has separated from social work training and the service has adopted a more punishment-focused, coercive and managerialist stance in its work with offenders.

Using a mixed methods approach that includes semi-structured interviews and case discussions, my research focuses on a sample of recently qualified probation officers with a view to exploring their experiences and perceptions of their working lives, and to construct a picture of the occupation from a newcomer perspective. In particular, given the shift in the ideological framework of the service, I wished to learn about the professional identity of the generation of probation officers who are now entering the service through an examination of their motivation and practices.

Despite pressure to eradicate the welfare-oriented ethos of the service, a significant and unexpected discovery arising from my research has been the resilience of traditional values that are brought to the service in the aspirations and habitus of newcomers. My findings are contextualised in relation to the criminal justice system, the historical development of the probation service, the status of probation as a profession and my own 'insider' experience. In addition, the study is underpinned by a theoretical perspective that draws on the work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu.

Declaration

This thesis represents my own research and original work. It cannot be attributed to any other person or persons.

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Abbreviations

ART	Aggression Replacement Treatment
CAFCASS	Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CQSW	Certificate of Qualification in Social Work
MAPP	Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements
NAPO	National Association of Probation Officers
NPS	National Probation Service
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OASYS	Offender Assessment System
PDA	Practice Development Assessor
PSO	Probation Service Officer
SFO	Serious Further Offence
SPO	Senior Probation Officer
TPO	Trainee Probation Officer

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Introduction

This research project represents a highly personal endeavour. Although it focuses on the experiences of probation officers who are at the start of their careers, my choice of subject was very much influenced by the fact that, in contrast to the research participants, I am approaching retirement from the Probation Service. Thus, this project has provided me with an opportunity to look back and reflect upon my own experience, whilst thinking about what has happened to the service in the current era. In making this statement, I hope it will be recognised that this study is far from being an indulgent, nostalgia trip.

Having worked for the Probation Service for more than 30 years as a front line practitioner and, more latterly, as a manager with responsibility for the professional development and training of staff, I consider myself to be a research 'insider' with substantial, first-hand knowledge of the organisation and its work. As a consequence, I have inevitably drawn on my subjective experience as a resource within this study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) recognise this as a legitimate approach to research and the idea of taking into account the subjective involvement of the researcher is lent further support by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) who argue that the researcher, whatever the circumstances, can never be detached from their field of inquiry.

I joined the Probation Service (or the Probation and After-Care Service as it was then known) in the early 1970s with a degree in Sociology. The subject of my degree being something which I regard as contextually significant insofar as it was a subject that seemed to naturally guide myself, and many of my contemporaries with the same degree, towards a social work related occupation. At that time, probation work seemed to be firmly located in the social work tradition and it was just one of several employment options I pursued, including as a back-up, non social work related jobs.

As things turned out, probation was the first job offer I received after a depressing run of rejections without interviews. Ironically, another job offer (as a personal assistant to the director of an old people's home) was received by post a few days later having been delayed by being delivered initially to the

wrong address. I have often wondered what might have happened if that letter had arrived first.

Having been unemployed for approximately 6 months following the completion of my degree, I was simply relieved to have finally gained employment and to have the prospect of earning something. I was not thinking of a long term career in probation, but I developed a lasting commitment to the job as a result of the experiences I encountered and the rest, as they say, is history!

Nonetheless, given the circumstances surrounding my entry into the Probation Service, I tended to regard it as having come about largely by chance. I knew little about the work of the service and completing the application form for the position of Ancillary Worker (which I later learned was a newly created post designed to provide support to qualified probation officers) felt like a random decision. This was, I should add, a period of my life when I neither acknowledged nor denied the possibility of unconscious motives or, for that matter, gave them any consideration.

Two separate periods of therapy later, and looking back with a reflective stance borne of my generic social work/probation qualifying course and subsequent post qualifying training at the Tavistock Clinic, I am ready to concede that my entry into probation work was probably not as random as I once thought. A combination of working class, quietly diligent, compliant and uncomplaining parents; a harsh, self-denigrating super-ego accompanied by self doubt, a lack of confidence in my abilities and a sense of being an outsider; a strong belief in social justice with idealistic notions of influencing societal change; one much older brother who became a primary school teacher; and a lack of interest in acquiring material wealth all played a part and constitute those factors which make up my personal habitus.¹

Insofar as my background, dispositions and first degree laid the foundations for my choice of occupation, the period when I trained and my route towards qualifying were equally significant in shaping my professional identity, practice

¹ The concept of habitus is a major theme in this study which will be addressed in detail later.

and values. The Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) was awarded to social workers and probation officers alike, during a period when both roles were regarded as part of the same profession². As I possessed what was considered a relevant degree, I was permitted to attend a one year CQSW course which, as part of the training, awarded a Diploma in Applied Social Studies at the same time; those with a non relevant degree were required to complete a course of two years duration. However, not all training was offered as part of a post graduate course, with some courses being available for those without first degrees, as well as a qualifying course delivered by the Home Office specifically for candidates who were 27 years old and over.

At the conclusion of my training, having gained a CQSW, I experienced a slight conflict in terms of my professional identity. At one level, I regarded myself as a social worker, albeit someone who had chosen to specialise in a particular aspect of the work but, as a probation officer, I believed I was afforded higher prestige and respect than generic social workers and I rather enjoyed that. It was certainly apparent that social workers, but not probation officers, had a rather unflattering image associated with doubts about their skills, their common sense, their politics and even their style of dress, all of which placed them in a negative light as far as sentencers were concerned (and the public and the media too)³.

It was a time when the focus of probation work was not exclusively on offenders as it is now. Indeed, the word 'offenders' was not yet part of the vocabulary. The service worked with *clients* and embraced a broad range of activities including divorce court welfare work, marriage guidance, non-school attendance

² At the end of the 1960s, consideration was given to the amalgamation of social work and probation, but the latter successfully campaigned to remain independent and, as a consequence, proposals for amalgamation were excluded from the remit of the Seebohm Committee's planned reorganisation of the personal social services. Efforts were also made to encourage the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) to incorporate into the British Association of Social Workers with a view to creating a unified profession. This, too, was successfully resisted by NAPO amidst fears of a loss of independence and influence although, in Scotland, the Probation Service was absorbed into the newly created social work departments (Parry and Parry 1979).

³ Social workers were perceived as applying a left wing ideology in their practice. For a while, it looked as though the National Association of Probation Officers might align itself to a similar stance but, as Worrall and Hoy (2005) have suggested, it decided to support the law and order lobby of the Thatcherite Government in the face of threatened financial cuts.

and acting as guardian ad litem in adoption cases. Caseloads included both juveniles and adults whom the courts had made subject to statutory supervision, and everyone released from prison, regardless of the length of sentence, was offered voluntary contact and support to facilitate their return to the community. Office Duty would bring in a variety of non-criminal problems from disputes between neighbours to financial management, as well as the occasional person seeking advice about wills having confused the probation office with the probate office.

It was also a time when probation officers were predominantly male⁴ and when 'advise, assist and befriend', 'care and control;' and 'social workers of the court' were the phrases which defined their role, alongside what felt like a large measure of autonomy and independence to organise our own workload. What we did with our clients who were subject to probation and supervision orders was generally referred to as 'casework' but what that actually meant in practice varied enormously. Nonetheless, my colleagues and I seemed to be driven by a belief that the intervention we provided was somehow intrinsically good and that the quality of our relationship with our clients was what mattered. Certainly, in the immediate aftermath of my training, I thought that my personal intervention in a case was sufficient to bring about positive change.

The supervision of offenders was primarily delivered on a one to one basis. There always seemed to be too many cases and staff shortages were just as much a feature then as they are now, but we intervened as we considered appropriate based on our own individual orientation and theoretical outlook and in circumstances in which management oversight was almost non-existent beyond what was known as casework supervision. The latter was provided by a Senior Probation Officer (SPO) who tended to be a highly experienced practitioner and, generally, very influential in shaping the practice and identity of the teams for whom they were the leader.⁵ They were a source of stability, support and containment and, in my early years, those who led the teams in

⁴ Since the 1990s the ratio of female to male probation officers has shifted significantly in favour of females and currently stands at approximately 3:1.

⁵ I have deliberately chosen not to refer to SPOs as managers as, in my recollection, management in any sophisticated sense did not begin to emerge before the mid 1980s.

which I was a member were a significant influence on the development of my professional knowledge post training.⁶ If the SPO did not know the answer to a query, the advice was usually to consult what was fondly referred to as 'Jarvis' – The Probation Officer's Manual, edited by Fred Jarvis and first published in 1969, which served as a reference guide to the duties and responsibilities of probation officers and the legislation underpinning their work. For my colleagues and I, it was an essential manual in the days before manualisation took on more negative connotations.

Community Service was in the process of being rolled out across the country offering a new, specialist dimension to probation work based on the notion of reparation, rather than casework or treatment. Technology had not yet progressed beyond the typewriter, dictaphones or the Banda machine for producing copies of court reports; and secretaries were employed on a ratio of one to every two probation officers. Their role being to type reports, letters and case records leaving probation officers free to undertake the front line work with clients.

These are just some of the memories that I have of the world I entered, first as a non qualified support worker in 1972 and subsequently as a qualified probation officer in 1975. Whatever it might have been that drew me to the service, it remains true that it was not a career I envisaged for myself when I was growing up and I suspect that the job of probation officer is not one which readily springs to the mind of many children when they speak of what they would like to become. The fact being that, both then and now, the Probation Service and its work continues to have a relatively low public profile. As Vanstone has observed, the service 'has always lived its life in the shadow of other professionals within the criminal justice system' (Vanstone 158:2004). If anything, because of its focus on criminals, its work arouses hostility amongst some members of the public. It is a job that is frequently misunderstood and which is largely unvalued. It is almost as if probation officers, as Hughes and

⁶ It should be stressed that these are my personal views. I am aware that during the 1970s NAPO adopted a very negative stance towards the expansion of the SPO and other management roles on the basis that they threatened the independence of probation officers. They even campaigned at one stage for the introduction of leaderless teams.

Pengelly (1997:12) have observed, are seen in 'the same light of irresponsibility and subversiveness' as the people they supervise. Choosing a career in probation certainly does not seem to impress itself on the public mind in the same way as, for example, choosing to become a doctor. Perhaps, even more contentiously, being a probation officer has tended to be regarded as a low status profession, if it is viewed as a true profession at all.⁷

The period during which I originally began working for the Probation Service has been described as the service's 'heyday' (Chui and Nellis 2003) but that would imply some kind of diminishment since then. Whilst the notion of a golden age of probation may be something of a myth, I believe it to be the case that I came into the service at a time when the rehabilitative model of work with offenders was the dominant ethos and the credibility of the service and confidence in what it was doing was at its height. I have subsequently supervised offenders and managed staff from the pessimistic days of 'nothing works' through to the period of even greater negativity which accompanied 'prison works' and onto the current era of 'what works' which has encouraged the development of effective interventions as measured and supported by research evidence. As such, it was viewed as offering an antidote to 'nothing works' and was introduced with the promise of being the key to a Probation Service renaissance.⁸

Writing in 1978, Haxby surmised that the service has:

[N]ever been free from change, but at present it is at a crucial stage in its development. Many changes have been imposed on it recently by legislation and administrative decision, and other changes are pending (Haxby 1978:15).

These words could be just as easily applied to the contemporary position of the service and remain equally relevant. In reflecting on the various stages from 'nothing works' to 'what works', it is particularly evident that the past thirty years

⁷ The professional status of probation officers will be discussed further in a later chapter.

⁸ I feel that it is relevant to make clear that whilst I was aware of the 'nothing works' polemic, I continued to believe in the value of the work I was doing with my caseload and, in the absence of any form of sophisticated management policy or accountability at that time, it had no impact either on my practice or, as far as I could tell, the practice of my colleagues.

or so have been a time of relentless change that has sometimes seen the Service struggling to survive. Indeed, referring currently to the Probation Service is, strictly speaking, inaccurate insofar as it has now been merged with the Prison Service under the umbrella title of the National Offender Management Service. That said, separate organisational structures remain in place which I feel, for the moment, gives some legitimacy to my continuing to use the term Probation Service.

Throughout its history the Probation Service has endeavoured to provide a solution to the highly contested question of how to deal with offenders. As attitudes and ideologies towards crime have changed or, more specifically, as the values and aims underpinning government legislation relating to what is considered to be the appropriate punishment of offenders have been redefined, so the Probation Service has also had to change and redefine its purpose and working practices. This has resulted in a developmental process which has seen the service evolve from its voluntary, philanthropic and evangelical roots in the 19th Century, when it was founded on the belief that criminals could be reformed, to its present incarnation as a centrally controlled, punishment oriented, law enforcement agency whose primary purpose is the protection of the public.

These changes have been accompanied by a radical shift in the way probation officers are trained. In 1998, the Diploma in Probation Studies became the professional qualification required by anyone wishing to become a probation officer, thereby separating probation qualifying courses from social work qualifying courses. It was a development which, on the one hand, could be viewed as serving to emphasise the unique, specialised nature of work with offenders. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as providing confirmation that the prevailing political ideology was one that wished to separate such work from social work on the grounds that the latter carried connotations of being too 'soft'. The driving force underpinning the change in training being the desire to create a harder image for the Service which, it was hoped, would attract recruits from the armed forces, a large number of whom had recently lost their jobs as a result of their own re-organisation and who were regarded as the ideal candidates to deliver the new punitive approach to offenders.

Those currently in training and recently qualified probation officers have joined an organisation which, in keeping with other parts of the public sector, has had to contend with diminishing financial resources, reduced staffing levels, rising workloads and more insistent demands from Government to demonstrate effectiveness. Re-organisation and change remains a frequent occurrence, contributing to conditions of stress that are heightened by the anxieties associated with working with offenders, including feelings triggered by the latter's projections. By way of substantiating this last point, Menzies (1979: 240) expressed the view:

The effects on staff of the human 'material' they work with is especially great in institutions whose clients are people in trouble. The clients are likely to evoke powerful and primitive feelings and fantasies in staff who suffer painful though not always acknowledged identifications with clients, intense reactions both positive and negative to them, pity for their plight, fear, possibly exaggerated, about their violence, or harsh, primitive, moral reactions to their delinquency.⁹

This study is essentially an investigation into the new world of probation. In planning my research, I decided to interview a sample of recently qualified probation officers with a view to exploring their experiences and perceptions of their working lives, and to construct a picture of the occupation from a newcomer perspective. I wanted to know how they viewed their role and what they did in their day to day practice with offenders, and I aimed to distinguish the factors that influence their professional practice and development. Alongside this, I had the desire to find out what sort of people wanted to become probation officers given the changes that had taken place, the ambivalence with which the role of the service has tended to be perceived by both the government and the wider community, and the general ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding its work.

However, the overarching theme of my research was concerned with identifying the professional identity of newcomer probation officers. That said, my interest was not solely in identity as a concept in its own right, but in terms of what it might tell me about the direction in which the service is going. As such, the

⁹ This highlights the importance of structures that help to make projected distress more tolerable – an issue I will return to later.

notion of identity was always a way of exploring broader issues. In particular, the question was underpinned by the idea that professional identity was changing. The manifestations of the change having been represented by the service's rejection of its former social work ethos, the official rhetoric which has portrayed the service as a law enforcement agency and the increasing shift towards bureaucratization.

My choice of title, *Probation Officers: The Next Generation* was intended both to capture my interest in the future of the service and to give acknowledgement to the fact that the generation, of whom I am a part, is gradually being succeeded. In thinking about this further, I feel I should admit that I had a personal, underlying motive in the pursuit of this project which, although not explicitly raised as a question, was to do with my curiosity to know how different the new generation is from me and the generation who, like myself, entered with a qualification in social work.

In the course of carrying out my investigations, the original aims of the study did not alter. Where there was a change, was in terms of emphasis insofar as I became more interested in the conditions that make it possible to do the job. In addition, I believe that the project has evolved and deepened in complexity. From the outset, I remained committed to conducting interviews with a narrative structure. As the inquiry proceeded, I became aware of the need for a much more expansive picture of the context in which the work takes place as a means of increasing one's understanding of what has shaped the development of the service. Consequently, the initial chapters have been designed to locate the probation service within the broader setting of developments in criminal justice and punishment in this country, its historical development and its place within the professional hierarchy.

Another significant advancement, that has been part of the organic evolution of this study, has been the introduction of a more theoretical orientation. Thus, in considering questions concerning the motivation of my sample to do the job, and the relationship between what they brought to it and what they encountered, I have found the theories and concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to be especially pertinent and enriching. This aspect of the study is addressed, first

of all, in a chapter outlining the main theoretical perspective I have adopted, and where I also indicate the ways in which I propose to draw on Bourdieu's concepts. Later, in presenting my findings, the application of his concepts becomes much more apparent.

Taking account of the way in which this study has progressed, I consider it appropriate to acknowledge that the ideas and concepts I began to recognise as useful emerged from the material in a manner that I regard as consistent with the exploratory and qualitative methods I was employing. In this sense, the whole thesis may be viewed as being part of an inductive process.

Chapter 1

Criminal Justice and Punishment

Introduction

The concept of criminal justice, as expressed through penal policy and the administering of legal punishment, is fraught with contradictions and contentious opinions. It is entangled in a complicated network of issues whose implications extend beyond the practical task of considering what to do with criminals. Thus, for Garland, a leading commentator on criminal justice, punishment is:

[A]n expression of state power, a statement of collective morality, a vehicle for emotional expression, an economically conditioned social policy, an embodiment of current sensibilities, and a set of symbols which display a cultural ethos and help create a social identity (Garland 1990:287).

It is a subject that can be debated from a philosophical or sociological perspective and which evokes a range of opposing responses from criminal justice theorists to the general public. The complexity of the conflicts and tensions generated by approaches to punishment has been perceptively encapsulated by Garland as being:

[B]etween condemnation and forgiveness, vengeance and mercy, the sanctity of law and the humanity of compassion, social defence and individual rights, the urge to exclude and the dream of rehabilitation (Garland 1999:5).

History suggests that in different eras, different views concerning punishment come to the fore. It is difficult to identify a specific explanation for this, but what is clear is that any examination of the criminal justice system cannot be considered separately from the multiple influences of the political, social, economic and cultural context in which it operates. This chapter addresses these influences with a view to considering how they have shaped the role of the Probation Service within criminal justice and punishment.

Punishment and the Maintenance of Social Order

The links between criminal justice and the wider social and political order have been addressed as part of the broad historical theory developed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and by Ignatieff in his study of the English penal system in *A Just Measure of Pain* (1978). In particular, both see penal reforms as a response to concerns about the maintenance of social order.

Foucault (1977) has outlined how, at the beginning of the 19th century, the nature of punishment radically altered. Previously, punishment had essentially meant execution and torture – the infliction of pain on the body, delivered as a public spectacle. In Foucault's analysis, public punishment and the theatrical rituals associated with it were necessary in order to re-establish and confirm the power and authority of the sovereign. It was abolished in response to growing criticism and discontent amongst spectators concerning the perceived inequality and excessive violence of punishment which, those in authority believed, was unintentionally generating sympathy and admiration for the criminal. This coincided with a significant reduction in crimes against the person and an increase in property crime.

Consequently, Foucault described how a shift took place in the focus of punishment from the body to the soul and the mind. This involved the introduction of a more humane prison system, focusing on the deprivation of liberty and the instilling of discipline. However, whilst ostensibly, the aim of imprisonment was to deter others and bring about the 'transformation of individuals', Foucault argues that the primary and more duplicitous purpose of punishment was, and still is, to reduce the power of the lower classes, promote social conformity and so protect the elite. As such, incarceration is simply a more subtle approach to the normalization of those who threaten the social order and the upholding of the law:

[I]t would be hypocritical or naïve to believe that the law was made for all in the name of all, that it would be more prudent to recognise that it was made for the few and that it was brought to bear upon others; that in principle it applies to all citizens, but that it is addressed principally to the most numerous and least enlightened classes (Foucault 1977:276).

An almost identical argument is expounded by Ignatieff (1978) who locates penal reform in the context of fears relating to class conflict and concerns about economic and social disruption arising from the effects of the Industrial Revolution. The latter had triggered a rise in unemployment, especially amongst those who were expelled from their agricultural land and who were, subsequently, entering the cities. In these circumstances, Ignatieff regards the development of the penitentiary as representing a model of social order:

It exerted a hold on men's imaginations because it represented in microcosm the hierarchical, obedient, and godly social order, which they felt was coming apart around them (Ignatieff 1978:84).

Garland and Young also support the link between penal policy and the sustaining of power relations and have given recognition to the complex inter-play of factors that contribute to such policy:

Political, ideological, economic, legal and other social relations do not merely 'influence' or 'shape' or 'put pressure upon' penalty¹⁰ – they *operate through it* and are materially inscribed in its practice. (Garland and Young 1983: 21, emphasis in the original)

The Rise and Fall of Penal Welfarism

In *The Culture of Control* (2001), Garland has analysed the transformation that has taken place in the field of crime control and punishment in both the United Kingdom and the United States. The term 'penal welfarism' has been coined by him to describe responses to crime from the late 19th Century through to the early 1970s. In its application, it emphasised an instrumental, welfare orientated approach to punishment in which reform and rehabilitation were the key aims. It was an ideology which linked crime to social disadvantage and it was predicated on a belief that growing affluence, full employment and the provisions of the welfare state would ultimately lead to a reduction in crime.

Weiner (1990), in his research of 19th century and early 20th century legislation relating to crime, has identified that advances in technology, economics and

¹⁰ Garland and Young (1983:14) have expressed preference for the terms 'penality' or 'field of penal practice' rather than punishment, as they 'signify a complex field of institutions, practices and relations rather than a singular and essential type of social event.'

science resulted in criminals, during the Edwardian era, being seen as less threatening and less responsible for their behaviour. On this basis, it was possible for sanctions to become less punitive and more welfare oriented. The relationship between societal change and attitudes towards criminals has also been confirmed by Melossi (2000) in his examination of events in Europe and North America during the 20th century which, for him, suggests an almost cyclical pattern:

A sympathetic attitude towards criminals has emerged in social periods when good economic conditions, optimism, a tendency towards liberalism and low imprisonment rates, tended to prevail. At such juncture (at least some) criminals were seen as innovators fighting against an unjust and suffocating social order, and punishment as playing a rehabilitative and experimental role. In other periods, criminals were seen instead with antipathy, and portrayed as monstrosities, evil forces fighting the very foundations of a social fabric and a moral order that should be defended at all cost. In these periods of prevailing conservatism, social theorists saw their mission in responding against situations of socio-economic crisis, characterized by the necessity to 'tighten the belt', and by higher imprisonment rates and harsher penalties (Melossi 2000:296).

Recognition of the oscillations that occur in the representations of crime and criminality and the influences upon these changing attitudes, provides helpful insight into the reasons why different approaches to the way offenders are dealt with emerge at different times. For example, in a climate that was right for the advancement of the influence of penal welfarism and its associated ideas, the foundations were laid for the growth and development of the Probation Service. Whilst this ideology held sway, the type of sentences imposed by the courts and their length was tailored to take account of the specific, individual needs of the offender.

However, it is Garland's assertion that in the mid 1970s there was a sudden turn of opinion against penal welfarism, causing it to 'collapse under the weight of a sustained assault upon its premises and practices' (Garland 2001:53). This shift in the fundamental principles of penal policy coincided with rising crime rates and the publication of the now notorious academic research paper by Martinson (1974), focusing on the effectiveness of rehabilitative interventions

with offenders which was widely interpreted as stating 'nothing works'.¹¹ Nonetheless, Garland has rightly questioned whether these were the only catalysts to change. In so doing, he has persuasively shown how global economic recession, triggering widespread insecurities, combined with advances in technology and demographic changes to alter the way governments and the public thought about crime.

This exposition is given added weight by Hall et al (1978) who, in attending to the situation in the United Kingdom during the 1970s, offer clear evidence of the linkage between crime and wider social issues. This was a time of intense social conflict leading, in the perception of the authors, to a general crisis of social order; the many dimensions of which incorporated capitalism and morality, as well as issues of law. It was exemplified by trade union militancy, concerns about rising inflation, questions of moral standards related to freedom of speech and sexual behaviour, an escalation of the conflict in Northern Ireland, fears of terrorism (as represented by the activities of the IRA and the Angry Brigade) and, pivotal to the argument of Hall et al, the threat of what was perceived as growing rates of Black street crime, known more specifically as mugging.

Within this context, the crime of mugging generated something of a moral panic. In his study of the public and media reaction to the 'mods and rockers' phenomenon of the 1960s, Cohen (1972/2002:1) states that a moral panic occurs when: 'A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.' Hall et al (1978) outlined that the term 'mugging' originated in the United States where it came to symbolise social problems and social crisis associated with Black people and drugs. In importing the term the British press promoted the same connotations and helped to induce a climate of vulnerability and paranoia. Tougher action by the police and heavier sentences by the courts were demanded and obtained.

¹¹ It is an accepted fact that Martinson never actually wrote or said 'nothing works.' What he did do was to query whether rehabilitative techniques had any greater impact on recidivism than any other form of intervention. Rutherford (1993) has observed, with some cynicism, that Martinson's retraction of his findings a few years later received little attention.

Strikes, protests and violent street disturbances which broke out in several cities during the 1980s re-ignited the sense of fear. The subsequent defeat of the trade unions and a hardening of attitudes towards immigration as well as towards crime in general may all be seen as part of the political response aimed at re-establishing order and authority.

Neo-Liberalism and the Politics of Crime

The turbulent events of the 1980s were used to criticise the welfare state for its apparent failure to provide a solution, undermining the values of penal welfarism and paving the way for neo-liberalism. In principle, the latter is a post-modernist, political/economic doctrine and ideological development that extends well beyond the penal arena. It advocates free market forces, freedom of choice, privatization, consumerism, reduction in public expenditure, and individualism. Its impact on criminal justice has resulted in crime being regarded as a matter of personal choice and responsibility. Public protection and the effects of crime on victims have subsequently become the dominant concerns of penal policy, which must also take into account an increase in the fear of crime. Moreover, it has served to create a milieu in which offenders are perceived as threatening, undeserving and dangerous people who must be punished in a more expressive, punitive and retributivist fashion. Providing further confirmation of this effect, research by Lacey (2008) has shown that countries with neo-liberal political economies (with reference specifically to the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand) have the highest rates of imprisonment.¹²

In Garland's view:

[T]he new discourse of crime policy consistently invokes an angry public, tired of living in fear, demanding strong measures of punishment and protection (Garland 2001:10).

¹² Melossi (2000:308) has pinpointed 1973 as the year when things began to change, leading to 'the most massive process of incarceration that ever happened in the West.' He has also argued that in the United States, demographic groups at the bottom of social stratification, such as Afro-Caribbeans and the unemployed, were disproportionately represented amongst those either in prison or subject to other forms of correctional control.

This situation has culminated in the politicization of crime which has had major implications for criminal justice legislation¹³. Whilst the principles of welfarism and the welfare state remained strong, concern about crime figured fairly low on the political agenda and criminal justice had little interference from politicians (Stenson 2001). This shifted radically in the 1980s, when political parties and government administrations began to feel pressurized to demonstrate that they were actively addressing the problem of crime in order to reassure frightened voters. This was reflected in political rhetoric such as Tony Blair's, now famous, New Labour promise to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'¹⁴ as well as in the more aggressive policies and sentencing that followed. Speaking at the launch of the Government's *Five Year Strategy For Crime* in July 2004, Blair alleged: '[O]f all the public services we inherited in 1997, the one that was most unfit for purpose was the Criminal Justice System.' Blair also used the speech to announce the end of what he termed 'the 1960s liberal, social consensus on law and order.' Implicit in this was a retraction of the pledge to tackle the causes of crime on the grounds that it was no longer what the public wanted. Instead, he promised a society built around 'rules, order and proper behaviour.'

The idea of there being a 'war on crime' became another political sound-bite, with the criminal, presumably, being cast as the enemy, leading directly to policies which have effectively promoted social exclusion (Sullivan 2001). Examples cited by Sullivan (ibid) included more aggressive policing which had greater impact on the lower classes and Black communities, and the ultimate form of exclusion in the United Kingdom – the increased use of imprisonment.

¹³ It is perhaps more accurate to argue that crime had always been implicitly political but, at this stage, was placed much higher on the political agenda. The abolition of capital and corporal punishment and reforms in relation to homosexuality, prostitution and abortion, which link to redefining what counts as crime and what are matters of choice, are all very political in nature.

¹⁴ This was the basis on which Labour continued the Conservative's tough line on crime whilst cleverly giving it an apparently social democratic and environmentalist spin through the use of the 'causes of crime' tag. To be fair, this was not entirely empty, for although penal policy remained hard line, with increasing rates of imprisonment, there was a strong commitment to reduce unemployment and achieve greater labour force participation, in the belief that unemployment, especially among the young, and crime rates are connected.

In the free market, individuals strive for success and get what they deserve. As applied to criminal justice, this dogma resulted for a time, in offenders receiving sentences that were designed to reflect their 'just deserts.' In practice this was intended to support the notion that the punishment should be commensurate with the seriousness of the crime, rather than being determined by the needs of the offender. However, even this strategy was quickly modified in the face of growing public concern about crime which then became speedily translated into a political concern.

The Emergence of the Risk Society

It is important to recognise that the fear of crime was influenced by a perception of growing lawlessness, fuelled by the media who have tended to play a crucial role in influencing public opinion on crime. It was also associated with wider anxieties and insecurities that had their origins in changes to the labour market and to family life (Muncie 2004). These changes included greater economic uncertainty and its consequences for employment stability, rising divorce rates and an increase in single parent families.

Whilst Schlembach (2007) has recently referred to 'an age of insecurity' to denote the uncertainties and turbulence of contemporary social life, Beck earlier used the same premise to signal the rise of the 'risk society', arguing that 'hazards and potential threats have been unleashed to an extent previously unknown' (Beck 1992:19). Drawing on Beck (op cit.) and Giddens (1998), Ekberg (2007) offers a clear outline of the social transformation brought about by the risk society:

In contrast to primary, industrial modernity, which was characterized by the safety, security, predictability and permanence of inherited traditions, such as class location, gender roles, marriage, family, lifetime employment and secure retirement, the risk society is characterized by dislocation, disintegration and disorientation associated with the vicissitudes of detraditionalization (Ekberg 2007:346).

Within the context of the risk society, 'crime and risk have increasingly forged a partnership' (Kemshall 2003:24). In response, a tough penal policy is viewed as vital to the management of the vulnerability and anxiety of the public. Thus, the culture of control identified by Garland is very much about controlling risk. With

this in mind, Michael Howard's 1993 pronouncement as Home Secretary that 'prison works' can be seen as emphasising the belief that prison offers the only effective protection from the risks posed by offenders¹⁵. At the same time, it was a statement that can be interpreted as a further attack on rehabilitation and the so called 'soft options' associated with it such as Probation supervision.

The proliferation of closed circuit TV, the use of security guards and security consultants, neighbourhood watch, zero-tolerance policing and naming and shaming are some examples of the way risk consciousness has manifested itself. As the pre-occupation with risk has grown, it has taken precedence over notions of justice producing 'risk-oriented, justice-careless policy shifts' (Hudson 2003:xi). According to Pratt (2000:138/139):

It is not so much the gravity of the particular offence that will determine the penalty to be imposed, but the risk that one is thought to pose to the security of the community.

Moreover, Oldfield (2002:45) has noted: 'Conceiving crime as risk avoids much of the causal theorising – and thus the ameliorative projects – of welfarism.' The 'new penology' identified by Feeley and Simon (1992) operates on the assumption that the best way to control crime and risk is by using statistically based, predictive risk assessment tools to determine the harm or dangerousness posed by an offender. As a consequence, it focuses on the promotion of risk analysis and risk management over other goals. Describing it as 'actuarial justice', Feeley and Simon (ibid) view it as the means by which levels of deviance are regulated (generally through incapacitation) at the expense of responding to individual offenders through treatment.

In 1998, Kemshall noted, with reference to the Probation Service, that 'risk is now the key organising principle for both practice activities and resource allocation' (Kemshall 1998:41). More than a decade later, risk continues to occupy a central place in penal thinking and remains a significant influence on the way in which the criminal justice system functions.

¹⁵ The basis of this argument was that whilst people are in prison they cannot be committing crimes. It was a dispute that was raised in response to the counter view that prisons were factories which produced and trained criminals.

In addition to its contribution to the containment of risk, actuarial justice tends to be justified on the basis that it helps to ensure the management and efficient allocation of resources. This proposition links directly to the final issue that I consider relevant to the discussion in this section – namely the advent of new public management or managerialism.

New Public Management

Faulkner (2002) has contended that, along with neo-liberalism, new public management has been the dominant influence on criminal justice in this country. Like neo-liberalism it is a concept that is bound up in economic principles but with its original focus being specifically on the improvement of public sector efficiency by reducing and having greater control over public expenditure on services. Motivated by the rising costs of welfare state provisions and a political desire to 'roll back the state', it aimed to apply a business model to the public sector thereby reducing state intervention and breaking the dependency it was felt to encourage - the latter being replaced by private enterprise and individual responsibility.

Initially hitting health and education, the ethos of managerialism shifted its attention to the criminal justice system in the 1980s, beginning with the Thatcherism inspired Financial Management Initiative. This introduced radical changes to the way government departments and public sector organisations operated, requiring them to demonstrate economy, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as value for money.

Within criminal justice and across public institutions in general, Raine and Willson (1996) have identified the deployment of a three-pronged strategy:

[C]ash limits and emphasis on efficiency to engender a more financially aware and prudent approach; greater standardization in policies and practices to curb the autonomy of the professionals and reduce their idiosyncrasies; and the reorganization of the agencies into stronger hierarchies, supported by target setting and performance monitoring to effect greater control and to sharpen accountability (Raine and Willson 1996:21).

Whilst the reconstruction which followed was at first regarded as a purely Conservative Government policy, it was developed even further by subsequent Labour administrations in their quest to exercise greater centralised control. As such, the principles of managerialism were adopted as a key feature of Labour's programme to 'modernise' the public sector with a view to the better provision of services.

At its heart, managerialism advocates auditing, inspections, performance management, competition and market testing. It places an emphasis on measurement and calculability and it is also concerned with performance indicators, accountability and the need to demonstrate continuing improvement or else face the threat of financial sanctions and competitive tendering. Nellis and Gelsthorpe (2007: 239) have suggested that 'No policy in criminal justice has been untouched by this.' Working practices relating to policing, prosecutions and punishment have all been subject to scrutiny and change, and all the agencies that comprise the criminal justice system have experienced restructuring in an effort to achieve cost effectiveness, with consequential impact on organisational culture and staffing¹⁶.

The amalgamation of the Prison and Probation Services should be seen in the light of managerialism – the belief being that it will bring about greater efficiency and effectiveness. The setting of standardized and consistent aims and objectives across the criminal justice system, as well as the promotion of 'What Works' and an evidence based approach to the allocation of resources can also be regarded as extensions of managerialist thinking (McLaughlin and Murji 2001).

Technological developments have been a further feature of the modernizing process, contributing to the aim of establishing a 'seamless' or 'joined up' system by facilitating the speedy sharing of information across all criminal

¹⁶ In defining managerialism and describing its impact there is a danger of it being construed in an entirely negative light. It is, therefore, important to make clear that targets and performance measures are not always inappropriate. The idea that professional bureaucracies should be unconditionally funded without any definite accountability for their performance is not really defensible. Furthermore, whilst it may be the case that performance measures can lead to perverse incentives and league tables can lead to demoralisation, they can also be beneficial and result in more effective practice.

justice agencies whilst, at the same time, providing the means to generate the data that is so essential for the monitoring of performance. It has also created an environment whereby the calculation and attainment of targets appears to count for more than knowledge and expertise, and where front line practitioners feel they are spending more time entering and recording data than undertaking what they perceive as the 'real' job. In this way, the use of technology provides a challenge to professional practice and potentially serves to fulfil one of the underlying motives of managerialism – the reduction of the power of the professions in public sector organisations.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the main principles and factors that have shaped the evolution of criminal justice in this country in order to facilitate understanding of the changing context in which the Probation Service operates. In particular, I have drawn attention to the influence of the highly turbulent socio-economic and political environment that has resulted in the rise of a more insecure and coercive social order. Accompanying this process has been a shift from a welfare oriented penal agenda, predicated on the perceived failure of rehabilitative approaches to offenders, to one in which punishment appears to have emerged as the dominant ethos, backed up by legislation supporting a more aggressive, tougher sentencing policy.

Since its inception, developments in the Probation Service have run parallel to developments in criminal justice and punishment. The chapter that follows looks at this connection in more detail.

Chapter 2

The History and Development of the Probation Service

Introduction

The concept of probation is something of a paradox in the fields of criminal justice and legal punishment. The word 'probation' is derived from the Latin verb 'probare', meaning to test, which provides the adverb, 'probatum' (the act of proving). Accordingly, the idea of the court placing an offender on probation was not conceived originally as a punishment at all. This interpretation of the term was given statutory authority in England and Wales by the Probation of First Offenders Act 1887¹⁷ which gave courts the power to release, on the condition of 'good conduct', offenders convicted for the first time. Subsequently, the 1907 Probation of Offenders Act introduced the Probation Order and made it clear that it was an alternative to a sentence.¹⁸ More particularly, the Act sanctioned the appointment of probation officers to supervise the new orders.¹⁹

Research by Vanstone (2008) has shown that within a comparatively short period of time, from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, various forms of probation emerged as a global strategy representing a 'common international symbol of political response to loss of faith' in the use of imprisonment (Vanstone 2008:736).²⁰ First and foremost, probation is about the supervision of offenders in the community. In the opinion of Raynor (2006:27), it remains a 'world-wide movement' aimed at reducing the number of offenders in prison and

¹⁷ This was the first reference to probation in English law.

¹⁸ In effect, it was the conditional suspension of a sentence which the Act now made available to all but the most serious of offenders, irrespective of age and the length of their criminal career. Key principles of the new probation order included the requirement that offenders must consent to it as a means of signifying their acceptance of the chance they had been given. They were also reminded that the prospect of punishment hung over them in the event of their breaching the conditions of the order.

¹⁹ The 1907 Act differed markedly from the act of 1887 as that did not include a requirement of supervision. It is also notable for containing the now legendary description of the duties of probation officers to 'advise, assist and befriend.'

²⁰ Vanstone (2008) has documented that between 1878 and 1920, probation was introduced in countries with very diverse political and social traditions in North and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia. Travis and Beck (2007) have reported on the use of probation in New Zealand and Australia during the same period.

promoting the use of constructive community penalties with a view to achieving rehabilitation. With some irony, Raynor (2006:27) notes:

England and Wales, once the leaders, now seem outside the mainstream, oddly pre-occupied with enforcement and punishment while prison numbers continue to rise.

Contemporary accounts of the probation service in England and Wales have tended to focus on its attempts to constantly re-invent itself, its apparent shift towards a more punitive ideology, its primary emphasis on the protection of the public and the perceived threat to its existence. All in all, the service is commonly considered to have departed radically from its original purpose and whilst the media and the public may still refer to offenders being placed on probation, the Probation Order was actually removed from the statute books in 1997.

Since 1907, the work of the Probation Service has been governed by legislation and shaped by several government departmental committees as well as numerous circulars, bulletins and green papers. In this chapter I will be taking a historical perspective, outlining those events that I consider to have had the most significant implications on the evolution of the service. In so doing, I plan to highlight the changing ideological framework of the service and the way in which this and other factors have impacted on the training of probation officers and their practice.

Origins of the Service and the Missionary Spirit

The roots of probation can be found in English court practices of the Middle Ages which permitted judicial reprieves and the binding over of an offender, for a certain period of time after which, if they remained of good behaviour, a pardon might be granted. However, there was no sustained, linear progression towards a system of probation, although most histories of the probation service tend to refer to the actions of Matthew Hill, a magistrate in Birmingham during the 1840s, as providing the starting point for modern probation practice in this country. Hill's approach focused specifically on young offenders who, after spending one day in prison, would be released subject to the supervision of volunteer guardians.

At around the same time, John Augustus, a shoe maker and philanthropist, managed to persuade the court in Boston, Massachusetts to release adult drunks, charged with minor offences, into his care for a time bounded period with a view to changing their behaviour and reporting back on their progress. He is credited with first using the term 'probation' and is often regarded as the world's first, unofficial, probation officer. The success of his work is attributed to leading directly to the formal creation of the role of probation officer in courts throughout Massachusetts, a process that subsequently spread to other states.

In this country, it was the Police Court Missionaries, initially appointed in 1876 by the Church of England Temperance Society to attend court hearings for the purpose of 'the saving of souls through divine grace' (McWilliams 1983:130), who have tended to be seen as the immediate forerunners to probation officers. Whilst their endeavours, which in the early years of their existence focused primarily on drunks²¹, have been generally portrayed as leading naturally to the development of the probation service (King 1969, Jarvis 1972, Bochel 1976, McWilliams 1983), providing it with a faith-based motivation. Vanstone (2004a, 2004b), in particular, has rewritten this traditional story offering a more complex perspective of the service's origin. The picture one gains from revisionist versions of events leading to the inception of the probation service, suggests the presence of many competing viewpoints concerning the causes of crime, each vying to influence decisions relating to the treatment of offenders and the practice of newly appointed probation officers.

In Vanstone's account, it was not just the missionary zealotry and success at saving souls that led directly to a seemingly more humanitarian approach to dealing with crime, but rather widespread fears relating to the perceived threat to public order presented by degenerate members of the lower classes.²² Thus, Vanstone has drawn attention to a convergence of social, political and religious

²¹ The lack of sobriety was seen as the cause of most offending and those who received intervention from the missionaries were required to take the pledge and attend church. Later missionaries became involved in matrimonial reconciliation work and helping offenders released from prison. However, their interventions remained strongly influenced by religious and moral values.

²² This links to the argument I presented earlier in my discussion on criminal justice and punishment. Vanstone backs up his assertions by reference to the work of Ignatieff (1978) which I have also cited.

ideologies which coincided with the emergence of the study of psychology, the rejection of uniformity in sentencing allowing for a more individualized approach to dealing with criminals and political support for the principles of eugenics, to which the early probation movement expressed some commitment.²³

Moreover, anxiety about risk would seem to have been just as prevalent then as now, along with efforts to differentiate the feeble-minded from the depraved or morally wicked; and the 'deserving' offender, who would receive probation, from the undeserving, who would be sentenced to imprisonment.

The process of understanding the mixture of help and control, rehabilitation and enforcement which characterises today's National Probation Service, therefore, should be informed by an acknowledgement (and understanding) that ambiguity and confusion about these elements, as well as attempts to resolve them, have been at the core of the Service's theory and practice since its inception (Vanstone 2004b:45)

Gard (2007:938) has relegated the significance of the court missionaries still further through his contention that 'the first probation officers appointed in 1908 had little to do with the Police Court Missionaries working in the courts of the major cities', preferring instead to root their methods and aims 'firmly in Edwardian England.' In making this statement, Gard is alluding to the growing interest in criminology and social work, as well as eugenics, factors which Garland (1985) has identified as contributing to the 'penal welfare complex.'

What is clear is that the Police Court Missionaries did not automatically transform into probation officers as a result of the 1907 Act. Rather, two distinct systems began to operate at this point, especially in London, with the missionaries continuing to work in accordance with their religious principles under the auspices of the Church of England, and with a small number of probation officers, employed and paid by magistrates, aligning themselves with the newly evolving secular ideas relating to the causes of crime and its

²³ According to Rose (1984:75) 'Eugenics took off as political doctrine in the first decade of the 20th century.' This was based on the notion that habitual criminals should be denied the opportunity to have children. Rose distinguishes between a call for positive eugenics, namely, increasing the productivity of 'the best stock', and negative eugenics, which was concerned with preventing the breeding of the lower classes.

treatment.²⁴ Within this context, the forming of the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) in 1912 may be regarded as part of an early strategy towards seeking professional recognition as well as an attempt to emphasise the independence of probation officers from the Church of England and the temperance movement.

Although the part played by the missionaries may have been overstated, their contribution cannot be ignored. Not only did they continue to operate in the courts through to the 1930s but, particularly in the provinces, they received the bulk of the referrals in the period immediately following the 1907 Act. As Nellis (2007) has identified, the missionaries were able to maintain their influence because of the absence of suitable candidates willing to become probation officers, which was thought to have been due to the low pay being offered. These factors gave the missionaries the means to dominate both the first generation and the later mythology of probation officers (Nellis *op cit*).²⁵

From the outset, questions as to whether probation officers should be trained and what type of training they should receive were contentious issues. Legislation did not stipulate any specific qualifications. Whilst NAPO appeared keen to link probation officers to developments in social work, training in which was beginning to be offered at several universities, a report by the Departmental Committee on the Training, Appointment, and Payment of Probation Officers (Home Office 1922) expressed doubts as to the necessity of training for work that was viewed by them as reliant on personal qualities and Christian principles.²⁶ Referring to representations made to them, the committee's report stated:

²⁴ The situation at this time was further confused by the fact that a number of missionaries were appointed as probation officers. In addition, the response to the 1907 Act by magistrates was initially variable. The Act did not make the appointment of Probation Officers a statutory requirement and, as a consequence, some courts chose to do nothing.

²⁵ Nellis (2007) has implied that a mythology was invented in order to give the service firm humanitarian, social work related roots. This enabled the service to distance itself from some of its less palatable early beliefs and practices, and helped to emphasise the later sense of loss arising from its apparent drift from social work.

²⁶ Ironically, Bochel (1976) has noted that around this time the Police Court Mission began to provide training to its missionaries.

Many qualities were mentioned to us as desirable in a good probation officer- sympathy, tact, common sense, firmness, are but a few – but there was general agreement that a keen missionary spirit, based on religious conviction, is essential (Home Office 1922:13).

The committee was also sceptical as to whether the role could attract university candidates and, whilst they recommended an increase in salary, it is fascinating to learn that they were of the opinion that it was a profession that neither expected nor desired large remuneration.

The main recommendations of the committee were made law by the 1925 Criminal Justice Act. In particular, the Act made it a requirement for each court to appoint a probation officer but, perhaps not surprisingly in view of the quotation above, there was still no mention of qualifications. On the other hand, growing interest in psychology, which offered new explanations for criminal behaviour, and its association with notions of diagnosis and treatment led to more forceful demands from within the service for greater knowledge of the subject, via training, in order to enhance the quality of its work. When, in 1929, NAPO began to publish a journal its initial articles were, according to Vanstone (2008), couched in psychological language. Even so, an editorial published in the second issue of the journal emphasised ‘religious spirit’ as ‘essential to the best probation work’ (NAPO 1929:19).

The Emergence of Casework and Diagnostic Thinking

Bochel (1976) has identified another significant advancement in practice in the journal, a year later, with what she considers to be one of the first references to casework in a probation context²⁷. In McWilliams’ (1985) assessment, the application of diagnostic thinking by probation officers was regarded at the time as an important step towards the achievement of their professional aspirations. Establishing a journal and pressing for staff to receive training may be seen as another part of this process. Taken together, these factors contributed to a

²⁷ The first use of the term ‘casework’ is attributed to the Charity Organisation Society, founded in 1869 with the aim of assisting eligible recipients out of poverty. In its original application, ‘casework’ simply meant work on a case but, significantly, this work entailed an investigation and assessment of each individual case in order to determine if a person qualified for assistance.

fundamental change within the service, prompting McWilliams (1985:261) to observe:

The gradual movement from the religious, missionary ideal to the scientific, diagnostic ideal, depending, in part, on notions of professionalism, required that probation work should be something for which people were trained to enter rather than called to follow.

Amidst concern about the knowledge and skills of some of the probation officers appointed by magistrates, the Home Office agreed to set up a training scheme in 1930. This offered two options: The first entailed practical training, on the job, under the guidance of an experienced probation officer, for those who already had a university qualification; the second combined practical training with a requirement to study for a diploma in social science.

Another departmental committee, which reported in 1936, described probation officers as having become 'essential to the efficient administration of justice' (Home Office 1936:viii). The committee proposed that the service should become a full-time public body and that the Home Office should take greater responsibility for the direction of the service.²⁸ Referring to probation officers as social workers of the courts, the committee also recommended that training should cover the principles of social work, with an additional, more specialised focus on probation work.

A Probation Training Board was established in 1937 to oversee a course specifically for those wishing to become probation officers but, the numbers seeking training remained comparatively small and, in some areas, probation officers continued to be appointed without any training. In fact, despite the continued existence of the Home Office course and an increase in the number of university based courses for probation officers following the Second World War, the appointment of untrained officers persisted until the 1970s.

²⁸ Prior to the implementation of these proposals, most probation officers and missionaries worked on a part-time basis. The decision to establish a full-time service effectively ended the missionary era. Missionaries subsequently withdrew from the courts and the religious and voluntary societies for whom they worked instead became involved in the provision of homes and hostels for offenders.

The Criminal Justice Act of 1948 re-affirmed the role of probation officers to 'advise, assist and befriend' those subject to probation orders, thereby lending weight to the importance of the relationship between officers and those whom they supervised. It also placed responsibilities in respect to making enquiries for the court, matrimonial conciliation and after-care on a statutory footing.²⁹ Additionally, the Act introduced a new administrative structure for the Service, legislating for the appointment of principal and senior probation officers and, as a consequence, not only making it more hierarchical but also paving the way for greater bureaucratisation. Significantly, though, despite the setting up of a probation inspectorate within the Home Office, probation officers remained primarily accountable to their local courts and generally continued to enjoy a substantial degree of individual autonomy. In effect, the oversight provided by the Home Office was of a consultative nature and the notion of professional consultation also characterised the relationship between front-line practitioners and the evolving hierarchy (Whitehead 2007).

When the service celebrated its golden jubilee in 1957, it appeared to be held in considerable regard by both the Home Office and the courts. Research into the effectiveness of the work of the service, published in 1958, showed positive results³⁰ and, in a preface to the research, Radzinowicz, a leading criminologist of the day, commented:

If I were asked what is the most significant contribution made by this country to the new penological theory and practice which struck root in the twentieth century – the measure which would endure, while so many other methods of treatment might fall into limbo, or be altered beyond recognition - my answer would be probation (Radzinowicz 1958:xi).

The treatment model was, by the 1950s, well established in both probation and social work. The main sources for the explanation of criminal behaviour came from psychology and psychiatry, and the casework method, which was used by

²⁹ These activities had gradually become part of probation officers' responsibilities over a number of years but, until the 1948 Criminal Justice Act, they had been undertaken on an informal basis.

³⁰ The research showed that 79% of all adults and 73% of juveniles completed their orders successfully (ie without further offences). When these were followed up after three years, the success rate had dropped to 70% and 57% respectively).

probation officers and social workers alike, and which emphasised the importance of the professional relationship between worker and client, had become heavily influenced by theories emanating from psychotherapy. This influence was reflected in the content of training as members of both aspiring professions sought specific knowledge and technique (Raynor and Robinson 2009).

Challenges to Professional Identity

Although crime rates had been steadily increasing during this period, the value and contribution of the probation service towards the re-integration of offenders seemed to be taken for granted. Respect and confidence in the probation service was re-enforced by the findings of a further departmental committee when the Morison Committee was tasked with enquiring into 'all aspects' of the service. Reporting in 1962, they were of the opinion that:

Today the probation officer must be seen, essentially, as a professional caseworker, employing, in a specialised field, a skill which he holds in common with other social workers (Home Office 1962:23).³¹

This statement has been perceived as not only giving official approval to casework as the main methodology of the service (Vanstone 2008), but as also confirming the service's position both as a profession and as a specialist branch of social work. However, writing shortly afterwards, Timms (1964) noted that Morison's perception of probation practice served to produce divided identities amongst officers, the fact being that not everyone saw themselves as caseworkers. Some preferred to regard themselves purely as court officers, whilst others considered that it was the provision of friendship that produced results.

In truth, there has never been uniformity with regards to the methods of practice adopted by the service. That said, many probation officers, with the support of training institutions, chose to embrace casework as a means of advancing their claims that they were the possessors of specialised knowledge. In this way,

³¹ The report also described the probation officer as 'the agent of a system concerned with the protection of society' (Home Office 1962:23). Although, at the time, the potential implications of this statement seems to have been overlooked.

they hoped to strengthen their aim of promoting themselves as experts in the diagnosis and treatment of criminal behaviour.³²

As the service's involvement in the after-care of those released from prison began to be extended through the 1950s and 1960s, the type of offender being supervised began to change. No longer were they those who had been assessed, selected and diverted from imprisonment but, instead, people who were more likely to be entrenched in their criminal behaviour and, as such, less responsive to the rehabilitative methods on offer.

The decision by the government to appoint probation officers as prison welfare officers, together with the introduction of parole shortly afterwards added another dimension to the work of the service and triggered a further conflict of professional identity.³³ Probation officers were now working within penal institutions rather than predominantly providing a social service to the courts. For King (1969:36) these were 'radical alterations' to the scope and expectations of the service, challenging its traditions and adding to the strain of already heavy workloads.³⁴

Moreover, taking on responsibility for parole, which entailed supervising the early release of long term prisoners, has been pinpointed by Brownlee (1998) as the start of the service moving 'up-tariff.' This observation is supported by the fact that, in the years which followed, probation officers worked increasingly with more serious, high risk adult offenders. According to Brownlee (ibid) it also brought to the fore the traditional and, to some extent, still on-going tension between care and control, given that probation officers were expected to recall to prison parolees who failed to comply with the requirements of their release. In addition, it can be argued that the exercise of recall brought expectations

³² Research by McWilliams (1986) has shown how the language and content of probation officers' reports for courts changed between the 1930s and the 1960s, as psycho-social diagnosis came to dominate, giving reports a more professional 'feel.'

³³ Legislation for parole was contained in the 1969 Criminal Justice Act.

³⁴ The only slight reversal to the expansion in probation officers' duties was the decision, incorporated into the Children and Young Persons Act 1969, to transfer principal responsibility for the supervision of young persons under the age of 17 years to the local authority social services department.

surrounding the service's responsibility for public protection into much sharper focus.

Questions concerning professional identity emerged again when NAPO was invited to join with other social workers and merge with the British Association of Social Workers. As indicated in my introduction to this study, NAPO had successfully campaigned for probation to be excluded from the Seebohm Committee's remit to review the organisation of the local authority personal social services, and fearing that becoming part of a unified social work association would undermine their argument to remain a separate service, ultimately declined the invitation.

Despite this decision, in chronicling developments in probation training, Whitehead and Thompson (2004) have remarked on pressure, towards the end of the 1960s, for 'generic' social work courses; the rationale being the stimulation that would be generated through the interaction of trainee probation officers with students from other branches of social work. This culminated in the creation of the Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work in 1971 and the introduction of the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW). Intended as a qualifying award for those in social services, health, education and probation, it was seen as providing confirmation of both a common identity and shared working practices.

Although the service continued to be regarded as the principal agency for the treatment of offenders in the community, concern about the rising prison population led to the government setting up a committee of enquiry into the provision of a wider range of community based penalties.³⁵ Most significantly, their proposals included the notion of community service, introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 1972, which required offenders to work unpaid in the community.

³⁵ There are good grounds to believe that the motive behind this was the mounting costs of imprisonment, as opposed to being reformist in nature.

Once again, the probation service was given responsibility for administering the new sentence, even though the underlying ethos of community service was reparation and punishment rather than rehabilitation through the provision of supervision. Its operation did not require social work skills and, as such, it represented another major departure from the traditional work of probation.

Ironically, the introduction of community service contributed to a need to increase the number of training places in order to cope with the extra workload. Such growth also precipitated an expansion of senior grades to provide greater oversight of the work and, whilst the term 'management' was not yet applied in any sophisticated sense, Haxby (1978) has commented on how probation officers viewed this development as an increase in bureaucratic control and an erosion of their autonomy.

Law and Order and the Move Towards Centralised Control

Whilst the compatibility of the new tasks with the established beliefs of the service was being queried on the inside, its methods of practice were being questioned externally. The collapse of the treatment ideal in the mid 70s, which has been linked to the publication of the Martinson (1974) findings, seems to have given ammunition to the critics of probation, many of whom had long viewed it as a soft option.

With the advent of community service and doubts about the effectiveness of probation supervision, the use of probation orders by the courts declined. Suddenly the optimism with which the service had been viewed in official circles seemed to disappear, prompting a crisis within the service of both ideology and confidence which was played out against the backdrop of a deteriorating economic picture.

Fearing financial cuts, senior staff viewed it as expedient for the service to align itself with the law and order lobby, which had been steadily gaining influence, and to promote itself as the agency best able to offer 'alternatives to custody.'³⁶

³⁶ Implicit in the concept of 'alternatives to custody' is the use of probation for more serious offenders who might otherwise have been sentenced to imprisonment.

Such a stance required the service to acknowledge a shift towards a more correctional, law enforcement position and for probation officers to exercise more forcefully the authority that had always been inherent in their role. Furthermore, the Home Office found itself under political pressure to undertake a more assertive role in relation to the service on the grounds that 'welfare had failed and punishment was demanded' (May 1991:30). As a consequence a train of events was set in motion that was to lead to greater centralised control.

In Chapter 1 I outlined the impact that the fear of crime and the associated moral panics had on the social and political mood of the country during the 1970s. The Conservative's promise of a tough approach to restore law and order was a key element in their election to government in 1979 and, at the start of their administration, this seemed to benefit the probation service which was awarded a substantial increase in its resources. Thus, when the government's Financial Management Initiative began to be imposed upon public sector organisations, underpinned by the '3 E's' of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, it looked for a while as though the probation service had escaped attention.

This was not to last and the first significant example of the impact of this policy on the service was the publication by the Home Office in 1984 of its *Statement of National Objectives and Priorities*.³⁷ This statement not only provided an official definition of the aims of the service for the first time, but also identified a set of objectives against which performance could be measured. Soon afterwards, a succession of other government initiatives began to be felt by the service including the introduction of key performance indicators, investigations by the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office, the establishment of Internal Monitoring and Inspection, cash limits and national standards governing the supervision of offenders.³⁸ Taken together, these developments resulted in

³⁷ Up until this point, each individual probation area had been free to determine its own policies and practices with little interference from the Home Office. Notably, the supervision of offenders in the community by way of the provision of credible alternatives to custody was given first place, whilst welfare work (such as in relation to less serious offenders and work in the family courts) was given low priority.

³⁸ In the opinion of Hedderman and Hearnden (2001), national standards are about setting a baseline for practice that would re-assure sentencers and the public that probation was not a soft option and that failure to co-operate would be taken seriously.

an increase in managerial control and accountability, with a view to greater standardization in practice, an emphasis on demonstrating evidence of effectiveness and a reduction in discretion and autonomy.

The Turn to Punishment

During the period that these strategies were imposed, changes were also taking place in the courts where an increasingly retributive approach to sentencing could be discerned amongst the judiciary. When rehabilitation was considered the ultimate aim of sentencing, differential punishment based on the circumstances of the offender and their treatment needs was regarded as justified. Now sentencers were adopting the principle that the punishment should fit the crime.

In placing this policy alongside efforts to reduce numbers in prison, the community penalties delivered by the probation service were expected to be tougher and more demanding, and probation officers were required to apply a greater degree of surveillance and control. This approach subsequently found its way into legislation via the 1991 Criminal Justice Act, which was especially significant for formalising the concept of 'punishment in the community', for making the probation order a sentence in its own right and for announcing that the service was to be given a 'centre stage' role in the criminal justice system in recognition of its anticipated contribution towards diverting offenders from custody.

Whilst the prospect of moving centre stage was undoubtedly an attractive one, staff at all grades of the service voiced deep dissatisfaction with what they perceived as a threat to its social work ethos by way of the emphasis on punishment and on probation interventions being promoted as restrictions of liberty.³⁹ In the opinion of Nellis and Stephenson (1998) this stance made the service more vulnerable to political criticism. Their ambivalence to what was being asked of them might also be regarded as foolhardy in the light of an earlier report by the Audit Commission (1989) which plainly threatened that if

³⁹ This was facilitated by the ability of the courts to attach more restrictive requirements to orders.

the service was unwilling to adapt and take on board changes to their way of working, other organisations would be found to do the job instead.

What happened next was entirely unexpected. Far from viewing probation supervision as a credible punishment, the public, frightened by their perception of soaring levels of crime perpetrated by young people and with their anxiety fuelled by distorted media reporting, complained that the Act did not go far enough to protect them.⁴⁰ Politicians joined in the furore, anxious not to be regarded by their constituents as too liberal. By way of a response, the Home Secretary, Michael Howard announced to the Conservative Party Conference in 1993 that 'prison works.'⁴¹ 'Welfare doesn't work' was, in the view of Ryan and Sim (1998:176), the reverse of Howard's declaration and what was understood by implication.

At around the same time as Howard's u-turn in policy, the centre stage offer was withdrawn. Incapacitation through imprisonment was what was needed and once again, rehabilitation was under attack. The Probation Service was still required to occupy a punitive position and continued to be subjected to steadily increasing scrutiny from the Home Office, but its status seemed to be diminished. Moreover, the need for the service to exist, which was implicitly questioned by the Audit Commission (1989), continued to hang in the air.

In evaluating the events of this period, Nellis (1999:302) has commented on how the Probation Service appeared to:

[M]ove rapidly from being respected enough by politicians to be offered a centre stage role in the criminal justice system, to a situation in which it was routinely disparaged as being 'soft on crime.'

Probation officers were criticized for paying too much attention to the offender and for focusing insufficiently on the victim. In a political culture that was

⁴⁰ Publicity surrounding the murder of Jamie Bulger in 1993 added to the strength of public fear and outrage relating to the threat posed by young people and the leniency with which they were perceived to be dealt with by the courts.

⁴¹ What Howard actually said in his address to Conference was: 'Let's be clear. Prison works. It ensures that we are protected from murderers, muggers and rapists and it makes many who are tempted to commit crime think twice.'

advocating individual responsibility and choice, the psychological factors or social conditions contributing to an offence were dismissed as being of little relevance. Accordingly, instructions from the Home Office required probation reports to courts to concentrate on the offence and not the offender in a step which seemed to separate the service still further from its welfare origins and its association with rehabilitation.

From an ideological and professional perspective, matters were to get worse when Howard announced a review of probation training. The report which subsequently appeared recommended the ending of the legal requirement for probation officers to hold a Diploma in Social Work, suggesting instead a competence based Diploma in Probation Studies.⁴² Whilst some regarded this as an opportunity for the service to develop a discrete identity of its own, many others viewed it as an attempt to deprofessionalize probation and, despite substantial opposition, the proposals were accepted by the Home Office. As Flynn (2007:107) saw it:

The Home Secretary was keen to replace social work attitudes with attitudes more appropriate to punishment in the community by recruiting and qualifying a different sort of probation officer, including people with police or military experience.

A change of government delayed implementation of the new qualifying course but brought no reprieve. The incoming Labour government supported the move away from social work on the grounds that it no longer reflected the core tasks of probation officers.⁴³

⁴² The Diploma in Social Work replaced the CQSW in 1989. Oddly, it was a legal requirement for probation officers to hold a social work qualification, but the latter was not legally required by social workers working in social services departments. Howard repealed the law relating to probation officers in 1995.

⁴³ The first students to undertake the Diploma in Probation Studies commenced in 1998. It consisted of two components: university based learning towards a degree and practice based learning towards a National Vocational Qualification level 4 award. Offered as part of a degree level course which was normally expected to be completed in two years, students were recruited and selected by individual probation areas via a process involving the use of assessment centres. Incorporating psycho-metric testing, the assessment procedure was designed to measure the performance of candidates against key criteria regarded as critical to identifying the capacity to train and the potential to practice. Successful candidates were employed as Trainee Probation Officers (TPOs) by the Probation Service whilst working towards their qualification. With their time split between their practice placement and university attendance, they were expected to be allocated a protected workload to allow time for academic study and to enable them to develop competence in practice. Appointed to a specific probation

Anticipating the potential impact on practice, Nash (2004:240) referred to the introduction of the new qualification as the dawning of 'a new corrections future' for the service. In the opinion of Worrall and Hoy (2005), it was the inevitable consequence of managerialism which, in emphasising accountability and the achievement of targets, placed greater store on processes over content. Thus, for them, the strengthening of national standards was a fore-warning of the change to qualifying training that was to come:

[I]t followed that the need for probation officers to undertake two years' training as social workers, when all the procedures they would ever need to follow were now laid out in a glossy ring-bound booklet, must be open to question (Worrall and Hoy 2005:84).⁴⁴

Becoming a Law Enforcement Agency

The new Home Secretary, Jack Straw, was not only keen to re-name, or more aptly, re-brand the probation service, but also considered its amalgamation with the prison service.⁴⁵ Subsequently, both ideas appeared to be shelved although, unbeknown to the two services at the time, the question of amalgamation was really only postponed. The injunction that they should work more closely together to provide a correctional approach was, with hindsight, part of the plan to eventually establish a joined up service.

During the interim, in keeping with its modernisation agenda, the government resolved to create a national probation service which would be centrally led and funded.⁴⁶ In addition, it was determined that family court work should be hived

area, trainees' contract of employment terminated upon the completion of their course and offered no guarantee of future employment within the same probation area.

⁴⁴ This echoes the view expressed by Fletcher, Secretary of the National Association of Probation Officers, who considers that professionally trained staff are no longer required on the grounds that, 'the job has become mechanistic and all that is needed is people who can follow manuals (Fletcher 2003:15). Whilst there is some truth in this statement, the supervision of offenders continues to entail something tacit and less tangible than that which can be measured or described in manuals.

⁴⁵ Straw was of the view that its name should more accurately reflect what the service did – namely, protecting the public and punishing offenders. Names including the Public Protection Service and the Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Service were considered. It is another indication of the direction of change that when the possibility of amalgamation was first mooted in the 1960s, it was with the social services department rather than with the prison service.

⁴⁶ At this stage, the Probation Service was comprised of 54 probation areas which were able to operate in a relatively autonomous fashion and which were criticised for their limited

off to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) and that the names of community sentences should be altered (perhaps, by way of a compromise for not changing the name of the service). Accordingly, the probation order became the community rehabilitation order and the community service order became the community punishment order.⁴⁷

In making these changes, the decision was taken to officially remove 'advise, assist and befriend' from the statutes, which was seen as the final, symbolic step in the transformation of the service from social work to law enforcement. Now the buzz words were punishment, control and enforcement.⁴⁸

Should there be any doubt, when the National Probation Service (NPS) was formally created in April 2001, a document setting out its strategic framework opened with the words: 'The NPS is a law enforcement agency' (NPS/Home Office 2001:iii). That same document referred to the new organisation as bringing 'fresh aims and duties for probation' and of it having been given:

[A] clear, unambiguous remit to be a public service that protects the public, operates and enforces court orders and prison licences and rehabilitates offenders to lead law abiding lives (NPS/Home Office 2001:1).

Central to its purpose, was the expectation that the service would work collaboratively with other parts of the criminal justice system, with public sector organisations such as local authorities, health, education and housing, and with independent and voluntary partners. The new national director wrote of the need for 'deep rooted cultural change' and stated that, in order to achieve it, she would be 'leading the service against the grain of its past history and tradition' (NPS/Home Office 2001:6). The 'proper punishment of offenders' was specified as a key aim and the government's commitment to evidence based practice

accountability to central government (Home Office 1998). This was the basis of the argument for reform.

⁴⁷ All these decisions were made law with the passage of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

⁴⁸ Monitoring, surveillance, challenge and confront also entered into the everyday, official vocabulary of the service. As Nash and Ryan (2003) observed, anything that suggested being on the side of the offender was now considered unacceptable.

was expressed through the requirement placed upon the service to demonstrate the outcomes of its work and to deliver to prescribed targets.

Having ambitiously expressed the desire to become both a world leader in the design and implementation of programmes leading to a reduction in reoffending by 2004 and a top performing public service by 2006 (NPS/Home Office 2001), the National Probation Service had barely been in existence for two years when the government announced its decision to instigate a review of correctional services. The resulting report, *Managing Offenders; Reducing Crime: A new Approach* (Home Office 2003) proposed the merging of the probation and prison services with a view to creating the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). The proposal was underpinned by the concept of 'end to end offender management' which promoted the notion of more consistent and co-ordinated approach to the supervision of offenders.⁴⁹ It also introduced the term 'contestability' where by offender services would become subject to market competition and tendered for from the public, private and voluntary sector.

The pressure for change had come from several high profile serious offences that came to be regarded as public protection failures insofar as they had been perpetrated by offenders subject to probation supervision (Strickland and Berman 2006). Consequently, contestability and end to end management were regarded as measures that would drive up standards and reduce the risk of reoffending.

Acting on the proposals with surprising haste, NOMS came into being in June 2004. One of the initial implications for probation was that qualified probation officers and non-qualified probation service officers (PSOs) were referred to internally as offender managers, thereby blurring the distinction and the professional boundaries between the two roles. Although contestability was not introduced immediately, local probation areas were left in no doubt that those who performed poorly (as measured by the achievement of targets) risked losing responsibility for providing services to offenders.

⁴⁹ The idea was that each offender should have a single manager responsible for assessing and organising a package of interventions, irrespective of whether the offender was in prison or in the community, or moving between the two.

What Works

I have chosen to discuss 'what works' separately from chronological developments in the probation service outlined above, partly in recognition of its significance as a contemporary practice ideology and partly because its rise to prominence now straddles a period of almost two decades. Newman and Nutley (2003) place it alongside managerialism in terms of its implications for practice. It has altered the knowledge base of the service and the nature of the professional relationship between probation officers and offenders, as well as influencing the organisational structure of local services and internal relationships between colleagues. In addition, 'what works' is viewed:

[A]s an arena in which tensions between professional autonomy, managerial control and government policies are played out (Newman and Nutley 2003: 549).

It is especially important to stress that, as originally conceived, 'what works' was not a centrally imposed policy but something that emerged from within the service itself as a response to 'nothing works' and 'prison works.' It arose in the context of attempts to identify methods of intervention that evaluative research could show to be effective in changing behaviour and reducing reoffending. Encouraged by findings emanating from Canada that seemed to indicate the success of structured group work programmes using cognitive learning and problem solving techniques, similar projects began to be established in this country during the early 1990s.

By the time the National Probation Service was created, probation areas had already invested heavily in group work programmes. The NPS now sanctioned their further development, emphasising the importance of matching offenders to programmes most likely to reduce offending and so achieve successful outcomes. Subsequently, accredited programmes, based on cognitive behavioural theory, proliferated.

In the process, one to one work with offenders was denigrated in the absence of research able to demonstrate its effectiveness and, for a time, it was not possible to supervise an offender in the community without a requirement that

they attended a programme.⁵⁰ Large numbers of non-qualified staff (PSOs) were recruited to help run the programmes, which emphasised the importance of programme integrity achieved through adherence to a manual or script.

Probation officers were turned into case managers, assessing and identifying the criminogenic factors or needs associated with the offence, and then preparing offenders for programmes and arranging interventions aimed at both reducing those factors and managing the risk they posed. This was a very narrow interpretation of the notion of case management (Holt 2000). In practice, it resulted in probation officers losing sight of the offender as a whole person and seemed to foster a rather impersonal approach whereby offenders rarely saw the same officer on a consistent basis.⁵¹

As the cornerstone of evidence based practice, 'what works' has also been associated with other evidence based initiatives. These have included the introduction of standardised tools designed to assist with the assessment and management of risk, of which the best known is the Offender Assessment System (OASys). Introduced in 2002, OASys has the potential to guide and support practice by providing a framework for the gathering of information linked to the risk of reoffending and the risk of harm posed by an offender. However, as an electronic, computerised tool it has also become the primary source of information concerning performance and the achievement of targets. The association of OASys with performance management, together with its substantial length which makes completion a time consuming exercise has, in my opinion, undermined its value as a practice tool. As a result, it has come to epitomise the worst elements of bureaucratisation and it has been criticised for encouraging a formulaic and mechanistic approach to the work (Fitzgibbon

⁵⁰ Whilst believing that attendance on programmes needed to be encouraged and supported, the Chief Inspector of Probation criticised what he termed 'programme fetishism' and the way in which activities not falling under the accredited programme umbrella came to be perceived as being of less importance (Morgan 2002:8).

⁵¹ These changes were consistent with the greater weight that seemed to be given to the acquisition of procedural knowledge in training. It is what Preston-Shoot (2000) has referred to as the valuing of 'know how' over 'knowing why,' entailing the avoidance both of curiosity and of a more emotional response.

2008), whilst contributing to practitioners becoming increasingly desk bound.⁵² Thus, OASys represents another significant shift in practice and culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to show the way in which the probation service has been transformed since its inception and to describe the background and general organisational milieu that newcomers encounter upon entry to the service. The intensity and pace of change over the past 20 years, in particular, has been substantial. The main pressures for change have come from the move towards a more punitive approach to offenders, as identified both in this chapter and in my account of the criminal justice system, and the introduction of proceduralism and target-based management in the service.

This has been accompanied by imperatives to restructure area services in an effort to balance public protection and the needs of offenders with political expediency and the availability of resources. The result has been frequent reorganisation of service delivery and changes in front line roles, and working practices. My research looks at how my subjects locate themselves within a system that seems to be constantly in transition.

⁵² In answer to a recent parliamentary question about the amount of time probation officers spent with offenders and on computer-based administrative activities, Crispin Blunt (2010b), Minister for Prisons and Probation, referred to a NOMS survey conducted in December 2008 which showed that probation officers and PSOs spent 24% of their time in direct contact with offenders, 41% on computer activity and 35% on other activities including correspondence, meetings and travel.

Chapter 3

Professionalism and the Probation Service

Introduction

In an era of greater uncertainty and instability, much cherished ideologies have been deconstructed and subverted, with a consequential loss of faith and trust (Dent and Whitehead 2001). These changes in attitudes and beliefs, accompanied by neo-liberalism and managerialism have had fundamental implications for what it means to be a professional, especially in the public sector. In circumstances in which workplace boundaries have been redefined (Malin 2000) and in a culture where accountability and the measurement of performance seems to take precedence, notions of professionalism have been seriously challenged. Indeed, according to Aldridge (1999), it is hard to think of any professional group in the United Kingdom that was not challenged by the Conservative administration between 1979 and 1997⁵³. Moreover, those who were hoping for a change of direction when Labour came to power discovered, instead, a Government that was intent on carrying forward notions of New Public Management and modernisation.

The challenges that occurred and the questions which continue to be raised about the role and value of the professions are especially of interest to this study owing to the experience of the Probation Service in laying claim to professional status. The coercive agenda and the rise of the performance culture have had ramifications both for the task of the service and its value base, two factors which are closely linked to professional identity.

In my view, historically, there has also been an internal conflict within the service between members who wish to acquire the prestige and privileges associated with professionalism and those who are motivated more by a social and moral commitment for whom task, rather than status, has been the priority. Given these differing perspectives, the debate about professionalism is highly

⁵³ Those professions affected included doctors, civil servants, judges, barristers, university lecturers and teachers.

relevant not only to how the work force see themselves, but also in terms of making sense of the freedom and constraints that exist in respect to how they carry out their work. Moreover, whatever the professional aspirations of some probation staff may be, the motivation of other work colleagues and the environment in which the service operates have combined to produce different directional pulls.⁵⁴

Before examining these issues in more detail and looking at how they relate to the professional identity of probation officers, I believe that it would be helpful to first consider where probation officers stand in relation to other professions. In addition, I consider it relevant to take into account what has been happening to the professions in general and what factors and circumstances contribute to an occupation gaining recognition as a profession – a label which many occupational groups still aspire to have bestowed upon them.

I wish to suggest that in choosing to join a specific field of employment, those who become probation officers are making a commitment to both the nature of the work and to a professional position. It is my contention that there exists a professional hierarchy that has been traditionally headed by the medical and legal professions (and, once upon a time, by the clergy and military). Exploring the debates associated with this premise, which includes giving consideration to the position currently held by probation officers within the ranking of professions will, I hope, assist in locating probation in its social field.

Sociological Theories of Professions

Beginning this exploration leads me into the highly contested territory of what it means to be a profession. The question of how professions should be defined and which occupations should be called professions has remained a contentious issue for decades (Wilensky 1964; Freidson 1971; Johnson 1972; Freidson 1986; MacDonald 1995; Freidson 1994; Freidson 2001). It is an argument complicated by the fact that the notion of profession and related designations such as ‘professional’ and ‘professionalism’ can be interpreted and

⁵⁴ A similar situation has been identified within social work, an occupational group to whom, traditionally, probation has tended to be most closely aligned, and where a strong anti-professionalization lobby has long existed (Hugman 1998).

applied in a variety of ways, invoking a range of different images, connotations and expectations (Noordegraaf 2007, Krejsler 2005, Watson 2002). For Watson (2002:94) the concepts are 'slippery and ambiguous' and yet it is still the case that to be classified as a profession is not only 'something to be defended or something to be attained' (Larson 1977: xviii), but also 'a sought after label' (Dent and Whitehead 2001:2). So much so that Noordegraaf (2007:761) asserts 'almost everyone wants to become professional.'

Underpinning the controversy concerning which occupations qualify as professions is an assumption that there is a fundamental difference between those that have achieved the status of professions and other occupations that are regarded as non-professions. This has prompted attempts to identify the distinguishing features of professions as a way of defining the term.

The definitions which initially seemed to dominate the debate came to be classified under two inter-related headings usually referred to as the 'trait approach' and the 'functional approach.' The focus of the former is on listing the characteristics that professions are considered to possess. The contents of such lists tend to vary from theorist to theorist, but the attributes that have been more commonly identified include autonomy, expertise, a distinct body of knowledge, formal training, entrance qualifications, a code of conduct and a public service ethos.

The functionalist approach, on the other hand, also concentrates on characteristics but, as Johnson (1972) has pointed out, only looks for those elements thought to have functional benefit for society or for the professional/client relationship. Strongly influenced by Parsons (1954), who viewed professions as a value oriented calling, this perspective places the emphasis on professions possessing and being motivated by notions of a service ideal and a desire to work for the common good, rather than being driven by money and self-interest. It is based on a consensual view of society in which members of professions act in the best interests of those to whom they provide a service and are rewarded with reputation and respect based on the authority of their knowledge and expertise.

The importance of the professions is summed up by Parsons in the following statement:

It seems evident that many of the most important features of our society are to a considerable extent dependent on the smooth functioning of the professions (Parsons 1954:34).

In the United Kingdom, Halmos (1965) promoted this same line of thinking, viewing the professions as driven by faith, 'professionalized benevolence' and an ethical calling which commits them to social improvement. He distinguished between the personal service professions (clergy, doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers) and the impersonal service professions (lawyers, accountants, engineers, architects), the former being motivated by a sense of personal service and a desire to bring about change in the body or personality of their clients (Halmos 1970).

According to both the trait and functionalist approaches, the extent to which occupations are able to meet the criteria contained in what are essentially checklists, determines the extent to which they can be regarded as professions. However, in his critique of the professions, Freidson (1971) argues that definitions drawing on traits are ideal types that merely reflect the characteristics which the traditional professions of medicine and law were perceived to possess. This is a view shared by Johnson (1972) who adds that the categories which comprise the trait approach:

(T)end to be derived from the analysis of a very few professional bodies and include features of professional organisation and practice which find full expression only in Anglo-American culture at a particular time in the historical development of these professions (Johnson 1972:26).

Picking up this last point, Freidson (1986) has traced the rise of the professions, linking it with the emergence of a middle class who were anxious to distance their occupations from low status trades and so gain respectability. However, he too is careful to emphasise that this was a culturally specific phenomenon that is really only applicable to the United States and the United Kingdom. Neal and Morgan (2000) have since provided evidence to support the perspectives of Johnson and Freidson in their comparative study of how professions have

evolved in the United Kingdom and Germany, which highlights very different developmental conditions and demonstrates that there cannot be a single, unified process towards professionalization and professionalism either.⁵⁵

A further criticism of the trait and functionalist approaches focused on their failure to take account of the dimension of power (Johnson 1972). According to this perspective, the distinguishing feature of the professions is purely their ability to gain recognition as professions (Freidson 1983). This is a point made by Becker (1971) who, in acknowledging the problematic nature of definitions, simply states that professions should be regarded as 'those occupations which have been fortunate enough in the politics of today's work world to gain and maintain possession of that honorific title' (Becker 1971:92).

For a substantial period, professions were regarded in a fairly neutral or benign light, generally being seen as motivated by an altruistic desire to service the needs of the public. Freidson (1994) has observed that a negative shift in attitude occurred during the 1960s, when the power theme started to emerge and professions began to be attacked for their monopolistic and privileged positions⁵⁶. Freidson's own study of the medical profession (1970) would seem to have been influential in highlighting these issues and other writers followed suit. This is confirmed by MacDonald and Ritzer (1988:254) who, in their review of the literature on professions, came to the conclusion that it 'indicates the centrality of power in understanding the professions.' In advocating the significance of power as a defining principle, Johnson forcibly argued:

Professionalism, then, becomes redefined as a peculiar type of occupational control rather than an expression of the inherent nature of particular occupations. A profession, then, is not an occupation but a means of controlling an occupation' (Johnson 1972:45).

⁵⁵ One significant distinction identified by Neal and Morgan (2000) is that in Germany the establishment of the professions was actively sanctioned by the state who, at the same time, conferred social status. Where as in the United Kingdom, laissez-faire policies enabled and encouraged occupations to organise themselves and derive status from being members of the independent professional classes.

⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that Parsons (1954) recognised the monopoly of the professions but viewed it as operating in the public interest.

From this standpoint, it is not so much the nature of the work or its contribution to the functioning of society that determines professional status but, the extent to which an occupation can acquire privilege and power and, thereby, achieve control. For Wilding (1982) the issue of control is what helps to distinguish those who have been accepted as professions from those who have not quite made it. Based on this premise, Freidson (1994) has clarified his own position by stating:

I use the word 'profession' to refer to an occupation that controls its own work, organised by a special set of institutions sustained in part by a particular ideology of expertise and service (Freidson 1994:10).

Particular characteristics or traits are relevant only in so far as they are a means towards gaining power as reflected in claims of autonomy and the ability to control recruitment and training. Thus, Freidson (op cit) stresses the importance of credentials which, he regards, as testifying to having received formal training to learn and inculcate the specialized knowledge and skill regarded as vital to competent performance. In his opinion, it is the possession of knowledge, requiring the exercise of discretionary judgement and grounded in abstract theory and concepts which can only be accessed through training that enables the occupation to gain public prestige and privilege essential to professions (Freidson 2001). Accordingly, a core feature of a profession is the achievement of specific qualifications, via a training programme based in higher education, which then become a requirement for entry to the profession, as well as a means of controlling who can join.

By these means, a profession is able to wield its power to control entry by excluding those without an appropriate qualification. These actions also contribute to shaping the identity of individual professionals and enables professions to safeguard their efforts to dominate their field and potentially ward off challenges from occupations working in close proximity. The implication being that classification as a profession is not an end to the matter:

[A]ny stability or security of position must be maintained by constant activity to mobilise the membership to contest any encroachment and to advance the boundaries of the professional territory (MacDonald and Ritzer 1988:259/260).

Consequently, far from being altruistic, the power approach portrays the professions as power seeking groups, whose values are seen as mere rationalisations of collective self-interest, willing to engage in a struggle to protect their domain and keep out potential rivals. It is a line of argument that essentially lends support to the notion of a conflict model of society, as opposed to the harmonious, consensual vision of the functionalists. From this perspective 'professions are occupations which have come out on top in the struggle (Wilding 1982:5). Moreover, this argument places the traits associated with professions in a new light, in the sense that they become attributes crucial to the goal of controlling their work.

Two theoretical frameworks have tended to dominate discussion of the significance of the power and control dimension in the study of the professions. The first is Marxist in nature and the second is neo-Weberian. The Marxist argument can itself be analysed at two different levels. At one level, professions are associated with capitalist oppression and the reproduction of the capitalist social order; whilst at another level, changing working conditions are seen as leading to a weakening of professional power and, ultimately, to the proletarianization and de-skilling of professionals.

The neo-Weberian argument focuses primarily on the issue of market or social closure which is achieved not only through credentialism and efforts to gain a monopolistic position, but also through the legal sanction and protection of the state, without which, a monopoly cannot be maintained. The process, as described by Krejsler (2005) emphasises the lobbying for state support in order to obtain exclusive rights over a specific field of work which, if successful, is followed by defining the conditions governing the ability to work in the field. Principally, exclusion is aimed at the upward social mobility of the whole group (MacDonald 1995), bettering the conditions enjoyed by the occupation's members by rewarding the qualified with the privileges of higher salaries and social prestige.

Accordingly, market closure provides a pathway towards professional standing and therefore offers insight into how such designations are conferred. It is especially helpful in making sense of the way medicine and law have been able

to maintain their influence and status as professions, whilst teaching, social work and probation have found it difficult to achieve widespread acceptance.

In developing his argument concerning the centrality of power, Johnson (1972) presents a typology in which he identifies three different forms of professionalism, termed collegiate, patronage and mediative. In his definition, each is based on the power relations between the producer and consumer of services.

Collegiate is where the professional practitioner defines the needs of the client and how those needs are to be met. Johnson places doctors in this category. Patronage is where clients define their own needs and the practitioner must do what is expected. Johnson views accountants and architects as falling into this group. Finally, mediative is where a third party mediates in the relationship between producer/practitioner and consumer/client. Of the three, mediative is the least powerful and Johnson has in mind occupations in which the state attempts to take authority in order to determine the content and subject of practice, defining the needs of the client and how they are met. This is the category which best applies to the caring professions, whose funding is also provided by the state. Consequently, as MacDonald (1995) has noted, their power is further restricted and their position is weakened in terms of economic rewards.

It is equally important to mention that Johnson (1972) views all professions as subject to some degree of state mediation, whilst Wilding (1982) contends that the more significant powers and privileges are actually granted by government. Again, this is highly pertinent to the probation experience especially when he rather tellingly states that the basis for government favour is:

[T]he power of the group, the compatibility of its interests with the interests of powerful groups in society, the measure of support which the group has from wider public opinion (Wilding 1982:9).

Professions, Bureaucracies and Managerialism

Although professions have been criticised and attacked for the power they wield, Freidson (2001) has acknowledged that, in reality, few, if any,

occupations can now be said to control their own work. The fact is that the nature of professions, the conditions of professional work and the way in which they operate has changed. In particular, most members of professions are not only salaried employees, as opposed to the traditional ideology of professionalism which assumes self-employed, independent employment (Eraut 1994), but employed in bureaucratic organisations and government departments where strict controls are imposed from above. Additionally, rising levels of education that have enabled greater numbers of people to achieve degrees and other qualifications, is considered to have narrowed the gap with regards to the possession of professional knowledge, bringing about the erosion of professional authority (Freidson 1986).

This has given rise to the suggestion that some degree of de-professionalization or proletarianization has occurred, together with a decline in the status of all professions linked to the consequences of technological developments, organisational and socio-economic change and the effects of state policies (Broadbent et al 1997). The same writers also postulate that professionals are seen as problematic for neo-liberals on the grounds of their relative autonomy which causes problems of control and, by way of a response, has led to demands from the state for greater accountability.

Furthermore, it has been argued that there has been a loss of public trust in professionals arising from a number of high profile scandals and a range of contested actions by doctors, scientists, civil servants and others that have led them to be perceived as untrustworthy (O'Neill 2004). The result, according to this perspective, has been an undermining of professional discretion, judgement and expertise which has served to reinforce the justification for closer scrutiny, accountability, financial discipline and regulation that are so central to managerialism in both the private and public sectors.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ It may be that scandals are as much a symptom of the declining authority of professions as its cause. Linked to this are issues to do with consumer rights and interests, which give rise to questions concerning complaints and scandals and how they get used, especially by the media. The tabloid press, for example, tends to support a kind of populism that is antipathetic to various forms of authority. The TV representation of professionals, such as doctors, has also changed, depicting them as making mistakes and, at its most extreme, murdering their patients (a storyline which, of course, has basis in reality). There are still positive portrayals as well but the balance appears to shift in different ideological climates.

Scott (1969) has expressed the belief that when professionals work in bureaucratic structures, the scene is set for conflict and tension. This is advocated on the basis of bureaucracies being associated with more routine, supervised activities that are organised hierarchically in an externally controlling manner and which are at odds with the idealized notion of the professional as a self-regulating, autonomous purveyor of specialised knowledge. The loss of professional judgement and the codification of professional knowledge is seen as the inevitable consequence.

Such opinions provide a source of confirmation for MacDonald's (1995, 2006) assertion of there having long been a school of thought that sees bureaucratization as antithetical to professionalism, with organisational rules taking precedence over professional practice and attributes and, by so doing, reducing their power and status. The issue of indetermination and its ratio to technicality, as identified and defined by Jamous and Peloille (1970), is especially relevant as a measure of professional power in these circumstances. For them, technicality is that which can be mastered and communicated in the form of rules, whilst indetermination is that which escapes rules and cannot be standardized. In other words, where the exercise of professional knowledge relies on judgement, the professional task is more able to avoid becoming routinized.

A strong counter argument has since emerged which challenges the traditional view of professions and bureaucracies being continually at variance with each other, and points to the fact that, in reality, their relationship is far more complex. Larson (1977), for example, sees them as complementary, if not interdependent, modes of work organisation – highlighting the existence of different types of bureaucracies which, like the professions themselves, deviate from the ideal type in the way they function. She asserts that the expansion of state bureaucracies actively generates professions and states: 'In a bureaucratized world, professions can no longer be interpreted as inherently anti-bureaucratic' (Larson 1977:199). There is even the possibility of mutual benefit being derived from their working together.

Parry and Parry (1979) coined the term 'bureau-professionalism' to refer to a hybrid blend of professional and bureaucratic organisation to be found in government departments in the United Kingdom, especially those responsible for the provision of education, health and social care. It was this type of structure which underpinned the functioning of the old welfare state. Epitomised by the social services departments of the day, the authors present a picture of organisational processes which are neither entirely bureaucratic nor reflecting wholly autonomous professionalism.

Significantly, this scenario, which resembles the conditions in which Johnson's (1972) state mediated professions operate, helps to bring into focus the capacity of the professional to adapt to working collaboratively within bureaucratic structures. Although Parry and Parry (1979:43) recognise the 'strains and complexities' involved in such a mix, they believe that, in relation to social work, the bureaucracy has the potential to become 'humanized' as a result of their co-existence. Moreover, in the opinion of Harris (1998), this type of organisational co-ordination enables social workers to continue to exercise considerable discretion.⁵⁸

This last point has also been raised by Lipsky (1980) who, in addressing experiences in the United States, has been able to demonstrate that his 'street level bureaucrats', a phrase he uses to mean 'public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their job' (Lipsky 1980:3), are able to keep hold of a substantial degree of discretion despite being employed within bureaucracies.⁵⁹ They retain their freedom, which is necessary to do their job and they have the ability to carry out actions unobserved, which allows them to act autonomously.

If this suggestion of compatibility between professions and bureaucracies is actually realised and sustained in everyday practice, it seriously weakens the arguments of those who regard bureaucracies as inevitably deprofessionalizing.

⁵⁸ Discretion has become lessened as an increasingly proceduralised, checklist style regime has come to the fore in Social Services Departments.

⁵⁹ I consider it relevant to mention that Lipsky (1980) included judges, public lawyers, police officers, teachers, nurses and social workers within his definition of 'street level bureaucrats.'

This is a matter taken up by Freidson (1994) who, in discussing the ability of bureaucracies to accommodate professions, considers there to be no empirical support for either deprofessionalization or proletarianization. In his view, it should not be assumed that bureaucratic controls place professional employees in the same position as industrial workers. For evidence, Freidson refers to the fact that supervisory, managerial and executive positions are usually filled by members of the profession. Consequently, he believes that whilst this:

[D]oes reduce the use of discretion and judgement by *individual* rank-and-file professional workers, it does not represent a reduction in the control of professional work by the *profession* itself (Freidson 1994:139, emphasis in the original).

This rationale is also used by Freidson to argue against generalisations which insist on a decline in the professions, his take on the situation being that there may have been a decline only in the position of some practitioners in some professions.⁶⁰

In an earlier work in which he addressed the same issue, Freidson (1986) identified the main problem for the individual professional in organizations as being their limited access to resources, which are controlled and made available to them by others. Managers make decisions concerning caseloads, how many staff to employ and which tasks to perform but, as Lipsky (1980) has remarked, managers have limited control over the practice and policy decisions that are made during the interaction that takes place between a professional worker and their client, which gives the former the power to subvert policy.⁶¹

It was the power bureau-professionals were perceived to wield that contributed to igniting the Thatcherite attack on the professions and the welfare state in

⁶⁰ In my opinion, a managerial class staffed by those with professional experience is certainly different from one whose members do not have such a background, but the outlook of such people can be altered greatly by management responsibilities held over a long period. Therefore, I do not consider it appropriate to deny the influence of managerialist approaches just because many managers come from the professions they are now regulating.

⁶¹ This offers an explanation as to why casework became unfashionable, insofar as it legitimated a certain amount of professional autonomy.

1980s Britain. As Pollitt (1993:43) has observed: 'A public sector bureaucracy dominated by a profession or set of professions was a double evil.'

For Thatcherites, the professions in general were viewed with great distrust mainly because they seemed to be committed to intrinsic values that were considered to be at odds with those of the market and the enterprise culture. Marquand (2008) has summed up the Thatcherite strategy as a determination to:

[S]tamp out the 'dependency culture', to win the war of the business class against the professional class, to humble the institutions in which professional values were embedded and to re-create the seamless web of state authority and market competition that the long descent into welfarism and collectivism had destroyed (Marquand 2008:284)

They were especially dismissive of the public sector bureau-professions who, in their perception, were regarded as upholders of a welfare ideology that cast them as either Socialists⁶² and/or do-gooders, interfering unnecessarily and paternalistically in the lives of their clients and committed to disposing of resources in accordance with their professional values and norms, rather than market principles. Thus, welfare professions were branded not only as opponents of the business ethos but also as self-serving, self-interested potential obstacles to change (Ackroyd et al 2007).⁶³ They, and the bureaucracies which employed them, were accused of inefficiency and wastefulness; and bureau-professionalism was attacked as a barrier to the reconstruction of the state and its role in welfare (Harris 1998).

From this perspective, managerialism, with its emphasis on doctrines and working practices based on the management of the private sector, including the principles of financial control, performance management and the creation of quasi-markets, came to be presented as the main means of reform. It was promoted as the solution to a range of economic and social problems, the bottom line being that better management would result in improved institutional

⁶² The Socialist activities of local authorities added weight to the Thatcherite case, as did strike action by social workers and teachers during this period.

⁶³ It was not just social work and probation that came under attack from the Thatcherites in the 1980s, but also progressive educational methods and anyone aligned to or seemingly inspired by sociology.

performance (Pollitt 1993). Instead of decisions being made on professional grounds, this new approach to public sector management stressed the importance of managing services through cost effective strategies, in which managers were expected to define what needed to be done through highly directive management systems. In addition, the operation of quasi-markets were intended to allow consumer preference to play a part in driving the organisation of services whilst, at the same time, generating competition which would act as an incentive to increase quality. In this way, it was anticipated that professional autonomy would finally be curbed and professional employees would become subordinated to managers and to markets.

Within the public sector, new policies were successfully enforced through legislation aimed at promoting the greater regulation of services. The introduction of government prescribed standards, detailed task specifications, manuals, best practice guides and performance targets served as further developments towards strengthening management control, whilst efforts to obtain the compliance of professional staff have been largely pursued through scrutiny, initially by the Audit Commission, who have since left an on-going legacy of audits, inspections and performance monitoring.

In Marquand's assessment of the impact of these measures 'qualitative judgement became suspect, while the spurious objectivity of quantitative measurement replaced it' (Marquand 2008:353). He further argues that this helped to foster the idea that public sector professionals could not perform properly without scrutiny, which fuelled the belief that they were not to be trusted.

The trend towards managerialism and public sector reform, which has not been confined solely to the United Kingdom, has resulted in the significant restructuring and re-organisation of welfare services and the re-defining of the professional task. However, questions concerning the uniformity of change across the public sector and the extent to which front line practice has altered (especially where there is a reliance on discretion and tacit knowledge or skill) have been raised by a number of analysts (including Exworthy and Halford 1999; Farrell and Morris 2003; Ackroyd et al 2007).

Thus, as with the dichotomy between professionals and bureaucracies, the assumption that professionalism and managerialism are automatically opposing ideologies is not clear cut. Exworthy and Halford (1999:12) for example recognise that professionals have always taken on some managerial tasks and 'will adapt to incorporate new managerial skills into their repertoires as part of a career strategy.' On this basis, they view managerialism as 'not solely an imposition on professionals' and consider that compromise and collaboration is possible.

A review of the literature by Farrell and Morris (2003) has highlighted the different impact of new public management on different professional groups. This has enabled them to demonstrate the diverse character of professionals⁶⁴:

What is important is the recognition that not only are professionals an extremely heterogeneous group in terms of occupations, but their level of control within organizations is contingent upon size and level or organizational bureaucracy, upon the nature of the particular profession and upon the strength of professional collectivization through associations (Farrell and Morris 2003:138).

They conclude that in general practice and education, professionals as managers have been able to maintain, and possibly increase, their professional autonomy; where as in social work, which has been subjected to greater legislation, increased accountability and financial constraints, autonomy has suffered.⁶⁵ Stronach et al (2002) regard professionals as being caught between an 'economy of performance,' which represents the demands of the audit culture, and various 'ecologies of practice,' which are defined as the

⁶⁴ Farrell and Morris (2003) also differentiate between managers, stating that not all of them can be assumed to have bought into managerialism and flagging up complications in occupational settings where front line practitioners are designated managers and where managers were once front line practitioners.

⁶⁵ An analysis of health, housing and social care by Ackroyd et al (2007) concurs that there is a mixed picture of change. Setting out with the intention of exploring the degree to which public management reforms have altered values, work and organisation, they found that although the reforms had impacted on all three services in terms of the reshaping of provision and the introduction of different priorities, new management practices have been slow to develop in NHS hospitals and, in health in general as in social care, there has been much more opposition. Only in housing have new forms of management been successfully implemented and positively engaged with by the professionals involved. Otherwise, 'older professional modes of working remain entrenched despite years of reform and untold disruption to staff and users' (Ackroyd et al 2007:21/22).

professional dispositions and commitments including experiences, beliefs and knowledge that shape what they actually do both individually and collectively. This argument recognises that some members within the same professions are likely to embrace the structure and framework provided by managerialism.

Whilst Stronach et al reject the inevitability of deprofessionalization, they consider there to be a persistent tension between managerialism and professionalism which leads them to express the conviction that 'professionalism cannot thrive on performance indicators' (Stronach et al 2002:131). Indeed, although such indicators may be upheld as signalling different levels of effectiveness, it has proved far more difficult to evidence to what extent measures of this type correlate to the actual quality of work provided to service users. The fact being that pressure to achieve targets and to economise does not sit comfortably with improvement in the quality of professional practice.

Gleeson and Knights (2006: 284) offer another way of looking at the interplay between managerialism and professionalism by describing professionals as either resisting performance culture or engaging in what they call 'creative mediation of targets and procedures'; the latter being an attempt to find ways of enabling one's professionalism to be maintained whilst complying with managerialism. In so doing, Gleeson and Knights also challenge the view of public sector professionals as having become deprofessionalized, submissive victims of management reform.

A balanced approach taken by Raine and Willson (1996), albeit one which pre-dates the Labour administrations, sees 'benefits and disbenefits from the change to a managerialist culture and, accordingly, cases can be made both in favour of and against what has happened' (Raine and Willson 1996:25). Therefore, they consider the emphasis on productivity and cost-efficiency as leading to improvements in timeliness and stronger financial accountability, but regard national standards and cash limits as undermining performance and creating pressure to cut service standards.

With the blurring of boundaries between professionalism and managerialism across both the public and private sectors, Dent and Whitehead (2002) contend that being professional has lost its exclusivity. For them, the 'true' professional of tradition has also gone, by which they mean:

[S]omeone trusted and respected, an individual given class status, autonomy, social elevation, in return for safeguarding our well-being and applying their professional judgement on the basis of a benign moral or cultural code. That professional no longer exists (Dent and Whitehead 2002:1).

In its place is an expectation that everyone is professional in a context in which the alternative is to be regarded as an amateur; namely, someone who is 'condemned as lacking competence and useful knowledge; not a serious player in today's competitive marketplace' (Dent and Whitehead 2002:3).

The Probation Service as a Profession

The question is, where does this leave probation officers who were inevitably caught up in the assault on the welfare state and who, in the opinion of Aldridge (1999) were singled out for relentless attack during the 1990s?

May and Annison (1998:168/9) have noted that 'the history of probation has witnessed varying claims for the professional status of its workforce.' From the perspective of Abbott and Meerabeau (1998) the hierarchical status of probation officers is 'ambivalent'. Nellis and Stephenson (1998) have referred to the 'near professionalization' of the Service, thereby implying that historically it has fallen short of becoming a fully-fledged profession; whilst in Vanstone's assessment, probation is an organisation 'with only a tenuous hold on professional status' (Vanstone 2004:158).

It is consistent with Etzioni's (1969) concept of the 'semi-professions' to regard probation officers as fitting into that classification. Originally the term was applied to teachers, nurses and social workers on the grounds that:

Their training is shorter, their status is less legitimated, their right to privileged communication less established, there is less of a specialized

body of knowledge, and they have less autonomy from supervision or societal control than 'the' professions (Etzioni 1969:v).

Etzioni added the existence of a high proportion of female members within the semi-professions as another reason for their failure to attain full professional status. By comparison, the 'true' professions tended to be male dominated.

Forty years on, this comes across as an overly rigid, narrow and outmoded approach to determining who is a profession; and Krejsler (2005:343) has very pertinently queried the basis on which the occupations specifically identified have come 'to submit to a definition of profession that hardly grasps the specific character of their field of work.' In his view, teaching, nursing and social work are characterized by holistic approaches to their practice which incorporates both specialized and general knowledge and skills, as well as a framework of values and what Krejsler (ibid) calls 'uniquely personal traits.'

Frequently referred to as the 'caring professions', the issue for me is not just about the appropriateness of the term profession or whether the concept of the semi-profession has any validity now but, more significantly, about their position in society. The fact is that whatever label is used, it is evident that they have not achieved the same status, power or economic rewards as other groups of professions. Therefore, the implication remains that they (and I am including probation officers here) are, perhaps at best, 'second order' professions.

Within the field of criminal justice, it is judges, barristers and solicitors who are generally perceived as occupying the higher professional positions as measured by social recognition, earnings and professional autonomy. As a consequence, the choice of a career in probation could be said to represent a lower level of social and material aspiration on the part of those who pursue such a career.

A similar line of argument is used by Toren (1969) in her analysis of social work. In Toren's opinion, a tendency for social work to recruit from less privileged social groups results in the role being identified with a lower social stratum which subsequently deters people from higher classes or those with upper

mobility aspirations from joining. This, in turn has a negative influence on professional prestige, contributing to social work's failure to rise up the professional hierarchy.

Despite efforts, over the last decade or so, to disassociate probation from social work, their historical connection in the United Kingdom means that one cannot ignore this argument as a potential explanation for probation officers' lesser ranking amongst the professions. In my view their relatively modest status is reinforced by the bureau-professional aspects of probation's structure and its subjection to managerialist disciplines. This is further compounded by the lack of understanding on the part of the general public concerning what probation officers actually do, as well as by the fact that they are viewed as working primarily with a marginalised and socially excluded clientele who attract little or no public sympathy.

Conclusion

Probation work is a prime example of a state mediated profession, as defined by Johnson (1972). By way of supporting evidence, Aldridge (1999:84) has referred to it as:

[A]n occupation entirely contingent on government policy through statute.....In principle the entire job could be abolished overnight.

There have been times when the prospect of abolition has been experienced as a very real concern and used as a means of bringing the service into line.

There are continuing tensions over autonomy and the opportunities probation officers have to exercise discretion, as well as uncertainty with regards to the precise nature of its knowledge base and the core values from which to currently practice. With its tasks defined by legislation and controlled through performance management, the service has been subject to government pressure to reduce autonomy and discretion, and routinize the occupation. However, the job has always involved a high degree of unpredictability and indeterminacy which makes high levels of skill an important attribute.

Probation officers need to be able to adapt their practice to the many varied situations they encounter. The capacity they have to negotiate between that

which is formally specified and that which is permitted to be constructed in practice remains a major issue.

The existence of these tensions is revealed in this study and partly motivated it too. They are matters which feed into the fundamental question concerning professional identity that the study seeks to explore.

Chapter 4

Research on Probation Practice

Over the past 50 years, there has been a great deal of research focusing on probation practice. Generally, these studies have tended to examine the experiences of offenders and the impact upon them of various kinds of intervention. More recently, studies have predominantly concentrated on measuring effectiveness to support evidence based practice, including an increasing body of research on factors contributing to offender's desisting from crime.

However, when I began this study, there had been a notable absence of published research from a probation officer viewpoint. This has been confirmed by Teague (2007:97) who, in lamenting the absence of ethnographic research on probation, has commented that 'the life experiences and motivations of practitioners seem on occasion to be virtually invisible.' Annison et al (2008:260) have also described the probation officer perspective concerning their changing role as 'an under-researched area.'

One exception has been a qualitative study amongst a group of six experienced probation officers that explored their current sense of commitment and motivation. The study by Farrow (2004:206) found them to be 'very demoralized and alienated.' In her evaluation the research subjects, who had all been in the job for more than ten years, remained committed to their work with offenders and to their colleagues, but not to the probation service as an organisation. The implication being that their negative attitudes were linked to the nature of the changes that had taken place.

Farrow's study appeared at a time when I was giving thought to the focus of my own research. It was influential in the sense that until I became aware of its publication, I had also considered researching experienced officers. Instead, my desire to contribute something new propelled me in the direction of recently qualified officers.

In fact, at the stage when I was planning my project, it was necessary to go back to the 1990s to find research that gave a voice to newcomers. During that period, two studies were published.

The first of these studies, by Boswell, Davies and Wright (1993), commenced in the late 1980s and was completed in the early 1990s. It examined the views of both newly qualified and experienced probation officers in respect to their professional role and the relevance of qualifying training to actual experience. The research, which was commissioned by the Home Office, identified dissatisfaction amongst newly qualified officers who felt that generic, CQSW training did not equip them sufficiently for professional practice.⁶⁶ On the other hand, experienced officers were found to retain 'a very firm social work base' (Boswell et al 1993:xii). Although the researchers were aware of an emerging new organisational culture linked to the notions of punishment and cost effectiveness, the research pre-dated the advent of managerialism, centralization and evidence based practice. As such, it is now primarily useful as an historic record of professional practice during a specific period in time.

In 1996, Marsh and Triseliotis published a study of newly qualified social workers and probation officers undertaken between 1992 and 1995. Focusing on their readiness to practice, it found probation officers to be better prepared and more motivated than social workers. The latter saw training mainly in terms of a response to career needs in the sense that they felt they could do the job already but needed the qualification to progress; where as probation officers viewed training more in terms of the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Thus, the authors concluded:

Probation is the jewel in the crown of this system, providing a clear example that can be built on to improve and enhance the overall readiness of the newly qualified (Marsh and Triseliotis 1996:203).

Ironically, by the time the study was published, qualifying training for probation officers had come to a halt pending decisions about appropriate qualifications

⁶⁶ Aldridge (1996) has expressed the belief that this research was used as evidence to support the decision to separate probation from social work training.

and training. It was to be another two years before training resumed with the new Diploma in Probation Studies.

Since completing the fieldwork element of my own study, several new pieces of research have appeared that have looked specifically at the experiences of newcomers. Gregory (2007), who is a lecturer on a probation qualifying course and previously a Practice Development Assessor (PDA), undertook a qualitative study utilising a semi-structured interview based on the one used by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), referred to above. The study involved a total of 15 subjects, 14 of whom were women and three of whom had been supervised by Gregory when she was a PDA. Having drawn the sample from members of the first three cohorts (five from each) to be awarded the new qualification, the researcher explored their motivation, their views on the training they received and their experience post-qualifying.

Gregory found that her sample were primarily motivated by career and financial considerations, which she noted was similar to the orientation identified amongst the social workers, rather than the probation officers, in the Marsh and Triseliotis study. Overall, the motives tended to be pragmatic rather than idealistic, although a desire to provide a service was cited along with a commitment to social justice and an interest in working with offenders. The sample described their difficulty in balancing the demands of academic work and practice and regarded their PDA as playing a key role in their development and successful completion of training. The transition from trainee to probation officer was considered to have been 'handled either very well or very badly, with the 15 respondents almost evenly divided' (Gregory 2007:63). When it worked well, it was put down to a supportive line manager who understood their continuing developmental needs but, generally, it was peer colleagues who were seen as the main source of support.

Based on her findings, Gregory came to the conclusion that her respondents had emerged 'as competent professionals with confidence in their skills and a commitment to anti-oppressive practice' (Gregory 2007:67). She inferred from this that there had been no loss in quality and values as a result of the split from social work training. Gregory noted the lack of a supervisory relationship to

assist sample members to reflect and advance their learning and, having identified the pressure of completing a degree and a National Vocational Qualification in two years, recommended the creation of a two year post graduate training course for the large number who already held a first degree and a three year course for those who entered without a degree.⁶⁷

Annison et al (2008) reviewed three studies that each of the authors had been involved in separately. All of the studies used survey questionnaires completed between 2000 and 2006 to ascertain perceptions from applicants to courses and those already training, as well as from a post training sample. They found that working with people and helping offenders were prioritised as the main reasons for choosing a career in probation and that these factors provide the greatest source of job satisfaction. They also noted the frustration of staff who felt unable to undertake effective work due to the emphasis on monitoring and form-filling. Thus, the authors conclude that whilst the language and style of the organisation has changed, the ethos of those joining has not. This causes them to reflect on:

[T]he fragility of the probation officer's role in which the more qualitative 'peoplework' with offenders is balanced with the more quantitative performance measures required by the centre, one aspect offering job satisfaction, and the other job security through meeting prescribed targets (Annison et al 2008:260).

Their conclusions also correspond with those of Deering (2010) who conducted a survey questionnaire of trainees from two cohorts across four probation areas between 2004 and 2006. Accordingly, he comments that the clear and consistent message is that his group of respondents:

⁶⁷ Gregory (2010) has published another small scale study of experienced probation officers whom she found to be resistant to the change in probation culture and whom she has described as constructing for themselves 'a form of subjectivity in which they continue to see themselves as social workers' (Gregory 2010:2280). Pursuing their own, underground resistance movement, they appear to have managed to remain more positive in outlook than those reported by Farrow (2004).

Added to this is research by Robinson and Burnett (2007) which looked at the impact of the creation of NOMS on frontline practitioners. In particular, they attributed a sense of confusion and uncertainty to the new structure, contributing to adverse affects on morale and motivation.

I regard these studies as relevant and helpful as they provide empirical confirmation of the attitudes newcomers are encountering amongst their colleagues upon entry.

[J]oined the probation service to engage on a humanistic level with offenders and to offer 'help' in the widest sense with a view to assisting individuals to achieve behavioural change (Deering 2010:23).

The studies that have taken place since the introduction of the Diploma in Probation Studies have covered similar territory to this one. Only Gregory (2007) has used a qualitative method in her research design and only her study records the spontaneous voice of those who took part. However, all of these studies appear to accept the perspectives of their respondents at face value and do not explore beneath the surface. It will be seen that this study is qualitatively different in depth and in its theoretical underpinning which brings a new dimension to the findings.

Chapter 5

Theoretical Perspective: Bourdieu

Introduction

In analysing my data and in thinking about how I would write it up, key questions came to mind. How were the findings of this research into the contemporary probation service to be theoretically understood? Insofar as the study focuses on workers in transition, employed by an organisation in transition, with what body of social scientific ideas could their experiences of transition be given meaning?

In answer to these questions, the work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, has been an unexpected, yet highly significant, influence on the way in which this study has developed. It was unexpected in the sense that it was not part of my original plan to apply a Bourdieusian perspective to my fieldwork, and his ideas and their application did not begin to take shape in my mind until after I completed the research element of this study. Instead, it was as a result of the presentation of my research material to supervisors and fellow doctoral students in research discussion seminars that the potential relevance of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts began to emerge.

A closer examination of his work contributed to the development of my understanding of Bourdieu's social theories and subsequently provided confirmation of the value of applying his ideas to my research. In particular, it led me to the view that the creation of a theoretical framework using Bourdieu's key concepts had the capacity to bring new insights and understanding to my data which might otherwise have been missed. Thus, the theoretical discussion that is contained within this thesis grew out of my thinking about the sample.

It can be argued that Bourdieu's concerns with social justice and what he termed 'social suffering' (Bourdieu 1999), together with his pre-occupation with the origins and perpetuation of social inequalities, have an immediate resonance with some of the underlying values of the Probation Service. In *The*

Weight of the World (Bourdieu 1999), he drew attention to the contradictions and ambivalence which he viewed as inherent in social policy, highlighting the frustrations experienced by public service workers in France owing to the absence of resources preventing them from doing their jobs effectively. It is a scenario which is equally recognisable in the United Kingdom and I consider that his words speak to Probation Officers as well when he observes: 'Social workers can give only what they have' (Bourdieu 1999:190).

However, it was in the realm of education that Bourdieu's work initially had most impact. Major proponents of Bourdieu can be found amongst researchers in education who have demonstrated the successful operationalisation of his ideas, for example Grenfell and James (1998 and 2004) and Reay(2004). Beyond education, Chan (1996) has taken a Bourdieusian approach in her study of police culture, Peillon (1998) has advocated the value of applying a Bourdieusian perspective to the analysis of welfare institutions and, more recently, Garrett has outlined what he refers to as 'social work's seemingly new interest in Pierre Bourdieu' (Garrett 2007:355), tentatively suggesting, as a starting point for further development, how his 'conceptual arsenal' can be linked to specific aspects of social work practice.

Central to Bourdieu's work are the inter-related concepts of habitus, field, capital and practice. He described these concepts as 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu 1989:50) and, in this chapter, I aim to define these terms and highlight the validity of using them to think about the world of recently qualified Probation Officers and the context in which they are working. It will be seen from what follows, that such is the nature of the relationship between the concepts, it is impossible to give consideration to one without reference to one or more of the others.

Habitus

It was the notion of the habitus which first drew me towards an appreciation of how I might utilise Bourdieu. His prolific written output contains several definitions of habitus. In my opinion, the essence of the term is most clearly captured in *The Outline of a Theory of Practice*, where Bourdieu defines the habitus as:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations..... (Bourdieu 1977:72)

Later, in the same work, Bourdieu elaborates further by describing habitus as:

[T]he strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and everchanging situations..... a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks. (Bourdieu 1977: 82/83 original emphasis)

He goes on to expand his definition by stating that it includes one's tendencies, inclinations, thoughts and feelings; 'a way of being' or, in other words, one's 'habitual state' (Bourdieu 1977:214). Although, even this, provides only a partial account of the habitus. In particular, Bourdieu was keen to convey that the dispositions he referred to which, significantly in his view, also incorporated bodily posture and gestures, were socially created.

The development of the habitus can perhaps best be explained as being akin to the process of socialization and, according to Bourdieu (1977), is laid down in one's 'earliest upbringing.' Influences arising from objective conditions in the environment, especially one's social and economic position, combine with and have a structuring effect on processes emanating from within one's family. This results in the internalization of an individual's social conditions and to the acquisition of attitudes, preferences, tastes, expectations and ways of doing things that are considered appropriate to one's social position, contributing to the formation of a social identity. In effect, the habitus comes to reflect not only social divisions, including differences of class and material possessions but, additionally, an individual's sense of self worth.

For Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), one's upbringing and initial educational experiences structure the habitus and this then becomes the basis of all subsequent experiences. As a consequence, a person's habitus cannot be completely understood without reference to their history and the influence of the

habitus of origin can persist throughout one's life, affecting the way expectations, aspirations and career are constructed and perceived.

Nevertheless, whilst Bourdieu used terms such as durable and lasting, it was not his intention to imply that characteristics associated with habitus are permanent:

[B]eing a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be *changed by history*, that is by new experiences, training or education (which implies that aspects of what remains unconscious in habitus be made at least partially conscious and explicit). Dispositions are long-lasting: they tend to perpetuate, to reproduce themselves, but they are not eternal. They may be changed by historical action oriented by intention and consciousness and using pedagogic devices. (Bourdieu 2005:45, emphasis in the original).

Essentially, habitus can evolve and adapt in response to new experiences and changes in the environment, so that it is possible for habitus to undergo continuous restructuring. However, insofar as one's perceptions of change are governed or filtered through the habitus, the degree of adjustment may initially be slight or gradual. In addition, the momentum generated by the habitus is such that practices can continue to be enacted for some time after the disappearance of the conditions that shaped them (Maton 2008).

As part of this study, I intend to demonstrate the extent to which habitus may be applied to explain the motivation that draws certain individuals towards a career in the probation service. Bourdieu's own studies led him to the belief that an individual's aspirations and perceptions of what they have the capacity to achieve in their life is shaped by their habitus. The implication of this being that we seek out careers that correlate to our dispositions.

In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu (1990a:94) referred to 'possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions' which generate dispositions compatible with the prevailing circumstances. In later writings he expressed the view that expectations and aspirations are unequally distributed and he considered that 'expectations tend universally to be roughly adapted to the objective chances.' (Bourdieu 2000:216) Thus, individuals

adjust to what they perceive as possible and whilst family, peer group and education may influence aspirations, there remains an acceptance of limits so that unattainable goals are not pursued (Bourdieu 2000).

These considerations feed into the debate about the professional status of Probation work. They also offer an answer to the question of why someone chooses a career in the Probation Service as opposed to a more high status profession. An explanation derived from Bourdieu being one that accounts for their choice on the basis that higher status professions do not even enter into their minds. They are literally 'unthinkable' (Bourdieu 1977), leaving them resigned to their place in the world and believing "That's not for us' (or 'not for the likes of us')' (Bourdieu 2000:185) when it comes to making career decisions.

In the view of Bourdieu (1990b), this sense of one's place leads people to keep to their place. How this comes about may appear, like other forms of behaviour, to be based on rational, conscious intent but, a key feature of the habitus is the way it appears to operate unconsciously.

The schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by will. (Bourdieu 1984:66)

However, as a thinking tool the application of habitus extends beyond the understanding of individual behaviour. It can also be employed collectively to facilitate the analysis of class, social groups and gender as well as organisational culture, professional socialization and the development of professional identity. People are shaped by the habitus in which they grow up and are then shaped again by the habituses they encounter, including that of the organisation for which they work.

It can be argued that professions develop a habitus that is shared by its members, influencing their perceptions and their actions. Accordingly, the selection process for the recruitment of trainee probation officers may be viewed as an attempt to identify candidates with dispositions that fit the organisational habitus of the Probation Service.

One can go further and suggest that, in the ever changing world of the Probation Service, habitus can be used not only to examine culture as manifested in probation practice, but also to offer an explanation as to why practices, which belong to what might be regarded as the traditional culture of the Service, continue to persist. The relevance of habitus in the context of change is shared by Hughes and Gilling who consider the concept to be:

[E]specially instructive in helping one explore occupational groups and their shared working philosophies in periods of transition.
(Hughes and Gilling 2004:132).

Again, the transitional nature of newcomer's experiences, within an organisation that is itself going through transition, makes the concept of habitus highly pertinent.

Field

It is impossible to consider habitus in isolation from the concept of field. It is a two way relationship, 'where the field, as a structured space, tends to structure the habitus, while the habitus tends to structure the perception of the field' (Bourdieu 1988:784). Thinking about habitus highlights individual dispositions and that which has been internalised to shape individual behaviour and motivations; whilst thinking about field draws attention to the external world of individuals and the shared beliefs they encounter. According to Bourdieu, habitus only becomes active in relation to a field: 'and the same habitus can lead to very different practices and stances depending on the state of the field' (Bourdieu 1990b:116).

Several definitions of field appear in Bourdieu's work. In discussion with Wacquant he stated:

I define a field as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination,

homology, etc). (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989:39, emphasis in the original).

In another definition, Bourdieu (1998:40) referred to a field as 'a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field.' The term can be applied to a network of relations amongst people or institutions. Each field is relatively autonomous in nature but collectively underpin society to the extent that we all act and live our lives in multiple, inter-connecting and over-lapping fields.

In essence, the field structures the habitus but such is the nature of their inter-relationship that habitus also contributes to making the field a meaningful world in which it is worth investing one's practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989). Bourdieu regards fields as dynamic spaces in which individuals and groups compete for dominance. They are 'the locus of power relationships' (Bourdieu 1990:141) which result in fields becoming characterised by rivalry and struggles over resources and access to them (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989), as well as struggles for the transformation or preservation of the field (Bourdieu 1998).

Bourdieu used the metaphor of a sports game to explain the field. Accordingly, he described entry to a field as being like playing a game. He explained that he used this analogy 'in order to say that a group of people take part in rule-bound activity' (Bourdieu 1990b:64). People choose the game they consider themselves to have the skills to play and whoever wants to win must have a 'feel for the game' and a feel for the necessity and logic of it. At the same time, players can influence the game through the strategies and tactics they adopt.

We have an *investment in the game*, *illusio* (from *ludus*, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (*doxa*) in the game and its stakes (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98, emphases in original).

Illusio and doxa are significant elements in the creation and development of a field. For a field to function players need to accept the basic premise of the game. Illusio entails treating the game seriously and regarding it as something worth doing; whilst doxa is a pre-conscious acceptance of the values and

assumptions of the field and of the way things are within it that subsequently gives shape to conscious awareness.

In the context of this study, I intend to advance the argument that the Probation Service is a field that operates within the wider field of the Criminal Justice System and which is sustained and reproduced in practice through a habitus.⁶⁸ I am especially interested in identifying how the habitus of origin of the new entrants, who are the subjects of my research, interacts with the professional beliefs and assumptions of the probation field. As new entrants, they come to the field with aspirations and assumptions of their own but with a willingness to make an investment in the game.

Practical faith is the condition of entry that every field tacitly imposes. Not only by sanctioning and debarring those who would destroy the game, but by so arranging things, in practice, that the operations of selecting and shaping new entrants (rites of passage, examinations, etc.) are such as to obtain from them that undisputed, pre-reflexive, naïve, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field which is the very definition of doxa (Bourdieu 1990a:68).

Accordingly, trainee probation officers would be expected to comply with the rules by which the game is played and, through experience, acquire new dispositions and develop practical knowledge relating to the habitus of the service. It is this process, which training and induction is intended to facilitate, that results in a feel for the game which once attained:

[E]nables an infinite number of 'moves' to be made, adapted to the infinite number of possible situations which no rule, however complex, can foresee (Bourdieu 1990b:9).

I regard this statement as being highly pertinent to the probation field where practitioners are working with offenders whose behaviour is diverse and unpredictable and where the uncertainty and indeterminacy this creates can never be entirely addressed by procedures or a manual. In these circumstances a combination of the experience derived from their personal habitus and the probation habitus becomes a vital ingredient in their response.

⁶⁸ One could also say that part of this study is about locating probation officers in the field of professions, although I am aware that in *An Introduction to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), Bourdieu expresses the wish to replace the concept of profession with that of field.

At one year in, I would anticipate that my subjects are still in the process of developing their feel for the probation game.

It is also relevant to acknowledge that fields do not exist in isolation. As indicated above, probation is part of the criminal justice field which is subject to a multiplicity of influences. In particular, as outlined in a previous chapter, the influence of both the political field, which Bourdieu regards as the field of power, and the economic field cannot be ignored in relation to the Probation Service. As Jenkins states:

The field is the crucial mediating context wherein external factors – changing circumstances – are brought to bear upon individual practice and institutions (Jenkins 1992:86).

Understanding a field's history and how it came into existence, its relationship with other fields and where it stands in the power structure in society are all vital ingredients of field analysis. New legislation, managerialism, audits and performance targets are examples of external factors arising from the political and economic fields which impact on the Probation field. They challenge the boundaries of the field and create tensions between various positions which can potentially lead to change in how the game is played.

Additionally, within the Service itself there are fields within fields. These include fields that comprise of those in strategic and policy making positions, middle management and front line practitioners, as well as those defined as stakeholders. One must also not forget the position of offenders and the power relationship that exists between them and the range of positions to be found in various associated fields.

A further perspective is reached by recognising that Trainee Probation Officers operate in a training field which inter-links with the academic field. However, the outcome of training is not simply a product of the field structure; it is also dependent on what individual's bring to it in terms of their habitus (Grenfell and James 1998). Consequently, the development of Probation competence is not just about the interaction between the academic and Probation fields, but must

take account of the habitus of the trainees as well. It follows from this that different positions in the field will generate a different habitus.

Capital

The term 'capital' was used by Bourdieu to refer to the resources or the qualities that each individual brings to the field. As with habitus and field, capital is relational in nature in the sense that, 'A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field: it confers a power over the field....' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989:39). The power that capital bestows influences an individual's position in the field and constitutes the stakes of the game over which struggles ensue.

[S]ocial agents are not "particles" that are mechanically pushed and pulled by external forces. They are rather bearers of capitals, and depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:108/109, emphasis in original).

Bourdieu (1986) posits that, depending on the field in which it functions, capital presents itself in 'three fundamental guises', none of which can be fully understood in isolation from the others:

[A]s economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. (Bourdieu 1986:95, emphases in original).

To these, Bourdieu adds symbolic capital, which is the resources that have been accumulated in symbolic form and which is valued and acknowledged as prestige, authority or honour:

Every kind of capital (economic, cultural, social) tends (to different degrees) to function as symbolic capital (so that it might be better to speak, in rigorous terms, of the *symbolic effects of capital*) when it obtains an explicit or practical recognition, that of a habitus structured

according to the very structures of the space in which it has been engendered. In other words, symbolic capital.....is not a particular kind of capital but what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognised as capital, that is, as force, a power or capacity for (actual or potential) exploitation, and therefore recognised as legitimate. (Bourdieu 2000:242, emphasis in original).

Thus, it is the acceptance, or what Bourdieu refers to as the 'misrecognition' of symbolic capital by those who do not have it, that confers its value and influence. Examples include the reputation ascribed to someone as a result of the knowledge or expertise they are perceived as possessing; the way in which wealth enables an individual to exert power, or the privileges afforded to a person who is regarded as being of social importance and which might be denied to those who are viewed as being of lesser status. Consequently, symbolic capital has the capacity to extend still further the inequalities generated by the differential distribution of other forms of capital. In particular, Bourdieu was concerned to highlight in his work the role played by the unequal possession of capital in perpetuating divisions between social classes.

In my view, the notion of symbolic capital is helpful in contributing to an explanation as to the professional status of probation officers. In his study of what he termed 'the juridical field', Bourdieu identified a correlation between the position of lawyers in the professional hierarchy and the position of their clients in the social hierarchy:

Those who occupy inferior positions in the field (as for example in social welfare law) tend to work with a clientele composed of social inferiors who thereby increase the inferiority of these positions (Bourdieu 1987: 850).

On this basis, I consider it appropriate to argue that the diminished position offenders are perceived as occupying in the social hierarchy, reduces the status of the probation field and those who work within it.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Research into desistance from crime (Maruna 2001; Farrell 2002 ; Boeck et al 2009) has identified the development of social capital as a key factor in bringing an end to offending behaviour. In particular, it has highlighted the value of social and community bonds and the significance of positive relationships with family, employers, professional workers and the wider community. These findings clearly have implications for the practice of probation officers and especially the importance of the quality of their relationship with offenders in achieving effective work.

Specific forms of capital grant legitimacy to enter a specific field and the extent to which different types of capital are valued varies according to the field.

The value of a species of capital..... hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98).

Thus, the possession of economic capital carries far greater influence and weight for someone planning to enter the business or commercial world, but is of lesser importance in, say, teaching or probation. In the latter occupations, it is cultural capital in the form of relevant academic qualifications that is much more important and a pre-requisite for entry to certain positions.

As well as qualifications, the internal currency of the probation service includes competence, one's sense of job satisfaction, acknowledgement from colleagues and the level of praise received. Moreover, a hierarchy of power exists within the service which is epitomised in the terms offender manager and offender.

Practice

It, perhaps, goes without saying that practice is what people do. However, Bourdieu produced a theory of practice in order to demonstrate that practice or agency is far more complex than a taken for granted activity.

One cannot examine practice separately from Bourdieu's other thinking tools, any more than habitus, field and capital can be fully considered either in isolation from each other or from the practices to which they lead. This means, inevitably, that several crucial aspects of practice have already been referred to in the preceding discussion.

Thus, I have outlined above that habitus generates practice and that practice takes place in fields, which gives practice meaning and context. A further point that can be made here concerns the capacity of differentiated practices to constitute a field. As such, it can be said that it is the collective practice of supervising offenders under the auspices of the probation service that confirms the existence of the probation field. Moreover, practice is not confined to individual agency. Organisations are not only fields, but are themselves, agents with practices that operate in broader fields.

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984:101) presented a formula for practice which helps to highlight the inter-relationship between his four central concepts:

$$\{(habitus) (capital)\} + field = practice$$

Put simply, it is a combination of habitus and capital within a given field that results in practice. Insofar as social agents are the product of history, to understand someone's practice requires knowledge not only of their position in the field but also how they got there and from what original point in social space (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Bourdieu postulated that people act according to their feel for the game and with a view to maximising their potential by securing capital. The rules of the game and the position of other players contribute to the forces that influence actions. Bourdieu (1990b) also refers to the feel for the game as 'practical sense,' advancing the view that actions follow a practical logic as opposed to conscious, rational calculation.

The conditions of rational calculation are practically never given in practice: time is limited, information is restricted, etc. And yet agents do do, much more than if they were behaving randomly, 'the only thing to do.' This is because, following the intuitions of a 'logic of practice' which is the product of a lasting exposure to conditions similar to those in which they are placed, they anticipate the necessity immanent in the way of the world (Bourdieu 1990b:11).

Thus, agents instinctively know what to do, behaving as if their actions are 'second nature.' Bourdieu regards actions of this type as strategy – practices which are neither entirely conscious nor unconscious and which are a product of one's feel for the game.

Habitus regulates behaviour and gives it some predictability, especially in situations with which agents are familiar. In such circumstances, they are much more likely to act unconsciously, like 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989:43). The better the fit between habitus and field, the greater the chances will be of agents reproducing past behaviour. However, there is more to practice than mere repetition, with Bourdieu (1990b:13) being concerned to give to

practice 'an active, inventive intention' that enables spontaneity and improvisation leading to new practices.

Swartz (2002) contends that the fit between habitus and field is, in any event, seldom perfect:

[W]here the gap between field opportunities and habitus expectations is considerable, this sets the stage for retreat (or exit) as the habitus self selects out of those fields, or crisis as the habitus stays and protests. (Swartz 2002:665)

This offers a helpful perspective on behaviour at times of organisational change or when expectations fall short of reality. It also provides an explanation for attrition rates pre- and post-qualifying, and for the resistance that sometimes greets new developments and policies in the probation service.

Trainees and newly qualified probation officers learn to interact with offenders, colleagues and other agencies as part of the process of professional socialization; but their responses will be shaped by their personal history and experiences, as well as by their *illusio* and *doxa*. The latter includes their perception of their role and their attitude towards offenders. The influence of societal attitudes towards crime and whether new entrants themselves, or people close to them, have been directly affected by crime may add another dimension to their habitus and, hence, to their actions.

In fact, it is the practice of my subjects that constitutes the central theme of this study. They and their front line colleagues are commonly referred to as 'practitioners' which, in the context of this discussion, gives the term a fresh connotation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have endeavoured to present the main features of the theoretical perspective that underpins this study. In addition, I have shown some of the ways that Bourdieu's concepts can be utilised to shed new light on various aspects of functioning within the probation service.

It feels entirely appropriate to bring a relational approach to the study of practice within a field where relationships play such a crucial part. I believe that the application of these ideas has enabled me to capture the antecedent experience, aspirations and cultural formation which bring recruits into the field of probation, and the changing occupational culture of the Service itself. It is the relationship between these two systems of meanings, representing two kinds of habitus, and the tension they create in the transition, that gives rise to the experience of new probation officers.

Furthermore, Bourdieu has much to contribute to my discussion of research methods, with his perspective on the importance of reflexivity being highly relevant to considerations of my own role as a researcher. These aspects of his work will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Methodology

Introduction

The fieldwork element of this study took place between October 2005 and July 2006. All the research participants were drawn from a cohort of students who had completed the same probation qualifying course approximately 12 months earlier. Subsequently, they were all employed by the London Probation Service.

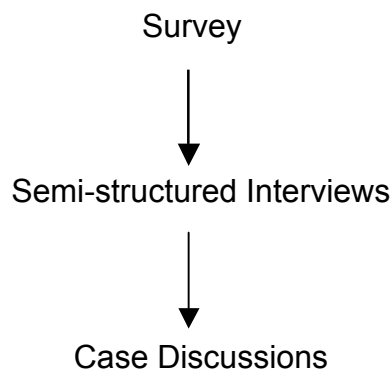
Nationally, at that time, the probation service consisted of 42 probation areas. The London Probation Area was created in 2001, following the amalgamation of five separate services. This created the largest probation service in England and Wales which, by reason of the comparatively high number of staff it employs and the total size of its caseload, continues to represent one fifth of the national service. This makes London extremely influential and its proximity to the source of government means that its activities and performance are closely followed.

It is also relevant to mention that London is a diverse and complex urban environment, containing pockets of significant social deprivation especially within its inner city boroughs. The probation service in London works with large numbers of high risk, psychologically damaged offenders. Official reports have highlighted the challenging and demanding nature of the workload, and have noted high sickness levels amongst staff, together with high staff turnover and offices where few offender managers have more than three years' post-qualifying experience (Ministry of Justice: 2009).

In thinking about the aims of my research, I came to the view that a multiple methods approach was required as there was no single research method which, on its own, could generate the answers to my research questions. These questions included 'Who becomes a probation officer now?'; 'What is the nature of their practice?'; and 'Where do they locate themselves ideologically?' In particular, my desire to focus on the professional identity of newcomers to the

contemporary world of the probation service and to give meaning to their experiences drew me, primarily, towards a qualitative approach. As a consequence, I considered various interview methods, the use of observation and the possibility of running a work discussion group for probation officers.⁷⁰ Ultimately I selected three methods which mixed quantitative and qualitative techniques.

The simple diagram below sets out the methods I adopted and the order in which they were undertaken.



Survey

My motives for beginning my research with a questionnaire based survey were largely instrumental in their intention. In keeping with the concept of mixed methods, it was my hope that a quantitative survey would help develop and inform various aspects of the qualitative methods I planned to utilise later.

Accordingly, the survey was designed as a means of obtaining some preliminary, background data. Its primary purposes were to provide a constructive way of initiating contact with the trainee cohort whilst, at the same time, generating information which would help to guide the selection of those whom I intended to approach to participate in the main part of the research.

⁷⁰ What I had in mind with regards to the work discussion method, was that I would run a group consisting of five probation officers which would meet weekly over a period of ten weeks. Each week a member of the group would be expected to bring a case, concerning an offender they were working with, for exploration and discussion of the group members' experience. There is a long tradition of work discussion groups being used to help develop the practice and reflective insights of staff in mental health, social work and educational settings. Jackson (2008) has for example described its application in schools. Its potential as a research method is by comparison very recent. Consideration of its value in a research context has been discussed by Rustin (2008).

The chosen cohort contained 44 members and consisted of 34 females and 10 males, indicating a female to male gender ratio of approximately 3:1 or, in percentage terms, 71% females to 29% males. Figures reported at national level, and available to me at the time the study was conducted, revealed the gender ratio to be the same although, in percentage terms, females were at 75% and males at 25% (Home Office 2004). More recent figures for recruitment to qualifying courses show the ratio to be unchanged.

Initially, I tried to make contact with the whole cohort using London Probation's internal e-mail system. The email I sent explained the nature of the project and invited their participation in the survey, offering the option of either taking part in a short telephone interview with me or, if they preferred, they could receive the survey questionnaire I had designed by e-mail. The second option required participants to complete the questionnaire in their own time and to return it to me by email. Whichever option was chosen, the same standardized questions were to be asked.

Emails were returned to me as undeliverable in respect to seven members of the cohort (six females and one male). Further enquiries confirmed that they no longer worked for the London service having either failed to qualify or, for one female member of the cohort, having moved to another service. I also discovered that of the remaining 37, one female and one male were not eligible to participate in the survey – the female, because she had withdrawn from the course before completion (and had now returned to a job within the service that she had been appointed to prior to commencing training); and the male, because he had been granted an extension and had not yet qualified. I later learned that this person had resigned as a trainee, making a course attrition rate of 18%.

Thus the total sample for the survey was reduced to 35 potential respondents. My first email to them elicited 15 positive responses; a second email resulted in another eight positive replies; and a third and final email to those I had not yet heard from brought forth a further three affirmative responses. Therefore, 26 members of the cohort eventually replied. I considered this to be a good

response rate and all of them subsequently took part in the survey, with ten participants choosing to complete the questionnaire in their own time and with 16 participants electing to take part in a telephone interview.

Conscious of the demands on the time of probation officers and their ambivalence towards form-filling, I was keen the survey should take no more than a few minutes to complete. It started with a request for some basic demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity and previous employment before asking four standardised questions which were put to each participant – In your perception to what extent did your training prepare you for your job? How contented are you with your job? How supported do you feel in your job? These three questions each required a rating from one to five. The fourth question asked them to identify their preferred approach to their work from a list I provided. A fifth optional question requested any additional, relevant comments and a final question, which from my perspective was perhaps the most important, asked whether they were willing to participate in a more detailed face to face interview. Of the 26 responses only one declined to take part in the next stage.

Consequently, I was of the view that the survey had served its purpose extremely well. It proved to be a very easy and convenient way of making contact with members of the cohort and it provided a research baseline on which to build.

Interviewing 25 people as part of the next phase was felt to be unrealistic and my approved research proposal suggested that I would try to involve between eight and ten participants. The ratings for the questionnaire were spread fairly evenly from the lowest score of six out of a maximum of 15 for the three questions to the highest score of 14 out of 15. Ultimately I sought the participation of respondents from the bottom, middle and top end of the scores whilst making a selection based on age, gender and ethnicity which was representative of the whole cohort. In this way, the survey made another important contribution to the study, in the sense that it provided the data which helped to facilitate decisions concerning the selection of the interview sample.

The means adopted for selecting participants effectively makes them a 'purposeful' sample. This is because they were chosen for their ability to provide the depth of detail required for the purpose of answering the research questions.

Semi-structured Interviews

Given that, at the start of the study, I was interested in specific aspects of the experience of newly qualified officers, rather than their whole lives, I formed the view that a semi-structured, question-based approach would work better than a life history style of interview. Had I known at the project planning stage that Bourdieu's concepts would be providing the theoretical underpinning, my decision concerning the second stage method may have been very different. For example, I would have tried to explore the habitus of participants more closely. As it was, there was still a substantial biographical element to the approach I adopted. My aim was to ask as few questions as possible in the hope of eliciting greater freedom of response, and the biographical element was especially evident in the first question that I put to all participants:

As you know, I'm interested in the world of recently qualified probation officers but in order to make sense of that I feel I need to know something about the people themselves. So I would like to begin by asking if you could tell me about yourself?

The semi-structured interview is neither open conversation nor highly structured questionnaire. I envisaged that it would allow me to address specific themes, ask common questions and pursue the depth of enquiry needed to get beneath the surface in order to find out what probation officers really do.

In order to determine more precisely the depth and scope of my investigations, and so as to test out the extent to which my core questions would enable participants to respond freely and would allow as full an exploration of the issues as possible, I piloted the interview schedule with two newly qualified probation officers from a different course. This resulted in some slight amendment to the questions and confirmed that the method permitted the type of flexibility which would have been missing from a more structured approach. Both in the pilot and during the actual study, using a semi-structured interview

meant that I was able to follow up and explore emerging thoughts and ideas whilst respondents had an opportunity to speak in an open-ended way with some description of their training and their experience of work.

Despite the indications given by the respondents to the survey of their willingness to take part in a face to face interview, my knowledge of growing workload pressures amongst front line probation officers heightened my concern as to whether those whom I had selected would feel too busy to see me. In the event, two people, whose scores in the survey suggested a low level of satisfaction with the job, stated that they could not spare the time to be interviewed due to work commitments when I made contact with them again. Neither felt that it would be possible to find space for an interview in the near future.

In addition, I discovered that another potential participant, whose score placed her in the middle range of satisfaction, was within days of working out her notice when I spoke with her by telephone with a view to arranging an interview. She stated that she would still like to meet with me and arrangements were made for an interview after her date of departure. She subsequently phoned on the day of our meeting to cancel, saying she had to work late and promising to contact me over the next few days to make further arrangements. She did not do so and, as a consequence, she too was lost to the research (and to the probation service). This necessitated my choosing other sample members to replace them. Fortunately, everyone else I contacted took part.

I met with the participants individually at the various offices where they worked. I gave each of them an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research and I obtained their written consent before commencing. An audio recording was made of all the interviews and during the course of each of them I took a written note both of participants' reactions to the questions and the impact of the material on me. I also wrote a reflective account of what took place after each interview. This helped to provide me with data relating to the impact of the work at both a conscious and unconscious level. All the interviews were later transcribed by me, thereby facilitating my further immersion in the material prior to analysis.

Whilst I anticipated that participants in the interview would comment on their practice, I did not feel confident that this would bring me sufficiently close to the reality of what they actually did when supervising an offender. As a consequence, I considered using observation in order to see for myself what took place. However, sitting in on an interview raised issues of ethics and confidentiality and, as there is no tradition of observing practice in field teams, there are no facilities such as specially adapted observation rooms. I also felt that an observation of a single interview, which might be comparatively short, would provide a very limited snapshot of their practice.⁷¹ Accordingly, I came to the conclusion that a discussion of an on-going case offered the best opportunity of gaining a sense of how the sample worked, thereby providing me with insight into their professional identity.

Case Discussions

My original plan, with regards to the final method, was to take a sub sample from the group of ten, with a view to undertaking more detailed work in the form of a case discussion. In effect, this was intended to be a theoretical sample, which I anticipated would contain between five and ten participants.

Silverman (2000), in his discussion of theoretical sampling, refers to a definition by Mason (1996). In keeping with this definition, a theoretical sample in the context of my project can be said to consist of those chosen on the basis of my theoretical position or, in other words, their relevance to my research questions and the explanations that I will be seeking to develop.

As things turned out, when I came to conduct the semi-structured interview with one of the participants, it emerged that she was in a role in which she no longer carried a caseload. She was, therefore, excluded from the third stage of the research on the basis that she had no cases to discuss. Whilst the remaining nine all agreed, at the end of their interview with me, to take part in the case discussion, this proved to be far from straightforward to arrange.

⁷¹ Due to workload pressures, it is common practice for some offenders to be seen for only ten minutes.

In the few weeks between the interview and making arrangements for the case discussion, I learned that one participant had suddenly resigned and left the service. Another was unavailable whenever I telephoned her office and did not respond to my messages to contact me, and a third participant cancelled two appointments with me, citing work related crises, before going on long term sick leave. In these circumstances, I considered it essential to meet with the six who were left and who were still willing to meet with me to discuss a case.⁷²

Conducted as an open, conversational style interview, the case discussions resembled the traditional casework style of professional supervision as I once knew it. In my experience, this entailed not only talking about and reflecting upon the content of the case, but also focusing on the dynamics of the worker/client relationship and the emotionality of the case through an exploration of the transference and counter-transference.

In my study, participants were invited to bring to the discussion a current case on which they were working. How they presented the case was a matter for the participants to decide for themselves. I prompted and encouraged discussion of the work they were doing with the offender, and also sought contextual information concerning the subject of the case.⁷³ As with the semi-structured interviews, I obtained their written consent before beginning and the discussions were also audio recorded. Again, I kept my own reflective account of the discussions, viewing these notes as a valuable source of additional data.

The fact that I took note of my perception of the work environment, along with how the participants presented and behaved in interview, meant that observation played a part in the interview process. In some instances, the pressure people were under was an immediate and highly apparent observation.

⁷² In giving further consideration to the reasons for various members of my original sample dropping out, I was drawn to the conclusion that I was mostly losing people from the study who were also being lost to the service at quite an early stage in their career. I also believe it to be a fairly common feature of research that those experiencing difficulties in the field are less likely to want to make themselves available to be researched.

⁷³ All participants were initially asked how they came to choose the case and then to tell me about the case.

Reflections on the Methods

The work I have undertaken in the course of my research has been both phenomenological and heuristic in nature. With respect to the former, the phenomenon in question was the job of probation officer; a major part of this study being concerned with how the phenomenon was experienced by the research subjects. A heuristic approach, which is linked to phenomenological inquiries, recognises the personal interest and insights of the researcher in relation to the phenomenon being studied (Patton 1990). In this instance, a combination of personal experience and of what Patton (1990:71) terms 'intense interest' is expected to lead to greater understanding of the phenomenon.

The three methods used in this project have provided me with three different sources of data. Subsequently, by applying triangulation which, according to Brannan (2005), is the main purpose for which mixed methods are used, it has been possible to enhance the validity of the findings and avoid the limitations that are potentially inherent in a single method. As Denzin (1989:313) has commented, the aims of triangulation are to:

[O]vercome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-method, single-observed, and single-theory studies.

In defending the value of triangulation and the use of mixed methods, Mason (2006:10) has developed this argument further by stating that:

[S]ocial experience and lived realities are multi-dimensional and.... our understandings are impoverished and may be inadequate if we view these phenomena only along a single dimension.

As used in this study, the three methods of data collection complement each other, enrich both the material and the findings through the ability to make comparisons with the data obtained from the respective methods and contribute to a greater degree of completeness. I have no doubt that the case discussions have enabled me to gain a much clearer picture of the working practices of the research participants, and the feelings arising from their work, than that which

was available to me via the semi-structured interviews alone. In fact, I believe that the use of case discussions in this study have been able to demonstrate what a good instrument they are for getting people to talk about their actual work. They shed light on both the professional knowledge and assumptions of the participants, illuminate their practice in the field and have proved central to the identification of their professional identity.

Additionally, the case discussions, together with the interviews, provide two different perspectives of the same person and, in the case of several participants, it has enabled me to see them from another standpoint. In particular, I feel that they were more revealing about their practice in the case discussion than in the interview. It is, therefore, a pity that it was not possible to engage all members of the interview sample in a case discussion as, without the discussion, there are inevitably gaps in my formulation and analysis of their working experience. Further reflections on what the absence of this material means are discussed later in this study.

In retrospect, I now think that it might have been better, and probably feasible, to have worked with a larger initial sample for the semi-structured interviews. This, in turn, would have given me the opportunity to undertake case discussions with more participants. The rationale for these thoughts is linked to the fact that the proportion of research time spent in collecting data from the sample, compared with researching the literature and undertaking the data analysis, was actually less than I had initially anticipated. However, by the time I realised that the second stage sample could have been greater, it was too late to recruit additional members. Too much time had elapsed, bearing in mind that I wanted recently qualified probation officers from the same cohort.

Nonetheless, all the interviews I undertook were able to provide a rich source of data, with the case discussions providing extra depth. Whilst I am aware that the size of my sample may lead to questions concerning the degree to which it is representative of newcomers to the probation service or typical of what the field produces, I hope that it will be recognised that the 'thick description' (Geertz 1975) generated by my interviews compensates to some degree for the actual number of participants. The sample compensates in depth for what I

have been unable to obtain by way of range. This has not prevented the identification of strong models of both good and bad experiences and, it is my contention that each individual participant may be regarded as exemplifying both a much larger population and a much wider picture. Of course, the methods chosen provide no way of knowing how representative each individual might be.

Doing Insider Research

In undertaking my research and in thinking about my role as a researcher, it will have been recognised from my earlier comments in the introduction that I came to this investigation with substantial personal experience of the probation service in general, acquired over a long period of employment in the service. I also have a great deal of knowledge, more specifically, of the probation area in which the research was located. Furthermore, by reason of my position as a London-wide training manager, I am well known to staff, including being known to those who took part in the study.

Thus, it is important to acknowledge that this project constitutes an example of 'insider' research. In an effort to maintain neutrality and objectivity, Holliday (2002) has suggested that researchers approach their role as 'stranger', thereby 'seeing the familiar as strange' (Holliday 2002:93). I have given a great deal of thought to this and have come to the conclusion that I am not just an insider but a well-informed witness of how the probation service is. I believe it to be the case that the authority of my study depends not just on my interviews but on what I am able to bring to my understanding of those interviews; the latter being linked to both my academic reading and to my experience of the service. Consequently, I have sought to make explicit the grounds on which I have made inferences from the data and, in this way, I have tried to limit its unavoidable element of subjectivity. This is the stance taken by Hollway and Jefferson (2000:3) who refute the notion of researchers being seen as 'neutral vehicles for representing knowledge in an uncontaminated way.'

It is in any event arguable as to whether an 'outsider' is any less free of bias. Chavaz (2008) contends that all researchers should be regarded as co-

participants in a situation in which both the researcher and the subjects of the study position themselves in relation to each other. Consequently, she asserts:

[Q]ualitative researchers, outsiders or insiders, cannot be assured that their observations, interpretations, and representations are not affected by their various identities and positionalities (Chavez 2008:475).

How I was perceived by the participants, how I presented myself and how I understood the material are additional dimensions to the research that need to be considered. It may be that I was so obviously interested in a more empathic, sensitive way of dealing with offenders, that those participants who did not work like that were quite uncomfortable. On the other hand, their knowledge of me as a manager, and the various connotations that carried for them, may have affected what they told me.

I tend to regard my meetings with the participants as providing them with a reflective space in which I tried to help them make sense of their experience. With regards to the case discussions especially, I was not perceived just as an investigator. In these meetings I seemed to occupy a teacher-like role, presenting myself as an experienced, older voice. There certainly seemed to be some sample members who came across as really trying to use their experience with me to think about where they are and what was going on for them. In that respect, they appeared to be treating the discussion as a consultation.

Given this position and their knowledge of me, I would say that the case discussions enabled participants to provide a more thoughtful and reflective account of their practice than they would normally get a chance to give. They seemed to feel able to describe and characterise their work but without misrepresenting or distorting it. I feel it is reasonable to suggest that it was an example of the type of discussion they should have been having regularly in supervision but which, at the time, had largely disappeared due to the focus on performance management.

In further reflecting on the dynamics of my relationship with participants in the case discussion, I am drawn to the view that their placing me in the role of

pseudo supervisor was an indication of their need for someone to fulfil that role in their everyday working environment. It is also relevant to note that dynamically the case discussions were really three-way transactions. Both myself and the research subject were physically present, but one should not ignore the influence of the offender and the transference issues that this entailed. The concept of 'the third position' (Britton 1989, 1998) is applicable too. Derived from psychoanalysis, the third position brings new perspectives and aids the development of self-reflective capacities. As Britton (1989:87) states:

This provides us with a capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting on ourselves whilst being ourselves.

Another interesting, related issue is to do with the extent to which the participants' perception of me influenced their choice of the case brought for discussion. Did some of them deliberately select difficult cases in order to use our meeting to explore the difficulties they were having? Alternatively, where they appeared to be on top of the work, had they chosen to present me with a story of competence, rather than exposing their anxieties?⁷⁴ Could it be that they were ascribing or inventing a meaning retrospectively to their experiences as a way of making sense of or rationalising their biographical and career trajectory?

It is possible that my bias played a part in what I learned both in the interviews and in the case discussions. Whether or not this was the case cannot be determined but it may well have been that someone with a different point of view and a different approach would have elicited something different. This, however, may be a frequent risk pertaining to the use of qualitative methods of investigation.

Data Analysis

⁷⁴ Hollway and Jefferson (2000:23) use the term 'defended subject' to refer to those who 'invest in discourses when these offer positions which provide protection against anxiety and therefore supports to identity.'

The survey sample which, for the most part, asked participants to choose answers from pre-determined response categories, generated statistical data. This enabled an analysis involving the calculation of numbers and percentages which was fairly straightforward in comparison to the detailed data obtained from the other methods. The only slight complication, in relation to the survey, was the additional comments which not everyone contributed. Those comments I received were coded and categorised.

Whilst the responses to the main part of the survey might be described as providing surface level information, it was clear that the additional comments were used by participants to make personal experiences more explicit. The comments also allowed feelings to be revealed and so marked the beginning of the emergence of qualitative insights.

Based on the figures obtained from the survey, I was able to work out distribution levels, along with the mean, median and mode. The data analysed using this method was easily adaptable for presentation in table and chart format. This is reflected in the survey findings which are set out in the next chapter.

The semi-structured interviews and the case discussions had the benefit of allowing some degree of analysis to be built into the interviews themselves in the sense that I was able to seek clarification and confirm understanding of the meaning of what participants told me. Robson (2002) advises to do this wherever possible with the result that the researcher is 'interpreting as you go.' However, the recordings gave me an actual account of what was said and how it was said, and each of the recordings were closely examined afterwards.

I started the analysis by reading through each of the transcripts and by making tentative notes in the margin as I went along. I then re-read the transcripts, which resulted in my seeing things which I had either missed or not recognised as important the first time. On the second occasion, I began to segment and more confidently apply coding to the text in order to organise the material and to assist in the identification of key themes and patterns. Comments and reflections were also added to the codes at this point.

In the view of Coffey and Atkinson, the value of coding is that it can be employed to:

[B]reak up and segment the data into simpler, general categories and is used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation. (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:30)

They emphasise, though, that coding is only the start of the process and that once completed, the data needs to be interrogated and explored in order to generate meaning. I took this on board together with Robson's advice concerning the 'editing' of data. By editing, codes are applied 'based on the researcher's interpretation of the meanings or patterns in the text.' (Robson 2002:458). These approaches are closely aligned to grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), in which conceptual categories inductively arise from the data. Hence the theory that is generated is grounded in the data; theory, in this context, being defined by them as:

[A] strategy for handling data in research, providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining (Glaser and Strauss 1967:3).

Glaser and Strauss advocate the 'constant comparative method' which I also utilised by comparing items of data with the categories. By so doing, I was looking to see how well they fitted with or related to each other, creating a new category where I was satisfied that there was an absence of fit. This method was applied not only within the transcript of each individual participant, but also across transcripts as a way of comparing each of them to those of the other participants.

At the conclusion of this process, I found it helpful to re-organise and re-present the material contained in each transcript under themes or categories. In this way, I grouped together relevant quotations and memos relating to the themes.

Data emanating from the case discussions was analysed using the same method, similarly identifying categories and thematic areas. However, I not only

focused on the content, but also on how participants presented the material and talked about their case.

Moreover, an important aspect of the analysis involved a comparison of the accounts respondents gave of themselves in interview, or in answer to the survey, with their accounts of their cases. My purpose in doing this was to demonstrate the contribution that each method had made to the study.

It is also important to hold in mind that the process of data analysis had begun well before I started to consider the potential contribution of Bourdieu to my study. When the relevance and potential application of his conceptual 'thinking tools' became apparent, I re-examined the data, revising my categories and refining my interpretations in order to highlight and link examples of habitus, field, capital and practice. I am strongly of the view that my theoretical reading and understanding of Bourdieu has enhanced my reading and interpretation of the research data.

Taking into account the influence that the introduction of Bourdieu brought to the study, the analysis of the data from the interviews and the case discussions can be described as having proceeded in three stages. The first being the initial grounded theory analysis; the second being the review of this in the light of the relevance of Bourdieu's concepts; and the third occurring in the writing up, when additional ideas emerged. These, I believe, were triggered by my bringing all the material together and the accompanying thinking through that this process facilitated. This enabled me to see a fuller picture, with the result that some earlier categorisations came to be viewed by me as being of less significance.

As an example of these processes, I have chosen to refer to my analysis of the interview transcript relating to Sharon.⁷⁵ In focusing on those aspects of her narrative that appeared to be associated with her motivation to train as a probation officer, my initial reading of the transcript resulted in codings that

⁷⁵ A more detailed portrait of Sharon, which develops the concepts reported here, is presented in the chapters that follow.

included 'family in caring professions', 'initial interest in social work', 'volunteer work with children', 'volunteer work at a women's refuge', 'employment as a teaching assistant', 'family expectations', 'career indecision', 'discovering probation', 'wanting to be a professional', 'making a difference' and 'family perception of probation.' Subsequently, these were refined as 'family influence', 'relevant previous experience', 'public service orientation' and 'professional ambition.' A further re-working led to the last two categories being incorporated under 'professional altruism.'

Alongside these refinements of the codings, various thoughts began to emerge. I was struck especially by the fact that Sharon's desire to be a professional seemed to preclude any aspiration towards higher status professions; and yet, in discussing her job, she seemed to imbue a career in probation with special and unique qualities of its own by describing it as 'out there.' In Sharon's perception her family, whom she believed were expecting her to become a teacher or a social worker, similarly accorded probation work elitist value in terms of their apparently viewing the job as 'up there' with lawyers and judges.

In reflecting on what other participants had told me concerning their motivation for seeking entry into the service, I wondered to what extent they had constructed stories retrospectively to justify their choice of career. The same notion was also considered in respect to Sharon, albeit there was no case in which it was possible to reach any definitive conclusions based on evidence. Nonetheless, all thoughts were noted in the form of memoing and these ideas became an integral part of the analysis.

Later, in '*Bourdieuifying*' the data, I became aware that many of the codings and categories I had used to reflect Sharon's motivation were really indicative of a vocational habitus. Moreover, the application of Bourdieu at this juncture brought with it a significant insight with regards to the connection between career choice and ones' perception of ones' own abilities, which seemed to offer a possible explanation as to why top tier professions had not been considered.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The preceding chapter, 'Theoretical Perspective: Bourdieu' refers to this point in more detail. It also arises again in my discussion of the findings.

Finally, when I came to writing up the findings, I realised that my coding 'family in caring professions' had omitted a significant detail. Namely, that this described the female members of the family only and that the men were largely absent. Sharon's father lived in Jamaica and this resulted in my speculating upon the existence of an unconscious motivation for Sharon joining the probation service, linked to the idea of her taking control and containing unruly and wayward men.⁷⁷ Consequently, my thinking about this has also been incorporated into the analysis and further demonstrates the inductive nature of my approach.

Support for the validity of this type of insight, in the context of grounded theory, comes from Charmaz (2006). In asserting the merits of grounded theory as a method, she makes it clear that the approach 'explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an *interpretive* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it' (Charmaz 2006:10, emphasis in the original).

Bourdieu and Reflexivity

Although I have already touched on some aspects of reflexivity in this chapter, I would like to re-visit it in the light of Bourdieu's views on the subject. Indeed, it can be said that he was particularly pre-occupied with the issue of reflexivity and expressed the belief that 'reflexivity is incumbent on all those who enter the scientific field' (Bourdieu 2000:119).

The relationship between the researcher and those being researched was of central concern to Bourdieu. He described the research interview relationship as 'a social relation', albeit it is 'different from most of the exchanges of ordinary existence due to its objective of pure knowledge' (Bourdieu 1996:18). Believing that distortions were embedded in the structure of the relationship, he considered that it was only through reflexivity that the distortions could be understood and controlled.

⁷⁷ Please see page 193 for an expanded discussion.

As Grenfell and James (1998:116) have suggested, reflexivity ‘amounts to an argument that the researcher’s social relationship to the object of study is itself a necessary object of study.’ The way in which the researcher is able to control his own projections into the objects of study is through what Bourdieu terms ‘participant objectivation’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:68). This requires the researcher to understand and be aware of his own social origins, values and dispositions in order to be alert to their potential impact on the study and to recognise the personal ‘interests’ that are brought to the study and which may have motivated the research in the first place.⁷⁸

The fact that researchers express interest in a problem was for Bourdieu (1998:49) ‘a euphemistic way of naming the fundamental fact that we have vital stakes in our scientific productions.’ This led him to advocate the need for researchers to undertake ‘a self socio-analysis (insofar as that is ever completely possible)’ (Bourdieu 1998:49) as a means of minimising potential bias.

Elaborating on his stance, Bourdieu (2003:284/5) explained:

[S]cientific objectivation is not complete unless it includes the point of view of the objectivizer and the interests he may have in objectivation (especially when he objectivizes his own universe) but also the historical unconscious that he inevitable engages in his work.

Bourdieu appreciated, though, that reflexivity was not enough to ‘ever completely control the multiple and complex effects of the research relationship’ (Bourdieu 1996:25). In particular, he cautioned the importance of researchers being aware that participants also have stakes in the study. One of these stakes being ‘the image they have of themselves, the image that they both wish to give to others and to themselves’ (Bourdieu 1996:25).

Striving to achieve Bourdieu’s view of reflexivity sets researchers a substantial challenge. Within this study, I have adopted a self exploratory and reflective

⁷⁸ Wacquant (1992:39) regards social origins as ‘the most obvious bias and thus the more readily controlled.’ In analysing Bourdieu’s ‘struggle for objectivity’, Swartz (1997) refers to Bourdieu’s belief that the self-interested motivation of the researcher includes a desire for scholarly recognition.

stance. My acknowledgement that I am a product of the field being studied and my discussion of how I positioned myself and of how I was positioned by the participants is another part of the process of reflexivity. Whilst I accept that it is incumbent upon me to reflect on the analysis and interpretations I have come to and to consider the cultural, theoretical, political and knowledge base from which they arise, the unconscious nature of any biases means, as Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009:9) have pointed out 'it is difficult, if not by definition impossible.....to clarify the taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots.' As such, critical reflection and awareness is for them a sufficient starting point in ensuring a reflexive methodology.

The Research Findings

The findings are presented in the four chapters that follow. Chapter 7 focuses on the survey questionnaire; Chapters 8 and 9 deal with different aspects of the semi-structured interviews; and Chapter 10 concentrates on the case discussions.

Chapter 7

The Survey Questionnaire and Findings

In the previous chapter I outlined the various steps that were taken in order to recruit my research sample and the part played in this by the survey questionnaire. It will be recalled that 26 members of the same student cohort, who had been qualified for approximately 12 months, participated in the survey.⁷⁹

This chapter presents the findings in terms of the demographic profile of the sample, their responses to the specific questions raised in the survey and what they said in respect to any additional comments.

Demographic Details

The Probation Service aims to recruit a diverse range of staff that reflects the communities that it serves. The demographic profile of my research cohort is outlined below:

Age Profile

The age profile at the point when the survey was undertaken was as follows:

Age	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50
Nos. in Age Band	16	3	4	0	2	1

61% of the survey participants were under 30 years old. As the survey took place approximately three years after the participants commenced their training, the youngest would have been 22 years old at the start of their qualifying course, with 50% of the survey group (13) being 25 years and under when training began. Three out of the four males in the survey group were in the first

⁷⁹ It should be noted that not everyone qualified at the same time owing to delays in completing the number of practice placement days and the need to resubmit academic work.

age band, whilst the fourth male was in the second age band. The oldest member of the survey group was a 50 year old female. She was also the oldest member of the whole cohort.

Gender Profile

In terms of the gender profile, 22 participants were female and 4 were male.

Females		Males	
22	82%	4	18%

Ethnic Profile

The survey group were asked to describe their ethnicity. This produced the following self-defined categories:

White British	Black British	Black African	Black Caribbean	Mixed Race
20	1	2	2	1

Academic Qualifications

Masters	First Degree	Certificate of Higher Education	A Levels	GCSEs	NVQ
3	17	1	1	3	1

The table above indicates that at the start of their Probation qualifying training, 17 respondents already had a degree and 3 had both a first degree and a Master's degree. The most common degree amongst respondents was psychology (6 people), followed by politics (4) and sociology (3). Other degree subjects included music, history, languages and chemistry.

Employment History

Three respondents had previously worked for the Probation Service as non-qualified practitioners prior to commencing their qualifying course. They also had previous long-term work experience as a chef, a police officer and as a prison officer.

Three had limited previous work experience having had one full-time post for less than 2 years.

Six had no previous full-time work experience, although they had been in paid, short-term casual employment and had also undertaken voluntary work.

Six had previous work experience that had entailed working in a specific post for longer than 2 years. This included employment as a university lecturer, a nurse, a facilities manager, a stock market trader, a custody officer and as a youth worker. For this group, becoming a Probation Officer represented a complete change of career.

Eight had a pattern of working in a range of short-term, full-time jobs. For them, being employed as a Trainee Probation Officer (TPO) and as a qualified Probation Officer represented their longest, continuous period of employment.

Rated Questions

Three questions were asked in order to gain a preliminary understanding of how the respondents experienced their working lives:

1. In your perception, to what extent did your training prepare you for your job?
2. How contented are you with your job?
3. How supported do you feel in your job?

They were required to answer each question by applying a rating of between 1 and 5 where 1= not at all and 5 = completely.

Fig.1 shows the ratings which emerged, with totals in ascending order. It will be seen that some respondents felt unable to award a rounded number to a question and, in those instances, added a half point.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	
Gender	Preparedness	Contentment	Support	Total
F	2	2	2	6
F	4	1	1	6
F	2	2	2	6
F	2	2	2	6
F	3	2	3	8
F	3	3	2	8
F	4	2	2	8
F	3	3	2	8
F	3	3	2	8
F	3	3	2.5	8.5
F	3	3	3	9
F	4	2	3	9
F	3	3	3.5	9.5
F	4	3	3	10
F	4	2	4	10
F	4	3	3	10
M	4	3	3	10
F	3	4	3	10
F	3	3.5	4	10.5
F	4	4	3	11
M	4	4	3	11
F	2	4	5	11
F	4	4	4	12
F	3.5	4	5	12.5
M	4	5	4	13
M	4	5	5	14

Fig. 1: Ratings Awarded to the Survey Questions in Ascending Order

Out of a potential top score of 15 points for the three questions, the ratings ranged from the lowest total score of 6 to the highest total score of 14. This indicates a significant disparity in perception and experience between the lower and upper ends, although it is equally significant to note that just over half of the

respondents (54%) opted for the centre ground by awarding scores of between 8 and 10.

Although males were very much in the minority in terms of their representation amongst the cohort as a whole and within the survey group, all 4 males were amongst the 10 respondents who awarded the questions the highest total scores and the 2 top scores were awarded by males. As a consequence, the males achieve a mean score of 12 in answer to the questions, whilst the females have a mean score of 9, suggesting that 12 months into their careers as qualified Probation Officers, the males in the survey would appear to be more satisfied with their jobs than their female counterparts.

In analysing the responses, it is useful to look at the distribution of scores in relation to each question.

	Q1	Q2	Q3
1	0	1	1
1.5	0	0	0
2	4	7	7
2.5	0	0	1
3	9	9	9
3.5	1	1	1
4	12	6	4
4.5	0	0	0
5	0	2	3

Fig. 2: The Distribution of Scores Across Each Question

Fig. 2 shows that question 1 produced the shortest spread of scores and the largest degree of consensus, with 12 respondents giving a score of 4. The conclusion one may draw from this being that most respondents felt reasonably satisfied with the extent to which their training prepared them for the job. However, additional comments volunteered by respondents (see section below) suggested a higher level of dissatisfaction with their training than might be assumed from their decision to award scores of 2 and 3.

Whilst the same number of respondents chose the centre ground in each question, question 2 highlights a stronger disparity with regards to the sense of contentment with the job felt by each respondent and question 3 indicates a similar disparity in terms of how supported they feel. In particular, the lowest score of 1 and the highest score of 5 were awarded in respect to each of these questions.

Taken from another perspective, an examination of the mean scores demonstrates the closeness of the scores for each question and the standard deviation confirms greater consistency in the responses to question 1 and wider variation of opinion in respect to questions 2 and 3.

	Q1	Q2	Q3
Mean	3.33	3.06	3.04
Standard Deviation	0.69	1.00	1.05

Additional comments also resulted in the disclosure of greater discontent than the scores would seem to reveal. This was especially so with regards to some respondents who had earlier given a mid level score of 3 – a finding which would seem to point to the potential limitations of conducting research using only a survey questionnaire based on an entirely quantitative approach. Moreover, I discovered in the course of later interviews that a high total score did not necessarily equate with competent practice and job satisfaction but, instead, was indicative of lower expectations and a higher capacity to accept and tolerate pressures.

Issues relating to preparation for the job, contentment and support were explored more fully in the subsequent stages of the research and will be addressed in greater detail in the chapters which follow.

Approach to the Work

In order to gain a picture of what informs their day to day practice, respondents were asked to select from a list of options the methods which best described their approach to the work. The choices offered were:

- Cognitive/Behavioural
- Reflective
- Problem Solving
- Task Centred
- Psycho/Social
- Other (please specify)

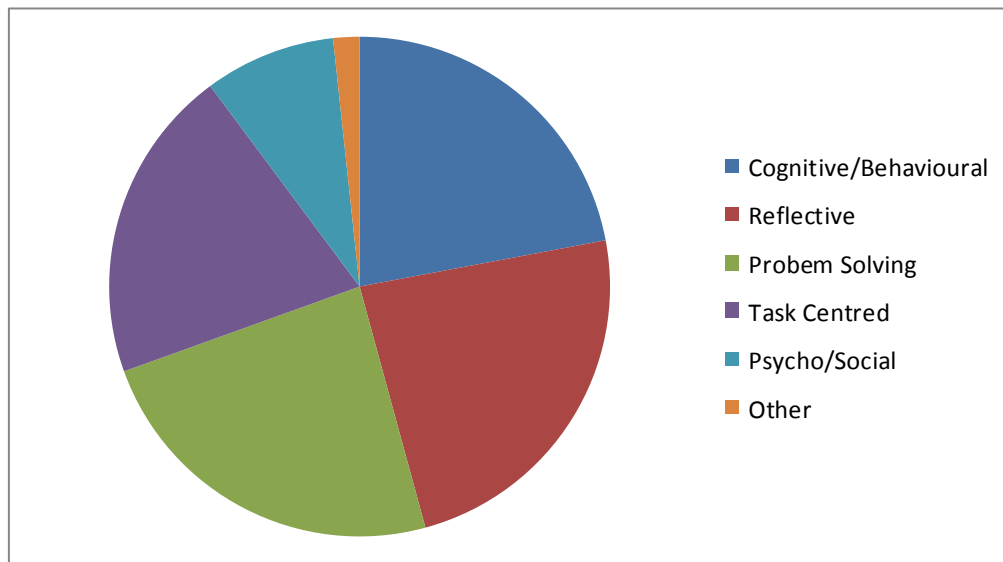


Fig. 3: Practice Methods used By Respondents

The pie chart in fig. 3 shows that no one method predominated amongst the survey participants. Cognitive/Behavioural, Reflective, Problem Solving and Task Centred approaches were cited in almost equal measure. A Psycho/Social approach was the least popular of the choices available with Motivational Interviewing being mentioned by 1 person in the ‘Other’ category. I did not include Motivational Interviewing as a category as I considered it to be a technique that either facilitated or was an adjunct to their approach, rather than it being an approach in its own right. Those who were selected for the next stage of the research confirmed that this assumption was correct.

	No. of Different Methods Used in Practice				
	1	2	3	4	5
No. of respondents	7	10	4	4	1

Fig.4: Number of Respondents and the Range of Methods Used

Fig. 4 sets out the number of respondents who identified using single or multiple approaches in their practice. The number of different approaches used ranged from one to a maximum of five. Thus, it can be seen that 7 respondents identified themselves as using just one approach, whilst 1 respondent identified five approaches. It can also be seen that the largest number of respondents (10) favoured two approaches.

Comments made by participants in subsequent stages of the research gave me to understand that, in their perception, the academic side of the training promoted a Cognitive/Behavioural approach to the work. Interestingly, although this approach was acknowledged by just over half of the respondents (54%) as informing their practice, it would appear that 46% did not apply it at all; and of the 7 who used one approach, only 1 stated that it was Cognitive/Behavioural.

The next stage was also used to examine more closely what approaches respondents said they used in their practice and what they actually did.

Additional Comments

This section was included in the survey to allow respondents an opportunity to step outside the constraints of giving numerical values and ticking boxes, as well as to supplement the evidence on which I planned to select my sample for the semi-structured interview which was to follow. Respondents were free to say anything they considered relevant or nothing at all. In the event, 5 respondents chose the latter option. The comments made by the rest revealed the diversity of their experience both during training and post qualifying and led to the initial emergence of some significant themes which were developed further in the interviews which followed.

Typically, respondents expressed concern that they had only been permitted to work with low to medium risk cases as trainees where as, upon qualifying, they were immediately allocated the supervision of high risk cases which they felt ill-equipped to deal with. Accordingly there was a sense of having been *'let down by training.'* Another view was *'training does not give you a full flavour of what life as a qualified probation officer will be like.'*

I am aware that this specific issue has since been addressed so that trainees are now able to have some experience of high risk work prior to qualifying. However, for this cohort, the experience generated some very negative feelings both towards their training and the job; and how it continued to impact was very much linked to the office and team in which they were subsequently based and the extent to which their line manager was supportive and able to provide skill development.

The competence and availability of their Practice Development Assessor (PDA) was also mentioned at this stage: *'Training varies a lot – it depends on your PDA and the approach they take.'* Another respondent reported: *'My PDA was never there so my group of trainees did what we could.'*

Several respondents, in declaring their dissatisfaction with the job, referred to the quantity of work they were required to undertake and what they perceived as an over concentration on bureaucratic elements. In making these comments, they also revealed aspects of their motivation:

Caseloads are unmanageable and the job is now just loads of paperwork and there is no actual time to work with the people to prevent re-offending. I chose the job to work with people and to give them the help and support they need. Unfortunately, the job has turned out to be an admin role – churning out paperwork, heavy caseloads and feeling frustrated, stressed and inefficient.

I enjoy the work I do with offenders. However, I do not appreciate the amount of paperwork, never being able to get on top of it. Too much time is spent pushing a pen and not enough doing the interventions with the offenders. How are we meant to reduce the risk of offenders re-offending when we cannot spend enough time with them in supervision?

Dissatisfaction with the work is on two levels: One is structural, in terms of the service as a whole. The focus on targets rather than individuals and the extremely high caseloads, leaving you no time to work with people which is why I chose to do this job. The other is on the particular area I'm working, in terms of environment – the overcrowded building, no place to have a break from your computer. Even lunch is eaten over your desk.

There's always so much to do. I rarely think about the offender and how I'm going to approach it – just deal with it as it comes. It's been a real struggle. I don't feel I know what to do. I'm going to hand in my notice soon and go to work in Bedfordshire. I hope it will be less stressful.

Three respondents left during the period of my research, two of whom gave no explicit indication that such a decision was imminent. In both the latter instances they moved to jobs outside the Probation Service.

On the other hand, despite difficulties, this next respondent implied she was sticking with it:

Been through a traumatic time in this office, been on a rollercoaster. So many transitions, restructuring this, that and the other. So feeling ambivalent at the moment, but I will get through this. I'm not leaving in spite of bullying, fear and intimidation.

A similar resilience was echoed in this statement: *'I get on with it really. No one really likes work.....I just get on with it.'*

It is also important not to overlook the fact that some respondents used the 'Additional Comments' to re-affirm positive views about their training (and possibly by implication their current job):

'It does prepare you well.' However, it was clear that their transition was made more successful by their relationship with their current line manager which was considered to be *'crucial re settling in and helping me feel part of the team.'*

Another respondent took the opportunity to say something more about her method of work, stating defiantly: *'I work depending on what the offender needs, not what approach the organisation tells me to use.'*

Finally, one respondent who, in expressing her enthusiasm to take part in the next stage of the research, also intimated that she viewed her cohort colleagues to be rather negative in outlook: *'I wouldn't be a moaner. A lot of trainees say it was all a waste of time. I'd be more balanced.'*

The fact that nobody had actually stated to me that the course was a waste of time confirmed for me the importance of exploring beneath the surface in order to try to establish what individual members of this cohort really experienced and perceived with regards to their training and day to day work; and the factors

which impacted upon their perception and practice as Probation Officers. Thus, whilst I was keen to gather data to assist in the formulation of patterns that may link members of the cohort together in terms of their behaviour and experience, I also set out to identify the personal matrix pertaining to each of those who took part in the semi-structured interview and case discussion.

Chapter 8

Choosing To Train As A Probation Officer

The Research Sample⁸⁰

Angela: Aged 46 years; white. Left school with 'O' and 'A' levels and has since had a variety of jobs including receptionist, accounts clerk, support worker with the homeless and an administrator in a probation office. She awarded a low satisfaction rating in the survey. When I interviewed her for the semi-structured interview she informed me that she was awaiting confirmation of a job offer to join a Young Offender's Team in a neighbouring county. She took part in the case discussion interview just before leaving.

Cathy: Aged 50 years; white. She has a first degree in History and Anthropology and an MA in Humanities. Her past work experience is wide ranging, including 12 years as a university lecturer and 7 years in the tourist industry. Her satisfaction rating in the survey questionnaire was in the low to medium range. She participated in both the semi-structured interview and the case discussion interview.

Cheryl: Aged 29 years; white. She has a degree in Politics with Social Policy and an MSc in Criminology. She has worked as a waitress and as an administrator, and as both a volunteer and a paid employee for a children's charity. Her satisfaction rating in the survey questionnaire was in the medium range. After participating in the semi-structured interview, she agreed to take part in the case discussion interview but did not respond to any of my attempts to contact her.

Dalia: Aged 26 years; black British. She has a degree in psychology and her previous work experience included temporary jobs in telesales and as hotel chambermaid. She has also undertaken voluntary work with the elderly. Her satisfaction rating in the survey questionnaire was in the medium range. At the end of the semi-structured interview she agreed to take part in the case

⁸⁰ All names have been changed.

discussion but, when I tried to contact her to make arrangements to meet again, I learned that she had suddenly resigned and left the Service.

Dan: Aged 29 years; mixed race. He has a degree in Politics with Communications and Media Studies. He subsequently worked as an off licence manager and as a barman, and acted as a volunteer mentor on a youth offender's project. In the survey questionnaire his satisfaction ratings were the highest of the sample. He participated in both the semi-structured interview and the case discussion interview.

Femi: Aged 37 years; black African. She has a degree in Chemistry. She has previously worked as an administrative assistant and as a court custody officer for 7 years. Her satisfaction rating in the survey questionnaire was in the medium range. She participated in both the semi-structured interview and the case discussion.

Kirsty: Aged 27 years; white. She has a degree in Communications and Society and is studying for an MA in Criminology. She has previously worked for a public relations agency and as a temping secretary and, prior to her degree, had undertaken voluntary work with physically handicapped children and the elderly. In the survey questionnaire her satisfaction rating was in the medium range. I did not invite her to participate in the case discussion interview as, during the semi-structured interview, I discovered she specialised in court work, undertaking brief, 'on the day' court reports and did not carry a caseload.

Ramona: Aged 33 years; white. She has no previous degree. Her employment history includes 7 years as a police officer and 2 years as a community service officer. She was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 9 years ago. She rated her satisfaction level as low in the survey questionnaire. Following the semi-structured interview, she agreed to take part in the case discussion but, subsequently, cancelled 3 meetings citing work commitments, before going off sick.

Sharon: Aged 27 years; black Caribbean. She has a degree in Social Anthropology and has previously worked as a learning support assistant in a

school and as a volunteer at a women's refuge. Her satisfaction rating in the survey was high. She took part in both the semi-structured interview and the case discussion.

Tom: Aged 26 years; white. He has a degree in Politics and prior to training had temporary jobs in customer services and as an archivist in a Social Services Department. His satisfaction rating in the survey questionnaire was high. He participated in both the semi-structured interview and the case discussion interview.

Introduction

In order to build up a picture of what constitutes the professional identity of newly qualified probation officers, I considered it important to first of all examine my findings with a view to identifying the motivation of my research participants to train as probation officers. In this respect, I was interested especially in what they told me about their background, education, previous employment and values, as well as looking for evidence of any other elements that may have played a part in influencing their decision.

Whilst some factors were presented as more dominant and influential than others, my analysis revealed the complex, multi-faceted nature of the decision-making process. In particular, the picture which emerged from the data was of a sample that, as a whole, shared a range of characteristics or attributes associated with their decision to train. However, although I identified significant similarities within the group, it was also apparent that there were important differences amongst them and that individuals did not share the same characteristics in equal proportions.

The main motivational themes and characteristics extrapolated from the narrative text are set out below. These highlight the seemingly accidental train of events that brought some of the subjects into the service, their sense of affinity with criminals, their intellectual interest in criminal justice, instrumental motives and feelings of altruism. Together, they provide a description of and insight into the orientation I found amongst this sample of newcomer probation

officers. The overlapping nature of the most distinctive traits has meant that some research subjects appear in more than one category.

By Accident or Design?

To embark on a course to train as a probation officer suggests a motivation and commitment to a very specific choice of career. Interestingly, none of the research sample revealed any long held aspiration to become a probation officer. Instead, they presented the decision to train as something that was formulated within a comparatively short time scale and, in several cases, it was referred to as having come about in a seemingly unpremeditated and unexpected manner.

Dan, for example, explained his decision in the following terms:

Coming to work for the Probation Service came out of the blue really. I just happened to see an advert for the Probation Service but, before that, I wasn't really that aware of it.

In Dalia's view:

In so many respects I landed here by accident. It was literally by accident. I can't say I ever dreamed of becoming a probation officer. Before I got here I didn't know much about the job and I had a career path in my head and it was proving very difficult for me to get to where I wanted to get to. And one day, I was on the bus and I just picked up this newspaper and there was this advert, and I thought oh, that sounds a bit like what I want to do, I'll give it a go and here I am.

Cheryl arrived at her decision whilst working for a children's charity and had not previously considered probation work. Her story described a chance meeting with someone who was already in training as a probation officer:

And then probation came to me via someone who used to work with me as a volunteer. I bumped into her and she said she had started training and she was thoroughly enjoying it and suddenly it seemed like a good avenue for me to go down.

Although the situation for Kirsty and Tom was slightly different to those outlined above, there still seemed an element of serendipity surrounding their entry into

the Service. This was because both of them were pursuing other career opportunities at the same time.

Significantly, Kirsty disclosed that she was totally unaware of the existence of the Probation Service until only a few weeks before submitting her application:

I was talking about the police, and it sounds really ridiculous now, but at that time I really didn't even know who probation were, what the Service was. It never even occurred to me that such a thing existed.

It was Kirsty's mother who suggested the possibility of probation work and, ultimately, it became a straight choice between probation and the police:

Basically, the probation application form got answered before the police application form. So I ended up working in probation.

Tom recounted a similar experience in terms of competing choices although, in contrast to Kirsty, he had some prior knowledge of probation work and its place in the criminal justice system by virtue of the fact that his father taught law on a probation qualifying course. There was a delay in Tom learning the outcome of his application for probation training and, as with Kirsty, it was highly likely that had another offer of work been received first, he would have accepted that instead and embarked on a very different career path.

For Angela and Ramona, the desire to be a probation officer was not the primary consideration at all, with both stating that their motivation had been triggered by the opportunity offered by training to go to university and obtain an academic qualification.

Angela:

I applied for the training because I didn't have a degree and I thought it was a good way of getting a degree and getting paid for it. 'Cos I couldn't afford to go to university, to give up work and go to university and I always wanted to have a degree. And so I don't think I ever had any great idea that I wanted to be a probation officer.

Ramona:

Basically, if I'm honest I wanted a degree. I've always been, it sounds quite sad, but I've always been put down in my life by my father and I felt I needed to do something to shut him up. When I did qualify he still had to remind me that I left it a little late to get a degree.

Of the subjects I selected for my sample, only the accounts given by Femi, Sharon and Cathy made reference to a definite and considered career choice at the point they applied for training. Femi was previously employed as a court based custody officer and whilst she described this first experience of working with offenders as 'just something I stumbled into by chance really', implying uncertainty, tentativeness and a lack of design at that stage, the job confirmed her interest in offender focused work and her desire 'to stay within it.' Consequently, when she applied for training, she had reached the conclusion that becoming a probation officer was a natural career progression, with her earlier job having provided her with some transferable skills and knowledge:

Working in my previous role gave me the opportunity to work with offenders across the board in terms of risk. So in terms of developing one to one contact, in terms of understanding offender's perspectives, my previous job gave me that opportunity. So I just thought I could develop on that and the next logical step was to look for work in probation, which is what I did.

Sharon had weighed up and rejected other possible career options, such as teaching and social work, before deciding in favour of probation. Here, she outlined for me some of the thinking that contributed to her decision:

I realised that my choices were in relation to teaching but I didn't really like the restrictions there. I wanted to be out in the community doing things so I gave consideration to going into social work. Then I realised that social work would probably be a bit limited. I had lots of changes of mind and then probation was brought to my attention. I've always been someone who kind of wants to be doing something active. I like to kind of get hands on, just kind of feeling I'm making a difference. I know that that's not really what probation's about now but that's kind of what got me into it.

Finally, Cathy, as the oldest person in the sample and the oldest person in her student cohort, came to the training having already experienced several changes of career direction. Despite seeming highly resourceful, she had felt a

sense of disillusionment over her failure to find her professional niche and spoke of feeling 'very bored and dissatisfied' with her life in general.

I felt burned out. I was going where I didn't want to go, so I bailed out and started temping in Social Services. That re-ignited my plan to do a social work qualification. So I started looking at Probation and discovered the trainee probation officer route of entry.

Becoming a social worker had been an earlier aspiration that she had not pursued. Although for several years during the 1980s she had worked as a Probation Service volunteer. Working as an administrator in a Social Services Department drew her back to thinking about social work. However, bearing in mind her age, the comparative brevity of the probation course, as opposed to the longer social work qualifying training, and being paid to train were, for her, crucial factors in the decision making process.

In my view, collating information about whether members of the sample considered themselves to have entered the field of probation by accident or by design has been a helpful first step towards understanding the factors influencing their career plans and goals, and the way in which they arrived at their career decision. What initially emerged is particularly relevant given that, historically, probation work has tended to be regarded as a vocation or a 'calling.' In other words, not so much a choice, but a response or inclination to undertake a specific type of work, underpinned by faith and a desire to be of service to others. Yet any such affinity towards probation could not be discerned immediately amongst the responses from the sample.

It is also notable, in the context of this study, that the Probation Service's low profile meant that for half the sample (Dan, Dalia, Cheryl, Kirsty and Sharon), probation work did not figure originally in their thinking about the career choices open to them. What is significant, though, is that the raising of their awareness about the service was sufficient to cause them to view probation as a potential career, suggesting that there must have been some kind of congruence between their new found knowledge and their career goals, capabilities and interests.

On the surface, the biographical information provided by the sample might lead one to conclude that the choice of probation was largely a contingent one. This is because, initially, the interview data seemed to suggest that only a few of the research subjects possessed a definite knowledge, understanding and commitment to the field at the point of entering as a trainee. The apparent contingency and randomness that predominated put me in mind of my own route into the service, referred to in the introduction to this study which, originally, I also considered to have been by chance.

It was my thoughts about my own experience that led me to wonder whether it was possible to identify underlying or unconscious affinities between the subjects and their occupational choice and whether there was actually more coherence and consistency in recruitment than might appear at first sight.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus, outlined earlier, has something to contribute to our understanding of the relevance of these thoughts. Thus, in considering the application of the concept of habitus to this study, it is my contention that sample members were somehow predisposed towards the type of work they perceived as being within the domain of the probation officer. In this way, the habitus of sample members which encompasses their life history, education, family background, previous work experience and culture, may be regarded as a significant source of motivation operating at an unconscious level. Or, in choosing to become a probation officer they were, as Colley et al (2003: 478) might suggest from their Bourdieusian perspective, "becomings' that are immanent, socially inscribed – in a sense, 'waiting to happen'".

What form these 'becomings' take is very much dependent on individual aspirations and on what work is perceived as available and right for them, so that career decisions tend to be a combination of habitus and job opportunities. The influence of the latter is clearly evident in the interview extracts I have cited. The part played by their habitus will, I hope, become more evident as this analysis progresses.

To Work with Criminals or to be a Criminal?

Initially, Dan presented as having no clear sense of occupational direction. He had obtained a degree but this had failed to provide him with the type of employment opportunities he had anticipated. Prior to training as a probation officer, he had been working in an off licence and had clearly felt dissatisfied, depressed and in a rut. His comments to me also raised questions about the level of self-efficacy he possessed:

I didn't have much of a career in mind. I think that's why I got to the stage where I decided I had to pick something and go for it.....Time was sort of moving on.....It had been 18 months since I left university and I wasn't doing a job I had gone to university for. I had only done temporary work and I was working in a shop so I was disappointed in that, and I wasn't particularly happy in my job. So that was pressure for me to start looking at something else.

Exploring Dan's motivation further was not an easy task as he seemed very wary and uncomfortable in interview, telling me early on 'I can be quite quiet when I don't know someone well.' Nonetheless, although very hesitant at times, it became clear that his interests and values included the altruistic notion of service to the community:

I guess I was sort of interested in the difficulties people have. I think I always knew that I wanted to work for the public sector rather than the private sector, for a charity or something like that.....I was interested in doing something for the community.

His sense of altruism came across more strongly, if sounding rather simplistic, when he added:

I'm quite interested in people.....Helping them out, making things better for them. I'm also quite concerned about the wider society in general and not just the individuals we work with but the impact they have on the people around them and that kind of thing.

My prompting with regards to Dan's thoughts about the origins of this interest led to his making a link to his background. He first informed me, 'I don't have a privileged background. I mean, I come from a working class background.' In encouraging him to expand upon this he told me:

I guess I always had an interest in communities and families and things like that. I come from a very large family. I had an interest in their backgrounds, the history of my family and I used to get involved in things in the community. And I think it's to do with injustice and stuff like that.....I've seen a lot of unfair things go on, not just to me personally but for other people out there so.....An interest in making things a bit fairer for everyone.

What could be inferred is that Dan seemed to equate his background and the environment in which he was brought up with difficulties leading people into crime. Referring to the 'troubled lives' of the people whom he encountered in his neighbourhood, he stated:

When I talk about my background I'm conscious that people can have similar backgrounds, but things can turn out differently. I was interested in why that was.....I know people sometimes say 'Oh, if things had turned out differently I'd have got into trouble.' But I know of people who've had a similar upbringing to me and p'raps have got into trouble and that I was more likely, based on what the evidence and statistics say, that I was more likely to find myself in trouble.

My attempts to elicit from Dan further information about his personal experiences and how they might have led him in a different direction resulted in a comparatively long silence (20 seconds) during which he adopted a pose that I perceived as rather child-like, by sitting on his hands. I commented on how this appeared to be something he found hard to talk about, but when this produced another silence of a similar length I decided not to pursue the matter further.

This left me feeling that there was something in his childhood that Dan felt unable to reveal to me. He was able to say, though, that his experiences had provided him with a unique perspective and understanding of criminal behaviour which, as a consequence, had given him the capacity to both empathise and identify with offenders. His explicit statement that he might have become an offender himself suggested to me that his orientation towards probation is really not as 'out of the blue' as was presented by him at the beginning. Indeed, upon reflecting on his response to the recruitment advertisement, he seemed to recognise the way in which his perception of his capabilities, concerning what

he could do career wise, was combined with his circumstances and latent interests to result in his application:

I think it was open to me. I think that I saw the advert at the right time. I was looking for work. I was looking for something that I could do. I think it just sparked an interest in me.

In addition, it contributed to a decision to obtain voluntary work with young offenders in order to gain experience and enhance his suitability for probation. His voluntary work experience also confirmed his interest in working with offenders.

Taken together, the foregoing provides some confirmation of the influence of Dan's habitus of origin, including his family background and the social and cultural context in which he lived. It also emphasises the inter-relationship between his habitus and his 'horizons for action', a term applied by Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997:34) which they define as 'the arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made'; the latter being based on a fit between how individuals view themselves and what they consider themselves able to do.

Whilst this seems to have led Dan in the direction of people oriented work, I was able to identify another motive. Earlier in our discussion he had expressed disappointment in his being in temporary employment for longer than he intended and alluded to his need to find work that was more in keeping with his academic qualifications. The Probation Service fulfilled this criterion for him, offering a career, status within his social field and a chance of professional growth, as well as a financial incentive to train:

I thought it would be a good career. Financially, I thought it was fairly well supported whilst doing the training and gave you a number of qualifications I thought would be useful. I think it opens up a lot of opportunities.

He acknowledged that he did not relish the idea of studying for another degree but felt that, without doing so, his career options were very limited. He also admitted that he viewed the job as providing other benefits that met his personal

needs, voicing this revealing comment about his personality that suggested difficulties in forming relationships:

I think I'm quite a shy person in a sense. I mean I like this job because you get to meet people and talk to people.

I found a significant link between Dan's narrative about joining the service and Ramona's account of her motivation for becoming a probation officer. From the outset, she had been quite blatant in giving purely instrumental reasons for wishing to train – the opportunity to gain a degree, impress her father and demonstrate she is the equal of her sister in her ability to achieve academic qualifications. But this is only part of the story.

For Ramona, becoming a probation officer was something of a compromise and a 'second choice' career, her foremost career aspiration having been in relation to the police force where she had ambitions of rising to the rank of chief inspector ('I would love to have progressed up the ladder. I could have seen myself as chief inspector'). Unfortunately, the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis resulted in her being recommended to transfer to a desk job. Feeling she had been 'put down' by her father throughout her life, she experienced this recommendation as demeaning and belittling of her talents. As a consequence, she refused to accept the desk job ('I'm better than that, I'll tell you when I can't run'), preferring to resign instead. She is driven by a need to prove herself to others and by a desperate will not to give in to an illness that dominates her life and which she knows is degenerative.

The factor that connects Ramona to Dan concerned her explanation of what she felt laid the foundations for and attracted her first to police work and, then, to probation:

It takes one to know one. I've not led the most squeaky clean, honest of lives. Never been caught, otherwise I could never have been a police officer. But I wasn't too sure if I wanted to work with the criminals or be a criminal. And I'll be honest with you, it was drugs, and if I hadn't met my husband – I met him at 17, I could have gone on a downward spiral knowing the sort of individual I was. It was the way I rebelled and I could probably have done myself more harm than good. But, as the years have

gone by, I've kind of used that experience to help me understand how people get to where they get to.

Thus, like Dan, Ramona recognised the existence of influences and experiences that may have led her down a criminal path (she later mentioned fighting as well as drugs 'and stupid things like that'). She considered that this, together with her experience of front line police work, had provided her with a personal perspective and insight into offending behaviour that she believed enabled her to work more effectively as a probation officer. 'So I understand it from my perspective and from the text book.' She believed herself to be 'street wise' and it was apparent, from what she told me, that she deliberately permitted some blurring of role boundaries to persist by way of her appearance and style of dress: 'Offenders think I look like some trendy individual who's on their level.' She did not recognise the deception that this entailed.⁸¹

Whilst self interest and the need to protect herself for the sake of her health seemed to be ever present issues, an element of altruism was also discernible in Ramona's approach to her work. As a police officer, she described trying to understand the people whom she arrested and of reflecting upon whether there was action she could take to deter them from further crime:

I've always been the sort of person who thinks I wonder if we did that, whether that would help? I wonder if I arrested them and talked to them, they wouldn't come back again. I always wanted to know. There's always got to be an answer to something. I'm very much why, why, why?

Her desire to get more involved with offenders was also apparent when she worked as a community service officer prior to training. In discussing this pre-qualifying role, she identified other motivational factors and explicitly mentioned the desire to help and offer counselling:

⁸¹Ramona was dressed very casually in jeans and t shirt. She had a stud in her nose and tongue and her hair was dyed green. I am suggesting that her decision to present herself in this way constitutes a deception as it implies an avoidance of what she is - an authority figure with considerable power. Of course, it may be that her inability to accept or recognise this as a deception is a reflection of the extent of her identification with offenders.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time there but I really wanted to get my teeth into it a bit more. You know, I felt the need to counsel these people. I know we're not trained counsellors but I wanted to help them a bit more.

Femi was the third member of the sample to feel an affinity with offenders, owing to her own experiences, and commented on the potential for her to be drawn towards deviancy had circumstances been different. It was this recognition, along with how she faced up to other personal challenges that led her to think about working with offenders.

I know what our offenders have been through. I can identify with those challenges; challenges growing up and trying to make a mark, trying to be different. When I was younger I was quite a large kid, if I can put it that way. I was a large kid and I was bullied a lot and because I was quiet and shy I found it hard to stick up for myself. And most times I used to feel vulnerable. And my father was a military man and I thought, may be because of that, he probably found it hard to show his emotions because that's not the done thing. You know, you've got to be hard and all that. So I couldn't really relate much to my father when I was growing up and I felt there was something missing there that could have led me off the rails, if I can put it that way, because you hear a lot of offenders say that they did not have a father figure or a mother figure or something. So I had a bit of that growing up. And sometimes it's hard being a woman in society because when you're a woman and a black woman it's additional. You almost have to prove yourself two times over if you know what I mean.

Similarly to Ramona, Femi considered that her personal experiences inform her practice. Her interest in and motivation towards probation work was further stimulated by the fact that she was impressed with the people she met from probation whilst working as a court custody officer. Interestingly, she referred to these contacts as having initially led her to believe that 'probation officers were just like social workers' and this belief seemed to have lent encouragement to her decision to apply for training. The realisation that this was not the case does not seem to have diminished her positive attitude to the job, although she expressed the wish that:

[T]he social work background will be maintained and we can still have the incentive to work from that perspective as opposed to what we're seeing now. I'd still want to be able to do that. You know, work with offenders in that way.

This statement was helpful in highlighting another dimension to Femi's motivation and the social work ethos which underpinned it. She described her driving force as 'assisting disadvantaged people in society to overcome the obstacles they face.' In expanding upon this, it was apparent that she too felt she had overcome disadvantage to achieve a career and there existed a strong altruistic element to her decision to become a probation officer, regarding it as an opportunity to give something back and to show gratitude for the way her own life had turned out.

I think I'm here to see if I can make society a better place. I want to be able to go home and say I've done something today, I've prevented something bad happening, or I've changed someone's life today, or just being able to make a difference.

I have chosen to link the three subjects described above because, in examining their motivation, it is possible to identify a shared orientation. It is clear that each of them felt either an affinity to offenders or a sense of identification with people who have experienced disadvantage and who have had a difficult time. This knowledge has also provided some insight or clues into their habitus which, by definition, is implicit and, to a large extent, unconscious. At the same time, it can be seen that some commonalities are beginning to emerge amongst sample members, indicating that they are more than just a group of individuals.⁸²

Interest in and Curiosity about the Criminal Justice System

Cheryl and Kirsty share an interest in the criminal justice system, which was presented by them as their primary attraction to probation work. Cheryl began her probation training having already gained an MA in criminology, whilst Kirsty started studying for an MA in the same subject as soon as she completed her training.

The experience of working for her MA and her admiration for the subject leaders on her course seem to have had a profound influence on Cheryl's choice of career direction:

⁸² If I were undertaking a larger scale study it would be especially interesting to test for this motivational pattern and to see how far it correlated with commitment and good occupational fit.

I definitely wanted to go into some part of the criminal justice system. I absolutely loved that master's course and really thoroughly enjoyed it, and it sort of consolidated quite a few interests I had had for some time.

There are, of course, several different facets to the criminal justice system, offering a variety of potential employment opportunities. Bearing this in mind, Cheryl did not articulate clearly exactly what it was that attracted her to the Probation Service rather than, say, the police, the Court Service or law. She mentioned having written a dissertation on the management of sex offenders that focused heavily on probation, stating it was a piece of work 'I really enjoyed doing, it was very interesting.' Her attraction to probation work coming across, at this point, as being of an intellectual kind, with her enjoying the academic challenges posed by the dissertation and the learning derived from it.

Following her MA, Cheryl went travelling for a year and, upon her return, seemed to be undecided about a career, 'doing odd bits of work.' She subsequently chose to join a charity providing a helpline for children, first as a volunteer counsellor and then as a paid volunteer co-ordinator, viewing the job as an interim measure. She spoke of having 'enjoyed the counselling side of the job' and of it helping her to develop listening and assessment skills. This would suggest a pull towards a career where these aspects might be applied, but this was not made explicit by Cheryl. Instead, as indicated earlier, it was a chance meeting with a friend who was already training as a probation officer and enjoying it that seemed to have been the determining factor.

In my continuing attempts to explore where this impetus may have come from, Cheryl expressed the thought that it was 'perhaps because of my personality', adding:

I always thought I was heading towards a people orientated career really. I suppose that's where my interest lies really in people and how they work and how they think.

According to her, this interest evolved as a consequence of coming from a large family and being brought up in a village pub where her parents were the landlords. 'There were always people around. I suppose it was a very sociable

background really.’ Thus, her ability to relate to others seemed to be a key factor but her interest in probation appeared to remain largely at an intellectual level, underpinned by curiosity and a desire to learn more (and thereby, a desire to develop herself).

Intellectual curiosity is something else that Cheryl had in common with Kirsty who explained the lure of probation work in the following terms:

When I was younger I probably had a morbid curiosity about crime and criminals and things like that. And when I was at school I was always interested in the forensic side of things, but just because of the way things worked out, I didn't carry on to do science at A levels so, therefore, I became more interested in the people side of things in terms of criminology and crime. So I think it's a bit of an intriguing area for me and there's some fascination about why people behave in that way and what leads them to behave in that way. And working as a probation officer is one of the easiest ways to find out that sort of thing, or to work with people who have been in those situations.

Despite thinking this, when she finished her first degree, Kirsty tried out other career options, including a job with a public relations agency:

The private sector experience I had at that time wasn't particularly good. I wasn't interested in public relations and when I was young I was always interested in either the media or criminal justice, and I kind of dabbled in the media a bit and didn't enjoy it. So I thought I'd do something a bit more worthwhile, something that had a bit more meaning to it.

This last extract from her interview offered a little more insight into her motivation, with the notion of her wanting to do ‘something a bit more worthwhile’ emerging. In trying to make sense of what constituted a worthwhile career and in whose eyes, Kirsty spoke of the importance of having a job that provided personal fulfilment. Pressed to explain what type of work this might be, she introduced the notion of helping others:

I found PR work quite false and it wasn't anything to do with helping people or using your brain in any way.

Dissatisfied with her job in public relations, Kirsty left to go travelling. She recalled that at that stage ‘I didn't know what on earth I wanted to come back to.’ In fact, by the time she returned she had made up her mind to apply to the

police, until the intervention of her mother brought probation to her attention ('She knew I had an interest in crime and criminals and this sort of world').

However, Kirsty was unable to shed light on the origins of her curiosity in crime:

No one in my family has ever had anything to do with the criminal justice system in any way so I'm not really sure where the interest has come from. I've never been involved in the criminal justice system at all. I'd never been in court before, so it was a completely new world to me and quite terrifying.

Nor was Kirsty able to offer any clues as to where her desire to help might have come from. She disclosed limited information concerning her family, only stating that her parents were not in the caring professions and revealing that her sister had followed what she considered to be a similar career path to herself by qualifying as an educational psychologist.

Kirsty did not see herself as making a long term commitment to probation work and it was difficult to untangle the extent to which this was in her mind from the outset and how far this idea was based on her post qualifying experience of the job. It was her ambition to eventually move into 'the academic side of things' where, ideally, she hoped to be able to undertake research linked to criminal justice issues. Thus, she anticipated that her interest in offending behaviour would persist, even if her desire to remain a probation officer did not.

In considering the way in which Cheryl and Kirsty expressed their motivation towards probation, I was drawn to the view that they both possessed intellectual curiosity and a wish to do something that had a value basis encompassing concern for others. For Bourdieu, such values will have been internalised as part of the process of socialization. As such, they become part of an individual's habitus, reflect their social capital and are likely to have been a vital element in their search for an appropriate field of practice. In keeping with other sample members, Cheryl and Kirsty have an interest in people and relational work, together with a desire not to engage in routine, mind-deadening activity. Significantly, as a field of practice, probation is able to continually give rise to

new questions and issues of difference, and these specific features of the work were, for them, an important part of the initial attraction.

A Means to What End?

Several other respondents portrayed becoming a probation officer as a stepping stone to another career. It was, therefore, seen as a means to an end although it was not entirely clear what that end might be.

Dalia described her main interests as having always included 'abnormal behaviour, mental health and offenders' which she considered developed from studying sociology and psychology at school.

Then when I was at university I kind of realised I could run these interests together and, you know, make a career out of it. There was always an interest with abnormality, with what's normal and what's abnormal. With why do some people do what they do? And for me, it was almost an underlying belief that people can change regardless of what they've done. I really did want to know more about this, learn more about this and work with people who are maybe experiencing mental health issues.

It was apparent that Dalia had remained passionate about working in mental health but, following her degree in psychology, found no one willing to employ her in a mental health role owing to her lack of experience. The Probation Service, which she previously had little knowledge of, was a compromise which she approached enthusiastically having been attracted by her perception of the organisation's values, the nature of the work and the willingness of the service to teach the skills required to do the job.

The one thing that I did like about it was that we accept people from all walks of life. There was an acceptance that may be there would be people who have no idea what we do, but as long as you're willing to learn then you can learn and you will be able to do the job. So for me that was important and I thought oh well I'm willing to learn, I can do that as long as you can teach me. I knew we would work with offenders, doing what exactly I had no idea.

Inspired by what she referred to as 'a passion for working with people,' Dalia gave me to understand that she was willing to work hard to achieve success and personal satisfaction in the job.

I'm very driven by my own development as a person as well as professionally. I know exactly what I want and work hard towards that. My priorities at the moment are about work and developing myself.

Nonetheless, Dalia was unequivocal in stating that whilst she was grateful for the chance given to her by probation to train and gain experience, she regarded her aspirations as still residing in mental health. As such, she viewed her training and subsequent work as providing her with the relevant experience she lacked and, at the time of my interview with her, had reached the conclusion that 'I won't be able to do the things that I've always wanted to be able to do in this kind of environment.' It is also significant to note that her family and partner were very unsupportive of her decision to become a probation officer, with Dalia commenting that her partner was someone who 'hates everything probation stands for.'⁸³

At 50 years old, Cathy informed me 'I'm doing the job I always wanted to do, or this kind of work. It's just taken me a long time to get there.' Her age was a major motivational factor, impelling her to 'fast track myself towards qualifying' in the sense that she achieved her aim of completing all aspects of the course in the shortest possible time.

Despite this, the job Cathy was doing when I interviewed her was not her ultimate goal:

To be quite honest I do not want to be a probation officer until I'm 65. I don't want to be doing this for the rest of my working life. I see it as a means to an end and I would like to go eventually to the Home Office and I would like to get more involved in policies.

Until she is able to move on, Cathy was, like other members of the sample, interested in understanding behaviour and was attracted to the work both by this and the challenges it posed.

There has to be a belief in working here and that it's possible to affect change and make a difference, not just to offenders, but the world in which we live. It's an intensely intriguing job. Why do people behave like this? How do we affect change?

⁸³ The tension generated by this and the impact it had on her will be addressed later.

She possessed a philosophy regarding the job which she outlined in the following terms, providing insight into her background, values and her habitus at the same time:

I have a strong sense of social injustice. I've always had it from an early age.....I just like working with people. Even at school I was endlessly fascinated by people. I've always wanted to work for a fairer, more just and civilised society. If you met my parents, you wouldn't think they supported those ideals but it crops up a lot in my mother's family. Her family were all in social services, reform and politics. They were involved with the Quakers and I believe in what they believe to some extent. I don't see myself as Elizabeth Fry, although she is one of my heroines. They were also involved in prison reform, the Howard League, which was Quaker inspired as well. I always fought for the underdog, even as a child. I sometimes thought that I was also the underdog.

The final sentence, intimating an affinity with those on the margins of society, is another common thread linking Cathy with other members of the sample.

I consider it appropriate to place Angela within this grouping, although the end to which probation training was the means is very unclear and, I suspect, not really thought through or fully understood by Angela herself. Having left school with 'A' levels, she recounted that she was never expected or encouraged to go to university. In any event, she informed me that none of her family had gone to university and 'I just wanted to get married and have children.' Her decision to train seems to have been triggered by disillusionment with her failing marriage and self appraisal of her life.

I realised that I spent 20, 25 years trying to be this woman like my mum and sort of expecting to have a husband that would look after me and stuff and never expected to work full time or have a career or anything. And then it all kind of changed. Now I'm having to look after myself and be independent and not rely on anyone else, which is fine. That's how it should be but I feel like women, it might be different for women now, but then we were really sort of playing this role which society put on us really, and with all that looking after my daughter and my partner and stuff, I ended up sort of forgetting who I was or what I ever wanted to do. So I never did ever go to university – I used to say I'd like to do that. I never learned to drive.... There's loads of things that I haven't done. I didn't even think of them as possibilities for me because I had this other role looking after these other people. Now I'm starting to see things in a different way. I can choose what I want to do with my life and you know, support myself. I don't have to look after people if I don't want to but it's

quite hard to go back and think 'oh, what do I want to do with my life now?'

Angela comes to the job with several years experience of working with homeless people in the private sector and her comments suggest that there was once an underlying commitment to working with disadvantaged people. Unfortunately, whatever satisfaction she may have derived from that appears to have been undermined by the attitude of her parents, who she stated were 'quite disgusted' by the idea. It subsequently emerged that Angela's wish for parental approval was another motivational factor in her decision to train:

They just thought who would want to work with smelly homeless people and they made me feel quite bad, even though I thought I was really doing something. And when this training came along and I told them about it, it was okay because they think probation is a professional job. So even though I may be working with the same people, because I'm doing it as a probation officer my parents are.....I think they're quite proud of me cos their daughter's a probation officer.....But I think there's a little bit of that in me, that kind of probably pushed me to do it, and keeps me doing it, because my parents would think it was OK.

I believe that Angela has some intellectual ambition, some identification with parental values, and some concern to work in a socially responsible way, but she is also internally conflicted. At the start of training her personal circumstances were in turmoil and she, too, acknowledged recognising something of herself in the unstable life of probation clients. She informed me that one of the reasons she enjoyed her previous work with homeless people was because 'I was really finding out about myself.' It may be that she also viewed probation training as a channel through which she would find a solution to her own problems and that achieving such an end was actually more of a motivational force than being a probation officer.

Professional Altruism

In my judgement, Sharon carried with her a very strong public service ethos, although she was also motivated by an element of self-interest (especially her wish 'to be a professional of some sort'). This was combined with a long term commitment to wanting to learn and develop in her role as a probation officer, which was only matched by Femi and Tom.

Sharon is of Afro-Caribbean origin and viewed her ethnicity as especially relevant because of her aim of wanting to establish herself as a role model to other Afro-Caribbeans. She comes from an extended family in which all the men are absent (Sharon's father lives in Jamaica) and all the women (including her grandmother, mother, aunt and sister) have been employed in 'caring' related roles such as nursing or social work ('that seems to be the norm in my family'), implying a gender dimension to her career choice which was not so evident in the interviews conducted with the rest of the sample. She also seemed to be suggesting an inevitability about the direction of her own occupational aspirations.

I've got to admit that my interest was initially social work and that started when I was at university, and I started to do volunteer work with children who were not achieving their potential at school.

Later, Sharon worked in a voluntary capacity at a women's refuge before obtaining paid employment as a Learning Support Assistant. Her family expected her to become a teacher or social worker and she has stated herself that this was where her initial interest lay. In trying to make up her mind, she veered backwards and forwards between the two until the headteacher at the school where she worked suggested she should explore probation. Based on what she found out at that stage, she came to perceive probation officers as possessing far greater authority and power than teachers and social workers to bring about change in those they supervised, and also believed that the role offered more opportunity for empowerment and advocacy on behalf of their clientele. Together, these factors proved to be decisive influences.

The process of completing the application to train appeared to have helped confirm her belief in her aptitude for the job:

We had to send back a thing where we state the skills that we have and the experiences that we've had and, as I did the application, I thought, yeah, these are the things they're looking for, I've actually got these skills. So I applied and.....got it (laughs). But when I started the training I really had no idea what probation was about. I'd never met a probation officer, never been on probation. I'd never been in court, never been to a prison. I'd never really had any contact with the criminal justice system, so it was all completely new to me and I really was like a sponge. I

wanted to know and experience as much as possible and that was the approach I took.

Her motivation was further enhanced by the prestige she and her family seemed to attach to the role of probation officer. Referring to her family she stated:

For them, being a probation officer is up there with being in court as a lawyer or as a judge you know. It's just like really strict and the law stands and so on, and I just leave them with that.....We have an important job, you know.

The ethos of Tom's family background connects him to Sharon and Cathy. On the other hand, as the only other male taking part in this stage of the study, I regarded Tom as being also a useful comparator to Dan. By contrast, he is from a professional, middle class background, having a father who is an academic and a mother who is a psychologist (as well as, incidentally, a grandfather who was a prison psychologist).

Dan looked exclusively at probation, where as Tom considered either social work or the police as other potential career options. In pondering the reason for these choices, Tom joked at first that it was 'down to genetics' before adding:

I think there's a family tradition going on. I think my mum and dad have got a kind of public service outlook and I think that's probably carried through to me quite strongly.

In trying to discuss what this actually meant for him and how it influenced him towards probation, Tom seemed hesitant and appeared to be having difficulty articulating his attraction to or interest in the job. I learned from him that it was a world he was familiar with through his father's work and this seems to have helped him to feel more confident and secure in his decision to apply. Equally, he spoke of knowing a number of police officers. Despite the obvious link between police and probation work, he did not mention a fascination with offenders or crime and gave me to understand that the possession of a public service ethos was regarded by him as sufficient justification for the choices he made.

Nonetheless, I felt that Tom was holding something back and believe that the problem he was having with his explanation was due to his reticence to admit to a more instrumental motive. He subsequently felt able to acknowledge that what he considered to be the over-riding factor bringing him into probation was his need for a job and, what it really came down to was the fact that 'The job offer was there and there weren't many other things around.'

Despite his father's connection with probation work⁸⁴, Tom was not entirely certain what the job entailed ('I'd never met a probation officer'), nor was he completely sold on it as a career. He informed me that he used the assessment centre as a means of gaining more knowledge about the job and expressed the belief that 'the more I understood what was expected of me, the more attractive it became.' By the time he finally learned he had been accepted for training, he was feeling more confident that the job was right for him.

I knew about the welfare aspect and about helping people and also about protecting the public. And I did understand that there was a tension between the two and that interested me, along with the front line aspects of the work.

Tom was keen to emphasise that financial rewards were of no consequence to him. At the same time, in keeping with other subjects, he asserted the significance of helping.

It's about helping. I don't think there's anyone in the Probation Service who's motivated by their salary. Well, it keeps you coming into the office but that's not what it's about.

Tom shares a place with Sharon under the heading of 'Professional Altruism' because they gave expression to the notion of public service in a more head on, self confident way. However, it is fair to say, this was really a common value that was held by all subjects to some degree.

Conclusion

In this section I have tried to capture something of the way in which my research subjects came to enter the Probation Service. For each of them, their

⁸⁴ It may be recalled that he teaches law on a probation qualifying course.

career path was by no means straight forward and, for everyone in the study, it involved a degree of tentativeness, uncertainty and a state of not really knowing the precise nature of the field they were coming into. The latter issue is, perhaps, not that surprising in view of the low profile of the service and the ambiguity surrounding its purpose.

The categories and characteristics that have emerged directly from the individual narratives of my subjects denote crucial aspects of their motivation and, although I have discussed specific individuals in relation to certain characteristics, elements of each characteristic are shared to a greater or lesser extent across the whole group⁸⁵. With this in mind, I was drawn to the conclusion that there was no case where one single attribute could be considered to account fully for a subject's motivation. I was also struck by the fact that in no instance could a sense of calling, exclusively to probation work, be identified.

Whilst some subjects were primarily motivated by the prospect of obtaining a degree and the potential opportunities offered by the job for material or professional advancement, rather than an affinity specifically with probation work, there were others who were carried along principally by values and beliefs associated with what might be regarded as the more traditional ethos of probation practice. A commitment to public service, underpinned by a solid sense of social justice and reparative desires to help, change and support those on the margins of society was strongly evident; as well as some identification with offenders, an interest in deviance and recognition that more powerful or higher status roles were beyond their capacity for attainment or antipathetic to their values and moral orientation.

It is especially interesting to note that what, at first sight, appeared to suggest a random or contingent choice of career on the part of the research sample had, in effect, underlying patterns of meaning. It is my assertion that all the characteristic factors that have emerged provide evidence of the underlying

⁸⁵ This links to Wittgenstein's (1953/2009) notion of family resemblances, whereby he states that family members are alike because they each possess a number of overlapping characteristics and attributes. Whereas members of other families have quite different distributions.

dispositions that constitute the habitus of the subjects. These dispositions, which have been internalised through the process of socialisation, shape their perceptions and attitudes and, ultimately, influence their actions and motivation.

Within this context, it is striking that none of my sample come across as professional high flyers with aspirations to attain careers in professions that have a more prominent public profile or elevated status. Judges and barristers, for example, are off their aspirational scale. Nonetheless, they are committed to being in professional work with its promise of a measure of autonomy and control over what they do, together with an element of challenge and variety in the job and the potential for them to be able to make some real use of their education.

Although my primary source is data drawn from individuals, I feel it is important to state at this stage that this study is not about the individual members of the sample, per se, but about how these individuals can be used to explore the shape and texture of what constitutes the field of probation today. Thus, my aim is to continue to present evidence with the intention of being able to generate a description of the Service seen from a particular point of view. I hope that by taking this approach it will be possible for the individual data to contribute to an understanding of a collective situation.

Chapter 9

The Making or Breaking of Probation Officers

Introduction

My last chapter was concerned primarily with identifying the motivation of research participants to train as probation officers. Thus, the focus was on what brought them into the job. In this chapter I plan to examine their training and post qualifying experiences. That is, I intend to highlight my subject's account of what they encountered in the probation field. In effect, this has allowed me to continue to structure my findings in accordance with a Bourdieusian framework.

In so far as the motivation of the sample may be said to correspond to sample member's habitus of origin, their subsequent experience of the probation service, firstly as trainees and then as newly qualified probation officers, is very much linked to the habitus of the service. To put it another way, applying a Bourdieusian approach to my analysis has enabled me to explore what habitus newcomers bring to the field of probation, what field of practice they encounter within the service and, perhaps most importantly, the dynamic nature of this interaction and the outcome to which it leads.

A key purpose of the training process is to equip trainees with the cultural and professional capital needed to work in the field of probation. Within this context, I am using the notion of capital to mean an investment in further education, as well as in a career, in order to develop knowledge and competence. It may also entail the inculcation or consolidation of values which are another aspect of cultural capital. The successful completion of this process is likely to involve some adaptation of an individual's personal habitus.

The dispositions which constitute the habitus, influence newcomer's perception of the probation field which together generate the 'feel for the game' that is central to sustaining commitment and to fashioning the way in which the game is played. As a consequence, a combination of individual habitus and experience of the field is the key to understanding differences in practice and

behaviour, as well as to how well newcomers adjust to the role of either trainee or qualified probation officer. This in turn has implications for the process of professional socialization and for the development of professional identity.

Given that the method of sample selection intentionally involved the inclusion of participants who had already revealed differing levels of satisfaction and contentment, a disparity in their perceived experiences was anticipated. My interest, however, was in the factors and circumstances that had produced these differences and in what they revealed about the field.

In interview some sample members described a positive experience of training and a negative experience after they qualified. For others, the positive and negative experiences were reversed. Significantly, no one described consistently positive perceptions of both their experiences in training and post qualifying. This was in spite of high ratings awarded in the survey. On the other hand, one participant described consistently negative experiences across both domains and this was reflected in their low survey ratings.

In this chapter I plan to focus initially on outlining the variety of contrasting experiences that were represented amongst the sample. I then distinguish between what I have termed non-facilitating and facilitating environments as a means of more fully understanding these contrasts and their impact.

Contrasting Experiences

Kirsty talking about her experience of training:

During training there was a lot of negativity amongst the cohort. A lot of the time I think it was to do with what the PDAs⁸⁶ were like and it really did seem to make or break people from the very start. People that joined and didn't have PDAs or did not have very useful PDAs were low at the start and they stayed low. Where as those of us who had excellent PDAs, we just kind of sailed through. It wasn't that easy but it was definitely made a lot easier and it was a lot more fulfilling.

⁸⁶ Practice Development Assessors

Femi describing her work environment post-qualifying:

It's like a family, it's fantastic. My colleagues are a strength really. They keep me going. I think I get up in the morning and come to work because of my colleagues. I know that sounds sad (laughs). It's a good place to work. We support each other. We work as a team and that's what I like about this office. If you need help, if you need support, there's a place you can go.

Becoming a probation officer and the development of professional identity is a transitional process which evolves over a time period that cannot be specifically defined. It involves linking dispositions and past experiences, aspirations and value commitments with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the understanding of task and responsibilities and organisational factors which include the working environment.

I have introduced this section with the selected comments from Kirsty and Femi as they help to highlight the important contribution of the practice supervisor and the culture of the team to which newly qualified officers are appointed in helping to achieve successful transition and occupational socialization. It will be recalled that Kirsty knew nothing about the Probation Service prior to deciding to apply to train as a probation officer and was actively pursuing an application to the police at the same time. However, during her period as a trainee, she was able to discover a commitment to the work owing to the positive experience of her practice placement and her confirmatory perception of the training in general:

I learned so much in those two years. It was really hard work in all different ways because you had the academic side of things and then you had the NVQ⁸⁷ and then you also had learning a whole new job; but I found it all really, really useful.....I'm glad I made the decision to become a probation officer.

Conversely, Kirsty observed that the commitment of some of her fellow students was totally undermined by their poor placement experience, contributing to their decision to drop out of training.

⁸⁷ National Vocational Qualification

Femi recalled that, literally from the commencement of training, she was in no doubt she had made the right career choice:

I loved it from the first day I went and we had this meeting in a large room with all the other trainees. I was so excited and I went 'wow' I'm going to work for probation, this is great.

In Femi's case, her pre-existing enthusiasm and commitment was able to be sustained throughout training and was later reinforced by her experience of the team she joined upon qualifying. Nonetheless, what appeared to be a successful conclusion was achieved despite her considering that 'the PDA experience was not very good.' It subsequently emerged that this last comment was something of an understatement given that, rather incredibly, she had five changes of PDA and, at one stage, no one at all. Looking back on this period, she stated:

I started off with a very good PDA and, I always say this, that first PDA gave me a really good grounding. I don't think I would have survived if I didn't have the first six months with that particular PDA. If you have a good beginning like that it goes a long way to making you eventually who you become.

The significance and implications of the supervisor/trainee relationship was given further emphasis by Cheryl who viewed it as the main reason for course attrition. She and Femi were placed together as trainees and so shared the same PDA experience. However, Cheryl's perception of that time was far more critical, feeling that her survival had nothing to do with the influence of their first PDA but due to mutual support she and Femi gave to each other: 'She's a large part of the reason why I qualified.' This has left Cheryl with a lasting sense of anger and bitterness towards the organisation which comes through in this statement about the disparities that trainees faced:

People don't have the same experiences as trainees or as probation officers. It's very much pot luck where you get placed in terms of offices, SPOs and PDAs. PDAs are your first port of contact as a TPO and there was such a huge variety, a huge disparity in everything..... Some were allowed to hold much higher caseloads than others, some were allowed to work on higher risk cases than others, some were very much more inducted rather than just thrown into the work. For some there was a structure about it and others were just left to get on with it. So I think

there were a wide variety of experiences that people had and some left because of that.

The views expressed concerning the variations in the performance of the practice assessor, their differing expectations and the extent to which they were consistently available to trainees, all point to the need for much greater standardisation of their role and requirements.

Experiences in Non-Facilitating Environments

Although those who dropped out early in training were lost entirely to this study, two members of my sample (Angela and Dalia) completed their training but resigned from their jobs at the start of their second year as qualified probation officers and shortly after I interviewed them. For this reason, they are both of special interest.⁸⁸

Angela made her plans to leave clear to me from the outset, speaking openly about her reasons for applying for secondment as a probation officer to a youth offending team in a small county. This was viewed by her as an interim position that she hoped would provide her with some space from where she could review whether or not being a probation officer was right for her. Dalia was less explicit, although her dissatisfaction with the job became very apparent as the single interview I had with her progressed. I later learned, when I tried to contact her again to arrange a case discussion, that she had very suddenly resigned and left probation work. It was not known whether she had moved to another job.

Dalia described starting out as a trainee with a sense of gratitude for the opportunity afforded to her by the Probation Service and seemingly highly motivated to develop and ingest the learning provided: 'I was an entirely blank

⁸⁸ In examining their experiences it is relevant to mention that when Angela was invited to take part in the semi-structured interview it was on the basis of the low scores given by her to the survey questions. Having conducted the survey by telephone, I was aware of her feelings and so I was expecting dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Dalia was selected because, when the ratings were collated, she appeared to represent a medium level of satisfaction. There was, therefore, a discrepancy with regards to Dalia which surprised me when I came to interview her. This casts some doubt on the reliability of the answers people give to survey questionnaires in general and highlights the very different picture that can emerge when one begins to explore beneath the surface.

slate and they fed me and fed me and fed me.’ She also reported having a good experience of training:

Training was interesting. I didn't find it particularly difficult, I enjoyed my training. I loved the academic side of it; I loved the practice side of it as well. It was new to me so I really enjoyed the learning and discovering everything about the job and working with offenders. It was a good two years. There was a great deal of support available and I had a good relationship with my PDA as well as with others in the same office.

Upon qualifying, there was every indication that training had fulfilled its function, with Dalia having acquired capital relevant to the field. The job as she now understood it seemed right to her and appeared to fit comfortably with her sense of public service. Thus, her experience of training had been able to create in her a positive orientation towards the Service where, previously, there had been ambivalence and uncertainty. As such, she conveyed the impression of having approached her first post as a qualified probation officer feeling optimistic and enabled. She informed me ‘I wanted to be a good probation officer’ thereby confirming that the potential for both successful occupational socialization and the establishment of career habitus were present, ready to be developed.

Instead, as Dalia related her story, I learned how her optimism was rapidly undermined and replaced by disillusionment and a very negative perception of her role:

How I saw the job when I was training is very different from how I see the job now. I'm so consumed with report writing that sometimes I feel like I do not have the energy to give time to offenders to do anything with them. Somebody might come in and I end up looking at them and thinking 'Oh God I need to finish that report.' So my thinking is to get them out of here as quickly as I can so I can give time to the report; but I just see the job as reports and reports and more reports and nothing else..... I just think I came into the job wanting to work with offenders on a one to one. Yes, the report writing is part of that but it doesn't stop there. When you're writing a report and you make proposals, a lot of the proposals that we make are for community penalties. So let's work with those people, let's work with them to reduce the risk of reoffending but, it's almost like we're just writing reports and then they come here, and when they come here we have no time for them. So it's not very satisfying on a personal level because you start thinking 'I don't really care about you as long as the reports are done.'

I want the job to be manageable and I want the job to be less stressful and I would love to be able to offer the offenders the time they need.....I try not to take the work home but I am so tired at times that I don't have a life outside this job and that bit of it I don't like at all. All my work is done at the moment, everything's up to date but the reason everything's up to date is because I do a lot more than I should in terms of the time. That's the only way I can do what's expected of me. But how long I can keep that up I don't know.

These extracts capture Dalia's profound sense of disappointment and allude to the way in which her expectations, derived partly from the protection and support afforded to her during training, were confounded by the reality of the particular environment she encountered as a newly qualified probation officer. Although striving to meet the demands of the job and to prove her competence in this early stage of her career, it is apparent that she considered the effort she was making to be unsustainable. She was unable to do the type of work she wanted to do and, whilst she told me that she felt some sense of job satisfaction from the praise received from sentencers concerning the high quality of her reports, this was insufficient to compensate for what she perceived as the endless drudgery of the report writing task.

Dalia's narrative provides some intimation as to why she was lost to the service so quickly. In retrospect, it is a pity that I was unable to interview Dalia again as there are many more questions I would like to have asked. The same applies, of course, to other participants in the research. As it is, in Dalia's case, I am left with some degree of speculation rather than definite known facts. Nevertheless, further exploration of her interview transcript revealed additional clues.

In particular, what comes across is no sense of belonging or assimilation, in an office where colleagues are viewed by Dalia as being too self-centred and pre-occupied with their own work related pressures to be able to show much interest in or support for others. The pervasive culture which she, too, began to share was summed up by her in the following terms: 'It's like I have to put myself first, I have to protect myself before I think of anybody else.' It may be that this statement also provides the strongest explanation for her departure.

Dalia described professional supervision in her first post qualifying year as being 'almost non-existent' and, although this had changed recently with the arrival of a new line manager, she complained that meetings were dominated by quantitative matters linked to the achievement of targets at the expense of her professional development. According to Dalia, no additional on the job learning had taken place since she completed her training, leading her to try to develop herself by paying for and attending outside courses in her own time, and reading at home 'to avoid becoming brain dead.' This further reinforced her feeling that she was 'really on my own.'

There seemed to be an expectation that the moment your title changes from trainee to qualified probation officer you know it all. You stand alone and you can do it all and that's very difficult to deal with in the first few months.

At the same time, Dalia was concerned to see experienced colleagues demoralised and lacking in enthusiasm for the job which seemed to contribute to her own despair:

There's a lot of people who have obviously been in the job for many years who are also unhappy and that worries me. I don't want to be their age and be so unhappy about my job. Surely there must be something more to life?

This is not to suggest that Dalia's view of the field of probation was entirely negative. In fact she very lucidly outlined what she saw as a split between two types of probation officers – those who really cared about the work they did with offenders and those who were going through the motions:

Some people are very passionate about what they do and are here because they love the job and enjoy what they do and can see a purpose to it. Whereas for others it's a case of as long as the offender comes in that's good enough, and they don't care about what they might actually do with them.

Dalia spoke of finding the former type inspiring, but it was the attitude of the latter type that she felt dominated the immediate field in which she was located. Whilst she aspired to be like the former and to do good quality work with

offenders, she considered that her efforts were being undermined by workload pressures which left her fearful that she would become like the latter⁸⁹.

The disruption of constant change was another factor that led Dalia to conclude that 'I wouldn't recommend anyone to come into the job.' However, an additional tension which may have influenced her decision to leave was created by the views of her partner, with her revealing:

He disagrees with everything probation stands for. He thinks we're a waste of money and we keep offenders out of prison when we should be punishing them.

As a consequence, she referred to him as 'not someone I could call a source of support when I say I'm really stressed at work and I'm having a bad day.' She also described her parents as initially surprised and questioning of her choice of career ('Why do you want to work with people like that?') and although they were more supportive than her partner, she reported that they had become increasingly concerned about the time she was devoting to the job and what they deemed its damaging effect at a personal level.

With regards to this last point, it would seem that Dalia's aspirations, whatever their origins, were running contrary to the wishes of the people to whom she is closest. This raises a number of other queries. For example, retrospectively, I cannot help but wonder whether her partner's opposition, and her parent's less than warm reaction, was something Dalia had anticipated and took into consideration when she applied to train. Would they have responded in the same way had she chosen the mental health field from the outset? Or might it

⁸⁹ In thinking about Dalia's observation of the way her colleagues operate, I feel it is relevant to comment that the polarity of care and control, with the perceived shift to the latter, is sometimes seen as the main division of purpose within the Probation Service. What Dalia draws attention to is another component which is in principle distinct, namely that of understanding based on narratives and cases, and understanding based on abstract principles and rules. Although a rule based approach is more likely to be coercive in emphasis, it is not quite the same as using control for the purpose of establishing professional boundaries and recognising when enforcement may be therapeutically in the interests of the offender as well as being in the interests of public protection. In the circumstances in which this probation officer found herself, it was the method of work which she objected to, not whether she was constrained to be tough or not.

be that she was trying to escape their attitudes through her choice of career and that there remains a force, unknown to me, driving her actions?

Ultimately, what one is left with is the recognition that there are elements in Dalia's personal circumstances, associated with her family of origin and her partner, that are clearly working against probation as a source of value. Consequently, when she needed support in her chosen career field, she found it absent. This resulted in her facing what is effectively a double negative – negative values surrounding her at home and nothing much in the way of relationships, either with her colleagues or with the cases she supervised, to sustain her commitment at work. The combination of these factors would seem to have subsequently defeated her original intention.

As stated earlier, the reasons underpinning Angela's decision to leave were more evident by comparison. She started her training with a habitus that was weakly disposed to probation work and with motives that were largely instrumental. I believe that there was once an underlying commitment to work with the disadvantaged, having several years experience of working with the homeless in the voluntary sector, but this had since evaporated. In the previous chapter I noted that becoming a probation officer was, for her, secondary to obtaining a degree. Her self doubt and ambivalence is exemplified in the following statement:

When I applied to be a trainee I didn't expect to get accepted on the training and I didn't really know what probation officers did. I know it sounds mad because I remember being asked that question at the Assessment Centre and I must have answered the question well enough to get through. But I came out and I thought you're applying to do something and you don't really know what it is.

Angela admitted that from the start of training 'I always had this idea that I'm going to do something else.' She came across as someone who was more pre-occupied with achieving something by becoming a professional, than with the nature of the work or the intrinsic values of the chosen profession.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ In my opinion, there is reason to suppose that having joined the Service for mainly instrumental motives, it is actually harder for her to achieve her instrumental goals as, in the absence of strong value commitment, she has less capacity to stick at the work and fully engage with it. One can make an analogy between Angela's position and people who want to

Moreover, Angela's experience of training seemed to do nothing to affect a positive change in her lack of self confidence or her general sense of uncertainty about the job. Her presentation in interview suggested a pervasive and, at times, overwhelming sense of anxiety which, in relation to work, had continued unabated owing to the rather hollow and unsupportive environments she encountered both in training and since qualifying.

Angela described her practice supervisor, during training, as having been frequently absent and, as a consequence, she recalled receiving little formal professional supervision. She felt that this affected her ability to develop work-related skills which, in turn, undermined her confidence to do the job.

I really wanted to know the right way to do everything and I felt that in my training I didn't learn the right way. It really felt like finding my way in a fog a lot of the time. It was quite stressful because of this not knowing if we were doing anything right.....When I came to the end of the two years I couldn't believe that I'd been training two years to do a job. I still felt that I didn't know what I was doing. I couldn't believe that. It seemed like something must be wrong because in all the other jobs I've ever done, after two years I'd have had a pretty good idea of how to deal with most things that came up and that wasn't the case here.

The fact that she qualified as a probation officer suggests either an assessment system that failed to sift out those who are not good enough, a practice supervisor who covered up for their own shortcomings by passing their trainees irrespective of their level of competence, or the possibility that Angela was able to demonstrate far greater competence than she believes she possesses. Whatever the situation, she felt frightened and ill-equipped for the role and, having been appointed to an office where the manager expected a fully functioning member of the team, she quickly became incapacitated by stress. This next interview segment captures the essence of her anxiety, which goes beyond the task and the workload.⁹¹

be doctors, teachers or lawyers in part because these seem like good professions to have but, who then find, they do not like medicine, or children, or the law. In this respect, it is best for the self when one's occupation is valued as a projection of the primary object, rather than being viewed purely in instrumental terms. That is to say, there needs to be an attachment to what probation stands for, this issue forming a major part of Angela's struggle.

⁹¹ It is relevant to mention that the completion of training coincided with Angela's decision to separate from her partner.

I think I had a bit of a crisis when I finished the training because I got ill and it wasn't just about work. It was a bit also about having a sort of professional job. I had always looked up to people that had professional jobs like nurses and doctors and social workers and probation officers, and I just thought they know about everything. Do you know what I mean? They understand the world and life and everything, and they're not like me and all of a sudden I was one and I thought I can't be one because I don't know what's going on, I don't understand. And I had this big crisis about not being able to do the job and that somehow I'd slipped through and that it must have been a mistake 'cos I don't know what I'm doing and I can't work with people and have them think that I've got all the answers, because I know that I haven't and so I had a bit of a problem with that.

The extract above provides confirmation of the terrible attack going on inside. It also shows that the general idea of having a profession can have a value base, as well as being valued as a source of status and security. Angela has the idea that what it means to be a professional is to have some field of knowledge and capacity, suggesting an internalisation of the public meaning of having a profession. She then discovers that she is in a false position, since she does not feel she has this mastery.

The internal conflict felt by Angela is compounded by the fragility of her value orientation, her location in an office where she felt afraid to seek help or advice from colleagues because 'they're so busy' and having a manager, who like her practice supervisor, is regarded by her as unavailable. This has meant that there has been no opportunity for her to develop her skills, confidence or commitment.

Initially, Angela also seemed unable to recognise or describe what she did with the cases she had responsibility for supervising.

I don't really have a particular way of working with people. I suppose I probably must use some kind of techniques when I'm working with people but I never think what they are..... I just sort of play it by ear. And some of that comes from being so busy all the time. There just isn't the time to sit down and plan this is what I'm going to do with this person this week.

According to Angela, 'work took over and I lost some of my personal life' and the demands of the job were, for her, so intense that there was 'no time to think; no time to plan.' Having been advised to reduce her working week to four days,

she still felt weighed down by her workload. Leaving her current post was therefore part of an attempt to re-establish some control and 'balance things.'

Sometimes I go home and I think it's a really unusual job to do. You know to be able to sit and talk to people and maybe be a positive influence on their life or whatever. It's quite a privileged thing to do and so I think I'm quite lucky to be able to do that. But then sometimes I go home and I just think it's all pointless. Why doesn't the government just get rid of it? It's not achieving anything and I think that when I'm having the negative thoughts it's because I know I haven't had time to do things properly and you know, I think that if there was more time I might feel different..... The number of times I've said I hate this job I'm leaving. Or, you know, I've had several days when the only way I've been able to force myself to come in is to say that I can leave at any point in the day. I can walk out and I never have to come back ever again. And I have been quite wary saying that I would want to make it my career because it makes it easier to walk away from it. It's like a self defence thing, I'm not going to open myself up to being put through all this stress. I still feel that I've been doing it for a short enough time and that I can walk away from it and do something else and I like that.

Angela was overwhelmed by the work, seemed to lack inner resources, was uncontained and, based on my interviews and observation of her, operated in chaos. In fact, whether she had the capacity to do the job was, at the conclusion of the semi-structured interview, very unclear. She did not identify with the role of probation officer and actually seemed to be struggling with any sense of identity, which may also have been linked to the separation from her partner and what was going on in her personal life. In particular, she had not yet developed a 'feel for the game' and by moving to another job, she was aiming to test out whether she could function better in what she hoped would be a less pressurised and more supportive environment.

One might say that the dissonant factors in Angela's case come, not from schisms with the culture of the Service but, rather, from personal factors which make it difficult for her to succeed in this work. She was pre-occupied with a fundamental question: 'What do I want to do with my life now?' She spoke of enjoying the independence she had now gained but commented that the absence of support in her personal life made the job much harder. Whether the close knit team promised by the new job will help to contain her and enable her to develop some sense of commitment sufficient to overcome the personal issues remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, what happened to Dalia and Angela emphasises the critical importance of professional supervision in facilitating the development of probation staff and providing containment. To enable them to stay, both subjects needed something to support them not only in their thinking but also in their emotional relationship to their work, with its range of tasks and burdens.

In my view, Kirsty's post-qualifying experience is also pertinent to this discussion as she too came close to breaking point. However, not only was she able to find a niche within the Service that seemed to fit her aspirations but, despite evidence of some burgeoning pessimism, she also declared to me 'When people ask me what I do I love saying I'm a probation officer and I love explaining to them exactly what that means' thereby seeming to demonstrate the possession of strong occupational identity.

During interview, Kirsty spoke of feeling 'spoilt' as a trainee because of the high level of support she received, but described herself as 'a wreck' soon after qualifying owing to the volume of work she was allocated. Although there are parallels between the experiences of Kirsty and Dalia, there are also features of Kirsty's situation which make it significantly different and which may explain why it turned out differently.

Bolstered by encouragement from colleagues who were worried about her, Kirsty was able to address the problem of her high workload with her line manager. The latter subsequently responded sympathetically by temporarily reducing the number of court reports she was required to write. When pressures began to build up again a few months later, she seems to have felt able to deal with it better owing to the camaraderie within the office and her sense that 'everyone was struggling and not just me because I was new.' She also presented a picture of a highly supportive culture amongst the front line staff within her office which was missing for Dalia:

I think that there's so much support around amongst the probation officers. There isn't a massive amount from the seniors or any level higher than that, but amongst the probation officers there's a bit of a clan attitude. We all sort of stick together and if you know that somebody's not doing very well or somebody's feeling low or somebody's having

*difficulty coping, I always got the impression that everybody would be willing to help out.*⁹²

Nonetheless, according to Kirsty, by the end of her first year the job had once again become 'completely out of control' in terms of the workload, whilst her efforts to detach herself from the emotional demands of her cases were beginning to fail. Again, unlike Dalia, having an understanding partner and parents with whom she felt able to share her experiences compensated for what she termed 'rubbish supervision' from her line manager, but taking the opportunity to move to a specialist court report writing post, based at court, seemed to be the main means by which she was able to survive.

At the time of my interview with her, Kirsty had been in her new role for just a few weeks. In discussing her reasons for the change from a more generic style of work it was apparent that it had been a calculated decision designed to protect herself from the pressures of the job and to allow herself some space to focus on the completion of her Masters degree in criminology and to consider her next step. She acknowledged that, in her perception, the new job was 'not real probation work' and that it was 'boring and unchallenging' but she viewed it as offering respite for a finite period.

I think that the Service is completely overrun with work. It's just far too much and there's not enough people, not enough healthy people to be able to do it – it's making an awful lot of people ill. I think it's just something I'm very wary of and I don't want to get into that situation myself and I'll protect myself from it and if it ever comes to the point where I think the Service is not looking after me enough, I don't have any qualms about leaving it.

During training, Kirsty developed expectations of the job which reinforced her underlying dispositions and her propensity towards probation work. Upon qualifying she found herself in a situation in which she realised her expectations would not be met and her sense of disappointment echoed a comment made by Angela about whether the job still had purpose:

⁹² I believe that this is a feature of a number of professions where individuals find themselves under stress, such as in the police force, resulting in a need for lateral support structures to sustain them. It is the basis of military training, to create solidarity at the level of the face to face group who may have to survive together. The experiences described here confirm its importance to the field of probation.

It doesn't always feel like we're helping people which is probably what I'd really like to be doing.....I do sometimes question what is the point. Sometimes when somebody comes along and they've got a long list of problems there's not actually a great deal we can do to help them because we don't have the resources and we don't ever have the time either. So it's like just kind of saying, well you turned up for your appointment and that's all we care about, so we can tick a box which is frustrating.

Significantly, instead of leaving, Kirsty's experience of the field resulted in her adapting her habitus, with her rationale for the actions and decisions that followed being influenced by a combination of her habitus and the demands of the field. In interview with me, she demonstrated her capacity to reframe the job in a positive light and in a way which reflected and supported her habitus.

It's quite a good place for me to be for a while because you're actually at the coal face. It's where the sentences are made and where everybody has to come through before they go off to other places. I hope it will enable me to improve my report writing and that I will be able to help the judges and the offenders through my reports.

Thus, in her new role Kirsty sees report writing as having real value, feeling that it enables her to provide the help that was missing from the work she was doing in the immediate aftermath of qualifying. Even so, I was left wondering if the pride she stated she still felt in becoming a probation officer was also part of her survival strategy designed to defend against her doubts about probation being the career she wanted. Certainly, there seemed to be a contradiction between saying 'I do like my job' and her experiences in the generic team where she described a sense of panic, a lack of job satisfaction and a belief that her line managers were not interested in helping her to develop professionally or in finding out her aspirations ('No one ever asked me what I wanted to do').

At the conclusion of the interview Kirsty revealed her plans to resign and 'go travelling' once she had completed her MA, thereby confirming that she was not yet ready to make a commitment to the field of probation. She thought she might return later to the service, but in a different part of the country. In the

meantime though, the fact that her current role met her needs and she was able to imbue it with meaning was sufficient to enable her to stay.⁹³

Cathy, Ramona and Dan also recounted negative post qualifying experiences but, with regards to each of these participants, factors, which were principally of a dispositional nature, seemed to result in an acceptance of or a willingness to put up with the non-facilitative environments they were encountering when I interviewed them. Certainly, for Cathy and Ramona, giving up their job was not considered to be a viable option.

Cathy had recently moved to a team in a different location. She described her previous office as dark, depressing, understaffed and with high levels of sickness. The affects of this were summed up by her in the phrase 'unbalanced teams and unbalanced people' and she blamed what she termed 'poor, oppressive management' for destroying 'team spirit' in the pursuit of targets:

I think it's a reflection of the times we live in. We've become a target obsessed culture to the point of forgetting that we're human beings who have to produce those targets. There's also been continual upheaval. Nothing is allowed to get embedded. Nothing is allowed to work properly before someone comes along and tinkers with it.

Cathy informed me that she had joined the first team with three other newly qualified officers, but she was now the only one still working for the service. Indeed, at the point of changing offices, she had become 'one of the most experienced' owing to the high turnover of staff. According to her, the volume of work compelled her to work long hours. She felt unsupported, stating 'There's no one to back you up or hold your hand' and she expressed the view, 'If you can survive there, you can survive anywhere.'

It subsequently emerged that in making a move, Cathy had effectively exchanged one depressed, stressed and demoralised team for another. She

⁹³ It may be that Kirsty will remain interested in the Criminal Justice System and, through her MA, learn a greater understanding of its functioning. Alternatively, she may come to the conclusion that face to face work with offenders is not what she wants - a decision that should not necessarily be regarded as a total failure.

spoke of feeling swamped by her workload, often thinking about it at home, and was clearly very anxious:

There's so much to do. I've been asked to take in and soak up so much. There's no time to process anything. No time to stop and think what I'm basing my decisions on. I'm seeing very highly dangerous offenders and I haven't had time to read the files. I can't even get their names right.

Cathy expressed the belief that the service was very poor in developing skills. She viewed managers as lacking experience both in management and professional practice, and she accused them of being disempowering and of failing to recognise the impact of constant change. She spoke of the need for space to think and of the need to be able to spend more time with offenders, echoing a comment made by Dalia:

Instead I'm watching the clock and saying 'please don't present me with problems because there is no time to deal with them.'

In Cathy's perception she, realistically, had nowhere else to go, owing to her age (it should be remembered that she is 50 years old). She considered that those from her cohort who had left the service had other options because they were much younger. She believed her life experience kept her grounded ('I'm not happy with what happens but I deal with it differently') and, although she angrily complained about 'impossible management expectations', the fact that she lacked time and resources to do the job properly and regarded bureaucracy and form-filling as additional obstacles to getting the job done, she somewhat incongruously told me, 'I love the variety and I love what I do.....It's a challenge, it's interesting, it's an intensely intriguing job.' The inconsistency of this statement seemed to be compounded by the disclosure of 'my plan' which was to try to become a manager as soon as possible. Although, in further exploring her aims, it became clear that she saw management as a stepping stone to a position of influence from where she hoped she could reverse the trends that met her disapproval.

Ramona viewed her position as rather more insoluble due to her health (she has Multiple Sclerosis). According to her, 'I've no choice.....Who's going to employ me with my illness?' Of all the subjects she was, perhaps, the most

difficult to get beneath the surface and I sometimes found it hard to determine what was being said honestly and what was being said for bravado and effect. She spoke of the need to remain buoyant and not give into her illness believing 'I must think positively to survive.' She maintained that she thrived under pressure but added that she needed to be careful because MS was stress related.

In the face of growing workload demands, Ramona graphically informed me 'I can't breathe. I feel like I'm suffocating. I'm slowly drowning.' She stated that she spent more than the designated hours at work in an effort to complete allocated tasks and in order to prove she could do the job despite her illness. Yet she also told me 'I don't know what I'm doing' and felt that she somehow qualified by mistake:

I sometimes feel I'm gonna wake up and someone is gonna say 'we've had the joke now, you're not really a probation officer'.....May be I blagged my way. That's what I feel like sometimes, that I blagged my way to this position.

Ramona continued to regard herself as 'very inexperienced' and considered that, since qualifying, she had not received sufficient support or additional training to help her to develop. She explained that her illness caused her to be office bound and, as a consequence, she needed to rely on colleagues to assist her with some aspects of the work such as undertaking home visits on her behalf. She was, therefore, worried that she was adding to their pressure, believing that the support she received from colleagues was being given reluctantly:

Everyone's so busy and in their own little corner, doing their own thing cos they've all got their own stresses and worries.

Viewing her line manager as equally stressed, she described senior management as 'malicious and bullying' in their efforts to gain compliance with performance targets, adding:

The way they treat staff, it's disgusting, quite disgusting.....As a service it stinks.

In her opinion, there was no trust between front line staff and senior management, especially since a well-publicised inquiry into a serious offence committed by an offender subject to supervision resulted in several colleagues being suspended:

If it all goes wrong, we're not going to have support from the top.

According to Ramona, she was being forced to work at a superficial level, because there was not enough time to do anything more. This added to her fears and general sense of insecurity, although she claimed that more of her cases reached successful outcomes than those of her colleagues. Her measure for this was that offenders she had supervised had managed to complete their orders without reoffending, 'So I must be doing something right.' On the other hand, she informed me that a recent influx of newly allocated cases had contributed to a situation which was now 'getting unbearable.'

Ramona did not consider herself to be a reflector ('I reflect when it hits the fan.') and told me that my interview with her was 'the most time I've had out.' Whilst she agreed to a second interview, arrangements were subsequently cancelled by her on two occasions owing to work pressures. When I attempted to contact her to confirm a third date, I learned that she was on long term sick leave.

Another dimension is added when one comes to examine Dan's experiences. Within the context of this study, he and Tom are atypical purely by reason of the fact that they are male. They are also of interest because their survey ratings were the highest of all the subjects who took part in the first stage of the study.⁹⁴

I found Dan exceptionally intriguing due to his seeming to present something of a paradox. On the one hand, his survey results suggested someone who was extremely contented with his work and, in interview, he spoke of job satisfaction deriving from engaging offenders, gaining their compliance and helping them

⁹⁴ This prompts questions about whether gender is a relevant issue and whether there are distinctive gender differences in the attitudes of probation officers. With only two male participants these are not questions that this research can answer with any authority but, in view of the trend that has resulted in the recruitment of a higher ratio of women to men, the issue of gender cannot be ignored and I will return to it later in this study.

towards successful change. Yet he appeared to struggle to articulate what he actually did with offenders and generally talked about his work in a manner that I experienced as being devoid of enjoyment or enthusiasm. In exploring his circumstances further, I concluded that I was justified in including him amongst those participants who were experiencing a non-facilitating environment.

Despite a degree in politics with, somewhat ironically, communications and media studies, Dan appeared to be very limited in either intellectual resources or the capacity to talk in an animated way. He spoke of being 'quite interested in people' but came across as detached, disengaged and very flat in disposition. Seeming to be aware of his deficits, he told me 'I don't tend to respond to people emotionally.' Remarks recorded in the previous chapter such as 'I didn't have much of a career in mind' and his acknowledgement of the job compensating for his inability to form relationships in his personal life can also be seen as indicative of his recognising his limitations. Within this context, his main source of satisfaction would seem to come, not so much from the achievement of work related objectives and the application of what he brings to the job, but more to do with what the job brings to him.

Recalling his time as a trainee, Dan described it as 'isolating' owing to his being moved to several different office locations that separated him from his fellow trainees and from his PDA. Even so, he viewed training as enabling him 'to learn to do the job properly.' In exploring what this meant, he explained it in terms of learning procedures. He therefore gave me to understand that he was clear about rules and processes that needed to be followed, but was less clear about how to respond to the needs of the people he supervised, especially in an intuitive way. It would appear that neither his PDA nor his line manager post qualifying have been able to provide him with the type of supervision needed to help him develop a greater sense of attachment and move him on from a procedural response.

Although Dan initially maintained 'I don't get upset about anything', one year on from completing his training, he described feeling overwhelmed by his current workload and, as my first interview with him progressed, chinks in his defences began to emerge. Having informed me that, upon joining the service, he was

not convinced that colleagues' complaints about stress were justified, he acknowledged that he had begun to experience stress for himself and that as his sense of stress had increased, his level of satisfaction had declined. In his view stress arose from a combination of management expectations, reduced staffing levels, the size of his caseload and the demands of the offenders he supervised. In one of his most coherent statements he admitted the extent to which his growing caseload had affected his functioning:

I think I actually believe now that what's expected of officers isn't actually possible or feasible.....When I qualified I got given this booklet and it set out the role and I believed it could be done and I did my best to work as I'd been trained, but I just don't think the numbers add up.....When it gets really bad you can become really overwhelmed and start to freeze. The problem of having 50 or 60 or 70 cases is the number of people it involves. So you're constantly getting phone calls and emails about these people. You get deluged with phone calls and emails and that's what's happening at the moment.....I've got so many people on groups and so many emails coming in I can't keep up. So I find that really overwhelming and it stops me from doing other things because I'm constantly answering the phone or getting emails about people.

Dan informed me that he had originally attempted to deal with the pressures himself:

I tried to relax and just not think about it but it's incredibly difficult. It's a bit of a new experience for me having such a stressful job in this way.....I just tried to work it out for myself.

He now realised that he could not survive without the support of others. Hence, he spoke of bringing problems to the attention of his line manager but, whilst the latter was regarded by him as helpful in enabling him to cope with what needed to be done, it was apparent that he did not receive much else from his manager in the way of professional development. A strong atmosphere of negativity prevailed in his office and although he had distanced himself from it to begin with, he recognised that he, too, had recently become much more negative in outlook. In an incisive comment, he told me:

If everyone decides oh, I'm just not gonna bother or whatever it's a bit hard to motivate yourself and go out there on your own and work very hard; but if there are other people trying to do their best, doing a

thorough job and saying yeah, you do need to do this or you do need to do that, I find it encouraging.

A demoralised office had undoubtedly impacted on Dan's morale and his attitude towards the work. He spoke of 'a sort of dread' at having to supervise angry and complaining offenders who seemed to mirror the feelings amongst his colleagues and he felt out of his depth when confronted with the complexity of issues presented by his cases. In his view an assumption had been made by his line manager that as a qualified probation officer he had acquired a level of competence, and may be even mastery, of all tasks. In reality, despite already being a graduate prior to training, he seemed to possess limited intellectual capital and was very much reliant on the acquisition of knowledge and skills during the training process. Unfortunately, as a trainee, he was placed in a location where he was cut off from other members of his cohort as well as his PDA and where there was little oversight of his work and development. As a result, it would appear that training was principally only able to provide him with knowledge of the technical framework within which the job took place and, after qualifying, any further professional development seems to have suffered given the absence of either a more positively supportive and motivated team or a more inspirational line manager. Not surprisingly, in these circumstances, he has begun to feel increasingly vulnerable.

Experiences in Facilitating Environments

The experiences described above help to highlight factors linked to habitus and field which, amongst my research subjects, negatively impacted on the transitional process of becoming a probation officer. By contrast, the experiences referred to in this section demonstrate and confirm those dispositions which, when combined with the dynamics of the field, facilitate the 'making' of a probation officer.

This vital combination was most strongly represented in the experiences of Sharon. It will be recalled that Sharon is motivated by a positive identification with public service. She possessed a strong desire to establish herself as a role model and had the support of very encouraging and affirming family influences.

She viewed being a probation officer as a highly responsible role and, in the eyes of both herself and her family, she was unquestionably a professional.

Despite her absent father, Sharon's description of her family life suggested an environment that had been able to provide her with security and containment, and which was likely to have contributed to her development as a seemingly self-assured, warm and optimistic personality. She was also resourceful, energetic and very positive in outlook. Her experience of good objects had extended beyond her family to include experiences when studying for her first degree, her work prior to probation training, her practice assessors whilst training and her office colleagues post qualifying.

Upon recognising the shortcomings of her qualifying training, Sharon managed to turn it into something positive. With some hint of sarcasm, she informed me that what she perceived as a 'disjointed' training experience, owing to a lack of organisation and a failure to link the content of the academic course with the demands of the workplace, was considered by her as exactly the right preparation for dealing with the disorder of the work environment. Moreover, she was instrumental in setting up a self-selecting study group for trainees which, she gave me to understand, replicated the kind of support that helped her to complete her first degree in anthropology. The group met to discuss cases, the application of theory to practice and their written assignments. In describing this initiative she told me:

It was the sort of support which should have come from the tutors. So what was lacking we made up for ourselves. In a sense it helped us to be independent practitioners, able to access support when we needed to in order to get on with what we needed to do. It also helped us to develop as individuals. So I came out thinking that was good, not because of what I got from the university, but because I was able to bridge the gaps.

On placement, Sharon had three changes of practice assessor. Nonetheless, she regarded herself as fortunate because she considered them all to be 'experienced and dedicated workers' who provided her with a range of learning opportunities which she believed other members of her cohort did not receive. She expressed particular gratitude towards her first PDA whom she described

as 'my guidance' and whom, she felt, took the time to identify her learning style and helped her to develop by 'observing people, having a go, writing about it, thinking about it.'

Sharon was also fortunate to be allocated to 'an absolutely brilliant office' when she qualified and where she remained. Her opinion of the office was based on her feeling that despite the high volume of work, the team 'always have time for each other.'

You'll come in here and people will be laughing and joking and just getting on with it and if something comes up that's just too much for me, I feel able to go to anyone on this floor to ask for help, and if everyone along here is busy I'll go downstairs. If people here aren't able to help you can guarantee someone will know of a colleague who's had experience of that particular difficulty and who can help. So I feel really supported in the sense that when I got here as a newly qualified officer everyone was just so helpful. I thought maybe that's because I'm newly qualified, but just over a year on I see that's just because that's the approach that people have here and it's brilliant, it really makes a huge difference.

According to Sharon, the staff at her office pull together in times of crisis and had created their own support network to compensate for constant changes amongst local management who, even when they are in post, are viewed as frequently not present. I gained the impression that this had resulted in the team becoming somewhat deviant or dissident in terms of their response to current probation policy; although from Sharon's perspective they were 'self sufficient' and it was apparent that she believed she had benefitted from the office culture. As with her time as a trainee, she felt she had learned from observing others and asking questions but, especially significant, had been the skills that she came with. These had been acquired during her pre-training work experience and which, with the encouragement of her PDAs and present colleagues, she had been able to apply and build upon as a qualified probation officer.⁹⁵ She acknowledged 'There's still a lot of stuff I'm not experienced at or

⁹⁵ In her previous role as a Learning Support Assistant, Sharon had been involved in a project mentoring and supporting Afro-Caribbean children who were at risk of exclusion. Her caseload as a Probation Officer now consisted primarily of young adults from the same background. She therefore felt that she was in familiar territory, working with problems that were similar to those presented at school, albeit that the offenders on her caseload were five to ten years older. With the pupils at school she had established regular contact with their families and she now tended to do the same with her cases. This was one method she found effective. She also mentioned

confident in but I seek suggestions from experienced probation officers nearby and try things out.'

Explaining her approach to the job, Sharon informed me that building a trusting relationship was central:

It's very much about getting to know the individuals, spending time understanding their way of looking at life and you know, realising that you can't change someone until you really know what it is that they actually understand and see and experience.

As part of the process of creating an effective working relationship, Sharon spoke of the importance of setting boundaries and of paying attention to the physical environment of where she interviewed offenders. She expressed resistance to using dedicated interviewing rooms that had been newly installed on health and safety grounds, consisting of a table and two chairs bolted to the floor and bare walls, apart from a CCTV camera. This set up was regarded by her as cold, impersonal and uncondusive to the type of safe space she considered essential to enabling her to get to know someone.⁹⁶

In thinking further about the ways in which she worked, Sharon described herself as providing a 'mish mash' of interventions, influenced by her assessment of what she believes will work with a particular individual.

I truly believe that there is no such thing as one overarching theory that will explain everybody that comes in here. You can have two people who, on paper, might be expected to have the same explanation for their

providing practical help such as assistance with form-filling and allowing her supervisees to use the office telephone to make calls regarding jobs and to other professional agencies they are involved with. This was something she did whilst working at the women's refuge where she found it to be a constructive way of helping to develop a relationship, 'and I've still got that habit in what I do now.'

⁹⁶ Opinions were apparently divided on this matter amongst Sharon's colleagues and she mentioned that for some members of her office, health and safety issues in general had become a major focus of tension between front line staff and management. Whilst she did not dismiss the significance of this subject, she was of the view that it was not worth the amount of energy being expended on it. She appeared to be aware of it being symptomatic of other underlying grievances and I took it to be indicative of an office where some staff did not feel as looked after and as contained as she appeared to feel.

behaviour because of similarities in their situations, but when you get into it you find that their experiences are different.

Thus, she talked of:

[D]rawing a bit from offending behaviour programmes, doing some conflict resolution work, taking some stuff from the effective practice manual, using a bit of motivational interviewing skills and I try to place people on the cycle of change. But then, sometimes, even when they fit into all of that, what you do with them still doesn't work and so you just have to be responsive. You have to listen to what they're saying and try and build up a picture and take the approaches that seem appropriate.

That said, she made it clear that risk management and the protection of the public outweighed other considerations, whilst working within the boundaries that are set by court orders and prison licences. She also appreciated the importance of her own emotional response to the work.

What you actually need to do is go in there and do the assessment of what's really going on for this person, to find out whether or not they're likely to repeat this behaviour.....Each time you just kind of find another way of looking at it and another way of using that feeling or dealing with that feeling to make sure you've achieved what you need to achieve in terms of the professional duties that you have.

Furthermore, despite a sense of 'being pulled in all different directions' Sharon conveyed an ability to deal with the pressures in a constructive way, through a capacity to reflect, organise herself and prioritise her workload. She gave me to understand that she had worked out a survival strategy that sometimes included the need to 'just go away for a moment and try and find myself, ground myself again.' She was reluctant to burden her partner with work problems, but found him sympathetic and understanding when she has had stressful days. Additionally, she viewed some members of her former student cohort as a source of support:

I think the times that I meet with or have conversations with colleagues that I trained with on my cohort, those are actually the best times. We usually meet at weekends and spend time over coffee or lunch talking about anything that frustrates us. It's about learning but also we recognise the things we've done well and share that with each other.

In the course of my interview with her, Sharon was keen to emphasise that she was still in a developmental/learning stage. In talking about her work with her caseload, I formed the picture of someone who had been able to draw on what she knew which included an intuitive understanding of what works, common sense and practical knowledge derived from her previous work experience. This would then seem to have been nurtured and aided by the sympathy she encountered for her point of view in those she first met and who supported her work early on. She expressed awareness that the responsibility she carried included the protection of the public, but her work seemed to be underpinned by what might be regarded as a more traditional welfare/social work type approach to the people she supervised.

Sharon has shown how, as a trainee, her practice supervisor and, more latterly, her current team colleagues have shaped her experiences by answering her questions and passing on aspects of their own work based knowledge. At the point of entry, she did not appear to have much idea about probation, but managed to find a fit between what she brought to it (from both her earlier work as well as her family background) and what those already ensconced in her particular team believed in. In my opinion, this has facilitated her ability to adapt and accommodate to both the team ethos and the service objectives of punishment and public protection without apparent conflict. She gave me the impression of working largely as she wanted and in a manner reminiscent of the relative autonomy of the past, and yet she was still able to achieve results which accorded with the agency framework and its targets. Despite anxieties about things going wrong, the realisation that 'the risk is there all the time' and fears that 'there's so much thrown at us', she appeared to thrive on the way things are. It inspired her and she used it creatively, appearing to enjoy the responsibility that she considered her role conferred upon her.

In this way, the culture and habitus of the team and the organisation would seem to have joined with Sharon's personal habitus to create an orientation that has been able to sustain her. It can also be seen how different this is to the experiences of other members of the sample such as Dalia and Angela. Additionally, Sharon appeared to possess a body of cultural capital that supported her practice. Drawn partly from relevant pre-training work

experience, it was something that Dalia and Kirsty were unable to match owing to the absence of any comparable experience and, whilst Angela did have some relevant past practice experience, the habitus in which she found herself served to inhibit her ability to access and utilise it.

The factors that aided and facilitated Sharon's development emerged again, in various combinations and to differing degrees, in the narratives of the remaining research subjects. Important elements being their willingness to modify or adapt their habitus in accordance with what they encountered in the field of probation, along with their perception of the containment available to them in the shape of support from colleagues or line managers.

Thus, whilst it was Femi's view that some colleagues had left or were leaving because they 'couldn't handle the changing face of probation,' by which she meant the focus on punishment, she acknowledged her own willingness to compromise her ideals and values for the sake of having a career that she felt still offered opportunities to influence change at both individual and societal level. She had refined her expectations, accepting the emphasis on punishment and protection of the public, on the grounds that it was 'what society demands,' even though it did not fit entirely with her own beliefs.

I've had to come to terms with it because essentially it's a good career. Essentially you can get out of it what you put into it and that's how I'm looking at it, which is why I'm still here.

For Femi, it was the meaning that she gave to having a career which, in itself, seemed to elicit loyalty and commitment to the field. This enabled her to take on board the rules of the game, encouraged by the knowledge that the rules allow her to be in a professional relationship where there was the potential to be of some good. Although unhappy with the extent to which the Service was subject to political influence and the shift from its traditional, welfare orientation, she informed me:

You're still working with people at the end of the day and you're still trying to bring about positive change. So basically those things are still there but probation has got to change with the times I guess.

Working from a starting point that utilised a mixture of personal experience and approaches learned in training, Femi seemed to have formulated a clear understanding of the task required. In her perspective, exploration, investigation and analysis were the essential skills that she applied in her endeavour to make sense of the behaviour of those she supervised, but she did not lose sight of what she understood the purpose of the Service to be:

You've got to think public protection; you've got to think risk to self, risk to the public and risk to others. Sessions can't be offender led. Whatever the offender tells you, you can't take their word for it. You've got to investigate, you've got to check things out and I think that makes sense.

Spurred on by the strength of her work ethic and a belief in the need to work hard to achieve success, Femi felt able to withstand the multiple demands of the job. Pressures were not viewed by her as debilitating but as challenges to be faced up to. The following statement, describing her office, encapsulates both the sense of excitement and the stress:

It's such a buzzing environment. Sometimes it's hard to step back from things and once you get into the office, once you come through the doors, it's immediately that your brain starts working. It's all systems go and you hardly get time to stop and think.

It was because of this hectic atmosphere that Femi, like Sharon, acknowledged the importance of taking 'time out' as a survival strategy.

It might be take some days off, it might be go and have a word with your senior, it might be go and have a word with a colleague who's probably been through what you're going through. But most of the time it might be taking an hour or two out and just doing something else, doing something different, occupying your mind with other things.

Also, in common with Sharon, Femi was aided by the support of her team colleagues, where as with Angela and Dalia there was no sense of team at all. Femi's resilience was additionally assisted by line managers at her office whom she regarded as available and approachable. Angela, on the other hand, found contact with her line manager unhelpful and a constant source of disappointment, accusing her SPO of only being interested in the achievement of targets and of failing to give her the type of advice and guidance on working

with her cases that she maintained she so desperately desired to aid her professional development.

Not only did Femi feel 'I always have people I can go to' but, at the end of her working day, she spoke of being able to 'switch the computer off and reflect on one or two things that have probably bothered me earlier in the day.' This did not prevent her from taking work home 'mentally' and contemplating what she could have done differently or better, but this was tolerated as an inevitable part of the job. Consequently, in weighing up the various aspects of her work as a probation officer, she spoke confidently of her ability to operate effectively within the present structure of the Service and asserted 'I wouldn't change the job for anything now.'

When I met with Tom he, too, seemed very positive, motivated, self-assured and comfortable with his role, albeit with some anxiety that his optimistic, upbeat mood may not last.

I never imagined that it would work out quite as well as it has. In the last 15 months I've never thought 'oh. I don't want to go to work' and I never believed I'd be like that.....And sometimes I feel I don't want to look at it too much in case it disappears.

Unlike Dan, Tom had sufficient internal resources to enable him still to flourish in a training situation in which he was without a PDA for some months, before receiving 'long arm' supervision from a PDA located in a different office. Upon the completion of his training, he had the advantage of a line manager who actively acknowledged his newly qualified status by ensuring he had a protected workload, together with the benefit of committed, experienced colleagues who were willing to share their experiences to aid his development. Thus, he talked of feeling 'looked after' in a way which was completely missing for Dan (and for Dalia, Angela, Kirsty, Cathy and Ramona).

Tom considered that training had shaped and built on his understanding of the job, describing himself as having come to accept the prevailing tenet that regards offenders as responsible for their actions as opposed to the sociological and psychological explanations of crime he had previously favoured. However,

whilst he also saw himself as a case manager, organising and co-ordinating interventions rather than directly providing them all himself, he informed me that he remained convinced of the importance of helping clients through the development of a working relationship. His view of the job was explained in these terms:

I think it's about people being committed to working with individuals, working with their clients or offenders and being committed to achieving objectives and agreeing those objectives as well. Some of the objectives we have, they might not want to do but, even with those cases, you can always find something to help them with. That's the thing, it's about helping and that's why it's a vocation. It's also about helping courts decide what sentences to pass and working with other agencies to manage the level of risk. Working out what needs to be done and putting things in place to reduce that level of risk or contain it.....With some people it ends up being about developing a working relationship. Well, I think with everybody it ends up being about developing a working relationship but with some it seems to come naturally but, with others, there's so much distrust.

Throughout this passage the word 'working' frequently appears, which I understood as conveying the notion of an activity geared towards the pursuit of a particular outcome and an understanding of purpose. Also, I felt at this stage that the collaborative nature of how Tom saw his role seemed to come through, suggesting that he had grasped something quite fundamental about the job and what might contribute to the achievement of effective practice. In that respect, one might say that it constituted Tom's definition of 'what works' or, at least, what works for him. Developing how he saw his role he told me:

I think I see myself as someone to make suggestions and to arrange things for people in a practical sense. I've been taught different ways of practicing.....I wouldn't say I've used any of those consistently. I think a kind of case manager approach is what I've been doing. Sort of making links I would guess.

Tom stated that he felt clear as to what was within his job remit and what was not, and informed me that he had no problem in telling his supervisees 'I can't do this because it's not my job.'⁹⁷ He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to test out 'what works with somebody and what doesn't,' valuing his colleagues

⁹⁷ I took this as an indication of a strong sense of reality, knowing and accepting what he can and cannot do. It was not until my case discussion with him that I realised it had another meaning and implications.

for ‘their own particular knowledge and specialities’ and from whom he felt he could learn. He regarded the job as fascinating, exciting and challenging, and he spoke of the satisfaction of ‘assisting someone to reach an understanding of their behaviour,’ adding:

If something goes well, I’m like flying down the street on the way home – something’s been achieved!

The notion of probation work being a vocation was mentioned several times by Tom and although he might easily have chosen another career path, had a different job been offered first, I sensed that he regarded himself as having found his vocation. In his phrase, he was, at the start of training, ‘a blank sheet’, eager to learn but with some concerns about his capacity to do the job. Fifteen months on, he had discovered a commitment to the field arising from his experiences as a trainee and as a probation officer. That successful occupational socialization would seem to have occurred, in his case, is not entirely surprising given his history and, whilst he may have regarded himself as a blank sheet, he had the advantage of a habitus that seems likely to have equipped him with tacit knowledge relevant to the job. From a Bourdieusian perspective Tom’s general demeanour, described earlier, also should not be ignored insofar as it enabled him to elicit a response from colleagues and supervisors which supported and consolidated his cultural and social capital. His is very much the reverse of Dan’s demeanour which would appear to have had a stultifying effect on his capital.

Cheryl is the remaining subject whom I consider appropriate to include here, in spite of sharing with Cathy and Ramona a specific attribute in their highly vociferous condemnation of the management of the probation service. This was a source of tension and contradiction for her:

It’s quite tough to work in probation as an organisation. A large amount is expected all the time with very little recognition of that and too few resources to actually achieve those expectations. It can be a very frustrating experience if you want to do your job very well. As an organisation, it doesn’t actually allow you to do it particularly well but keeps constantly reminding you of targets. So as an organisation I haven’t got a great deal of respect for my employers due to how I get treated and how I see other people getting treated which is quite a

difficult position to be in. It's very much a contradictory position. You know, you want to do well on the one hand but not on the other.

However, Cheryl's position was very different to the perspective of Cathy and Ramona, recognising that with her academic background a range of potential career choices remained open to her. Moreover, despite evident dissatisfaction with the quality of training and with the quality of supervision provided by her line manager in her first post qualifying job, she had successfully applied to transfer to another team where she felt 'held' by an extremely charismatic SPO. It is on the basis of her more recent experience that she is placed in this group. In effect, her stance might be summed up by saying that she loves the job but hates the organisation.

I've been so grateful that I've moved because the manager of the team is fantastic and it's the first time since I've been in the organisation that, actually, I feel very motivated to do my job properly. I feel very much recognised in what I do by my manager and she's a very inspiring person. She makes me want to do my job better because of the way I see her do hers and so, on a very local level, I'm happy with my job.

In Cheryl's perception she gained very little from training and considered the support she and Femi gave to each other was 'a large part of the reason why I qualified.'⁹⁸ Concerns about deficiencies in her training and the gaps it had left in her knowledge prompted her to seek transfer. Referring again to the SPO, Cheryl explained:

She sort of made it known, when the post became available, that she didn't care about experience because she was willing to help someone learn and develop. So this felt like a way of plugging all those gaps I thought I had. I knew I definitely had the interest and the enthusiasm for the job but I always felt a little bit less confident about my practice because of my training.

As a result of her change of team, she felt able to grow professionally. She considered herself protected and contained and described feelings of anxiety, which had been present in her previous workplace, as having dissipated.

⁹⁸ My interview with Cheryl identified an unresolved organisational dilemma concerned with how an under-graduate training course caters for someone with her academic background (she already had a post-graduate MA in criminology).

I feel very confident about the job whilst Maggie stays my manager. That's the bottom line. She gives me an awful lot of confidence and support and enables me to do it.

In addition, the team culture encouraged the discussion and sharing of caseload issues:

Because of the way our team is we talk a lot about the things that have been going on. We know each others cases and reports and everything else. We are very respectful of one another; it's a very friendly environment, a very approachable environment and that's great.

Within this location Cheryl felt supported, valued and appreciated. This in turn enhanced her sense of purpose, motivation and commitment and enabled the development of her professional capacities. The supportive framework of the team also enabled her to provide what she described as a structured, boundaried, yet supportive relationship to the offenders whom she supervised. Public protection was prioritised by her but this was followed by a commitment to helping and trying to change offending behaviour.

Cheryl's experience is a good example of what can happen when there is a productive engagement between someone's habitus and the specific practices of the field in which they are based. It also contributes to an understanding of the factors that help to sustain probation officers in their work.

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned primarily with my research subjects' encounter with the field of probation. It has focused on those aspects of this encounter linked to their professional socialization, with particular emphasis on the theme of survival. In so doing, a key element has been the dynamic relationship between their habitus of origin and the professional field and habitus of the service.

What comes across is the way in which the dynamic relationship between the habitus of the individual and the habitus of the team and the organisation interact to facilitate or hinder successful socialization into their role. The importance of the quality of the professional support structure and culture is

especially evident in the differentiation between a non-facilitative and facilitative environment. Newcomers arrive with various orientations, values and aspirations that require an environment that will support their capacity to grow and develop. Whilst a few encountered both a supportive SPO and team, these newly qualified officers looked, on the whole, for help and mentorship from team colleagues.⁹⁹ Where the team habitus was one of demoralization then, they too, were likely to become demoralised. Conversely, a more positive team habitus was able to be motivational and inspiring.

I consider the stance adopted by Cathy and Cheryl to merit attention as it is indicative of another kind of probation officer who feels disposed to continue in the job in spite of their deep opposition to the organisational and structural context in which the work takes place. Thus, whilst they regard the failings of management as directly responsible for the stress, demoralisation and level of attrition they observe amongst colleagues, they each appear to have been able to transcend their own negative experiences to enable them to establish a role for themselves which fulfils their aspirations, but without commitment to the organisational field itself. In fact, with the sample in general, it is not the shift to being a law enforcement agency and the priority given to public protection that clashes with their habitus, causing dissonance and conflict in the field, but the manner in which the organisation has embraced managerialism and the audit culture.

Furthermore, Cathy and Cheryl's narrative suggests the relevance of intellectual understanding and the possibility of it representing a potential lifeline. It is something that is present for Sharon and which can be seen in Kirsty's pursuit of an MA; whilst Ramona's awareness of the deficits in her training experience seriously undermine her confidence. In view of this, I am wondering whether intellectual understanding increases their sense of control and helps to reduce feelings of vulnerability and anxiety. If this assumption is correct, it raises the question of how far the continuing development of a knowledge base is important to the satisfaction and competence of individuals within a profession.

⁹⁹ This would appear to confirm the continuing relevance of the findings of Satyamurti (1981) who studied the impact of change on social workers in the 1970s. She found that it was the team, rather than management or the organisation, that provided the main source of support; where work identities were located and where the job was learned.

It is perhaps the case that a lack of primary knowledge and the absence of on-going intellectual development leaves them liable to be mere processors of other people's decisions and understandings, in quite mechanical terms.

Chapter 10

Exploring Probation Practice and Identity Through Case Discussions

Introduction

In choosing to conduct a case discussion as the third stage of my research methodology, it was my original purpose to use it as a means both to illustrate the professional practice of my sample and to identify the relationship between what they told me about their experiences in the second stage and the way in which they worked with their cases. However, it has also been possible to draw on the material I gathered to further illuminate the interplay between the habitus and field of my subjects. In so doing, the case discussion helped to provide additional insight concerning their underlying orientation and values, their professional knowledge and their professional identity. With regards to all the cases, my interest was not so much in whether the research sample had arrived at the correct formulation of the case, but rather, the body of knowledge they had drawn on to reach their formulation and what they had done with their offender.

I consider it relevant to mention that at the time of my research, the practice of probation staff routinely engaging in formal case discussions with their line manager, as a means of facilitating learning and developing practice, had largely ceased to occur¹⁰⁰. Moreover, professional supervision, which had traditionally been case oriented, had been renamed 'work review' with an emphasis on accountability and the achievement of targets.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Many of the managers appointed in recent years have never experienced receiving casework supervision themselves, and with induction training focusing on accountability issues and performance management, they do not have the skill or knowledge to facilitate such discussions.

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that this was a decision of the particular probation area where my research took place, rather than a national decision, and the policy has recently been reversed as part of the response to criticism of the quality of practice by the Inspectorate of Probation. Interestingly, a policy requiring local managers to organise a monthly team discussion focusing on the presentation of a case also has been introduced with a view to improving quality.

As stated in Chapter 6, the subjects were asked to bring a case of their choosing to the discussion, the only stipulation being that it should be a case with which they were currently working. They were not given any instructions about how to present the case. In the event, all but one attended with the case file containing reports, the plan of intervention, the risk assessment and contact logs.

In this chapter I have chosen to present four of the six case discussions in full. The remaining two may be found in the appendix to this thesis. This decision was taken primarily for the purpose of limiting the text in the main part of the thesis. In my view, the four discussions I have chosen best illustrate the differences in practice and professional identity to be found amongst the sample. Each case discussion is followed by reflections that link it to earlier data. The chapter is concluded by some general reflections on what I have learned from the different methods that have been deployed in this study.

1. Sharon

Sharon was the only subject to have prepared by writing notes covering what she considered to be the most significant aspects of the case¹⁰². The case she selected concerned GW, a 22 year old white male convicted of racially aggravated threatening words and behaviour and racially aggravated criminal damage. This had resulted in his receiving a Community Order consisting of a supervision requirement for 18 months and a requirement to undertake 80 hours Unpaid Work (formerly known as Community Service). As part of supervision he had also been ordered to participate in a Diversity Awareness Programme.

The offences were preceded by an argument between GW and his partner, both of whom had been drinking heavily, and which, owing to the level of threats and verbal aggression that were loud enough to be heard next door, led to their neighbour calling the police. When the latter arrived at the scene, GW's partner

¹⁰² I regarded this as evidence of Sharon's capacity to find the time to think, prepare and plan in an organisational environment where many of her colleagues complain about the lack of time. It will be seen that thinking, preparation and planning continues to be a feature of her work with this offender.

assaulted one of the police officers resulting in her arrest. Sharon recounted police statements which indicated that GW had then become enraged by this. Blaming the neighbour for his partner's arrest, he grabbed a kitchen knife and stormed out of his home shouting racially abusive remarks at the neighbour, a man of Indian origin. When the neighbour appeared at his window, GW threw the knife at the window, smashing it. The neighbour was unhurt.

GW had no previous convictions and, in the light of the offences, he was assessed as posing a medium risk of serious harm to the public.¹⁰³ He was two months into his order when he was transferred to Sharon and she had been supervising him for five months.

In explaining her choice of case, Sharon informed me that she viewed GW as a challenge having never worked with a racially motivated offender before. Indeed, she mentioned that there were queries raised, initially, as to whether it was an appropriate case for her to supervise owing to the racial element and bearing in mind that she is Black. After discussion with her Senior Probation Officer (SPO), she agreed to 'give it a go' on the basis that it would be 'good for my development' and on the understanding that the case would be re-allocated if she felt uncomfortable with him. In fact, she stated that she had since derived considerable satisfaction from the case because she felt she was learning from it and because GW appeared to be responding positively and making progress towards the achievement of supervision objectives. She spoke of finding the case exciting 'as there are so many things going on' and of it allowing her the opportunity to work in a way she most enjoyed.

In her previous interview with me, Sharon had voiced the opinion that building a trusting relationship was essential to effective work. In this second interview, she re-iterated this view, talking of the need to establish 'rapport' from the beginning and telling me 'that comes from my previous experience of work,

¹⁰³Predictions concerning the level of risk of serious harm posed by an offender are determined by applying specific definitions originally laid down by the Home Office and incorporated into the Offender Assessment System (OASys) which is the main assessment tool for the Probation and Prison Services. The OASys definition of medium risk of serious harm states that factors are present which indicate the potential for serious harm, but this is unlikely to occur unless there is a change in the offender's circumstances (Home Office 2005).

rather from the training I've had in Probation.' Referring to her first meeting with GW, she described how she went about building rapport:

If I remember correctly my words were something like we need to work together and the fact is you've been convicted of a racially motivated offence. However, I'm not going to be sitting here making judgements or assumptions about you, just as I hope you won't do the same about me. And I was really surprised at myself, being so sort of open about it, and then I realised that's actually what's needed to do the work, to get him to be open to challenge and for him to be honest about how he feels and what he sees and what he believes. And I think that that was a turning point for him because up until that stage every single induction officer and the basic skills officer that he had seen had been black members of staff and I think he had been coming in fear of the fact that he would actually be seen as dangerous or be disadvantaged because he had a racially aggravated offence. So I made it clear to him that I'm not here to judge him and, in doing so, put it back onto him to actually give me a chance as well, as it were.

Sharon had planned her opening remarks but had been anxious about how well she would deliver them and how they would be received. Her words immediately acknowledged the nature of his offences, underlined her own ethnicity and communicated empathic understanding of GW's fears. The phrase 'just as I hope you won't do the same about me' implied an expectation or hope of reciprocity and mutual respect between them and conveyed a belief in his capacity to respect her. She felt that it helped to lay the foundations for actively engaging GW in the work and, insofar as her words seemed to resonate positively with him, reaffirmed some of the principles underpinning her approach to the work concerning the importance of combining openness, challenge and trust.

Having by this point, supervised quite a number of cases, some of which had not gone quite as well, Sharon told me 'you kind of learn from things that work and don't work.'¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, it was also what she had learned outside the service, concerning the importance of the client/worker relationship, that continued to lie at the core of her intervention, although she acknowledged that 'My first PDA spent ages talking to me about the importance of human

¹⁰⁴ Learning from experience appears to be another key element in this officer's development, the importance of which seemed to be recognised and understood by her when she agreed to supervise this case.

relationships and the fact that we're working with people.' As a result, she was critical of those workers who had been involved in the case before her for seemingly not making an effort to create a relationship 'based on mutual respect' and for 'not bothering to lay things on the table' and to clarify expectations.

In addition, Sharon emphasised the importance of gathering as much information as possible in order to make an accurate assessment.

I wanted to make sure that I got to know this individual. I'd looked up all the paperwork which for me is part and parcel of being a probation officer. You need to know what's going on for your case and if the paperwork isn't there you have to try to get it.

This was a principle Sharon had learned as a trainee and which she recognised as having special significance in this case in view of her need 'to figure out whether or not I'm going to be OK to be in a room with this person.' Even so, at the point when she met him for the first time, she acknowledged that there was still some uncertainty in her mind and felt she was taking something of a risk by seeing him. GW had since proved to be 'an absolute pleasure to supervise', with his manner and response quickly dispelling any misgivings she may have had, and with him appearing to display strong motivation to work on changing his behaviour.

Sharon's aim to engage GW in a working partnership with her was further demonstrated by her efforts to involve him in the setting of supervision objectives. This also highlighted her focus on change and her attempts to encourage the offender to take ownership of the work.

My role is to, and I'm sorry if this sounds like a cliché, but it's to enable the individual I'm working with to bring about the changes and to make sure that individual owns it. Because one of the things, and I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing, but when I have final supervision with people and they say to me 'thank you so much for doing all this for me', I always turn it back onto them and I say 'you know what? You're welcome, but it wasn't me it was you, you did it.' And I believe that, because no matter what phone calls I make or this or that, it takes that person to go to that appointment or to follow it through and to live their life.

In going through her objectives, Sharon described carefully wording the objectives with GW, recording them in his voice, an example being 'I will address the underlying causes of my racially motivated behaviour and work to change my attitudes.' The use of the offender's voice is recommended good practice but not always followed, and Sharon mentioned her own discomfort with an objective set by her predecessor in the case which stated 'To cease having racist attitudes.'

It basically implied that all he was, was a racist and that's how the organisation saw him, but what I wanted to encourage was that, actually, this is something that could be changed. It took quite a while to come up with that wording together and he was really happy about that and I think that's one of the major factors why he's moved on so much since then¹⁰⁵.

Shortly after commencing supervision with Sharon, GW revealed that he planned to separate from his partner and move back to his mother's home. He spoke of recognising the destructive nature of his relationship with his partner, who also had an alcohol dependency problem, and whom he alleged was often violent towards him when drunk. Sharon viewed this decision as a very positive step which she took as confirmation of his motivation and commitment to change his lifestyle.

Planning her intervention, Sharon was keen to separate her role in the rehabilitative process from the punishment element of the court order. This had been made easier for her by the requirement that GW should undertake Unpaid Work.

I made it clear to him that was imposed as punishment and he took it in that vein. You know, this is what you need to do to make up for what happened.

This is not to suggest that Sharon failed to accept notions of public protection or enforcement as being key aspects of her role. As it happens, GW had been

¹⁰⁵ The other objectives related to tackling GW's alcohol misuse, his anger and the potential for domestic violence which, together, appeared to provide a clear framework for supervision. With regards to the alcohol objective, Sharon stated that she was keen to get across to GW that she was not colluding with his initial attempts to blame his drinking for the offences, but that alcohol was a disinhibitor, allowing attitudes that were already there to come to the surface. Accordingly, they settled on 'I will increase my awareness of how alcohol triggers violent behaviour and work to reduce its intake.'

fully compliant with regards to supervision and had kept all his appointments. The same had not been the case with Unpaid Work, where commitments relating to his paid employment had sometimes prevented him from attending Unpaid Work projects. Sharon showed me how, in her role as case manager, she had followed up his absences with letters warning GW of a return to court if he were unable to provide an acceptable explanation. In the circumstances, she had accepted all but one of his reasons, re-affirming her recognition of the importance of being able to make informed and defensible decisions based on having verified knowledge of the offender:

This has shown me that you really need to be aware of what's going on in the person's life to be able to make those decisions and put them in the context of national standards.

The Diversity Awareness Programme is designed to be delivered by probation staff on a one to one basis, and comes with a written manual prescribing what should be covered. It was especially noticeable that Sharon welcomed the use of the programme not only because it was a new experience for her or guided her in what to do, but because she believed it gave her justification and brought legitimacy to working in a particular way.

It allows me to spend time with the offender, to actually look at their history, what they do now, how they feel about things because the whole point is to examine attitudes and values and belief systems and, with this particular guy as well, working on his identity. So this case has allowed me to actually get really in depth, where as with some other cases you have to skirt over some of these issues because it's not seen as enforcement or offender related. Therefore we don't have the time to spend on that where as, with this one, I feel it's part of the work and it really reminds me of the fact that the reason I'm doing this job is because I do believe in people's ability to change, because without that it would be a struggle to work with this kind of offending behaviour I think.

These comments re-state Sharon's motivation for wanting to be a probation officer and clearly allude to the frustration of being unable to work in the same way with more offenders. However, this tension was not only about a lack of

time owing to a demanding caseload but, in her perception, was also linked to an organisational culture that discouraged intervention that was not supported by a recognised programme which met the criteria of 'what works.' She went on to voice irritation with her line manager, who had criticized her for failing to meet timeliness criteria relating to a review assessment she had delayed completing on GW as she was still collating information.

In the spirit of honesty, openness and what Sharon considered to be representative of pro-social modelling, she admitted to GW that she had not delivered the Diversity Awareness Programme before and arranged for the programme designer to act as a consultant and to participate in the first session. She described this as another learning opportunity that had helped to enhance her interview technique, with her expressing considerable admiration for the professional style of the consultant whom she observed during that first session.

Now I try to phrase questions in a way that isn't accusative. It's more 'how' questions and I do a lot of mmms and uh-huhs.

Through her empathic approach to interviewing, Sharon seemed able to convey interest and curiosity in GW, encouraging him to think and reflect. At the same time, her account of the interaction suggested that she was thinking and reflecting with him, reviewing together the previous content of sessions because 'there may be connections that neither myself nor him will have seen' and helping GW to make links between his current lifestyle and behaviour and his background. Thus, she seemed to value opportunities for this type of reflection for what it might contribute to the work. In addition, she stated that she tried to set aside time for reflection outside the sessions but this was frequently interrupted by telephone calls or unexpected developments relating to her other cases.

Ideally what I'd like is breathing space to think, right, this is what happened today. What did I miss? What did I do well?

Professional supervision with her line manager was not regarded by her as a reflective space owing to its emphasis on the achievement of targets. Consequently, reflection was often limited to 'thinking on my way home.'

Sharon's apparent ability to successfully establish a working alliance with GW resulted in his disclosing that he was a heavy cocaine user and experiencing feelings of depression which he associated with the death of his father three years ago. Prior to these disclosures, Sharon, in her capacity as case manager, had referred GW to an alcohol counsellor and, having clarified their mutual responsibilities, liaised with each other regularly. She responded to the new information concerning GW's cocaine use by re-examining the work of the counsellor and satisfying herself that the latter could incorporate a focus on his drug misuse as well. She was noticeably less confident in knowing how to respond to GW's depression on the grounds that 'We need to be really careful about that because it sounds more like bereavement counselling.' Further discussion with her around the meaning of this comment confirmed her reluctance to focus on areas of the work that might generate strong feelings. She felt comfortable implementing exercises linked to the cycle of change and diversity awareness, where a clear framework was provided for the work but, seemed far less comfortable to delve too far beneath the surface, despite originally voicing commitment to working in depth and recognising the importance of examining feelings.

The bits I've been doing have been fairly practical in terms of looking at the cycle of change and just looking at past events and plans for the future. I guess I need to get more into it and explore things more deeply but I think I might just be uncomfortable in terms of the emotional issues which might come up and whether or not I'll be able to deal with those.

In my view, this statement underplays the quality and effectiveness of the work Sharon had undertaken so far with GW, but it is striking that she can think about what she perceived her limitations to be. I pointed out to her that the evidence she presented in our discussion indicated she had not been dealing merely with 'bits' or practicalities and this seemed to enable her to acknowledge that she had invested a great deal in this case and was pleased with the progress he appeared to be making. Nonetheless, she seemed to be anxious about

whether she was developing professionally and admitted to being pre-occupied with questioning 'Did I do the right thing or did I do that well enough?' Ironically, she also worried about this kind of anxiety clouding her judgement. This was surprising, given the confident manner in which she presented and although she appeared to be realistically aware of the potential for setbacks in GW's case, the following comment further revealed her self-doubts about her competence:

My eyes are wide open and although it feels honest there's always the fact that it's possible there's something's not quite being disclosed and that we haven't picked up on yet..... The danger is that if things don't work out, I know myself, I'll feel really disappointed and I'll feel it's something I did wrong and this is one of the things I need to work on personally and professionally because, although in a sense of the positives, when people have achieved things I've put it onto them, when things don't work out, for some reason, I'm to blame.

In the absence of support from her line manager, I gained a strong sense of Sharon seeking reassurance from me about the quality of her work which I felt able to give her. It also emerged that her most recent session with GW had not gone to plan, with Sharon's hopes of moving him from a stage of apparent indecision over his continued use of cocaine meeting with his stating that he was not yet ready to change this aspect of his behaviour. This had left her concerned about the risk of his overdosing and the feelings this had engendered in her were possibly the main reasons why she had brought this case for discussion. Moreover, it demonstrated how easily one's confidence and belief in oneself can be undermined if emotions arising from the work are not dealt with in an appropriate forum.

Sharon's work on this case highlights some of the struggles and dilemmas that prevail in the field of probation. How she operates is affected by a range of factors including time, resources, national policy and legislation which are in turn influenced by the political and economic fields. These fields, which have contributed to a redefinition of the role of probation officer and transformed the focus of line management supervision, have also impacted on what the probation officer needs to know. In the more punitive world of probation, where case management and prescribed programmes of intervention predominate, the knowledge base becomes inevitably more constricted.

The nature of Sharon's intervention reflected her current state of knowledge, but she seemed to be on the look out for new learning opportunities all the time. When, during our discussion, I interpreted GW's racist behaviour as a projection of his own feelings and sense of alienation, she embraced the idea, which was entirely new to her, with enthusiasm and thoughtfulness:

I hadn't really viewed it like that and I guess I have to be careful that it doesn't come across as justifying it. But yeah, that's helpful. That's why it's good to have these discussions. It certainly makes sense in the context of the work I'm doing, in terms of helping him to develop a sense of himself and encouraging him to think about the life he wants for himself in the future.

It also seemed that following the separation from his partner, Sharon diverted from focusing on GW's potential for losing control and resorting to violence. This type of behaviour had been a feature of the domestic situation and a significant element in the original offence as well. Instead, it was the racial aspect of the offence that predominated rather than his aggressive behaviour per se.

As a black probation officer working with a white offender, Sharon seemed able to avoid being persecutory or accusing. In fact, she appeared to deal with her own ethnicity and the racist dimension with much greater sensitivity than her colleagues who had been involved in the case before its transfer to her. There was some recognition on her part of GW's racism being a symptom of other problems and, ultimately, she was far more concerned about working on reducing his cocaine use, owing to the dangers that entailed for him, than on working to change his racist attitudes. It may of course be that through their professional relationship and a focus on more tangible issues, such as his drug and alcohol use, that his racism would diminish anyway. I advised that it was also important for Sharon not to lose sight of the link between his alcohol misuse and his violence, with the loss of control of his aggression being an equally important issue in terms of public protection.

Sharon was concerned to impress on me that she preferred to use the term 'responsive' rather than caring to describe her activities in the case and to distance herself from the traditional ethos. Even so, some of her actions

suggest befriending in order to influence GW's behaviour and it would not be difficult to identify examples of her advising and assisting too. She calls this 'my personal approach.' It is also apparent that she would like to understand GW holistically and go further in her exploration and response to his offending related needs.

However, the structures that make up the organisational habitus discourage this activity. Generally, Sharon adapted her ideas and approach to offender supervision to fit organisational expectations. Yet there was evidence of her circumventing national standards, with the assistance and collusion of the local team habitus and in circumstances that she perceived as being in the interests of the offender. Despite this, she provided a good example of someone who was able to do quite a lot with what was available and acceptable given the conditions that currently prevail within the Probation Service.

I suspect that Sharon's resistance to explore feelings in depth is indicative of her concern about working at an emotional level without adequate professional support, together with her frustration that training did not provide her with sufficient knowledge to do so. It is also possible to argue that, to a certain extent, she did actually get beneath the surface insofar as she discovered two very important aspects of GW's situation – his cocaine use and his depression following the death of his father.

It is apparent that Sharon is interested in the underlying problems of the offenders she supervises, whilst recognising the difficulties in exploring further. In my opinion, her reflections about the emotional dimension of the case and her limitations are impressive. It is to be hoped that she will be able to avail herself of post qualifying training that will help her to increase her capacities.

Reflections on Sharon

Sharon was invited to participate in the principal stages of this study as a result of the comparatively high ratings given by her in answer to the survey questions. The semi-structured interview confirmed her positive engagement and commitment to the field of probation, whilst the case discussion provided an equally strong picture of her practice and orientation towards the work. In

effect, it showed her habitus in action with her demonstrating her capacity to develop a professional relationship with GW by drawing on dispositions derived from her past and present experiences. Thus, she presented evidence of boundary setting, together with an ability to assess, understand and respond to the needs of this particular individual in a sensitive and empathic manner.

From the outset, Sharon also displayed commitment to this study, adding a typed comment to the survey questionnaire in order to ensure clarity with regards to one of her answers; participating in the semi-structured interview 'so that my voice may be heard'; and having prepared for the case discussion by writing notes, in advance of our meeting, highlighting the most salient points. Subsequently, during the course of the discussion she explained the notes as having been produced to benefit each of us. They were to help me to fully understand the case, whilst allowing her to contribute more constructively and to gain as much as possible from the discussion as a learning opportunity. Thus, I felt that she showed awareness of my needs and interest in what I was doing in a way that I found engaging, captivating and a little bit seductive. I in turn responded positively to her in terms of feeling that I wanted to nurture and encourage her development. I could imagine her being motivational and inspiring, although I wondered momentarily if I was being 'taken in' by her exuberance and charm. However, I experienced her as genuinely caring and responsive, and I saw this as evidence of her ability to elicit a similar reaction from her colleagues, enabling her to mobilise their support, as well as viewing it as proof of her capacity to supportively engage those whom she supervised.

It is relevant to recall that Sharon was one of only three research participants who regarded their entry into the probation service as a response to a definite career choice. Even so, her initial decision to join seemed to be based on assumptions rather than firm knowledge of the work of probation officers and her rejection of teaching and social work, as the main alternatives, did not seem to be based on a well-informed judgement in respect to either of these occupations. Her decision confounded the expectations of her family, who regarded the idea of probation as 'out there.' It was off the family's radar, it set her apart from other family members and it is interesting that she chose not to

correct the various misconceptions they had about the work which conferred admiration and, in their perception, status upon her.

Significantly, Sharon's stated aspiration to be a professional did not lead her to consider a career outside the public sector/welfare arena. In this respect, it could be postulated that she was unconsciously following a path that Bourdieu might say confined her to only pursuing the possibilities that her habitus of origin led her to recognise as being open to her.

In providing an explanation for her eventual choice, Sharon cited her frustration at what she saw as the lack of boundaries or statutory authority in the role of teacher or social worker. These were seen by her as essential pre-requisites to the success of her desire to turn lives around and achieve the objective that seemed to provide her main motivation – namely, 'making a difference.' For her, the legislative framework of the probation service gave her role more weight and enhanced her power.

To make sense of this in the context of what has already been said concerning the dispositions that brought Sharon into the job, I feel that one cannot ignore the influence of her absent father on her development. Thus, even though the all-female environment in which she was brought up was able to provide her with good attachment figures, it seems to me to be no coincidence that she has chosen to commit herself to a job in which she is sorting out wayward, unruly men.

Arguably, by rejecting teaching and social work, she has opted for a more 'masculine' role. Moreover, I suspect that having lacked the authority of her father, she has selected the authoritative structures of the probation service for their potential to enable her to feel safer and more contained. Hence her efforts to seek out and re-create containing structures not only for herself (examples include the supervision group she established as a trainee, the informal meetings she continues to have with her cohort post qualifying, the colleagues within her office, as well as myself), but also for the people on her caseload.

During my first interview with her, Sharon spoke of her wish 'to get hands on,' suggesting someone who saw herself as more than an offender manager who merely co-ordinated interventions. Although she recognised a tension between this and what she understood to be the official message of the organisation, the case discussion was able to provide further evidence of someone who clearly was not prepared to apply a narrow definition to her role.

Sharon espouses an approach to the work that she refers to as a 'mish mash,' incorporating various methods ranging from cognitive behavioural techniques to a more traditional casework style of practice, and including advocacy and empowerment. The case discussion did not show evidence of advocacy, and she acknowledged in the first interview that opportunities were sometimes limited to 'making a phone call or writing a letter of support.' However, it did highlight her ability to apply many other ways of working. In particular, her non-judgemental approach towards GW was indicative of her capacity to listen to his views and experiences, enabling him to think and reflect and leading to some important disclosures and actions on his part.

It is apparent that Sharon has not given up on the hope that more opportunities for advocacy will arise saying, 'I'm still trying to find ways to get things happening.' Instead, she continues to hold onto what she believes in but has adapted her ideas to fit with organisational expectations without feeling constrained by them.

At just over one year in, one would not expect Sharon to be fully competent or have 'mastery' of the game. She appreciates that there are things she does not know, a feeling that is expressed in both interviews and, whilst this is a source of anxiety, there is a clear sense of her wanting to find out and of her wanting to develop further as a practitioner. She is learning from her colleagues and, by establishing contacts with other agencies, she is acquiring knowledge of their work and of the additional resources available to her in the community that can be utilised to enhance her work.

She informed me 'I just want to spend time getting to know the job and building up experience.' Accordingly, she is not interested in further academic

qualifications at this point, but in what can be derived from in service training. At present, it could be said that she is applying and putting to good use the social and cultural capital she already possesses.

What also comes across in both sets of interviews is that Sharon is in the process of developing a notion of probation work that is very much about relationships and about rehabilitation, rather than being about punishment and the management of risk. Moreover, she uses the opportunity to talk to me to make explicit her perspective.

2. Angela

At the beginning of our discussion, Angela informed me that she had intended spending some time before meeting with me thinking about which case to choose. In the event, she described being 'up to my eyes in work'. She was interviewing an offender when I arrived at her office, which resulted in my waiting twenty minutes beyond the time we had originally fixed. She seemed frazzled and pre-occupied and, as a consequence, I suggested that we could re-arrange our meeting but she expressed the wish to continue, feeling that it would be difficult to find another time before she left her present post. Having agreed to go ahead with the session, she explained her choice of case on the basis that she had 'just grabbed a file.'

During my previous interview with her, Angela appeared to welcome the opportunity to talk about her experiences, viewing it as offering some thinking space in a daily work routine that was otherwise hectic and totally disorganised. She had seemed weighed down by her workload and very uncertain about her capacity to do the job or whether she wanted to remain a probation officer. She hoped that a planned move to a job where she anticipated receiving more professional support and where she expected the work to be less stressful, would enable her to develop her knowledge and help her decide about her future. Until then, she regarded herself as 'muddling through' and, owing to the volume of work, she had told me 'I'm only doing what I absolutely have to do.'

What I observed as we commenced the discussion on this occasion appeared to confirm the on-going chaos in which Angela operated. Furthermore, the

grabbing of the file seemed to substantiate her comment in the last interview concerning her failure to plan anything and her tendency to 'play it by ear.'

The case she selected concerned SK, a 61 year old man, whom she described as a 'career criminal' on the grounds that he had over 40 convictions spanning more than 40 years and 'never had a job in his life.' All his offending involved theft, fraud and deception and Angela suspected that there were many more offences for which he had not been caught. He had been sentenced to imprisonment on many occasions and his most recent conviction had resulted in his receiving another term of custody, this time for 15 months. Having been released at the half way point of his sentence, Angela had been responsible for supervising him for seven months on licence. That licence had finished a few days earlier and so he was no longer subject to probation supervision.

Although Angela had initially implied that she had selected the case without any thought, it subsequently emerged that she had chosen SK on the grounds that 'he's different to the other people I've seen.' This opinion was based on his age, the span of his offending and his complete lack of motivation to alter his lifestyle and behaviour. It transpired that other reasons may have influenced her choice of case as the discussion progressed.

Not unreasonably, Angela concluded from the outset that she was unlikely to achieve anything with SK given his history, his attitudes and the comparatively short period of licence and, as such, regarded her role as simply a matter of providing control and securing compliance. However, she appeared to have so little confidence in her skills that she immediately began to question her judgement. Additionally, it became apparent early in our discussion that she attached other meanings to her relationship with SK which impacted on her work with him:

I felt quite intimidated by him at first, when he got allocated to me, because I didn't really know what I was going to say to him. Because I thought, well, obviously he knows a lot more about the Criminal Justice System, offending, prisons and the courts than I do. I also felt that whatever I might say had been said before. So I felt quite uncomfortable about it.....I thought he knew more about the world than I did and that he could outwit me whatever I could say.

Following his release from prison, SK returned to live in his own home where he lived alone. He was separated from his second wife and had three grown up children of his own and two stepsons. He had sufficient savings to support himself (which Angela assumed had accrued from his offending) and no identifiable practical problems. His licence was too short for him to attend a programme but, even if it had not been, Angela had valid doubts about his suitability, believing that he had the potential to exert a negative influence on a group of younger, less sophisticated offenders with burgeoning pro-criminal attitudes, and given the absence of any needs that programme intervention could effectively address. However, instead of feeling secure in her assessment and in the authority of her role, she seemed to be left feeling vulnerable and unprotected, with the case epitomising her sense of hopelessness.

It was only me, sitting down and trying to get him to talk about his offending and that probably wasn't going to get anywhere.

Having no programme to underpin the work, meant Angela having to rely on her own knowledge which she was convinced was inferior to SK's criminal know-how and experience. The phrase, 'It was only me,' felt typical of her tendency towards self denigration which had been apparent in my last interview with her. She considered herself to be the fraud, with nothing to offer, and she appeared to enact something of a role reversal in which, in the counter-transference, she placed SK in the position of the professional, viewing him as a pseudo teacher or mentor.

I saw him every week for the first 16 weeks and I've learned a lot from him really, about what it's like in prison and how he planned his offences.

Also, in my previous interview, Angela had voiced the wish to have had access to a mentor for a short period, post qualifying:

[T]o just sort of ask them what might seem like silly questions which you think you should know and which really puts you off asking because, you think, I know I should know this, but I don't think I can admit that I don't know it. And just sort of discuss things as you go along. I would really have liked that. I think that really would have helped me with my confidence.

These words now appeared to me to be echoed in her description of her sessions with SK which, given her initial anxiety about seeing him, took an unexpected turn:

Like I said, I felt a bit intimidated at first and then I thought, I don't know, 'cos in the end I got to quite enjoy seeing him because I felt like I could ask him anything, say anything.

It was as though perceiving SK as a mentor somehow gave Angela legitimacy to seek answers to questions that she might otherwise not have had the confidence to ask. Thus, she began to be curious and show interest in him which, ironically, given the nature of the case, resulted in her engaging him in some semblance of role related work. In fact, as supervision with him progressed, she stated that she found it easier to explore his offending than that of the other offenders whom she supervised.

In focusing on what she actually did with SK, Angela spoke, once again, of her lack of preparation prior to meeting him but, this time, added:

Sometimes I'm at my best when I just play things by ear, particularly things that I think are going to be difficult. So all my life, if I've got a difficult phone call to make, I just pick up the phone and dial the number and somehow it comes out okay.

Explained in this context, her absence of planning can be seen as representing a defence strategy which makes sense when one considers her anxiety about working with SK (and presumably others on her caseload).¹⁰⁶

During the semi-structured interview, Angela had been unable to articulate what she did with her cases and had become very flustered when asked about her work, saying 'I can't think, I can't think.' This time she was able to convey a little more, offering this definition of practice:

¹⁰⁶ I also realised later that she must have felt the need to apply this strategy to me too, with her anxiety surrounding the exposure of her practice reflected in her jokingly stating near the end of the case discussion 'You might be suggesting that they should sack me.'

Working with someone is getting them to understand why they do things and getting them to do them a different way.

Despite being convinced that gaining compliance from SK was the best one could hope for, Angela spoke of feeling compelled 'to show that some work was being done with him.' This statement suggested a fear of criticism for not being seen to be making an effort to alter SK's criminal lifestyle. Her sense of compulsion also seemed to be mirrored in how she viewed her role, insofar as the notion of 'getting them to' implied a somewhat coercive approach to the job. Furthermore, I wondered if she felt compelled to demonstrate to me that she was doing something with the case, with her possibly regarding me as an inspector or auditor of her work.

I have recorded all my contacts and what we spoke about, so you can see that I did a lot of work with him about his offending and about victims and that sort of thing.

I did not ask to see her records but when I requested that she tell me more about her work and how she developed understanding, it became apparent that she needed her records as a prompt; only to discover that they were not on the file.¹⁰⁷ Forced to rely on her memory Angela's recollection of detail was rather vague.

So each week I'd sort of be trying to challenge him from a different angle. So the next week would kind of come out of thinking about how it had gone that week and may be something that he said. Say he ended up one session saying.....I'm really struggling to remember, but he would sort of give a throw away comment at the end and I'd say, we'll talk about that next week and I would think about it during the week what we would talk about the next week. And I'd say, well you said this last week, but what about such and such because I'd have had a week to think it through.

This suggested a much more structured and thoughtful approach to the work than I had previously deduced. She went onto explain:

¹⁰⁷ Angela's supervision objectives were also missing from the file. Nevertheless, she recalled her main objective as being 'increased awareness of the impact of his offending on himself and others.'

I just hoped that in the short time I saw him I could just make him think a little bit, especially as he's in his 60s. He said to me right at the beginning that he didn't really want to go back to prison again and he wasn't that healthy. There was a suggestion that he might have TB.....I was trying to get him to see a reason to stop.

Once more, the idea of being able to 'make him' or 'get him' to do something emerged. How this was to be achieved was, according to Angela, through adopting a challenging stance.¹⁰⁸ She informed me that, with regards to SK, this meant 'Whatever he said, I had to be able to offer a counter argument.' By way of an example, she recalled trying to refute his assertions that 'everybody's out for themselves' and 'if you can get away with something, why shouldn't you?' Another example was her response to his saying he did not want his children to follow in his footsteps by asking him 'if it's not alright for them, why is it alright for you?' However, according to her, he would not be drawn into this debate. He was also resistant to questions about how he came to commence his criminal career and why he chose to forego any attempt to obtain paid employment. 'He just wouldn't go there' and, looking back on what she knew about him, she remarked 'he didn't really give that much away about himself.'

Implicit in this last comment is Angela's belief that she failed in her efforts to work with him, in the sense that she seemed to blame herself for being unable to create an environment in which he felt able to open up. She thought she could ask him anything but acknowledged how hard it was for her to explore matters in any depth, suggesting it was really she who 'wouldn't go there.' Moreover, whilst she was of the view that her supervision of SK represented progress in terms of her development, she conceded that she experienced this way of working as both frightening and difficult:

When I first qualified or when I was a trainee, I wouldn't have dared to challenge. I think that's one thing that's been quite hard to learn about the job. I think you do have to be quite challenging with people. I mean, not all the time but to know when it's appropriate to do it. But it's not something that comes naturally to me and I have to overcome those feelings of upsetting somebody, upsetting their feelings. Because it

¹⁰⁸ The notion of challenging is generally perceived by recently qualified probation officers as a fundamental aspect of their role. As understood and applied by them, it can often lead to a persecutory stance that can result in being counter-productive in terms of compliance and change. My suggestion to Angela that she could explore empathically without being collusive seemed to come as something of a surprise.

doesn't seem very polite to question what somebody's saying and now it's, sort of, like my job to do that.

In a further instance of role reversal, Angela divulged that SK also challenged her ethics and principles. Thus, in a session focusing on the morality of theft, she told me that he tried to cajole her into admitting that if she were to find a purse containing £500 she would keep it. Whilst she denied this to him, she conceded to me that there was a period in her life when she might have done as he supposed, adding that there were still times when she shared something of his perspective:

On my bad days, I think that everybody's out for themselves and so I sort of think about society a bit like he does. And I found that difficult because to see him, I had to be having my good citizen head on and I was worried I wouldn't be up to it. You really need to be quite sort of centred yourself. You need a philosophy but I still haven't finished thinking mine through.

Another worry that interfered with what Angela felt able to do with her supervisees was concerned with whether 'I'm saying the right thing to people', her anxiety being that getting it wrong could make the difference between their stopping offending or their continuing. It was in respect to this that she longed for the support of line management supervision that focused on something other than targets:

I don't really care about the targets. What I do care about is if what I'm doing is going to work. I understand why the targets are there but whether they come in 20 times in 16 weeks or 14 times is not necessarily going to make any difference to their offending if I'm saying the wrong stuff to them. Somehow you need someone to confirm every so often that you're doing alright, that you're on the right track.

Here, Angela starts off by expressing a fundamental dilemma within the Probation Service concerning the issue of quantity versus quality. Arguably achieving targets is about good practice in the sense that no work can be done if the offender is not seen and if the assessment process is not completed in a timely fashion but, in a culture where hitting targets equals resources, the actual quality of the work has tended to be perceived by many staff as having become of secondary consideration. This is a major source of conflict for Angela given her own anxiety about her competence which, in the absence of a more

nurturing, developmental style of supervision, has the effect of undermining her confidence still further.

Throughout the case discussion there were examples of Angela struggling with what she believed to be organisational expectations surrounding her role, her own expectations regarding the job and her anxiety about whether she was capable of doing it. This seemed to leave her in a state of confusion and uncertainty. She felt uncomfortable about challenging, and appeared equally uncomfortable about gathering information by way of adopting a more inquiring or forensic approach. She informed me that what she really wanted to do was to support and advise people whom she felt had been unfairly treated and 'help them back into society – showing them they've got a place.' She bemoaned the fact that she felt discouraged from undertaking home visits, appreciating their value in enhancing understanding and gathering vital information about the offender.

You only see someone when they come into see you and hear what they've got to tell you. Sometimes you just know people are lying to you but you can't really do anything with that, unless they've lied so inconsistently and you can point it out. I find that a bit frustrating. You know that they're lying about where they live and who they're living with. That's when it feels like the job's not really doing anything effective.

On several occasions Angela returned to the question 'Is there any point to this job or not?' In some respects her supervision of SK provided her with opportunities to experiment with ways of working which she did not have the confidence to use with other offenders. There were indications of her achieving some personal success with this case, but any enjoyment or notion of accomplishment seemed to be quickly eroded by her belief that the work had little purpose because no change occurred. The fact that the likelihood of no change was recognised by her from the start offered no consolation.

For some months I've been feeling that I'm not really getting anywhere with people and so there hasn't been much job satisfaction. I quite like writing reports, I have to say, and it's because you do the one interview, you write the report. You can sit and think and write the report. Not get interrupted, you have time to do it. When it's finished, it's finished so you can cross that off. I've actually done something. When you're working, supervising offenders it's bitty and they ring you up and stuff and it's

never finished. I actually find that quite difficult to deal with.....I think I've become a bit bored, which is outrageous of me to say as I've only been doing it for a year, but I think it's a lot of the same work over and over again and that's also why there's no job satisfaction.

Angela's planned move to a youth offending team promised 'slightly different work, slightly different rules,' together with a multi-disciplinary approach and regular discussions about cases which she hoped would enable her to develop greater knowledge and expertise. It also appealed to her because:

I'm really going to be part of a team. I won't feel like I'm working on my own all the time.

The case discussion confirmed Angela's habitual state of conflict which was identified in my first interview with her and reported on in the previous chapter. She was at odds with the habitus of the organisation and how she perceived the job to be defined, and lacked the confidence and skills base to be able to reach an adaptive compromise. She spoke of still having 'loads and loads to learn' and, if her expectations of the new job are realised, it may be possible for some professional growth to take place. She expressed the belief that she would be more motivated by working with young people whom she anticipated would be less entrenched in their offending and more amenable to change. However, one of her closing remarks to me hinted at her continuing ambivalence about the work and of the prospect of dissatisfaction and disillusionment resurfacing after a while:

I still couldn't say it's what I want to do indefinitely. I've never been known to get carried away with jobs.

Reflections on Angela

Angela opted to complete the survey questionnaire by way of a telephone interview and very quickly demonstrated a lack of confidence in her thinking and decision-making abilities. She expressed uncertainty over which ratings to select and, having made her choices, immediately questioned whether she was being entirely fair or whether the scores truly reflected her experiences. Her indecisiveness and self-doubt, together with the anxiety and guilt her decisions seemed to generate for her, were traits that also featured strongly in both the semi-structured interview and the case discussion.

Nonetheless, Angela appeared very definite about participating in the main research which led me to imagine the type of tussle she might have had with herself prior to us speaking on the telephone and, also to wonder, if she had chosen the telephone interview in order to ensure that, quite literally, her voice would be heard. She informed me that she was on the verge of resigning and made it clear that she would appreciate the opportunity to recount what she had been through adding, 'I feel like I want to say things before I go.' My sense of her wanting to speak with me as part of the process of bringing closure to her present, unhappy situation was further reinforced when we met.

Looking back on our meetings, at the conclusion of the case discussion, I felt that I had occupied several roles for Angela. These roles included confessor and confidante, as well as an inspector, critically evaluating her work, and by contrast, a more benevolent and understanding face of an organisation that had failed to provide her with sufficient support or recognise her needs. Moreover, I had shown an interest in her - something she felt her manager had failed to do.

In my subsequent thoughts about Angela, I noted a tendency to think of her rather like an ambivalent offender who withdraws from supervision. I was also aware that she, too, recognised an affinity with the unstable life experiences of her cases and viewed the offender she brought for discussion as a mentor from whom she could learn and develop. Thus, she seemed to be struggling with boundary issues but, at the same time, was struggling with issues concerning her identity in general.

What I took away from our first face to face interview was an image of someone who seemed overwhelmed by the work and who operated in chaos. In her view, training had not been able to provide her with sufficient knowledge or the confidence to do the job. Her lack of self-worth seemed to leave her unable to trust her judgement or her instincts and she felt very uncontained. In fact, whether Angela had the capacity to do the job was a question that was very much in my mind. She did not appear to identify with the role of probation officer and the narrative she presented led me to the view that she had come to the work primarily for instrumental motives (her wish for a degree, to gain

parental approval and to make sense of and, perhaps, resolve her own issues through contact with her cases).

Whilst my impressions were largely confirmed by the case discussion, I felt that the latter provided her with much more of an opportunity to think about her practice and her aspirations (her inability to think having been a message that she strongly communicated in the previous interview). As a consequence, amidst the chaos of the job and whatever personal turmoil she was experiencing, the case discussion enabled her to focus in a more ordered and reflective manner. In so doing, she conveyed genuine interest in her case and offered a glimpse, not only of the kind of underlying humanitarian and compassionate motives that probably contributed originally to her career choice, but also of her potential to engage offenders in outcome specific supervision. This would have been missed had her involvement in the study not progressed beyond the semi-structured interview.

Angela seemed to be constantly battling with expectations, whether they be her own, her parents', her partners' or those of the probation service. Whilst the issue of performance targets was mentioned by the other research participants, they were especially relevant in the context of Angela's case discussion. In interview she had spoken of having a manager who appeared to only care about the achievement of targets. In the case discussion she made it clear that she did not share this concern. However, what she noted was the potential lack of fit between the number of attendances required of an offender and the tangible benefit that might pertain as a result. Closely related to this was the influence of her professional superego that caused her to feel that she was failing if she did not change behaviour. I began to wonder whether this feeling was something internal to Angela or whether there was also something in the organisation's habitus and culture that generated this expectation.

As it happens, although she might not have managed to help or change SK very much, she did succeed in doing some reasonable work with him. In fact, she provided him with space to think and, according to her, she gained from the experience too. It may well be that the learning she derived from this experience will enable her to help other clients in the future. I felt that it was a

pity that the professional supervision she was receiving was not conducive to enabling her to identify and apply such learning.

At the point of leaving her present job, Angela had little belief in herself and remained in a conflicted and fragile state. Although I am sceptical about her succeeding any better in a youth offending team, I drew some optimism from the fact that she was not giving up immediately on probation work.

3. Dan

I was surprised that Dan agreed to participate in the case discussion as he seemed extremely uncomfortable during the semi-structured interview. I experienced him as the most reticent of my subjects, who appeared to find it difficult to speak about his work and who left me with the feeling that our first meeting had been, for him, something of an ordeal. As if to compensate for his taciturn and distant manner on that last occasion, he explained that the person he had decided to discuss with me had been chosen because 'I wanted to be able to talk quite a lot about a case.'

The offender Dan selected was a 32 year old male (CR) who had 14 convictions over a 17 year period. The offences were predominantly violence related and included robbery, assaults on police, grievous bodily harm, causing an affray, criminal damage and the possession of an offensive weapon (a flick knife); as well as burglary, theft and the possession of drugs. Previous records also indicated that he had experienced physical abuse as a child and had been in Care.

The case was of special significance to Dan because:

He was the first person I officially saw when I started at this office, when I first qualified. Just so much has happened with this case and I've had a lot of new experiences. It may not be representative but I've had it all the way through my first year and I've sort of learned a bit about the way I work and had lots of challenges during that time.

Thus, it appeared that the case had come to signify a kind of rite of passage for Dan, the implication being that he now considered himself to be more

professionally mature and experienced as a consequence of his work on the case. As he began to reveal some details about CR, I became aware that this was precisely the type of offender who, in our last interview, he had described as causing him to feel 'a sort of dread' and who, as a result, he found difficult to work with as 'I just don't want to be in the same room as them.' In other words, CR was an aggressive, demanding and highly volatile person who, on several occasions, complained to Dan's line manager that he was not being helped. I wondered, therefore, if he wanted to demonstrate to me his ability to contain his fears and survive this difficult aspect of the work.

Having chosen the case because Dan considered it to contain a lot of material for discussion, it was apparent that he was unable to speak about it in a spontaneous way. Instead, he needed to refer continually to his case records as if he had no confidence in his ability to remember the interaction or important aspects of the case.

The case had been transferred to Dan from a colleague who was moving to another team. At that point, CR was coming to the end of a period of supervision on licence which followed his release from a 30 months prison sentence for causing grievous bodily harm to a man who had failed to provide him with drugs for which he had paid. However, just before the expiry of his licence, he was convicted of affray (an offence which pre-dated his imprisonment) and made subject to a Community Order comprising of a supervision requirement for 24 months, a requirement to attend an Aggression Replacement Training (ART) group work programme and 100 hours Unpaid Work. Dan had subsequently supervised CR for just over 12 months and, at the time of our discussion, was about to transfer the case to another probation area as, owing to allegations of violence towards his step-children, he had been required to leave the home he had been sharing with his partner and her children and live elsewhere.

Adding to this picture, Dan informed me:

During the time I've been supervising him he's self harmed, domestic violence issues have emerged, child protection issues have emerged,

he's been diagnosed with a personality disorder and he's had health problems.

Dan was unaware of any of these matters when he took over the case and, prior to the making of the new Community Order, CR had been attending the probation office on a monthly basis for monitoring purposes and merely checking in. This accorded with the minimum requirements of national standards, but meant that no focused work had been undertaken with CR by Dan's predecessor. The latter had also failed to realise that by reason of his conviction for GBH and the length of his sentence, CR should have been referred and managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

From Dan's account of their contact, CR was angry and hostile towards him from the moment they met. He made it clear that he was unhappy about having a new supervisor and started to become enraged when, by way of introduction, Dan attempted to discuss CR's background and review his progress during his previous period of supervision. He became even more irate when he discovered that the new court order required him to increase his frequency of contact to weekly.

In the very first session I thought we'd start to think about what we were going to do together, but at that first appointment I just remember him being really, really angry. He didn't want to go back over what he'd done. He just wanted to put it all behind him. I mean, if he doesn't want to do something he'll let you know about it and be really angry and, in fact, in that first interview, he was so angry that one of my colleagues deliberately interrupted the session because he was worried about me.

Dan spoke of feeling 'a bit shocked' by the degree of CR's hostility towards him, especially as he had not encountered anything like that before and had no idea how best to deal with the situation. To Dan's relief, his colleague's entry into the interview room seemed to diffuse what was happening, although it was CR who seemed to remain in control, with him stating that he had 'had enough' and requesting that the session be brought to an end. This was agreed and another appointment was arranged.

I learned from Dan that he subsequently consulted his line manager about what to do in similar situations and was advised to walk out of the room.

Consequently, this was the strategy he adopted and, in anticipation of each interview being difficult, he told me 'I gritted my teeth and went through with the session.'

It would appear that Dan approached each session in a planned and structured way. He informed me that he wanted CR to be involved in deciding the focus of supervision, viewing this as good practice, but seemed to have little ability to work with resistance or anything else that CR may bring to the interview. During their second session together, Dan wanted to set objectives for supervision but recalled that CR quickly became angry and frustrated. This had occurred when Dan asked CR to tell him the requirements of supervision as a means of demonstrating that he understood them. The intensity of the rage that followed led to Dan stating that he would complete the objectives without him, giving him a further appointment and then leaving the interview room as his manager had instructed him.

CR left the room himself a few minutes later and went to reception where, in an apparently much calmer state, he requested and was given an appointment to see Dan's line manager with a view to making a complaint. By chance, he also met his previous supervising officer who reported back that CR had accused Dan of being 'an arsehole' – his main complaint being that 'he doesn't show any interest in me.' This is also what CR told Dan's line manager. The latter rejected his demand for a change of probation officer and later advised Dan to keep future sessions brief and to try to talk with CR about what was happening in their interviews. In his record log he had also noted his SPO's advice 'to think together about how supervision is going.'

I had felt some concern about the guidance Dan reported having initially received from his manager, which seemed to amount to abandoning CR, and thought them lucky that it did not precipitate a serious incident either within the probation office or outside. The latest advice reassured me that the SPO was perhaps more in tune with the need to address CR's anger and support his thinking capacities than I had at first imagined.

Accordingly, Dan raised with CR the issue of there being 'a communication problem' between them. Reading the entry in his records, he informed CR that he had been shocked by his anger and told him 'it is in my nature to pursue things when perhaps I should back off.' CR's response was to say that he was not angry with him and that previous problems with probation were on his mind. Dan did not explore this explanation in more depth and was relieved to have a session with him which did not trigger another angry outburst.

In the sessions which followed, Dan stated that CR's anger would 'switch on and off.' Dan remembered that there were two more interviews which ended with his walking out; a further occasion when CR complained to Dan's line manager that he was not being helped and a joint session in which Dan and his line manager saw CR together in order 'to tell him things we knew he would not want to hear.' There were also occasions though when, despite CR's anger, Dan was able to complete his agenda for the interview.

He'd get really angry, blow up and I'd say, that's it, I can see you're really angry and I'm not gonna stay here listening to this, we'll have to leave this until next week. And then it would all be okay. It was almost like cutting him off short.

Using this tactic, Dan managed to undertake a number of prescribed exercises with CR for the purpose of preparing him for attendance on the ART programme. Dan described these exercises as 'exploring the roots of his anger' and, although he was of the opinion that CR had 'blocked out a lot of his childhood,' he did reveal a little more of his history. This included his father leaving the family when he was 7 years old, his exclusion from school and the development of a £300 a day heroin and cocaine habit. At this stage, he claimed to have been 'clean' for more than 18 months, apart from smoking cannabis whilst in prison.

By the time CR began the ART programme, he had been supervised for approximately 5 months and his frequency of contact had been reduced to monthly. He had kept all but two of his appointments with Dan but was much more erratic in his attendance for Unpaid Work. However, his reasons for

failing his appointments, which were due to health problems, were all deemed acceptable.

A significant turning point came at seven months into the Order.

CR rang me and basically he was in distress and under the influence of alcohol. He said he had thrown a golf club through the window of his home. His family had left him, he said ART wasn't helping him and he was angry and he was just asking me could I help him, could I help him. He said if I didn't help him he was going to kill himself or someone else, and this is like at 6.30 in the evening. So I told him to think about the consequences of this and to contact his GP that evening as they may be able to offer support that night and I told him to come and see me first thing the following morning. He shouted I wasn't helping him and that he wanted to go to prison and then he hung up. I phoned him back but there was no reply and I left a message saying I was concerned about him.

Worried by the call, Dan consulted a colleague who confirmed he had done all he could. He took no further action that evening but 'I spoke to my manager first thing in the morning.' Again he took her advice to contact the police, social services and the leaders of the ART programme, and also to organise a psychiatric assessment. He subsequently learned from the police that they had been called to CR's home address following a report of a domestic argument during which he had smashed up furniture. When the police arrived, CR threatened to harm himself with an ornamental sword. He was told that he would be arrested for a breach of the peace, where upon he cut his arm with the sword and had been taken to hospital. His partner was present but unharmed. It sounded as though CR had called Dan shortly before the police had visited his home.

Later the next morning Dan received another telephone call from CR.

He was crying and in a terrible state. He told me he had just hurt himself and no one else. He was calm by the end of the conversation.

Given the increase in risk, Dan required CR to revert to more frequent contact and, for a while, he presented as far more compliant. He co-operated with the psychiatric referral which resulted in the personality disorder diagnosis and he also agreed to return to court so his order could be amended by removing the

ART requirement and replacing it with a requirement for him to attend a domestic violence programme.

Not long afterwards, allegations of CR kicking his 10 year old step-daughter surfaced, triggering a child protection investigation. In addition, a further argument with his partner led to a second police call out to his home, culminating in CR's arrest for assaulting a police officer and the imposition of a Suspended Sentence Order. Although Dan informed me 'I don't think he was really motivated to work with us,' his court report was nonetheless influential in keeping CR out of prison:

I don't like to see people go to prison. Better he continue on the programme than go to prison which wouldn't change anything. He was on the right group so I hoped something might change. He might have a bit more insight into his behaviour which would help reduce the risk to his family.

In the remaining weeks of their contact more allegations of physical abuse were made by CR's step-daughter and the child protection team insisted that he move out of the home whilst they continued their investigations. With his moving to an address outside the borough, the decision was taken to transfer the case to another probation office.

This is all happening now and supervision with me has come to an end, and at the end of our last appointment he shook my hand and thanked me for the help I'd given him. And to be honest, I didn't ever think I'd hear that from him and so I was quite surprised.

The transfer of this case coincided with the start of Dan's second post qualifying year and, in consideration of this, he informed me 'I think I've got plenty of experience now.' In attempting to explore the basis of this statement Dan informed me that he now recognised that he had been 'too soft' with his supervisees and with CR in particular. Elaborating further, he explained that this is what he meant when he told me, at the start of our discussion, that he had learned from the case about the way he worked. Although CR had kept appointments with him, he realised that he had been too willing to accept his absences from Unpaid Work and should have returned him to court. It emerged that this issue was especially pertinent to him at present as two other offenders

whom he had been supervising had been arrested recently in connection with allegations of their involvement in the commission of a serious further offence (SFO). This had since triggered an internal enquiry that had resulted in his being criticised for his failure to enforce. The implication being that swifter enforcement may have prevented the further offences.

It was apparent that Dan felt very indignant over the criticism of his work and in defence of himself stated:

I think my work is of reasonable quality but if I don't have enough time to spend on cases.....I had 13 domestic violence cases at one stage out of a caseload of 60 and things are constantly happening and there aren't enough hours or days in the week, and I'm always conscious that something like Hanson and White could happen to me, and I've now been through two enquiries and there were a couple of questions about caseloads and stuff like that, but no one explains how, if something like this happens at the same time as something else, how do you even do the assessments and the reviews or anything like that and see the people?

In my view this statement is very helpful in contextualising Dan's work with CR and serves to draw attention once more to the conflict between quality and quantity, and organisational expectations versus the individual dispositions of the worker.

Based on his experience of the SFO inquiries and his supervision of CR, Dan told me that the way to motivate offenders like him was:

[T]o kind of back them into a corner so that they can't sort of wriggle around and, you know, escape. I've seen people with programme conditions move around the area and give different addresses, so you've got to pin them down and say you've either got to face this or you've got to go back to court. So that's how I kind of see my role with some people and I regret I didn't do that with CR.

Accordingly, Dan appeared to be voicing the need to be tougher but did not seem to recognise a need to extend his repertoire of interventions or develop greater understanding of offenders like CR. Whilst I have no dispute with the necessity of establishing and enforcing containing boundaries, I must confess to being worried by how Dan's description of his role will be enacted in practice in

the future. He felt blamed and persecuted by the SFO inquiries for what had gone wrong and now seemed to want to respond by behaving in a persecutory way himself towards those he supervised. He was prepared to alter his practice in order to conform to managerial requirements but plainly regarded enforcement as being at odds with his own values. He was in the job 'to provide a helping hand' and informed me 'I want people to do well. I don't want to see people going back to court.' He was unconvinced by my suggestion that enforcement and the provision of a helping hand were not total opposites or by my argument that enforcement, carried out with sensitivity and understanding, could be therapeutic.¹⁰⁹

Referring once again to the investigations into his cases, Dan summed up his work in the following way:

I just do the best I can and keep my fingers crossed. I mean, I can only spread myself so far and I just hope that I don't miss something.

Reflections on Dan

In reflecting on the three types of material that Dan has contributed to this research, I feel that he has presented a number of contrasting aspects of himself. This may be indicative of the contradictions and confusion that are around for him and which impact on his way of thinking, or it may be suggestive of issues to do with the methodology, especially the capacity of the survey questionnaire to capture what respondents are really feeling.

It is important, first of all, to consider that Dan gave very high ratings to the questions contained in the survey. Thus, in advance of meeting with him, his survey answers had led me to suppose that he was someone who felt that training had prepared him well for the job and who felt contented with and supported in his work. Upon interviewing him I learned that, in his view, training had taught him 'to do the job properly' but he now regarded this as impossible owing to the high volume of work he was required to undertake. He believed

¹⁰⁹ This is an argument that is closely aligned to the care versus control debate of yesteryear, but which I feel is just as relevant today.

that he was continuing 'to do my best' and yet he described feeling overwhelmed and at times paralysed by his workload. He spoke of wanting a relationship with those he supervised that could help 'make things better for them', but came across as disengaged and remote. He stated 'I don't get upset about anything' and 'I don't tend to respond to people emotionally' but admitted being filled with 'a sort of dread' at the prospect of supervising difficult and potentially dangerous offenders whom he experienced as hostile and complaining about his failure to help them. He perceived his team colleagues as both de-motivated and de-motivating as a result of their own heavy workloads and this, together with the number of cases he was expected to manage and the nature of the behaviour of some of his cases towards him, seemed to have led to a growing sense of negativity and vulnerability. Thus, I could discern no evidence of either contentment or of a supportive team environment.¹¹⁰

Dan's reference to his feeling of dread put me in mind of 'nameless dread', the phrase Bion (1962) applies to an infant's experience of being uncontained. In the context of Dan's experience, I regarded his dread as symptomatic of the absence of the type of containment that I believe professional supervision needs to provide to enable Dan and his front line colleagues to reflect upon and detoxify the feelings arising from the work. The fact that this did not appear to be available to Dan caused me, in turn, to question his capacity to offer containment to those he supervised. He gave me to understand that he possessed technical skills, but it was the more indeterminate elements of the work that eluded him.

This seemed to be confirmed by Dan's description of his initial involvement with the offender he selected for the case discussion. However, the case discussion turned out to be something of a revelation, not only because Dan was able to talk in a more animated, coherent and less despondent manner but also

¹¹⁰ I have since been wondering whether Dan's high survey ratings can be explained on the basis of where he is coming from in terms of his habitus. He seemed to possess limited expectations or ambition and this may have contributed to greater acceptance or satisfaction with the way things are. This finds support in Bourdieu (2000:217) who refers to:

[D]ispositions which lead members of the dominated classes to put up with objective conditions that would be judged intolerable or revolting by agents otherwise disposed.

because it provided a much fuller picture of his practice. Where as in the interview, he seemed not to have enough knowledge to talk about his work in a general way, I felt that the case provided a protective focus that enabled him to feel more comfortable, so making it easier for him to talk. Curiously, he chose the type of case that, in interview, he had described as instilling a sense of dread but, at the end of the discussion, I was left thinking that he had genuinely been doing his best. He also seemed to take some pride in what he had achieved in the case, showing that his situation was not as hopeless as had been portrayed in the interview. I was, nevertheless, concerned by his statement 'I think I've got plenty of experience now', which seemed somewhat delusional.

In reflecting on these issues further, it is important to recognise that the case of CR was, undoubtedly, an extremely difficult and complex one that would certainly have stretched a more experienced probation officer. At times CR was simultaneously rejecting or attacking as inadequate the help being offered, but was also desperate to be helped. He was causing harm to others as well as himself and, perhaps, frightened of his behaviour and of what he might do, saw prison as a refuge. Faced with an angry, complaining and unpredictable offender there was no manual to which Dan could refer for guidance or instruction and he possessed no previous practice knowledge to help inform his response. In these circumstances, he was heavily reliant on support and advice from his manager, whom he considered 'backed me up.' This, I felt, was positive especially because it showed awareness by Dan of when to ask for help.¹¹¹

In addition, I think he may have chosen the case in order to show me just how difficult he found it to supervise people like CR. However, despite an approach which, for the most part, seemed to suggest that he had little understanding of CR or what to do, Dan managed to get through supervision with him and appeared especially self-satisfied with the action he took, without prompting from his manager, to enable CR to attend a domestic violence programme.

¹¹¹ This offers, perhaps another speculative explanation about why he rated so highly the survey question about support.

Implicit in this was recognition by Dan that Aggression Replacement Training can be counter-productive for offenders who exhibit instrumental violence, which domestic abuse is generally regarded as being. This may be taken as an indication of Dan responding appropriately to perceived need (and taking on board new insight from research and other investigations of practice¹¹²). Apart from this, I did not see any additional evidence to support his assertion that 'I increasingly got the measure of him.' Notwithstanding that, Dan's achievement in this case was to stick with it.

It is also relevant to note that CR's parting expression of gratitude, which I consider to have been extremely important for Dan to hear, would appear to suggest that CR had developed some appreciation of Dan's concern and, perhaps, of the fact that Dan had stayed with him. Even Dan, in spite of the hostility, seemed to feel an emotional connection towards CR:

When I had my final appointment with him, in a sense I felt it was a bit sad to leave him at one of the most turbulent times of his life.

This statement also suggested recognition by Dan that his withdrawal from the case had the potential to add to the instability of the situation, increasing CR's experience of loss.

It would be good to think that Dan might receive help from his line manager to reflect and build on the lessons that might be derived from his work with CR and from the SFO inquiries. As a matter of course, and especially because of Dan's status as a newcomer, professional supervision should be the place where he can learn from experiences such as these. Unfortunately, I did not get an impression either of Dan regarding his SPO as a teacher or of his SPO seeing herself in that capacity. I was equally unsure as to whether Dan was in a learning frame of mind.

¹¹² The publication by the Home Office in 2006 of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation Report into the murder of John Monckton by Damien Hanson and Elliot White, both of whom were subject to probation supervision at the time of the murder, identified a number of practice errors including the importance of distinguishing between expressive and instrumental violence. Hanson had been assessed as exhibiting expressive violence and as a consequence had been placed on an ART programme, where as his violence was actually of an instrumental nature and required a different type of intervention.

Even so, one lesson that I considered important to draw to Dan's attention was that staying calm and sticking with it could, in itself, do some good. It actually led to his being thanked. It may be one could not really expect him to learn anything more than that in view of his having been dropped in the deep end with the case and having been pushed quite close to the limit.

4. Tom

Tom selected a case for discussion which he believed was typical of the offenders he was working with and which he felt best represented his style of working. The case concerned KD, a 26 year old male who, at the age of 21, had been sentenced to seven years imprisonment for two offences of robbery at jeweller's shops. He and a co-defendant had burst into the shops, threatening staff with sledgehammers and stealing jewellery worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. Following his arrest, KD attempted to escape from court when a bail application was denied, assaulting two police officers in the process and, as a consequence, was sentenced to an additional 6 months imprisonment. His first application for parole was refused but his second application, which allowed him a period of 14 months supervision on licence, was granted. Tom had visited him on one occasion in prison and had prepared a report recommending KD's early release. At the time of our discussion he had been supervising him in the community for seven weeks.

KD had previous convictions for street robberies which, as a teenager, led to his being sentenced to three years at a Young Offenders Institution. He also had convictions for burglary of a house and for theft from vehicles. According to KD, these earlier offences were motivated by his need to obtain money in order to support his dependency on crack cocaine. However, he claimed to be drug free at the time when the robberies at the jeweller's shops took place and stated that these later offences were motivated by greed and his wish to establish 'a glamorous image and a champagne life-style.' He explained his attempt to abscond from court on the grounds that his partner had just given birth to their son.

The conditions of KD's release required him to live with his mother, her partner and their two children aged 14 years and 10 years. His parents had separated

when he was five years old and he had not had contact with his father since then. His relationship with his own partner ended at the start of his prison sentence although she had continued to visit him regularly and he was optimistic that they might successfully rebuild their relationship.

Tom first met KD prior to his release, interviewing him in order to assess whether he should be granted parole. His original application for parole had been rejected as it was thought 'he had not done enough to reduce his level of risk.' In particular, his previous probation officer had not recommended parole as KD was considered to lack victim empathy.¹¹³ However, in making his assessment, Tom had come to the conclusion that KD's risk had now reduced, making his successful release on parole more viable. In making his decision, Tom had taken into account progress within the prison system which had resulted in KD being decategorised and transferred to an open prison. He had participated in a cognitive behavioural programme where he was perceived to have done well and having, at an earlier stage in his sentence, tested positive for cannabis use, all subsequent tests had since been negative and no further adjudications had been awarded against him.

I noted from my discussion with Tom that in recommending parole on this occasion he had balanced public protection and risk issues with what he regarded as the needs of the offender and the ways in which rehabilitation could best be achieved. In his view, a longer period of supervision was preferable and likely to be more effective in terms of KD's resettlement than his remaining in prison for another six months. Tom was satisfied that some natural maturity had taken place, along with increased victim awareness and other positive changes in attitude. In addition, he believed that the length of sentence had in itself served as a deterrent and that a major factor in KD's future rehabilitation was his wish to develop a relationship with his son, whom KD shamefully referred to as having 'grown up in prison visiting rooms' and his desire to reconcile with his former partner.

¹¹³ This has tended to be an extremely contentious issue amongst criminal justice professionals. In the past, an absence of victim empathy has been regarded as an indication of increased risk. More recently, there has been a growing body of influential opinion that has argued that it is impossible to measure victim empathy objectively and that its apparent presence or absence should be treated with great caution and, along with minimisation and denial, it should not be regarded as a variable risk factor.

As if feeling the need to defend himself against an accusation that his assessment may not have been sufficiently thorough, especially in the event of KD reoffending, Tom stated that the amount of time he was allowed for the assessment process had been curtailed owing to prison procedures that had both delayed his entry into the institution and KD's arrival for interview.

Nonetheless, Tom told me:

I had quite a long discussion with him about victims to test out what work he'd done and what his thinking was. We discussed a case that had been in the media and there was quite a lot that came from him without me having to ask directly. So I felt that his awareness had improved. He was also able to talk about his own victims – the shop workers and their families and how they may have been afraid to go to work.

A recent, well publicised SFO enquiry that had, once again, raised concerns about the quality of risk assessments in the Service, had recently caused Tom to re-visit and re-evaluate his work in a number of cases. Having taken this action in respect to KD he reported feeling satisfied that he had made appropriate and defensible decisions based on the information available to him. He described looking back over previous assessments and reports on KD, and of having liaised with prison staff and spoken to KD's mother. In my opinion his only omission was not accessing information relating to KD's first sentence of imprisonment as a teenager, something he promised to rectify after our discussion. Even so, he seemed to feel secure in his judgement for someone who had just commenced their second post qualifying year.

Being aware that KD's drug dependency was a motivating factor in his early offending and feeling uncertain as to how he would respond to pressures and frustrations in the community, Tom requested that KD's licence should include a condition to address his drug misuse by first of all co-operating with an assessment undertaken by a drugs counselling service. This was to be followed, if applicable, by drug treatment. He also considered it important for KD to build on the cognitive behavioural work he had done in the prison and so made it another condition that he should attend a cognitive skills booster programme. Supervision objectives were built around both of these conditions, which additionally highlighted the importance of gaining paid employment as soon as possible. To this end, Tom arranged for KD to meet regularly with an

employment advisor who worked in partnership with the probation service. A further action was to refer KD to the MAPPA process as a category two case.

For the first two weeks following his release Tom saw KD for weekly appointments. Since then, he had been seeing him fortnightly, alternating KD's appointments between himself and the employment advisor. So far KD had been fully compliant and in outlining progress to date, Tom demonstrated that he was actively managing the case in accordance with his perception of his role by completing all the appropriate referrals. He expressed satisfaction with this:

It's been going very well. He's reported every time and he's been engaging quite well. He's done the pre-group work for the cognitive skills booster and he's now waiting for a date for when he can do the programme. He's seeing the employment advisor and has been working on his CV and doing job searches and things like that. I've referred him to the local drug interventions service and they've arranged to see him for an assessment. MAPPA has been the only problem as, in this borough, the police are currently unwilling to accept pre-release referrals which seems to miss the point. So he's not been discussed yet.

Despite the issue with MAPPA, Tom felt that he had fulfilled his obligations and responsibilities and, in this particular instance, he was not anticipating that MAPPA would have much to offer in terms of assisting with the risk management of the case. In his opinion, the risk to the public presented by KD was under control and only likely to re-emerge in the context of a return to his previous life-style and type of offending.

At the moment those offences don't seem likely unless there's a breakdown in his support systems, in his relationships. He's not working, but he does seem quite motivated to. I feel that if, in a few months time, he hasn't got a job that may raise the risk level and the frustration may get to him, and he may seek more immediate financial gain.

However, Tom was of the view that if KD continued to co-operate with what had been put in place for him, it would act as a control mechanism. He was especially keen to monitor KD's drug use and was not willing to be diverted from this by KD's insistence that he was no longer using drugs.

I'm still looking at his drug use. He says it's not a current issue but he understands why I do. It's difficult to monitor when someone says they're

not using but that's why I've set up the referral to the drugs service. I suspect he may be using cannabis occasionally. There haven't been any obvious signs though. He's on time for all his appointments, so he's motivated enough.

Tom's approach suggested a healthy scepticism. It also seemed evident that he took his duty to protect the public and manage risk very seriously. Accordingly, in this instance, he told me 'I've taken a risk management and case management role' and, in the absence of MAPPA involvement, he considered that 'The onus is on me to do what I can at this stage.' He was therefore planning a home visit in order to verify information provided by KD.

I'm hoping that his mother's going to be there. I'll try and make a rough judgement on the state of their relationship and see how things are going. I'll be looking for evidence, evidence of anything that causes me concern. Evidence of drugs misuse, things like that. But I know people generally have a tidy up before their probation officer comes round. I'll be looking at whether or not he's got his own room and see what sort of space he has for himself. I'll check whether he's thinking of moving on because that's another area I can offer him assistance and advice with.

It would appear from this that Tom recognised the potential value of home visits in gathering further information about the offender and providing a fuller picture which might contribute to the assessment of risk. However, he admitted that he usually did not have the time to do them but, on this occasion, was more organised and wanted to impress his new SPO by 'doing things properly.' It was also apparent that the visit was being conducted to fit around the boundaries that Tom had placed on his working day and which were partially in conflict with the benefits he hoped to derive from the visit. Thus, whilst he thought it would be good to speak to KD's mother and stepfather, he had not actually arranged to meet with them. Referring to the visit, he explained:

I had to arrange to do it at a time when I was able to do it, which is the nature of the work, unfortunately. I remember having discussions during training about home visits and a lecturer saying we should pop round at 7pm in the evening to see whether they're there.....To see who's there and go unannounced but it's possible but not very practicable.

Unannounced visits are not generally advocated, but Tom seemed to feel that his response to this suggestion, as stated above, was sufficient to counter other arguments about doing visits outside core working hours and, as such, justified

his stance. The fact he was intending to do a visit at all was commendable and he was aware that many of his colleagues tended to avoid them. Arguably, it was another indication of the extent to which he had the job sussed albeit on his terms. On the other hand, I could not help but feel that his strategy was evidence of an avoidance of the emotionality of the job, with his having developed a seemingly rational, qualm-free way of protecting himself.

With the aim of managing risk, Tom was very clear about his obligations with regards to enforcement. He was especially keen to ensure that there was no ambiguity concerning KD's licence conditions, with Tom requesting that the wording be amended for the sake of clarity and to avoid any legal challenge should he need to take any enforcement action. Furthermore, he appeared entirely comfortable with the authority inherent in his role, appreciating how this may impact on his relationship with KD.

I think he's still suspicious of what we do, about checking up on him. I have to ask him lots of questions to get information from him. I don't think he's holding it back but I think he's reluctant to tell me more than I need to know. I've been passed the office when he's been talking to the employment advisor and he seemed much more animated. I suspect there's something about him being more directly a source of help, of practical advice so that's why their relationship may be different. I think he sees me as the person who he's got to come and see every week or fortnight or whatever to avoid going back to prison. I'm hoping to get to a stage where he knows he can tell me if something's wrong, if there's something he needs help with. He has phoned up a couple of times to ask advice about something – about where to go, so that may be a sign of things improving.

Throughout our discussion there was always a sense of Tom being in control of his cases and his workload. He acknowledged 'I'm sure there's plenty I don't know' about KD but had no anxieties about this state of not knowing and talked realistically about what he could achieve, given that he felt constrained to allocate no more than half an hour to each offender interview. Moreover, he had no doubts about his areas of expertise and competence, and about his limitations.

At the moment I'm happy with what I'm doing. To have a more holistic view of the person would be nice but I don't think I have the skills in some areas. I don't have therapeutic skills. So I'm very happy that other

people are delivering the interventions and I can kind of review what they're doing and follow the guidelines in the programme manual.

Tom considered that a substantial part of his job was to motivate KD, and others he supervised, to attend programmes.

I'm preparing him for the programme by doing some lifestyle questions with him, focusing on the influences on his behaviour like the people he mixes with. More detailed work will be done on the programme. Apart from that, I work on the immediate. So with this case it's been his employment, his drug use, MAPPA, accommodation if he wants me to. I've also checked with the local authority if his partner is known to them.

In clarifying his notion of 'the immediate' Tom spoke of taking into account a person's history in his assessment of risk but generally felt that he worked on the 'here and now' which, in KD's case meant working on practical problems that might interfere with his successful resettlement. He anticipated that once KD had commenced the cognitive skills booster programme, he would receive feedback from the programme tutors and, in his meetings with KD, he intended to go over the learning points with him.

Tom felt content to prepare offenders for programmes but he was careful not to stray beyond the prescribed exercises. There was a range of behaviours that he did not feel able to explore in depth, such as domestic violence, the experience of sexual abuse and 'other things in the past', as he did not consider himself to possess the necessary skills. However, he did not rule out doing such work in the future, providing he received relevant training and 'a lot of guidance.'

In concluding our discussion, Tom summed up his approach to the work as follows:

There are limits to what we can do but we need to do what we can do effectively and make sure we're doing everything we should be doing.

Reflections on Tom

In both my interviews with him, I was struck by Tom's confident, relaxed manner and by the absence of any overtly expressed negativity or gripes. Thoughtful

and introspective, he seemed to possess a well-considered recognition of his capacities and skills to do the job given his current stage of development.

However, Tom proved to be an unexpectedly challenging subject for me in a manner that I believe was completely unbeknown to him. The principle source of this challenge came from his approach to the work which was revealed very fully in the case discussion and which he announced, unashamedly and with considerable self-assurance, typified his practice. It is wrong, perhaps, for me to imply that any shame should be ascribed to his practice which was focused, boundaried, practical, rule bound and entirely rational.

In the semi-structured interview, Tom had described himself as a case manager which, for him, entailed a clear delineation between the assessment of risk and needs and the delivery of interventions. He regarded himself as responsible for the assessment process and for being the ultimate authority in a case, determining and brokering how needs would be met and risks reduced, whilst also carrying responsibility for evaluating and monitoring progress and, where necessary, taking appropriate action to achieve enforcement. He was very definite that it was neither within his brief nor within his realm of competence or expertise to provide interventions himself.

A working relationship was established where by the offender clearly knew where he stood, but that relationship seemed to be devoid of emotion. Significantly, it was apparent that Tom did not seem to suffer the work related anxieties or self-doubt that marred the experiences of some of the other research subjects. He did not have sleepless nights worrying about the work and he did not appear to have a problem in containing his workload within standard working hours. He was also very unequivocal about what was within his sphere of responsibility and what fell outside his remit.

Although Tom had explained his orientation to the work in the semi-structured interview, I had not appreciated what it might mean until the case discussion. During the latter, I became aware that I was finding myself both admiring Tom's style of work and regarding it as deeply frustrating. I wanted him to engage with offenders in a less practical, more therapeutic way because that was my

orientation. Thus, in thinking about this further, the challenge he presented was to my perspective of what constituted a good probation officer.

In Tom's case, training appeared to have produced someone who had bought whole-heartedly into the case management approach, shifting the values that he described having at the start of training (ie an explanation of crime linked to sociological and psychological factors) and instead, adopting a more moralistic perspective in which offenders must take responsibility for their own behaviour. He seemed to have no difficulty in conforming to current service ideology and was still able to view the job as a vocation that fulfilled his altruistic motives.

From this standpoint, Tom had few quibbles about the quality of his experience so far and this was reflected in the high ratings he awarded to the survey questions. He did not regard therapeutic approaches as a major element of the work and firmly stated that he did not have the skills to deliver approaches of that type. He was not averse to acquiring such skills in the future and to developing a wider range of interventions via further training, and if given the appropriate support via professional supervision, but seemed unconcerned if this were not to happen. Accordingly, he seemed perfectly content to continue to organise interventions for offenders, rather than becoming emotionally involved with them. In his perception this was still relationship work, albeit with the emphasis on the practical.

As far as I could ascertain, in respect to the case he presented, Tom quite literally ticked all the boxes in terms of management expectations, appearing to conform precisely to national standards and achieving those targets that fell within the realm of his responsibility. He made all the appropriate referrals, drew on relevant information to formulate an assessment and used all the right words such as protecting the public, managing risk, gathering evidence, monitoring, checking and controlling.

On this basis, I felt that Tom was able to produce a viable and acceptable orientation to the occupation. Whilst this may contain an element of flight from the feelings the work can generate, his adherence to this style of practice provided a form of protection that seemed to be missing for the others. It also

represented a strategy for dealing with feelings that he was comfortable with and which produced desired outcomes from a management perspective. This is not to suggest that he did not experience conflicting demands or frustrations, but gave the impression of being able to both manage them and take them in his stride.

Unlike some other members of the sample, Tom did have time to think and plan. It was also apparent that the performance management approach he experienced in supervision with his line manager met his current needs.

Given the prevailing culture it is perhaps inevitable that someone like Tom should emerge and be represented in this study. Whether he will continue to operate in this vein is likely to be influenced either by subsequent training and guidance or by colleagues and offenders who may experience his style as unsatisfactory.

Tom may hit the targets, but does he have a positive impact on offending behaviour? The other subjects who took part in the case discussions were able to affect some degree of change, even if it was only in terms of enabling their cases to think or understand themselves better. Dan, for example, may not appear to have had the enthusiasm and positive commitment that Tom seemed to possess, but he was able to 'hold' his case. It could be said that this, in itself, is what the job is about; the hope being that by providing holding, the offender will find a way of moving on. Tom, on the other hand, sets out with the aim of managing risk. He would seem to provide his offenders with a clear set of boundaries, so that they know where they stand, and he encourages them to take a rational view like he does himself.

An approach such as Tom's undoubtedly plays a part in the overall scheme of things. He knows what he is doing, where as it could be argued that those who attempt to do more through a more relational mode of work, but who lack sufficient skill and judgement, may actually represent a greater danger. Thus, it is possible to assert that there is a place for what Tom does in the spectrum of relation based versus rule based modes of approaches to offenders.

If I were supervising Tom, I would wish to encourage him in a different direction, building on the foundations he has so far established. It would be wrong not to give him credit for the accuracy of his practical knowledge, especially concerning the rules, and his ability to cope with the work.

General Reflections on the Case Discussions

Some reflections on the contribution made by the case discussions to this study have already been included in the methodology chapter and so I do not propose to repeat those comments here. In that earlier chapter, I also gave some thought to the questions they raised about the nature of the research participant's relationship with me and speculated upon their rationale for their choice of cases. Indeed, throughout the discussions, I was especially mindful of what was going on in the transference that led them to present a certain kind of case. In some instances cases were presented that revealed their weaknesses; in others a picture of competence was exhibited. In respect to all of them I was trying to help them to think about what they were doing and, as a consequence, I was not just an investigator. Indeed, at various times I felt as though I was being placed in the roles of consultant, teacher or confessor.

The manner in which they presented the case to me was also of interest. Thus, for example, Sharon came well prepared confirming her organised, thoughtful approach to the work; whilst Angela conveyed something of the chaos in which she functioned.

Having now set out all the case material, it is my hope that I have succeeded in demonstrating the way in which it builds on the data obtained from the earlier interviews. In my opinion, the achievement of the case discussions is in their ability to show how the subjects concerned embody the field. In particular, they provide a more explicit view of the way the subjects practice, the conditions in which they practice and the inherent complexity of the work. They reveal more clearly the different approaches that the subjects bring to the job, along with their different forms of adaptation, and they serve to augment the picture of the prevailing culture within the probation field and its impact on the work.

Accordingly, the case discussions highlight the field of practice in action, which may be described as the place where the prescriptive procedures of managerialism and official service policy meets the dispositions of the front line

practitioners. Taking all this into account, it can be said that It is through the case discussions that the professional identity of the sample can be seen most vividly.

These cases have shown a group of people who, it must be remembered, are relatively inexperienced, struggling to both engage and commit to an occupation to the best of their abilities. As part of this process they are seen facing up to various challenges, problems, expectations and rules.

In the course of the discussions a number of themes identified in the semi-structured interviews re-emerged, thereby substantiating their relevance. These included the original motivation and orientation of the subjects towards the work, the presence or absence of support structures and resources, pressures arising from the workload and the seemingly all-pervasive issue of time. The latter is a feature that has appeared repeatedly in each of the discussions, whether in terms of time to think, prepare and plan; time to give directly to offenders; time to complete the work that needs to be done; or the importance of time out away from the job. It is interesting to note, however, that those who felt most supported, such as Sharon, Femi and Tom, seemed able to either find the time or to utilise their time more effectively, getting things done within the constraints of their individual style of practice and their current level of knowledge and experience.

Through the cases, one can also see the anxiety, frustration and disappointment that probation officers frequently have to work through. At the same time, one gets a sense of the feelings of anger, fear and guilt that the offenders bring to the supervisory relationship. The emotional pressure that the work generates for most of them can be hard to contain without someone else helping them to think about it. Bearing this in mind, those who took part in the discussions appeared to respond extremely positively to the opportunity of having time to think about a case with me, using it as a reflective space to review or develop their understanding.

In concluding this chapter, I am left thinking about the four people with whom I did not have a case discussion. It is undoubtedly a limitation that I did not have this additional source of data, when one considers how informative it has been when it was provided. It had not been anticipated that I would be unable to

complete my information gathering with nearly all my original subjects. With hindsight, it is probably the small initial sample size that has made this a bit of problem and perhaps, a larger number of interviews would have provided some insurance against sample attrition.

Chapter 11

Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

In reflecting further on all aspects of this project, I feel that it is important to acknowledge, once again, that it is very much an insider study that has emerged from my own experience. I have been researching, writing and thinking about a field with which I am very familiar. I have learned a great deal from the subjects who participated in the research, but my knowledge and experience of the probation service is considerable and extends a lot further than my sample. I was, of course, once a newcomer and practitioner myself in the field I have been studying, and I currently teach and consult to a wide range of front line staff and managers. These facts alone have meant that I not only approached the research from a particular perspective but, also that I have inevitably viewed my findings through a particular lens.

Moreover, working in a training department has provided me with a unique vantage point from which to observe and influence organisational developments and practice. I believe that it has also enabled me to remain more informed and in touch with the literature that is written about probation from outside, as well as with the literature that is produced from within the service, from local policy documents to bulletins and directives that are generated centrally by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Ministry of Justice. Thus, whilst my conclusions are drawn from the data, my insider status has given me a much wider perspective. As a consequence, I have not confined my reflections wholly to what has emerged from the primary data of the study.

In any event, I hope that it is apparent that this study consists of far more than the presentation of empirical data from my interviews. It includes a contextualisation of the data I have gathered, locating it in relation to the criminal justice system, the historical development of the probation service and the status of probation as a profession. In addition, I have brought to this material a theoretical model that has contributed to my ability to think about the

field beyond the data. These elements are, in their own right, a contribution to the research and give the project a richness which the sample on its own would not have been able to deliver, in part owing to its comparatively small size.

In the discussion that follows, I consider the significance of my research and what it contributes to the field. I also make recommendations in respect to policy and practice, as well as with regards to future research.

.A Question of Identity

A question of identity has been the pervasive theme throughout this study. In thinking back to the genesis of this project, I was very conscious of the shift towards a more punitive, managerialist and proceduralist stance within the Probation Service, at the expense of rehabilitative, professional and relational approaches. As a consequence, I wanted to learn about the generation of probation officers who are entering the occupation now. Who they are, what they do and where they locate themselves within the ideological framework of the service were the basic, underpinning questions. However, what began as fairly simple questions about identity at an individual level has evolved into much more complex questions about the field of probation and what is needed for the profession to develop. In so doing, the study has been able to incorporate a stronger psycho-sociological dimension.

Although I began analysing my findings by trying to identify distinctive elements of motivation, it has been the performance and practice of the sample, as revealed primarily through the case discussions, that have given the clearest indication of their professional identity. In this sense, identity is better understood in terms of what gets enacted, rather than through what might be spoken about. It is through practice that probation officers express themselves.

As new entrants into the contemporary world of NOMS, my research subjects had no direct experience of the way things were previously. I initially supposed that they would have been trained to deliver on public protection and enforcement, and adhere to a more coercive and punitive way of working. I had felt disappointed by my own experiences of change within the service and I anticipated that what I might discover is that my view of what probation should

be about was dead in the water. Yet despite the apparent pressures to eradicate the traditional ethos, of which the separation of qualifying training from social work training is one manifestation, the subjects who took part in the research have demonstrated evidence, in the main, not only that some of the traditional, humanistic values are alive and well; but also that they possess the type of attributes and pursue a style of practice that would not have been out of place when I joined. This finding is very much in keeping with the conclusions of other research that has been published in the period since I completed my own fieldwork.

The resilience of what might be termed the traditional culture came as a surprise that emerged early on in my research. It is not simply a case of the traditional conceptions continuing to exist in the habitus of established staff like myself. My research shows that they are brought to the service in the aspirations and habitus of the newcomers. These ideas are then reproduced or re-invented; or else, newcomers find themselves trying to work out a compromise between what they bring and the prevailing ethos of the service. The implications of this are, in my opinion, far reaching and it feels appropriate to mention this finding in advance of other discoveries, as much of what follows needs to be considered in the light of this fact.

People come to the service with their personal habitus, linked to their life history, and then encounter a particular organisational context and office environment where they interact with colleagues and offenders, as well as other professionals, service users and stakeholders. All these factors combine to influence individual styles of practice and, as a consequence, it is perhaps inappropriate to think in terms of a singular probation officer identity but, rather, identities whose differences undermine the notion of a common professional identity.

For example, amongst my research subjects, it is apparent that Tom's perception of his role and professional identity, as reflected in his practice, is very different to the way Sharon perceives her job and performs, despite the fact that they both seem to possess a similar value orientation. Indeed, there remain competing viewpoints about practice where Tom, with his emphasis on

case management and his wish to distance himself from the offender, represents one end of the spectrum and where Sharon, who is keen to engage the offender through a professional, bounded and empathic relationship, is located towards the other end.

Currently, the service remains a contested field between the bureaucratic, managerialist aspects of the work and the relational elements. Indications from the centre appear to be strongly suggesting a return to rehabilitation and a renewed emphasis on the quality of engagement with offenders is being discussed.¹¹⁴ There is even the promise of a relaxation in performance management and the re-introduction of greater professional discretion. Although staff have yet to see evidence of the latter and are sceptical as to the benefits it might mean for front-line staff, another phase of change and transition appears to be approaching. Accordingly, the opportunity should be taken to review what it is that defines the profession. Ideally, the desired outcome of such a review would include a commitment to a relational approach and the creation of a practice framework that would allow it to happen.

Recruitment

Probation officers exist in a competitive field of other occupations and professions. Within the criminal justice field there are a range of career options from judges, barristers and solicitors to legal clerks, police officers, prison officers, social workers, youth workers and more. It is my contention that choices are made on the grounds of differences in educational and financial resources (or, in other words, cultural and economic capital) and on the basis of orientation and habitus.

In considering who becomes a probation officer, my findings suggest that the probation service recruits from those who are committed to being in

¹¹⁴ Both Kenneth Clarke (2010), the current Justice Secretary and Crispin Blunt (2010a), Minister for Prisons and Probation, have referred to a 'rehabilitation revolution.' In the same context, they have questioned, in the light of rising numbers in prison and the increasing financial expenditure this entails, whether imprisonment is the most effective way of protecting the public from crime. The debates that this has triggered appear to be signalling the re-emergence of a less punitive approach towards offenders. At the same time, policy developers in NOMS appear to be giving their support to a growing body of literature, based on research, which is highlighting the centrality of the quality of the relationship between worker and offender in bringing about desistance from crime.

professional work but who regard the top tier professions to be off their aspirational scale. Furthermore, joining the service is not a career that is harboured from an early age and then pursued. No one in my sample stated 'I always wanted to be a probation officer,' although they each possessed attributes such as altruistic impulses and an affinity with the disadvantaged or those on the margins of society, which ultimately drew them towards the service. An identification with offenders featured strongly in the narratives of three research subjects and, if doing a large scale survey, I feel it would be useful to test for this motivational pattern and to see how it correlated with commitment and good occupational fit.

What I found to be especially significant was how little the sample seemed to know about probation work at the point when they became trainees. In my opinion, public knowledge of the service remains weak. Probation does not impress itself on the public mind in the way that higher status professions do and this has led me to question how far its public persona invites understanding and interest in what it offers as a career. In my experience, the general public carries a range of conceptions and misconceptions about probation work, including resentment and hostility. Probation officers need to be able to survive in an alien culture which adds to and further complicates the emotional dynamics of the job.

Given the above, it is hardly surprising that the service has tended to recruit a somewhat random group of trainees through its selection process, a number of whom drop out when they discover what the job is really about. This was certainly the situation amongst my sample, which contained a number of people for whom probation was not their overriding ambition. The fact that only three people in my study had made probation a firm career choice has left me wondering how different this might have been, in percentage terms, if I had had a larger sample.

Based on my findings, it is apparent that the service would benefit from a higher and more positive public profile. This might be facilitated by attempts to raise its standing by making known the distinctive role of probation officers within the criminal justice system, describing the intrinsic interest of the work linked to its

diversity and responsibility, and giving people an understanding of it through descriptions of cases, including the production and publication of success stories where probation has made a positive difference¹¹⁵. As part of this process, there is a need to market the service better to potential recruits.

Training and Professional Development

The inherent complexity of the work means that there is a need for well qualified and well trained people, who can work to a high standard. Since the completion of my study, the route towards qualifying has changed again and this may result in a different profile of recruits.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, there is still confusion surrounding the type and level of expertise probation officers are expected to have acquired at the point of qualifying or through continuing professional development. Until this is clarified and action taken to ensure the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills through training, both at the point of entry and subsequently, the service is always going to provide an inconsistent service to offenders, other service users and, ultimately, to society.

It is important to acknowledge that many people look, above all, for work that is meaningful to them and this is borne out by my study. Practicing as a probation officer is an intrinsically meaningful activity. It is interesting, varied, has a moral framing and carries quite a lot of individual responsibility, no matter how far attempts have been made to manualise it. However, I am of the view that greater attention needs to be given to the development and presentation of what it means to be a probation officer, as I am concerned that the current

¹¹⁵ The service tends to come to public attention only when offenders, subject to community orders or licences, commit serious offences; or when sentencers are viewed by the media as having been too lenient.

¹¹⁶ In 2010, NOMS introduced a new qualifying framework, requiring all potential probation officers to be recruited first of all as probation service officers (PSOs). In this position, they undertake duties commensurate with their non-qualified role, whilst progressing through stages, and via distance learning courses, towards qualification. The length of time this takes to achieve is dependent on whether or not the applicant has a relevant degree. It is a symptom of the tensions within NOMS that a degree in police studies, for example, is regarded as relevant, allowing the holders of such a degree to be fast tracked towards qualifying, whilst degrees in social work or psychology are not considered relevant. Therefore, it would appear that what is relevant is still being defined from an enforcement mentality. Yet, as indicated earlier, notions of rehabilitation within the context of a professional relationship are resurfacing and are beginning to be advocated from within NOMS.

failure of the service to promote a clear and positive image is likely to continue to hinder its ability to attract good, committed recruits.

Training, of course, should not stop when one qualifies. Consideration must be given urgently to what people need as they grow in experience. How do probation officers keep abreast of developments and how can they be helped to sustain their role and functioning in the long term? Encouraging individual team members to take a specialist lead in developing knowledge and expertise in respect to a particular aspect of the work, such as mental health, child protection or domestic violence may not only increase their job satisfaction, but also enable them to act as a team resource disseminating information to colleagues and providing coaching.

My study has demonstrated the relevance and effectiveness of using a method that combines biography and case discussion as part of an 'insider' project. As a consequence, it contributes to a growing body of studies that have taken a similar perspective. These studies, which have been referred to as 'practice near' research, have the aim of reducing the gap between research and practice (Froggett and Briggs 2009). Research that is practice near places the emphasis on finding out what is happening in practice and on the experiences of practitioners, linking it to the emotional and relational aspects of the work.

Probation officers should be encouraged to engage in research of this nature with a view to contributing to the development and advancement of both the field and practice within it.¹¹⁷ Research that not only expands the evidence base but which is also able to show to its staff and to people outside that probation supervision has value, has the potential to enhance both public understanding of the service and its professional status.

This is linked to the need for the service to begin to take itself more seriously as a profession. Such a step requires a stronger knowledge base. The original

¹¹⁷ I fear that ideas such as these will fail to succeed without organisational support and a culture shift that permits greater flexibility with regards to performance management. At the time of writing less regulation and a relaxation in monitoring has been promised. The Chief Executive of the London Probation Trust has also stated that in future efforts to raise the quality of work, rather than the achievement of targets, will be given greater priority.

concept of profession was of a group held together by a shared body of knowledge and values. Doctors, for example, have to continue to attend conferences and seminars to keep up to date with developments. For the probation service to take enhancing the profession and its knowledge base seriously would require managers to provide time for study opportunities and for staff to undertake research. The service will struggle to develop without a knowledge base derived from its own practice.

Management and Supervision

This study has helped to confirm that the quality of management and supervision is of fundamental importance. It is apparent that people only develop in this work if they receive support and containment. Thus the dynamics that underpin the professional hierarchy and the nature of the relationship between those who provide leadership at management level and those who come into the work is central. The message from several of the research subjects, and which has also been expressed strongly amongst the groups of practitioners I train, is that they are not getting what they want from their managers/supervisors. A complaint voiced by participants in this study and by probation officers in general being that, too often, supervision is dominated by accountability and auditing issues at the expense of providing a reflective space to focus on practice and the discussion of cases.

The work involves unavoidable failures, bearing in mind the nature of the service's clientele and the lives they lead. Probation officers are often working with violent personalities, many of whom have overlapping mental health and drug problems. In many cases change is likely to be extremely difficult to achieve and front-line staff are being asked to do a great deal to contain these offenders. Even with better training, clinical supervision or by having a wider range of approaches available to them, there remains an element of the 'impossible' in this type of work.

Whilst there are some successes, the reality is that quite a number of people on probation service caseloads will not improve or be rehabilitated. Probation officers need to be able to tolerate the failures and not be so demoralised by them as to prevent them from committing themselves to new cases as they

arise. I believe that they need to recognise the real value of quite small gains, which are often all that will be achieved in the short term. Excessive expectations in a field like this are likely to lead only to disappointment or burnout. Probation officers have to remain engaged and committed to trying to do their best, whilst knowing that sometimes, whatever they do, is going to fail.¹¹⁸ This requires a good support structure that helps them to keep things going and to cope with setbacks.

There needs to be greater appreciation of the fact that newly qualified officers are still in a learning role and in need of supervision to aid their development. Getting to grips with the job depends on accumulating experience and, as part of that process, it is important to recognise what can be learned from offenders. Even a fully functioning probation officer with several years of experience is going to continue to meet different kinds of offenders over time. To successfully derive learning from these encounters requires a facilitating supervisory relationship.

It is not just a matter of acknowledging the value of supervision. The supervisor needs the skills, experience and empathic style to be able to create a space in which effective supervision can take place and to facilitate professional growth. This raises questions about the training and development of managers which, until recently has tended to focus on understanding policies, processes and procedures associated with the achievement of performance targets, whilst neglecting the quality of practice and the type of clinical supervision required to sustain practitioner's commitment to the work. Thus, there are now probation managers who, themselves, have had no experience of receiving professional supervision of their own practice prior to being promoted and who, as a result, feel ill equipped to provide this type of supervision to those whom they manage. Similarly, there are probation officers who feel they have become technicians and process compliant, and who therefore consider that they lack the skills to engage effectively with offenders (Hosking 2010).

¹¹⁸ There remains an omnipotent, manic notion that somehow the probation service can protect the public and stop things happening, and that offenders should not re-offend.

The six subjects who took part in the case discussion responded positively to the opportunity to think about and reflect on their work. Unfortunately, the work situation that all members of the sample were in did not allow much scope for reflection and I feel confident in saying that this is a common experience throughout the service.

Supervision need not only be on a one to one basis. The encouragement that has been given recently to the introduction of work discussion groups meets a significant need and could be used as another means of helping to deepen the knowledge base. Work discussion, as described in Chapter 5, has the potential to provide a valuable learning experience facilitating a greater understanding of offenders, allowing colleagues the opportunity to share knowledge about ways of working, providing a space to explore the emotional experiences of the work and enabling team members to support each other in extending their repertoire of approaches. The knowledge base could be built up by producing a body of literature from the discussions comprising of ideas about how to deal with certain types of offenders. There is currently an absence of examples of good casework. Time given to writing up the supervision of a case discussion would be a good investment and is another way of learning from the offender.¹¹⁹ Such a resource may help officers get further in interviews and assist those who supervise practitioners.

Mechanistic approaches to the work which rely on following manuals are not working well and my suggestion would entail a return to a more reflective style of practice, but this of course cannot happen if space is not allowed for it. Moreover, whilst it has been proposed, within the service, that work discussions should take place monthly, ideally, for the inexperienced, the frequency needs to be weekly if they are to benefit developmentally. There may even be a place for work discussion in the recruitment process, where it could be used as a way of assessing and predicting the strengths and limitations of applicants.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Learning from the patient is completely routine in psychotherapy where there is a considerable body of literature giving accounts of the work.

¹²⁰ Within this context, I would envisage work discussion operating more like a focus group. Potential new recruits, in future, will join as probation service officers (PSOs) as a first step towards qualifying. They may not have relevant work to talk about at the selection stage but hypothetical or dramatized scenarios might be used. More attention needs to be given to

Working Environment

The experiences described in this study have led me to the view that the probation service in London is an organisation that does not socialise its newcomers very well. The habitus of the individual and the habitus of the team or office in which they work interact to facilitate or hinder successful socialisation into their role.

In all cases, the capacity for professional development appeared to be strongly affected by a combination of sufficient personal resources in the individual, including their predispositions, and a working context in which relationships, especially with their line manager and team colleagues were found to be supportive and helpful. I consider the relevance of habitus at an individual and organisational level to be another substantive discovery arising from the research.

If the team habitus was one of demoralisation, then those entering that team were also likely to become demoralised. Within the study, Dan exemplifies this position. Dalia and Angela are also examples of the impact of a negatively perceived experience. Both felt alone and unsupported, with the result that Dalia was lost to the service completely whilst Angela transferred to a team where she believed she would be more looked after and where she expected to work in an atmosphere of mutual collaboration.¹²¹ On the other hand, from the outset, Femi and Sharon had their team colleagues to turn to for advice and containment thereby producing a much more positive orientation, and Cheryl spoke of it being a very different job without the warmth and positive response of her line manager.

In addition, the research has not only highlighted the importance of the quality of the support structure but also the influence of the office culture. The culture in a strong form seemed to help make Sharon into a potentially good probation officer, renewing and reinventing probation values. When it is weak or non-

defining what is being looked for in new recruits, although the current state of flux referred to above is likely to make this difficult. It should nonetheless be possible to develop arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of selection and training.

¹²¹ Based on my experience, if staff feel cared for and valued they are more likely to mirror a similar style in their work with offenders .

existent, though, as experienced by Angela, it would seem to prevent the development of a professional identity, driving her out of the London service and leaving her uncertain about her future as a probation officer.

It may be that one is more able to develop a commitment to the current values of the service where there exists a team culture and professional supervision that is able to provide support through the pressures and stresses of the work and which can in turn enable a professional identity to be formed and sustained. However, if a containing culture and support network is not there, and if one does not have a strong intrinsic motivation or service commitment to start with, then the capacity to commit to the role becomes much more difficult.

This confirms once again the importance of relationships. The relationship that probation officers have to the work is mediated by other people and the quality of the relationships that subsequently develop is what, ultimately, enables them to do the work.

Applying Bourdieu

Bringing Bourdieu into the study has helped me to think theoretically and has offered a way of focusing attention on entry to and life in the probation service and those aspects of it in which I was most interested. The application of the concepts of habitus and field, especially, have provided a framework in which to make sense of the attributes and attitudes displayed by my subjects, as well as offering a means of understanding organisational issues and the tensions between habitus and field that generate and impact on practice. Thus, I feel justified in stating that undertaking this research has endowed me with fresh conceptual resources with which to think about what has been happening within the service.

As outlined in Chapter 5, Bourdieu's approach is very much a relational one and it has felt highly appropriate to utilise his scheme in the study of an occupation in which relationships are a key aspect of the work. For Bourdieu (1989:39), 'the real is relational' in the sense that he views existence in the social world as defined by relationships. Wacquant (1992:16), in his appraisal of Bourdieu's

work, considers that 'habitus and field designate bundles of relations', major features being the interaction between structures, agency, capital and power. The importance of relationships, whether they are with government, the public, other parts of the criminal justice system, probation managers, colleagues or offenders lie at the core of my findings. It is the forces, tensions and practices that these relationships produce within the various structures and networks of the probation field that have helped to construct the professional identity of my subjects and of probation officers in general. Moreover, being newcomers is a relational position to the field which carries its own distinction.

A major part of this study has been concerned with the relationship between the habitus of my subjects and the probation field that they encountered first as trainees and, subsequently, as qualified probation officers. Each of the subjects came to the probation service with particular personal qualities, values and motivations and each finished their training with different levels of knowledge and skill (or what Bourdieu refers to as cultural capital). The theoretical dimension provided by Bourdieu has led me to the view that the differences they brought to the job are linked to their personal habitus and the dispositions they acquired through their family, education and previous work experience. These in turn have affected their perception of the habitus and environment of the service, as well as their practice within it. (Forbes 2010).

Bourdieu did not write specifically about probation officers, although he did write about social workers whom he described as 'agents of the state.....shot through with the contradictions of the state' (Bourdieu 1999:184). In particular, he noted the contradiction between 'the endless missions entrusted to them' and 'the invariably paltry means granted to them' (Bourdieu 1999:184). It is not difficult to imagine these statements as being equally applicable to probation officers faced with rising workloads in these resource limited times. Indeed, at the conclusion of this study I am firmly of the opinion that Bourdieu's conceptual framework fits the probation experience extremely well, at an organisational, team and individual level. Clearly, its application requires some adaptation and creativity but, applying a Bourdieusian perspective, for example, to the practice of supervising offenders, results in a highly complex picture of the relational dynamics involved. However, it has to be said, that what emerges from taking

such a perspective is, in some respects, not radically different from elements of practice that I tend to associate with traditional casework.

Thus, one might say that the supervisory relationship, mediated through a legally binding court order or prison licence, provides the context in which the habitus of the probation officer and the habitus of the offender come together. I believe that Bourdieu would have advocated the importance of recognising and understanding the various forces that are active in this scenario, but I do not see this as being dissimilar to the ground rules associated with good practice in probation, which includes the need to reflect on the psycho-social factors that the probation officer and the offender, respectively, bring to their professional relationship. Thus, the notion of habitus has the potential to work in conjunction with therapeutic concepts such as counter-transference and projection in the understanding of behaviour.

Bourdieu's method, applied in a probation context, also encourages the need to consider the personal history of offenders and their social context which, in my opinion, remain two of the basic principles of good assessment work in probation. Unfortunately, these principles came to be neglected as a result of the 'what works' agenda which, at first, tended to focus on the offence rather than the offender and then on the individual pathology of the offender, with scant regard to the social circumstances in which he or she lived.

Bourdieu adds to the complexity of the professional relationship by highlighting the elements of power and control that are inherent in the interaction that takes place (a further dynamic acknowledged in casework). However, a point of departure is perhaps the weight he would have given to the notion of probation officers being, themselves, subject to control through legislation and managerialist processes, and the emphasis he would have placed on their being agents of control, regulating the behaviour of offenders with a view to bringing about normative change and so reducing the risk of social disorder.

In my opinion, the way in which I have used Bourdieu is a particularly distinctive element of the study. His conceptual tools have not only enhanced this project but have confirmed their validity and applicability to studying the probation

service and other professions. Therefore, it is my assertion that, through my research, I have been able to demonstrate the potential for the wider application of Bourdieu as a means of bringing greater understanding to the probation field as a whole, and possibly beyond.

Gender

A question I am left pondering over at the conclusion of this study concerns the relevance of gender. A significant change has taken place within the contemporary service relating to the reduction in the proportion of male to female probation officers, which I have alluded to at various times in this study. When I joined the service it was predominantly a male occupation, whilst women were in the majority as social workers. A shift began to occur during the 1980s and, according to Annison (2001) the switch over to more women in probation occurred in 1993. The recruitment of women has continued to rise ever since and was voiced as a concern by the review of training that recommended the separation of probation and social work training (Aldridge 1996).

Annison (2001) has suggested that the influx of women occurred as an unintended consequence of the professionalization of the service. Her argument is based on the view that having achieved occupational closure through the requirement that probation officers should hold a social work qualification, the service was seen as opening up career opportunities to women who had previously regarded such educational credentials as the key to building a professional career.

Cree (2001:153) in a research study on men in social work education has confirmed social work as 'a conventional career choice' for women, but as something that is 'going against the grain' for men. Whilst for Christie (2001) it is social work's emphasis on care which is felt to position it as a feminized profession.¹²²

¹²² Similar arguments might be applied to teaching and nursing where women are strongly represented.

Other traits that are commonly associated with women, including being good at talking to people and a capacity to deal with emotionally complex issues may also draw them to careers where these dispositions can be utilised. In addition, it may be that women are now choosing probation as an alternative to social work, as the latter is perceived to operate in an even more procedural and bureaucratic manner

Christie (2001) has noted the absence of men as service users in local authority social work. This is very much the opposite in probation, where offenders are overwhelmingly male. It was Cathy, who in the study, spoke of her all female team being 'out of sync.' Currently, the service is able to provide only a minority of male role models and consideration needs to be given to how this can be remedied. The relationship dynamics that arise when women supervise men who are perpetrators of domestic violence or have committed other offences where the victims are women also needs attention through a reflective style of supervision and would, I believe, benefit from closer study.

When one considers that the criminal justice system in general and the probation service in particular have become tougher, it is curious that the service has not attracted more men. Perhaps, it is the case that the service is seen as rather soft whatever the changes. Hence, it continues to attract more women, whilst men appear to be more drawn towards the harder edge of the system such as the police or the prison service.

I did not explore gender as an issue in my research and Cathy was the only participant to refer to it. It may be that a large scale research that includes a focus on recruitment and selection is needed to help shed more light on the disparity between the proportion of men and women in the service.

Recommendations for Further Research

Given what I have learned during the course of this study, I believe that the Probation Service would benefit by developing a more reflective capacity to think and learn about what it does. To this end, the service needs to make greater use of research, especially research of a qualitative and sociological kind as opposed to outcome measures. Indeed, I would argue that it is

important for the service to become as curious and interested about its processes, and the impact that they have, as it wants its front-line staff to be about offenders. It is to be hoped that the adoption of the type of 'practice near' approach that this study represents will help to bring this about.

Like many other 'practice near' studies, this project has been small in scale but has, nevertheless, been able to make some significant discoveries. These relate to method (the value of a biographical type approach and case discussions to illuminate experiences) and theory (the application of Bourdieu). Moreover, I have been able to identify factors that motivate people to want to become probation officers, I have learned about the resilience of the traditional culture in hostile circumstances and I have been able to distinguish features that appear to contribute to the commitment and professional development of probation officers.

In my view it would be valuable for the service and for sociology to try to take this further by way of more extensive research, and to test out what I have found. Such research could help to support many of the recommendations I have made with regards to policy and practice. This includes research on selection processes and motivational patterns, in order to facilitate the recruitment of more suitable staff; as well as initiating studies relating to the impact and influence of professional supervision and continuous professional development.

This study has focused on a field and a practice in which relationships are fundamental. In the presentation of my findings, its significance has emerged in several places suggesting a unifying theme. It comes up in respect to people's original socialisation, in connection with what makes the work interesting and real for people and it appears again with regards to the discussion concerning the professional supervision of staff and the influence of relationships with colleagues. There is already substantial research on the importance of the relationship between practitioner and offender in reducing re-offending. However, what has been missing until now is research on the importance of relationships between staff within the organisation and how this affects the quality of practice. My research makes a contribution towards that, but I do

think that investment in a broader study, that reaches similar conclusions to my own, has the potential to substantially influence the future direction of the profession.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, the Probation Service is once again in a state of uncertainty. There are positive indications concerning a move away from a more punitive and procedural stance, towards a greater emphasis on rehabilitation and the re-introduction of professional discretion. On the other hand, the service is facing contestability and competition from other potential providers of its services.

Over the past 30 years the service has been beset with survival anxieties. It is my contention that society needs probation work as no matter how coercive criminal justice becomes, it is not possible to put all offenders in prison. Equally, they cannot be let off. Therefore, something needs to be provided for those offenders who are in a kind of middle position. Arising from this, important issues that require attention from within the service are what it means to do probation work and what is needed to do it? This research has attempted to answer these questions, linking them to issues of professional identity.

Throughout this study, I have tried to convey the complex and demanding nature of the work that probation officers are required to undertake. The experiences that are contained within the accounts of my research subjects have enabled me to explain the conditions which are needed for good work to be done and for sufficient satisfaction to be achieved. I regard probation work to be difficult because of the many individual differences in offenders that have to be thought about; because of the various elements of risk that can arise, emanating from the offender's behaviour and from what happens to the worker when things go wrong; and also because of the various emotional projections from both offenders and the public.

Given this situation, one could argue that it needs pretty exceptional people to do the job, but it would be impractical to attempt to run the Probation Service, or any organisation, on the basis of exceptional people. An alternative would be to

move to greater routinization, so that people can do the job under instruction and by using manuals, but that is unlikely to be successful as it inconsistent with the complexity and indeterminacy of the work. However, I would suggest that there is a compromise position that is revealed by my research. What it shows is that the work can be done with a combination of people who are well selected in terms of their experience, dispositions and cultural capital; and where there is a culture and organisational structures, including leadership and teamwork, to support them. I regard this as a crucial finding that I hope the service will heed. I would also urge that full consideration is given to my recommendations concerning policy and practice, in addition to my recommendations for future research.

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Appendix

Two Additional Case Discussions

1. Cathy

When I met with Cathy for the case discussion she looked anxious and agitated. In order to develop her experience she had applied for and been selected to transfer to a team that specialised in working with high risk offenders and, at the time of our discussion, had been based in the team for three months. On the one hand, she seemed to take pride in the belief that her appointment to this role was an acknowledgement that she possessed knowledge and skills that were more advanced than many other members of her cohort. On the other hand, she complained of having felt almost immediately overwhelmed by the volume and demands of the workload, especially as she was having also to cover some of the work of a colleague who was on sick leave.

The case Cathy chose for discussion was part of a caseload that she described as having been 'dumped on me.' According to her:

I didn't have time to read the case files, I just had to get on with it. I was fire-fighting from day one. Plus a colleague of mine had gone off sick and we also had her cases and we were fire fighting those as well.

Within this context and with reference to the case she had selected, Cathy informed me:

There was no time for me to really get my head round it at all. I just had to sort of work with it on the hoof.'

From this opening description I was struck not only by the pressure Cathy seemed to be working under but also by the fact that the style in which she subsequently began to present the case felt to me to mirror her experience of taking over the supervision of this offender. Thus, rather than introducing the case by providing some basic information about the offender such as his name and age or details about his current or previous offences, she started in a place that graphically attested to the danger, fear, complexity and highly dynamic

nature of the case, but in a manner which made it very difficult to gain a clear picture or fully grasp what the case was really about.

He was recalled for a serious further offence, so I got involved in a serious further offence. Then the Parole Board ordered his release but he was still on remand for other offences. But with no warning at all we were suddenly told he was being released as the Crown Prosecution Service had dropped the charges and that's caused us untold problems, anguish, heartache; people running around all over the place and we managed to persuade various things to happen so as to give us breathing space. But within two days of his being released he was recalled for breaking the conditions of his licence which we knew he would break the moment they released him. We knew that what he wanted to do was to never be released in the first place. He wanted to sit out his time.

Cathy conveyed a sense of the case being out of her control from the outset. Other people were making ill-timed or inappropriate decisions that impacted on her and the offender had also managed to gain a degree of control.

He's very bright, very intelligent. He's got it all worked out in his head and he knows exactly how to work his way around the system, and what he's trying to do is reach a point where probation and police have absolutely no control over him.

It sounded as though the case had come to represent something of a power struggle for Cathy, not just involving herself and the offender but also between herself, the Parole Board, the Crown Prosecution Service and, as matters unfolded, the police, mental health agencies and housing officials. Various details of the case continued to spill out in a non-sequential and rather uncontained way, and it took a while before I was able to get Cathy to pause and think about what was going on and to piece recent events together for me in a more coherent form.

I was eventually able to ascertain that Cathy was speaking about MJ, a 44 year old man of Jamaican origin. Although I remained unclear as to the precise chronology, it was my understanding that his current involvement with the probation service had come about as a result of his being sentenced initially to 7 years imprisonment for the kidnap of his former partner (who, Cathy added, 'happened to be a probation officer') and their child. He received a further 7

years for firearms offences (including the possession of a shotgun and ammunition) and was first released on licence after serving almost 6 years. Within a few months of his release he was recalled owing to failed appointments with his then supervising officer and due to the theft of a CCTV camera from the probation office. At the time of his arrest for the breach of his licence he was found to be in possession of crack cocaine which resulted in his being sentenced to an additional term of 3 years imprisonment.

MJ subsequently remained in prison for another 18 months before being released on a further period of licence. Although he attended appointments on that occasion, he was recalled just a few weeks after the case was transferred to Cathy, having been charged with attempted murder after stabbing a man during a fight in a pub. It was this charge that triggered the SFO inquiry mentioned by Cathy at the beginning of our discussion. Another lengthy prison sentence was anticipated, but a surprising decision by the Crown Prosecution Service not to proceed with the prosecution, on the grounds of insufficient evidence, led to MJ's sudden, unplanned release back into the community. He subsequently failed to comply with the emergency arrangements that were put in place for him and, as a consequence, he was recalled again.

At the time of our discussion, MJ was back in prison and Cathy was waiting for a pronouncement from the Parole Board as to whether he would now serve the remainder of the sentence imposed for the firearms and possession of drugs offences. The implication of this being that he would be released without any further involvement from the probation service by way of supervision. In addition, Cathy informed me that MJ had a 'stream of convictions' dating back to when he was a teenager. These included offences of burglary, wounding, robbery, theft, handling, driving whilst disqualified, assault on the police and failing to surrender to bail. There were also suspicions of drug dealing. He had been diagnosed as suffering from a personality disorder and had been placed at the highest level of risk management (level 3) in respect to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

The above information served to confirm just how risky and difficult a case this was. In my opinion, Cathy felt unsafe and unsupported from the start. MJ had

previously been supervised by a male probation officer who had left the team and Cathy had misgivings about taking it over.

I think there was an issue about male/female. He's extremely manipulative and there had been domestic violence issues. There were certainly issues around his attitudes towards women. But mixed in with that there was, you know, a disregard for all forms of authority. So it was difficult at times to be sure whether it was authority he was kicking against or if it was me he was kicking against, and I think at the beginning it was a mixture of both.

Cathy raised her concerns with her manager but as a member of an all female team she accepted that there was no one else to whom the case could be re-allocated. Her sense of vulnerability was also raised by the fact that one of the victims of the kidnapping had not only been female but also a probation officer, thereby adding to the broader picture of MJ being in command and possessing the capacity to corrupt and seduce without any respect for boundaries.

It is relevant to note that Cathy referred to her team as being 'out of sync with the caseload.' Her meaning being that her team colleagues were all white women whilst the clientele was predominantly black men.

I gained the impression that amongst the reasons Cathy had selected this particular case for discussion was in order to impress on me the reality of the job and to draw my attention to the problems she experienced in joining her present team and having to take over cases of this type. The case encapsulated a range of emotions that had not been fully thought about or worked through.

Cathy's attempts to establish some professional authority and control over both MJ and her caseload in general seemed mutually entwined.

This is a case I inherited and it has proved to be a steep learning curve in terms of dealing with public protection team issues. I learned the hard way because I inherited a caseload in which there were large gaps of things that hadn't been done and it was very difficult to even think. I think I felt very swamped. It's a case of someone who has proved to be a very unique individual. He's very challenging and he's caused us considerable headaches because he doesn't want to engage.

Continuing to alternate between talking about MJ and her caseload, which I gathered was comprised of equally dangerous offenders, Cathy acknowledged that, three months into the job, her feelings of unease and fear remained unabated. She associated this primarily with her inability to assimilate all the information about her cases.

Coming into this job was absolutely scary. It was very frightening and still, I think, my anxiety levels are very very high because I have never felt that I'm fully in charge of my caseload. I still have big gaps and I feel that I'm still fire-fighting all the time.

Cathy only supervised MJ for five weeks, seeing him on six occasions, prior to his last recall. In her view he was 'anti-probation' and a contradictory mixture of 'utter reasonableness and total lack of co-operation.' She believed that his aim was to avoid any form of work with her and to be supervised on his terms only. Describing what it was like to supervise him, she told me:

It was difficult, it was very difficult. He would turn up very late and take over the agenda. He would not allow me to speak and I had to say if he continued like this I would have to issue a warning letter. He very much had his own agenda. All he wanted to talk about was housing and I tried to pull him back to focus on other issues. You know, I might have been told by my SPO to focus on victim empathy work with him – well, it was a non-starter. He would just keep on talking and not stop to give me a gap to say anything. He could make me feel quite powerless. He was very good at keeping me on the back foot. He was always extremely polite but sometimes he would stand up and pace about I would try to persuade him to sit down. He wouldn't be threatening me; he wouldn't be over me or making me feel he was going to hit me, but he was somehow quite threatening and he knew that.

Rationally, Cathy was able to acknowledge that it was impossible to engage MJ in any form of intervention designed to bring about behavioural change and a reduction in his risk of harm to the public. She was angry with her predecessor for not taking action to refer MJ to local forensic psychology services (and for leaving her with the case) yet, in reality, she was well aware that they were at a loss to know how to deal with him too, having attempted to work with him in the past.

I think he would manage to evade any real engagement and when I spoke to the Forensic Intensive Psychology Treatment Service about his

being referred back to them, they threw up their arms and said, 'Oh no, not again, I don't know what we'd do with him.' He's just very difficult to work with and, in fact, if you go through the file it's actually very difficult to get a feeling of him at all because he's been so successful in evading anybody getting anywhere with him. You know, there's very little insight into him.

In Cathy's view the only help MJ was interested in receiving was her backing to enable him to be allocated permanent local authority housing.

His usual cry is probation does nothing for me. It's only there to fulfil his needs as he sees them. Probation's only role, for him, is to help him find accommodation. He doesn't believe he needs to think about or reflect on his behaviour or address his offending.

In talking about MJ, I noted a rather haughty, indignation in Cathy's tone. She seemed to regard herself as the put upon victim in this case who was having to suffer from the failures of others to do their job properly. These attitudes were especially apparent when she received the news that MJ was to be released from prison following the decision by the CPS to drop the charges relating to the stabbing allegation. She was given only a few hour's notice of his release which triggered a frenzy of activity that culminated in the intervention of a probation senior manager who managed to obtain agreement from the prison governor to hold MJ until appropriate arrangements could be made for his return to the community. Efforts to convene an emergency MAPPa meeting were confounded by the non-availability of relevant personnel and Cathy's frustration and annoyance was increased when, a few days later and in advance of the MAPPa meeting, the prison announced they could no longer hold MJ as his continued incarceration was in contravention of his human rights.

The Parole Board insisted he be released, absolutely insisted. They said we were disadvantaging him and he could sue us. So he was released on the Wednesday and by the Friday recall proceedings had been instigated. I think he was arrested by the following Monday.

It was anticipated that one of outcomes from the MAPPa meeting would be an offer of accommodation for MJ in an approved hostel but, in the circumstances, Cathy felt forced to reluctantly agree to his residing temporarily at an address which he provided and which he stated was the home of his girlfriend. The following day, the MAPPa meeting confirmed that a hostel place was available

for him with immediate effect and it was his failure to go to the hostel that led to his recall.

Cathy considered herself justified in feeling aggrieved by MJ's return to prison as she regarded it as predictable. Additionally, she was annoyed because she felt that she had been put needlessly at risk by visiting the address he had given, as she later discovered that the girlfriend had three sons with convictions for firearms offences. Moreover, she reported that MJ had himself queried why he had been released. An element of frustration and retaliation, on Cathy's part, was detectable in an exchange she described between the two of them:

One of the things he said to me at one point was, 'Why did you ever release me, I was quite happy to sit there?' And I said, believe you me you don't know how hard we tried to keep you in.

Her exasperation was further compounded by her feeling that MJ had completely dominated her work for a week as well as 'large chunks of my working life' when she first took over the case. Ultimately, she viewed this as time wasted – something she could ill-afford in view of the other demands emanating from her caseload.

Conversely, it was apparent that Cathy felt resentful over the fact that MJ was back in prison and likely to remain there until the end of his sentence, as this meant he would be released without supervision. Thus, in her perception, he had once more gained the upper hand and had managed 'to achieve exactly what he wanted.' In this way, it seemed as though the relationship between Cathy and MJ was mirroring something of the domestic tension that was known to exist between MJ and the victim of the kidnap.

In yet another contrary statement, Cathy expressed concern about the prospect of MJ's release with no support or surveillance from any of the statutory agencies. She thought it was unlikely that she would have further contact with him, adding that if she were to do so 'there's going to be little I can achieve or that he's going to want.' In spite of this she was clearly worried about the potential danger he posed in the community and upset by the criticism that gets levelled at the probation service when something goes wrong.

Now we're left with the problem of what's going to happen if he doesn't come out until the end of his sentence. He's going to be out in the community soon and all that risk, all that hammering that we get at the moment, all the public concerns about risk and so on and the way probation is lambasted, and my hands are completely tied.

Thus, Cathy spoke of her wish for MJ to be released with further supervision and in a manner that would 'allow time to manage him more appropriately.'

This would mean having time to sort things out properly, like accommodation. We could have the psychological services going in and seeing him prior to his release. If this could have been done before it would have resulted in a lot less stress, agony and a lot less running around.

In exploring this in more depth, Cathy voiced a fear of being blamed if MJ had either committed another serious offence following his last release or if he were to do so in the future. For her, the anxiety was that she would be criticised for having failed to work with him effectively. She was concerned about 'being in the headlines' and in reflecting on events leading to his most recent recall stated:

I don't suppose we could have done anything differently, but it felt like we were under huge pressure to get it right and we had no time in which to do it. We got it right by the skin of our teeth. Even though we probably did do everything right, it felt like we got there by sheer luck. It was by the lap of the gods nothing went wrong.

On the one hand, Cathy appeared to have a realistic acceptance of what was possible which was defined by her as 'monitoring and containing his risk.' On the other hand she had nagging self-doubts that she should have done more, mixed with a belief that if it was not for the mistakes of others, she could have been the one to positively turn MJ's life around – an opportunity now denied to her if he were to be released without supervision.

Underpinning these contradictions was a degree of narcissistic omnipotence, linked to personal faith in her ability to succeed where others could not, as well as confusion and tension surrounding her role. She complained to me about 'the huge amount of emphasis put on enforcement' and referred to a colleague whom she felt had been unfairly criticised in an annual appraisal for 'Too much

social working.’ She spoke of reading and taking on board comments made by a member of the Probation Inspectorate which she had interpreted as stating that probation officers ‘have to disabuse themselves of the idea of doing anything effective in terms of rehabilitative work with high risk offenders’ but seemed disappointed and dissatisfied that a rehabilitative approach with MJ had failed to work.

I feel I’ve jumped through all the hoops in terms of addressing his offending and looking at rehabilitative work, and I’m really feeling that it’s all been for nought because what I’ve been doing is monitoring and control, and that’s what it boils down to.

The outcome of Cathy’s work with MJ confirmed the inspectorate’s comments, but I gained the impression that this was not going to stop her from trying to bring about change with offenders of a similar type. In fact, it was Cathy’s contention that her work was undermined and made more difficult by the absence of local resources to which she could refer offenders, thereby preventing her from doing anything more than monitor. She regarded it as important to get the balance right between expectations of compliance and the provision of help, but also felt that it would sometimes be much easier to gain that compliance if she were able to offer something tangible like easy access to housing, employment or mental health facilities. Whilst the lack of community resources left her feeling angry and disillusioned, she was also keen to add that this situation was not something that affected her work all the time and that there were occasions ‘when it does go right and when there are positives.’

However, Cathy admitted to having doubts about her decision to join a specialist high risk team:

From a learning point of view I’m pleased I made the decision. From my own personal sanity, I’m questioning it, I’m actually questioning it. I feel the work/life balance is out of kilter and I think that an awful lot is demanded of us. I don’t feel we get sufficient recognition and I’m not sure it’s worth it – the sheer demand, the level of anxiety, the worry. The number of people I know who have left field teams and, especially, have left public protection teams and gone elsewhere, and they’ve said I’ll never go back to that madness.

She considered she had learned to work with more complicated issues and had developed greater understanding of mental health problems and of sex offenders and the way they operated. In addition, she informed me:

I'm becoming more sophisticated in how I assess people and how I analyse people. Picking up on things I may not have picked up on before; learning to read more obscure signals. Dealing with people who are very manipulative, who are very sophisticated at being able to divert you away.

Thinking particularly about MJ, and demonstrating a capacity for reflection which she described as a rare occurrence in the midst of all her 'fire-fighting', Cathy stated:

I think the reason this case interests me more than others is because what I've learnt is about me and my own anxiety levels and my own recognition that I can't change everything. And whilst I always knew that and had admitted it, I don't think I had ever really practically dealt with it. I knew in theory that you can't, you can't rehabilitate everybody; and here, the learning curve has also been about how to work with the system.

Cathy was also emphatic that despite the stresses, anxieties and frustrations caused 'by the demands that are put upon us without the resources and the tools and the time to do the job,' she had no regrets about her choice to become a probation officer. Feeling very much aware that she had at times spoken very negatively about the job, she apologised 'if I have sounded like the voice of doom and gloom,' and was keen to conclude our discussion by saying:

There are moments of success along the way which make it worth its while. I like to think of myself as a facilitator and a motivator and if you can get those things right so that people are making their own decisions, moving away from offending, or even if we do a good piece of monitoring work or a good piece of enforcement work, that can be just as satisfying.

Reflections on Cathy

Cathy's career trajectory had previously taken her in a number of diverse directions embracing car mechanics, tour guide, business woman, clerical assistant and university lecturing. She had lived in a variety of countries, could speak several languages and had a degree in history, an MA in anthropology and, whilst living in the United States, began, but did not complete, a PhD

research project. She therefore came to the field of probation with significant social and cultural capital and a habitus which she felt had always inclined her towards the type of work opportunities offered by the service. Her occupational diversions along the way had failed to satisfy her and she described herself as having 'bailed out' a few years ago, feeling that she had lost control over the direction of her life and needing time to take stock. Retrospectively, she referred to this experience as a form of 'burn out.'

Closest in age to Angela, Cathy's history and the image she projected of herself seemed to separate her from other members of her student cohort and from her fellow research participants. Conscious that she was joining probation at a later stage of her life to most other recruits, I gained a sense of her operating against the clock and of her making a much greater emotional investment in her need to succeed. She was determined to get through training in the fastest possible time, making good use of her practice assessor and university tutor to gain knowledge and practice skills. She also had no difficulty in completing the academic side of training. Then, since qualifying, she had been pursuing a career plan that had resulted in her quickly changing teams for the purpose of developing additional knowledge and skills. Her next step is to move into a middle management role at the earliest opportunity, with her ultimate goal being to obtain a more strategic position.

The progress she had made towards her goals had not dissuaded Cathy from being highly critical of the training process, as well as of probation management and organisational culture both as a trainee and post-qualifying. Interestingly, she was another participant whose responses to the survey questionnaire did not seem to entirely reflect the views she subsequently expressed in interview and in the case discussion. Thus, despite being extremely disparaging about her experiences when we met, she gave mid-range responses to all the survey questions, explaining at the time that it was an indication of her ambivalence towards the job. This ambivalence became more apparent in our meetings which revealed several incongruities.

Cathy presented herself as a survivor. In the interview she spoke of having been one of four newly qualified probation officers who were appointed to the

same office but, just over 12 months later, she was the only one still working for the probation service. The atmosphere at her first office was described by her as dark, depressing and oppressive; and the factors impacting on the work were summarised by her as poor, inexperienced management, poor practice, understaffing, high sickness levels and constant change. She viewed her age as a major factor in her decision to stick with it, adding that her past life experience kept her grounded. She insisted that she had no regrets about her late choice of career.

Cathy's ability to evaluate her previous work setting in such a clear, precise way led me to imagine her as a consultant, rather than as a research subject. I could see how this ability, together with her physical maturity could provide her with a degree of symbolic capital, creating a misconception of greater practice skill than she possessed. Alongside this, I also picked up a strong sense of her wanting still to be nurtured, together with a need to feel valued. At the same time, it was apparent that she felt anxious and stressed. She had forgotten that I was coming to interview her and, as if to ensure that I fully understood the pressures she was facing, informed me that our meeting would result in her staying late in order to complete the volume of work that needed to be done that day. In fact, she maintained that it was common for her to work an additional two hours every day, although she succeeded in causing me to feel that I was contributing to the pressure.

I learned from Cathy that she was now in a team which specialised in working with high risk offenders. In making this change, she appeared, based on her description, to have merely traded one depressed and demoralised office for another, where the local manager, like her previous manager, was regarded by her as disempowering and unsupportive. In her opinion, too much work was preventing the job from being done properly, causing her to feel angry and frustrated. Additionally, she was critical of the make-up of the team which consisted entirely of white women, working with a black male clientele. Her reference to it as being 'out of sync' seemed to imply that she felt it was wrong for her to be there as well.

Cathy graphically described her sense of feeling swamped by the work, to the point of being unable to remember the names of people on her caseload and feeling unable to 'soak up' anymore of their problems. The line between her working life and her personal life was becoming increasingly blurred, with her finding it difficult to let go of work issues even when on holiday. The job was viewed by her as primarily 'fire-fighting' and in her heightened state of anxiety I felt concerned that she was getting close to breaking point. She certainly believed that it was not going to be possible for her to work at her current level of intensity for very long and seemed to be hoping that her desire to secure a management position as quickly as possible would provide sufficient incentive for her to keep going.

The pressures of the job and the difficulties Cathy was experiencing came even more vividly to life in the case discussion. This not only highlighted the tensions she was experiencing in the field but also brought into sharper focus the ambiguities that she was struggling with in the work. Ironically, for someone who could summarise what was going on in her workplace with such precision, she seemed to be all over the place with her case and, at first, found it hard to even present the basic facts.

Temporarily, Cathy's capacity to think clearly seemed to become immobilised. She felt that she had been 'dumped' with a very difficult case and with no time to process the complexity of the material. According to her, this was typical of her work setting. She longed for space to think and in interview she told me how she looked up to people who helped her to think. I believe that the interview and case discussion provided her with an opportunity for reflection, which enabled her to give expression to the various conflicts she was feeling. As the case discussion progressed, it became possible for her to speak in a more focused way.

At our first meeting Cathy described herself as, 'A darned good interviewer, a natural motivational interviewer.' However, her chosen case neither displayed this side of her nor her professed aim of working collaboratively with offenders. Instead, the contents of and circumstances surrounding the case discussion showed the ways in which her efforts, including her desire to be in charge, were

thwarted by the behaviour of the offender, the actions of other agencies and what was happening in her office in terms of workload and support. Moreover, it revealed the disjuncture between protecting the public, her ideological aspirations to rehabilitate the people on her caseload and the reality of what is possible for her to achieve.

Cathy was very concerned in interview that management did not fully appreciate the psychological impact of constant organisational change on staff or the effects of the other pressures they were facing. Thus, rather than demonstrate her competence, she seemed to use the case discussion to powerfully communicate her rage and anxiety, and the negative impact the job was having upon her, whilst trying to maintain composure and hold onto the fascination and love for the work that brought her into the probation service in the first place.

2. Femi

Femi was the only participant to discuss a case from memory, coming to our meeting without notes or the file. This I took as an indication of her confidence to talk about her work. She explained that she had chosen a case on the grounds that it especially interested her. It concerned PN, a 44 year old male with a history of drug related offending. His last conviction had resulted in his being sentenced to 5 years imprisonment for a series of burglaries and he had now been released on licence. What captured Femi's interest was the challenge of trying to aid the rehabilitation of someone who had been offending over a 30 year period and whose time in the community was generally chaotic, drug fuelled and brief. She was therefore intrigued by the prospect of supervising and monitoring his efforts to re-establish himself, and supporting his very fragile ability to cope in the outside world.

This was actually the second time that PN had been released on licence during the course of his last sentence. On the day of his release, on the first occasion, arrangements had been made for him to travel 80 miles by himself from the prison to a residential drug rehabilitation centre. He failed to arrive and a recall notice was immediately issued. He was arrested a week later having been found in a collapsed state in the street after using crack cocaine. This time he

had succeeded in being out for six weeks and was living in a hostel, although not one which provided drug treatment.

Femi, who initiated the recall, had only had contact with PN via correspondence at that stage. She met him for the first time when she visited him following his return to prison. She considered it extremely important to meet with him as soon as possible after the recall in order to demonstrate that she had not given up on him and to ensure that he fully understood why it was necessary for her to take enforcement action. Talking of PN and the importance of making swift recall decisions in general she stated:

I told him that it was not only for his sake but for the public as well. When they don't comply all sorts of things could be going on, one of which could be offending which links to public protection. So those are the kinds of things you have to think about and you don't hesitate really. If you have to recall, then that is what you must do.

In outlining what she said to PN, Femi informed me that she had emphasised the necessity of recall for 'his own good.' She also left him in no doubt as to how frustrated, angry and disappointed she felt over what he did in view of the time and effort she had put into organising the rehab.

I think he understood and I think he recognised that although I'm here to clamp down if things go wrong, I'm also here to support him through that if things go wrong.

It seemed to me that these comments contained several important points concerning Femi's approach to enforcement and how she viewed her role. First of all there was an appreciation of the need to protect the public but, at the same time, she also saw the value of enforcement as something potentially therapeutic. Secondly, the words she used were not significantly different in inference to the traditional notion of care and control. In exploring these ideas with her further in the context of her role she added:

Essentially the climate at the moment makes you a law enforcer, we're also offender managers. That's what we are, we manage offenders. We manage the risk; we look after the public; the victims. So essentially I think that's the way the role is – we're a law enforcer but I guess you can do a lot of things with that. You can be a bit creative with that depending

on your style and your caseload. It doesn't always have to be about enforcement, there are other things that go on and you can certainly contribute to that.

This was another important contribution as it indicated that she was able to adapt and reconcile the key elements of her role in a way which Dan, for example, seemed unable to manage. In addition, implicit in several of Femi's statements was an understanding of the importance of her relationship with PN and how she was using it as a tool to influence his thinking and bring about change. She had returned him to prison but she felt it was important for him to know that their work together was not over. Whilst he had used his discharge grant to buy drugs, she was relieved he seemed not to have committed a serious offence whilst on the run although, realistically, suspected that it could only have been a matter of time before he did. Perhaps, most significantly, she impressed upon him her belief that 'We've nipped whatever was going to happen to you in the bud and hopefully we can start all over again.'

Luckily, for PN, he was given another opportunity to be released on licence, with arrangements being made for him to receive non-residential drug treatment on this occasion. Having succeeded in reaching his destination this time, he relapsed within a matter of days. However, Femi spoke of this as not being entirely unexpected, telling me:

When people are dead set in their ways it's always hard to change, so he found it pretty difficult during the first two weeks, when he got out, to adjust. So I needed to help him re-assess his priorities; help him to change his way of thinking; work with new things.

Notably, what Femi did not do in response to PN's rapid return to drug misuse was to have him recalled again. I am aware of many probation officer colleagues and their managers who would not have had the confidence to refrain from taking such action in similar circumstances for fear of the repercussions.¹²³ As stated above though, Femi anticipated that he would not

¹²³ Probation policies urge offender managers to take swift enforcement action, in order to protect the public, in situations where there appears to have been an increase in risk and with a view to preventing further offending. Concerns about being involved in an SFO enquiry or disciplinary proceedings if something were to go wrong have tended to limit discretion. Although, more recently, staff have been encouraged to consider what is to be achieved by

find life easy outside prison and believed that it would be counter-productive to send him back to prison so quickly. The likelihood being that he would remain in prison until the end of his sentence, come out without supervision and so destroy any chance of rehabilitation. Fortunately, Femi was supported in her decision by her SPO. The action she took instead, was to increase the frequency of PN's appointments with her to twice weekly and to arrange for him to have weekly drug tests.

I felt he needed encouragement and motivation, and he almost needs someone to check up on him. I felt he needed constant motivation and the only way I could really do that was to see him more often. So he knows I'm on his case, basically.

Moreover, Femi spoke of wanting to break the cycle where by PN had been going into prison every so often and coming out again to exactly the same situation:

Nothing's changed and he's put back into the old way of life and everything catches up with him pretty quickly. I also believe he's reached a turning point because he recognises he's getting older. He had a long sentence the last time, the longest he's had, and I think it gave him time to reflect on his life. He's reached a stage where he feels he's been there, done that and he wants to turn things around.

Thus, Femi appeared to possess a belief or a degree of faith in PN, in spite of his relapses. He had since been complying fully and his drug tests had been negative which she felt vindicated her decision not to recall.

Femi also described working in a very intuitive way:

It depends on how he presents. It could be his demeanour, it could be what he says, it could be how he reacts, it could be how he answers a question, it could be the mood he's in. I might go into a session thinking today I'm going to talk about this but then, when he turns up and presents in a certain way, you have to change the plan for the day. So you need to re-adjust. You see how they're presenting and you work with that.

recall and whether there may be alternatives to such action, the anxiety surrounding this still leads many staff to choose recall.

In working with PN, Femi had set a number of objectives which she hoped would reduce both the risk of harm and the risk of re-offending. This included focusing on the impact of his behaviour on himself and others; addressing his drug problem by engaging with treatment; assisting him to move on from the hostel before his licence expires and improving the quality of his relationships with his family. He has a mother and sister with whom relations are strained and, owing to his drug-taking, he has never been able to sustain a relationship with a partner for more than a short period.

Femi referred to her approach to PN, and the other people she supervised, as being a combination of motivation and challenge, trying to facilitate his reflection of specific actions and on his life in general. To assist in this process she was using his previous offences as a focus.

It's about asking him where he was at the time of an offence. Can you tell me what was going on? And I'll ask him how much he thinks his behaviour affected others and, depending on the response he gives, I might say, but if you know that, how come your record is so long? When he came out I think I started off by asking him, if you were to have the perfect life what would be in it? So I started with that and he gave me a long list. This is what I want – X, Y and Z. So my next question was, how come you haven't got these things, if these are the things you want, why haven't you got any of them? And he was able to say why and what had gone wrong. So I tend to start with him. What his own views are and what he thinks he needs to do to achieve his objectives.

Whilst I did not ask Femi to provide precise details of PN's answers, it felt clear to me that after a shaky start, during which he had used drugs, Femi had been able to engage him in a containing relationship that was enabling him to think. She stated that she had subsequently formed the opinion that he possessed a good level of insight into his behaviour and knew what he needed to do to change, but needed to be empowered to do so.

The aim is to make him independent. The aim is to empower him enough so that he can take responsibility for his own actions and he can set goals for himself; but I also like to think that apart from being his probation officer I'm also there to guide and support and advise and counsel. You know, it's a million roles all in one.

Given the above, it was also apparent that Femi was not afraid to use a range of approaches in her work. Nonetheless, whether she was using motivational interviewing or drawing on other cognitive behavioural techniques, she was convinced that successful intervention relied on certain fundamental principles which she tried to employ:

It's always about getting them to think about how did they get here; what could they have done to stop it? What can they do to make sure it doesn't happen again? A lot of solution focused therapy. Offenders have a lot of problems and they tend to get tied up with the problems, but I say you need to look at it another way. Let's look at the solutions. How can we solve it? A lot of that, a lot of counselling. Essentially what I'm doing is counselling offenders.

It was especially interesting to hear Femi talk of counselling, as this seemed to be something which some other members of the research sample did not consider themselves to have the skill to use. In her view, though, it was a method that came naturally to everyone and so, for her, was simple and carried no mystique:

I think everyone's got a bit of counselling in them. People walk up to you and say this is what's happened and you say 'oh, really?' Everyone's got that ability although we use it in different ways. It's something you develop along the way.

Furthermore, Femi spoke of the importance of commending offenders for their achievements, feeling that, on the whole, it did not happen often enough. Applying this to PN, she recalled telling him 'So you haven't had drugs for a week – fantastic. Let's try two weeks next time.' She believed that positive comments of this sort elicited a positive response. She thought that PN had come to recognise and accept her authority, but also appreciated that she was taking him seriously and showing interest in him.

I hope he doesn't think I'm overbearing (laughs). I told him at the beginning that it's about results. It's not just about him saying this is what I'm going to do – it's about him saying this is what I've done, and I think he understands that. And because of his history, there's been a lot of stop and start, stop and start and I've told him this time things have got to be different. I think I'm using a different approach to what's been tried before and I'm hoping he's seen that as being supportive as opposed to anything else. It's a good relationship I think.

Based on her experience, Femi expressed the view that 'as long as you connect' was the key to success. She presented evidence of a connection between herself and PN that suggested she was in the process of establishing a secure attachment. In fact I was not surprised to learn from her that she had achieved total compliance from all but a very few members of her caseload. Interestingly, she seemed very modest in acknowledging her success and reluctant to put it down to the quality of her relationship with her supervisees. Accordingly, her explanation as to why her offenders comply was first stated in terms of:

A clear understanding of what it means to be on probation. I think offenders get the message about enforcement and that motivates them. It gives them an incentive to come in. So that's the thing that's working.

It was only after I asked her how much she thought compliance was due specifically to her ability to engage offenders in the work, that she added:

Some offenders come in and think how much longer do I have to report here. I suppose it does help if you've got a good relationship with them, it does help. You would hope that they look forward to coming in to talk about life issues and things that impact on them. So I like to think, yeah, may be sometimes if you've got a good rapport with them it does help. It does encourage them to come in.

Femi went on to concede that creating a good relationship with an offender was a major source of job satisfaction and of mutual benefit: 'It keeps you going and it keeps them going as well.' However, she informed me that what satisfied her even more was:

[W]hen offenders on my caseload say they're not going to offend and they don't, and when the order expires I don't see them anymore, I don't hear from them. That's what keeps me going, when they don't come back. That's where the job satisfaction comes from. And when you're having a discussion with someone and you can see, you know what you're saying is sinking in, and that's evidenced by their reaction and their behaviour afterwards.

She was optimistic that this was beginning to happen with PN. She considered that he was being open and honest with her but acknowledged that she had not yet been able to identify any underlying factors that may have contributed to

such long term drug misuse. Femi had chosen to contact his mother and sister in order to confirm and obtain more background information but this had failed to reveal any early family disturbance. Nonetheless, she regarded such family contact as another essential part of the work:

It sends a message that we are not only checking up on you as probation officers, we are also ensuring that your support networks are there and, if anything goes wrong, we know who to go to provide extra support. So I see contact with the family as being a source of benefit for the offender.

It was apparent that Femi had invested a great deal in this case and had been affected by it emotionally, sharing the hopes and anxieties of PN's family that this time, he was going to succeed in staying drug free.

You're a human being first and then you're a probation officer. Sometimes you can't help but feel some of the things offenders and their families are feeling. Also some offenders can be draining and difficult. You can have a session with them and everything gets dumped on you and you do feel it.

Issues such as these were ones that she had no hesitation in sharing with her colleagues or her manager.

Reflections on Femi

Femi had provided fairly neutral responses to the survey questionnaire and was invited to take part in the main research on the basis of her middle ground stance¹²⁴. Subsequently, during both the interview and the case discussion, she came across as extremely positive in outlook and presented herself as determined, optimistic, calm and pragmatic. Whilst there may have been a defensive element to this, she never seemed to permit her anxieties to hinder her drive or undermine her composure and her affirmative nature. Essentially, as the survey answers could be taken to suggest, she brought a kind of balanced perspective to the work; weighing up the negatives she came up against with possible benefits and solutions.

¹²⁴ Femi rated the questions concerning training and contentment at 3. She felt the question relating to support merited between 3 and 4. The gratitude she expressed in interview for the support she was receiving left me surprised that she felt unable to award a higher rating.

Femi explained in interview that she had overcome a number of personal adversities whilst she was growing up, the experiences of which she considered had provided her with an affinity with offenders and she did not allow difficulties in training to get in the way of her professional learning and development. Immediately prior to training as a probation officer, Femi's employment had been as a court custody officer. In this position she was responsible for security at court and for ensuring the safe confinement of offenders within the court precincts. She had no direct experience of probation work or of other related employments.

Femi emerged from training committed and appreciative of the opportunity to become a probation officer. She has been able to bring to the job a habitus that has not only equipped her with intuitive qualities, but also with curiosity, sensitivity and empathy. She described her willingness to compromise and to adapt her ideals to the requirements of the service because it offered 'a good career.' Although she would prefer to see her role aligned more closely to social work, she was unperturbed by the label of 'law enforcer' later stating in the case discussion, 'I guess you can do a lot of things with that.' Similarly, she seemed to look upon the pressures of the work as challenges that demanded a more creative, purposeful approach, rather than obstacles that might hinder or divert her from her stated ideal 'to make society a better place.'

I found Femi to be highly convincing in the account she gave of her motivation and dedication to the job. She displayed clarity in her understanding of her role and gave the impression of possessing a range of knowledge, gathered from her life experience, previous work and training, as well as inner resources that she could confidently draw on to assist her in her role as a probation officer. She also had the benefit of supportive colleagues, including team managers, to turn to when in need of guidance or advice.

This picture of competence was further borne out in the case discussion, which served to provide an even stronger portrait of her capacity to engage offenders in a professional relationship that was appropriately bounded and focused. Moreover, her account which was delivered from memory, demonstrated warmth, empathy and authority, all of which she seemed entirely comfortable

with. The ability she displayed to integrate a variety of approaches into her work appeared to come naturally to her. She demonstrated several aspects of motivational interviewing and appeared at ease with basic counselling. She challenged in a non-persecutory manner, encouraging PN to think about and reflect on his behaviour; whilst she, too, listened and reflected. She was unperturbed by initial setbacks, understanding when recall to prison was necessary to protect the public (and the offender too). Later, she demonstrated both flexibility and confidence in her practice, together with her capacity for containment, when she exercised an element of discretion (with her manager's approval), resulting in her decision not to recall PN following his drug relapse.

Ultimately, I sensed that Femi was someone who was in control of her work and who appeared to have the potential to be very effective. She recognised her need for continued professional development and whatever her anxieties may have been, they did not dominate her practice and, when necessary, she appeared able to follow a survival strategy that enabled her to take 'time out' from the emotionality and stress of the work. Indeed, she seemed to possess an emotional resilience that shaped her capacity to cope with negative external factors, turning them into something positive. One might speculate that it was this disposition, which might be regarded as strength of character, that helped her through her earlier personal difficulties.

In addition, I feel it relevant to remember that Femi was one amongst only a small number of research subjects who regarded their entry into Probation as the desired outcome of a well-considered career goal. This has led me to wonder to what extent her aspirational pull towards the work may have been a factor in her making out better both as a trainee and upon qualifying.