A MONSTROUS 'OTHER'?

MYTH AND MEANING IN MALE EX-PRISONER NARRATIVES

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Abstract

This thesis explores the concepts of 'crime', justice and punishment through the narratives of male ex-prisoners. I adopt a critical criminological perspective and seek to humanise those who have been made monstrous by their status as ex-prisoners by allowing their stories to be heard. I provide a unique examination of ex-prisoners' identities and argue that if we allow those who have experienced prison to tell their stories, new theories and counter discourses about prisons and justice can develop. By hearing these stories we are forced to confront the ex-prisoner 'other', and must explain our own fears, disgust, pity, vitriol, but also fascination with those who have been punished. In hearing the stories of the ex-prisoner 'other', we must reflect on what demands for ever harsher penalties, greater restrictions on liberty, disenfranchisement, and the denial of full human rights does: to those whom we focus these pains upon, and on us, as a society, who believe pain is the equivalent of justice.

The methodology of the thesis involved life story research with 15 male ex-prisoners. Utilising intertextuality, myth and mythology, the arc of the ex-prisoners' life stories is followed in analysing: life before prison, imprisonment, and life after prison. In doing this, consideration is given to the outlaw identities of the men when they were actively involved in offending, the prison myths that shaped their experience of incarceration, and the mutable identities that they adopt on release.

The stories recounted here offer new ways of understanding 'crime', justice and imprisonment. They also, I argue, have the power to problematize existing discourses about prisons and punishment, and to open up new possibilities for social justice.

Key words: crime, prison, identity, intertextuality, myth.

Acknowledgements

This PhD is the culmination of many years of working with ex-prisoners, and researching, campaigning, and teaching about 'crime', justice and punishment. During that time there have been many people who have helped and inspired me along the way, not least the many ex-prisoners, both male and female, I have worked with. They sparked my initial interest in what, even to a relatively naïve 22 year old, appeared to be a bizarre situation in our prisons. It was these early work experiences that led me to the 15 men included in this study, each of whom must be thanked for sharing their lives so freely and with such good grace and humour; without them this PhD would simply not exist.

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Chapter One   Reawakening the Criminological Imagination: monsters and myth

> The State, you know, the probation officers, social workers, and psychologists, they've got no interest in us. They're not interested in the prisoner, or the politics of imprisonment, and even less about what happens to us after release.
> (Colin)

> In common usage, the word myth rather invites dissent, implying delusion and falsehood… myths are not always delusions, [and] deconstructing them does not necessarily mean wiping them… they can represent ways of making sense of universal matters… they enjoy a more vigorous life than we perhaps acknowledge, and exert more of an inspiration and influence than we think.
> (Warner 1994: xii-xiii)

> The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.
> (Muriel Rukeyser 1968 *The Speed of Darkness*)

1.1   Introduction

As the last decade came to a close, cultural criminologist Jeff Ferrell suggested that criminology faced two distinct crises. The first related to the global context within which criminologists operate. The unfolding crisis of capital, and the numerous social harms connected to this, such as increasing poverty and social division, environmental damage, and mass incarceration, would, he said, lead to uncertainty and strain, as well as new forms of surveillance and control. The second crisis Ferrell identified was one of a more specific nature: the crisis of criminology itself. Criminology, he argued, was 'crippled', and had given itself over to a 'fetishism' of inappropriate methodologies;[1] criminologists had failed to be sufficiently critical and analytical. He concluded that contemporary criminology had reified research

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[1] A concern first raised by Wright Mills (1959/2000: 225): 'Avoid the fetishism of method and technique'.

methods that were 'wholly inadequate and inappropriate to the study of human affairs' (Ferrell 2009: 1).

Yet human affairs are the central concern of criminology and this thesis is written with that concern at its heart. Although Ferrell goes on to defend the importance of ethnographic research, we should, as he recognises, not simply swap one methodological fetish for another. Indeed, the reconceptualization of method that he calls for, which involves blurring, confounding, engaging, and destabilizing the research process, can be found in other methodological approaches, and has been the experience of this study which seeks to tell the stories of men who have been incarcerated.

Research that is concerned with human relationships is, by its very nature, unpredictable, contradictory and fragmented (Manning 1995) in much the same way that many peoples' lives – and ex-prisoners in particular – are unpredictable, contradictory, fragile and fragmented. For researchers, the key is how to share the stories of these lives in a way that has meaning. To, 'widen the lens' of understanding 'and perhaps reshape public perceptions' as Crewe and Bennett (2012: xxii) have suggested. Ultimately, of course, communicating with others is the goal of this research – communicating and engaging in the hope for progressive social change and a more humanistic understanding of the incarcerated. This, I would argue, should be true of all criminological research. When the subject matter is those who have experienced imprisonment, such an imperative is even more marked.

Ferrell is not alone in believing that criminology can, and should, do more. Writing several years earlier, Elliot Currie (2002) discussed how the strength of critical criminology lay in a criminological imagination that confronts new intellectual and political challenges in what is a progressively more volatile global situation. In particular, for criminologists, there is a need to challenge an increasingly punitive criminal justice agenda, which not only fails to respect human rights, but also, at times, actively threatens them. In a similar vein, Scraton (2002) suggests that the application of critical analysis to the study of crime and criminal justice is crucial to understanding, interpreting and challenging the authoritarianism of State institutions that appear committed to widening the criminal justice net and expanding, exponentially, imprisonment. Proponents of critical criminology, such as Currie and Scraton, argue that one of its most important facets is that it falls between theory and politics. It is in this intellectual space that a fruitful, productive and creative relationship can emerge. In this space criminal justice is placed firmly within the context of social justice.

Informed by a critical criminological perspective and with a commitment to research methodologies that 'humanise the deviant' (Fitzgerald and Muncie 1981), this research study sought to turn attention onto the taken-for-granted cultural processes involved in the punishment paradigm, and to challenge this through the counter narratives of those on whom the most severe form of punishment has been afflicted. Such counter narratives can, I believe, add to our

knowledge and understanding about crime, punishment and justice. Counter narratives are not only instruments of power, but help illuminate the exercise of power on lives that have literally been expunged from view. For the men involved in this study, the experience of imprisonment is one that they have had to at least try and hide from employers, friends, colleagues, children, parents and potential partners.[2] The experience of incarceration is one that is put to the edge of their lives, of their identity, of their storytelling; and yet the experience pervades virtually all aspects of their being. It means that large sections of time must remain unexplained or lied about, that career options are closed off, that their own response to imprisonment is left unexplored.

This then is an experience at the margins, generally hidden from mainstream view; and it is in this hidden space that myths about what prison and prisoners are like can grow. When attention is given to ex-prisoners, it is frequently distorted in such a way that it renders the experience meaningless, or partial. Stereotypes and clichés abound – the wanton violence of the thug, the lack of intelligence of those who get caught, prisons as holiday camps. It is almost as if ex-prisoners have become mythical creatures, lurking in the shadows, they represent our negativity about the human condition: they are a monstrous 'other'.

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[2] These ideas are reminiscent of Goffman's (1968/1986) work amongst others.

These 'monsters'[3] instil fear but also enthral us. They are 'monsters of our own making' who, nonetheless, provide us with 'the peculiar pleasures of fear'.[4] In contrast, this study seeks to present the life stories of ex-prisoners in order to open up the theoretical and political space for analysis about prisons and punishment at the micro level of personal experience, and the macro level of social and cultural understandings about crime and justice. It aims to challenge both 'penal ignorance' and 'the 'othering' that occurs when a person is imprisoned' (Warr 2012: 143).

Adopting a life story approach, this study presents the experiences of 15 men[5] who have become embroiled in the criminal justice system and been incarcerated. Alongside secondary literature and analysis, the men's own words are used in order to highlight issues that they consider to be of importance in their lives. The research is informed by a critical theoretical approach and utilises the work of a number of theorists writing in the fields of penology, power, narrative, and identity. Taking a critical approach has a number of distinct features: firstly, the adoption of a non-objective methodology; secondly, an

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[3] A term regularly used by the media. For example, Category A, Wakefield prison, has been described as 'Monster Mansion' by *The Mirror*, *The Sun* and *The Guardian* newspapers. Ian Brady, convicted of five murders in the 1960s is regularly described as a monster (for example Daily Mail 30/6/12), as were Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, convicted of the murder of James Bulger in 1993 (Jewkes 2011). The film *Monster* depicted the life of American Aileen Wuornos who was convicted and executed for several murders. See also Drake (2012) for discussion on the persistence of the belief that some people are inherently evil.
[4] This is the title and subtitle of Warner's 2007 book.
[5] The focus is on male ex-prisoners as they make up 95% of the prison population (Ministry of Justice 2013a) and because masculinities should be an important issue in criminological analysis.

interest in seeking to expose the power relations which infuse the criminal justice system as a whole, and prisons in particular; thirdly, recognition of the multiple, fragmented and performative aspects of identity; and finally, the centrality of language and communicative action in both conducting the research and undertaking analysis. Ultimately, this thesis is based on a belief that understandings of the criminal justice process can be significantly enhanced if we allow those who have been through the criminal justice system to speak for themselves. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what it is like to pass through the criminal justice system, and that it has the potential to challenge existing assumptions of what ex-prisoners are like, and how men cope with the deprivation of their liberty. Moreover, the thesis is predicated on the belief that these narratives inform us about the social and cultural context within which punishment takes place.

1.2   A flight of fantasy

At the outset of this study the focus was on the methodological approach, a commitment to hearing the life stories of men who had been in prison. At the point of analysis however, the thesis changed shape and has metamorphosed into something else. How did this happen? In the beginning, there were three key elements that informed the research: a commitment to life story research; an engagement with critical theory; and a belief that the concept of intertextuality had

something to offer the study – that there is a blurring of lines between the text and the lived experience. I went about the research task in the relatively standard manner of extensive reading, planning, seeking access to participants, thinking about ethical issues, and undertaking interviews. I then had an enforced period of absence from the work during which, although I barely wrote anything, I read the interview scripts over and over. I immersed myself in the data. One theme that emerged almost whilst the interviews were taking place was that of the outlaw. A large number of the men perceived themselves as outlaws; they lived their lives outside of mainstream society, embraced an outlaw identity and set their offending within that context. This intuitively made sense to me, and the few people I mentioned it to seemed to understand the idea as well. Nonetheless, it was not until a fortuitous moment involving driving back from a prison visit (for another piece of research I was undertaking – hence the enforced break from the PhD) that I heard a radio programme interview with Martin Parker who had just had his book *Alternative Business: Outlaws, Crime and Culture* (2012) published. Grabbing pen and paper, I hurriedly wrote down the details and felt a huge sense of relief, and a bit of excitement, that there was academic work out there that could aid my analysis.

The next step was far more slowly realised. Reading about their lives, it was apparent that many of the men's identities were complex; they were not simply 'spoiled' (Goffman 1963/1990). This realisation should

not have come so slowly to me as I had spent many years working with ex-prisoners (as discussed below) and many of the stories I heard were told with a great deal of humour. During the research interviews I, and the participants, had spent numerous moments laughing,[6] and many of the men appeared to revel in telling stories and anecdotes that were funny. Some put on special voices to 'perform' different roles. There were stories of sexual exploits, substance induced 'nirvana', fleeing town to escape the law, great friendships, and criminal successes. There were also tales of abuse, neglect, homelessness, substance problems, fear, and death. At first I thought of these narratives as contradictory, but no less authentic for it, and that is still partially true. But the more I read and the more I thought, something else started to emerge from the 'data'. The men's identities were ones that altered over time and space. There was rarely a single fixed identity but several identities in one. Without really knowing the meaning of the term, or its mythological connections, the word shapeshifter came to mind. I mentioned this to one of the men who had been interviewed and he immediately got it – 'Yes' he said 'I do that all the time'. And, that is how I ended up reading *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. Within days the analytical framework for the research was set.

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[6] Warner (2007: 348) discusses how laughter is: 'a means to knowledge and a way of communication'.

1.3   Contextualising the study: themes, theory and trajectory

The structure, or trajectory, of this study has been shaped by the research on which it is based. When asked to tell the stories of their lives, more often than not, the life was told as a chronological tale, with a clear, beginning, middle and end. The beginning point and end point might be different. For example, some men started their stories at their teenage years, possibly this being a key point in their development and autonomy, a point when friends become more or as important as family. Others however, started from points they themselves would not be able to remember, such as arrival into England as their families emigrated from other countries. Others still, recalled specific incidents in their childhood to explore a particular issue. Tales about running away from home, violence at the hands of sadistic teachers and carers in 'boarding schools'[7] or children's homes were used to frame wider stories of neglect, violence, and fear. In keeping with this narrative arc, the chapters based on the men's stories are set out chronologically and therefore follow the format of: life before prison, imprisonment, and life post-prison.

This introductory chapter sets out some of the key themes, concepts and theories that have informed the study, which are then intertwined with the substantive, analytical chapters. These themes relate to: counter narratives and identity; critical criminology; biography and

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[7] Boarding schools were referred to by some of the men but when questioned this related to experiences at approved schools or community homes with education.

structure; and intertextuality and myth. The state of criminology as a discipline is also explored in recognition that research of this type is itself often seen as counter to mainstream criminological understandings and explorations, and therefore less valid or valuable. I argue however, that the crisis within criminology that Ferrell has identified must be challenged, and that critical criminology provides the theoretical framework, life story methodology a practical application, and intertextual analysis a unique way from which such challenges can be made. First however, I outline the origins of the story from my point of view, as the teller of these other tales, and in doing so a more reflexive approach is required.[8]

1.4   The origins of the story

The genesis of this thesis can be traced back over two decades. My career began in a voluntary sector hostel for women offenders. These women were homeless at the point of their release from prison, secure unit or special hospital. Providing 24-hour care, I spent three years talking, laughing and crying with my fellow workers and the women we housed (for further information about this organisation see Rumgay 2007). What started at this organisation was to become an abiding interest in prisons, those who end up in them, and the wider operations of the criminal justice system. From that initial job I went on to work in a variety of other settings with both men and women who had been in

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[8] This thesis incorporates elements of my story into it; this fits with the critical tradition in terms of acting reflexively (see Carlen 2002).

prison. Throughout this time I listened to the stories of those I worked with. I heard about lives that were not only tainted, but often decimated, by terrible abuse, neglect and violence perpetrated against them as children, and as adults. I heard about lives ruined by a lack of care from families, and the State, in the form of care homes, social workers, teachers, probation officers and prison officers. And, I heard about the experience of prison. Seldom seen as the answer to their problems, in fact imprisonment generally heaped more pain and damage on what were already painful and damaged lives.

On occasions too numerous to mention, I would suggest that the people I worked with write down their experiences, share them with others, start to challenge the dominant view of ex-prisoners as despicable, dangerous and devious people. I am not aware however, of this suggestion ever being taken up. I am aware however, that many of those men and women are now dead: suicide and overdoses are far from rare occurrences amongst the ex-prisoner population (Sattar 2001). Moreover, the ongoing battle to make sense of experiences that frequently make so little sense can be long-standing, and can be lost. In one particularly harrowing case, I was watching the news a few years ago when a picture of a woman I'd worked with in that very first hostel, nearly 20 years before, flashed up on the television screen. She had been shot dead by police in Kent.

By listening to ex-prisoners we start to understand that some of our most basic assumptions about crime and punishment do not stand up to significant scrutiny. By listening to ex-prisoners, the perception that those who have been in prison are evil, violent, unpredictable and monstrous is challenged (Drake 2012). By hearing the life stories of ex-prisoners we can come to understand the function that these popular representations play in meeting people's needs for an explanation of their own experiences and in wider cultural understandings about crime, justice and punishment.

1.5   Counter narratives and identity

Engaging with narratives has been a key feature of many academic disciplines. Narratives allow for the study of people and culture, they allow us into individuals' lived experiences; their problems, actions, hopes and explanations of behaviour, and provide insight into who they are. Narrative helps to construct identity. Furthermore, 'to raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself' (White 1980: 5).

Within criminology the use of narrative has a distinguished genealogy. The life story approach was a key element of early Chicago School research. In *The Jack Roller* (Shaw: 1930/1966) for example, we hear the story of Stanley, imprisoned for jack rolling – the mugging of drunk

people – whose early upbringing was replete with experiences of deprivation, death, family disjunction, and running away from home; as his life unfolds Stanley progresses into homelessness, offending and institutionalization. So iconic is this particular story that it has been revisited on a number of further occasions including Stanley's seventieth birthday (Snodgrass 1982) and again, in a special edition of *Theoretical Criminology* in 2007 (vol. 11 no. 4), one hundred years after his birth.

More recent, and diverse, examples of narrative studies within criminology can be found in the work of Carlen (1985); Crewe (2005, 2006, 2009); Crewe and Bennett (2012); Maruna (1997, 2001) and Parker (1991, 1995). Despite this rich history the relationship between criminology and life story approaches has become a rather rocky one. This has culminated in a number of scholars arguing that criminology has virtually abandoned narrative approaches such as ethnography or life story research (Crewe 2009; Liebling 2004; Maruna 1997; Maruna and Matravers 2007; Wacquant 2002). Consequently, the voices of those who have been imprisoned are increasingly quiet. This is important on at least two counts. Firstly, it comes at a time when mass imprisonment has become a common feature across much of the western world; and within Europe, is at its most pronounced in the United Kingdom. With a diminishing number of accounts of prison life (Simon 2000), and a punitive turn both politically and in the media (Pratt et al. 2005; Muncie 2008), public understandings of

imprisonment have become at best partial, and at worst, highly distorted caricatures.

The second issue of interest is that despite the initial use of life story approaches within criminology, and in penological research in particular, the eclipse of in-depth qualitative criminological research (Wacquant 2002; Jewkes 2012a) has occurred simultaneously to the concepts of narrative, counter narratives and life stories becoming more visible in numerous other disciplines (Amsterdan and Bruner 2000; Erickson 1982; Learmonth 2004; McAdams 1985, 1993; Plummer 1995).

This study therefore seeks to re-engage criminology with life story research. Moreover, a key aim is to challenge some of the taken-for-granted myths of mainstream discourse, or cultural narratives, about crime, offenders, punishment, and justice. Counter narratives, stories told by those who have experienced the most extreme form of punishment, help to shed light on the operation of power in society, and on the cultural and historical context that allow particular individual and collective identity possibilities. Such stories have the potential to open up new understandings and possibilities for justice. This is one of the unique aspects of this study. Narrative research calls for critical and theoretical interpretations, and therefore this research is not simply about telling stories, but recognising that there are multiple ways of conceiving an ex-prisoner identity.

Such counter narratives tell us about the cultural processes of punishment in a distinct spatial and temporal moment:

> The need for stories has become acute in our contemporary culture, it has been recognised from the origin of time as an indispensable ingredient of any meaningful society.
> (Kearney 2002: 4)

When criminological research has been based on narratives it has generally been concerned with narrative coherence and continuity, a life moving towards desistance (Maruna 1997, 2001). Some people, however, may narrate their experiences of punishment in a less organised fashion. They may also not see themselves as 'making good' in terms of acceptance of punishment and recognition of harm done. They may not conceptualize their ex-prisoner identity in terms of personal agency and the re-authoring of a life-narrative of desistance. Rather, personal struggles may be reframed as political ones, for example, in terms of righting a wrong, or challenging State controls and ideology.

This conceptual shift in terms of narrative analysis moves counter narrative dialogue about the punished away from individualistic ideals such as personal agency; or criminal justice ideals about desistance, towards discourses that are significantly more wide-ranging. Investigation into the lives of these ex-prisoners has gone far beyond the legal, economic and personal experiences in which they live; and beyond the sequence of events in their lives. Their experiences as ex-

prisoners have passed through a mesh of common images that are grounded in ideas about destiny, about human rights, and social justice. Furthermore, their voices and experiences are mediated by other voices, many of which are from popular culture and mythology. These ex-prisoner counter narratives have rubbed against and absorbed other narratives including that of the outlaw and of mutable identities. This thesis therefore explores offender identities that connect to and draw upon mythological outlaw narratives, on prisoner identities shaped and distorted by myths about prisons, and on ex-prisoner identities that must confront the mainstream construction of the monstrous ex-prisoner 'other'.

1.6   Critical criminology

Although I use the term critical criminology to locate the theoretical framework for this research, it is necessary for me to be explicit in regard to what is actually meant by this term as it can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In the context of this study I refer to critical criminology simply as the application of critical analysis to criminological notions. It is about recognising that social harm requires a wider analytical lens than the study of 'crime' would allow. It is about a belief in, and commitment to, social justice, and recognition that this may be ill-served by the contemporary practices of the criminal justice system, and by some criminological research.

Early critical criminology such as the 'new criminology' of the 1970s was inflected with a Marxist perspective that prioritised class relations as the key focus of attention in considerations of the State, law and crime. This 'first phase' (Scraton and Chadwick 1991) has however been criticized for being overly deterministic, naïve, and utopian (Lea and Young 1984). Despite these criticisms, at times from those who had previously been proponents of the 'new criminology', Marxist criminology retains academic capital, whilst a refined form of critical criminology has evolved – one which recognises that power can be exercised and experienced at the intersection of identities that are not only shaped by economic power, but gendered and racialised power also. The influence of Foucault's (1972, 1977/1991, 1977, 1981) work is also evident in this emergent critical outlook, which suggests that power is dispersed throughout society and argues that there is a distinct link between power and knowledge. Offering an alternative knowledge in the form of ex-prisoner counter narratives provides an opportunity to challenge knowledge and understanding about the criminal justice system, the power to punish, who the punished are, and the cultural context in which that punishment occurs.

Whilst not wishing to minimise the harm caused by those who have been punished – and many would regard some of the offences committed by the men included in this study as indefensible – the location of analysis is about recognising that conceptions of crime, deviance, punishment and justice are determined by power relations

which have, in this instance, been crystallised in the institution of the prison. This study therefore is about men who have all committed crimes, up to and including murder; it is also about men who have all been given prison sentences whether for a few months or for life. But, it is, nonetheless, set within a human rights agenda, which challenges the context and consequences of State sanctioned 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980: 133), where inequality is pervasive and social justice seldom realised.

Scraton (2002) argues that the application of critical analysis to the study of crime, 'deviance' and criminal justice is crucial to understanding, interpreting and challenging the authoritarianism of State institutions committed to expanding imprisonment. In this challenge to powerful institutions and their collective regimes of truth, critical criminology can, according to Scraton, be associated with campaigns for social reform and political change by mobilising a human rights discourse and agenda to provide a procedural alternative to the administration of law and criminal justice.

Recognising the inherent tensions in researching the human experience Carlen (2002) suggests that the critical project should strive to cherish its contradictory tendencies and to work on these contradictions by acting reflexively. This has been a crucial perspective for this study as the contradictions within storytelling are significant. If all knowledge that is produced should be critical, recognising these complexities and

exploring them is an important part of the analytical process. Commitment to the critical project requires that two distinct paths are therefore followed: firstly, to embrace the contradictions and complexities found in research involving human affairs, and to make them the focus of study rather than suppressing them in the face of difficult analytical considerations; and secondly to act reflexively, that is to integrate our personal accounts into the research, in order to connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social (Ellis 2004; Holman Jones 2005). It is therefore necessary to 'turn inwards' (Denzin 1997: 199) and to incorporate reflexive praxis into this story, thereby making it transparent that this is a story of stories; that it is my story of others' stories.

One of Nils Christie's (1998) contributions to criminology has been in considering the ascription of crime through institutional and classificatory processes of State control. There is no 'crime'; there are only acts in the making. These processes are set within a political-economic context of definition, enforcement and application of the rule of law. Inequality is centrally placed in this analysis and is key to his seminal text *Crime Control as Industry* (1993/2000). In this, Christie illustrates how management ideology has become pervasive and demands for 'useful knowledge' are made. This concept of 'useful knowledge' can be linked to Foucault's concerns with 'truth'. For Foucault (1980: 93), the production of 'truth' cannot be understood outside the relations of power: 'relations of power which permeate,

characterise and constitute the social body' dependent on the 'production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse' which is directly associated with the 'production of truth'. As Foucault has convincingly shown, 'truth', and the exercise of power are inextricably interlinked. 'Truth' and 'knowledge' are therefore constrained by political and economic imperatives and include the 'scientific' discourses of formally sanctioned knowledge. Truth, knowledge, power are then key concepts pertinent to this current study.

Presenting the life stories of the 15 men who took part in the research is not about finding 'truth', but recognises that truth is produced in the context of power relations. The 'truth' about the processes involved in becoming defined as ex-prisoners can be explored through the narratives of those who are ex-prisoners. Prisoners are stripped of their power in a myriad of ways, ranging from limited options in terms of when or what to eat; when they can see friends and family; to an utter loss of privacy, including over their own bodies. These are the pains of imprisonment that Sykes (1958) described. On release from prison such privations can continue with limited choices over jobs or careers, feeling unable to tell people about this part of their identity or experience, or being perceived by wider society in a particular way, as monsters, in need of separation, strict monitoring, or complete transformation.

Critical analysis of the criminal justice process must be mindful that relations of power are central to personal action and social interaction. An example of the analytical potential of critical analysis for challenging the politics and practices of criminal justice and imprisonment can be found in Mathiesen's (1990/2005) critique of prisons and punishment *Prison on Trial.* He illustrates that while the harms of the powerful are neglected, the operations of the criminal justice system, and the institution of the prison, create an illusion of legitimacy and meaning in terms of controlling crime and administering justice. He goes on to state that: 'by relying on the prison, by building prisons, by building more prisons, by passing legislation containing longer prison sentences' it appears as if those in political power 'are doing something... that something is presumably being done about law and order' (Mathiesen, 1990/2005: 143).

In contrast, counter narrative research challenges the dominant discourses on crime, punishment and justice found in western societies. The 'regimes of truth' and 'useful knowledge' pronounced by the State minimise the value of alternative, ex-prisoners' voices, whilst simultaneously ignoring the structured inequality which pervades society constructing a perverted view of both the 'crime' problem and the administration of justice. Counter narrative research offers critical criminology its own form of 'useful knowledge', a 'truth' that can help illuminate the exercise of State power on bodies that have attracted the ultimate State sanction. Lea and Young (1984) had accused early critical

criminology of what they termed its naïve anti-empiricism. Later critical criminology, informed by post-structuralism, feminist and post-colonial theory and with a commitment to human rights, meets this criticism head on.

Cultural theorist and early associate of critical criminology, Stuart Hall, said:

> Feminist and post-colonial theory have much in common as oppositional discourses which attempt to redress an imbalance in society and culture. Both began with strategies that aimed to upset dominant hierarchies and recover or reassert marginalized histories and writings. Both have also since turned towards analyses of the construction of those hierarchies, categories, and canons, questioning the systems of thought and forms of critical legitimation behind them.
> (Hall 1980: 198)

Such a contention, that a variety of 'oppositional' discourses can be brought together to assert what have been marginalized experiences, is central to this study. My research is therefore informed by the oppositional discourses that can be broadly put under the umbrella of critical criminology. This involves recognition of economic, social and political inequalities, the need to 'upset' mainstream narratives, by placing the marginalized at the centre, and has a commitment to societal change. Criminological research should be 'on behalf of those on the downside of power relations' (Hudson 1993: 7) particularly because, as Hudson was later to note, criminology has a 'dangerous' relationship with power as the 'categories and classifications, the labels

and diagnoses and the images of the criminal produced by criminologists are stigmatizing' (2000: 177).

Arguing on a similar basis, Scraton suggests that critical criminologists should seek to represent and value the 'view from below' (2002: 35). He goes on to say that those who have endured institutionalized harm are now more ready to raise their voices in order to demand a fairer administration of justice. This however, is not always the case. Having been ostracised by society, and frequently their families and friends, many of those who have endured incarceration seek to hide, minimise or forget that experience and take little positive from it. Moreover, having at times committed a significant level of harm themselves, it is not always easy to make such demands, or to be heard. As criminologists, we too have a role to play in both ensuring such voices are heard, and in demanding an alternative to punitive justice.

Many criminologists are, as Piquero, Farrington and Blumstein (2007) argue, interested in how and why criminal behaviour begins, continues and ends. These are, on the face of it, important criminological issues. However, as one (quantitatively minded) criminologist once said to me, death is the only sure way to ensure desistance. This I took not to be a pessimistic view of offenders as unchanging and persistent, but more about the fact that there are many and various ways of engaging with critical criminological questions which go well beyond the onset of criminal behaviour, persistence and desistance. The focus of this thesis

is, therefore, less on the criminal career followed by a move towards desistance; instead, this study recognises that it is the operations of the criminal justice system that defines when criminal behaviour begins, persists and ends. Let me give a brief explanation of this. A number of years ago, I conducted research regarding young male prisoners' resettlement needs (Farrant 2006). When asked about their first involvement in crime, the vast majority discussed an event which had resulted in involvement of the police, and then potentially other criminal justice agencies. I soon realised that what the participants considered to be the commencement of their criminal activity was not when they had first committed a crime.[9] This was made even more problematic as their identity as someone who did not commit crime remained apparently untroubled as long as their behaviour did not lead to involvement with an agency that labelled them as an offender, and therefore forced them to identify that particular behaviour as the starting point of their 'criminal career'.

This thesis is therefore not about criminal careers, nor particularly about the journey towards desistance. It is about what life story counter narratives of male ex-prisoners can tell us about a culture of 'justice' and punishment that creates a monster, the ex-prisoner 'other' and about how those who have been defined in this way make sense of their lives. Moreover, to understand ourselves, we must, I contend, have

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[9] A construct already difficult to pin down firmly due to the age of criminal responsibility, amongst a multitude of other factors such as memory, and changing categories of criminal behaviour.

understanding of this 'other' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Kearney 2003). By analysing the construction of the ex-prisoner monster we come to understand ourselves, and the culture we live in. In consideration of these 'others' alternative meanings of justice, punishment and crime are opened up.

In reality, much criminological research that puts the offender at the centre does not fit under the critical criminology umbrella. For example, in his foreword to *Key Issues in Criminal Career Research: New Analyses of the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development*, Wellford states that 'the crimes that most directly contributed to the miseries of mankind were those that were the focus of the criminal justice system' (2007: ix). This is a standpoint antithetical to critical criminologists, and to myself. Many of those who cause the most harm in society are not the focus of the criminal justice system. Those whom we currently criminalise, stigmatise and imprison should, nonetheless, be of interest to critical criminologists because they inform us about the society in which these processes occur. It has been suggested, that critical criminology itself has played a role in the diminishing interest in offenders (Jefferson 2002). When the criminal actor does appear, they do so in what Jefferson (2002: 145) describes as a 'depleted and unrecognisable form: a travesty of a human subject'. This leads him to conclude that critical criminology has in fact been as inadequate as mainstream or traditional criminology in its analysis. Deconstructing such an image should be an

integral part of the critical criminological project, which for too long has left the criminal subject largely untouched.

Jefferson, in his call for a psychosocial criminology, laments critical criminology's failure to answer the question 'why he, or she, "did it"' (2002: 151). This particular study is, however, less interested in that question. By hearing the counter narratives of those who have been caught 'at it' we learn about the wider culture we live in and about a system of 'justice' that is generally directed at the poor and the dispossessed, rather than the powerful. Trying to find out why someone commits a crime and asking ex-prisoners about that is to me short-sighted. If the focus of criminological research is why someone 'did it' then any cohort of individuals are likely to provide as good an indication as ex-prisoners. The likelihood is, that we have all 'done it' but that the vast majority of us did not get caught. So, focusing on ex-prisoners has a purpose, but the purpose must be one of increasing our understanding of imprisonment and the enactment of punishment in a society which places the institution of the prison as a prime site for justice. Such a rendering of the experience of imprisonment will, of course, include the steps taken that led to incarceration. It should, always be kept in mind however, that it is the act of being caught, charged, processed, prosecuted and sentenced that makes the 'offender' and not the act *per se*. In considering this, the 'peculiarly passionless subject of criminology' (Jefferson 2002: 152) must engage with the

biographies of the punished, and the activities and experiences of their lives.

1.7   (Auto)Biography and structure

> When the prisoners began to speak, they possessed an individual theory of prisons, the penal system and justice. It is this form of discourse which ultimately matters, a discourse against power, the counter-discourse of prisoners and those we call delinquents – and not a theory *about* delinquents.
> (Foucault 1977/1991: 209)

Prisoner autobiographies have provided insightful accounts into the culture of the prison and the 'interior mental universe of the incarcerated' (Crewe and Bennett 2012: ix). Such autobiographies are, nonetheless, frequently treated with hostility and distrust (Nellis 2012); and criminal justice and criminological research has largely failed to engage in any meaningful way with such works. Although there have been a few notable exceptions. During the early period of his work on desistance, Maruna (1997) analysed 20 published autobiographies written by 'reintegrated ex-convicts' and identified what he termed prototypical reform stories. Another example of this type of analysis can be found in Morgan's (1999) work on prisoner autobiographies, which segments the texts into those by 'straights' and those by 'cons'. Straights were those, generally middle-class, prisoners who found themselves in the alien environment of the prison but refused to accept a criminal identity. Cons, on the other hand, had a long-term history of imprisonment, a criminal identity and lifestyle. Such analyses of

prisoner autobiographies, as well as prisoner autobiographies themselves, frequently provide evocative accounts of the lived experiences of prisoners. More recently, Nellis (2012) has considered autobiographical writing by British prisoners in terms of the therapeutic, redemptive and reformist purposes that such writing can serve. As Nellis notes, however, autobiographies are often about the exceptional rather than the mundane.[10] Moreover, autobiographies are by their nature individualised, and consideration about how a personal story connects to wider society may, or may not, be given.

Crewe and Bennett's *The Prisoner* (2012) moves explorations of prisoners' narratives on in new and interesting ways. Chapters are set out thematically with excerpts from interviews with prisoners alongside academic analysis and commentary. The authors state that the inclusion of quotations from prisoners helps to 'convey some of the more distinctive qualities of prisons' (Crewe and Bennett 2012: xxi). They also argue that many of what are now termed the 'classic studies' of imprisonment, had muffled the voice of the prisoner by failing to make significant use of direct and extensive quotations. These are important concerns and ones that this study shares. The emphasis in this research is about making connections between the individual biography of the ex-prisoner, once outside of the prisoner society; and the wider cultural resonances about punishment and justice to be found in such counter narratives. The work of Wright Mills on biography and

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[10] The autobiographies of women seldom attract significant attention (Nellis 2012).

structure, and of Kristeva on intertextuality is, therefore, also of relevance.

Wright Mills' major contribution to radical discourse was that the sociological imagination lay in analysing the dynamics between biography and history, the dialectic between the personal and the public. Exactly fifty years before Ferrell's (2009) invocation to 'kill method', Wright Mills succinctly stated the dilemma for the researcher:

> To *appeal* to the powerful, on the basis of any knowledge we now have, is utopian in the foolish sense of that term. Our relations with them are more likely to be only such relations as they find useful, which is to say that we become technicians accepting their problems and aims, or ideologists promoting their prestige and authority.
> (Wright Mills 1959/2000: 193)

Yet, if knowledge is power, then power can be unsettled by an atypical form of knowledge based on ex-prisoner narratives.

Despite Wright Mills' frequently anachronistic language – it is men who 'feel that their private lives are a series of traps' (1); there are 'men of science' (16) and 'literary men as critics and historians' (17) – the call for the sociological imagination to understand the wider historical context in terms of its meaning for individuals remains an important one. The intellectual journey for social study requires analysis at the intersection of the historical, social and biographical. The most fruitful distinction according to Wright Mills is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure' (7: 1959/2000).

This theme of 'trouble' is one returned to on several occasions in his work, and is of direct relevance to the issues of arrest, charging, prosecution, sentencing and imprisonment of those caught up in the criminal justice system.

> To formulate issues and troubles, we must ask what values are cherished yet threatened, and what values are cherished and supported, by the characterizing trends of our period.
> (Wright Mills 1959/2000: 11)

It is in personal biographies that identities are described, although these cannot be fully understood without knowledge or reference to the social structures in which everyday life is organised. The life stories told in this research require analysis that recognises the men as both individual actors as well as social and cultural informants. Moreover, their counter narratives cannot be adequately understood without reference or recognition to the institution in which part of their biography has been created. In this instance therefore, the institution of the prison must be put centre-stage.

Returning to the subject of trouble towards the end of *The Sociological Imagination,* Wright Mills (1959/2000) noted that many personal troubles cannot be resolved merely as troubles, but must instead be understood as public issues. Applying this point to the way the criminal justice system functions would mean that, rather than focusing on the idea of individual deficits and criminogenic needs – as seen in the rise of cognitive behavioural therapies, and revised rehabilitation and

resettlement agendas which put reductions in offending as the only issue of relevance (Ministry of Justice 2012a) – structural processes should be recognised as crucial. For Wright Mills, people's lives are both bounded by social circumstances and shaped by social forces that were not of their doing. This, he sees as leading to two consequences: it lends most human life a somewhat tragic aspect; but it also creates the potential for significantly improving life through concerted action. The power of a reawakened criminological imagination therefore lies in the ability to connect the counter narratives of ex-prisoners with wider cultural narratives relating to crime, punishment and justice. A potential method of exploring this bridge between the cultural and biographical is provided by the concept of intertextuality and the interconnectedness of myth.

1.8   Intertextuality and myth

> We are living in a society in which our *perception* is directed almost as often to representations as it is to "reality".
> (Lash 1990: 24)

Scholars interested in semiotics have highlighted how in order to communicate we must use concepts and conventions that already exist. Furthermore, although our intention to communicate and what we intend to communicate, are important to us as individuals, meaning cannot be reduced to the speaker's or author's intention. Although some of the ideas associated with intertextuality are longstanding (Porter Abbott 2008); it is Kristeva (1967/1980) who is generally

credited with introducing and defining the concept of intertextuality more fully. In its most simplistic terms intertextuality refers to the way in which all texts are made out of other texts.

In this study, narrative traces from mythology and popular culture were found in the life stories of the men. For example, in discussing their criminal identities a number of the men made reference to outlaw mythology and archetypes, to ideas about freedom, opportunity, honour, individualism and justice. In their stories about prison, intertextuality was evident in the men's references to the 'surreal' and 'film-like' quality of their first entry into prison. However, it was prison myths that most informed their narratives. The most frequent myth mentioned was that the men were fearful of sexual violence from other prisoners. Films and television programmes had shaped the belief that rape in prison is endemic. On release from prison the way the men discussed their identities brought to mind the idea of mutable identities, a concept that can be found at the heart of many classic, as well as more modern myths and involves a sequence of struggles as identity shifts occur. The counter narrative texts of the men involved in this study therefore come out of a 'pre-existing cultural web of expressive forms' (Porter Abbott 2008: 101).

Literary theorist and teacher of Kristeva, Roland Barthes (1974), demonstrated this idea through analysis of a short story by Balzac. In his literary deconstruction of the story, Barthes shows how texts reflect

a number of voices well beyond the author and how identity is produced by language rather than expressed through it. Such insights are useful for this thesis on the basis of the connections between the author/speaker of the counter narratives, the listener/author of the research, and the reader of the research. At each stage, the meaning of the text will change. The narratives and their meaning are affected by time, by memory, knowledge of other texts, and the life experiences of all those involved in the construction of the text, including the reader. The meaning of these counter narrative texts is therefore not fixed at any stage, but is in constant flux in much the same way that the telling of the story cannot be fixed, and would be different on different days, with a different researcher, and in different settings.

Intertextuality highlights not only references to other texts but the blurring of lines between the text and the lived experience (Kristeva 1967/1980). In the context of counter narrative research this is particularly useful; it is also worth examining because intertextuality draws attention to other texts that affect the meaning of the primary text. Readers who know a secondary text bring that knowledge to bear on the primary text – in this instance the life stories of men who have been incarcerated. When you read a primary text, your knowledge of other texts affects how you understand that primary text – of course there are many other factors that influence the creation of meaning – however, knowledge of other texts is one significant factor. In this thesis it is possible to identify the intertextual loop, or the circle of

mimesis (Ricoeur 1991), of the various texts relevant to this story. Mimesis relates to showing and reinterpretation, fiction and real life. Storytelling therefore has a mimetic function that allows for a creative representation of the world so that 'hidden patterns and unexplored meanings can unfold' (Kearney 2002: 11).

In her analysis of crime films, Jewkes (2011) suggests that 'crime film' incorporates a range of genres including the Western, the pirate movie and gangster films due to the shared references to 'good' and 'bad' guys, outlaws and heroes. The men involved in the current study also took this eclectic approach to popular culture. In some instances, the connection between secondary texts and the primary counter narrative text was explicitly stated by the story-teller. For example, references were made to multiple cultural influences from across film and television, music and books: such as Robin Hood, biker gangs, *Bugsy Malone*, *Pulp Fiction,* Jim Morrison and the Doors, Waylon Jennings of Outlaw Country music fame, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, 'Gangster rap' and the work of Beccaria, Dostoyevsky, Dumas, and Solzhenitsyn. In addition, utilising intertextuality as an analytical tool can identify submerged patterns, which may reinforce, subvert or otherwise affect more obvious patterns of understanding.

There has been very little criminological research that explores narratives from an intertextual perspective. When this does occur it is normally of a historical nature. For example, Leps (1992) analyses

intertextual modes of knowledge production by focusing on the emergence of criminology via the work of Lombroso and Goring; the emergence of a mass media; and in the proliferation of crime fiction during the nineteenth century. She then considers how these three discursive practices shaped the production of knowledge about crime, criminals and crime prevention during the nineteenth century. Other examples of such analyses have been in relation to media representations of crime. For example in terms of exploring the crime narratives found in films, documentaries, 'reality' TV, radio and fiction (Carrabine et al. 2009). This is perhaps unsurprising given that narrative analysis fits more obviously into the disciplines of language and literature, cultural and media studies. Moreover, such cultural portrayals of stories of transgression are both universal and central: 'it is the pleasures and dangers posed by transgression and 'Otherness' that make such narratives so seductive to readers' (Carrabine et al. 2009: 416).

There is a possibility that in presenting the counter narratives of the men involved in this research that their stories will become entertainment-fodder, that in writing about their lives and in reading about their experiences, the stories become 'consumed'; another media representation of lives we have little knowledge of, but a great appetite for. How is such a dilemma to be avoided? During the time I have been undertaking this thesis, I have discussed the research with numerous people, presented papers at conferences and seminars, and shared,

verbally and in written form, some of the life stories of the men. The responses have been diverse: ranging from fascination, disgust, shock, excitement, and frustration. In one instance I was asked if I had simply chosen to tell the stories of those who were 'most fascinating, what about the cases who aren't so interesting' on another, I was told that I had too much sympathy with the men I had interviewed, had failed to demonstrate sufficient moral disgust and sounded like an 'apologist' for behaviours that needed to be condemned. Let me deal with these issues at the outset. Firstly, I believe that all our life stories are 'fascinating' and research consistently demonstrates this to be the case, whether that is hearing about the lives of clergymen's wives (Finch 1980); NHS chief executives (Learmonth 2004); flight attendants (Hochschild 2003); prisoners (Crewe and Bennett 2012); or ex-prisoners. The added element in the stories of the men presented in this research is that they cast a light into a hidden world. In fact, they illuminate several hidden worlds: as offenders they need to keep much of their behaviour hidden from view; as prisoners, they themselves have been hidden from view; as ex-prisoners, they may feel the need to keep part of their identity and experience hidden from others.

The more tricky issue is how the stories are perceived by others and how they are interpreted in relation to both the men and myself. Again the concept of intertextuality proves helpful here. This thesis reflects a number of voices well beyond mine, or the men's. Nonetheless, I recognise that my authorial voice is reflected within this text and has

shaped the men's stories in countless ways. Also, the voice of my supervisor can be found, as well as the conventions of PhD study – hence the number of interviewees: 15 was felt to be an appropriate number of interviews for PhD purposes. In addition to these multiple voices is that of the reader who brings their own set of understandings mediated via other texts and experiences. I cannot control how this study will be received, but it may be useful to restate what my intention had been. My overall aim was to present the life stories of men who had been in prison in order to demonstrate that current criminal justice practices are rarely about social justice; and that within the criminological discipline we are too frequently called on to provide the evidence for those very practices which increase injustice rather than promote justice.

Counter narrative methodologies offer, I believe, a counter-balance to a dominant research paradigm that seems to have forgotten that criminology is about human relationships. Crucially, in listening to these stories and re-telling them in my own way, I have sought to make links between individual biography and wider cultural understandings about punishment: bridging personal troubles and public issues; and reinterpreting their stories in the hope that a more mindful and compassionate understanding of these 'others' can be realised (Kearney 2003). In doing this I have not seen it as my job to act as a moral arbiter of any of the men's stories, to judge them as they told me, or indeed to judge them now. Instead, I regard it as a privilege to have had the

opportunity to meet, speak to, and be told the men's stories. On some level I also hope that this thesis is entertaining, an enjoyable as well as informative read. If it is not, I will not have done justice to the stories the men told.

1.9   Contributions

This is an exploratory rather than illustrative study, exploring the myth and meaning in male ex-prisoners' narratives. Although this thesis does not aspire to grand theory, or suggest that generalizations can be made based on it, it is, nevertheless, intensely theoretical. I draw from, and attempt to synthesize, a number of perspectives and theorists in order to provide insight on a number of levels. In the substantive analytical chapters (four, five and six) I apply theories from beyond the confines of penology to consider questions of identity, culture, power and authority. I consider the power of prison myths to close down wider understandings of imprisonment, and I also use mythology to explore the identities of the men, as offenders and as ex-prisoners.

In order to do this a life story approach was adopted, a methodological approach that has become somewhat marginalized within contemporary criminological research. I make a link between the marginalization of this methodology and the marginalization of the voices of those who have been incarcerated. Life story research runs counter to the dominant research paradigm within criminology.

However, we cannot understand ourselves, or others, without understanding the way we narrate our own and others' lives (Coupe 2006). Those who have experienced the most severe sanction within our society seldom have their views heard, or their stories told. Or, when they are, this is generally set within a framework of learning how to stop more crime being committed, as if these are people who have greater knowledge about crime than the rest of us. In fact, as I assert here, the expertise of this group is not only, or simply, about offending but much more about the processes involved in punishment.

This research combines four substantive areas within criminology: crime, prison, ex-prisoner identity, and narrative research. In addition, this thesis ties with three analytical concepts that cut across these spheres: intertextuality, storytelling and mythology. The theme that runs through each of the substantive chapters is that myth and mythology have power in society. Myths, as is shown in the chapter on prisons, can function as the 'validation and maintenance of an established order' (Campbell 1991: 621). Myths can define enemies and in conjuring them up they say something about who we are, and what we want: 'they tell stories to impose structure and order' (Warner 1994: 19). Myth in this sense implies delusion and falsehood. However, *mythology* can represent ways of making sense of the world; these stories and legends are interwoven with social systems and can reveal their inner workings. They encourage us to engage with questions about transgression, order, politics, and human relations (Warner

2003). Moreover, mythological archetypes inspire and influence us more than we give them credit for. Of course there are links between the two interpretations of myth(ology). Myths tell us about the reality of power and about our understandings of 'truth'. As Segal (1987: 136) asserts: 'myth is both true and indispensable. Only when taken literally is myth false'. Both myths and mythology are inherently intertextual and serve a mimetic function; and crucially, in regards to this research, it is in the power of myth and mythology that the story of identity and belonging can be found (Warner 1994).

The first area of analysis draws on the men's life stories to give consideration of the cultural iconography of the outlaw. In this chapter, how the popular cultural construction of outlaw mythology has consequences at the intersection of politics, economics and culture is explored. This type of analysis provides a deeper understanding of the culture that produces and sustains such a mythology, and about the men who act upon it. The men's counter narratives refer discursively to the ground of lived experience: 'even if that ground is comprised in part of cultural myths, dreams, fantasies, and subjective memories' (Smith and Watson 2001: 9). Without such understandings it is all too easy to see offending, particularly when committed as part of a gang, as 'non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic' (Cohen 1955/1971: 25). These men, who saw themselves as outside of the law, operated at the margins of society and rejected what was offered to them by mainstream society, inform us about, not only the ongoing attractions of the outlaw

identity, but about the exercise of power and authority, of resistance, and alternative ways of living (Parker 2012).

A further area of analysis is pursued in relation to imprisonment. Here I adopt a five-fold typology of prison myths as a framework to analyse the men's narratives about prison. Based on a review of the literature on media representations of prison (see Jewkes 2009, 2011; Jewkes and Johnston 2006; Mason 2003, 2006a, 2006b) I set out the five most common prison myths. These are: violent sexual assault is commonplace; prisoners are pampered; prisoners are dangerous – a breed apart, they should be kept away from society; security in prison is lax; and prison barely constitutes punishment. This chapter uses Barthes (1957/1972: 11) notion of myth as 'ideological abuse'. In this rendering of myth, Barthes argues that modern culture creates a set of myths that hide reality under the supposed naturalness or common-sense views about a particular way of doing things. In this context it is necessary to identify the taken-for-granted, established and apparently accepted views of imprisonment and prisoners, and expose the delusional ideas on which most popular understandings of prisons are based.

The final analytical chapter considers the men's life after prison. I examine how the ex-prisoner identity is one of mutability and mutation; it is an identity that frequently involves shapeshifting, tricking and metamorphosis. These tales of mutability express conflicts and

uncertainties but also transformation and in doing so: 'they embody the transformative power of storytelling itself, revealing stories as activators of change' (Warner 1994: 210). Pain, mortification, a sense of a spoiled identity were all present in the men's counter narratives; but this was not the whole story. At times, being an ex-prisoner was 'unique', 'attractive', and 'interesting'. There are pleasures as well as pains in this identity.

A further contribution that this thesis makes is in relation to what Ruggiero refers to as the importance of making the boundaries between academic disciplines more 'permeable and fuzzy' (2003: 3). This thesis, although set within a criminological context, and exploring criminological concepts, does not look inwards. Instead, I embrace the opportunity provided by adopting a more creative approach to research and argue that story-telling and story-hearing, can provide essential ingredients in understanding criminological notions around justice and punishment, crime and criminals. In his sociological analysis of fiction Ruggiero makes several useful points in regards to this, and these have helped to inform the more creative aspects of this research. Referencing the work of Edgar Allen Poe, Ruggiero (2003: 4) states that: 'artists see injustice where the unpoetical see no injustice whatsoever'. Drawing on this idea I have incorporated comments and quotes from outside of the criminological discipline in order to examine some of the ideas and concepts explored in the thesis; for example, one of the opening quotes to this chapter comes from American poet and activist Muriel Rukeyser

who wrote extensively about gender and equality. At the start of each of the chapters there is a quote from one of the men interviewed for this study, followed by a quote from an academic text and then a quote with wider cultural resonance. This is to highlight how the men's words, and this study, are situated within both an academic and a cultural context, and how wider cultural influences permeate all our understandings of crime, justice and punishment.

The importance of storytelling has been woven into the content and the structure of the thesis, and, as mentioned, there are many voices in this project. Alongside providing an overview of my own interest in the topic, as part of the structure of the thesis I have included brief biographical information about the men in order to inform the reader about the key 'players' in the thesis. Such a structure is, of course, indebted to the work of Goffman (1959/1990) and his dramaturgical model, which sees life as a series of performances. Indeed, there are several performances running simultaneously in this research.

The performances on which I have most bearing are, firstly in regards to the performance on which this thesis is based: the interview, and secondly as author/researcher of the thesis. Both performances place me central to the text, but should not preclude the importance of the other 'players' in the research. Relating Goffman's (1959/1990) dramaturgical model to the research, we can see its importance on a number of levels. Firstly, the interview performance required of

participant and researcher. Secondly, the definition of that interaction as an interview; part of a research study on male ex-prisoners. In addition, the expressions and impressions created within this, such as body language, image, and ways of talking to each other are relevant. The motives of each party are also important, I wanted to interview male ex-prisoners because I am genuinely interested in understanding how such counter narratives can inform our understanding of punishment, of prisons, and identity, particularly of male ex-prisoners, however, there is another element to this. The interviews were undertaken as part of a PhD, in fact they were crucial to the PhD, which could not progress without interviews being performed. Finally, the situated identity within the interaction is relevant, in this instance it was between interviewees who were male ex-prisoners, and an interviewer who is a female PhD student. Despite the situated identity remaining the same throughout the research, there were numerous other elements that came into play. For example, most of the men were unknown to me prior to interview and the situated identity of interviewer/participant was therefore relatively clear-cut. With a small number of the men, it became apparent during the interview interaction that although we did not know each other prior to meeting, we shared some kind of history. For a couple, there was some prior connection and shared history before the interview took place. The interaction in each of the interviews was influenced by the role we were playing at that particular moment in time, contextualised by prior knowledge or not. Warner (1993: 17) suggests that in any recounting of

story it is important to ask '*Who* is telling this story?' I therefore weave a little of my own story into this thesis as well.

Connected to the process of doing the research and seeing it as a performance, is the content of the stories. These were performances also, and sometimes literally, with the taking on of different voices for different characters for example. The stories were also told in a relatively traditional way with a beginning, middle and an end. In keeping with the arc of the narratives this thesis is structured accordingly. The thesis starts with an introduction, which is followed by a chapter about the methodology on which the thesis is based. In the next section I introduce the men involved in the research, I then move onto life before prison, then explore life inside prison, before going out into the community where the stories were brought to an end: whether that be at a point where release was only three weeks previously, or 25 years. Such an approach keeps in mind the performative aspects of identity and of the research process. Adopting a formal narrative arc, and intertwining insights from outside of the criminological discipline, reminds us that punishment, prisons, and the punished are part of the cultural landscape. The history of society is, as Chekhov tells us, the history of how we incarcerate our fellow human beings (1966/1983).

1.10   The thesis

I will sketch the order and content of the succeeding chapters. In chapter two I set out the methodological approach employed in this research. As such, this chapter deals explicitly with issues of epistemology, method and analysis. I argue that counter narratives can be used to challenge the ways in which society thinks about the marginalized, ostracized and excluded people who largely make up the prison population. I conclude that such counter narratives have the potential to open up new understandings and possibilities for justice.

In chapter three I introduce the men on whose narratives this research is based. Brief biographical information is provided, alongside some commentary about them and the interviews from my perspective.

Chapter four is the first of the main analytical chapters and focuses on a selection of the men's stories about life before prison. I focus particularly on the concept of the outlaw. In order to explore this concept extensive use is made of a small number of the men's stories in an attempt to preserve some of the narrative form in which the stories were told and to remain committed to my initial aim of telling stories about men who had been in prison. I therefore present fragments of Bobby, Phil, Nathaniel and Butch's narratives. In doing this a number of outlaw concepts are explored and archetypes considered. These include the Lone Ranger (Bobby) who fights injustice, but acts alone; a Robin

Hood for the 1960s counter-culture (Phil); the ghetto superstar (Nathaniel); and the outlaw biker (Butch). This chapter concludes that outlaw mythology operates as a metaphor for the problem of power, and ongoing issues about freedom and an oppositional struggle against authority; inevitably therefore, outlaw mythologies coalesce around questions of law and legitimacy (Parker 2012). The popularity of outlaw mythology tells us about the fantasy and imagination of not only ex-prisoners, but wider society also.

Although each analysis builds its own explanation there are moments of convergence between the analytical chapters. Moving from outlaw mythology, in chapter five I consider the unique institution of the prison and argue that the uses we make of them, and the conditions we consider acceptable within them, provide clues to society's views and values, and ideas about identity and meaning, which go well beyond the prison walls. I provide a brief overview of the development of the prison before outlining five common myths about prisons. These myths are that: prison rape is endemic; prisoners are pampered; prison protects the public, prison security is lax; and prison is not punishment. Each myth is explored in the men's narratives, and to some extent, all of the men's stories are used to inform this chapter.

Chapter six is the final analytical chapter; in this section the focus is on the men's narratives once they had left prison. At the point of interview all of the men were out of prison, whether that was for less than a

month or for 25 years, were on life licence, or their offence was 'spent' (a conviction that under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 is no longer taken into account for legal purposes). In this chapter, the idea of mutable identities is used to explore the men's sense of identity as ex-prisoners. The mythological concepts of the trickster, shapeshifter and of metamorphosis are used in this analysis. Tricksters are the pragmatic archetype who must use whatever comes to hand to achieve what they need. The trickster must deceive although he may not do so deliberately (Beer 2000). Moses' narrative is used to explore this idea. Andy's identity was one of shapeshifting, of repeated and reversible transformations between ex-prisoner and respectable professional. The identity of the shapeshifter is unfixable; it is a marriage of upper and lower, light and dark (Clute and Grant 1997). The final aspect considered in relation to mutable identities is that of metamorphosis, and we return to Butch's narrative to examine the idea that identity can be transformed and a new identity achieved. In this instance all other shadow stories are subsumed as a new masterplot emerges, in this case that of the reformed offender.

The final chapter brings together the arguments from each chapter and comments on how the findings of this research contribute to the possibility of a reawakened criminological imagination, no longer reduced to the sidelines in commenting on human affairs, but instead connecting the counter narratives of ex-prisoners with wider cultural narratives relating to crime, punishment and justice. It is through this

process that the ex-prisoner 'other' can become humanised. In addition, this chapter assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the project and summarises the key academic contributions of the thesis.

Chapter Two   **Reimagining a Criminological Tradition: identity and the life story interview**

> Yeah that's been good that, thanks. It's, like, it's you know cathartic, kind of talking about yourself, yeah I enjoyed that...
> What about you? What's the worst thing you've done?
> (Craig)

> I would wish to enter a plea for a greater willingness in criminology to explore beyond its rigid terms of reference, to open itself to the adventure of other insights.
> (Young 1996: 14)

> Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation.
> (Angela Carter 1983 *Notes from the Front Line*)

2.1   Introduction

The use of life story data has a relatively long tradition within criminology. The Chicago School of Sociology used life histories, alongside official statistics and participant observation during the 1920s and 1930s (Jupp 1996). For Chicago School sociologist, Clifford Shaw, the life story approach was to become a key focus of his research: 'the basis for the formulation of hypotheses with reference to the causal factors involved in the development of delinquent behaviour patterns' (Shaw 1930/1966: 19). *The Jack Roller* (1930/1966) formed part of a series on young male delinquents carried out by the University of Chicago and encapsulates a number of issues pertinent to life story interviewing. However, even at this early stage of such research, tensions in terms of the veracity and usefulness of the approach can be detected.

Concerns over the scientific limitations of life story research were stated, whilst justification for an in-depth qualitative approach was given on the basis that: 'there are many aspects of delinquency which are not, for the present at least, susceptible for treatment by formal statistical methods' (Ibid: 21). Such defensiveness about life story research is apparent in other ways also. The subject of the study, Stanley, whose life experiences we learn include poverty, homelessness, family dysfunction, offending and imprisonment, is allowed to tell his own story – the subtitle of the book being *A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*. However, verification of what Stanley reports is sought from other sources such as official agencies and organisations that have been involved with him. These documents are seen as providing a more coherent picture of Stanley's life. I would argue that by making these secondary documents more worthy than the information gained through lengthy interviews with Stanley, his 'Own Story' is somewhat undermined. The reification of the 'official' discourses on Stanley's life risk both the interview, and the retelling of the story, becoming little more than a 'conversation between the classes' (Reisman 1964: 493-494).

In terms of outcomes and expectations, Shaw concludes that: 'ultimately the value of all scientific discoveries in human as well as in physical behaviour must submit to the test of their significance for the purposes of practical control' (1930/1966: 194). It would appear, therefore, that Stanley was interviewed and allowed to tell his story in

order that better diagnosis and treatment of delinquency could be made. *The Jack Roller* is a seminal piece of research, however it was somewhat tentative in the move towards giving those most often neglected by criminological research a voice.

The concentration on Stanley's personality traits and family history in the telling of his story neglected other important issues such as the relationship between authoritarianism and the State (Scraton 2002); the construction of 'crime' (Christie 1998); and power and knowledge in the creation of 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980: 133). Ultimately, Shaw appears to be nervous and even a little unconvinced of the value of allowing Stanley to tell his story and a sense of defensiveness and over-justification pervades the work. Concerns that the technique is not scientific enough, and that generalisations may be difficult to make are underlined by the hypothesis that the main value of this type of research lies in the diagnosis and treatment of young, male offenders and not that ex-prisoner counter narratives inform us about the criminal justice system, the power to punish, who the punished are, and the cultural context in which punishment occurs. Such a view was partially remedied in the 1966 edition of *The Jack Roller* when Howard Becker, who had already outlined the foundations of labelling theory in *The Outsiders* (1963), wrote the introduction. Becker widened the scope of the life story approach, commenting that such accounts have value because they provide insight into not only the social and cultural world

that the offender inhabits but also the social processes of penal institutions.

The use of life story approaches has a long and distinguished history within penological research, and diverse examples of the life story approach can be found (Carlen 1985; Crewe 2009; Crewe and Bennett 2012; Maruna 1997, 2001; Parker 1962, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1991, 1995). Such research has nonetheless become marginalized, and the voices of those who have been imprisoned are increasingly quiet. Into this silence, myths have been allowed to develop, about offenders, prisoners and prisons. The marginalization of this type of research has occurred simultaneously to the concepts of narrative, counter narratives and life stories becoming more visible in other academic disciplines. The study of narrative and life story has moved beyond the traditional confines of linguistics and language studies and into anthropology (Holland et al. 1998; Langness and Frank 1981), sociology (Plummer 1995), gender studies (Leysdesdorff, Passerini, Thompson 1996), management studies (Learmonth 2004) and history (Allen and Montell 1981). In addition, the life story narrative approach has gained considerable prominence in psychology (Erickson 1982; McAdams 1985, 1993; McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich 2006) and significantly, given the potential for the cross-fertilization of ideas with criminology and generally accepted historical academic influences, within law (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000; Brooks and Gewirtz 1996; Dworkin 1986; Fish 1989; Levinson and Mailloux 1988; Posner 1988).

In this diverse range of research, life stories have generally been approached from two perspectives (Alasuutari 1997); either as material to be used in studying lives in social contexts (Bertraux and Bertraux-Wiame 1981); or viewed as texts that reflect individual personalities or identity construction (Gubrium 1993; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). In the first perspective, the life story provides a picture of the lives the interviewees have led, set within a distinct cultural specificity. The second sees life story narrating as a phenomenon in its own right, moving away from the assumption that everyone possesses an authentic self that can be captured in text. This approach emphasizes that life story narrating is both situational and functional (Alasuutari 1997). The distinction between these two perspectives may, however, be a false one. As feminist and post-structuralist authors have noted, a person may not experience themselves as an entirely unique being because identity is tied up in meanings shaped by the dominant culture (Butler 1999; Connell 1987, 1995; Rowbotham 1973). The life story is a phenomenon in its own right, but it also offers a valuable insight into understanding lives in their particular social and cultural context (Wright Mills 1959/2000). The counter narratives of the male ex-prisoners in this study can therefore inform us about wider cultural issues relating to crime, punishment and justice.

In this chapter I outline the role life story research plays in the social sciences, and in criminology in particular. Whether the counter narratives of ex-prisoners challenge a resurgent positivist outlook in

criminology is also examined. I then present the argument that identity can only be understood through texts, and therefore a life story approach is the most appropriate methodology for this type of research. As the concept of identity is a key focus of the study, this is further explored by critically evaluating two different ontological positions. Erickson (1982) and McAdams (1985, 1993), argue that life stories aid the construction of a coherent sense of self, as opposed to Gergen (1991) and Raggatt (2006) who offer a position informed by a post-structuralist perspective which views the self as fragmented and even contradictory. Despite these ontological differences I believe that life stories can provide important social and historical information and insight into the construction of identity. That life story research provides a unique methodological approach that illuminates our understanding of individual lives, and the culture in which they are situated, is then a key argument of this study. In addition, I discuss how the research was undertaken and ethical issues arising, not only from the approach, but also in regards to some of the more practical aspects of gathering narratives from men who have been imprisoned. Finally, I give consideration to the ways in which narrative analysis can be evaluated to ensure that rigorous research standards are maintained given that this is a research methodology that has become marginalized within the criminological discipline.

I conclude by advocating for research methodologies that involve a sensibility about the external world and its ambiguities and have an

understanding of the ongoing, symbolic construction of meaning, while promoting a research sensitivity that is open, attentive, and respectful (Ferrell 2009). These research methodologies, of which a commitment to counter narrative research is an example, recognise that social justice is ill-served by many current criminal justice practices; and that within the criminological discipline we are too frequently called on to provide the evidence for those very practices which increase injustice rather than promote it. Counter narrative methodologies offer a counter-balance to a dominant research paradigm that seems to have forgotten that criminology is about human affairs.

In terms of the life stories on which this study is based, 15 men, all of who had served a custodial prison sentence, were interviewed. The interviews lasted between just over an hour to over six hours and additional time was spent with most of the participants in terms of chatting prior to the interview and afterwards, or having lunch or coffee breaks. Those involved came from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. The age range of the men was 24 years to 63 years old. The shortest prison sentence was three months and the longest life. Eight of the men had received more than one prison sentence; two of whom could not remember how many times they had been in prison.[11]

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[11] Brief biographical information about each of the men can be found in chapter 3.

2.2   Constructing identity through stories

The issue of identity in life story research is an important one. Many life story researchers in psychology have tended to see identity as an individual achievement (Erickson 1982; McAdams 1985, 1993). In these understandings, identity is regarded as an integrative function and therefore the life story or narrative identity serves to make a meaningful, cohesive sense of self. It is through the telling of stories, these writers argue, that scattered and often confusing experiences are provided a sense of coherence.

For others however, life stories are an expression of different, multiple and potentially conflicting aspects of the self (Gergen and Gergen 1983; Gergen 1991; Raggatt 2006). These differing ontological positions offer on the one hand, the idea that a core, integrated sense of self is feasible and indeed desirable, in terms of psychological well-being, and can be achieved through narration and story-telling: 'narrative is a significant resource for creating our internal, private sense of self' (Linde 1993: 3). On the other hand, although individuals may derive a sense of purpose and feelings of happiness by integrating the past, present and future, it is equally the case that narrative research can be used without the assumption of a single or definitive life story. Instead a life story can provide: 'vivid illustrations of oppositional voices in the self through the vehicle of narrative' (Raggatt 2006: 20); 'polyphonic versions of

possible construction… of people's selves and lives' (Lieblich, Mashiach and Zilber 1998: 8).

It was this latter view of complexity, fragmentation and confliction that most accurately described the men's narratives. The stories the men told did not provide clear or concise 'data', or answers, as say quantitative criminological research suggests, and even some qualitative research implies. Although quantitative data was not sought, it was clear that even basic information on which some statistical understanding could be based would be highly problematic. For example, some of the men could not remember the age they had first gone to prison, what type of court had dealt with them, or what offences they had actually been charged with. In addition, all the men talked about their initial involvement in crime in relation to the first time they had contact with the criminal justice system, as opposed to the first time they had actually offended. Such findings exemplify, not only how statistical conclusions can be highly suspect, but supported the idea put forward by social interactionists such as Becker (1963), Mead (1934/1972), Tannenbaum (1951) and Goffman (1959/1990, 1961, 1963/1990) that deviance is not inherent in any act. Instead the focus is on the linguistic tendency of powerful groups and agents to negatively label others as deviant. The self-identity and behaviour of individuals is influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them, and also by the discourses available to them. Some of these ideas connect with the concept of intertextuality, for example, in the first

analytical chapter the mythology of the outlaw is interwoven into the men's texts and affects their sense of self; whilst in the second, the impact of prison myths on the men's identity and sense of well-being in prison is significantly affected.

At the outset, I had decided to adopt a life story research method, and was keen to understand the importance of counter narratives, of listening to those who have been through the criminal justice system in the belief that this would be a meaningful way of understanding that system, how it operates, and what it does to people.[12] Very early into the research, I found that rather than answers, what I had were narratives that were slippery, imprecise, confused, unclear, and even contradictory. These confused and confusing stories made me question the purpose of the research and what it was I was trying to achieve. Alongside this, the literature on identity offers starkly different ontological underpinnings to understandings of identity that were themselves, conflicted. Nonetheless, the literature on identity shares a common belief: that life story narratives offer distinct, unique, and rich data and understandings of the human experience, and that a life story methodology is distinct from other, more positivistic methodologies. The idea that our understandings of the human experience may be beset with contradictions and complexity, and that this should not be ignored, was to become something I embraced as an intrinsic part of all human stories. The life stories of these ex-prisoners should therefore be

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[12] See Crewe and Bennett (2012) whose study combines prisoner narratives with academic commentary to explore these issues.

seen within this context. Rather than seeking to eliminate ambiguity in the data elicited from research participants (Gregg 2006), this study believes that the ambiguity and conflict in the stories told by the men are useful sites for analysis and exploration. In fact, it was the sense of ambiguity in some of the men's stories about life after imprisonment that led me to the idea of mutable identities: identity is not fixed, but unstable, shifting and changeable. The ex-prisoner identity itself is frequently conflicted and ambiguous. An idea evoked by Warr who, though released from prison in 2004, referred to 'the prisoner still inside me' (2012: 147).

The issue of identity is the key feature of narrative life story research whether in the sense of an integrated core self or a more fractured, performed self. Despite the significant difference in ontological positions about what is achieved in narrating one's life story, that identity is realised through storytelling is a shared view.

> A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reaction of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going.
> (Giddens 1991: 54)

McAdams' (1985, 1993) commitment to the view that narrative identity creates a coherent sense of self is premised on the view that narratives are the psychosocial construction of a person's identity. Alternatively, however, the life story that we tell, or listen to, is but one from a number of possibilities more like a: 'cacophony of competing interests

or warring historians' which offer multiple identities (Raggatt 2006: 32). According to Raggatt, this social construction of the life story rests on two theoretical and two methodological assumptions. The first assumption suggests that there is no definitive life story; the second is that identity is dispersed in a moral landscape and defined by often conflicting narratives. The first methodological assumption is that identity can be read in narrative as a polyphony of texts or stories; and secondly, that certain people, objects and events act as icons or landmarks for life stories. This provides a helpful framework for considering the theoretical and methodological issues raised by a life story approach. Moreover, it marks out a distinctly different approach from some other life story research. For example, in *The Life Story Interview* (1998) Atkinson argues that it is best for the researcher to suspend any theoretical assumptions; and, although the idea that the life story is constructed is accepted, Atkinson nonetheless suggests that the primary purpose of the life story is to pull together the central elements, integrate and make sense of them.

With ambiguous, fragmented and conflicting stories this was not always possible with the narratives I heard. In contrast to Erickson (1982) and McAdams (1985, 1993), who argued that identity is an integrative function in human lives and that the life story, or narrative identity, serves the function of making a coherent sense of self, the work of Gergen (1991) and Raggatt (2006) was to prove more convincing. These writers discuss multiplicity and conflict in the dialogical self, and

it was these concepts that proved most convincing in this particular study.

2.3 A new methodological paradigm?

With this understanding of narrative research, where relativism, pluralism and subjectivity were the watchwords, this study, its purpose and meaning became increasingly clear. I was committed to a mode of inquiry that is typically naturalistic and contextual, inherently exploratory, which could provide rich and descriptive accounts of phenomena with the aim of generating novel insights and new understandings (Willig 2001). This contrasts with the dominant positivist paradigm, and the belief that research can capture a single absolute truth and that there is an independent world that is directly accessible via our perception (Bem and De Jong 2008).

The advent of the life story approach across multiple disciplines has led to a number of scholars declaring the death of the positivist paradigm (Bruner 1990; Sarbin 1986). This was to be a somewhat premature declaration, and, in relation to the criminological discipline, one that has proved far from reality. In fact, with an emphasis on quantification, a demand for easy answers, and a preoccupation with risk and management, a positivist stance has been particularly resurgent within criminology. At the same time, the life story approach with its concerns about identity and meaning, and a commitment to providing space to

marginalized voices, has arguably itself become marginalized (Liebling 2004; Maruna 1997). Given the dominance of the positivistic paradigm within much criminological research (Mentor 1997), it is necessary to consider why I chose to use a life story approach, what counter narratives have to offer contemporary criminology, and also to orientate this study in the context of the existing literature.

Lieblich et al. (1998) argue that narrative research can be classified into three domains. Firstly, studies in which the narrative is used for the investigation of any research question. For example, it can be used to represent the character or lifestyle of groups who face discrimination and whose voices are seldom heard. A great deal of feminist-informed research falls within this category. The second category includes studies that investigate the narrative itself rather than narrative as a means of studying other questions. This approach is more often found in literature, communications, and linguistics theory but can be found in other studies that take the narrative form as the point of analysis. The final category includes those studies whose focus is more on the philosophical importance of the narrative approach, for example, narrative as a mode of human cognition (Bruner 1990); or narrative as identity (McAdams 1985, 1993; McAdams et al. 2006; Giddens 1991).

Many of the narrative studies on desistance fit into this final category and are informed by Bruner's (1987: 15) view of the importance of narrative identity and behaviour:

> Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives.

Narrative research itself is, then, contested epistemological territory, which raises a number of ontological, epistemological and metaphysical issues about how to know the social world. At one extreme, narratives may be treated as texts of fiction (Lacan 1991); at the other end is the taking of narratives at their face value, complete and accurate representations of reality, told honestly (Atkinson 1998).

As desistance is the main focus of contemporary criminological narrative research, it is useful to briefly say a little about this literature and why it has not been a path I have followed. The initial impetus of this study had been to draw attention to the lives of men who had been incarcerated. I did not want to come with any additional agenda, as I wanted the men to shape their own stories. Alongside this, was a concern that in virtually all interactions with 'professional others' the focus on the ex-prisoner is how to prevent them committing further offences, rather than listening to their experiences in the way they wished to tell them.

If the focus of my study was on desistance this would not only shape the stories that I was told, but impose an identity based on a binary distinction of offender/non-offender that may well be false. Moreover, a quote from Edwin Sutherland kept coming to mind during the early stages of the research. In *The Professional Thief*, Sutherland concluded that the most significant difference between professional thieves and white-collar criminals lay in the self-conception of the violators: 'Professional thieves, when they speak honestly, admit that they are thieves' Sutherland observed, whereas white-collar criminals 'think of themselves as honest men' (1937/1956: 95-96).

This struck me as highly pertinent. Although I am interested in men who had been in prison, I align myself with those others who have argued that studies on the operations of any of the criminal justice institutions are studies on the socially excluded (Braithwaite 2003; Rusche and Kirchheimer 1969). Furthermore, I believe that the concept of justice, rather than being equally applied, serves particular values and interests (Weedon 1997). Not only, as Sutherland asserts, does self-perception have a role to play, but our own understandings of what is crime and who are offenders is shaped by the workings of the criminal justice system (Christie 1993/2000; Mathiesen 1990/2005). In addition, an early interview challenged the view that we 'become' the narrative that we tell about our lives; power also has a role to play. Moses, for example, rejected the label of offender, seeing this as an identity that had been imposed, incorrectly, upon him. Although he had

been imprisoned, and had to deal with the inescapable ex-prisoner identity, he asserted that: 'what I had done was wrong in the eyes of the law... [but] deep down I did what I thought was right'.

Lieblich et al. (1998) suggest that stories are likely to be constructed around core events and facts. In the telling of the story, the process of selection, emphasis and interpretation, as well as the creativity of the act of telling, means that the story shapes and constructs the narrator's personality and reality. From this perspective, the life story narrative is seen as providing an effective means of gaining an understanding of the subjective perspective of self, and an understanding of the lived experience from the view of the person who has knowledge of it. In the context of my study we learn about the men's offending, their contact with the criminal justice system, their experience of incarceration and what it means to them to be an 'ex-prisoner'. This, however, is but one instance of the life story. On a different day, in a different setting and with a different interviewer, the stories would have been told, and heard, differently. Furthermore, all the men were told that I was actively interested in hearing about their lives and about their time in prison. In a different context I have little doubt that many, although not all, of the men could have told a life story which excluded their time in prison. In fact, a number of the men discussed that they had done this, for example, when seeking employment or when meeting new people. Rather than regarding the stories as texts of fiction (Lacan 1991), complete and accurate representations of reality (Atkinson 1998), or a

way of understanding dramatic changes in behaviour through subjective change in identity or cognitive transformation (Maruna et al. 2004, 2009) I regard them as part of a performance that traverses fiction and reality. These are performances from which we can gain insights into the lives and identities of ex-prisoners and an understanding of the social and cultural context within which punishment takes place.

With this in mind it is also important to recognise that the life stories presented in this study are not the life experience itself, but a representation of it. The aim of presenting the life stories of these 15 men is to allow what have become increasingly marginalized voices to be heard, recognised and acknowledged. Furthermore, I believe that these counter narratives can help to humanise prisoners in the eyes of a wider society reliant on a media too ready to present stereotyped and negativistic portrayals of prisoners. Therefore, not only do we learn about individual life stories, but the life story also becomes an artefact that reveals a culture: 'social and historical circumstances provide the fabric through which life stories are woven' (Cohler and Hammack 2006: 151). Identities, including those of ex-prisoners, are realised in a uniquely constructed narrative, and are told in a particular time and place, however, it is the cultural and historical context within which life stories are narrated that particular identity possibilities are realised (Butler 1999). The narrative framework adopted in this study therefore seeks to emphasize 'the significance of social context in the agentic

process of narrative self-construction' (Cohler and Hammack 2006: 153), and provide the bridge between social and psychological perspectives on identity (Gergen and Gergen 1983; Gergen 1994). In the realisation of this aim, the concept of myth and mythologies emerged, not only myths about the nature of imprisonment, but various mythologies about how life can be lived and what shape our identities can take.

Criminology is not only about rules and laws, policies and practices, but about the stories and explanations, performances and experiences that a life story approach lays bare. These counter narratives are vivid accounts which encourage awareness of those human lives that have been subject to the criminal justice system and the ultimate societal sanction of imprisonment. In recent years however, it has been generally outside of the discipline that the power of narrative has been harnessed in order to make an attempt to mitigate the kinds of injustices to which the criminal justice system has traditionally been blind. It has been in critical legal studies and critical race theory in particular that this approach has been adopted (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000; Brooks and Gewirtz 1996; Dworkin 1986; Fish 1989; Levinson and Mailloux 1988; Posner 1988). In addition, much feminist criminology has put methodology, or gendered ways of knowing, at the centre of the wider feminist project. The production of knowledge within criminology has been challenged on a number of fronts. For example, much criminological research has been 'top down' and

therefore not only fails to reflect the reality of people's actual experiences, but also fails to acknowledge that marginalized groups can be producers of their own discourse and research. There has been a tendency towards false universalism in relation to generalized, or even 'grandiose theorizing' (Stevens 2006); and an over reliance on positivism and narrow conceptions of research methods (Ferrell 2009). It is within critical theories that recognition has been most forthcoming that stories of the disempowered have the potential for cultural transformation: in this context it is 'no exaggeration, then, to call narrative an instrument of power' (Porter Abbott 2008: 40).

Although the life story narrative approach has not been completely abandoned by criminology,[13] it is most frequently used as a way of looking at other criminologically relevant issues such as the processes involved in desistance (Maruna 1997, 2001). However, a life story approach with those who have been subject to the most extreme punishment in society should be considered valuable in itself, not only because it tells us something about those who have been in prison, but because it also tells us something about the society in which that imprisonment occurs. By grounding our understanding of those who have experienced the most extreme sanction in society, in the words they use, meanings they provide, and identity constructions they create as they reflect on how they travelled through the criminal justice

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[13] See Crewe (2009) who explores issues of power and adaption in prison; and Crewe and Bennett (2012), who make extensive use of interview transcripts in *The Prisoner,* an approach that does much to draw attention to the prison experience.

system and back into society, comes the opportunity to not only 'humanise the deviant' (Fitzgerald and Muncie 1981), but to turn critical attention on to the taken-for-granted cultural processes involved in the punishment paradigm that are embedded in the everyday practices of storytelling (Chase 1996).

2.4   Life story and cultural understandings

The stories presented in this study are more than the story of an individual life. They reveal the discourse of any given culture, expose systems of power, and illuminate personal and collective identity. Kearney (2003) argues that various strangers and monsters do more than merely reside in myths or fantasies – they constitute a central part of our culture. He goes on to suggest that until we better understand the 'other', and how it resonates deep within ourselves, then we can have little hope of understanding some of our most basic fears, how they manifest themselves in the external world, and how we can learn to live with them. It is out of fear, he suggests, that western culture demonizes the 'other', in this instance those who have been in prison, who are perceived as monstrous and evil.

As a number of commentators assert (Butler 1999; Raggatt 2006; Kristeva 1967/1980), individuals appropriate meaning from culture in the form of important attachments to people, events, valued objects, environments, and even orientations to our bodies through embodied

identity – a pertinent issue when considering the male, imprisoned body. The concept of intertextuality (Kristeva 1967/1980) proves useful here and is used to analyse the men's narratives. This refers to the ways in which all texts are made out of other texts and often serve a mimetic function. To interpret intertextually is to bring out the complex embeddedness of a narrative's meaning within its specific cultural context. This is of particular interest within the criminological sphere because the issues of relevance to the discipline so often involve dramatic human stories. 'Crime' is an arena that attracts not only academic attention, but also a significant amount of cultural focus. The media and political sectors pay great attention to crime; through news stories and documentaries, in films and books, and through law and order campaigns. It is unsurprising, therefore, that wider cultural accounts of 'crime', 'criminals', and 'prison' seep into the narratives of ex-prisoners, and that ex-prisoners' understanding of themselves are mediated by the images and meanings available in wider society. This is the intertextual loop or triple mimesis within which this research is framed, where we travel between the narrative world and the real world and in doing so: 'our sensibility is enriched and amplified in important respects' (Kearney 2002: 133).

Analysis of ex-prisoner narratives involves considering the narrative itself; how identity is constructed in the narrative and mediated through the cultural and historical specificity of storytelling. This is explored more fully in the main analytical chapters where popular

cultural, myth and mythological ideas are used to explore the men's stories. However, a brief example based on the interviews is useful here. When the men discussed their first experience of imprisonment, all of them referred to film and television programmes about prisons, normally from North America. These televisual cultural references provided most of the men with their initial perception of what prison would be like. The most common feature of these cultural texts of imprisonment was of sexual violence by inmates towards other inmates. The fear of sexual violence has become the defining characteristic of the prison experience in the United States (O'Donnell 2004). With significant cultural and political influence this particular narrative about prisons has become pervasive in Britain.

The men's understanding of prison therefore relied on what appears to be a largely inaccurate representation of imprisonment that was from outside of their own cultural milieu. Further, as a dominant feature of cultural understandings of imprisonment, this was a representation of prison that the men had to countenance as they entered the criminal justice system, and again on their release from prison. This is not to imply that prison rape does not occur in Britain. In 2011 when the latest data is available, 137 sexual assaults were recorded on the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) incident reporting system, with over 90 per cent occurring in male prisons (Ministry of Justice 2012b). It is likely, as with all sexual assault figures, that this will be a significant underestimate. Nonetheless, this contrasts with

America, where one study of seven Midwestern states found that about one in five inmates experienced some form of pressured or coerced sexual conduct while incarcerated (Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson 2000). As O'Donnell argues, the problem of sexual violence in American prisons is significant and may relate more to the distinct cultural specificity of that country (slavery, gangs, high societal levels of violence) than to the pains of imprisonment and loss of sexual autonomy outlined by Sykes (1958). This brief example demonstrates the way in which one cultural influence, or myth, informed the men's expectations of imprisonment and their response to it.

2.5   The interviews

Most subjective interpretations of a person's life history are obtained through autobiographical interviewing or ethnographic research (Carlen 1985; Crewe 2009; Crewe and Bennett 2012; Denzin 1987; Katz 1988; Toch 1987; Parker 1962, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1991, 1995), although some interesting alternative approaches have been taken. For example in Maruna's (1997) analysis of autobiographies by 'reintegrated ex-convicts' he looked for similarities in theme, plot, structure and character in order to identify subjective self-understanding related to desistance from crime.

The data collection method for this study was largely conventional, in that an interview format was utilised. As with most qualitative research,

interviews were recorded and transcribed, and extensive use of the narratives provided by the men is made. This is in line with the contributors to Crewe and Bennett (2012), who provide analytical commentaries on extended excerpts from interviews with prisoners. This approach means that significantly greater inclusion of the words of participants is provided; certainly well beyond the insertion of pertinent quotes to highlight a particular issue. Generous use of the words of the interviewees serves a number of purposes. First, it provides insight and a feel for the person whose words are presented; secondly, it provides an understanding of their life experiences particularly in relation to the criminal justice system; and thirdly, it evokes an emotional reaction in the reader as connections are made in relation to the story told and the reality that this has been someone's experience; in this process the ex-prisoner is humanised. According to Lieblich et al. (1998) this also adds to the robustness of the research. Of course, with 15 life stories undertaken (and well over 250,000 words transcribed) this was not an easy feat to achieve. However, as much as possible, I have tried to include various aspects of each of the men's stories to explore particular issues – this is especially the case in the chapter on prison myths. In addition, one of the men's stories is included in both the chapter about life before prison and the outlaw identity, and the chapter about life after imprisonment and mutable identities. The aim here is to give an overall flavour of the life story of one of the men interviewed. The chapters on outlaw identities and mutable identities concentrate on a selection of the men's stories to

explore archetypes relating to these ideas, for example, parts of Bobby's story are used to consider the concept of lone justice (the Lone Ranger), whilst Nathaniel, Phil and Butch's stories explore outlaw mythology in relation to gangs.

In preparation for the interviews I referred to a number of guides and suggestions regarding the mechanics and content of a life story interview. In particular the work of Atkinson (1998) and McAdams (1985, 1991) was considered. Atkinson (1998) provided a basic interview guide for life story interviewing which involved eleven steps: decide who you want to interview, explain your purpose, take time to prepare, create the right setting, get the story, use an open ended interview, be responsive and flexible, be a good guide, listen, accept that emotions may emerge, and be grateful. Although a useful checklist, it is notable that these eleven steps would be relevant for most qualitative interviews, and do not appear to be necessarily specific to the life story interview. However, Atkinson goes on to recommend that between three and five hours of interviewing is required, which is significantly longer than most qualitative interviews tend to be.

It is probably McAdams (1985, 1993) who has done most to popularise life story interviewing. In relation to conducting the interview both McAdams (1993) and Atkinson (1998) suggest that the interview begins with general questions asked in relation to chapters of a book. McAdams also provides a clear guide to interviewing, and a conceptual

framework for understanding narratives. There are nine sections in McAdams' (1993) life story interview. In the first, which looks at life in relation to chapters of a book, he advises the interviewer to clarify issues but not to interrupt, nor to reorganise the table of contents or suggest chapter titles. He suggests that attention should be paid to the images, symbols and metaphors used by the interviewee. The interview should move onto critical events which include peak and nadir experiences, turning points and memories from various points in the person's life – childhood, adolescence, adulthood. Stories watched, read and heard that have had an influence on the person should be discussed. The interview then moves onto the single biggest challenge that the person has experienced in their life, the circumstances of this and who helped them through it. The fourth section explores positive and negative influences on the life story; these influences can be a person, institution, organisation or group. Potential future scripts, negative and positive, are sought. The person's fundamental beliefs and values are examined, before moving onto discussing whether an overall theme can be discerned from across all the discussions. The interview finishes with the participant being asked if anything has been missed out.

Atkinson's (1998) approach covers similar territory and starts with an initial question that asks the interviewee to outline their life as book chapters. In contrast to McAdams, Atkinson argues that making some suggestions about what those life chapters may be is appropriate. The

areas of the individual's life that should be covered in the interview are also outlined and include: birth and family, growing up, education, relationships, work, and life themes.

During a pilot of the life story interview an adaptation of McAdams and Atkinson's approach was adopted. A number of interviewees struggled with the concept of discussing their lives as book chapters and direction was generally sought. Therefore, in line with Atkinson, some suggestions were provided. Interviewees also tended to rush somewhat over large portions of their life, or to get stuck on a particular story. One interviewee, for example, only started to discuss their life from the age of eighteen and said very little about their childhood or growing up. Piloting the life story interview raised a number of issues, not least of which was that although I was keen to allow the men to speak for themselves, I was nonetheless interested in their lives in relation to the criminal justice system in general, and prison in particular. As these are potentially sensitive subjects it seemed sensible to be a little more upfront about this, hopefully showing that I was not only interested in this aspect of their experience, but would also be a somewhat sympathetic listener.

It is discussed in the literature that the recounting of your life story can be empowering, it is nevertheless very rare in research for a researcher-led idea, concept or hypothesis not to form part of the research process. Life story interviewing provides rich, varied and

unique data; in the context of this research, that 'data' needed to link to the criminal justice system and the experience of imprisonment. Although adopting a life story approach, I was looking for counter narratives that could add to our knowledge and understanding, provide opportunities for interpretation and analysis about prison at the micro level of personal experience and the macro level of social understanding, the aim of which was to challenge cultural understandings of the ex-prisoner 'other'. From the pilot study it became clear that in the act of conducting a life story interview, both explicit and implicit processes of communication, understanding and explaining needed to take place (Lieblich et al. 1998).

Whilst it is generally recognised that the interpretive and analytical process of research is partial and personal, as well as dynamic, it is rare for the actual content of the life story interview to be seen as shaped by the interviewer. Instead we are led to believe that the story is told almost free of involvement or influence of the person who is being told the story. This is possibly because researchers who use narrative to investigate other research questions dominate such studies; how that narrative has been collected therefore rarely forms a significant part of the methodological explanation. As Lieblich et al. (1998) argue, more has been written about the philosophical perspectives represented in narrative research than on its methodology. Yet, I would suggest that if we accept that life stories are about identity, but that a life story told is but one representation of that life lived, and that stories develop and

change over time, and that each time the story is told it will be affected by the context within which it is narrated – the nature of the audience, the relationship between the story teller and listener and the mood of each party – then directing the story in relation to topic, is a likely and acceptable consequence. A similar conclusion is reached by Crewe (2009) in his study of prison life. In this he asserts that McAdams' schedule is 'too specific to capture the texture of prisoners' lives' (481), and that participants' lives were too chaotic to fit an imposed framework.

Following the pilot of the life story interview I was to reject many of the suggestions provided in the literature. Instead I turned back to the texts that had initially inspired me to undertake a study about ex-prisoners' lives: to the work of Tony Parker (1962, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1991, 1995) and Pat Carlen (1985), whose accounts of lives affected by imprisonment were so powerful. In *Criminal Conversations: An Anthology of the Work of Tony Parker* (Soothill 1999) I was to find the 'basic principles of interviewing' on which this study is based. Below I outline some of Parker's suggestions and briefly recount my experiences based on his advice.

Parker reminds us that it is the interviewee who is doing the favour by giving up their time and attention. This was to prove invaluable advice. Hearing the stories was a privilege, and could take a significant amount of time. On occasions interviews were spread over a number of days,

although in one instance, the time constraints of the participant led to an interview that was much shorter than all the others.

The interview is referred to as a 'chat' and not an interrogation. Interviewees should be told that if there is something that they do not wish to talk about that is fine, and as an interviewer we should move the conversation on. Thinking of the interview as a chat or conversation was helpful and gave it a more naturalistic feeling. This suited my approach to the research which saw the men as the key experts in the field of punishment. At the start of the interview I told the men that they did not have to discuss anything with me that they did not want to. Although none of the men said directly that they did not want to talk about a particular issue, it was occasionally apparent that they wanted to move on from a discussion that they felt uncomfortable about. In these instances I took my cue from them.

The importance of ensuring that participants are told that the interaction is a research interview and not a therapy session is one made by McAdams (1993), and was covered in the introduction to the interview. Parker referred to how it is not difficult to reduce someone to tears, and that as a researcher, and not a therapist, this should be avoided. That said, one participant did cry during the interview when he spoke about a sense of culpability for the deaths of two people. I offered to stop the interview on both occasions and although he wished to carry on, we did stop shortly after for a coffee break.

Not covered by Parker, but worth mentioning, were the times that I had to manage my own emotional response to the stories I was told. During interviews I experienced a range of emotions that had to be managed including shock, surprise and upset. I frequently felt disconnected, even a little sad, after an interview finished. The space of the life story interview is often one of heightened emotions and where personal disclosures made. Despite attempts to minimise the disparity between interviewer and interviewee, it was the men who talked about their experiences of loss, joy, hope, depression, alienation and loneliness, and not me. I could not help but feel that as much as I wanted to minimise the power dynamic between the two of us, it remained invisibly present.

A further point covered by Parker is to be an 'interested learner', intrigued by what the person is telling you, and extremely grateful to them for sharing their stories. This was not particularly difficult to achieve, the stories were interesting, intriguing, often entertaining and frequently painful. In fact, as discussed in the introduction, the 'fascinating' nature of the men's stories was such that I had been charged, during a seminar where I had presented emerging finding from the research, with only focusing on those stories that were most interesting!

Parker also discusses some of the technical aspects of interviewing. In regards to transcribing, He says that this should include every word,

pause and 'um', that tapes should be wiped after transcription, and that only the interviewer should listen to them. He suggests that the purpose of detailed transcribing is not only to get what the person said, but to listen carefully to your own questions and realise how poor they were, and to resolve to try better next time. For me, the transcribing process served several purposes. Transcribing provided the texts on which the study is based and analysis has been made. In addition, transcribing reminded me of the mood and emotion in which the stories were told. Listening back to some of the interviews I was struck by how much humour there was. Moreover, some of the men literally performed elements of their stories, taking on the voices of others as vignettes of experiences were re-enacted for me. Worse was listening back to myself. Fortunately, as the interviews progressed so did my skills as an interviewer. There were some experiences and issues I wanted to ensure were discussed, such as imprisonment; however, on the whole, the men were given the space to talk about the experiences and issues that were important to them. For example, rather than assuming that ethnicity would have an impact on the men, it was left to them to mention if they felt that their own, or others' ethnicity, was important in their interactions with the criminal justice system.

There were a number of other principles covered by Parker. These included remembering that the interview is about the other person, and not about you. However great the temptation, you should not be led into talking about yourself, but tactfully guide it back to the other

person. To always use a tape recorder was another recommendation. Fortunately, none of the men refused to be recorded, however, it is notable that this did not mean, as some researchers imply (Polit and Beck 2003), that participants forgot that they were being tape recorded. A number of the men told me stories 'off the record', they were happy for these stories to be shared, but did not want any 'proof' that such a conversation had taken place. Others spoke directly into the recorder wishing to create added emphasis to their stories, for example, when talking about misdeeds committed by the police. Others still, were intrigued by the recorder, which was small and compact and became a source of discussion. Plus, there were times when it was impossible not to forget the discussion was being recorded, for example, if someone came into the room, or the memory stick became full, and in the process of setting up, when I checked sound levels etc.

Three questions were asked at the end of the interview; firstly, if there was anything on the recording that the interviewee did not want me to use. None of the men asked for something to be removed although I discussed at some length with the men that identifying factors would be altered. The second question was if there was anything they felt they would like to add or explain more fully. At times the men took this opportunity to make a final statement that they thought was important. In addition, to these two questions, I asked each of the men how they felt after the interview was complete. I used this as a way of trying to allow some space for the men to talk about the actual process of the

interview, identify if there were any issues that needed to be further discussed, and to close the interview down in a positive way. The responses to this question were interesting, some mentioned that the interview had felt therapeutic – even though it had been discussed at the outset that the interview should not be regarded as therapy. Nonetheless, I felt that they used the term more generally, in that it had been a positive experience, as opposed to a clinical therapeutic intervention. Other responses included that the process had been 'cathartic', 'alright', 'interesting' and 'positive'. Although none of the responses from the men had a negative connotation this cannot be ruled out; firstly, they were responding to a question about process posed by the person who had been actively involved in that process with them; and secondly, I did not maintain long-term contact with most of the men so would be unaware of anything other than the immediate impact of taking part in the study.

Keeping in mind the principles outlined by Parker, and mindful of the wider narrative literature, I started each interview with a brief outline of what I was doing and what I was interested in. The first and only scripted question was:

> The interview is very open. I'm interested in hearing about your whole life, although I'm also interested in your experiences of the criminal justice system and prison in particular. Don't worry about remembering things in order, although you may find it useful to start with growing up, family life, life before your involvement in the criminal justice system.

In general, the interview tended to segment itself into specific timeframes: life before contact with the criminal justice system, involvement with the criminal justice system, imprisonment, and life on release. As with Crewe's (2009) study, the interviews, although much more open and less structured than the literature on life story interviewing suggests, tended to be chronologically linear. The men talked about a range of issues that were important to them.

2.6   Access and ethics

At the outset of the study I did not know a significant number of men who had been in prison. Starting with what I did know, I was able to access a couple of respondents, and from there I was given the opportunity to contact other potential interviewees. Simultaneously, I contacted a number of prisoner related publications and made requests for interviews. I telephoned an organisation I had worked for several years previously; after so many years no one knew me, but nonetheless, they facilitated interviews. I asked friends and family, and more arrangements were made. This was a rather eclectic approach to accessing participants, referred to as "snowballing" or "purposive sampling" in the research literature (Oliver, 2006). Such terms do not, however, fully capture what is often a long and laborious process involving many phone calls, emails, and pleas for help. Trying to access groups that are difficult to locate requires tenacity and time as well as a little bit of luck. Due the in-depth nature of the research methodology

it was decided that a small cohort of participants would be appropriate.[14] Nonetheless it took a year to reach the figure of 15 participants.

Although research of this type is not about finding representative samples of a general population, in this case male ex-prisoners, it is useful to briefly state how the process of access may have impacted on the study. As stated, there was no, single approach to access, however, all of the men voluntarily agreed to be interviewed and no external restrictions were put on what could and could not be discussed. I knew two of the men prior to the research. A number of the men came via the ex-prisoner organisation I had previously worked for. These men, who made up a significant proportion of those interviewed (5), most closely resembled research samples of ex-prisoner populations[15] in that they were in contact with services on the basis of their identities as ex-prisoners. Another of the men was put in contact with me through snowballing; three more were accessed via friends and colleagues. The remaining men (4) were self-selecting having seen my advert in one of the various prisoner outlets I had advertised in.

Although a representative sample was not sought the variety of means by which access to the men was reached does reduce homogeneity of experience amongst those involved. An issue also supported by the

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[14] See Lieblich et al. (1998) and discussion in the next section in relation to issues relevant to undertaking narrative research.
[15] See for example Social Exclusion Unit (2002).

diversity in relation to age, ethnicity, offence type, sentence length and time out of prison of the 15 men.

Life story interviewing involves not only the story as constructed by the narrator, but because it is an interpretive exercise, it also involves construction on the part of the interviewer. This raises significant issues in relation to the idea of confidentiality and anonymity. Based on the lives of people and making that public, converts the private into the public and has the potential to violate privacy, and cause participants a range of harms including mental, legal, social and financial (Bakan 1996). For those who are, or have been involved in offending, these are issues of great importance. Although the life story method sits firmly within the qualitative approach it remains, as I have asserted, rare for the role of researchers, as inventors of questions, constructors of contexts, co-participants in interviews, and interpreters of data, to be fully recognised.

These issues are explored in *The Narrative Study of Lives: volume 4* (Josselson 1996). The introduction of this volume touches on a number of pertinent issues for the interviewer. In relation to analysis, for example, the interpretive framework that structures understanding of the life story is recognised as 'owned' by the interviewer, or as Bar-On (1996) puts it, once the narrative has been analysed it is now your text as well as theirs – it has become part of the intertextual loop. Consequently, the concept of informed consent was problematic given

that at the outset, the men who were interviewed, could have only a vague idea of what might happen during the interview, or in the interpretative and analytical process; therefore what was being consented to, would be based on only a partial understanding. Moreover, traditional approaches to informed consent may hinder or stultify the research process rather than aid it.

In his study involving interviews with children of Nazi perpetrators Bar-On convincingly argues against the use of standard informed consent forms because he felt that this formal procedure would introduce suspicion into a context already fraught with problems. This was something I related to having conducted research with prisoners and ex-prisoners previously, when I had found getting participants to sign a consent form at the outset of the interview rather uncomfortable and formal in contrast to the more relaxed interaction that was sought. A further example of this type of dilemma is provided by Chase (1995), who chose not to send manuscripts back for clarification to his research participants, women school superintendents in North America, and against Atkinson's advice that 'people telling their stories should always have the last word in how their stories end up in written form' (1998: 26). Instead, Chase defends his position on the basis that he was less concerned with what the women school superintendents intended to say, and more interested in the meanings expressed implicitly in their use of cultural discourse, narrative strategies and linguistic practices.

In relation to the anonymity of research participants, it is generally agreed that assurances of anonymity are of use in relation to minimising some of the potential harms created by involvement in research, and that participants will be more 'truthful' if they think that their words will not be connected with them as individuals. Yet, even here, possible problems can be identified. A number of scholars have commented on the powerful, even transformative nature, of the life story interview (Atkinson 1998; Maruna 2001; McAdams 1985, 1993). Stories may be one way that people can reclaim some measure of agency: 'no matter how buffeted one has been by events, at least one can take charge of how the story is told and, in some way, rescue oneself' (Ochberg 1996: 98). For those whose stories have been rarely told, and in a discipline less than persuaded by the value of such an approach, the issue of anonymity is a stark one.

If counter narratives seek to convey meanings that have been excluded or marginalized by mainstream criminological thinking, then the life stories of the men provide a unique opportunity to present their experiences, understandings and meanings and to make these 'other' voices heard. And, these 'other' voices may well wish to be attached to a concrete, embodied being. If we accept that a life story methodology disrupts the illusion so frequently created within the social sciences in general, and criminology in particular, that research can be used in the service of rational administration and general modes of analysis; we are instead reminded that human beings have 'feelings, quirky

developments, and textured vitality' (Minow 1996: 36). In fact, the telling, hearing and reading of stories can have potent emotional effects, which makes standard, generalized responses to research 'subjects' inappropriate.

The life story interview insists on the highly contextualised, subjective judgements and interpretations of the researcher. Moreover, a commitment to the potential for individual and cultural transformation necessitates not only a theoretical framework that can admit multiplicity, conflict, and contradiction into understandings of identity, but is equally comfortable in allowing diversity in relation to methods of study. Indeed, in the complex process of authoring and reauthoring their lives, some of the men did request that their authorship was recognised. Nevertheless, it is imperative as researchers to remind ourselves, as well as prospective participants, that narrative research is a contingent and unfolding process. Although informed consent forms and promises of anonymity cannot capture the nature of the authorship/interpretation dynamic, this did not mean that these issues were ignored or glossed over. Instead, acknowledgement of the exposure to which participants could be potentially subjected was required, recognising not only the well-rehearsed debates about interviewer/interviewee power relations but interviewee/wider society power relations also.

In relation to issues of consent and anonymity I therefore sought to extend the principles of informed consent as much as possible to the men whilst recognising the significant limitations of this given the nature of the methodology of the life story interview. Each interview started with me explaining the research, its purpose and intention and potential future uses of their stories, for example in journal articles, books and conference papers. Permission to record the interview was requested. It was stated that involvement in the research was completely voluntary, no question had to be answered if they chose not to, and that information would be excluded if the interviewee requested for that to happen. I told them that we would both sign the consent form[16] on completion of the interview so that they could make any requests about confidentiality and anonymity when they knew what they had discussed. It was hoped that this would avoid some of the pitfalls identified by Bar-On regarding people signing consent forms without knowing what it was they would talk about, and the formalising nature of form signing at the outset of the interview. In relation to authorship, some of the men said they would like their names to be used and where this was requested I have done so. However, it was also explained to them that some elements of their stories (locations, names of others) would be altered to ensure that they could not be easily identified which seemed important given the nature of some of their stories which involved ongoing offending and discussing offences for which they had never been caught.

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[16] See Appendix.

Ownership of narratives told by one person, but requested, listened to, recorded, transcribed and analysed by another, was something I had to wrestle with. Part way through the research I started to feel unnerved by the very process of the fieldwork. In a relatively short period of time a number of interviews were conducted and I began to relate to those tales of cultures and peoples who (supposedly) believe that cameras can steal souls. In this instance, asking people who were generally strangers to tell me about their lives, and recording their words, felt like I was stealing part of them. In trying to make sense of this I came across a fascinating article on 'necromedia' in which O'Gorman discusses how recording renders others 'infinitely repeatable, redundant' and 'can trigger a more subtle demise: death by repetition' (2003: 159). This did not make me feel any better.

All but one of the men agreed that I could use their narrative in a range of formats. The one who declined was not necessarily adverse, but wished to be contacted prior to the inclusion of his story in any outlet wider than the PhD. Two of the men asked if they could have the transcripts of their interviews and this was agreed. A small number of men asked me to contact them if their stories were used in a book.

2.7   Evaluation and analysis

Due to the focus of much writing on narrative research being on the philosophical nature of this approach, whilst largely ignoring lengthy

discussion about the methodology employed, there are few sources of information that provide models for analysis, developments of techniques, or criteria for evaluating narrative research. In fact, initial considerations of these issues may seem to be in marked contrast to the basic tenets of life story narrative research. The need to be open to change, comfortable with ambiguity and flexible in approach is challenged by the idea of guidance for narrative research. However, without criteria for assessing the value of narrative-based research, this approach risks being accused of lacking analytical and methodological rigour and therefore being of little use.

Moreover, it remains the case that small scale qualitative research continues to attract criticism based on concerns over the generalisability, transferability and validity. A question posed of this study, with these concerns in mind might be: 'what can such a small cohort of participants really tell us about the culture we live in, the enactment of punishment, systems of power, and the personal and collective identities of ex-prisoners?' These are, on the face of it, reasonable queries to raise. Nevertheless, if we think a little deeper about such critiques, cracks in this analysis of qualitative research soon appear and the more positivistic foundations of such queries come to the fore.

Positivistic approaches seek to identify, measure and evaluate phenomena and to provide rational explanation for them. Causal links

and relationships between the different elements of the subject are sought and related to a particular theory or practice. This is based on the belief that people respond to stimulus or forces, rules and norms external to themselves and that these can be discovered, identified and described using rational, systematic and deductive processes. Merriam (1995: 52) for example states that although such questions:

> Reflect legitimate concerns about the rigor of qualitative research; they also reflect philosophical assumptions underlying a quantitative or positivist worldview and are thus inappropriate for assessing the rigor of a qualitative study.

Rather than setting up a competition between narrative and non-narrative inquiry we should instead recognise that different research questions require different research approaches. Gadd (2009: 761) has argued that small scale, case-study style research is: 'the best hope we have of developing approaches that foster the "empathic creativity" needed to truly understand offenders without forsaking the "rigor and transparency" needed to make our analyses credible'. Furthermore, no matter what the research question and methodology, and no matter whether qualitative or quantitative approaches are used, all research is constructed within a particular social context.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) have identified four turns researchers complete as they turn to narrative inquiry. These are: the changed relationship between the researcher and the researched; the use of words as opposed to numbers as data; a shift in focus from the general

and universal to the local and specific; and the blurring of ways of knowing, through the wider acceptance of alternative epistemologies. Each of these 'turns' is relevant to this study. I discuss in chapter 7, the changed relationship between the researcher and participant. In the substantive analytical chapters extensive use is made of the words of participants. Rather than grand theorizing and suggesting universal understandings, this study is focused and specific – this does not mean however, that the findings do not have a wider resonance, applicability or offer insight into the lived experience of ex-prisoners and the culture in which their punishment has occurred. The final 'turn' involves the blurring of ways of knowing. This recognises that there are different ways of knowing, understanding and creating new knowledge. The appreciation of individual lives is one such approach. This should not come as a surprise within criminology where, arguably, the sociological foundation of contemporary criminology can be traced back to the pioneering work of the Chicago School of Sociology and the use of life story approaches.

Runyon (1984: 152) suggests several criteria for assessing the value of life histories: do they provide 'insight' into the person, clarifying the previously meaningless or incomprehensible, and therefore suggest unseen connections? Do they provide a feel for the person, conveying the experience of having known or met him or her? Do they help us to understand the inner or subjective world of the person, how he or she thinks about their own experience, situation, problems, and life? Do

they deepen our sympathy or empathy for the subject? Do they effectively portray the social and historical world that the person is living in? Does the life story illuminate the causes and meanings of relevant events, experiences, and conditions, and finally is the life story vivid, evocative, and emotionally compelling to read? These criteria provide a useful starting point from which the life stories on which this study is based can be evaluated and I return to this in the concluding chapter.

Lieblich et al. (1998) have sought to elucidate some working rules for narrative research. Developing Runyon's work, they put forward four models, or dimensions, for analysis. Narrative research, they argue, should have *width*. By this they mean that there should be comprehensiveness of evidence in the quality of the interview, the observations made, and in the interpretation or analysis. Numerous quotations in reporting narrative studies, as well as suggestions of alternative explanations, should be provided for the reader's judgement of the evidence and its interpretation.

The second dimension is *coherence*: the way different parts of the interpretation create a complete and meaningful picture. Coherence can be evaluated both internally, in terms of how the parts fit together, and externally against existing theories and previous research. Life story research should also offer *insightfulness*. There should be a sense of innovation or originality in the presentation of the story and its

analysis. Close to this criterion is the question of whether reading the analysis of the life story of an 'other' has resulted in greater comprehension and insight. The final dimension identified by Lieblich et al. is *parsimony*. This relates to the ability to provide analysis based on a small number of concepts. Quality of interaction, coherency of interpretation, insightfulness of analysis, and an evocative writing style are therefore regarded as critical elements in relation to evaluating life story research. Consequently, adopting such an approach requires awareness of: the voice of the narrator who tells the story; the theoretical framework, which provides the tools for interpretation; and, reflexive monitoring in the act of reading and interpreting (Lieblich et al. 1998).

On this basis, once the life stories had been collected and transcribed, I needed to consider what to do with each of them, how to 'read' them, how to understand them, and consider what the life story of each of the men meant to me as the researcher, and what they meant as a way of understanding the enactment of punishment in the culture in which the story was told. Interpretation or analysis is as important as the method of data collection itself.

In addition to the guide for conducting a life history interview McAdams (1993) has also set out a conceptual framework. This contains three elements: nuclear episodes, imagoes and themes. Nuclear episodes are those parts of the life story that involve high points, low points,

beginnings, endings, turning points and transformations. This point is reiterated by a number of scholars who suggest that not only are the events of our lives made up of an ongoing repetition of a pattern involving beginnings, conflict and resolution (Atkinson 1998), but that it is the key turning points, or moments of crisis in people's lives, that are of most interest to researchers (Denzin 1989). Indeed, stories about trouble have been the centrepiece of narrative research (McLean and Thorne 2006). This idea also echoes Wright Mills' (2000/1959: 7) view regarding the connections between personal troubles and public issues and how this requires analysis at the intersection of the historical, social and biographical. Although most of our lives are punctuated with certain kinds of trouble, some trouble is heavier than others, and trouble that involves imprisonment falls very clearly into this latter category.

The second element of McAdams' (1993) framework involves the idea of imagoes. This, he describes as the personified idealizations of possible selves that we use to understand and guide our behaviour. A person may therefore assume many different imagoes of often opposing types (master/servant; violent/caring) chosen from popular culture, archetypes, or caricatures. This resonates with the concept of intertextuality: that life story narration is made out of other texts. The narratives of ex-prisoners, and their understandings of themselves, are mediated by popular cultural conceptions of what it means to have been in prison, but also what it means to be an ex-prisoner. Popular

imagoes in regards to this involve concepts such as bad/good; out of control/in control; lost cause/reformed, these 'characters' or imagoes are regarded by McAdams as important aspects of a person's self-concept. Moreover, although McAdams' ontological position is of narrative as a function of integrated identity, the concept of imagoes can be used to explore contradiction and conflict in identity rather than coherence. This is an interesting idea, and Lévi-Strauss' (1978) work on myths, which argues that myths are structured in terms of binary oppositions, would seem relevant. The relatively simplistic idea of identity as binary opposites was, however, problematic for this study. These counter narratives involved multiple identities; the ex-prisoner identity is more complex than analysis through the lens of binary opposites can provide.

The final aspect of McAdams' (1993) framework is themes. These are the recurrent goal-oriented sequences that main characters pursue in narratives generally relating to agency (or power) and communion (or intimacy). Agency relates to the individual, self-protection, self-expansion and control of the environment, status attainment, achievement, responsibility and empowerment; whilst communion includes themes such as love, friendship, help and community. From the penological literature, it is apparent that such themes are integral to prisoners' narratives (Crewe 2006, 2007a, 2009, 2012; Farrant 2006; Halsey 2007; Jewkes 2005; Wahidin and Tate 2005). This is perhaps unsurprising given that loss of agency and lack of intimacy have long

been identified as significant features in the pains of imprisonment (Sykes 1958). Overall, McAdams' conceptual framework was a useful starting point from which analysis of the men's narratives could take place. However, as with the guidelines for conducting the life story interview, adopting this formal framework for analysis seemed to be too restrictive, like putting a straightjacket on life stories that were in fact more creative, more complex, more fragmented, than such an approach would allow.

2.8   Enter intertextuality: multiple readings, masterplots and mimesis

Gilligan et al. (1988) call for multiple readings of interviews to sort out distinct themes and voices within the narrative. It is in these multiple readings that intertextual interpretations of the themes and imagoes referred to by McAdams, can be explored, and the complex nuances and connections of the counter narratives with other texts come to light. Similar in concept, but emerging out of literary studies, is the idea of masterplots and skeletal stories (Porter Abbott 2008). These offer a potentially rich approach to penological research given that much of the power of the masterplot can be found in their moral force. From this perspective, culture is a complex weave of numerous, conflicting masterplots which: 'create an image of the world in which good and evil are clearly identifiable, and in which blame can fall squarely on one party or another' (Porter Abbott 2008: 48). Drawing on the work of Jewkes (2009, 2011) and Mason (2006a, 2006b) I develop a five-fold

typology of prison myths, the apparently universal set of beliefs that exist about prison. In addition, there are recurrent 'skeletal' stories, belonging to cultures and individuals, which play a powerful role in questions of identity, values, and the understanding of life (Porter Abbott 2008). These skeletal stories have been linked to mythological archetypes relating to outlaw identities and mutable identities, ideas and concepts that connect the men's narratives with those of popular culture and long-standing mythological beliefs.

According to Aristotle, *mythos* outlines that human existence is a life of action which is transposed into a telling, a fable or fantasy, or a crafted structure. All three meanings convey the common function of narrative as a way of making our lives into life stories. Storytelling also serves a mimetic function whereby submerged patterns and unexplored meanings (skeletal stories) can be identified. Mimesis is the imaginative redescription of a life and involves an invention 'both to discover *and* to create' (Kearney 2002: 132). This analysis is therefore based on multiple readings of the men's narratives. But this is not a study of linguistics such as critical discourse analysis might offer. Instead, this study is informed by a number of ideas about the power of narrative and its role in identity and culture.

Intertextuality widens the limits of the word and of representational categories inscribed by language (Kristeva 1967/1980). These interpretations and explanations are dynamic and open, and may be

affected by new readings and new contextual information. The notion of intertextuality offers a way of looking at the men's narratives as they interact with other texts, masterplots and skeletal stories. As with any other analysis, intertextual analysis is an interpretive activity, depending on the researcher's personal judgement and experience (Fairclough, 1995). Nonetheless, it has been suggested that intertextual analysis offers a way of examining power relations as a locus of contestation and struggle (Fairclough, 1992). Intertextuality is the interface between the culture and the text. The counter narratives of men who have been in prison inform us about the culture in which the prison is a key site for punishment.

In the case of the present study, intertextuality is crucial to understanding how various cultural texts have influenced the men's identities: as offenders, as prisoners, and as ex-prisoners. For example, there is power in the cultural text of the outlaw, which evokes ideas of freedom, space, fighting injustice, living life at the margins; but that cultural text when enacted demands a powerful State response – alternative ways of living, alternative ways of managing behaviour, and of dealing with apparent wrongdoing must be controlled. There are also a number of cultural scripts about incarceration that shape the men's experience of prison, and which they must contend with on release. One example is that if you have been in prison you are a dangerous person. Another is that prison is easy and prisoners are pampered. Being in prison will not, in this textual reading, cause damage or harm, it does

not inflict the pain that society demands, nor allow the representational space for exploring the pains that most prisoners actually experience (Crewe 2009, 2012; Crewe and Bennett 2012; Sykes 1958). It is, perhaps, the cultural demands put on ex-prisoners that are most infused with power. Society, and criminal justice discourse, demands the ex-prisoner feels remorse, guilt, shame, embarrassment.

As much as we may like films and dramas about miscarriages of justice (*Fugitive, In the Name of the Father, Let Him Have It, The Wrong Man*), prison escapes (*Cool Hand Luke, Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?, Papillon, Porridge, Prison Break, The Shawshank Redemption*), and prisoners fighting back against the system (*Oz* as well as many of the above) we do not wish challenges to State power, or prisoner resistance and escapes, to be reality. And yet, just as an outlaw identity carries with it a form of currency or capital, so it is with being an ex-prisoner. This is after all an identity that despite increasing numbers of people being incarcerated remains somewhat 'unique', and with this comes the possibility of being perceived as 'attractive', and 'interesting'. There are delights as well as agonies in this identity.

2.9   A brief history of narrative, story and discourse

Such analytical considerations highlight the need to define what is meant by narrative, story, and narrative discourse. Used interchangeably, there are subtle differences in meaning between each.

For example, the seeking of wholeness or coherence within much life story research can be seen as the result of an interpretative analysis that reifies the concept of a meaningful, cohesive self-identity, one that has little contradiction or fragmentation. Such an approach has a long pedigree. Over 1600 years ago, in interpreting scripture, Saint Augustine wrote that meanings found in one part of the text must be congruous with meanings found in other parts; that is, there must be a sense of cohesion in a story. Such a rule has proved to have a significant hold over narrative analysis, suppressing the idea of multiple interpretations, and laying the foundations for the belief that coherency of self can be found within life story texts. For example, in the McAdams' (1993) life story interview, the participant is actively encouraged at the end of the interview to detect an overall theme from within their story. Wholeness, or the sense of an integrated self, is therefore something we impose on narratives rather than something we necessarily find in them (Porter Abbott 2008).

Story is always mediated, and what we call a story is really something that we construct through language. Story is simply a chronological sequence of events involving entities (Porter Abbott 2008) and should not be confused with narrative discourse which is the telling, or presenting, of the story. The story is the event; narrative discourse is how the story is conveyed. The important point to make here is that we never see the story directly, but always pick it up through narrative.

The life stories of the men are counter narrative discourses that tell us something about crime and punishment in our current cultural milieu.

For Chatman (1990), narrative is unique amongst text-types because of its doubly temporal logic. Story is bound by the laws of time, goes in one direction, starting at the beginning, moving through the middle and arriving at the end. This, then, is an internal movement through time. Narrative discourse, when the representation of an event or series of events is rendered in a particular form, does not have to follow this order. Although narrative discourse also entails movement through time, this is external: for example, the duration of telling a story, reading a novel, or watching a film or play. To be specific, although hearing the life stories of men who had been in prison, the telling of that story never exceeded six hours. This distinction between story and narrative was first made by the Russian Formalists[17] who distinguished between the fibula – the order of events as they took place in the world and referred to as the narrative discourse; and sjužet – the order and manner in which events are presented in the narrative discourse.

Literary analysts have reflected on the ways in which discourse reorganises stories to give them a certain inflection and intention, potentially in order to have an impact upon those who hear them. The life story interview may take five hours to conduct (the narrative discourse); it will have taken many years however to have been

[17] Propp (1928/1968) was among the first to make this distinction.

experienced. The fibula-sjužet distinction leads to a further consideration which is of key significance to this study, as readers or listeners all we have to work with is the presentation of events in the vehicle of narrative discourse (Brooks and Gewirtz 1996; Porter Abbott 2008). That life stories are presentations of events, mediated through narrative discourse, highlights the malleability of the narrative process. Without wishing to labour this distinction, it remains important to remind ourselves that it is the rhetoric of narrative that is its power. Texts produce thoughts and evoke feelings and emotions. Presenting the counter narratives of those who have been excluded and denigrated by mainstream society has the potential to challenge and transform a range of personal and cultural assumptions. Not only do they offer an alternative to the dominant discourse, but narratives of the marginalized are often about the operation of power itself. According to Porter Abbott (2008) this is because in almost every narrative of interest a conflict of power is at stake.

2.10   Conclusion

> The act of writing the life story mobilizes the discourses of identity in social and historical context and, in the process, itself represents a performance of self.
> (Cohler and Hammack 2006: 153)

Once at the forefront of narrative and life story research, criminology now has some catching up to do with those other disciplines (management and organisation studies, history, anthropology, law and

psychology) that have embraced the opportunities that life story research has to offer our understandings, not only of individual lives, but also of society and culture.

In this chapter I have argued that the best way to understand identity is through story. A story created, told, revised, and retold allows us to both discover and reveal ourselves. It is in the submerged, shadow or skeletal stories within a narrative that understandings about the individual, and wider society are revealed. Nevertheless, it is important to accept that no one single interpretation of a life is going to be the 'correct' one; any interpretation may say as much about the researcher as it does about the narrator. The life story, then, is a phenomenon in its own right; it also provides valuable insight into understanding lives in their particular cultural context. Rather than seeing this approach as offering a way for people to create a coherent sense of self, the multiple, conflicting voices that can be heard in life story research should be recognised.

The literature on life story interviews is extensive. In particular, the work of McAdams (1985, 1993) and Atkinson (1998), who have provided specific advice in regards to how to conduct a life story interview has been examined, and, based on their insights, an interview schedule was developed and piloted. Following the pilot, the schedule was all but abandoned. Instead the work of Parker (1962, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1991, 1995) and Carlen (1985) was revisited in order to remind

myself of the original inspirations for this study. Based on Parker's advice, a new, less didactic, more conversational and significantly more free-flowing approach was taken. With this approach I had to be confident of my own skills as an interviewer in creating a space for dialogue, discussion, and disclosure. As with any research there were numerous ethical dilemmas that needed to be considered, and, as far as possible, overcome. Issues of anonymity and informed consent have been of specific interest to this study, and ways of managing these to ensure the fewest possible problems for participants were implemented.

Although the literature on life story interviews is significant, little has been written on the best ways of evaluating narrative research. Lieblich et al. (1998), however, offer a model that can be used. They argue that such research should be comprehensive and of good quality in relation to the interview, as well as in interpretation and analysis. Various analytical approaches have been explored, and the work of McAdams (1993) in relation to his conceptual framework provided a useful starting point; the concept of intertextuality (Kristeva 1967/1980); and the idea of masterplots, and skeletal or shadow stories informed analysis of the men's narratives. Coherence is a further issue of importance in this model; this means that the research should be embedded within wider understandings both of the methodological literature but also of the penological literature. The research should also be insightful, and there should be a sense of innovation or

originality in the presentation of the story and its analysis. Therefore, significant use is made of the actual words of the male ex-prisoners, and the analytical approach is not only transparent but critically examined throughout the process. The final dimension identified by Lieblich et al. (1998) is parsimony. This relates to the ability to provide analysis based on a small number of concepts. Although this research is based on interviews with 15 men, the quality of that interaction, the coherency of interpretation, the insightfulness of analysis, the robustness of the analytical framework, and the ability to write about these lives in an evocative manner are all of key importance in ensuring the high quality of this thesis.

The meanings of various terms within narrative research have been explored; in particular, the idea of story, narrative and narrative discourse. It is accepted that stories are always mediated, and what we call a story, is really something that we construct. Story is a chronological sequence of events involving entities, whilst narrative discourse is the telling, or presenting, of the story. This research is therefore based on a life story interview, the narrative of which provides the basis for analysis.

Criminological analyses have failed to be responsive to the interests and concerns of those on whom the criminal justice system has the most impact. A life story approach in criminological research provides an alternative methodology (a counter methodology), to what has become

a reinvigorated positivistic approach within the discipline, and simultaneously offers the potential to resist the dominant discourse of punitiveness. I have argued that the presentation of counter narratives, stories told by those who have experienced the most extreme form of punishment, illuminate systems of power, and the cultural and historical context that allow particular individual and collective identity possibilities. Narrative has the ability to represent the experiences of individuals and to make their voices heard (Crewe and Bennett 2012), at a point in time when such voices have been silenced (Liebling 2004; Maruna 1997; Simon 2000; Wacquant 2002). These voices contest many of the contemporary assumptions about what it is to be someone who has been imprisoned, and about prison life. Such narratives form what has been termed a 'countermajoritarian argument', a discourse intent on showing that we cannot understand 'crime' or the criminal justice system until we have listened to the stories of those who have had direct experience of it (Brooks and Gewirtz 1996). To become part of this movement is to advocate for the use of narrative in order to challenge the ways in which society thinks about the marginalized, ostracized, and excluded people who largely make up the prison population. Most significantly, I have argued that such counter narratives have the potential to open up new understandings and possibilities for justice. This requires the reawakening, reigniting and reimagining of a criminological tradition that has lain dormant for too long.

2.11   Summary

This chapter discussed the context of life story research across a range of academic disciplines, and in criminology. Whether narrative approaches challenge a resurgent positivist outlook has been examined. I have presented the argument that identity can only be understood through texts, and therefore a life story methodology is the most appropriate approach for a research study on male ex-prisoners. I have argued that these narrative stories can provide important social and historical information and an insight into the construction of identity which illuminate our understanding of individual lives, and the culture in which they are situated. I considered the ways in which narrative analysis can be evaluated to ensure that rigorous research standards are maintained. Ethical issues relating to the research have been explicated. In the next short chapter I introduce a group of key players in the research – the men on whose narratives this thesis is based.

Chapter Three   Introducing the Men

> Can I do it [the interview] like *Pulp Fiction*? Like jumping
> backwards and forwards. Or it could be like the Count of Monte
> Cristo. I'm going to tell it like that, so I'm in a cell and my cell-
> mate dies and I pretend that I'm him and they throw me off into
> the sea and I went and retributed myself or whatever the term is
> I dunno. I'm pretty hungover today so I'm going to give you
> words that don't exist and you're going to think 'how do I spell
> this word that doesn't exist?'
> (Paul)

> The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing
> that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born,
> to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from
> a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial
> concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.
> (Goffman 1959/1990: 25)

> And all the men and women merely players:
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> And one man in his time plays many parts.
> (Shakespeare 1994[18] *As You Like It)*

ABDI is 33 years old and came to Britain from Somalia aged one. He has

a long history of homelessness and substance misuse. His father was

violent towards him in his childhood and he spent time in foster care.

Despite being in contact with social services, he was homeless from an

early age and has never had stable housing. Abdi came across as rather

shy and nervous during the interview although he seemed to relax as

time went on. We met in the drug service he attends as part of a Drug

Rehabilitation Requirement. He tells me that the first illicit substance

he used was crack-cocaine. He was looking forward to graduating from

the drug service at the end of the week but still hoped to go into

residential rehabilitation for his alcohol use. The interview was

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[18] First published 1623.

somewhat curtailed due to Abdi having to meet the requirements of the programme. Abdi had been in prison three times, all for short sentences and all for shoplifting offences. Having lived for a long time on the streets he said: 'In prison, it was for me a little bit... at least I was getting a shower, warm bed, watching TV, in a way it wasn't that bad'. He continued however: 'but when you've got a place to live, you're sitting there [in your cell] thinking why did I do this to myself?'

The interview lasted just over an hour.

ANDY has contacted me via a prisoner organisation e-newsletter that had included my request for male ex-prisoners to be interviewed. He says he decided to do it because, having just completed his own PhD, he knows how helpful it is when people respond to interview requests. Andy is in a complex position as an ex-prisoner in his chosen field of study. Potentially, he could gain some element of credibility because of this in his professional life, however, he recognises that not everyone will take a non-judgemental view of his past. He also has two young children who know nothing about his imprisonment. We discuss the shift in his life, which now has all the trappings of a middle-class existence. He is concerned that those he has met more recently, through university, where he lives, and his children's school, will find out that he was sent to prison for drug offences during his twenties. Friendly and chatty, we discover we know a number of the same people. He will turn 42 the day after we meet.

The interview lasts just over three hours.

BOBBY (FROSTY) has been out of prison for three weeks and is currently living in a hostel in central London. The hostel is run by an organisation I had worked for previously, who I had contacted regarding access to interview men who had been in prison. Bobby is wearing very new, bright white trainers, is clearly concerned with his appearance and has a very deep but not unpleasant voice and is personable and chatty. He has a short beard and talks about being 'a big man now' (he, like many of the other men, took up gym during his imprisonment). In addition to the physical, bodily changes he went through in prison, Bobby keeps telling me he is 29 years old. It only comes out towards the end of the interview that he is in fact 28; his birthday is still several months away. Turning 30 is seen as a significant event, he must have his life in some kind of order for that milestone age he says. He is keen to state that his (and his brothers') involvement in crime is not to do with their family upbringing or social deprivation, although he does briefly mention that his dad had been in trouble in his youth. Bobby also left home at 16 following a disagreement with his mother. His life fits in well with the idea of 'outlaw' and he talks about how he would never go to the police, no matter what the circumstances, and his shock that his victim did. He has never worked, and earned a living prior to imprisonment by dealing cannabis, although he was never charged with this. His prison sentence was for Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) with intent, for which he received a six-year sentence. All his family call him Frosty and when I ask why, he tells me it is because he is cold hearted. The interview lasts just under 3 hours.

BUTCH is a 52 year-old ex-biker. Brought up in Hampshire he has spent much of his life homeless and with an extensive drug problem. His mother died before he was a teenager so Butch was brought up by his dad. Butch talks eloquently about his first heroin use and the effect it had on him. Now, with a largely respectable demeanour he is nonetheless heavily tattooed. He shows me the two tattoos on his inner lip: FTW (fuck the world) and Outlaw. Butch (his nickname comes from a cartoon dog) is keen for his story to be told. He has responded to my request via the prisoner organisation e-newsletter. He shows me a photo album of his early life, usually on a motorbike with long, red, curly hair. He cries during the interview. I'm not surprised as the stories he tells are very upsetting. He has been in prison three times, but saw turning 40 as a key milestone in his life. Now Butch does not take drugs or drink, he is a vegetarian, and credits his turn away from crime to taking a more spiritual approach to life, which for him has involved learning to meditate. We meet at my work, where he arrives on a motorbike and in leathers. The interview lasts well into the evening and then he rides off back to his home in north London.

The interview lasted nearly six hours.

CHARLIE meets me at my work having volunteered via the prisoner organisation e-newsletter to take part in the study. He comes across as a caring, thoughtful individual. Small, he discusses how his size led to bullying as a child. He also talks about having dyslexia, although this was not identified until well into adulthood. His father was, and

remains, a problem drinker, an issue that has clearly shaped Charlie's life. Charlie is highly creative and has performed at the Edinburgh Festival and other spaces including universities and prisons. He is planning a film related to the story of his imprisonment. In telling his story Charlie adopts, as a number of the other men do also, a range of accents as he takes on the parts of those involved in his story. He works part-time for a voluntary sector organisation that works in a prison, matching mentors with prisoners. He has been in prison once, having received a 16 month sentence for rioting during an anti British National Party (BNP) demonstration in 1993, a demonstration I too had attended.

The interview lasted three hours.

COLIN has been in prison so many times that he has simply lost count. He is of slight build and has the appearance of a heavy smoker. It is through contact I made with *Inside Times*, the national newspaper for prisoners, that the interview is arranged. Colin has the serious demeanour that you would expect of someone who has only been out of prison for a year, having served 15 years of a life sentence. Dressed casually, he looks like a man who, even at 63 years of age, should not be messed with. He has a long, extensive history of institutionalization including care homes and borstal. He relates this back to the violent and abusive upbringing he had experienced in care homes as a child. He is matter of fact, almost deadpan in the interview, and when I ask what he did when he found out that his third wife had started a relationship

with his son from a previous marriage, replies 'I murdered her'. At the end of the interview I make a joke about the consent form – about signing your life away – I'm immediately embarrassed by what I've said. The interview lasted just over 3 hours.

CRAIG is a friend of Paul's, who I knew through previous work. It is odd, although not particularly disconcerting, meeting someone I'd never seen before at a train station. We email in advance and arrange to meet on a Sunday when he has finished work. We meet at the station and fortunately spot each other straight away. We head to a nearby, nondescript pub and tuck ourselves at the back in order to tape the interview. Craig is 27 years old and in his work clothes, tall, he regales me with stories of childhood abuse for having ginger hair. Between the ages of 14 and 27 Craig had never been out of prison for more than a year. At the time of interview he was working full-time in an electrical shop and had been out of prison 17 months, the longest period of time in 13 years. Craig had an array of offences and classed himself as a 'habitual offender - for bloody donkey's years'. He had been in adult prisons, young offender institutions, a secure training centre and local authority secure children's home. He had spent time in children's homes whilst growing up. His longest sentence was for nearly five years, which he had received at the age of 19. He referred to this sentence as 'deserved'. Currently living back with his family he sleeps in the kitchen and predicts a return to prison may be imminent.

The interview lasted two and a half hours.

DANNY is 35 years old and within my social group. He agrees to be interviewed and we arrange to meet at the flat he shares with his wife and daughter. Known by all his mates as the 'good-looking one', he is a tattooed ex-hippie. Danny is an accomplished storyteller, adopting voices for the tales he tells. Much of his story is told almost as a play with him taking on the various characters including that of his younger self, for which he adopts a high pitched voice. Danny remains aware of the tape recorder throughout and carefully tells stories to avoid identifying anyone currently close to him. He shares one particular story about his past only off tape. Danny has been in prison once, for offences relating to supply of Class A drugs and fraud, he received a three year sentence aged 20. He has been out of prison 14 years. Despite this he talks about the ongoing impact that his prison sentence has on him: 'it was kind of weird man, I look back on it and for sure it was one of the scariest, darkest times of my life'.

The interview lasts just under four hours.

HECTOR has a quiet voice and when we meet sounds particularly sleepy: he admits to having had only a few hours sleep the night before. Hector lives in one of the hostels managed by the ex-offender organisation I had previously worked for, we had met briefly during a service-user involvement meeting I had attended to explain what my research was about and what would be involved. Hector is clearly well regarded in the hostel and is seen as a success. He comes across as level-headed and appears to be holding on to a level of motivation to

stay away from crime. This is despite numerous knock-backs in regards to employment and training. Now 28 years old, Hector's early life was beset by bereavement, poor attendance at school, problems at home, crime, and substance misuse. He had been adopted at a young age, although his adoptive mum died. The woman his dad then married also died whilst Hector was still young. He is currently trying to locate his biological mother and father. He had been in prison four times including young offender institutions. His longest prison sentence was for importation of Class A drugs for which he received an eight-year sentence.

The interview lasted two hours.

JASON is 28 years old; he lives in a north London hostel run by the ex-offender housing organisation I had worked for many years ago, who had agreed to facilitate interviews with some of their service users. Jason is well built, and dressed in gym gear, he clearly works out. He is expressive as he talks. I visit the hostel that he lives in but we head to a nearby park for the interview as it is sunny. The interview is long and we stop part way through as Jason has an appointment he needs to attend. We arrange to meet again, although this gets delayed, as Jason is not in the hostel at the pre-arranged time. I worry that he will not meet me again, but fortunately, after a few weeks he is back on the scene and we recommence the interview, again in the park. Jason is open and talks with emotion about various aspects of his life; including racism and the difficulties he is facing being out of prison. He had been in prison twice,

both as an adult. The most recent occasion was for a number of offences including possession of a knife and an imitation firearm, and for robbery, for which he received a six-year sentence. His mother had died when he was young. He had been adopted and had contact with a social worker whilst growing up. He had no contact with his dad. Unemployed, Jason had been out of prison for two years but considered life on the outside hard and talked about 'surviving at the moment, but only just'. In total the interview lasted five hours.

MOSES is introduced to me by a friend who had been his manager at work. She had provided a character reference for his court appearance but he was nonetheless sentenced to prison and therefore lost his job. We meet in his old work office. Moses discusses his connection to Eritrea where he lived until he was eight years old. He would return again for two years at the age of 16. He is 24 years old. His voice lilts although I would never guess that English is not his first language. He has a calm and measured presence despite currently experiencing problems both in relation to his housing and employment. Prior to conviction Moses had not had any contact with the police despite a 'few madnesses' whilst growing up. Moses pleaded guilty to an offence of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and received a two-year sentence, although this was reduced to 18 months on appeal; he has been out of prison for just over a year. Prison he saw as 'a tough place where you had to make sure no-one took you for a mug'. Moses talked about corruption within one prison; how his cellmate had two mobile telephones, open use of

drugs, and a failure by prison officers to intervene during fights. Prison officers in this particular prison he saw as 'just as bad as some of the prisoners'. Moses was living in rented accommodation that he shares with other ex-offenders, and was applying for social care work, which he had experience of prior to imprisonment. He also hoped to do a social work degree, but had been rejected for both work and courses due to his criminal record.

The interview lasted two and a half hours.

NATHANIEL (LOOPIE) lives in a hostel I used to work in 15 years ago and where the interview takes place. He arrives for the interview in shorts and t-shirt, drinking tea out of a pint glass. Good looking, he is 28 years old and had been a member of a south London gang. He uses street slang and I frequently have to ask him to explain what words mean. I'm reminded of watching *The Wire* when some of the dialogue was at times impenetrable. He has been in prison once but his story is a litany of violence: violence to him from his step-father in particular, violence as part of being in a gang, and then the offence for which he was imprisoned, Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) on his daughter, then aged two. I'm not surprised that Nathaniel has been able to pick up numerous jobs as a chef in recent years as he comes across as charming. Having lived in some precarious situations, the hostel is, he says, the best place he has ever lived in. I ask him why his nickname is Loopie and he tells me that this is what he was known as in the gang as he was

always the first one into any situation: a bit mad. The interview lasts just under two hours.

PAUL is tall and wiry, with dark hair and striking blue eyes. I've known him a few years through work and then as friends. He has studied law and is currently studying for a Masters Degree in Criminal Justice. We arrange to meet at my house, and as it is hot we sit in the garden. The interview lasts all afternoon. We decide to stop before evening and rearrange to meet a few weeks later at his house. The remainder of the interview takes place in the flat he shares with his girlfriend and numerous cats. Having initially been refused parole, Paul would serve over four years in a combination of local authority secure children's home and young offender institutions. Previous to his offence, he had no formal contact with the police. Paul says that for some time leading up to the offence he had known he would do something violent and that this was partly to differentiate himself and bring an end to the monotony and boredom of his life. Initially charged with attempted murder he was sentenced to four and a half years for Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) with intent. He reported his first thought after committing the offence as 'my life will be different now'.

In total the interview lasted five hours.

PHIL is well educated and currently holds a high status, professional position in a large organisation. The interview comes about as the result of a colleague sending out an email on my behalf to a range of

contacts she has. Phil refers to some health problems when we are arranging to meet in his adopted town of Bristol. When we meet he looks ill, is very thin, and appears to have some problems breathing. At 62, Phil has something of the old-school offender about him, and his stories are evocative of life growing up in the 1960s, of LSD, sexual freedom and 'sticking it to the man'. He loves music, particularly the blues, and has an impressive knowledge of music from the 1950s, 60s and 70s. He is both amusing and charismatic. His story is beautifully crafted as a coherent, chronological narrative, the telling of which allows him to demonstrate a remarkable range of accents. Phil has been in prison twice and has an interesting take on his experiences. The first sentence for fraud 'did what it says on the tin' curtailing what had been, until then, a lifestyle wholly reliant on crime. However, several years later, finding himself back in prison Phil argued that on receiving this sentence 'I knew exactly what to expect, I knew exactly what was coming, so there was no fear at all, just simply resignation'.

The interview lasted just under five hours.

RICHARD has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and currently lives in a hostel for people with high levels of co-morbidity, including severe and enduring mental illness, personality disorder and poly-drug use, a history of serious offending and who represent a risk to themselves or the public. He initially starts the interview by giving me details of videos he has put on YouTube and talks about how Brixton prison officers are after him. Soon he settles into his story and

comes across as cogent, clever and thoughtful, which is a little at odds with his somewhat dishevelled appearance: he has few teeth, is bald, and dressed in old tracksuit bottoms. Richard describes his father as having a significant problem with alcohol, of being abusive and violent both to him and his mother. Brought up by his grandmother, Richard's wider family is involved in crime, a cousin has been convicted of murder and he refers to police concerns about his own criminal networks. His description of his first use of heroin is incredible. He describes it as 'euphoric', like a dream. It is in the chasing of that dream he says, that his criminality would increase. He has served two prison sentences both for intent to supply and possession of a range of drugs. Both sentences were for six years. In the course of the interview he refers to being known to FTAC, which I look up when I return home. This is the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre and is a joint police and mental health initiative which assess the risk to prominent people from obsessive individuals. The interview finishes slightly prematurely as he has to go and pick up his medication.

The interview lasted four hours.

Chapter Four   Life Before Prison: outlaw mythology

> I was the pacesetter, do you know what a pacesetter is? Someone who starts the trouble, so I'd be the first one to jump a till, I go in and do, just to make sure no-one's getting killed. Getting what we're coming for, then it's alright do you know what I mean? I used to be like that, that's why everyone used to look up to me and why a favour to them was like nothing because I've done most I could do in the 'hood. Like I've got 'hood status, 'hood credit, you know. It's like being a ghetto superstar, if I go down there, everyone knows who I am. If I go to Vauxhall or Brixton everyone knows who I am, or knows a member of my family, like I'm famous you know.
> (Nathaniel)

> As part of the construction of their identity, it also seems fairly evident that Ronnie and Reggie [Kray] were attempting to dress and talk like Capone, muttering just like screen gangsters, driving big American cars and wearing well-made suits with expensive accessories.
> (Parker 2012: 121)

> Original gangster, I respect the laws
> Of the crimes lords and the gangster wars
> My only religion, is the code of the streets
> We never use cops, we just handle our bleat
> The penalty precision is an infant death
> Never disrespect or betray your set
> Love and loyalty is the ultimate goal
> To the Code of the Streets, I hear my pledge in my soul
> (Ice-T *Code of the Streets* from 2006 album *Gangsta Rap*)

4.1   Introduction

A recurring theme that emerged from the stories that the men told was

the idea that in their everyday lives they had operated outside of the

law; some referred to themselves as outlaws. Colin, for example, talked

about himself as 'an outcast, an outlaw'. Butch had outlaw tattooed onto

his inner lip. Bobby (Frosty) talked about how his life was lived outside

of mainstream society. Paul discussed his offence as part of a reaction to

the feeling of normality and boredom in his life as a teenager, and the need to *be* something different. Phil committed fraud against banks and shared the proceeds equally with those involved. He saw his offending as a political statement whereby he defied the rules of an oppressive system, he was: 'the closest thing to a socialist you'll ever meet'. Nathaniel, on the other hand, was a 'ghetto superstar'. One of the tasks of narrative analysis is to propose how various popular cultural, fictional, or mythic figures help us to see connections between aspects of human conduct and their cultural contexts. In this chapter I do this by looking at the outlaw archetypes present in the men's narratives.

Historically, the outlaw is someone who has been cast out of society because they have committed a crime, are a threat to those in power, or both (Hallsworth 2005; Seal 2011). The outlaw is stripped of legal and political rights and is forced into a state of nature: 'through sovereign enactment of a ban, the outlaw or werewolf and the zone of lawlessness are created' (Spencer 2009: 222). This reference to the werewolf[19] is used to define the status of the outlaw, the condemned man, who is now dehumanised, made into an animal. The outlaw has become a werewolf and can therefore be hunted by anyone (Gerstein 1974). Once a person has become an outlaw they are no longer controlled by the same laws and values but are outside of them, they are literally outside of the law and are therefore not afforded the same protections as a citizen. This long history of casting out, exiling, making monsters out of those who

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[19] The concept of the werewolf is explored in chapter seven as this image is referred to in relation to both outlaws and shapeshifters.

were regarded as having transgressed laws, or challenged power, would eventually develop into systems of punishment where criminals are removed from society and incarcerated. More recently, some politicians have also suggested that prisoners have forfeited their rights as citizens by operating outside of the law (Warr 2012).[20]

This brings to mind Agamben's (2005) notion of a bare life, a naked physical being without political, legal, or social status image. Agamben (1998: 104) makes the direct link between 'the bandit and the outlaw, the wolf' and uses the image of the werewolf to consider conditions of confinement. If the werewolf is successfully trapped and caged, he may perhaps be kept alive, but no efforts need be expended to ensure his well-being. He is non-human, an animal, and merits no such consideration (Dolovich 2011). Popular representations of outlaws are however, markedly different from this, as were the stories some of the men told about their outlaw identities. Agamben's bare life describes a political state, but suggests an empty monochrome existence characterised by misery, lack of self-determination and irrelevance (Bhui forthcoming/2013). The notion of bare lives has explanatory power, but the dramatic nature of the insights it offers are perhaps too seductive. In this analysis real lives become simplified and dulled, and the complexity of human existence, the vividness of experience, is lost.[21]

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[20] A situation embodied by the ongoing denial of prisoners' right to vote.
[21] For example, Willis (1978: 1) argues that: 'oppressed, subordinate or minority groups can have a hand in the construction of their own vibrant cultures and are not merely dupes'.

In this chapter I explore a number of outlaw myths in relation to the men's stories. I start with an overview of academic analysis on outlaws; notably, Hobsbawm's (1969/2000) work on social banditry, Seal's work on 'hero outlaws' (1996, 2011) and Parker's (2012) recent text on 'alternative business'. This chapter draws on intertextuality in order to consider the relationship between the use of outlaw mythology in the stories of the men, and the cultural context in which those stories were told. In terms of considering the outlaw identity in relation to gangs, a brief overview of the criminological literature on gangs and subcultures is provided.

Taking an intertextual approach to popular outlaw mythology and the men's narratives transcends traditional questions of influence and originality, instead we see how, rather than being able to provide unitary understanding, such an analysis requires interpretation at the intersection of other 'textual surfaces'. Outlaws inspire films, songs, poems and plays that testify to their tenacious exploits (Hallsworth 2005). In this instance the intertextual connections are between a popular culture that teems with references to outlaws and the men's narratives (Kristeva 1967/1980).

Similar to the work of Crewe and Bennett (2012), more extensive use of the men's narratives is used in this chapter and the two that follow. This more fully allows the men's voices to be heard, giving first-hand accounts of their experiences, whilst also challenging the idea that those

who have been imprisoned are 'a categorically different species' (Crewe and Bennett 2012: xxii).

I start with the Lone Ranger, the lone figure of America culture who fights injustice. Bobby's narrative was infused with this outlaw archetype. In general, however, the outlaw myth involves groups of people, gangs. Having considered Bobby's story, I move on to the second part of the analysis which is about membership of gangs or subcultures. Both Butch and Nathaniel stated that they had been gang members. Some of the other men, generally on the basis of their drug use, drug dealing and drug importation, also considered themselves to be part of a specific subculture. This included rave culture (Danny), 1960s counter culture (Phil), and drug networks (Hector, Jason and Richard). The outlaw's presence in the cultural landscape is one that appeared to be a compelling metaphor in a number of the men's narratives as they discussed their early lives, involvement in crime and way of living. Cultural fascination with the outlaw myth is experienced as a form of reality in the men's stories; it was manifested in their counter narratives; and in the telling (and the writing) of their life stories, the outlaw myth is recycled and refashioned again.

4.2   Mythologizing the outlaw

In *Bandits* (1969/2000), historian Eric Hobsbawm set out his interpretation of the bandit literature and gave these outlaws a social protest function. The behaviour of these bandits, he argued, can be regarded as a form of protest or an expression of injustice. In the original version of the history of bandits he said that:

> Peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported.
> (Hobsbawm 1969/2000: 17)

Such a viewpoint stimulated significant debate mostly concerned with the extent to which Hobsbawm's representation of outlaws was romanticised. For Blok (1972: 496), these outlaws were largely mythical creatures: 'rather than actual champions of the poor and the weak, bandits quite often terrorised' the very ranks of which they were a part he argued. The use of bandit song and story in the original publication of *Bandits* was said to reflect ideals and aspirations rather than social reality. In the 2000 edition of *Bandits,* Hobsbawm accepts these critiques, partly he said, on the basis that some of the bandits he had assigned 'good bandit' or heroic criminal status to, did not stand up to significant scrutiny, and partly on the basis that poems and ballads could be 'slippery' and 'contaminated' (Hobsbawm 1969/2000: xi). Contamination is indeed a good word to use. But contamination can

work both ways. It is not simply the case that the poems, stories and ballads – the mythology of the outlaw bandit – has rendered Hobsbawm's analysis questionable. Slatta (2004: 34), in further criticism of Hobsbawm's work, argues that: 'much bandit mythology emanates from literate, urban, middle-class writers with no first-hand experience of bandit-folk ties, real or imagined… Popular culture reveals little of the social reality of bandit behavio[u]r'. Such a dismissive perspective of outlaw popular culture and mythology seems misplaced. Warner (1994: xi) for example, refers to how, when she undertook historical research this 'always led me to myth' and how myths are intrinsic to our social systems. Analysis of myth and mythology can inform and reveal social reality. It is, I argue, the mythology of the outlaw that is important. Hobsbawm should not be chastised because he romanticised the outlaw; the outlaw archetype requires being romanticised.

This chapter seeks to show that those who transgress the law draw on outlaw mythology and contaminating their stories, outlaw mythologies are reworked into contemporary understandings about crime and justice. Criminality is viewed as necessary and justifiable (Spraggs 2001). A further area of analysis relates to how outlaw mythologies coalesce around questions of law and legitimacy, power and authority (Parker 2012). Finally, what the popularity of representations of outlaws tell us about the fantasy and imagination of not only ex-prisoners, but wider society also, is examined.

Popular outlaw mythology shimmers with abstractions such as freedom, opportunity, honour, individualism and justice. It is an extremely powerful idea that has evolved over several centuries and has been reproduced in books, song, films, paintings and the like. According to LeJeune (2007) outlaws, or rather what the outlaw mythology represents, transcends regional and geographical boundaries and extends beyond a single form. The outlaw is a figure who lives a complex life crossing both physical and mental borders. Although the outlaw has been cast out, the werewolf outlaw remains a 'fierce warrior' figure (Giffney and Hird 2008). For LeJeune (2007), the popularity of the outlaw legend is because outlaws stand as expressions of people's own conflicts. Seal (1996, 2011), who has written extensively about outlaw heroes, suggests that outlaw traditions provide a set of boundaries or signposts that allow us to negotiate situations which are outside of everyday experience. Seal (2011) argues that both real and mythic outlaws have influenced social, political, economic and cultural outcomes. He draws parallels between outlaw history and mythology and contemporary global conflicts and concludes that:

> In the end, the outlaw is inside society as much as he or she is cast outside it. Outlaw heroes are a projection of ourselves beyond the pale, beyond the further outposts of law, order and authority. We can neither live with them, nor without them because their existence, real or mythic, is a living metaphor of the problem of power and age-old questions of equitable access to the means of subsistence.
> (Seal 2011: 183)

Martin Parker (2012) considers the economic or business outlaw. In this analysis, these rebels enlighten our understanding of power, organisation and economics. The outlaws in Parker's work are considered to be part of a broader counter culture, whose existence problematizes power and authority by helping to denaturalize dominant forms of economy and organisation. In outlaw mythology, therefore, we can find a counter culture in regards to ideas about work, authority, and the legitimacy of the law. Consideration of the outlaw offers a 'commentary on the ways in which we think about organisation, economy and questions of justice' (Parker 2012: 8).

It is in North America that outlaw studies have most proliferated. This is perhaps unsurprising given that much of outlaw mythology has been shaped by the idea of the American West, of cowboys and frontiers. Parker (2012) argues that this is because dissemination of outlaw mythology requires mass media technologies, and that by the time of the Wild West a media saturated environment existed. Although the Wild West outlaw archetype has somewhat faded, its legacy continues to cast a long shadow. In music, for example, a diverse range of artists have drawn on outlaw mythology, including Adam Ant, Eminem, Jim Morrison, Joan Jett, Johnny Cash, Ice-T, Richard Thompson, Tupac Shakur and Woody Guthrie. There are also contemporary renditions of the outlaw in television and film. The outlaw figure can be found in programmes such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire* and in the 2007 British

film *Outlaw,* which, although fictional, was based on real-life incidents researched by director Nick Love.

LeJeune (2007) argues that studies on outlaws in North America have gone in three major directions. First, many of the studies have focused on the life and exploits of a single outlaw figure, such as Jesse James. The second direction has been shaped by geographical location or region, such as the American West. Finally, the progression of the outlaw figure in literature and art has been explored. It is possible to see how this model could be applied to the British context, for example, in terms of analysis on particular individuals or gangs such as the Krays, or areas, such as Glasgow or the east end of London. In contrast to these individualised and location based approaches, the first part of this analysis, informed by the work of Parker (2012) and Seal (1996, 2011), seeks to challenge hegemonic ideas about ex-prisoners by acknowledging and exploring the interweaving of their narratives with that of outlaw mythology. Rather than being dismissive of the use of the outlaw representations in their stories, I seek to examine what this tells us about crime, punishment and justice.

It is also worth noting that although not a major element in their analyses of outlaws, both Parker (2012) and Seal (2011) recognise that masculinities are an important facet in outlaw mythology. In a chapter on the Mafia, Parker (2012) discusses the strong sense of tribalism that can be found in not only the 'real' Mafia, but also often amongst the

male viewers of such films who: 'wanted to be part of the gang' (107). The world of the outlaw is highly masculinised and outlaws are profoundly masculine, and an array of prized masculinist concepts, such as aggression, violence, sexual freedom, autonomy[22] were very much part of the men's narratives.

Outlaws are encountered in a popular culture that swarms with their images and it is because they break the law, defy convention, and act in often highly selfish ways, that they are so compelling. The danger, the operating outside of societal rules, the contempt for authority, even the violence and self-interest, it is all this that makes the outlaw identity attractive. But there is more. An outlaw identity is not this alone, the outlaws of popular culture, and the outlaws in this study, also problematize power and authority. These outlaws reflect a deep suspicion of those in power and represent different ways of living which offer radical alternatives to the present. The concept of 'justice' as something outside of the State, as well as the legitimacy of the laws of the State, are made unstable as the exercise of power and the production of hegemonic or 'true' knowledge is exposed. Moreover, the stories and myths about outlaws shape what outlaws do.

The outlaw myth represents for some people a way of making sense of their lives, it has given their life form and meaning, it has been a part of their identity, a masterplot in their story. Outlaws rework notions of

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[22] See Connell's (1987, 1995) work on masculinities and Messerschmidt's (1993) work on masculinities and crime.

justice and provide a powerful counterpoint to both the rule of law, and the power of the State (Bond Potter 1998).

4.3   The Lone Ranger

The Lone Ranger is the masked, fictionalised, lone figure of American culture who fights injustice. The Lone Ranger first appeared in 1933 on a radio show in the United States. Proving to have popular appeal, the Lone Ranger would go on to become a television series that ran from 1949-1957. The show was shown around the globe and repeats continued to be televised until 2010 (Witschi 2011). A new Lone Ranger film, starring Johnny Depp and Armie Hammer, is planned for release in 2013, eighty years after the Lone Ranger first rode into popular culture. Bobby's story displayed many of the features of this outlaw archetype as his offending was largely committed alone. The offence he was sent to prison for was an example of this, and also demonstrated his perception of needing to 'do something' when he felt injustice had occurred.

According to Hemmer (2007), the figure of the Lone Ranger displays a darkness that makes him a 'Good Badman'. Part of this identity is due to the outlaw mask that the Lone Ranger wears which sets him apart from traditional, more virtuous cowboys, none of whom managed to achieve his popular attraction. The mask, for Hemmer, is an important feature in the Lone Ranger identity and appeal. The reality of the Lone Ranger

mask operated in a metaphorical sense in a number of the men's stories both in and out of prison. The reality for both real and mythic outlaws is that they often have to remain hidden. There were frequent references to putting on a 'front' or a mask in the men's narratives, a common theme in a number of studies on prisons (Jewkes 2012b), and reminiscent of Goffman's (1961) dramaturgical perspective where the 'face' is a mask that changes depending on the audience and the type of social interaction that people find themselves in. For example Bobby said:

> Even though I've been a drug dealer for years, a bit aggressive and violent, you got to, how should I put it? You got to wear a mask for the world, fit in.
>
> I would always be like a normal person rather than a typical kid, like when old ladies walk past from the neighbourhood and are scared to walk past you, I wasn't like that, I wouldn't want them to think that of me, that I'm a scary person.

Although capable of violence, Bobby is keen to show that he also has the capacity to avoid it; and indeed there is a sense of repugnance at the idea of being unnecessarily 'scary'.

Cawelti's (1999) analysis of the Lone Ranger argued that such figures dramatize the conflict between the simultaneous adolescent desires to join the adult world on the one hand, and fear of the adult world on the other.

This conflict between desire and fear of adult status was evident in Bobby's narrative, he continued:

> But I took no shit, used to get into a lot of fights with men from the pubs, they'd come out of the pubs all drunk and be like '*move you little bastards'* and at 16, 17, 18 I wasn't going to take that. You think you're a tough man cos you come out the pub, got a skinhead and drunk ten pints, and have a few tattoos on your knuckles? That's the thing, I used to get into a lot of fights, never got arrested for any of them, but I used to get into a lot of scraps with men coming out of the pub.

This idea that the Lone Ranger provides a symbolic expression of conflict between a fascination with the adult world and a hesitation to become part of it, is particularly interesting given that a feature of Bobby's narrative was the numerous references to his age, time passing, and the need to 'grow up'. He referred to being a 'big man now' who needed to pull his life together and to stop being involved in 'boyish silliness'. He discussed how turning 30 years of age would require him to find a new way of spending his time, getting a job, becoming an adult. Although he frequently referred to himself as nearly 30, when directly asked what his age was, he said that he was 28. Thirty was someway off, and yet it provided a clear, identifiable mark for when he would have to join the adult world.

Cawelti (2004) argues that the Lone Ranger's symbolic outlaw garb, and choice of company in Tonto, his Native American companion, and Silver his horse, should be interpreted as a self-elected separation from the wider community rather than integration into it. In his counter

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narrative, Bobby referred extensively to his closest male friend, Byron, who was affectionately termed 'Landlord' as he had consistently provided somewhere for Bobby to stay from his late teens onwards; and to Laiya his dog. He described her as:

> Slim, she was beautiful... she was big like a lion, strong, got big shoulders, she used to stand up, she was a big girl put it that way, she was a big girl but she wasn't one of those slow dumb dogs you see these dogs who can't even walk, she could climb trees and that.

The independence of movement and companionship provided by 'the great horse Silver' (Cawelti 2004: 1) is synonymous with Bobby's depiction of Laiya. He spoke about her in ways similar to how you may refer to a girlfriend - he was 'devoted' to her, used to share his bed with her, she acted as his protector. Dogs such as Laiya may fit the stereotype[23] of being a status dog (Harding 2012), and was indeed used in this manner, but the relationship was more complex; just as the relationship between the Lone Ranger and Silver cannot be easily reduced to simplistic ideas about ownership and human domination over animals.

A further connection between Bobby's narrative and that of the Lone Ranger relates to the representation of the Lone Ranger as someone 'good' fighting those who are 'bad'. Bobby did not have a long list of previous convictions and had been in prison only once. Nonetheless, Bobby lived his life as an outlaw. His narrative shows the pervasive

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[23] She was a Mastiff cross.

influence of the cultural iconography of the American West and how it extends beyond the borders of the territorial Unites States of America. Bobby seldom claimed benefits and had never worked. Instead he operated as a cannabis dealer, not only to get money, but also to maintain his own use of the substance. When his two-year old niece was attacked by a dog and injured so badly that she was hospitalized, it had not entered his, nor his family's, head that the police should be called. Instead, justice was meted out on the owner of the dog in a manner that was utter retribution. The attack was vicious:

> I beat him up, I attacked him. I got myself into a mad state, like I got angry, that day I kind of like got myself in a mad violent kind of thing cos obviously he's been beaten up already, he's in a bad way and I was going mad. I wasn't even; I didn't even feel satisfied as it were. So my little brother was holding my dog, I remember he was holding her, where I was fighting and doing what I was doing and the dog was going mad. She was ten-stone, she was massive, but she was slim, beautiful, she was beautiful. So, my brother's [father of the injured girl] holding her, I tell him to let go of the dog, and for the dog to get him [the victim]. My brothers like *'no, no that's a liberty'*. I was holding the kid, he was fucked, he was in a bad way. I say to my brother to 'let go of the dog', I say to my brother 'if you don't drop the lead I'm going to make the dog bite you' so he thought fuck that and let go of the dog and the dog bit up the kid, ripped up his, he, ripped his scrotum, don't know if he actually lost a testicle. He, he, he the kid was in a bad way from my dog. He got fucked, bites all up his arms and his legs.

Despite the ferocity of the attack, that it was in daylight and in full view of other people who lived on the estate, Bobby did not expect any police involvement; instead life would continue, as normal, beyond the gaze of the authorities.

There followed a lengthy period of time where there were problems between Bobby's family, particularly his two younger brothers, and the family of the young man who had been attacked by Bobby, his brother, and the dog. During this time Bobby bought a stab-proof vest from a friend who had recently broken into some nearby army barracks and gave it to his youngest brother. This was to prove fortuitous. A few months later his brother was stabbed, but as he was wearing the vest he did not get badly injured. For the following eight months, Bobby was backwards and forwards between where he was living independently and the estate that his wider family still lived on. Fights, threats and various infractions continued throughout the period. Yet, despite being aware that the incident with his dog and the victim had been witnessed, Bobby was not concerned about the police.

> That's not how we live. Like I've been a drug dealer for years and both my brothers, whilst I've been doing what I've been doing they've still been living on the estate growing up. They've started selling drugs and getting into fights and getting involved in things so…

> I chose to live a certain life, for me to turn round now and call the police because my life might be under threat, or I woke up one night and there was a burglar in my house, for me to turn round and call the police, it would be bad wouldn't it? I've been breaking the law my whole life when I see fit, so for me to turn round and try to use them to my advantage it's a bit bad innit?

> I know it may not make sense to other people but to me that makes sense. That makes sense because I've chosen to live outside the law so I wouldn't see fit to sit inside the law. No, I chose to deal drugs and so no, it's not morals, it just seems a bit hypocritical, I chose to be a criminal. I've been running from the police my whole life and now I'm going to be on their side and phone the police, no, do you know what I've done in my past? That's the way I look at it, so that's why I'd never call the police.

Moreover, Bobby did not expect anyone else to ring the police either, he was adamant 'no, no, you don't'. When, eight months later, in the early hours of the morning, the police bashed down his door, arrested him, took his dog and her 12, just born, puppies away, he remained convinced that it was for his dealing rather than the attack. 'The kid, he's a burglar by nature, that's what he does, so therefore he's the same as me, it didn't even enter my head that he would phone the police, it's just one of those things he's just not going to do'.

This was, however, not to be the case. Charged with Section 18 Wounding with Intent, and with the dog he doted on and all her puppies destroyed, Bobby went to court. The trial took place at the Old Bailey, the only reference Bobby had to this was seeing the court on television, and being aware that this was the court that dealt with the most serious cases. As he recounted the story of his trial he talks about the slow realisation about what was to happen to him. Bobby had admitted to the offence but was pleading not guilty on the charge of Section 18 Wounding with Intent, as he claimed the dog had not been used as a weapon. By the point of the trial the victim was himself in prison and would require being brought to the court. This gave him some hope, as the idea that someone of a similar outlaw background would grass remained incomprehensible to Bobby.

> I was thinking it's all going to crash because he's not going to come from prison, he's going to refuse to give his evidence in court. There's no way he's going to stand up in court and point the finger at me, there's no way he's going to do that, his life

would be over sort of thing. He'd never be able to go back to the area and try and live a criminal life after you've done something like that, it wouldn't be allowed sort of thing. So I thought he's never going to do it.

Things did not, however, go to plan. The victim arrived in court in the morning ready to give evidence, at which point, and on the advice of his solicitors, Bobby changed his plea to guilty. At sentencing, he was given a six-year custodial prison sentence and arrived in Belmarsh high security prison that night.

Bobby's story encapsulates many of the ideas of outlaw living and operating within a code of conduct well outside the dominant culture. It also highlights that some people will not always abide by those rules. Historically, the term outlaw referred to the formal procedure of declaring someone as outside of the sphere of legal protection, and this is precisely Bobby's perception of his life. As a man who operated outside of the criminal law, he could not, he thought, expect the law to protect his family. His need to seek justice for the attack on his niece was the culmination of a life led as an outlaw.

Having considered some of the salient features of the Lone Ranger as outlaw, I now move on to explore the more dominant feature of outlaw mythology – that of the gang. This is where groups of people operate together as part of an outlaw gang or subculture. This section briefly considers the literature on gangs and subcultures before moving on to exploring three key narratives. Firstly, Phil, who was part of a relatively

loose grouping, or subculture, and operated within two often opposing, and, at times, social class delineated identities, that of the hippy: a drug using, music loving, traveller; and the snooker player: a drink loving, gambler. Phil talked about having a 'dual identity', as a member of the emerging hippy counter culture in the 1960s, but also a member of the working class snooker hall group. With the hippies he took drugs and listened to music, but this group were ambivalent about the need for 'bread [money]'. Phil though said: 'never mind all that shit. Yeah I need bread because that's what I gamble with, that's what I need to enjoy myself!' Drugs were an alien concept to the snooker hall crowd, but gambling and prowess on the snooker table were revered. Phil straddled both groups, enjoying the drug use of the hippies, but also the love of gambling and the skill of playing snooker found in the snooker hall crowd.

The other narratives are those of Butch and Nathaniel who were members of more formal gangs. Butch was a member of a biker gang in the 1970s, whilst Nathaniel was a member of a south London gang in the late 1990s, early 2000s. A number of the men talked about their involvement in gangs or groups in a generally positive light, even when much of that involvement was crime related, whereas Nathaniel was more circumspect, even though he recognised the status that came from being 'a face', 'known'. Initial involvement in the gang, he said, was largely due to survival. Homeless at the age of 17, and unaware that he could claim benefits, Nathaniel had started to do robberies as part of a

gang. In contrast, Butch mainly recalled good memories of wild times with the biker gang.

4.4   Outlaw gangs

Research on gangs has progressed in somewhat different directions in the United States of America and Britain. In the USA, studies on gangs have tended to focus on the deviant and criminal behaviour of the gang and to seek explanations for criminal behaviour, whilst in Britain, the focus has been on working class youth cultures, which were only occasionally associated with serious acts of delinquency. Nonetheless, the idea of criminal subcultures has a long established history within sociological and criminological research in both countries (Cohen 1955/1971; Cohen 1972; Downes 1966; Hebdige 1979/1988; Miller 1958; Thrasher 1927/1960). The study of gangs emerged from the work of the Chicago School and developed through symbolic interactionism into a set of theories arguing that certain groups or subcultures in society, have values and attitudes that are conducive to crime and violence. In his now classic book: *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang,* Albert Cohen (1955/1971) developed a theory to try and explain the apparently high rates of delinquency and crime amongst lower class boys living in run down, urban neighbourhoods. Cohen argued that most delinquent behaviour was meaningless, carried out without purpose, and took place within gangs, which upheld a different set of conduct norms to those usually found within the

dominant culture. Delinquent behaviour was largely 'non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic' (Cohen 1955/1971: 25). It was not material success that delinquents were searching for, he concluded, but meaning in some other way.

American anthropologist Walter Miller (1958) offered a radically different interpretation of the causes of lower working class deviance. He argued that deviant subcultures, or gangs, are formed quite independently and are separate from mainstream society and culture. It was this perspective of the independent subculture that has had most impact on British criminology. Downes (1966) for example, argued that delinquency is not at heart rebellious, but could be regarded instead as conformist. Downes rejected the idea of delinquent subcultures and argued that delinquency should be seen as a solution to some of the structural problems faced by young men.

Defining gangs remains a difficult business. Since the early classic American gang studies of Cohen, Miller and Thrasher, gangs have changed and proliferated, yet new academic research on the topic remains sparse and overly reliant on these early studies. More recent research on gangs has examined whether there is common ground between the American gang experience and European gangs. Or, alternatively, if there is a 'paradox' based on the idea that 'real' gangs exist in North America, and, because European gangs do not fit the American model of what a gang constitutes, this has led to denial of

gangs in the European context (Klein et al. 2001). For example, Klein (2001) argues that denials about the existence of gangs in Europe are due to European gangs generally not fitting the American pattern of highly structured, cohesive, violent gangs. However, he goes on to state that few American gangs fit this stereotype either.

Following concerns regarding gang-related offending and an apparent increase in the use of weapons in the early 2000s in England and Wales, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) commissioned research on gangs and weapons in order to develop a research informed evidence base on the issue (Young et al. 2007). However, this research concluded that there remains no consensus about what constitutes a gang. Moreover, the authors go on to state that caution is sometimes urged in the use of the term 'gang' due to the 'glamour' that may be associated with it. This is an interesting point given the fascination and thrill that is apparent in popular representations of outlaw gangs. Members of outlaw gangs have to negotiate a careful line between glamorous representation, and frightening 'other'. It has been argued, for example, that the 'lack of coherent research into this subject [is because] crime in general and gangs specifically are associated with an alien "Other"' (Mares 2001: 153). Gang members both appeal and repel.

In order to avoid some of the semantic debates about the use of the term gang, this study has relied on the men's description of their criminal identities. Phil referred to being the member of two

subcultures. Nathaniel and Butch specifically referred to being part of a named gang. It is useful to note that their experiences of intergang rivalry, high levels of violence, of small groupings, and of the importance of class and the structural difficulties faced by young people, were also found in Mares' (2001) work on gangs in Manchester.

Despite the long-term attention given to gangs within criminology, little focus has been applied to outlaw mythology and gang practice, or criminal identity. Yet, the men's narratives swirled with real and mythical outlaw figures. Fact and fiction intermingled and became confused; contradiction and ambivalence abounded: some of the very same notions that surround outlaw heroes themselves (Seal 2011).[24] Outlaws may be an alien 'other' but these figures have also had positive associations projected upon them. In his study of street crime Hallsworth (2005: 14), for example, discusses both the street robber as folk devil, as well as the more romantic mythology of the street robber as embodied by seventeenth century highwaymen. These are figures of 'respect, veneration and affection as much as... a figure of loathing and fear'.

There has been a long and extensive history of outlaw gangs, from the English heroic criminal gang of Robin Hood and his merry men, to the Australian Kelly gang. Seal (2011) suggests that the characteristics of

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[24] James Holmes, dressed as *The Joker,* a character in the *Batman* story, shot members of the *The Dark Knight Rises* cinema audience in Colorado in 2012, exemplifying the porous nature of popular culture, real action, and identity.

both historic and mythic outlaw gangs are that they involve a perception that the behaviour is something more than criminal. They are redressing an injustice, avenging wrongdoing and are defiant in the face of power and authority. Members of outlaw gangs therefore carve out their own path, their own way of doing things, even if this involves recourse to crime or violence.

4.5   Robin Hood and the 1960s counter-culture

Phil, who was a young adult in the 1960s, recognised that he had a somewhat unusual affiliation with both the hippy subculture, which involved drug taking, music loving[25] and not working for the 'man'; and the more working class subculture of the snooker hall, with an interest in gambling, dodgy deals and drinking. Whilst on the surface these two groups were different, they did share some similar traits:

> Well, when you mix in two different, but nevertheless subcultures; the snooker hall crowd, the drug taking crowd then it's not too difficult to come across people who are a bit shady or who are not averse to seeing a nice little earner.

From school, Phil had been employed in a number of respectable jobs, firstly as a civil servant and then with an oil company. He was however, scathing about the experience of working. The lure of an alternative criminal existence, which involved less effort and more financial reward, was not ignored for too long. Phil said he could pinpoint the

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[25] See Willis (1978) for a discussion on the hippy scene, music listening and drug taking.

exact time that crystallised for him the fundamental moment when he

decided to reject being an office drone and become a financial outlaw. A

lengthy section of Phil's story is used to demonstrate this:

> I was fairly bright and capable, however the path to promotion in the civil service, and later in the oil company was so enormous you had to wait half your life to get it. It was more like time served than ability, and as I didn't have a degree it just seemed to me that it was going to take forever. I got hacked off with that and I increasingly found work was highly inconvenient because it curtailed the time I could devote to taking drugs [laughs] and going down the betting shop and playing snooker and things like that, which of course were all the things I was much more interested in doing...
>
> Now the guy who introduced me into gambling and horse racing also introduced me to LSD - I'm still in touch with him – and another one of our co-members, they both live in Australia, but I'm still in constant contact with them. We also knew, just by the fact that they lived in Catford, a couple of people who were really into their blues music and had started their own record label. They were able to get drugs, which was in those days, as I say, just LSD and cannabis so that's where that sort of started. I got so frustrated with the work situation, and found work increasingly inconvenient, and something I really didn't want to do which left me then with a conundrum which was - I don't want to work but I want money - and that's what got me into full time criminality.
>
> What I did was cheque book fraud, I would have been about 22 years old, something like that, and funny enough what began it was, I can remember one day graphically, it's one of those things that's embedded in my memory. The oil company was housed in this huge building in the centre of town. My manager said to me *'can you take this envelope to such and such office up on whatever floor'*. So I wandered off looking for this room. I found the corridor it was in and I walked past all of these office doors eventually finding the office door with the right number on it and went in and actually found that I was in this huge room and all the doors that I had passed also led into this enormous room, with rows of these clerk-type people pecking away on their comptometers [mechanical calculators] and it scared the shit out of me. I thought no, no this is a nightmare; I've got to get off this boat.
>
> Now one of my sort of soulmates in this haven of grey suits, he also liked to smoke cannabis, and we were both big Bob Dylan

fans, I introduced him to backing horses which didn't do either of us any favours I have to say! As luck would have it before he worked for the oil company he had worked in a bank, and he had, as not many people did in those days, what was called a cheque guarantee card, which meant that you could write a cheque, show the guarantee card that had a signature on it, and you could have either cash or goods up to the value of £30 or so.

After I'd been at the oil company about a year I thought I really couldn't stand it anymore, and he needed a few quid so I said: what if you 'lose' your cheque book and your card, I 'find' your cheque book and your card and I misappropriate it. He said '*yeah that sounds like a good idea*', and I said, you know you're going to be grilled by the police so you're going to have to hold firm with your story. So what we agreed was that I'd hand in my notice at work because I couldn't stand it anymore, and on the day that I left, my last day, they'd arrange this lunchtime drinks thing and here's your leaving card and all that stuff, so I said what we'd do is that I'd say I was going around saying goodbye to people in the morning, no-one's going to give a monkey's if I'm out of the office and it's my last day, what they gonna do anyway? So I said I'll go do the business then, and that'll be a perfect alibi because everyone will think that I've been at work. So I took his cheque book and his card and in about two hours I went around as many banks as I could which was only about eight, getting £30 a time and then made it back to the office for my own farewell do with my pockets stuffed full of banks' money to the tune of what then would have been about six months salary in two hours. I thought – way to go. Pat [the accomplice] then did his part during the leaving drinks '*oh, I've lost my cheque book, I better go and report it to security',* so he went to tell the security guards first of all. And then another sweet memory, the security guard said '*well you don't have to worry about it being anyone here, no-one in this place would have the nerve to do anything with it*' I thought 'yeah!'

He went on to detail the events of that first day as a financial outlaw:

The very first cheque that I cashed I was nervous. I'd been practising his signature, I went in and handed over the cheque and the card and they didn't give a second look, just '*how do you want your money?*' and I just about refrained from saying 'as quick as possible!' Over and done, in and out, and I thought what a doddle that was, how easy is that? And of course, it just got easier and easier and easier, so by the time I was hitting the eighth or the ninth it was easy. It became fun, it was just a hoot and then to come back to my own drinks party with my pockets stuffed full

with this cash - the equivalent of six months salary - and then the security guard saying that, it was just phwoar, this is the way to go.

So that was me – my life of crime officially had begun, and that was my *modus operandi.* I would agree with people to 'lose' their cheque book to me until about 3 o' clock when the banks would be closing so I'd know I'd have a full day to go to work with someone else's cheque book. Then we would split the money, you see I always was a socialist, I used to say to people 'I'm the nearest thing to a socialist that you're ever going to meet'. So we would split the money, so although it would seem that I was most at risk, and I had done all the work, as far as I was concerned, that was a doddle and their part of it, although it would be less time consuming in some ways, was more difficult because they would be grilled by police officers who quite possibly didn't believe them, so it was vital that they held their ground and said effectively if push came to shove, you can think what you like pal, but I've lost it and that's the end of the matter*.*

And so life continued for Phil for the coming few years. There were a number of scrapes with the law but nothing too serious in terms of sentencing. Discussing this time he said:

I saw myself as Robin Hood, I was taking from the rich, meaning the banks, and giving to the poor. So yes, I've never been a sort of, what can I say? You know when you have a group of people when they go out for a meal and likely as not there's someone there who says '*I didn't have any poppadoms'.* Oh fuck off, I've never been that sort, it's always been easy come easy go, I've always been like that, and obviously in those days it was both, it was easy come, and pretty much easy go and then I'd have to go out and get some more.

Phil, then, explicitly links his choice of criminal career with that of the most notorious hero outlaw, Robin Hood – he regards his offending as redistributive and political. In the way he operates, in terms of giving all those involved equal shares, despite it being his idea; taking the most risk, and spending the most time on executing the offence, Phil saw the

fraud as political: socialism in action. This connects with a number of facets of outlaw mythology, such as the outlaw as a rebellious, but principled individual (Seal 2011); Parker's (2012) work on business outlaws; and Hobsbawm's (1969/2000) earlier studies on how outlaws are well-defined figures who inhabit the cultural space between criminality and 'primitive rebellion' or pre-political/political protest.

The outlaw identity also had other benefits that Phil mentioned: the outlaw is often a successful 'ladies man'. In *The Beggars Opera* (Gay 1728 cited in Duncan 1996) the outlaws' lives are presented as ones to be envied rather than avoided, and it is the chief protagonist, the criminal-hero Macheath who: 'enjoys all the captivation of command, and the devotions of the most beautiful girl' (Dickens 1967/1970: xv cited in: Duncan 1996: 62). That their criminal identity was attractive to women was mentioned by a large number of the men. Colin, who also identified as an outcast and outlaw, and had been married three times, said that he had never had any problems getting a partner (although as an older man who had just been released from a life sentence this was not something he perceived himself as involved in any more). Hector said: 'and then the girls started to see me, and, once girls start seeing you it's like this is a good thing'. Jason discussed how when his offending started to escalate so did his involvement with girls. Andy talked about how sleeping around was an integral part of his identity growing up. But more than this, he wanted to ensure that he remained emotionally free of involvement so that he could pursue his other

interests. He rather sheepishly told me (as a female researcher): 'I wanted to be the best shag that they'd had, so they'd fall in love with me, and then I could fuck them off I guess, in a sense'.

This was not always the case however; neither Moses nor Charlie thought that their criminal identity had made them more attractive to women. In fact Charlie said that he found it difficult to get a partner. This may be because neither of these men had taken on a criminal identity nor embraced the outlaw mythology, and both saw their imprisonment as unjustified. Being an offender, and defined as an ex-prisoner, did not make them more sexually desirable, if anything, it was a hindrance. Charlie discussed how when he was being transported in the prison van at the start of his sentence, a fellow prisoner had whistled at a woman walking past. He said that he had thought to himself how funny this was: 'I was kind of thinking, what girl is going to hear someone wolf-whistling from a prison van and think: there's my dream man?'

That the outlaw identity was one that bestowed a certain level of sexual attractiveness was nonetheless apparent in a number of the men's narratives and Phil recognised this. Moreover, he made the link between his newfound enamour, and the outlaw cultural script that proclaimed this aspect of the outlaw identity.

> I have to say, there's an old country song *Ladies Love Outlaws* and it's true. I used to find that there were women who wouldn't

look at me once, but when they knew how I got my money, all of a sudden they were very interested, I became very attractive all of a sudden. Plus you had all that freedom, fun to do what you wanted. So for quite a while it was a very conducive lifestyle.

Waylon Jennings had recorded the song *Ladies Love Outlaws* in 1972 and in 1976 a compilation album *Wanted! The Outlaws* was released. With these, and other musical releases, including those from Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson and Willie Nelson, outlaw country music became a recognised sub-genre of country music. In 1977 however, Jennings was arrested for cocaine possession and went on to release what appeared to be the death knell of outlaw country *Don't You Think This Outlaw Bit's Done Got Out of Hand?* That was until the 1980s when outlaw country supergroup The Highwaymen was formed with Jennings, Kristofferson, Cash and Nelson.

Freedom is another core feature of the outlaw identity. Phil happily gave up a stable and respectable career to pursue his criminal career as it gave him the time and the money to do those things he most enjoyed: taking drugs and gambling. Freedom is also an aspect in Bobby's narrative; he does not rely on the State for benefits, nor the police for justice. Butch, who had been a biker, loved the freedom associated with that identity, of living fast, being free to roam the roads. One of the most abiding aspects of outlaw living is access to the vast expanse of space that was the American West. If trouble comes to pass, which it frequently does for outlaws, then you can simply move on. For example, Hector, who was involved with drug networks, had briefly moved from

London to Birmingham; Andy left England and went to Cyprus; Colin moved between various towns and cities in the south of England; Butch and Craig would each travel to the south-west when attention from the police got too much. Those who lived in London generally moved from one area to another (Nathaniel, Bobby, Abdi, Richard, Jason). It was Danny and Phil, two self-identified hippies, (though separated by thirty years) who travelled most extensively. Danny would go to India, Egypt and Israel. Phil and his friends decided to take the classic hippy trail, travelling through Europe overland to Afghanistan, on to India, then down to Sri Lanka before heading off to find some form of work in Australia. The decision was based on a number of factors including fear that the next time Phil and his mates got caught they were looking at 'porridge'. Phil also said that as time went by committing fraud was becoming a chore, more like a job, the thing that he had been seeking to avoid.

They had also heard tales about some of the substances that could be had abroad and were keen to try them for themselves.

> We went to Afghanistan, obviously this is a long time before even the Russians were there, this was the early 1970s, I described it as the Wild West with turbans, but it was the classic hippy trail, where all the best dope was, before they got into opium and heroin and all that stuff, it was hashish, and it was the best in the world. So we headed off there and then into India and by the time we were in India, we hadn't got enough cash for all of us to get through and do what we wanted to do so the next plan we hatched was that we were going to buy some hash in India, get it sent back to England, sell it, and then resume our travels.

So Trevor couldn't go back cos he had this bloke after him, the third one he couldn't go back because he'd skipped bail, so it fell on Joe Mug here. Now, we'd been in touch with someone else and there hadn't been any enquiries about what we'd done to raise the money in the first place to get out of the country, so as far as we were concerned everything was all ok. So I said, ok, I'll go back, which I duly did. As soon as I got back to Heathrow a customs bloke said *'oh we need to detain you, there's a police officer planning to talk to you'.* I thought this doesn't sound too good: *'he's been trying to get hold of you since October'.* I thought, that can't be so bad then, because what we'd done had been in November so it can't be that, that he wants to see me about. So he tried to contact him, DC Miller his name was, but was told that he couldn't be found and there was no information. So he searched my bag and let me go. Off I went and I asked if they could give me this copper's telephone number so I could contact him because I was curious.

So I phoned him up and I said *'I want to speak to DC Miller'* and they said *'oh, he's been seconded, he's on a special case I'm afraid',* so I said *'never mind',* but then it turned out I was the special case!

Outlaws commit crimes, but many of the popular representations of them focus more on their personalities and adventures, whilst the seriousness of their crimes is laced with humour (Cavender 2004; Hallsworth 2005). This popular culture representation of the outlaw was echoed in the men's narratives. Many of the stories were told for laughs. At times they themselves were the butt of the joke, as we see in the denouement of Phil's story. Anecdotes were told as miniature performances, a vast array of voices and accents were adopted for the various roles required. Stories were rarely told without humour; even the most vicious of offences could elicit laughter.

4.6   The Ghetto Superstar[26]

The men who identified as outlaws, and whose criminal activities were performed as part of a gang, discussed this in ways that evoked the romantic view of the criminal outlaw. They talked of freedom, sexual prowess, fun and camaraderie. Nathaniel, however, was far more ambivalent about his gang membership; although he enjoyed the status that gang membership had given him, he also discussed how young people should try to avoid joining gangs. This ambivalence was evident even during the early days of his involvement. For example, through the gang he managed to find somewhere to live, but on failing to pay rent one week he was threatened with a gun. The gang therefore offered an opportunity to survive, but also added to his feelings of insecurity, isolation, loneliness, and fear.

Nathaniel's gang involvement revolved around street and shop robberies[27] and a lot of fighting over territory particularly in central London, where gangs would congregate to fight:

> Like there would be other gangs of boys that would come from Tottenham, they would come down and we would be on our side, they would be on their side, and the Chinese boys would be there and we'd just beef it up with the Chinese boys, and if it wasn't that, then it might be serious between like one of the Peckham boys, and one of the Tottenham boys, and we'd watch. And then us and the Peckham boys, it would be like that, it

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[26] Hallsworth and Silverstone's (2009) work on violent street worlds concluded that individual gang members also committed offences that bore no relation to their gang membership. This is also the case for Nathaniel whose prison sentence was for a non-gang related offence.

[27] See Hallsworth (2005) for a discussion on street robbery of this type.

> wouldn't be like altogether everyone rocking each other, it
> would be organised in a way, not one on one, but one on one
> gang.

Nathaniel talked about how being part of the gang meant that he got things for free: 'free weed, free stuff, and people being interested. Like coming round and saying they've got this or that for me, or can you get rid of this or rid of that, like a laptop, and I'd be able to get rid of it and get some money from them for doing that. Little odd jobs and stuff like that'. He went on to discuss the status that such a position in the gang had given him: 'it made me feel like a bit of a king. A king cos you've got status'. After a period of time Nathaniel moved up the gang hierarchy, he did not have to go out and rob himself anymore, but could send people lower down to commit thefts for him. He said:

> I felt invincible between the age of 16 and 18 I felt like I was
> untouchable in the manor, like no-one could talk to me, if you
> were from another end [area] and you talked to me I'd like get
> 15 guys to go to your mum's house and beat you up, or just
> kidnap you, take you off the streets and take you far away, and
> then we'd write your mum a letter saying we have your son…
> We'd beat the shit out of him until he gave us some p [money]
> and then we let him go.

The outlaw identity in Nathaniel's narrative takes on aspects of a superhero figure. He is 'invincible', 'untouchable', he is a 'pace-setter', whose speed and fearlessness earns him status and respect within the gang. However, Nathaniel's own ambivalence about being in the gang, despite this status, is mirrored in the various responses to popular cultural references of outlaw figures. Some will find outlaws heroic and

admirable, whilst others will view them as villainous and repulsive (Seal 2011; Hallsworth 2005).

4.7   Bad Company: the biker gang

Seal (2011) suggests that since the 1950s the formation of outlaw motorcycle gangs has provided an example of the persistence of the needs, wants, and fantasies that underlie outlawry. He finds it somewhat surprising therefore, that there has been little research in this area. Butch's narrative may help to shine a light on the hidden, and highly masculinised,[28] world of biker gangs.

Butch was a member of Bad Company, a biker gang in the 1970s. Although he would come to see involvement in the group as problematic on some level, Butch talked about the gang with great affection and had numerous anecdotes to tell about fast living.[29]

It had taken him a while before he found the right gang however:

> I started off as a skinhead, shaved all my hair, boot boys and all that and then I got beat up by a greaser when I was about 14, 15. So I thought I was on the wrong side, started growing my hair long, leather jacket, you know hanging around with the greasers and the bikers.

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[28] See Willis (1978) for a discussion of masculinity and biker gangs.
[29] Butch talked about his outlaw mission statement: 'live fast, die young and leave a good looking corpse'.

Following this aesthetic change Butch would go on to form a biker gang with a group of friends and acquaintances. He clearly links the creation of the gang with outlaw mythology particularly from the United States, where biker gangs are more long-standing.

> We actually created a club, a gang, that we called Bad Company; I've got the tattoo up here [top of arm]. There was a band Bad Company[30] who had a song called Bad Company which was sort of our theme: *'Company always on the run, destiny is the rising sun, I was born 6-gun in my hand. Behind a gun I'll make my final stand. That's why they call me Bad Company, and I can't deny, Bad Company till the day I die'.* It was all cowboys and civil war and stuff that fitted with our lifestyles, desperados on the run you know. Loveable rogues. But it was a play on words because Bad Company is one thing, but Bad Company is a sort of military thing, like Company A, Company B, Bad Company, the misfits, the outcasts.

According to Dulaney (2005), biker gangs are frequently formed along militaristic lines, with clear hierarchies and codes of behaviour so that individuals understand their role, identity, and place in the gang. For example, in Bad Company there was a president, a lieutenant, and a sergeant-at-arms, who looked after the gangs 'weaponry'. Moreover, they tend to take a name that reflects their outlaw personae. Along with Bad Company, Butch made mention of Satan Slayers, The Chosen Few, Hells Angels, the Windsor Angels, and the Desperados. These aspects of the biker gang make clear the separation from the conventional society of 'citizens' and the outlaw identity of the gang.

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[30] The importance of music for biker gangs is discussed by Willis (1978).

Joining the gang had also given Butch an identity that the mainstream had failed to provide. He set his membership in the gang as a reaction to a society that had rejected him:

> If you don't smoke the same cigarettes as me, if you don't have this sort of haircut, the media telling us if you don't wear this sort of shirt, this sort of body type, this sort of skin tone. If you don't have this sort of car, if you don't have a girlfriend, you're rubbish. And we sort of subconsciously said, well we're never going to have that sort of body shape, that sort of girlfriend, that sort of skin tone, that sort of job, never going to have 2.4 children; so we're told we're rubbish, and if we're told we're rubbish we'll be the best kind of rubbish you've ever seen. So the Bad Company thing was saying that if we don't fit in over there, well we'll fit in over here, which is as far from that as you can get.

> That whole thing about snapping citizens' minds was a conscious attitude; I don't have any respect for these people because they're living a sham in my perception. So we wanted to freak them out because it's fun you know. I developed a party piece of eating beer glasses. I remember being in this pub in Poole where I use to do it virtually every night at a certain stage of drunkenness, when I'd bite off a big piece of glass, start chewing and swallow it. Then maybe two other bits, it got to the point that when I went into the pub the landlord said *'right that's 50 pence for every beer glass you eat tonight'*, and I'd say I'll have a couple of quid's worth then...

> I was with the bikers, what enamoured me to that subculture, particularly the Hells Angels, they have this system, class, showing class, which is a bit like chivalry but opposite, and the thing is to do the most outrageous thing you can do to snap citizens' minds. I'm sure you've heard of this one, but biting the head off a live chicken, that's showing a hell of a lot of class, especially if it's in front of a load of old grannies and makes them throw up, you know, cool, cool. And I just kind of got into this code if you like, where without being vicious or nasty, I use to try and do things to try and mess with people's heads. And linked to that, the clothes I wore were the stinkiest leather jacket, the jeans had never been washed ever, stand up on their own and go for a walk, and the long hair, that all kind of appealed to me.

The outlaw status that shocked 'straight' society was all part of the gangs appeal, and clearly fits in with Cohen's (1955/1971) ideas about

reactive subcultures. Referred to by Willis (1978: 18) as 'rumbustious extroversion' these were 'mechanised marauders of the highways' (Seal 2011: 139), making their own rules, often living outside the laws of the State, leading a lifestyle that flouted moral as well as legal codes.

Most of Butch's time was spent with the gang who all lived together, partied, and took drugs together.[31] The gang committed an extensive number and range of crimes, including raiding garages, commercial burglary, theft, violence, drug dealing, and armed robbery. Membership of the gang was, however, more than crime related. In contrast to Nathaniel, where most activities to do with the gang required some legal transgression, Butch had a large number of anecdotes about the biker gang that were about a more general outlaw lifestyle and being part of a wider counter culture that rejected dominant ideas about work, law and justice:

> There was one guy called Hairy Mary[32] because he had really long blond hair. His mum had died, and she lived in this little bungalow, a little bit dilapidated, but we all moved in and this was like yeah, great for after the pub. Sooner or later the electrics got turned off, the gas got turned off, so we were burning stuff in the open fire, baking potatoes, opening up tins of beans and cooking them on the fire that sort of thing. Anyway, we ran up a huge bill with the milkman. He came to the door one morning, *'is Mrs. Wilkins here?'* *'No, she's not here'* *'is her son here?'* The guy that answered the door, his nickname was Slug-Death, he says *'I dunno, I'm just on my way to work, I'll just go and see'.* So he goes in the lounge, shouts out for him: *'Mary are you in? There's a bloke at the door for you',* then he goes into the bedroom that he shares with his girlfriend, where his Triumph 650 was parked, starts the bike up, and rides it down the

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[31] This contrasted with other biker gangs (such as the Hells Angels) who, I was told, were anti-drugs.

[32] The use of nicknames by 'motor-bike boys' is discussed by Willis (1978).

hallway, past the milkman, down the path, and off to work. Great stuff.

Such an image evokes much of the mythology of the Wild West: living hand to mouth, cooking on an open fire, a man riding off (if not quite into the sunset on a horse, into the morning on a bike), leaving a 'citizen', a representative of mainstream society, agog.

Butch's narrative consciously referenced outlaw mythology which also appealed to the idea of notoriety. The behaviour of the gang itself is something that comes to be mythologized: the myth becomes reality and reality becomes mythology. The popularity of representations of outlaws are fed back and replayed by those who wish to make their own legends. Butch discussed the gang as being 'a bit like a den of thieves':

> There was a social club and we found this little compound that was around the back that had a 6ft wooden fence but you could climb over it, and we had this old Morris Minor van, tiny little thing, we pushed it up and then someone climbed into this compound and would pass a beer barrel over the top and we'd put it into the van. We got about three and then suddenly *'Oi, what you doing?'* We got in the back, bump started the van, and got off. We got away with three beer barrels, great stuff. The party: the bath was full of it! We just poured it in the bath and used saucepans to drink with. And then a week later there was this thing in the local newspaper, *The Echo*, you know brave manager foils raiders kind of thing, 20 armed men managed to escape with eight barrels of beer despite his efforts to fight them off. Real urban legend this stuff.

Ultimately Butch was to go on to transform his life, metamorphosing from an outlaw 'Jim Morrison [lead singer of The Doors]' type figure to

a peaceful hippy: 'something like, you know Neil from *The Young Ones'.*[33] Nonetheless, Butch arrived at the interview on a motorbike. He showed me pictures of his younger self, clad in leathers, with the gang and their motorbikes. The draw of outlaw imagery clearly remained strong.

4.8   Conclusion

This chapter has explored how a number of the men identified themselves as outlaws. Generally, outlaw life was lived as part of a brotherhood, or gang; but in Bobby's story I considered how an outlaw figure, in this instance represented by the Lone Ranger, could be interpreted as involving self-elected separation from the wider community, rather than integration into it.[34] Bobby had not considered calling the police when his niece had been hospitalised after an attack by a dog. Instead, retributive, outlaw justice was enacted. Following his fight with the owner of the dog he set Laiya, his own dog, on the owner, which resulted in extensive injuries, and took place in daylight in the middle of a housing estate. Still, when several months later the police rammed down his door, he thought this must be for the drug dealing he was involved in rather than the attack, because the victim, like Bobby, was an outlaw. In this instance however, the outlaw code of never

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[33] *The Young Ones* the classic British sitcom centred around four archetypal characters. Neil the hippy; Rick the anarchist student; Vyvyan the violent punk; and Mike the wide-boy.

[34] It should be noted that Bobby was not alone in this individualised outlaw identity; Colin and Paul's counter narratives also featured this concept.

grassing or involving the police was breached, and Bobby went on to receive a six-year prison sentence for what he had done.

It is outlaw gangs who have most captured the popular imagination, and gangs have captured the criminological imagination also. Despite the apparent overlap between these two, there has been little serious criminological attention on the concept of outlaw gangs. In the three outlaw gang counter narratives explored in this chapter, each had a distinctly different perception of their involvement with gangs. Phil, the Robin Hood of 1960s counter culture, explicitly set his planning and participation in bank fraud as a political statement, of socialism in action. Nathaniel, the ghetto superstar, was far more ambivalent towards his gang membership, which although offering him street status and access to goods and services, also invoked feelings of fear and insecurity. Butch, the outlaw biker, sunk his individual identity into that of the gang's. He lived, dressed, socialised and offended with the gang. He sought the snapping of citizens' minds and revered those who wanted to do the same. The gang inverted and rejected mainstream society's expectations of them: they would be filthy, they would not make work the focus of their lives, they would not get a mortgage, live in one place, or abide by the law. They would create a new form of living, of being, and have their own rules and regulations and hierarchies.

One theme identifiable in the men's outlaw narratives was that their criminal activities made them far more attractive to women; they were more sexually desirable, and more successful in attaining a sexual relationship, than they believed they would have been if their identity was not one of an outlaw. Such beliefs raise the important spectre of the role of masculinities in these narratives, and indeed several of the components of outlaw identity can be seen to be essentially masculinist.

In analysing Bobby, Phil, Nathaniel and Butch's counter narratives we can see how there is an intersection between their stories and other outlaw 'textual surfaces' (Kristeva 1967/1980: 65). Popular culture has a long-standing fascination with outlaw mythology and the outlaw figure has become a commodity for music and film. The lives and legends of outlaws such as Robin Hood highlight the interplay of myth in the production and perpetuation of notions of identity (Seal 2011). However, the popular idea of the outlaw is predicated on a fundamental estrangement from most people's everyday experience. Spatial mobility and economic self-reliance are dreamt of but seldom realised, being a wage 'slave' or office 'drone' are far more likely experiences (Parker 2012). So, stories of exotic travels, humorous scrapes with the law, of tight friendships, of subverting the 'rat-race', and resisting authority offer a glimpse of an alternative existence:

> There was a lot of brotherly love and that, so I think we were saying we wanted something different. What we were being presented with was hypocritical rubbish and we were never

> going to attain it so we had to seek something else otherwise we
> can't justify our existence as human beings.
> (Butch)

In the representational and interpretive space of the outlaw we can see social, political and cultural aspects of human conduct played out. For some, the outlaw existence offers a more vivid way of living, greater freedom, and more fun than a conventional existence can provide. As outlaws, they were freer than citizens and therefore more fully human.

Consideration of outlaw mythology has come largely from without the criminological discipline; moreover, where there has been academic study it has at times attracted negative attention – as if serious consideration of outlaws reaffirms the power and pull of these figures. Hobsbawm's (1969/2000) historical analysis situated outlaws as primitive rebels whose existence and way of living could be seen as resisting those with power and offering alternative forms of justice. Almost immediately, Hobsbawm's work attracted criticism for overly romanticising those who were not, in reality, held in high esteem by their contemporaries and for misunderstanding or misusing bandit artefacts (Blok 1972; Slatta 2004). I have argued that such criticisms of Hobsbawm's early work are somewhat misguided. Outlaw mythology is intrinsically romantic – to de-romanticise them is to miss the point.

The work of North American scholars has been extensive in terms of consideration of outlaw mythology, the Wild West, and popular cultural

representations. LeJeune (2007) discussed how part of the popularity of outlaw mythology is that the outlaw is symbolic of the conflicts all of us face. In a similar vein, Seal (1996, 2011) posits that outlaw traditions provide a framework or template that help us negotiate and make sense of experiences that are outside of our everyday lives. From the perspective of management and organisational studies, Parker (2012) examined business outlaws, more rebels who can illuminate our understanding of power, justice and of economics. The literature on outlaws demonstrates how they provide a metaphor for power struggles which allow consideration of questions about inequality and justice.

Ultimately, outlaws contest popular conceptions of justice, the rule of law and the power of the State.[35] Consideration of outlaws and outlaw mythology in the men's narratives has drawn attention to a number of essential human experiences: to issues of power and authority, justice and punishment, economic freedom and inequality. One of the key features of the outlaw mythology is that there is frequently a strong ethical impulse and this was something that a number of the men referred to: a feeling that justice had not been achieved, or would not be achieved. They took on the outlaw identity and became the

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[35] Danny, for example, discussed the failures and misconceptions of the drug laws that had led him into prison, despite his perception that he had simply been 'serving' people what they wanted and had actively sought out.

embodiment of justice in what they considered to be an unfair, unequal, or lacking in understanding, society.

4.9   Summary

This chapter has achieved a number of aims. Adopting intertextual analysis, the blurring of lines between outlaw mythology and the lived experiences of some of the men who took part in this study has been explored. Consideration has been given to different forms of outlaw existences such as the Lone Ranger, the primitive rebel, the economic outlaw, and biker and street gangs. I have argued that the cultural iconography of the outlaw has meaning at the intersection of economics, politics and culture and that analysis of outlaw narratives offers us a deeper understanding of the culture that produces and sustains such a mythology. This exploration has been informed by a number of writers from a diverse range of perspectives including historical analysis, economic analysis and insights based on outlaw mythology and conflict. The men's counter narratives rework mainstream notions of law and justice, power, authority and freedom and challenge us to think about why outlaw mythology is so attractive to not only offenders and ex-prisoners, but to all of us who are tempted by outlaws, even if at the distance of a mediated popular culture.

Chapter Five   Life Inside Prison: prison myths

>   I felt suicidal, I wanted to die, I really did. I remember at one
>   point getting tablets and thinking fuck I can't do four years, I
>   came really close to suicide; it had pushed me that close to it, I
>   was manic. I completely understand why people do commit
>   suicide, I understand being pushed in that way because your
>   mind doesn't think in the way it does normally. I couldn't see
>   things in the future, that I would have a future, I just had this
>   blank thing for four years, and the worse thing for me was
>   prison, and prison being what I saw on the television.
>   (Charlie)

>   Much of human life consists of playing… roles within specific
>   institutions. To understand the biography of an individual, we
>   must understand the significance and meaning of the roles he
>   has played and does play; to understand these roles we must
>   understand the institutions of which they are a part.
>   (Wright Mills 1959/2000: 161)

>   Hope is fading
>   The cage is near
>   Confinement calling
>   A fallen tear

>   Inevitable incarceration
>   Running its course
>   Nearly there now
>   Environment forced

>   Freedom gone now
>   Lost in the haze
>   Put on the mask
>   Enter the maze
>   (Anthony Corson 2009 *What's it all for?*)

5.1   Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore a number of common myths regarding

prison. Whilst prisons are without doubt unique organisations, the uses

we make of them, and the conditions we consider acceptable within

them, provide clues to society's views and values, and ideas about identity and meaning, which go well beyond the prison walls. There are few organisations that explicitly have the infliction of pain as one of their primary functions. Prisons have, as their overarching aim, their ultimate purpose, the exercise of punishment: 'the deliberate infliction of suffering and hardships upon those contained within its walls' (Scott 2007: 49). Although Goffman (1961, 1968/1986) in his analysis of 'total institutions'; and Foucault (1977/1991), in his exploration of power and control, could draw upon a range of organisational settings, including mental hospitals, monasteries, factories and schools, to explicate their theories, there is nothing so total, in constraints, in degradation, and in the display of power, as the prison (Christie 1993/2000). This is something Foucault appears to accept when he states: 'the prison, much more than the school, the workshop or the army… is '"omni-disciplinary"… it gives almost total power over the prisoners; it has its internal mechanisms of repression and punishment: a despotic discipline' (1977/1991: 235-236). The State's exercise of power, by imposing painful deprivation, is apparently a unique kind of 'public obligation' (Sparks, Bottoms and Hay 1996: 22).

Prisons have traditionally attracted significant sociological and criminological attention and a range of issues have been explored. However, Garland (1990: 186) has accused penological studies of becoming rational and passionless where 'moral evaluation is displaced by scientific understanding'. Considerations regarding the moral and

ethical dimensions of imprisonment have been superseded by a growing focus on correctional efficiency. This places individual deficits at the centre of the punitive discourse and the wider cultural context within which criminalization occurs is obscured from view. Actuarial techniques of risk management (Feeley and Simon 1994; Simon 1988) are used to develop standardized, packaged responses that can apply a technique, or strategy, to groups of offenders to deal with their 'criminogenic needs'. This punitive turn is based on the belief that efficiency, management and cost-effectiveness will somehow help to depoliticize criminal justice debates and defuse issues of power and legitimacy. Early penological studies, with their interest in the micro-level of interaction that goes on in the prison (Goffman 1961, 1968/1986, 1983) and the 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes 1958) have given way to the managerialist discourse of targets, key performance indicators, and cost effectiveness (Farrant 2009).

The criminological study of human affairs increasingly neglects the human; and hence Christie (1997: 13) has lamented the shift to what he terms a more boring criminology, the: 'oversocialization of criminologists', which seems to ignore that danger, conflict, catastrophe, abuses and sacrifices are the material on which the discipline is based. Fortunately, there remains a strong resistant strand in critical penological work, particularly in the United Kingdom. For example, studies on the effects of imprisonment (Cohen and Taylor 1972; Crewe 2007a, Crewe 2009, Crewe and Bennett 2012; Goffman

1961, 1968/1986, 1983; Haney 2002; Sykes 1958); staff-prisoner relations (Crewe 2006; Liebling and Price 1999; Liebling, Price and Elliot 1999; Edgar et al. 2003); and prison staff and management (Bryans 2007; Crawley 2004, 2006; Cressey 1951, 1997; Dilulio 1987; Jones 2006) suggest that not all criminologists have become oversocialized, even if there is a tendency within the discipline, and in research funding in particular, for a more tame criminology to have developed.

This chapter sets out to examine the extraordinary nature of the institution of the prison, recognising that whilst it is an institution like no other, analysis of the inner world of the prison, and its symbolic value in wider society, exposes the interplay of power and powerlessness, of conflict, loyalty and alienation (Crewe 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Bauman (2000) argues that prison offers an appealing triple promise: it can render our streets safe by keeping dangerous people away from us; it allows ontological fulfilment by restoring our freedom of movement, and prisons avenge in kind the immobilisation we have suffered. These promises, although never achieved, provide a veneer for the necessity of the institution of the prison. In reality, these are myths, rather than promises.

The intertextual representation of the prison in popular culture has been explored by a number of scholars (to name but a few: Fiddler 2007; Jarvis 2004; Jewkes 2007, 2009, 2011; Jewkes and Johnston

2006; Mason 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Mayr and Machin 2012). The aim of this chapter is to utilise the existing literature on prison and prisoners to identify key prison myths. In this instance a Barthesian notion of myth is adopted. In *Mythologies* (1957/1972), Barthes argues that modern culture creates a set of myths - or 'ideological abuses' (11) – that operate to hide reality under the supposed naturalness or common-sense notions about what is portrayed. In this sense myths, rather than opening up new modes of understanding of a subject, make understanding opaque. According to Barthes therefore, myths can depoliticize, simplify and naturalize, ultimately falsifying the message that is being relayed. Myth in this sense is about searching out the lies that the powerful tell in order to persuade the powerless that society cannot be changed (Coupe 2006). In the context of considering prison myths, this means identifying the taken-for-granted, established and apparently accepted views of imprisonment and prisoners and exposing the delusional ideas on which popular understandings of prisons are based. For Sontag (1993: xxx) this is what makes Barthes work of interest, it is, she says: 'genuinely subversive, liberating – playful. It is outlaw discourse'.

Drawing on the work of Jewkes (2009, 2011) and Mason (2006a, 2006b) in particular, this chapter identifies a typology of prison myths: those assumptions that appear to be natural and obvious. These myths are then examined via the men's narratives this serves two purposes: firstly, to consider how these myths structure the expectations and

experiences; and secondly, to offer a counter point to the dominant discourses that exist regarding prison. I begin, however, with a brief account of the representation of the prison.

5.2   Prison representations

The history of the prison is somewhat shorter than may be first imagined. Prisons, as places of punishment rather than confinement, were devised approximately 200 years ago. The American War of Independence curtailed transportation, and imprisonment as a way of dealing with crime, came to be a central plank of sentencing policy (Soothill 2007). By the final quarter of the eighteenth century prison building was already dominating the penal and physical landscape. These first prisons were designed as 'places of real terror' (Evans 1982: 169), frequently built in the centre of cities and towns, the prison architecture itself aimed to instil a sense of fear. It was not long however, before prisons attracted attention from reformers with a desire to rehabilitate offenders rather than to simply punish them. However, this apparent duality between reform and punishment has been questioned. Instead, both punishment and rehabilitation can be seen as equally associated with power relations. Economic motives, and the operation of State power to regulate and control various sections of the community, are evident in the purpose of imprisonment (Foucault 1977/1991; Melossi and Pavarini 1981; Rusche and Kirchheimer 1968). When people are imprisoned, a powerful symbolic message is

communicated by the State: there are certain people who are unfit to live amongst us (Lippke 2007).

As Foucault (1977/1991) has suggested, the exercise of power is pertinent to every practice of punishment or sanctioning. The prison, as the ultimate sanction in our society, is therefore the site in which the exercise of power is at its most brutal, and is inextricably linked to knowledge and resistance (Foucault 1972, 1977/1991). Mathiesen (1965) argued that a legitimate distribution of power and authority in prisons is impossible and that attempts to discover one simply become rationalizations for the persistence of the 'prison solution' to what are in fact a range of social problems. Unsurprisingly, the issue of power and domination has been the focus of much prison research. The effect of power, or lack of it, has proved a particularly fruitful area of study (Clemmer 1940; Cohen and Taylor 1972; Crewe 2007a, 2009; Mathiesen 1965; Sykes 1958; Toch 1977).

Gresham Sykes' *The Society of Captives* (1958) is traditionally regarded as the seminal text on prisons, and retains contemporary credibility having been judged the most influential book on prison studies in the twentieth century (Reisig 2001). Sykes identified power and institutional order as key areas of consideration in prison research. He argued that prison staff did not assert total dominance over prisoners, despite the potential for them to do so; instances of struggle for control, and examples of resistance, could be found in the numerous violations

of regulations committed by prisoners. Although prison staff could coerce prisoners into obedience through force this was seen as potentially dangerous, as well as an inefficient way of getting things done. Instead certain members of the prison community – prisoner leaders – were co-opted by staff and became informally involved in the maintenance of order.

It was not only prisoners who compromised prison order. Staff, according to Sykes, struggled to maintain formal boundaries and to systematically enforce rules. The first reason for this was that working in such close proximity and so regularly with prisoners made it difficult to remain distant, therefore more informal relationships between staff and prisoners developed. Secondly, staff were dependent on prisoners to maintain the smooth running of the prison and were reliant on them to undertake a range of routine tasks. Negotiation and compromise between prison staff and prisoners was key for order to be maintained. Rules were not too strictly enforced as informal arrangements between staff and those prisoners who acted as prison leaders helped reduce the likelihood of disorder. Sykes concluded that order functioned through the prisoner hierarchy. The inmate code, which included such things as, being tough, not grassing on another inmate, not siding or showing respect to prison officers, all operated to ameliorate the harshness of prison life.

Nevertheless, the defining characteristic of imprisonment for Sykes was deprivation, what he termed the 'pains of imprisonment'. These involved the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relations, autonomy and security. Experienced by prisoners as a set of threats and attacks on their own being, one of the ways prisoners could try to diminish the pains of imprisonment was to form a cohesive set of rules and behaviours to abide by. The social solidarity between prisoners and the operation of the inmate code were therefore explained as cultural mechanisms for alleviating these pains, and of asserting some power over a situation in which they appeared to have little.[36]

Drawing upon, and developing Sykes' work, Erving Goffman (1961, 1968/1986) argued that prison was just one among a number of 'total institutions'. Goffman defined these as 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed formally administered round of life' (1968/1986: 11), and encouraged consideration of the ways in which structural properties of institutions impact upon, and alter, the identities of their occupants. For example, the admission process into a total institution is described as a 'civic death' – a series of social and psychological attacks that undermine a person's sense of self. In prison, the exercise of power was seen as involving a range of instances that eventually lead to the

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[36] See Crewe (2009) for a more contemporary analysis of 'the prisoner society'.

'mortification of self'. Examples of this included: the dispossession of property; dispensing with referring to people by their name; restrictions on clothing and other bodily adornments; strip and other types of searches; verbal deference; restrictions on communication; lack of control over when and what to eat, when to get up, and what to do during the day; access to showers; and reliance on staff to allow access of movements around the prison. Power in prisons, according to Goffman, operates at the very micro-level of interaction that occurs between prisoners and prison staff. Things that are minor and taken for granted in the outside world become the focus of attention and the site of control and resistance in the total institution.

As Foucault indicated (1977/1991), the use of timetabling and spatial organisation are key means by which prisons can regulate and discipline their members – both those contained and those who work there. Nevertheless, Goffman (1968/1986) argues that despite being socially and physically separated from the outside world in a closed environment where the inmate can be completely controlled by a single authority, prisoners still seek some control and some kind of independent self-concept. It has been variously suggested that individual forms of resistance can be seen in relation to the development of alternative forms of communication between prisoners, such as prison language and terminology; in breaches or selective compliance of prison rules; and in attempts to control and manipulate

the physical body (Crewe 2007a, 2009; Jewkes 2005; Wahidin and Tate 2005).

Moreover, the early gothic spectacle of punishment has given way to institutions that blend into the environment, their role and purpose camouflaged. Foucault suggests (1977/1991) that various buildings, including the prison, have come to resemble each other, the factory is like the school, both are like hospitals – 'all resemble prisons' (228). This view was first posited by classical philosopher Jeremy Bentham who declared that his Panopticon[37] design, which offered the potential for continuous surveillance of prison cells from a central watchtower, was also 'applicable to any sort of establishment, in which persons of any description are to be kept under inspection… prisons… hospitals and schools' (Bentham 1787: 40, cited in Carrabine 2012: 59).

In analysis of the architecture of incarceration Jewkes (2012c) has argued that prisons have been transformed from 'gothic palaces' (33), that combined both terror and a form of beauty, to places characterised by unaesthetics; bland and ugly they blunt the senses and function as places of cultural 'disenchantment' (30). Part of this process of disguising prisons may be due to public concerns that inmates could escape. Instead of operating as symbolic sites of punishment and reformation as Bentham and prison reformer John Howard had hoped, prisons have instead merged into the fabric of the city and become:

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[37] This would also provide Foucault with one of his most persuasive metaphors for the disciplinary society.

'architecturally naturalized' (Davis 1990: 256, cited in Jewkes 2012c: 36). The prison building no longer marks a new technology of punishment nor celebrates the transformation of souls. Instead, these are the places we hide those defined as monsters.

So instead of spectacle, state punishment and those who are its focus are hidden, made visible only through mediated representations (Carrabine 2012; Fiddler 2007). As prisons recede from view, it is the popular cultural representations of imprisonment that operate as the interface between the public and the incarcerated (Fiddler 2007). Contemporary understandings of punishment, crime and justice therefore cannot be separated from how they are represented in popular culture (Carrabine 2012; Jewkes 2007). Even here however, the prison is at the margins, afforded less attention than the police, gangsters, or courtroom dramas (Carrabine 2012). Jewkes (2007: 454) has argued that this reliance on mediated understandings of punishment has led to punitive sanctions seeming 'both ordinary and acceptable'. Prisoners have successfully been constructed as 'others', frightening and monstrous they are beyond compassion, and myths about prison and prisoners proliferate.

5.3   Prison myths

> Nothing travels more extensively and effectively than myth.
> (Ricoeur 1991: 122)

Media portrayals of crime and deviance are a source of fear, but also a source of fascination and escapism. Popular media in modern societies play a pivotal role in 'othering', and the monsters that are created, which terrify and intrigue us, are simultaneously fascinating as well as forbidding (Kearney 2003).

In his study of media representations of the British penal estate, Mason (2006a) analysed one month's media output in Britain. This included 19 national newspapers, television news bulletins, and drama, documentary and film. From this he identified a number of salient features in regards to the narrow construction of prisons and prisoners. Mason notes that media coverage was not only beset with misrepresentation and distortion, but also silence.

Prisoners, when they were represented, were portrayed as an uncontrollable danger. The most violent offences and offenders were the main focus of news coverage; and stories about poor security, early release and escape have helped to create a fearful public. That prisoners are an uncontrollable danger and that society is fearful of them was the first theme identified by Mason. The second most prevalent theme in the month's media output was that prison is a soft option. Liberal

regimes, the protection of prisoners' rights at the expense of victims' rights, poor security and access to drugs were all features of this particular discourse. Simultaneously, overcrowding and high levels of self-harm and suicide were largely hidden and unproblematized. Where stories about prison were presented, these were frequently clichéd with stereotypical ideas about prisons and prisoners, including references to sexual violence and rape. Mayr and Machin (2012), in their study of the language of crime and deviance in the mass media, also identified prison as a soft option, and prisoners as a danger to a fearful public as the two dominant media discourses about prisons.

The final element in Mason's analysis is less about discourse and more about a lack of discourse or focus on imprisonment. Although Mason (2006a) concludes that media representations of prison and prisoners are misrepresentative and distorted, there are also significant silences about prisons. Silence, absence or cliché about prisons abound. He concludes that there is, in fact, little coverage of prisons, and some of the most important voices are not heard at all. Silence about prisoners is an important feature, as without their stories being told we are unable to develop empathy or understanding; an untold life story is one we cannot relate to, reflect upon or share.[38] As Foucault (1990) has argued, discourse and silence are not each other's opposites. Without these stories people cannot explain themselves, or experience themselves as a fully human life, they can become dehumanised – the

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[38] Parker (1962, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1991, 1995) and Carlen's (1985) work went some way to filling this silence. As do Crewe and Bennett (2012) more recently.

'other' (Kearney 2002). Examining the men's stories in regards to their experiences of prisons can go someway in challenging this process.

Jewkes (2007, 2011) has written extensively on media and crime and has developed a five-fold typology within which prisoners are constructed by the popular press. This consists of: celebrity prisoners, pampered prisoners, sexual relations in prison, lax security, and abuses or assaults on inmates, for example, in the representations of sexual violence in prison films (Jarvis 2004 cited in Jewkes 2009). Moreover, she concurs with a number of points raised in Mason's (2006a, 2006b) work, noting that reporting of prisons is negligible and therefore knowledge about imprisonment is scant. Jewkes goes on to say that much newspaper coverage appears to be 'predicated on the belief that large segments of the media audience regard prisoners as society's detritus' (2007: 449). Prisoners are presented as dangerous people living an easy life in a place more like a holiday camp than a prison. The media therefore operates to construct prisoners as a monstrous 'other': marginalized both physically and metaphorically.

Drawing on the literature regarding media representations of prisons it is possible to set out a typology of prison myths, namely: that violent sexual assault is commonplace; prisoners are pampered; prisoners are dangerous – a breed apart they must be kept away from society; prison security is lax; and, that prison barely constitutes punishment. In the following section, each of these myths is explored in the men's

narratives under the headings: prison rape is endemic, prisoners are pampered, prison protects the public, prison security is lax; and prison is not punishment.

This analysis it is about understanding the ways in which these types of delusional myths structure the expectations and experiences of ex-prisoners, potentially shaping their bodies and their friendship networks within prison and reducing their opportunities on release.

5.4   Prison rape is endemic

As briefly discussed in the methodology chapter the most common cultural feature of the men's narratives was concern about sexual violence in prison. The fear of sexual violence has become the defining characteristic of the prison experience in the United States of America (O'Donnell 2004). Prison rape has also been depicted in popular culture, particularly in films and television series (*American History X, Midnight Express, Oz, Scum, Shawshank Redemption*). Many of these examples come from the United States, however, the cultural reach of the USA means that their influence goes well beyond the boundaries of that nation and is evident in cultural understandings about imprisonment in Britain, as well as elsewhere. For an array of reasons, such as lack of research, poor data collection, and failure to take the issue seriously, it is very difficult to draw any concrete conclusions about levels of rape across different geographical locations. However,

the statistics infer that rape is more prevalent in prisons in the USA than in England and Wales. Nonetheless, the men frequently discussed that prior to their incarceration they had been worried about sexual exploitation in prison. Moreover, it was something that was mentioned to them by others. Discussing the lead up to his imprisonment Charlie said:

> At that time I got to see who my friends were. I dropped a few people especially when it came to the prison thing, for some of them it almost became like a big joke, it's like yeah, *'you're going to go to prison you're going to take it up the arse',* all this kind of stuff, or *'you'll never survive'*. All this stuff that they'd seen on the television, and it used to really piss me off because I'd think, you don't know what you're talking about, this is for real, this isn't like some kind of joke, so I dropped a few people after that.

There are several elements in the myth that prison rape is endemic, including that sexual violence, in this context, has become something to be joked about, not taken seriously. Mason (2006c) argues that cultural depictions of prison rape are about spectacle and entertainment rather than examples of violence and inhumanity. Moreover, the idea that prison rape is endemic raises issues of homophobia, negating the idea that there may be consensual sexual relations in prisons and demanding an appropriately masculinised response to the 'risk' of rape. The need to have a 'front' or a 'mask' in order to perform an appropriately masculine role was discussed by a number of the men (Jewkes 2005, 2012b).

Danny has been in prison once, for offences relating to supply of Class A drugs and fraud, for which he received a three year prison sentence. He was heavily involved in the rave culture of the late 1980s and early 1990s and talked about how when he was dealing he would look around a club and think: 'I'm responsible for everyone loving each other man'. Dealing in ecstasy and cocaine, he had a particular view of his offending which he argued did not involve traditional perspectives of victimization; either of himself, as someone caught up in selling drugs, or of those he served up to. During the first visit from his parents, it became apparent that his mum knew a notorious London criminal whose son was in the same prison as Danny; on this basis Danny was told he would be 'looked after' by the son. Danny discussed the visit:

> You have to send out visiting orders for people to come and visit you so my mum and dad are sitting there and I'm in bits, there's these little tables and I'm crying my eyes out, I didn't want my mum and dad to be ashamed of me really, but it was the first time that they clocked how much trouble I was getting into. And for me, that was a thing. Anyway I'm sat there crying, and you know Mad Dog Frankie Fraser? Well my mum used to be a bit of a girl in Soho back in her day, so my mum's sitting there and Frankie Fraser's come in and his son's doing three years for all this cannabis and stuff, and he's a couple of tables down, and Frankie Fraser's going 'Nancy, Nancy', and my mum's looked up and they're saying hello and all that and she says about me being in prison and he says his son is too. Anyway, that's the only words that are exchanged. I ask her how she knows him and she tells me the story after that visit.

> So when this visit finishes I get strip searched because of the nature of my conviction, so anyway, I got strip searched, put my clothes back on and Frankie Fraser's son, Dave Fraser, also had to get strip searched cos he was there for a lot of hash, whether he was innocent or guilty I don't know. I had to wait outside and get marched by the screws back to the wing you were in. Dave Fraser's there and said *'my dad's told me to keep an eye on you'* and I'm like 'really?' he goes *'yeah, he knows your mum or*

something' so I'm 'yeah, probably, I don't know the history'; well it weren't til later that she told me what had happened.

So he's going to keep an eye on me and I'm like what does that mean? So he kind of takes me under his wing then, like, so I felt like I was safe. But it turned out to be that he was a bit of a batty boy and he wanted to get my arse.

So we're now about two months roughly into my sentence. Cos I've got long hair people are calling me Shirley, because I got long hair and I didn't want to get it cut. Up until I found out he was a batty boy I was hanging out with this white crew.

On rejecting the protection from the white prisoners on the basis of the belief that one of them was gay, Danny shifted allegiances to his black cellmate Elroy and started to regularly use the gym. Penological research is increasingly recognising the importance of masculinity, and it has been suggested that prisons harbour a culture of aggressiveness and violence, extreme competitiveness, homophobia, and a climate of fear (Jewkes 2005). The role that prison rape plays in creating this environment is a moot point.

Although Danny did not make this link, his story continued:

So then Elroy was taking me to the gym. The first time I went to the gym, his bench press partner Jess, who was even bigger than Elroy, not as well cut but massive, and they're kind of bench pressing this massive weight, around about 160-180 kilogrammes, like two and a half of me. They've now taken off all the weights, and they've let go of the bar and it's on my chest and I can't get it off, the whole gym is black, there's only a couple of really hard white geezers in it, '*honky white boy can't fucking take it, pussy'*. They're all pissing themselves laughing, whilst I'm dying with my chest being crushed, Elroy and Jess just about manage to get it together enough, wiping the tears from their eyes to take this weight off me. Anyway we're walking back down [to the cell] and Elroy's having a go at me, as we go into our cell he's taking the piss out of me. But then the next day he goes '*you coming to the gym then honky?*'

I went down and kind of got into the gym with the same geezers and we'd do some squats where you have the bar on your back and bend down and stand up and it's all about your legs that's all it is. And I out-squatted this Jess geezer cos my legs were solid, I was doing 60 miles a day on the bike [as a bike courier], pretty fit, so they called me pigeon legs though it was the only strong part of my body back then. I got really big splits in my muscles, though you couldn't do any cardio because you couldn't walk any distance anywhere and the exercise yard was still scary so I didn't want to go out there at all, so it's all about bulking up. And when you are in the cell you'd turn the single bed on its end so you've got a single bar, do loads of push ups so your chest starts getting massive and your lats [back muscles] start to develop and it's about being big, you're in prison, it's about being big. It was fear, and the environment, and also there's fuck all else to do so you might as well go to the gym and get fit. I used to find it kind of funny cos when I came out of prison I was the biggest I'd ever been, the muscliest and I swore to god that I was going to keep it up but I came out and started smoking weed again and I thought fuck that.

After hearing Danny's story, and on re-reading the transcript of the interview, I was left wondering if there was a connection between concerns about prison rape, largely based on media representations of a prison system outside of their own culture, and the focus on the prisoner body, the need to be bigger than you have ever been.[39] The pumped up prisoner body could not only be a signifier for the ability to fight off any unwarranted attention, but is also a physical manifestation of masculinity in a prisoner society that refers to men by women's names if their hair is not short (an interesting situation given that prison authorities had historically enforced the cutting of prisoners' hair on entry into prison), and where friendship groups are altered on the basis of someone's perceived sexuality. The myth of endemic prison rape may therefore have a number of impacts well beyond fear of

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[39] See Evans and Wallace (2007) for discussion of masculinities in prisoners' narratives and the idea of the 'big' prisoner body.

imprisonment. Furthermore, Danny was not alone in mentioning the bodily changes that prison helped foster. Bobby, Jason and Hector all discussed this masculinisation process of increasing their body mass whilst they were in prison.

5.5   Prisoners are pampered

One of the common themes in the literature on media representations of prisons is that prisoners are pampered, and prisoners' rights take priority over victims' rights (Jewkes 2006, 2007; Mason 2006a; Mayr and Machin 2012). Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, the novelist Charles Dickens had voiced a number of complaints about prisons, including that conditions in prison were better than those endured by the honest poor[40] (Carrabine 2012). Colin had a relatively straightforward take on this myth. Rather than believing that prisoners are pampered his perception was that prisons were largely made up of people like himself: the poor, the homeless, those who had experienced oppression and discrimination in society. Such a view is in fact supported by research on prisoners. 'Many prisoners have experienced a lifetime of social exclusion' stated a Social Exclusion Unit (2002: 6) report which went onto list a range of factors that supported this view such as high rates of being in care and high levels of unemployment and mental health problems amongst the prisoner population.

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[40] Such a view continues to persist.

Colin set his lifetime involvement with prisons in the context of a system that had failed him as a child. In and out of children's homes, he said he had a brutal, abusive and violent upbringing from those who were supposed to care and look after him. By 16 he was in borstal and the violence that he had experienced as a victim would become part of the 'downward spiral in my life as I went on to repeat that violence'. Prison would remain an intimate part of his life until in his late forties Colin was sent to prison for life for the murder of his ex-wife. To a greater or lesser extent, much of what Colin said about his life, and the experiences of poverty, deprivation and abuse, and how prison was symbiotic with this, was also mentioned by Abdi, Charlie, Craig, Hector, Jason, Nathaniel, and Richard.[41]

Abdi's father was abusive and violent towards him when he was growing up and he spent periods of time in foster care before ending up living in temporary accommodation at the age of 15. Soon he was drinking heavily and by 19 he was living on the streets. He returned to Social Services for support but was told there was nothing they could do now that he was over 18 years of age. Abdi's first illicit drug use was crack-cocaine and before long he was stealing from shops: 'so you'd go in and pick up the stuff, give it to the dealer, he'd give you some rocks and you'd go and sit down and have a smoke'. Abdi frequently got caught shoplifting and due to not having an address would be refused bail. He faced the courts on a number of occasions before receiving his

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[41] See Wacquant (2009) for further discussion of the relationship between poverty and prison.

first custodial sentence of three months. Knowing that Abdi was homeless and 'fed up with seeing me so much' the magistrate told Abdi that he needed to go to prison to get help.

During this time Abdi talked about being utterly desperate:

> All this time I was just feeling really bad, really down, sometimes I was thinking I should just end this life, I felt very, very bad. A couple of people I know overdosed on drugs, some killed themselves you know. I wasn't taking heroin, but they were injecting themselves, and these were young people and most of them, they were in care you know, they'd been taken from their families, but they were left in the city with really bad problems, it was very, very bad, very sad.

Abdi said at this point he did not care what happened to him, including being sent to prison. Whilst he was in prison someone did come to see him about his housing, saying they would return to speak to him again, but they never did, and six weeks after arriving in prison Abdi was released back on to the streets again. Unsurprisingly, it was not long before Abdi was back before the courts and convicted of shoplifting again, and he was back to prison. Again he was released with no place to stay. Although Abdi did not use drugs in prison 'you need money to use', each time he was released without support or help and returned to the same situation of homelessness and drug use. It was not until a further conviction and probation involvement that, rather than getting a prison sentence, he received a community sentence that would tackle his drug use, a Drug Rehabilitation Requirement. With a community

sentence he said he was now able to formally tackle his drug use, and was finally in accommodation, although this was not permanent.

Another of the men, Jason, said in relation to people's intentions about release from prison:

> I emerged, almost everyone in fact, apart from maybe one or two sad people, usually elderly, who are so institutionalized that they can't function outside the jail and all they want to do is something that will get them back, but 99 per cent of people coming out of prison would say I don't want to go back. Nobody comes out and says, that was alright, can't wait to get back. You leave prison saying that you don't want to go back, but then it's what's happening out of prison, that is where the attention ought to be.

A number of the men were familiar with the idea that in-cell television, access to a gym and education were frequently construed as making prison like a holiday camp for pampered prisoners. This has been a strong element in the discourse that prisoners are pampered. Reporting on the announcement in April 2013 that there would be changes to the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme[42] focused on how such changes might see the end of holiday camp prisons. *The Sun's* headline was: 'We'll axe holiday camp perks in jail so lazy lags must work for privileges'. For the *Express* it was: 'Time to get tough on holiday camp prisons'. In a more critical report in *The Independent* the announcement was referred to as: 'A party political broadcast by the Tories: Prison's like a holiday camp'.

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[42] Incentives and earned privileges (IEP) schemes in prison are designed to encourage good behaviour and challenge misbehaviour. Schemes generally have three levels and the basic level is the most austere.

Phil had an interesting take on this comparison:

> You hear analogies to prisons and holiday camps and in between my two sentences I did have the misfortune to go to a holiday camp on a few occasions and there are some genuine comparisons to be made…
>
> Unbeknownst to me, and with no consultation I have to say, I discovered that we were booked in for a week at *Butlins* in Clacton. As soon as we turned up, and I looked at what was before me, I thought this don't half remind me of somewhere, what with the fence, Checkpoint Charlie, men in uniforms. Of course the fence was there, not to keep those outside from coming in, it was to stop those inside getting out and spending their money elsewhere!
>
> The reason I say the comparisons are very valuable was because the architecture was almost identical, the ethos was the same in that you go through the door and this is where you leave your decision-making process, this is where you leave your responsibilities, because once you step through this, decisions are taken for you. This will be where you will be at a particular point, do this, do that: it is an institution, it runs like an institution. The two things are also working class institutions; you don't get the wealthy and well to do going to *Butlins* for their holidays.
>
> I discovered the year after, when once more unto the breach, that recidivism is also quite high at Billy Butlins.

Although Phil makes a number of (quite compelling) comparisons between holiday camps and prisons, it is not on the institutionalizing effects of holiday camps that the media generally concentrate.

Charlie discussed sharing his cell with someone he felt clearly had mental health problems. The incessant chatter of his cell-mate frustrated and irritated Charlie including the man's comment that prison was a holiday camp: 'they're right, it is a holiday camp isn't it, it is a holiday' he had told Charlie.

Charlie's view was somewhat different:

> I felt a bit for him because he had mental health problems, he clearly did. Things like using the toilet and still talking to you, and masturbating, and you'd be coughing and saying 'what you doing?' and he'd still carry on doing it. Fucking hell, there were days you'd be thinking how do you do that?

> If you talk to the mad prisoners or the tabloids it's a holiday camp. But it always amazes me when people say that, what kind of holiday camp exists where you are locked up for 20 hours a day? What sort of holiday camp do you walk around constantly on edge that people are going to be violent? Do you go to holiday camps to get bullied? Do you go to holiday camps to be locked up in a small space? I don't think so. To me that's warped thinking, I think it's mentally ill when these papers write that, they know exactly what they're doing, they're just fuelling people. Cos they are educated people that write for *The Mail* and *The Sun* they've been to Oxford and Eton, they know what they are doing.

5.6   Prison protects the public

A common myth is that prisoners are dangerous and incarceration of these dangerous 'others' protects the public. Former Home Secretary, Michael Howard, encapsulated this idea when he famously said:

> 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... This may mean that more people will go to prison. I do not flinch from that. We shall no longer judge the success of our system of justice by a fall in our prison population.
> (Howard, M. (1993) Conservative Party Conference. Cited in *The Guardian* 8th August 2004)

Howard state that prison protects us from 'murderers, muggers and rapists' – three criminal constructions certain to cause most alarm and fear amongst society and an excellent way of 'othering' prisoners – but,

importantly, this idea is connected with a policy shift that embraces increases in the prison population, as opposed to seeing this as a mark of societal failure.

There appears to be little consistent evidence to support the contention that prison reduces crime (National Audit Office 2010). If reoffending rates are to be used as a measure for protecting the public then according to official statistics prison has a poor record on this. Nearly half of those who are released from custody go on to reoffend (Ministry of Justice 2013b).[43] Despite this, and the dominant but contradictory mainstream narratives that prisoners are pampered, security lax and that prison is not a punishment, the view that prisons hold dangerous even monstrous individuals and therefore society is protected from them whilst they are in prison remains. Yet official statistics show that nearly three-quarters of serving prison sentences have not committed violence against the person offences (Ministry of Justice 2013c).

Although in a minority, a significant number of men who were part of this research had committed violent offences including murder, and several had committed what would be termed serious offences regarding Class A drugs, such as dealing or importation. Of the 15 men, the sentence range was from three months up to life. It would therefore seem commonsense to accept that prison helps to protect 'us' the public, from 'them' the offender. Yet, this apparent truism appeared not

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[43] Although reoffending figures should be treated with caution as complex analysis on frequency and type of offending is seldom offered in these statistics.

to be the case. The majority of the men had been in prison more than once. A small number of the men were unable to remember how many times they had been in prison it had been so many, including Colin who had served a life sentence. Craig predicted that he was likely to end up back inside prison again. In addition, the actual enactment of the punishment appeared to have a counter-productive impact on a number of the men's perceptions of justice and fairness and they hinted, or sometimes explicitly stated, that being sent to prison had made it more, rather than less, likely that they would commit crime. Moses had been sent to prison for his first offence of Actual Bodily Harm (ABH). He had been found guilty and received a prison sentence for something he felt did not deserve such a harsh penalty. Being made an 'ex-prisoner', and all that is associated with that identity, meant, he said, that he might as well do something more serious so that it seemed worthwhile going to prison. Paul, who had committed a serious violent offence at the age of 16, does not believe that prison should be used for children at all. He discussed how on transfer to prison from a local authority secure home he had been terrified, too scared to come out of his cell for weeks. Andy argued that his prison sentence had a largely detrimental effect on his life, ruining his chances of pursuing the career he had hoped for.

Danny, who was charged with drug dealing, continued to deal whilst he was on bail. He reported that this led one of his friends (who had never been in prison) to state that he was impressed with Danny as his ongoing dealing showed that he had not been 'beaten' by the system. Danny also discussed how being sent to prison altered the nature of the relationship with his parents. Originally Danny had kept his imprisonment a secret from his parents. Somewhat estranged, and

having spent periods of his life travelling and working abroad, he hoped he would be able to serve his prison sentence without them finding out about his sentence. Within months, however, they had found out and came to visit him.

He got a surprising response from them. Danny said:

> This visit was pretty heart wrenching really, there was no pretence as a son anymore it was very real, a bit of a relief and I think quite a moving thing for my mum and dad. It was like all of a sudden I was a bit of a bad geezer, now they saw me as a man. I was only 20 when I got nicked, but I think things had changed somehow, power had shifted.

The connections between masculinity, being a 'bit of a bad geezer… a man' is made explicit here. It was in fact, Danny's arrival into prison that led to this shift in power and what he believed to be his parents revised view of him as a son who was moving towards manhood, a process marked by his incarceration. This can also be linked to a number of the men's stories already discussed in relation to them becoming the embodiment of manliness: physically bigger and stronger than they had been on the outside.

Charlie is strongly committed to restorative justice and believes that imprisonment makes society less, rather than more, safe. He works part-time in a prison matching community mentors with serving prisoners to aid the resettlement process when someone is released. In 1993 Charlie had attended an anti British National Party (BNP) demonstration in south London. This was an area of significant tension due, in part, to the recent election of a BNP councillor; racist attacks –

including that of Stephen Lawrence,[44] and the location where the BNP had their headquarters. There were a number of violent clashes between the police and the protestors that day as the march was prevented from going past the 'bookshop' that operated as the BNP's HQ. Charlie had been hit over the head and punched in the stomach by the police. As another police surge took place he picked up a brick and threw it at the police line.

Although the brick did not hit anyone, a few months later Charlie was at home with his mum and a neighbour watching *Crime Monthly,* a television programme investigating crime, when footage of the demonstration was shown and requests made for information to be forthcoming about those who were seen throwing things. One of the images was clearly of Charlie.

He performed the incident:

> My mum's Irish and our next-door neighbour was West Indian, so when they saw me on *Crime Monthly* my next door neighbour went [does West Indian accent] *'oh god Charlie boy you better run boy, run into the country'*. And my mum [does Irish accent] *'Oh bejesus I told you not to go on that demonstration but you never listen to me, hail Mary full of grace, the lord is holy. I've spoken to Jesus and you're not going to prison. Now go to sleep and we'll talk about it in the morning'.* I was like oh my god is this some kind of dark comedy, or is this for real?

Charlie said that he was a peaceful person but that the presence of the BNP headquarters in an area of racial tension, hearing Auschwitz survivors talking on the day of the demonstration about the need to

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[44] Stephen Lawrence was murdered in 1993 in a racist attack.

fight fascism, and the police's 'brutality' had made him boil over with anger. During the two years he waited before sentence Charlie suffered a mental breakdown and was suicidal.

> The experience for me, I would say, was that prison was never as bad as my headspace was. My headspace took me into a prison that was much worse than the actual physical thing of prison.

During this period Charlie undertook voluntary work in a home for people with disabilities and met a policewoman who had been paralysed during a different demonstration.

> That really hit home, it was really powerful. Someone had got a concrete block and smashed it over her spine and left her paralysed, and she had to use this special machine to communicate.
>
> I remember asking [why she had joined the police], she said she wanted to help people and I asked her 'do you hate the people that have done this to you?' and she wrote in *'no, there's too much hate in the world'* and I never forgot that, that's amazing, to have those feelings, because that's forgiveness, the language of forgiveness, and I thought that's really powerful. And in some ways you know, even since then it's helped me to see some sense of humanity around police officers because before then I didn't see any, I saw them as like storm troopers or racists I just didn't see any humanity in them because they hadn't shown me any humanity or dignity so I couldn't see any. But when I heard her talk, I thought bloody hell, for you to be in that space, with what they've done to you, I'd understand if you hated the people that had done that. Sadly now, the thing that makes me sad, I probably wouldn't be allowed to volunteer in some of those places [because of his conviction] and yet the experience made a huge difference to me because then I started to see a sense of humanity, and not see all police officers as violent racists, which I had up to that point, because that's what I saw and witnessed that day.

On arriving into prison Charlie described the 'civic death' (Goffman 1968/1986) of the admissions process: prison rules were stated,

fingerprints and photographs were taken, then the 'worst aspect of it was being stripped, having to show them my foreskin, for me it was just abuse really'.

Charlie served half of his 16 months sentence and returned back home. On reflecting back, over a decade after his conviction and release, he said that he did not think that he should have gone to prison. Having been attacked by the police, he suggested an alternative solution: 'I don't look for any of them [the police] to have gone to prison, but I would like to sit down and talk to them and I think if we lived in a more civilised society we could have sat down and they could have opened up and been slightly honest'. Recalling a recent question from somebody about whether he had forgiven himself for what had happened he said that it had never entered his head that he needed to forgive himself, he did not feel bad about the 'offence' as no-one had been hurt. In fact rather than prison protecting the public from dangerous and violent offenders Charlie concluded that:

> They were sending me into prison for violence. That's what they said, I was a violent man; well they've sent me in somewhere that is violent. Man, I survived in some ways *by* violence, the thing they were sending me to prison for.

5.7   Prison security is lax

This particular myth connects a number of the other prison myths. For example, if prison security is lax then the public is not protected as

dangerous offenders can escape. Poor security is down to prisoners being pampered, their human rights being prioritised over prison rules so that prison has become more like a holiday camp than a punishment. Inside prison it is prisoners who rules the roost, able to commit acts of violence and rape against each other, use drugs, access mobile telephones, and continue to indulge in anti-social and criminal behaviour.

In reality, escapes from prison are relatively rare;[45] although the story of the prison escape is a well established one. Prison escape features in films such as *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* and *Papillon,* which was based on a true story, as was *Catch Me If You Can*. The American television series *Prison Break* which ran for four years (2005-2009) was about two brothers; one sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit, the other plotting to help his brother escape. Moreover, a number of high profile escapes such as that of Ronnie Biggs (events of the train robbery he was involved in were also made into the film *Buster*; whilst *Mrs Biggs,* a TV drama in 2012 depicted his prison escape and his family's attempts to evade capture); by Soviet spy George Blake; and members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) have also attracted a great deal of media attention. One of the men reported that whilst he was in prison an escape had in fact happened. Although the prison was said to be 'paranoid about escapes', one New Year someone got onto the

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[45] Although a number of high-profile escapes have occurred, perhaps most notoriously, the escape by helicopter from Gartree prison in 1987.

roof and escaped. The prisoners, it was said, could not have been more made up for the man.

References to prison security in the men's narratives were rather mixed. A number of prisoners said that access to drugs in prison was relatively easy, particularly cannabis, however, others said that the prisons they were in had no apparent drug use at all.[46] Jason said: 'people say it's easy to get drugs in prison but it's not'. The general view of the men was that prison staff tolerated some drug use. A number of the men discussed their own breaches of prison security including drug use in prison, making hooch, and having mobile telephones. Richard managed to get a mobile telephone into prison but was caught and shipped back to a higher security prison. Although he had been relatively high up a large criminal network he noted that the days when a helicopter would go in and get people out were 'well gone'.

If anything, it was the concentration on security and risk management in prison that caused the men the most anger and frustration. Paul, Craig, Jason, Colin, Richard and Hector all served past their Earliest Date of Release (EDR). Paul, who had so meticulously calculated his time in prison, including the millionth minute, used his parole date as his date of release, yet he would be refused parole. Paul was furious at a decision that he said was based on a report from a probation officer who did not visit him, and a psychologist who made assumptions about

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[46] See Crewe 2005, 2007a, 2009, 2012 for discussion on drugs in prisons.

him following a range of psychometric tests rather than meaningful discussion and interaction. This is an example of the 'psychological power' Crewe (2009: 117) refers to as an increasingly important element in the 'path towards freedom'.

Hector had been in prison four times. His most recent sentence was for drug importation for which he received an eight-year sentence. He said: 'I just thought to myself I'm going to get it done and be out of here in four years, all I was looking for was my parole. Everyone's like *'don't get your hopes up high'*, but I thought no, I'm getting my four and then out, cos I need to see my son'. In the end he would serve nearly five and a half years. Colin, who received a life sentence, failed on his various attempts at appeal and served 15 years.

A small number of the men suggested that rather than prison security being lax, it was prison officers' decisions to turn a blind eye to drug use, bullying and violence, and some corrupt officers who caused the most problems. Richard remained convinced that there was corruption at the large local prison he had been sent to. Moses also mentioned the same prison as being particularly corrupt, especially in comparison with another prison he went to during his sentence.

> I was taken to Brixton prison for about two months, it is shit, it really is, it's a shithole. Their way of doing things is so, so unorganised, there's so much corruption there, I mean it's officers that sell drugs and phones in the prison, do you understand? Most of the local prisons in London are known for it and they're supposed to be pretty stringent when it comes to

security and stuff like that but it's shocking, what you see in there is shocking. It's like I can completely say you're more likely to get drugs in there than out here. Basically, what it is you're looking at, is the ways visitors are getting searched, you're looking at the way you're getting searched, doing squats and all sorts, naked and what not, so you're seeing things and you're like, what I've just seen from the search they can't have this much contraband being brought into the prison with that, do you understand?

There's got to be an inside job. Someone's just blatantly selling it to people, cos I won't lie to you, there's one phone to every cell, one phone for every cell, my room-mate had two phones, he had two phones, he had about ten women on the go when he was inside, always kept on phoning them every ten minutes just to see how they were and stuff like that. He wasn't really a smoker, but if you wanted to smoke drugs then you could get it easily through him. The guy next door, he was a cleaner, he was on enhanced level so basically his behaviour's outstanding etc. etc., and he's standing there smoking drugs every day, every morning when he's mopping the floor, smoking weed when he's mopping the floor, actually out on the landings.

It's just, it's just shocking, really. Really shocking, cos you think the officers are there to fucking, there to maintain some sort of law, some sort of fairness but they're just as bad as some of the prisoners in there to tell you the truth, you with me? So it was crazy, it was nuts, it was nuts, and after that, after you been to Brixton and you go to other prisons, it's pretty relaxed to tell you the truth.

The issue that it was not security that was lax, but that prison officers colluded with breaches of security, or put prisoners at risk, was also discussed by Paul who had been in prison when Zahid Mubarek was murdered in Feltham YOI. Although he did not know either Mubarek or Robert Stewart, the perpetrator, Paul said that Feltham had felt very unsafe. He was not surprised that there were allegations that prison staff had deliberately placed Mubarek and Stewart in the same cell, and

discussed how, in the days before the incident, the prison had shown the film *Romper Stomper* about neo-Nazi violence.[47]

5.8   Prison is not punishment

Linked to the myth that prisoners are pampered is that incarceration does not operate as a punishment, but is a 'soft option'. In this popular understanding, prisons are insufficiently hard and fail to inflict sufficient pain. For example, in the first newspaper interview given by Chris Grayling after he had become Minister for Justice, it was reported in the *Daily Mail* that: 'Life will be made harder for criminals in and out of prison to rebuild shattered public confidence in the justice system'. Prisons would no longer be places that prisoners 'enjoy'.

The myth that prison is not punishment contrasts with the vast majority of prison research. Well over fifty years ago, Sykes (1958) wrote about how prisons were infused with a strong power dynamic where certain prisoners were co-opted by staff to aid their control of inmates. Furthermore, imprisonment was about deprivation, the pains of imprisonment which included the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relations, autonomy and security.

Even those men who had been in and out of prison on more than one occasion did not suggest that prison failed to punish them. Prison had caused all of them some form of pain or distress. In some instances it

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[47] Also discussed in the Inquiry report following the murder of Mubarek (Keith 2006).

precipitated self-harm, led to suicidal thoughts or some form of mental breakdown. Despite the view that prison does not operate to sufficiently punish prisoners there were over 23,000 recorded incidents of self-harm in the year up to September 2012, with nearly a quarter occurring in the first month of custody. Although women in prison have particularly high rates of self-harm, men account for 70 per cent of such incidents (Ministry of Justice 2013d). And, whereas 6 per cent of the general population report having ever attempted suicide, 21 per cent of male prisoners have (Ministry of Justice 2013e). Men who have recently been released from prison are also eight times more likely to commit suicide than the general population (Pratt et al. 2006).

Paul discussed how a prison officer who thought Paul had sworn at him threatened him with violence. Seventeen years of age, and 'stick thin' on arrival into prison, Paul was petrified of being the target of bullies. Paul showed me the diary he kept during his sentence.

This was not a diary in the sense of noting down events of the day but a way of marking time served:

> We used to get these diaries every year from the chapel, so I kind of would cross off each day, and then I'd have how many days I'd served and how many days I'd got left, going down to my parole day. I mean I'm ok at maths but it was just something I'd do, I've got the weeks as well at the top.
>
> Oh, and there's my one millionth minute, 4.50pm 27 May 2001, and then I've written 'tell a lie' because I'm slightly out, and reworked it, and put the hour down to the next day because I'd marked my first day as day one but it's day zero. That was after

99 weeks. People were saying to me not to do it as it [the prison sentence] will take you even longer, and they were probably quite right. It probably did take longer because of it... I couldn't help myself: I did it automatically.

On transferring to his fourth prison Paul experienced extreme bullying on the wing where he was housed. He talked about how the bullies were given a 'free rein', got enhanced status, and dealt with anyone who 'got out of line'. It was during this part of his sentence that Paul experienced a breakdown.

That was probably the worst of my entire time in prison. I was spending a lot of time locked up in my cell and not going out. For a good month and a half I refused to go out on association. It sounds terrible now, but I think there was this stage of, a period of three weeks, when I didn't have a shower, you know. I was getting really depressed. I was writing a lot, good stuff not bad stuff, no violence or anything, some stories, a diary, but as I wasn't going out of my cell there wasn't really very much to report!

I was doing lots of maths, lots of technical drawing, I had rulers and pencils and was doing Escher style technical stuff, so I'd try and do impossible shapes and actually they were pretty good but I had just so long, just sitting there, to do it...

I'd been paranoid for a few weeks, like really paranoid, I'd stay up really late, so all the noise would die down and I wouldn't be able to hear anyone or anything from outside. I'd imagine, I thought that they were trying to section me mentally. So my whole paranoia was about that, I think for a while I had a concern that they had a remote controlled car to creep up outside the door and then somehow fix a listening device on it so they could hear behind the door, you know just stupid stuff like that. I was also quite paranoid about the guards, that if one of them reacted differently to me, if they were in a mood or whatever and snapped at me, I'd be like, why is he being like that to me today, he was alright yesterday, what's been said to him? I kind of thought there was more going on than what I saw. I remember one of them [prison officer] was quite good generally, but I had a cell inspection one day, and I was really good with my cell inspections my cell was always immaculate. I cleaned my cell and waited about two hours for him to come round. I just

happened to have a shit because I'd been waiting so long and he came in and he starts shouting at me because there are poo stains in my toilet, but I had to go do a shit and that kind of threw me cos he was one of my preferred guards.

And then I guess it was in a few days, or a week after that, I might have written it somewhere, [looks up diary] 14th June 2003 I've written PS for paranoid schizophrenia...

I kept my head down and didn't get noticed. I had a few friends but made myself unavailable, although I think part of that was the paranoia, the possible episode of paranoid schizophrenia. I just got really paranoid that they were going to... like getting the last bit of evidence on me for sectioning and so the only thing I can really clearly remember is that there were some holes in the wall where screws had been holding up mirrors something like that, maybe six or seven, so I was putting my ear up to them listening out for noise, I was listening really hard trying to work out if there was a listening device in them and I couldn't work out if I was talking aloud or if I was talking in my head, but then I was thinking maybe they can hear me anyway even if it is in my head. When I was aware I was talking out loud I'd try to whisper really quietly. I got toothpaste and started filling up all the holes with the toothpaste and that was when I was thinking to myself, this is really, really mental behaviour, but then there was this other part of me thinking that it's necessary, I need to do it. I'm not going to stop thinking about it until I do it, because I'd have just kept thinking about it.

I was just really depressed after that, when I kind of recovered from it, like the next day I was crying about it and I thought, I've been in prison for months, I've got another year and a half to get through, and there's no guarantee that this madness is not going to happen again.

The impact of incarceration is clearly set out by Paul as he outlines his descent into paranoia; moreover, in this small vignette we also face Paul's indignity. Not only does he have to use an in-cell toilet but can be humiliated about using it just before a long-awaited inspection happens. Although prisoners can assert some form of resistance, this story is about loss of power (and mind) rather than an assertion of power or control. It also brings to mind Žižek's assertion that as soon as

we come into too close proximity with the law it turns into an obscene and abhorrent monstrosity. Or, as Kearney (2003: 96) suggests, it is in contact with the law that 'the human subject finds itself obliterated in a sort of Kafkaesque confusion of sublime proportions'.

Richard had been in prison twice, receiving a six-year sentence on both occasions. Referring back to the first prison sentence he talked about the devastation he had seen prison create:

> The thing is that you have to remain upbeat, if you start to let the situation get you down you'll succumb to various different components of being dehumanised because that's what it is, if you succumb to that sort of pressure it literally will dehumanise you, it will break you.
>
> So the trick is not to let them break you, have some discipline, some structure in your life, something constructive that you will get out. Unfortunately, I've seen a lot of people in fairly short periods of time, prison has broken them, they've become institutionalized, withdrawn, isolated, the very fabric of what they were before they went to prison, they're a shadow of themselves, they don't even interact with their family or their friends.

On Richard's second prison sentence however, he had a mental breakdown and was sectioned under the Mental Health Act (1983). He served the remainder of his sentence in secure hospital, and, was at the time of the interview, living in a hostel for people with severe mental health problems. Richard has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and says that he hears voices '24/7'.

The men discussed a range of experiences that they had in prison including: self-harming, being bullied, emotional and mental anguish, mental breakdowns, escalating drug use, suicidal thoughts, the murder of a prisoner by another prisoner,[48] prison officers assaulting prisoners, violence between prisoners, and aggressive demands for money or other goods. With this litany of pain it is difficult to think what further punishments we would want to extract from our prisons.

5.9   Conclusion

Incarceration provides a concrete illustration of issues relating to power, inequality, order and conflict; and prisons are a potent symbol of the State's power to control. Inside and outside prison, various myths exist which both shape and construct prisoner identities and wider society's understanding of prisons and prisoners. Prisons are unique organisations, however, the uses we make of them, and the conditions we consider acceptable within them, provide clues to society's views and values, and ideas about identity and meaning that go well beyond the prison walls. Foucault (1977/1991) showed that the practices of punishment reflect the dominant forms of social and political control and involve the power to threaten, coerce and suppress. He also cultivated a deep suspicion towards claims that contemporary society had humanised these new forms of punishment by abandoning corporal

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[48] Paul was in Feltham young offender institution when Zahid Mubarek was killed by his cell-mate.

brutality in favour of a prison system that controls the time and movements of prisoners and operates to 'transform' (or render docile) the individual.

Research on prisons and the impact of imprisonment has been one of the richest areas of study within criminology. The vast majority of penological research paints a rather depressing picture of pains, mortifications, poor conditions, high levels of violence, and the illegitimate use of power and authority. This is an environment that cultivates ill-health, danger and damage.[49] And yet this is not the popular understanding of imprisonment. As we build more prisons to house ever more prisoners, the austere, centrally positioned prison building of the Victorian era has receded from view, replaced by non-descript buildings on the borders of cities and towns. In this physical distancing process, prisons, what they are about and who they contain have also, figuratively, been pushed to the borders of understanding. Fiddler (2007) argues that the location of punishment is in retreat and that in this space a place-myth has been created. Rather than the reality of imprisonment, it is media portrayals of prison that people are most familiar with. A characteristic feature of these mediated representations of imprisonment involves the demonization of prisoners to a monstrous 'other', and associated with this is an indifference to their suffering, and a distorted understanding of their experiences (Jewkes 2007).

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[49] Although as Crewe (2012: 36) asserts 'warmth, humour and kindness' may also be found.

Popular understanding of the term myth is that it is a word used to describe something we are deceived and deluded by. This understanding of myth is what Barthes (1957/1972) wished to draw attention to; that some stories that myths tell seem to describe the way things are, when in fact they describe things that have been made to be. There are some myths that are illusions, just as there are some myths that illuminate. By analysing the literature regarding media representations of prisons, a typology of prison myths was developed and these concepts were explored as they appeared in the men's narratives. These counter narratives shine a light onto the taken-for-granted cultural processes involved in the punishment paradigm adding to our knowledge and understanding about crime, punishment and justice.

The first myth was that prison rape is endemic. This belief was particularly evident in their expectations of what prison might be like; this was drawn from media depictions of prisons as places where sexual violence was endemic. In relation to this myth, I suggested that largely misplaced concerns about prison rape may help contribute to a culture within male prisons which constructs (and limits) ways of being a man within the prison environment, for example, contributing to the bodily changes of increased body mass.

The second myth that prisoners are pampered was challenged by a number of the men who described early life experiences that were

extremely damaging, involving abuse, neglect and violence. In this instance, prison appeared almost as a continuation of these negative life experiences. This was reminiscent of Wacquant's (2009) work in North America where, he argues, there has been a programme to penalise poverty and that prison should be regarded less as a technique for law enforcement and more as a political institution of control. Elements of this myth were debated in the men's narratives. Phil for example, suggested that the oft referred to nature of prisons as holiday camps stood up to a reasonable level of scrutiny; staff in uniforms, perimeter fences, a lack of autonomy, and both prisons and holiday camps were, he argued, working class institutions. However, it is not these features that the media seeks to bring to mind when referring to prisons as holiday camps. Use of the analogy of the prison as a holiday camp is instead one that creates a perception that prison is easy, you can do what you want, and luxuries that we on the outside might struggle to attain are freely available to those who have done wrong.

The myth that prison protects the public from those who are dangerous was questioned in a number of the counter narratives. Many of the men had been in prison on several occasions; and official statistics appear to suggest that, with high levels of recidivism, prison does not achieve one of its key aims of helping prisoners lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release (Ministry of Justice 2011). Rather than protecting the public, some of the men said that their prison sentence increased their risk of offending in the future, or made it more

attractive to commit a serious offence. Others discussed their on-going offending throughout the criminal justice process. A number of the men talked about the impact of a prison sentence on their future employment prospects and how lack of work and money could increase the likelihood of returning to crime. Others did not believe that they were dangerous, or that the offences for which they had been imprisoned caused any significant harm in society. Some queried the appropriateness of being sent to a place of violence if their behaviour was to be transformed on release.

The myth that prison security is lax is supported by the numerous cultural renditions of prison escapes. In reality prison escapes are rare, although one of the men had been in prison when an escape had occurred. In terms of security inside of the prison establishment, a rather mixed view was gathered, with a number of men discussing their own breaches of security, and, at times, of the ease of accessing drugs and mobile telephones. Risk management and risk aversion were seen as major concerns by the prison, with many of the men serving well past their Earliest Date of Release. Prison officers were the focus of most negative attention from the men in terms of alleged corruption, ignoring bullying and violence, or indeed precipitating violent infractions. Whilst external security to prevent escapes was largely intact, a number of the men felt insecure and unsafe whilst they were inside prison.

The final myth was that prison is not regarded as a sufficiently harsh punishment and the pain we expect from a prison sentence is not realised. A number of the men, however, discussed situations in prison that were extremely painful; these included instances of self-harm, mental breakdown, bullying and violence.

One of the important findings in this chapter was that despite the apparent fascination with all things prison related in the media, and the frisson of fear created by vicarious proximity to the monstrous 'other', the experience of imprisonment is not one that is made more transparent, meaningful or understandable by media coverage. Mason (2006a) found that not only are media representations of prison distorted, there is little reporting of prisons, and significant silences from those who have most to tell us about the experience. If we do not hear these stories then we cannot understand or develop empathy about these other lives. In addition, we do not have to explain ourselves and our perceptions about crime, punishment and justice as no counter narrative is offered. Prison myths therefore distort and stereotype those who have been in prison, whilst silence about imprisonment makes them alien and unknown. The magical power of narrative fails to ignite if a narrative goes untold. It is in the silent representational space about prison and prisoners that the monstrous ex-prisoner 'other' is crafted. It is necessary therefore to fill this space with the voices of those who can offer us new theories and insights about prisons and justice. Without their stories, the culture of the prison remains

unknown.[50] Simultaneously, we should seek to dissolve the types of prison myths considered here, which operate to depoliticize, simplify, naturalise and falsify the prison experience (Foucault 1981; Barthes 1957/1972).

5.10   Summary

Having provided a brief overview of the literature on representations of prison and its symbolic value in wider society, this chapter utilised a five-fold typology of prison myths to analyse the men's narratives about imprisonment. This framework was developed out of the work of Jewkes (2007, 2011) and Mason (2003, 2006a, 2006b) who have written extensively on media representations of prison. This typology provided the framework for my analysis and included the prison myths that: prison rape is endemic, prisoners are pampered, prison protects the public, prison security is lax, and prison does not punish. The Barthesian meaning of myth as 'ideological abuse' was adopted to expose some of the fallacies on which popular understandings of imprisonment are based.

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[50] I would also include research on prison officers, see for example Crawley (2004, 2006).

Chapter Six   **Life After Prison: trickster, shapeshifter and metamorphosis**

It's like you have to be one thing to probation, another to your mates, god knows what you got to be to get a job.
(Jason)

We may require a theoretical framework and a set of methods for study that can admit multiplicity, conflict, and even contradiction in the structure of the self, including the storied self… Life stories can be used in the study-of-lives tradition without the assumption of a definitive or single story line, and hence without assuming a singularity of identity or even selfhood.
(Raggatt, 2006: 17)

And all the little monsters said in a chorus:
You must kiss us.
What! You who are evil,
Ugly and uncivil.
You who are cruel,
Afraid and needy,
Uncouth and seedy.

Yes moody and greedy.
Yes, you must bless us.

But the evil you do,
The endless ado.
Why bless you?
You are composed of such shameless stuff.

Because, said the monsters, beginning to laugh,
Because, they said, cheering up.
You might as well. You are part of us.
(Suniti Namjoshi 1994 *The Ubiquitous Lout*)

6.1   Introduction

If story is a chronological sequence of events involving entities, and

narrative discourse is the telling, or presenting of the story, then it soon

became clear that the men's stories reached a point in their telling where their identity as ex-prisoners was one that was complex, contradictory and challenging. One of the early conclusions that I reached was that contradiction and complexity was inherent in most of the men's narratives. This led me to consider that rather than achieving an integrated sense of self, identity construction is a far more complex process; it involves multiple other narratives and may remain unfinished.

> Textual negotiations work like intertextual polyphonies, and meaning production cannot but refer to its own interdiscursive nature, and to a new approach of referentiality whereby the word and its meaning prove necessarily mediated by *other* voices.
> (Chivite de Leon 2010: ix)

As discussed in the methodology chapter, Raggatt's (2006) and McAdams' (1993) ideas come from opposing ontological places – with McAdams believing life story or narrative serves to make a meaningful, cohesive sense of identity; whilst for Raggatt, in contrast, life stories are an expression of different, multiple and potentially conflicting aspects of the self. Nonetheless, both McAdams' conceptual framework and Raggatt's theoretical and methodological assumptions offer useful ways of analysing narratives. Furthermore, there is some shared learning that can be made from each. For example, although McAdams' ontological position is of narrative as a function of integrated identity, the concept of imagoes can be used to explore contradiction and conflict in identity rather than coherence. Both also lend themselves to

intertextual analysis; Raggatt's assumptions sit well within a post-structuralist approach, whilst McAdams' concept of imagoes, where people adopt opposing types from popular culture, echoes intertextual analysis regarding the presence of texts in other texts, or the mimetic function of storytelling as imaginative redescription. Following extensive re-reading of the transcripts of the interviews, as suggested by Gilligan et al. (1988), distinct themes within the narratives emerged. The themes and imagoes referred to by McAdams came to light and in these, it was clear, as Raggatt posits, that identity is dispersed in a moral landscape and is defined by often conflicting narratives. Identity in these readings is neither singular nor integrated, but involves drawing out the nuances of narratives' meanings, in a specific cultural context. This chimes with the idea of 'masterplots' (Porter Abbott 2008). From this perspective, culture is a complex weave of numerous, conflicting masterplots. Porter Abbott also discusses the concept of 'skeletal' stories, belonging to cultures and individuals, which play a powerful role in questions of identity, values, and the understanding of life. Again, the concept of masterplots and skeletal stories can be connected to intertextual analysis, as these stories are influenced by the culture in which they are told.

With these ideas in mind, I read and re-read (and re-read!) the interviews. An idea began to slowly emerge and started to take shape. This was that the contradictory stories, the multiple identities, and the practical problems faced by ex-prisoners could be analysed through the

concept of mutable identities. Mythology had shaped the men's existence in terms of popular cultural references to outlaws, and in terms of their prison experiences where dominant discourses, or myths, about prisons and prisoners significantly impacted on them; affecting their mental and emotional wellbeing, their friendships both inside and outside prisons; and even their physicality. In thinking about their lives post-imprisonment a number of mythical tropes – all related to mutable identities – emerged from their life stories.

6.2   Mutable identities: trickster, shapeshifter and metamorphosis

The idea that identity can undergo a range of changes through shapeshifting, metamorphosis or trickster figures, has been central to classical and other mythological stories, and runs counter to notions of unique individual integrity of identity (Warner 2002). Many great myths recall that the self is never secure in itself (Kearney 2003). There are numerous connections between the archetypes of mutable identity, and the terms to describe mutability are frequently used interchangeably; however, some nuances in these definitions are worth pursuing in analysis of ex-prisoners' identities. In mythology, the trickster role is one of rule-breaking, ambiguity, deception, sacredness and lewdness. The shapeshifter moves between identities and has little control over these changes, whilst metamorphosis brings about an abrupt change, or reveal, and involves some sort of transformation (Clute and Grant 1997; Garry and El-Shamy 2005; Warner 2002).

This section considers three mythological archetypes that involve mutable identities and each has links with the other, but by looking at the trickster, the shapeshifter, and metamorphosis, we can begin to understand the ways in which ex-prisoners struggle but also find ways to manage their identity. In order to do this, firstly I explore the trickster figure. This is a complex mythological character who serves many purposes and has many facets. In this instance I look at the trickster in regards to the role that ex-prisoners have to play in managing a spoiled identity when they are seeking to be accepted back into society. Moses' story is used to demonstrate that this can become a meaningless process when it is felt that the criminal justice system has operated in a way that is discriminatory and unjust. Moses felt that he had to deceive people, trick them into believing that he felt remorse and guilt for an offence that he regarded as self-defence. Needless to say this situation made Moses angry. An important point here is that he did not feel that he was getting away with anything by doing this – but that he was being forced to play the trickster role in order to survive. Having been let down by the criminal justice system, Moses viewed his punishment as overly punitive, and, in reality, more damaging and dangerous as options in terms of housing, education and employment became increasingly restricted to him. At the point of interview, he continued to play the criminal justice game that demanded remorse and admission of guilt.

As Warner (2003: 461-462) has said:

> Apology is a new political enthusiasm: especially when it concerns the sins of the past; it unites two different forms of speech, both of them deeply intertwined with ideas about self-examination, and self-disclosure, with, in short, ways of remembering oneself: a theological and sacramental language of repentance and atonement, on the one hand, and on the other, the psychoanalytic practice of the 'talking cure'.

Listening to Moses' story I could not help but think that many more setbacks could lead him down a different path.[51] The ex-prisoner identity is one that makes a productive and fulfilling life more difficult to lead, a situation that is borne out in the high reoffending rates amongst ex-prisoners (Ministry of Justice 2011).

Moses believed that the assignation of the ex-prisoner identity on him was utterly unjustified. In this instance, there was little regret or remorse about the crime, but a belief that the ex-prisoner identity was one that had been forced upon him and that he must appear appropriately remorseful in order to progress, both through the criminal justice system as well as in life outside, such as during job interviews. These ideas were echoed by a number of the other men, particularly around parole decisions and about probation supervision, where they said it was like they were forced to play a particular role (of apology, self-examination, and disclosure)[52] in order to meet a pre-existing cultural script for offenders.

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[51] Recently I have found out that unable to find a job or secure a place at university Moses has returned to Eritrea.
[52] As Warner (2003) suggested.

The trickster is closely associated with situation aversion – altering his identity in order to facilitate deception. In this reading of the ex-prisoner identity, the men had to 'trick' others into believing some aspect of their ex-prisoner identity appropriately met the requirements that we have of offenders: of apology, of guilt, of remorse and of shame. Moses spoke at length about shame and remorse but this was to do with the situation he was in, rather than the offence he had committed. Moses felt that he had been mistreated and discriminated against, and that justice had not been served by his punishment. He described the offence as one of self-defence: out for an evening with a friend, the friend had bumped into a woman he knew who was out with her partner. The woman and Moses' friend were speaking in Tigrinya, an Eritrean language that the boyfriend could not understand; however it was apparent that the two were getting into an argument. Realising this, the boyfriend started to hit Moses' friend, he got him to the floor and started kicking him. Moses went to separate the two men from fighting; he picked his friend up so they could get away. The man who had been hitting his friend came up to hit Moses. As his friend shouted out to warn him Moses turned around and hit the victim. Hitting him once, but wearing a ring, he had caused greater harm than he had expected.

In a number of cultures, the trickster and the culture-hero are combined, for example the Native American trickster is at once the scorned outsider and the culture-hero (Ellis 1993). This feature of

trickster mythology can also be found in Moses' narrative where he positions himself as someone who had been trying to help a friend who is being attacked, yet, ultimately ends up as an outcast from society when he is imprisoned for hitting someone.

According to *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy,* shapeshifting is the preferred term to describe: 'those who change shape (and for the act of thus changing shape) *repeatedly* and *reversibly*' (Clute and Grant 1997: 858). The italics are from the original, and draw attention to the key features I wish to explore in relation to considering the mythology of the shapeshifter and the identity of the ex-prisoner. The process is transformative, but transformations for the shapeshifter are ongoing, moving constantly backwards and forwards. So, with this reading, the ex-prisoner can be a bundle of selves in a single person; for example he can be the bad boy who conned people out of money, and now the remorseful ex-offender who has changed their life around; now, the person who does not want people to know he was in prison, and still simultaneously, can use his ex-prisoner identity to further his career. By adopting shafeshifting mythology to consider ex-prisoners' identities, the contradictions, multiple identities and problems experienced can be more fully examined. Rather than viewing these narratives as lacking authenticity, what the prism of shapeshifting does is clarify that at any one time, we can all have multiple identities, some of which appear directly oppositional to the other. The concept of shapeshifting is used to consider how a number of the men discussed feeling constantly

judged because of their offending history and believed that they were unable to wholly escape this.

For the shapeshifter, there is no dominant identity; instead there are many masks to be worn, many masterplots and skeletal stories to be explored. In this analysis I turn to Andy's story. Shapeshifting appeared to be a feature of much of Andy's life, including his early upbringing. Brought up in a Greek Cypriot household, Andy referred to the problems caused by being raised in a family that held highly traditional views about how children should be brought up, punishment and gender roles. He discussed how his own expectation growing up had been that he would marry a woman who was a virgin, despite his own early engagement with sex and his desire to make girls and women fall in love with him by being 'the best shag they'd had'. Hegemonic masculinity was required whereby emotions were rarely discussed and boys were expected to be tough – an issue possibly confounded by there being three sons in his immediate family unit. Andy achieved hegemonic masculinity with relative ease, meeting the expectations of both his family, and, as he grew up, also his friends, most of whom were drawn from his immediate location in North London which he described as being largely working class – who also held traditional values around gender in particular.

With a strong work ethic, a manually demanding job running a successful roofing company, and also maintaining sexual success, Andy

on many measures could be perceived as representing working class, hegemonic masculinity. Alongside this, Andy from an early age was regarded as something of a troublemaker at school; he had little interest in academic achievement, and would go on to be involved in an array of offences some of which were violent, others financial.

Not long before his arrest Andy talked about his life as seemingly spiralling out of control, excessive risk-taking and an almost inevitable journey into prison. Yet, rather than confirming the masculine status that one might expect; arrest, conviction and imprisonment led to fundamental changes in Andy's life. He got married to a woman who had a child from a previous relationship, started to study and went into therapy. His life started to turn around as he confronted some of the entrenched familial issues he had grown up with and moved away – both physically and figuratively – from the working class community he had inhabited. And yet, the pull and the influence of those early experiences, and his status as an ex-prisoner, have to be managed; something that Andy does by shapeshifting. He has not turned his back on many of the friends or expectations that he grew up with. Despite now achieving a doctorate, he occasionally still does roofing. Post-imprisonment he continues to battle with his shapeshifting identity, not only in regards to being an ex-prisoner, but in terms of class position also.

The final aspect to be examined is that of metamorphosis. In this instance I use the concept of metamorphosis as one of personal transformation (Warner 2002). Metamorphosis, in terms of the ex-prisoner identity, involves the subversion of the masterplot of the spoiled identity of offender and ex-prisoner, and as this identity becomes but a shadow plot, in its place emerges the transformed offender, the man who has made good, learned from his mistakes and turned his life around.

The mythical concept of metamorphosis fits most closely with the existing criminological literature, particularly around desistance. It can also be found in a number of prisoner autobiographies (James 2005; Leech 1993; McVicar 2000), as well as being a core part in the mission of reform organisations, and even recent government policy in regards to the 'rehabilitation revolution' with its intention to reform criminals by 'turning them away from a life of crime' (Ministry of Justice 2010: 8). This, then, is a dominant discourse in our particular culture. Analysis of metamorphosis mythology and ex-prisoner identity is based on the offender recognising that they have done wrong and trying to find ways of making good; the key theme is of personal transformation.

The concept of metamorphosis is also the most longstanding and culturally compelling of all the shapeshifting myths, and can be traced back to Ovid's poem *Metamorphoses* completed in 8 CE. In Ovid, metamorphosis often breaks out in moments of crisis (Warner 2002).

In contrast to shapeshifting, which involves repeated identity shifts and reversibility, metamorphosis, in this analysis, is about the attainment of a new masterplot, the achievement of a new identity.[53] Whereas the trickster and shapeshifter may have to play with many masks and use different masks for different occasions, the mask is singular and largely stable in the metamorphosed identity. There has been a complete change in form or nature (in much the same way that Gregor Samsa is transformed from a man into an insect-like creature in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*)*.* This idea is explored through Butch's narrative. Butch had embraced outlaw mythology, and offending and imprisonment had remained features in his life up until he was in his 40s. His story involved drug use, unemployment and crime, plus, he had experienced several deaths of people close to him, two of which he felt a sense of culpability for. The first involved a direct sense of responsibility, having given a friend the heroin that he would overdose from. The second death related to both drug use and being a biker; Butch and a friend were riding their motorbikes dangerously whilst high on drugs; losing control of his bike, his friend had come off at a roundabout; worried that he would get caught Butch had continued driving. When he went to his friend's house later that night he was to discover that the friend had died. On his last time in prison, Butch experienced what he described as a 'conversion'. He began meditating, gave up alcohol and drugs, became

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[53] These mythological archetypes can inform our understanding of ex-prisoner identity. It is perhaps, though, the requirement of complete transformation (metamorphosis) that is made most of those who have been incarcerated.

a vegetarian, and transformed his life from long-term offender to reformed character.

These are not neat categories and some of the men moved between these ideas, feeling at some points that they had 'made good', then at others that they were pulling the wool over people's eyes. The mythology of the trickster, of shapeshifting, and of metamorphosis appeared to be something of an ongoing feature in all of the men's lives. The three stories presented here set out to demonstrate how ex-prisoners deal with their lives following imprisonment, and how their experiences pass through a web of common images which are grounded in ideas about destiny and origin, about what they can achieve and how. By using mythology in this way, we can start to decode the ex-prisoner experience in new ways. Moreover, the mythological literature abounds with readings of the 'other', and we can therefore connect some of these understandings with the process of dehumanisation that ex-prisoners endure (Sutherland 2006). First, however, I use some of these ideas to explore contradiction and confusion more fully in the men's narratives, and connect this with critical criminology's suggestion that as contradiction is inherent in human relationships, we should value it rather than hide and ignore it.

6.3   Contradictory personae

Contradiction is a core feature in trickster and shapeshifter mythology. Tricksters and shapeshifters can both assume an array of contradictory personae in the course of a single narrative, and move from one to the other with a skill that says more about ever-changing identities, evolving forms, and mutability than it does about a fixed, unique identity, or indeed about deception and lies (Ellis 1993). The exploration of contradiction through the concept of these mythological stories is useful given that, according to Carlen (2002), if critical criminology is to flourish, there is a need to recognise, and indeed 'cherish', the contradictory nature of human experience. Moreover, this is particularly the case in research involving ex-prisoners whose identity as law-breakers leads to concerns being raised about the veracity of the stories they tell (Nellis 2012).

Most of the men's stories exhibited some elements of contradiction. For example, Craig discussed his high moral standing, whilst also saying that he 'deserved' the five year prison sentence he received which led to the breakup of his relationship with the mother of his, as then, unborn child. Colin, who had committed murder, and had, even before receiving a life sentence, been in prison so many times he could not remember, was furious that his release came at a time in his life that he considered himself to be old, yet also admitted that little else could have been done than give him a life sentence, which nonetheless he had sought to

appeal. He felt institutionalized but still sought the institution of sheltered housing, which he believed would provide a stable setting for the remainder of his life. The stories the men told did not provide clear or concise answers but were contradictory and complex.

Nathaniel had been in prison once for an offence of Actual Bodily Harm. For Nathaniel, as for a number of the other men interviewed, there was a huge ambivalence about the street status attained because of their criminality and the desire to be free of the requirements and expectations of such a reputation. He simultaneously liked the idea of being a 'ghetto superstar' but equally appreciated the anonymity of living in a location where he had no status. In Nathaniel's case there was also significant dissonance between the offence for which he had been imprisoned and his own upbringing.

Nathaniel spoke at length about the difficult life he had growing up, of the father who left him and his mother, and the stepfather who brought him up, but who subjected him to 'beats constantly, like through the whole of my life'. The violence he was subjected to at the hands of his family caused him great distress, and being told to leave the familial home at 17 was the turning point for his descent into crime.

Following his custodial sentence Nathaniel spent a period of time in therapy, recounting the impact that this had on him, he said:

> Things with my parents now, they're all good. Like, since I got out of jail I've hardly argued with them at all. I've spoken to them on the phone about being really angry with my step-dad and real dad. I spoke to them in a way that they'll never forget. Like I told my dad I'd never put my hand on my kids the way that you did to me. You messed up my whole life, you don't want to know but you did, you really messed up my life; at the end of the day you raised me to be the man that I am, you raised me to be the way that I am, and this is it, it's not just my fault, you've got to take responsibility as well.

Yet, less than an hour before, Nathaniel told me that the offence he had been imprisoned for had been Actual Bodily Harm against his two-year-old daughter.

At the initial stage of the research, such contradictory and confusing expressions of identity made me question the purpose of the study and what it was I was trying to achieve. Nathaniel's story is one of neglect, abandonment and violence at the hands of his parents. He holds his stepfather to account in regards to the deeply negative impact that such regular violence had on him. Yet, despite the upset and shame apparent as Nathaniel recounted the offence against his daughter, the connection between his behaviour and his stepfather's is not made. Indeed he says he would 'never' put his hand on his children in the way that was done to him, although it is clear that this is exactly what he did.

In the quest for meaning we should not however, dismiss such statements out of hand. Any understandings of the human experience are likely to be beset with contradictions and complexity, and these should not be ignored, as they are an intrinsic part of all human stories. An individual can feel pride in the street status of their gang membership *and* revel in the calm provided by being unknown; feel shame for hurting a child *and* anger at being hurt whilst a child them self. Contradictions are as fruitful sites of analysis and exploration as commonalities and themes have traditionally been. Moreover, in the telling of Nathaniel's story, the inadequacy of the simple binary of the victim/offender dyad is recognised; and a far more complex identity dynamic, which most incarcerated people inhabit, is highlighted.

Drawing on the mythology of the trickster, shapeshifter and metamorphosis allows us to explore the deeper and unstable, contradictory and ambiguous elements in the men's stories, to 'cherish' them. These are experiences that demonstrate that – as with mythological figures – multiplicity, conflict and contradiction are intrinsic to our understandings of the ex-prisoner identity, and should not be ignored or simply viewed as an example of the lack of faith we should have in the 'truthfulness' of such stories.

6.4   Trickster

In almost every mythology a trickster can be found. They can be cunning or foolish or indeed both; tricksters, like many ex-prisoners, are also notorious boundary breakers. Analysis of the trickster mythology itself has an interesting story. One of the classic texts in Native American studies is Paul Radin's 1957 book *The Trickster: A Study in Native American Mythology*, which was in reality a collaborative effort between Radin, a cultural anthropologist; Karl Kerényi, who studied Greek mythology and Carl Jung, the analytical psychologist, who provided psychological interpretations of trickster myths. Jung concluded that the trickster equates with the collective shadow, the dark part of society's psyche and consists of feelings of guilt and fear. In Jung's view of mythology the imaginaries of such tales serve a positive, life-affirming end. In mythology we recognise and integrate ourselves. The true subjects of mythology in Jungian analysis are the archetypes themselves: myths do not symbolize but are symbolized (Segal 1987). The study of mythology has, therefore, been undertaken from a diverse range of perspectives including psychology (Jung 1957), anthropology (Radin 1957, Lévi-Strauss 1957), cultural studies and semiotics (Barthes 1957/1972), and literature (Warner 1994, 2002).

Using Hynes' (1993) heuristic guide to mapping the characteristics of tricksters, it is possible to identify correlations between offenders and ex-prisoners' experiences with the characteristics used to craft

tricksters. Drawing on a diverse selection of trickster stories, Hynes (1993) sets out a typology of characteristics common across all trickster archetypes and these are used to explore Moses' story about life following release from prison.

Moses was 24 years old and had been out of prison for a year. He had been found guilty of Actual Bodily Harm and received a two-year prison sentence, reduced to 18 months on appeal. This was his first offence. He saw the incident as one of self-defence as the victim had been beating up one of his friends. Moses was keen to pursue a career in social work and had applied to a number of universities to progress this aim. He had, however, been rejected by all the universities he had applied to because, after declaring his conviction, he was told he was unable to do the course due to the placements he could be involved in. This was despite the fact that prior to prison he had worked with a number of vulnerable groups in the community, and immediately before being sent to prison was working with young people involved in gangs. He said:

> You come out [of prison] and you realise that a lot of doors are shut to you and it's difficult to open them, and that's what frustrates people, and I think that's what drives people to reoffend… it's a kick in the teeth but you got to go on, you can either breakdown, or you can just keep on trying.

Moses had decided to keep on trying, but he felt that at times he had to deceive the system just to be given a chance.

One of the strands in Hynes' typology is that tricksters have fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personalities. For Lévi-Strauss (1978), the trickster epitomizes binary oppositions, although for Hynes this does not fully capture the essence of the trickster, who is more than a binary distinction. A key component of this strand is that the trickster appears on the edge, or just beyond, existing borders: 'the trickster is cast as an 'out' person, and his activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order' (Hynes 1993: 34). All ex-prisoners fall within the scope of this characteristic;[54] having been exiled from society during imprisonment, many remain at the boundaries of acceptable society even on release.

Other elements of the trickster identified by Hynes include being a deceiver and trick-player: the trickster causes disruptions and improprieties. They may experience misfortunes and therefore lie, cheat and deceive, although this is not necessarily deliberate. The trickster is also a situation-inverter; they can turn a bad situation into a good one, and vice versa. Developing the idea from Lévi-Strauss, Hynes argues that the trickster is a sacred and lewd bricoleur, a tinker or fixer who transforms anything at hand for a creative solution. Finally, the trickster acts as a messenger, bringing gifts that are essential to human culture. All these aspects can be seen in Moses' story.

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[54] As discussed in chapter 4, it is also the case that some offenders embrace this type of identity.

Moses had been out of prison for about a year and was living in an ex-offender hostel that he shared with a number of other young men, a situation that he did not like. He discussed the impact that his conviction had already had on him and the ongoing consequences of this particularly in relation to work, study and accommodation. Moses said he had been aware that although prison was a 'shithole', it was about afterwards, the coming out of prison that would be the hardest part. Initially Moses had disclosed his conviction on job application forms, however, he never got invited to interview. He therefore stopped doing this and decided that he would disclose at the end of the process instead. He was then successful at two job interviews; however, each job offer was withdrawn once he told them about his conviction. Moses therefore sought advice about how to get employment and how to disclose his conviction. He was advised that this should be explained at the point of interview in order to outline the circumstances himself, face-to-face, or to write a letter about his situation that could be given to potential employers. He said: 'I wrote that letter. Rather than saying I got a conviction for this, it's like why don't you read this letter and then you'd understand it's not just a conviction for ABH. It's *my* story, my personal thing, do you understand?'

He went on to say:

> I was upset that I was in that situation and between me and you, yes what I had done was wrong in the eyes of the law… but deep down I thought what I did was right, I was protecting myself, I was merely protecting myself. Yes I can say I regretted it, but deep down I knew that what I did was genuine, it wasn't because

I wanted to hurt the person you know, in any way do anything bad to the person, it was basically just an act of self- defence, but in the eyes of the law and obviously the witnesses [there weren't any], there's no evidence etc. etc. they've basically done what they've had to do.

It's like a taboo, it's like you don't want to talk about it, you want to delete it because you know that, you know what you've done, you know your situation, and you can live with that and not be too hard on yourself, however, you don't know that someone else might magnify it ten times worse and that's the problem…

Yeah it's like I said to you that deep down I thought that what I did, I felt I did the right thing for myself, do you understand? It's because I'm going to protect myself. However, to the public because they think I've committed such a horrific offence I have to come across as if I regret it wholeheartedly and that I have so much remorse and that I won't do it again, and it was completely out of character etc. etc. and I even added [in the letter] that it was probably due to the fact that I was drinking and that I'd actually stopped drinking to negate that problem. So you know it's things like that you know. That letter, maybe you could say I'm trying to trick the system, but then the system don't give you a chance anyway so you need to get as much advantage as you can, are you with me?

The more I say it was self-defence, it was this, it was that, the more they think he hasn't learnt from his mistake sort of thing. So I'm telling you, if it happened again, I'd do it again I just hope the situation would be different, because I'm not going to let somebody run up to me and hit me for no reason.

I have to show them that I think I was wrong and I won't do it again and show remorse even though like I say deep down I don't regret it, I don't regret what I did to him I regret the injuries that he sustained and the situation in general, but if you was to say, you know some people say I can't live with myself, I can't believe I did this, I can't believe I did that, well I'm at peace with myself to tell you the truth, I just think I was unlucky.

Moses' story demonstrates many of the features of the mythical trickster archetype. He has an ambiguous and anomalous personality. Through his ex-prisoner status, he has been forced to continue to live

his life on the margins, in an ex-offender hostel and as someone who is unemployed and struggling to find work. However, Moses retains his desire to work, to study and to find somewhere more appropriate to live. During the interview his whole demeanour changed in the telling of his story. At the outset of the interview he came across as quiet, even shy, he was measured and detailed in his storytelling. When the story moved onto imprisonment and life on release he came across more forcibly, when discussing the offence he hit his own hand to demonstrate the punch. The frustration, and even anger about the prison sentence bubbled up to the surface, it was as if he himself saw that although part of his personae was a quiet, measured and thoughtful young man, this would now never be viewed as the full story and the label of violence would be attached to him for some time.

Moses concluded that the only viable option open to him was to 'trick the system' if he was to be given a fair chance. If he was to state what he really thought – that the offence was an act of self-defence, and that if he was in the same situation he would probably do the same thing again – does not fit with the dominant myth of transformation and reformation that is demanded of those we punish.

In terms of situation inversion, Moses was in a relatively good situation prior to his conviction; he was in work, in a relationship, and had housing. Excluding the relationship, all else was lost to him when he went into prison. Following incarceration, Moses was in a relatively

poor situation. However, he continued to try and make the best of things, to apply for work and courses, and to seek better accommodation. This he did even if it required that other element of the trickster, the bricoleur, where a creative solution is sought. Moreover, although Moses made no suggestion that his story was a message to others, or that his story tells us something essential about human culture, in analysis, these aspects of the trickster mythology can be detected. His story is a message; it is a message about punishment and about the enactment of justice.

As someone of Eritrean heritage, his story could be about how the criminal justice system discriminates against minority ethnic young men. Not least, Moses' story is one of the enactment of State power through the processes of punishment, about the devastating consequences of such power, and of how meanings of justice are not fixed and understood but fluid. In addition, as Moses states, a less safe society could be created when someone feels that justice has not been served: 'there's a part of you that thinks if you are going to be in prison you might as well have done something big'. This view was shared by a number of the men; for example, Hector said: 'Prison just made me want to do more crime, it was like I was more rebelling, I'd done prison now and it's nothing. Plus when I came out I was also bigger [physically]'.

6.5   Shapeshifter

Among the best known of mythological shapeshifters are werewolves:[55] a trope of horror because the shift is not voluntary but seen as a curse, a bondage. The lack of control over their ex-prisoner identity was critical for all of the men interviewed. Although they recognised that there was often much to gain in having an outlaw identity, in terms of status, sexual attractiveness, and practical gains due to their criminal activity, this rarely translated onto their ex-prisoner selves. And, whereas voluntary shapeshifting offers broad vistas of wish-fulfilment, the bondage of being given an identity that one has not chosen can be 'horrifying'. Shapeshifting was woven in and out of Andy's story, which had a number of shapeshifting references throughout the text. Talking about his childhood, he discussed how his Greek Cypriot parents had tried to bring him and his brothers up in a 'particular way, with particular values, that are sort of Greek culture'. This, he referred to as being quite medieval, and that there had been a 'culture clash' between his parents, who were 'strict' and 'traditional', and the parents of his English friends. Home life and street life were delineated and many of the demands of home were set against the life he wanted to live whilst growing up.

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[55] Other mythological shapeshifters include the Chinese fox women, and, in Islamic folklore, the jinn. Vampires are however, probably the most famous shapeshifters of all. The vampire myth is especially interesting in terms of intertextual analysis, given that the ability to shapeshift into bat form seems to have fed back from fiction into reality after the vampire bat was so named in the 18th century (Clute and Grant 1997).

This duality was also evident in Andy's early working life. He asserted that, like his parents, he had a very strong work ethic, which meant that from the age of 11 he was not only doing a paper round like many other children, but that in addition, he worked as a cleaner in offices. Later he became a successful roofer, but it was during this time that more endemic offending took place – although crime had been a feature of his early life also. Andy considered his own struggles with why crime had become part of his story, especially because as a roofer, and running his own company, he was making plenty of money. In fact, by 18 years of age, Andy had bought his own flat. Alongside being a successful businessman, Andy was, nonetheless, already involved in a multitude of offences including credit card fraud, fighting, football hooliganism, and car crimes. This did not mean that he would provide a poor service to his roofing customers; on the contrary, he asserted that he would 'never stitch anyone up' through the company, and that most of his work was through recommendation and repeat customers. He took pride in his work and wanted to do a good job for those who paid him, although tax fraud was also a strand in his criminality. This work ethic continued post imprisonment to the point of going to university to do a degree, then a Master's programme, before successfully completing a PhD.

Andy's identity is torn between his working class, second generation immigrant, offending roots and the middle class, high educational achievement and stable family man that he has become. Managing this was particularly difficult as Andy was concerned that neighbours and

friends of his family would find out about his past - something that is relatively likely as he establishes himself in a new academic career and as someone actively involved in UNLOCK, the National Association of Reformed Offenders. Shapeshifting for Andy was, then, something that he was skilled at, and on discussing this concept he immediately understood what it meant in regards to his own identity. Despite all that he had achieved, and the fact that he had been out of prison for 14 years, Andy has not been able to pursue his chosen career as a psychologist because of his criminal conviction of intent to supply Class A drugs, for which he had received a three year prison sentence. Due to this, he has been forced to transfer his attention to criminology, where his offending past offers something of interest. He said:

> I've spoken to a lot of other offenders about this and the fucking stigma's there whether you like it or not, and you can't get away from it. Now if I was a roofer it wouldn't really matter would it, it gives you a bit of kudos.

He immediately recognised that this was not, however, the full story: 'although saying that, a few people in this environment [academic] think it's impressive you know'. Although he argued that the negatives outweighed the positives, he referred to using the ex-offender label as a 'commodity': 'on some days it's a bit of kudos to be an ex-offender, on other days you want to keep it away with a barge pole'. When discussing where he was now, Andy said he felt that he was living in two separate worlds. Increasingly in his professional life, Andy is carving out a career that hinges very much on his ex-prisoner identity;

in his home life, no one other than some of his immediate family knows about his past. He said: 'I don't want to imagine what it will be like, but I'm aware that at some point these two separate worlds, the not knowing world and the knowing world, somehow, someone's going to find out'.

The shapeshifter is a complex, even riddling concept: it can mean having multiple selves, and multiple existences, often coexisting at the same time (Warner 2002), and this comes through strongly in Andy's story, where he explicitly states that he feels that he is living in two separate worlds. However, as Warner suggests, such stories at the same time as expressing fear, and the loss of self, entertain the possibility of metamorphosis. Andy, whose masterplot was that of a reformed offender still expressed conflicts and uncertainties, the shadow self of the ex-prisoner remained a potent identity.

6.6   Metamorphosis

The theme of personal transformation has a long mythological pedigree and can be detected not only in the work of Ovid but also Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*), and in Robert Louis Stephenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* amongst numerous others. Arguably these are the most powerful trickster figures, as they believe in their own powers of transformation, creating rituals and

disguises that can produce new identities. A metamorphosed identity has literally shifted shape.

Redemption, transformation, and 'making good' are core strands in the desistance literature. Maruna (2001), who used a narrative analytic framework in his seminal study on desistance, concluded that successful desistance from crime - the process through which people cease and refrain from offending - required a shift to a coherent, pro-social identity. Maruna (2001) also highlights the importance of the individual's role and personal agency in desistance; underlying the shift to a pro-social, non-offending identity, required the re-conceptualisation of the self. This is achieved through reconstructing one's internalised life narrative. Here, a positive conceptualisation of the self is developed as past events are reinterpreted to suit future aspirations. In his research, Maruna (2001) found that many of his study's desisters assumed generative roles, whereby they used their past experiences to help others. Importantly, participants attributed self-change to personal agency and expressed how much more meaningful their 'new' lives were.

Desistance is, then, bound up in a process by which ex-offenders come to see themselves as an essentially good person, who had previously acted in bad ways. Rather than being ashamed of their pasts, these individuals perceive their previous lives as a necessary requirement for their newfound callings, utilising the past as a means of

reconceptualising their lives, and a basis for making a contribution to society. Crucially, generative roles such as the 'wounded healer' or 'professional ex' were part of a reformed script allowing prisoners to give something back. Here, they can explain their past while also rationalising their decision to go straight. Importantly, 'making good' involved a redemptive narrative, a 'moral heroism' enabling them to overcome the immorality of their criminal pursuits, by finding new meaning in what they now considered to be otherwise shame and guilt filled pasts.[56]

The concept of metamorphosis, of transformation, has significant political, social and cultural currency. Moreover, it is something that we demand from our ex-prisoners: in fact this could be viewed as one of the great prison myths: that incarceration will achieve such a magical transformation.

Warner (2002: 26-27) has suggested that it was from the late eighteenth century onwards: 'the era of secularization, scientific inquiry, epistemological adventures in the pursuit of clear Reason' that tales of metamorphosis really proliferated. Simultaneous to people falling under the spell of mythological metamorphoses, the rise of the prison as a form of punishment was occurring in western penal systems (Foucault 1977/1991). These two events can be seen as inextricably

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[56] See also Barlow and Maruna (2012).

linked: prisons were increasingly required to create 'docile bodies' through the transformation of prisoners' minds.

Butch's life up until his early 40s was crime filled. He had been involved in a vast array of criminal behaviour including theft, burglary, violence, and armed robbery as part of a biker gang, but as the biker existence fell away he was left with a severe drug problem. Butch had used drugs from his teenage years and by his thirties was injecting heroin. On describing his first use he said:

> Wow. I had one line and the colours, sensations, yes, nirvana, I'd found it, the Holy Grail. I'd found it and I wanted more, more, more. It was powerful, blew my socks off and I was like yes, where have you been all my life darling, come to me.

However, he went on to say that:

> It's never been the same since, you might come close, and you might get different things but that's the insidiousness of it, because it gives you this glimpse of heaven and you never go there again.

Arriving in prison just before his fortieth birthday Butch went through an eight-day methadone reduction programme whilst also attending education. Instead of experiencing the normal pain of withdrawal, this time he experienced it: 'like the monkey came off my back'. His story continued:

> I was 39 right, coming up to my 40th birthday which for many people is a pivotal point in life, it's a reflective point, it's a taking stock point, and life begins at, and all that sort of stuff. And it was for me, sat in my little cell my mind had its own kind of detox

and from being in a habit, a pattern of constantly scheming and being creative, and how to add a little bit of powder into my reality, that was suddenly removed.

Although there is this assumption that there are more drugs in prison than there are on the out, sometimes that is true to an extent, but you need resources to get it. You've got to have something to trade for it and whether that's people on the outside smuggling you in lots of money or you've got lots of gold rings that you can barter with, even if you are prepared to sell your body, you know you have to trade for it, nobody comes along and gives it to you for nothing. I kind of realised that no matter how hard I thought about it there was no way I could get something to trade. Nobody was going to support me from the outside, I'd burnt all those bridges, and so it was almost like the mind said ok, we can't think about that any more we're going to have to think about something new, about something different.

And, in a solitary space, where there's not a lot happening, you automatically gravitate towards reflection and coming back to some of the traumatic and fateful incidents of your life, and the philosophy behind my mission statement, which was the Jim Morrison [lead singer of The Doors] thing 'live life fast, die young and leave a good looking corpse'. That had been my espoused philosophy up until that point, I had decided, looking back, that I didn't like the world, that I didn't like the materialistic, consumerist, boring, hypocritical world that I found myself in. So I'd do my best to create another one. But you can't do that absolutely, so the only alternative was to get out i.e. exit. Exit this life you know altogether, if it's that bad, top yourself. But that's a bit of a coward's thing suicide, possibly. The machismo says live your life hard and fast and go out in a blaze of glory, so that had been the philosophy up until that point.

And the realisation was, sat in my little cell, that I'd been doing my best to do that, drinking petrol, eating glass, getting into fights, getting shot at, getting stabbed, bike accidents, drug overdoses, I was doing everything I could for death to take me, but it didn't seem to want me. Seemed to keep throwing me back into the ring. And the other part of that was the corpse wasn't getting any prettier! So part of the mix was a reflection that I needed to rethink my mission statement, and coming up to 40 years of age, that's the time to do it...

I'm free of the gear now, when I come out of that prison gate, there's a fork in the road, I have a choice to go back to Hampshire and the old ways and the old crowd and probably succeed on the mission statement and end up like my mate, in the toilet, who'd lost his tolerance, and white light, see god you know. Or I can do

something else, and at 40 years of age you know, this thing about brain and brawn, I've earned my crust through my brawn up until this point, do I want to be doing that for the next 20 years? Until I retire? Do I want to be breaking the ice on the water, on the building sites?...

I'm on the education wing and was doing a computing course and it was something that I found I had an ability around, and it was like opening up new pathways if that makes sense. So all of this was going on and I was feeling good about myself, I didn't need brown, powder, to feel ok when I got up in the morning.

At the same time there was a spiritual awakening, in that quietness, in that reflecting bubble I kept thinking about an early lesson that I'd had at school where we were told that life was like a three-legged stool and the three legs were mind, body and spirit. This kept coming out of the void, that life was like a three legged stool, and I thought this was an interesting model, how does that apply? The extension of this was if your life is unstable one or more of the legs isn't up to it, and my stool is in the gutter, my stool's been kicked into touch, so how can I use that model? And I said to myself, I don't think it's the body because although I've done my best to abuse and destroy it, I've never had any major illnesses, I've never had any major operations, I'm fairly fit, always done fairly physical work so I don't think it's that. Is it the mind? Well I'm not thick, I can string a sentence together, I've had people say I'm reasonably articulate, I can get my head round a conversation. So I don't think it's that. So it must be the spirit, but what's that, I don't even know what that is? So I decided to investigate this concept called spirit to find out what it was and fix mine. So I started going to the prison library and there was this very small section on personal development and religion you know, and what I would do is pick a title intuitively, would zero in on something that I wanted to read about, and I started to try and understand what spirit is and how to fix it. At the same time, I started to go to the chapel; I gave my first confession in 25 years to the vicar. It was like 'you never?' 'I did', 'right, three million Hail Marys, two million Our Fathers and don't come back here again!' [laughs]. I went to a couple of AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meetings, had a chat to the Salvation Army guy when he came in with the *War Cry*. Trying to understand what the spirit was and how I could fix mine.

Now the books I read were many and varied, Islam, yoga, faith healing, colour therapy, think yourself rich, give up smoking in one easy lesson. All these kinds of different things, and there was one word, one item or concept that kept leaping out of the pages at me, and that was meditation. There would be something about meditation in each of the books and I sort of thought there's

something about this meditation lark that I need to find out about. Now, as I say, I'd made this decision and there was all this other stuff going on, but the decision was that when I came out the front door I'd get a travel warrant so I could go anywhere I liked, and London seemed to be the logical place in terms of finding out about meditation and in terms of the high support needs I would have being homeless, unemployed, witless [laughs], skint, no friends, we want to rebuild the life and London has the agencies, Hampshire doesn't. A lot of people said, you're moving to the heart of the problem, you're going to go to Sin City but I said, well I could go to John O'Groats or Lands End or live under a rock, but you know, I know, what it's like; the heroin might find me there and I've got all these other needs, housing, a job, I'm getting into this education thing because I want to learn to use this [head] rather than this [fists]. My deduction was that London was an anonymous place… I don't have to walk down the street bumping into all the old crowd and all of that sort of thing. And I actually found a hostel in one of the prison magazines that offered the chance to change.

All was not plain sailing however, following what would be his final release from prison, Butch discussed how he had located a crack house near to the hostel (or as he referred to it, 'hostile') for the homeless that he ended up in. However, despite this blip, Butch said that coming out of prison and starting a new life in London was the beginning of his new identity.

He explained:

There's a scientific, academic explanation behind some of this as well; there's a sort of road to Damascus thing, a sort of redemption aspect. You know, the cell didn't fill with white light; there wasn't an angel that said change your ways, but I do refer to it as a spiritual experience.

If you invest your identity in the physical, the role, the looks, the car, the job then you are always at risk of loss – you lose those looks, your identity goes, whereas the soul conscientious is that I can always be happy even if there's shit going on, I can be happy, I know because I've experienced that. I can be loving, even if

> people are being horrible to me, so if I identify with that, then I'm on safer ground than if I identify with the physical.

> So when I was the junkie I was literally the experience junkie, I was in the experience and that was it, I was not moving on, when I was physically removed and went into reflection I had no choice but to reflect because there was nothing else to do and it was then that things shifted. It was then that things started to happen, and from reflection I moved onto concepts, the three-legged stool, the mission statement and then onto planning, let's try that experience, ooh that was nice, that worked, let's reflect on that, yeah that's good, and then the blockage was removed and things changed.

This metamorphosis was however, not a religious one, despite using a range of religious imagery, Butch was at pains to make clear his new identity was not the result of a religious conversion.

> I'd been taught a lot of religion and it sucked. And all I could see, and I'm not saying Christianity is horrible, but my experience at that time was to be forced every Sunday to go to this draughty building, with boring grey people, saying all these stupid words, 'oh please forgive me and I won't be doing it again'. And they'd go home and do it all over again, and that's just crap, it's not for me.

Out of prison for 12 years, Butch had shifted his identity from the rock and roll iconography of the 'mythic hero' Jim Morrison (Hopkins and Sugerman 1982) with whom he had been so enamoured, and whose outlaw identity Butch had sought to share. Morrison, who died aged 27 years of age, has been mythologized in numerous books and film, and has been described as 'shamanic' (Davis 2006 ix), 'a god' (Hopkins and Sugerman 1982: vii); 'Adonis' and 'Dionysian' (Jones 1990: 9). A non-conformist and controversial character who encouraged rebellion and sexual liberation, he was: 'an acid evangelist on a suicide mission to

deprogram[me] his generation from what he saw as a prisonlike conformity to social and sexual norms' (Davis 2006: ix). This was the type of outlaw mythology that Butch had built his life around. Now reaching middle age, and long past the point that Morrison had died, Butch switched allegiances to a wholly different character.

> You know Neil from *The Young Ones* - my body is a temple and I do not abuse it or the world in which it lives - you know without being too prattish…

The transformation was therefore complete. Butch had clearly done a great deal of thinking around his identity and who he was now. Having lived all his younger life, and much of his middle-age, in the thrall of the outlaw identity, as a biker, a drug taker, and offender, in later middle-age he had metamorphosed into another archetype – the hippy, the vegetarian, the peace-maker. In the language of desistance, Butch's redemptive script was complete. In terms of metamorphosis we can see how Butch himself identifies the process he has gone through. The pull of the outlaw mythology, as embodied in Jim Morrison, has been replaced with that of a pacifist, a gentle, quiet person: a character from a comedy programme rather than the real-life 'mythic… god' of Morrison.

Regarding his identity as an ex-prisoner he said:

> Am I stereotyped for life or can I break the mould? I don't have an answer. But I am trying to break the mould, or find a different one, because the old one doesn't work. Can the leopard change its spots? Well that's not the question; it's recognising it's a leopard and not the spots. [Being an ex-prisoner] well I would

> say it's not part of my identity; it's part of my experience but it's
> not part of my identity.

6.7   Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the concept of mutable identities, where

the self is never stable has been central to many mythological stories.

The mimetic function of storytelling is particularly evident in this

analysis, as an inventive re-depiction of the world, with its submerged

meanings and patterns has come to the fore in considering various

mythological archetypes that have mutable identities. In this newly

imagined world, the impact of imprisonment on the ex-prisoner

identity has been explored through the free-play of mythic narratives,

although it should not be forgotten that these are real life experiences

(Kearney 2002). As Warner (1994) reminds us, myths, like fiction, can

tell the truth, even whilst making things up.

The path to this newly imagined world has not been a particularly easy

one to follow, but has come out of a place of confusion and concern

regarding the often complex and contradictory stories that I heard

whilst speaking to the men. However, adopting a critical approach to

the study, which challenges taken-for-granted ideas about crime, justice

and punishment, required the embracing of such contradictions and

complexities; and by embracing them new lines of inquiry, of seeing the

world and making sense of it, were opened up. It was in the process of

cherishing the contradictory personae that the men at times presented

that an intertextual understanding could be reached by considering the mythological concepts of trickster, shapeshifter and metamorphosis.

The trickster figure involves notions of ambiguity, deception, situation aversion, and rule-breaking: in Moses' story we have the dramatic depiction of a reversal of fortune that can result from a specific behaviour. Using Hynes' (1993) heuristic guide to mapping the characteristics of tricksters, I examined Moses' narrative. Moses had been employed, had housing, and was in a relationship when his life took a turn for the worse. Involved in a fight one evening he ended up convicted of Actual Bodily Harm and was sentenced to prison. On release from prison Moses had lost his employment and had been turned down for numerous jobs, was struggling to get into university, and was living in accommodation that he hated. He felt let down by the system and did not think that justice had been realised, as he perceived his offence as one of self-defence. Moses felt embarrassed, shameful and remorseful about being an ex-prisoner, but he felt that society demanded he felt these things about the offence. He discussed a letter he had prepared for potential employers and university admissions that met the requirements demanded of him in terms becoming a reformed offender: demands for confessions of guilt, apology, and changes in behaviour. He said that he was in fact tricking the system with this letter. But he believed that he had been let down by a justice system that could not deal with the complexities of his experience.

Andy's story involved extensive shapeshifting even from his early years as a young man of Greek Cypriot heritage growing up in London and as a successful businessman who was involved with several criminal networks. As an ex-prisoner, he had multiple selves all existing at the same time, and, depending on the context, he had to shift between one identity and another as he was living in two separate worlds. As with mythical shapeshifting, Andy experienced this as a form of bondage, despite creating a new career for himself and achieving a number of successes, he was denied his chosen career as a psychologist, and remains fearful that information about his past would come out in places he would rather it did not.

Stories of reform and transformation, of metamorphosis, much more than those of the trickster or shapeshifter, are the ones that academic criminology and practice-based criminal justice have been drawn towards. Moreover, the lure of metamorphosis, of moving from bad to good, is powerful and reinforced across a range of cultural, political and social landscapes. The complexity of identities that are contradictory, multi-faceted, oppositional, that are tricky and shapeshifting, have been marginalized: they remain the 'other' whilst metamorphosis, involving transformation and redemption is the far more appealing concept. Butch had, in his pre-metamorphosed existence, been an outlaw who had identified most with the Greek-god-like mythic hero Jim Morrison. After much of his life was spent at the margins, in and out of prison, Butch decided aged 40, that a new identity was required and he

metamorphosed into a non-offending, non-substance misusing, vegetarian: the hippy Neil from *The Young Ones.*

The men's counter narratives involving unstable selves, led, perhaps predictably, to myth. My attempt to understand the ex-prisoner experience has carried investigation into areas far beyond the legal, economic and personal circumstances in which the men lived. The men's stories inform and reveal the social systems and cultural norms within which the narratives were told in ways that may not have been possible if these ideas had been suppressed rather than investigated. By exploring deeper and further into the concept of mutable identities, the conflicts and uncertainties of the ex-prisoner identity have been analysed, and in doing so, the power of storytelling itself has rendered these fantastical experiences that little bit more understandable, and from understanding we get to recognition, and from recognition we may eventually achieve action.

6.8   Summary

This chapter has explored the men's lives after prison. The complex and contradictory personae evident in their narratives operated as a catalyst for analysis of the mythological notion of mutable identities, in particular the archetypes of the trickster, shapeshifter, and the concept of metamorphosis have been used to examine some of the conflicts, complexities and uncertainties in their narratives. These stories

demonstrate that the men's experiences pass through a web of common images and ideas about human existence and about what it means to be an ex-prisoner. By using mythology in this analysis, the ex-prisoner experience is opened up to new ways of understanding, and in reaching new understandings we can begin to recognise that the ex-prisoner is not a monstrous 'other'. Due to the ex-prisoner identity they have to contend with the various negative expectations and assumptions made about them. In the telling of their lives and in listening to their stories, these ex-prisoners become a little more human.

Chapter Seven   The End of the Story: reflections and conclusions

> I suppose I was interested in telling my story for other people to hear. You know what it's like when people see someone who's been in prison; they think he's just scum. They don't think or know what's behind that person, you know; you need to know the individual sort of thing.
> (Hector)

> In imagining a rock 'n' roll criminology, I would like to encourage forms of criminological research and writing that press the boundaries of convention and conformity.
> (Daly 2011: 112)

> There are nearly thirteen million people in the world. None of those people is an extra. They're all the leads of their own stories. They have to be given their due.
> (Caden Cotard *Synecdoche*)

7.1   Introduction

And so, we reach the end of the story. This story has been about justice and punishment, about how a monstrous 'other' has evolved in the space where meaningful discussion on prisons and prisoners, on justice and punishment has become ever more silent. The aim of the thesis was to maintain methodological rigour whilst artfully portraying, through the words of ex-prisoners, some of the experiences of those most affected by the criminal justice system. It is, of course, also my story, and the men's narratives and my own have become entwined. This is then a story about stories. Good life stories, we are told, 'are those that can be retold in different ways' (Kearney 2002: 45); which is true, but we should always be ready to explain, even defend, the way we choose to tell a particular story.

In this final chapter there are a number of important tasks to accomplish. First, I examine whether the aims of the thesis have been achieved and emphasise the main academic contributions. Second, I point to some limitations of the thesis and highlight areas that require further investigation. Third, I evaluate the research based on some of the suggestions that were set out in chapter two. Fourth, I revisit some of the themes and concepts explored in the men's narratives such as outlaws, mutable identities and the impact of prison myths, and suggest ways in which this story of myths and monsters contributes to abstract and theoretical notions of crime, justice and punishment. Finally, I summarise the arguments of this chapter before restating the academic contributions of the thesis.

7.2   Aims and contributions

One of the key contributions of this thesis has been to give voice to stories that are seldom heard; and in the process of doing so, humanising those who have been demonised into monstrous beings. This is a crucial point, as I argue that narrative has the power to upset existing regimes of truth and to offer new knowledge, or, as Foucault put it:

> There are monsters on the prowl whose form changes with the history of knowledge.
> (Foucault 1981: 60)

It is in the silent spaces about imprisonment and prisoners that a perverse image has been created and a monstrous 'other' allowed to form. Yet, if we allow prisoners to be heard, then new theories and counter discourses about prisons and justice will develop (Foucault 1977/1991). But there is more to this idea of allowing marginalized voices to be heard. According to a number of theorists and writers (Arendt 1958; Kearney 2002; Kristeva 2000), the chief characteristic of a human life is that it can be told as a story; it is in the transition or distance between action and narrative, from the time of experience to time enacted, that a biological life becomes a human one. 'Life is lived', Kearney (2002) tells us, but 'stories are told. And there is a sense in which the untold life is perhaps less rich than a told one' (132).

Engaging with myth, mythology and with popular cultural concepts about crime and punishment offers potentially exciting new insights for criminological analyses. Storytelling has the power to not only upset existing discourses about prisons and punishment, but to help develop new theories about prisons, crime and justice. Storytelling can create a shared sense of humanity that alters the way we think about prisons, justice and prisoners and the counter narratives of ex-prisoners open up new ways of knowing by engaging with alternative epistemologies. Life is only understood when it is told in stories, and a recounted life prises open understandings that would ordinarily be inaccessible. It is in our exposure to new stories that possibilities for social justice are opened up. Stories make possible the ethical sharing of a common

world, where individual troubles also come to be understood as public troubles (Wright Mills 1959/2000). It is these aspects of storytelling, myth and mythology that offer criminology not only reengagement with its early approaches to study but new and original understandings of collective and individual identity and the exercise of power at a distinct cultural and historical moment. Some stories alter our lives as we move from text to action. We can hitch a ride with a story as it transports us to other times and places, where we can experience things we may never actually experience in our own lives, and, at the end of the story, we may well be transformed ourselves as new knowledge about prisons, crime and justice emerges.

There are several stories in this story, the 15 men's stories, my story, and a story about stories: an intertextual loop, or the circle of the triple mimesis, to which Ricoeur (1991) refers. Mimesis is the imaginative reinterpretation that captures the essence of lives. It involves both the 'free-play of fiction *and* a responsibility to real life' (Kearney 2002: 133). This implies not only that all texts are related to each other but that each text will lie somewhere between convention and invention (Carrabine 2012). Thinking about storytelling in this way turns, inevitably, to myth, the most common form of early narrative. Kearney (2002) provides a useful discussion about the role of mythology and its historical roots. *Mythos*, in Greek, means story; the founding myths were told by people to explain themselves and to explain others. Aristotle was the first to develop a philosophical reading of storytelling,

defining it as the dramatic imitating and plotting of human action, the art of which gives us a meaningful and shareable society. Storytelling involves more than a simple mirroring of reality, it requires the art or imagination of an action. Kearney argues that myth and mimesis are essentially tied:

> Narrative thus assumes the double role of *mimesis-mythos* to offer us a newly imagined way of being in the world. And it is precisely by inviting us to see the world otherwise that we in turn experience catharsis: purgation of the emotions of pity and fear.
> (2002: 12)

Mythology can therefore help us make sense of the world, revealing the reality of power in terms of what constitutes 'truth' at any one temporal and spatial moment. Mythology retains a dynamic role in society, possibly more so than we recognise. Moreover, much of the power of contemporary understandings of mythology, or storytelling, is in their influence in relation to identity (Warner 1994). In criminology, mythology could be applied in many different ways. In this instance it has been used to explore male ex-prisoners. It could however be utilised in the study of female prisoners,[57] as well as different criminal justice workers, police work in particular comes to mind as offering potential value in using mythological analysis.

Aristotle believed that stories or myths offer up the freedom to consider all kinds of essentially unpleasant events, but that in the narration of

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[57] This is a potentially a particularly fruitful line of inquiry given that some feminist work has embraced mythological analyses and/or critiqued the patriarchal underpinnings of certain myths.

those stories, some of the harm is removed. By hearing unpalatable stories we are forced to confront the 'other', and must explain our fears, disgust, pity and vitriol. In hearing the stories of the ex-prisoner 'other', we must reflect on what demands for ever harsher penalties, greater restrictions on liberty, disenfranchisement, the denial of full human rights does – to those whom we focus these pains upon, and on us, as a society, who believe pain is the equivalent of justice. It is hoped that by presenting fragments of the men's life stories we can begin to know ourselves, and the ex-prisoner 'other', a little more. Furthermore, it is in listening to stories that empathy with others becomes possible, and by experiencing the 'other' in narrative form, a reversal in attitude may be provoked and new ways of seeing and being revealed. In telling the men's stories I hope to have created an interpretive space in which a more humanistic understanding of the incarcerated can develop.

One of the themes that I detected very early on in the research was that the men's stories, the counter narratives on which this thesis is based, were complex, conflicted, imprecise, slippery: they were contaminated. This is also true of this thesis, as various influences have shaped not just what has been written, but why a life story methodology was selected. A further aim of the thesis has therefore been to draw from, and to synthesize, a number of perspectives and theorists in order to provide novel insights about ex-prisoners. It is therefore useful to reiterate some of these key influences and explain their role in this research.

Once upon a time, in my first 'proper' job, working with women who had been released from prison or secure hospital, and then onwards for nearly a decade, I was to hear stories from the margins of criminal justice experience. These stories were interesting, explanatory, funny, imaginative and devastating. They were fantastical, in every meaning of that word; and offered insights not only into the lives of the women and men with whom I worked, but also challenged dominant thinking about 'crime' and justice, about prison, prisoners, and punishment. Yet few people get to hear these types of stories. Instead, there is a narrow construction of 'crime', punishment and justice.

Media coverage distorts prisoners and ex-prisoners into monstrous beings: uncontrollable, violent, these are dangerous figures who, rather than being punished by incarceration, are pampered by liberal regimes that protect prisoners whilst neglecting victims. But this is not the whole story. Absence and silence are important features also. Not only is reporting on prison full of cliché and stereotype, it is also partial. At the same time, the location of punishment is itself in retreat. It is now contemporary prison drama, as opposed to the physical façade of the prison that represents the interface between the public and the incarcerated (Fiddler 2007), whilst criminology – the discipline we would expect to have most to say about such issues – is consistently accused of failing to offer such insights (Christie 1997; Jefferson 2002; Liebling 2004; Maruna 1997; Wacquant 2002). And, into this

knowledge-void, myths have been allowed to develop and a monstrous 'other' has come to inhabit.

The figure of the ex-prisoner helps to define 'our' identity and the cultural norms, or taken-for-granted views that exist about punishment and prisons, by the very idea that it is the ex-prisoner 'other', not we, who is unknown. It is, however, through examination of this 'monster' that we come to realise that all humans contain a monstrous element (Kearney 2003). Such monsters do not reside only in myths, but are a central part of our culture and offer understandings about ourselves and about justice. By creating this 'other', and then failing to give it a voice, it is possible to construct a 'crime problem' that overlooks the significant harms committed by the powerful (Pearce 1976; Mathiesen 1990/2005); the consequences of inequality (Christie 1993/2000; Wacquant 2009); and that prison is a 'major institution of control and pain in our society' (Mathiesen 1990/2005: vii). It was in this sense that critical criminology was used to demonstrate some of the fundamental beliefs on which this thesis is based. Attention was given to existing regimes of truth in order that they can be challenged, and a new, human rights discourse, with a commitment to social change, can develop. In locating this thesis in the critical theoretical literature, the first crisis to which Ferrell (2009) referred: the crisis of capital, of increasing poverty and division, environmental harm, mass incarceration, increases in surveillance and control, should be seen as the backdrop to which this study has taken place.

The institution of the prison has been central to this thesis and the experience of imprisonment was one that all the men shared, but storytelling was of equal relevance. It was the works of Pat Carlen (1986) and Tony Parker (1962, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1991, 1995) that shaped the impetus for this study.[58] These were texts written with a clear commitment to take us deep into the heart of the prison experience, these were texts dedicated to the study of human affairs (Ferrell 2009). It was these texts, and my personal experience of working with ex-prisoners, that inspired me to use a life story methodology.

Whilst conducting the interviews with the men, I had been concerned that some of what I heard was highly complex as well as contradictory and conflicting. This led me to evaluate the literature on identity and to come down firmly on the side of those writers who suggest that identity is fashioned by the dominant culture and is often ambiguous and oppositional (Butler 1999, Connell 1987, 1995; Raggatt 2006; Lieblich et al. 1998; Rowbotham 1973). From what had been a relatively conventional start to the research, the study took what I termed a flight of fantasy. Rather than the spoiled identities (Goffman 1963/1990) or the redeemed offenders (Maruna 2001) that I had somewhat expected to find, the men told stories about outlaw identities, shifting identities, rejected identities, masks and fronts and masquerading identities. Gilligan et al. (1988) recommended multiple readings of interviews in

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[58] Although published when this thesis was near completion, Crewe and Bennett's (2012) *The Prisoner* has also provided inspiration.

order that distinct themes can be identified, and based on extensive reading of the interview transcripts and mindful of some of the strongest messages from the interviews, I turned to texts that fell well outside of the criminological domain.

Connections between the men's counter narratives and other stories emerged which led me to intertextuality, how all texts are constitutionally intertextual. This reading of the men's narratives meant that – instead of suppressing the intertextuality of their stories of outlaw existences, the feeling that they had to trick the system, that they were constantly shifting between a range of selves, or that they had achieved complete identity transformation – it was these concepts that became the focus of analysis. The conflict and complexity that such stories frequently exposed was celebrated rather than ignored. Moreover, I had set myself the task, at Carlen's (2002) invocation, to cherish the contradictory tendencies inherent in researching the human experience, and to work on these contradictions by acting reflexively. This led me to two conclusions. Firstly, that I needed to find a way of responding to the research in a manner that was reflexive. To knowingly write myself into the study, acknowledging my role in the research (Phillips and Earle 2010). To try to answer the question that Warner (1993: 17) posits: '*who* is telling this story?' Or, as Richards[59] (2009) puts it, researchers need to account for themselves, recognising that what we study, and how we interpret, derive in part from our own

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[59] Richards is active in convict criminology.

biography. My second conclusion was that if outlaw and mutable identities were a feature of the men's stories then they needed to be considered. New and illuminating ideas flow from bringing concepts into a relationship with the 'messiness' of ordinary lives (Willis 2000).

During a fortuitous car journey, I heard Martin Parker on the radio discussing his recently published book on business outlaws (2012); from this aural encounter I went on to discover Hobsbawm's early work on bandits (1969/2000); Seal's work on outlaw heroes (1996, 2011); and the North American literature on the Wild West, and the wider popular cultural references of outlaws that excite and enchant us with notions of individualism, opportunity, honour, justice, and freedom.

If, in thinking about outlaw mythology I had been concerned about the lack of criminological literature that was traversing the same ideas that I was, then with a fantastical turn to mythic narratives of mutable identities, I was worried that I had cast myself out to the margins: a criminological outlaw! And yet, discussing these ideas generally garnered a positive response; people appeared to intuitively understand these concepts and how they connected to ex-prisoner identities. Popular and mythic narratives have therefore shaped this thesis. Representations of outlaws were used in the analysis of the men's involvement in crime, the influence of prison myths was considered in regards to the men's experience of incarceration, and the mythical concepts involving mutable identities – of trickster,

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shapeshifter and metamorphosis – were utilised to explore the men's sense of identity as ex-prisoners.

This thesis has therefore fulfilled one of the aims of the research, which was to develop original understandings about the ex-prisoner identity based on a range of theories and perspectives. From a starting point of Carlen and Parker's work, I swiftly moved on to the literature on identity. In the men's narratives, I found allusions to an assortment of cultural references, from film and television, books, music and beyond, the men's stories bore the marks or traces of the wider cultural universe: they were intertextual narratives, and from that point original insights about those who have experienced the most severe sanction in our society have been made.

Alongside the crisis of capital, Ferrell also referred to a second crisis – the crisis within criminology itself. This crisis was one that involved the fetishism of research methodologies that are utterly unsuited to the study of human affairs and 'divorced from the nuanced politics of everyday life' (2009: 2). A further contribution this thesis has made is to argue that criminological study should re-engage with life story research, and that in doing so the discipline can be reimagined and reinvigorated.

If criminology can be persuaded away from its more positivist tendencies and encouraged to embrace a life story approach[60] then this will help to illuminate our understandings of individual lives and the culture in which they are situated. Criminology is frequently about dramatic events in people's lives, about stories and adventures, about experiences and insights; it is more than criminal justice institutions and legal practices. Counter narrative research puts human relationships at its heart; it also allows us to consider power relations, about how some voices are quiet and distorted whilst others are loud and iterative. In adopting a life story approach I found that a range of methodological freedoms occurred. These related not only to how the research was undertaken, but also in relation to who was involved, where interviews took place, issues around consent and anonymity, and on the variety of impacts that the research made once it was complete.

It took over a year to complete the fieldwork on which this thesis is based. Throughout that year I travelled around the country meeting some men at their places of work, many at their homes, one at mine, one at a drug treatment agency, another at a voluntary sector agency, one at a pub, and a number at my work. Furthermore, a small number of interviews took place across a number of days. What impact this timescale and range of environments had on the interview interactions it is difficult to say; that it will have had some impact is without doubt. I

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[60] Or any other methodology that encourages openness, attentiveness and respectfulness, and is sensitive to the external world, ambiguity and the ongoing construction of meaning (Ferrell 2009).

discussed at length issues relating to consent, confidentiality, and anonymity in chapter two. Suffice to say for now that these concerns are paramount in research of this type, and that on a number of levels it feels that it is difficult to get the various issues raised by consent, confidentiality and anonymity consistently right. In taking a less rigid approach to these matters however, I believe that a more humanistic interaction in setting the interviews up and during the interview process was accomplished. The final methodological freedom of this research approach has been what has happened since the fieldwork was completed.

At the start of the research I knew two of the men; I am now in relatively regular contact with a further two, and have been in contact with another three of the men occasionally. The organisation that I had worked for all those years previously, and who agreed to facilitate interviews for me, asked me to tender to do a service performance evaluation for them, which I did, and this was successful. The evaluation needed an assistant and as my colleagues were unavailable I asked one of my research participants who had just completed his PhD if he would be interested in being involved. For the next year Andy and I worked together on this project. He is also now employed as a visiting lecturer at the university I work for. Another of the men, Charlie, suggested that some of the students I teach could do a research placement for the organisation he worked for, and two final year students were given the opportunity to go into one of the London prisons as part of an

evaluation of a service there. In addition, Charlie does a lecture for me about the experience of imprisonment on a module I convene, *Punishment and Prisons*. I have allowed the research to be contaminated, and it has contaminated me.[61] Or, alternatively, I have been freed of a rigid view of methodology that shackles rather than liberates the criminological imagination (Ferrell 2009). This is the changed relationship between researcher and researched that Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) refer to in writing about the processes of narrative inquiry.

The final contribution that this thesis makes relates to encouraging a greater willingness in criminology to 'explore beyond its rigid terms of reference'; to 'open itself to the adventure of other insights' (Young 1996: 14); to be more 'rock 'n' roll', (Daly 2011). The aim of breaching the borders between criminology and other disciplines is so that such boundaries become more 'permeable and fuzzy' (Ruggiero 2003: 3).

Although set within a criminological context, and exploring criminological concepts, this thesis has taken a creative approach to research. I have embraced the poetic practices of a narrative imagination, utilised insights provided by intertextual readings of the men's narratives, and contextualised this in relation to the wider cultural resonances of poetry, song, film and books to hint at the context within which the men's stories and identities were performed,

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[61] See Jewkes (2012a) for a discussion on emotion, prison research and reflexivity.

and the thesis written. This has highlighted in a concrete sense some of the ideas from within the research, such as intertextuality and mimesis. This breaching of conventional criminological norms, will, I hope, demonstrate that other disciplines have much to offer criminology, and that criminology has much to offer them. In making these borders more porous, even leaky, understandings about imprisonment, crime and justice seep out beyond criminology, and are reciprocated by those many others, who have the same or similar concerns about justice and human rights at their heart.

7.3   Limitations and potential future areas of study

Before considering whether this thesis meets the requirements set out for evaluating narrative research, I must consider some of the limitations of this particular study. I raise four limitations and address each in turn.

Although implicit in the study and discussed on occasion, I have not fully engaged with the literature on masculinities. Originally, this was a point of key interest to me, and had been the focus of previous post-graduate study I had undertaken. Furthermore, much of the men's narratives could be easily connected to this literature, for example, in regards to the male, imprisoned body, the environment found in many penal institutions, hegemonic masculinity, edgework, and 'doing' masculinity. This is, then, a gap in the study. Whilst hinted at, for

example in the discussions on outlaws, and prison rape, greater focus could have been given to masculinities, particularly as this is a study about men. An area for future analysis could more specifically relate to the masculine connotations evident within the outlaw archetype. For example, it may also be the case that the outlaw script is only relevant to certain offence types. I would hope that the thesis has not been 'gender blind' (Gelsthorpe and Morris 1988: 98), but it has, nonetheless, not been as observant of masculinity as it could, and possibly should, have been.

A further limitation, or possibly consideration may be a better word, is the need to keep in mind that storytelling is never neutral. This thesis bears an evaluative charge regarding the actors featured and the events narrated. Although 15 men's life stories were collected, choices have had to be made about whose stories have been regaled, what fragments have been included, and the extent to which each story has been told. These decisions have not been easy ones to make, and in making them I risk doing a disservice to some of the stories I was told; firstly, in terms of lack of inclusion,[62] and secondly in analysing and presenting them in ways that the men may not be appreciative of. There is a tension within this study, between my epistemological commitment to supporting research that puts the ex-prisoner centre-stage, and being ultimately, the author of this thesis. In some ways, thinking of the work as an

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[62] The reduction of the men's narratives from over 250,000 words to a matter of a few thousand.

intertextual loop or triple mimesis may help. Bar-On (1996) argues that the interpretative or analytical process makes the text yours (as well as theirs), whilst Chase's (1995) position on the matter is that it is less what participants individually have to say that is of importance than the implicit meanings that they express. However, for me, the limitation remains clear. This is my story of others' stories, and one thing we can be sure of is that if the men had recounted their stories unmediated they would be very different from what is presented here.

The absence of a comparative aspect to the research could also be viewed as a flaw. A comparative analysis would help to produce knowledge about practices in places other than those that have been the focus of scrutiny (May 2001). In this instance, it could be beneficial to have an understanding of the experience of imprisonment from a different geographical location or from different groups of prisoners: short-termers, life-sentenced prisoners, women prisoners etc. In the men's narratives, recognition was given to some of these issues; for example, Paul, who feared bullying in prison and referred to his imprisoned, embodied self as under-developed and thin, discussed that whilst, on the one hand, he automatically garnered respect from some prisoners due to his long sentence; on the other, he was frequently placed on wings for long-term prisoners and was therefore with people who he found intimidating and scary.

The identity of someone whose offence was against a child and who is therefore excluded from certain types of work for life; or those whose offence is never spent, may have their identity more obviously marked by their incarceration.[63] Undertaking research in a different geographical location could prove promising, and has the potential to support my contention that research of this type allows us to understand the culture in which the practices of punishment occur. It would prove fruitful, therefore, to explore life story research with ex-prisoners in a geographical space that has a different understanding and approach to justice and punishment from our own, or to look at specific groups of ex-prisoners.

The final limitation relates to the analytical framework used to explore the men's narratives. This was informed by the concept of intertextuality and mimesis in order to identify a range of utterances in the men's narratives that inform our understandings about identity, crime, punishment and justice. But I am no expert in semiotics or language, nor was a specific analytical framework deployed. I came to the study, to the men, and to the analysis, as a criminologist. A linguist, skilled in the art of discourse analysis, would provide a different reading of the men's words. From the knowledge I have of critical discourse analysis, this approach could have much to offer criminology.

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[63] Although this can only be a tentative suggestion, a number of the men's convictions were spent in this study but they nonetheless discussed how the experience continued to shape their existence. The use of criminal records checks also challenges the idea of spent convictions. In addition, some of the men in this research fell under these categories.

Critical discourse analysis regards discourse as a form of social practice and is particularly interested in the relationship between language and power (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) set out eight principles of critical discourse analysis. These include the belief that research of this type should recognise: the relevance of the social, cultural, political and economic context; that power is exercised and negotiated in and through discourse; that discourse constitutes society and culture; that ideologies are often produced through discourse; the historical context within which the research takes place; that the link between the narrative and society is mediated; that analysis should be interpretive and explanatory; and finally, that critical discourse analysis is a form of social action. There is nothing in this list that I would disagree with, and on some levels this thesis demonstrates aspects of some of these principles; however, a formal analytical framework has not been used. Although this might have been liberating as discussed above, I may have limited the research by not utilising a more formal method of analysis.

7.4   Models for evaluation of narrative research

The third point to be covered in concluding the thesis requires me to return to chapter two which set out a number of models or criteria for evaluating narrative research. There is little written about this in the literature, which generally focuses on the philosophical nature of narrative research rather than on methodology. There are, then, few

models for analysis, or techniques for evaluating narrative research. In addition, the idea that narrative research should be processed through some external validation appears to be somewhat at odds with the suggestions that research of this type should be undertaken in a way that is flexible, open to change, and recognises ambiguity. However, attempts have been made to offer some suggestions for assessing narrative research and I return to these now and offer my response to them.

Runyon (1984) suggests several criteria for assessing the value of life stories. Firstly, they should allow us to have an insight into the person; they should also provide a feel for the person; they should help us to understand the inner or subjective world of the person and should deepen our sympathy or empathy for the subject. On a larger scale, the life story should portray the social and historical world that the person is living in, and help to clarify the causes and meanings of relevant events, experiences and conditions. Finally the life story should be vivid, evocative and emotionally compelling to read. Although life story interviews were undertaken, whole life stories have not been presented. Instead I have presented fragments of stories in the hope of providing insights into a number of lives within the confines of this thesis. These fragments, and the analysis that accompanies them, help me to meet many of the criteria set out by Runyon, such as insight, feel, and empathy. In addition, by returning to Butch's story in chapter six, about life after imprisonment, there is at least one life story thread that

runs through the thesis as a whole. In the rendering of their stories, I hope to have done justice to the way the men talked about their lives and to what they told me, because their stories were vivid, evocative and emotional.

Lieblich et al. (1998) draw on Runyon's work and set out four dimensions for the analysis of narrative research. These are that narrative research should have width, coherence, insightfulness and parsimony. I shall discuss each in turn and relate them to the research presented here.

Width, in this sense, means that there should be comprehensive evidence provided so that the person reading the research can make a judgement on the evidence that is presented and on the interpretations that have been made. I have achieved this through outlining and reflecting on how the interviews were conducted. Width is also evidenced by the number of interviews on which the thesis is based and in explaining the analytical framework. An intertextual reading of the men's narratives has provided insight into the cultural enactment of 'justice', of the process of 'othering' ex-prisoners, and of the symbiotic relationship of the men's narratives and numerous other texts or cultural artefacts about identity, power and control. These ideas and concepts have been supported through the inclusion of numerous and lengthy sections of the interviews and by including my own personal reflections.

The second dimension is coherence; this can be evaluated in two ways: internally in regards to how the various sections fit together, and externally by considering the existing literature on the subject. In terms of internal coherence, this requirement has been met by using the findings of the research to shape the narrative arc of the thesis. Generally, the men told their life stories with a relatively clear trajectory; although the starting point and end points may be different, they all told stories that had a beginning, a middle and an end. The narrative arc that the men used in their stories has been used to structure this thesis. Having positioned the research, in terms of its theoretical context and analytical framework, outlined the methodological approach and introduced the men, I turned to consideration of their lives when they were actively involved in crime; focus then moved on to their time in prison, and, in the final analytical chapter, their identities as ex-prisoners were explored. Despite the complex lives the men had lived, and the fragmented nature of their identities, internal coherence has been achieved by presenting their stories in this way.

External coherence is an area slightly more beset with potential problems. Although written from a criminological perspective and concerned with intensely criminological issues, this thesis has turned to disciplines that are not often linked to the criminological enterprise. The literature on storytelling and myth, linguistics and semiotics, and studies on outlaws and bandits have been as critical to this study as the

penological literature. This research has travelled far and wide, into lands inhabited by mythological creatures and I fear in doing so some of the coherence that is said by Lieblich et al. to be required may have been lost. In my defence however, this is a story about lives that are unpredictable, contradictory, fragmented; lives that have at times been hidden from view; it is perhaps unsurprising, or even in keeping with this, that the story of such lives bears some of those same unpredictable characteristics.

The third criterion is that life story research should be insightful. The presentation of the story and its analysis should be innovative or original. This I consider to be of key importance, this is not about representativeness, generalisability or validity. It is about offering insight into the lived experience of others and in the process opening up understandings about the cultural which we inhabit. On this dimension I feel confident in saying that this thesis has successfully met what was required. Although life story research is far from a new approach, it is nonetheless one that has become increasingly marginalized within criminology, or, when it is used, tends to be in regards to understanding the life course of criminal behaviour (Piquero et al. 2007); or risk factors for criminality (Farrington and Welsh 2007); or the processes by which desistance can be achieved (Maruna 1997, 2001). Few studies have the privilege of simply allowing participants to speak, with very little preconception about what will be found. Although I believe this research to be innovative and original and to offer insight into lives that

have been assigned as 'detritus' (Jewkes 2007: 449) it does not offer (or even try to offer) answers to those traditional criminological concerns about who 'did it' and why. Instead, drawing on post-structuralist ideas about fragmented identities; literary studies perspectives on intertextuality, masterplots and skeletal stories; and on storytelling, myth and mythology, this research combined four substantive areas within criminology: crime, prison, ex-prisoner identity and narrative research, with three analytical concepts: intertextuality, storytelling, and mythology. On the basis of this approach, outlaw archetypes, prison myths, and mutable identities became the central figures in this research. From this, insights have been given into the men's lives before prison, in prison and post-imprisonment, and into the culture in which their experiences of crime and punishment took place.

The final dimension Lieblich et al. (1998) refer to is that of parsimony, the ability to provide analysis based on a small number of concepts. As mentioned above, three main analytical concepts were utilised in this thesis: intertextuality, storytelling and mythology. There is a clear connection between these three concepts; therefore the ability to provide analysis on a small number of concepts has been realised. Elegance or aesthetic appeal and the literary merits of the presentation of the story and its analysis are also regarded as important in this dimension. At the outset of this study I discussed how, although I wished to avoid presenting the men's narratives as crime-related entertainment, I do hope that it has been an entertaining and

informative read. In the sharing of their stories and in adopting intertextual analysis, and by contextualising both their experiences and my own, I believe that elegance and aesthetic appeal have been achieved.

7.5   Myths and monsters: contribution to notions of crime and justice

This thesis combined four substantive areas within criminology, namely crime, prison, ex-prisoner identity and narrative research, with three analytical concepts: intertextuality, storytelling and mythology. I now return to the key themes that emerged out of this framework in terms of mythic and popular outlaw figures, prison myths, and mythological mutability in the (changing) shapes of the trickster, shapeshifter and metamorphosis. Through this it is possible to demonstrate the ways in which these narratives have helped to develop new theories about crime, justice and punishment. I begin by exploring the recurring theme of the werewolf.

Werewolves have featured in a number of contexts in this thesis. Outlaws have been associated with the werewolf as they are cast into a zone of lawlessness (Spencer 2009). The image of a caged werewolf, kept alive, but with no effort made to ensure his well-being is reminiscent of Agamben's (1998, 2005) work about the bare life: a life without form and value, stripped of the political and legal rights that are normally accorded to citizens (Dolovich 2011; Spencer 2009). These

references to werewolves are used to define the status of the condemned man who is now dehumanised, made into an animal. This is also how a number of the men felt. The stigma of the ex-prisoner identity branded them as different; they were not allowed to function as full human beings nor have the same rights offered to them. Andy for example, has achieved significant academic and professional success since his release from prison yet is barred from following his preferred career and is fearful that information about his incarceration will reach people he would rather did not know about this previous existence. Simultaneously, part of Andy's success has been based on his reflection on life as an ex-prisoner and his identity as an ex-prisoner. Werewolves are also mythological shapeshifters, the repeated and reversible features of which are experienced as a form of oppression and restriction, facets that came through clearly in Andy's story of living in two worlds.

We first met the figure of the werewolf in the chapter on life before prison, the connections between outlaws and werewolves is one based on outlaws being cast out of society because they have transgressed laws and challenged power. In the men's narratives, and in some of the existing studies on outlaws, it is recognised that rather than experiencing this as troublesome, there are in fact numerous attractions to this existence, it is only when caught and caged that outlaw living more closely resembles Agamben's (1998, 2005) concept of a bare life.

Identifying as an outlaw and living an outlaw existence meant that some of the men experienced a sense of economic freedom, neither reliant on minimal state benefits nor existing as an office drone. They also had a sense of spatial freedom, rapidly moving location if required or the mood took them. Some of these outlaws also had a strong sense of justice and fairness, Phil shared his criminal gains equally with the people he committed crime with. Bobby took a literal sense to retribution by setting his own dog on the owner of the dog who had attacked his niece. Firm same-sex bonds were evident in the men's narratives, of utter faith and trust in friends, and shared adventures as a group or gang. The outlaw identity also proved to be sexually attractive; men who had experienced little success with women previously, found themselves irresistible once their outlaw identity was known. These figures operate as an expression for our own conflicts, allowing us to negotiate situations outside of our own everyday experience. Outlaws are a metaphor for contemporary problems of power and authority, law and legitimacy, and ongoing concerns about equitable access to the means of subsistence (LeJeune 2007, Parker 2012, Seal 1996, 2011).

In the chapter about life in prison a number of common myths about prison were explored. The mass media play a central role in the process of 'othering': creating monsters that are both fearful and fascinating. Based on the literature on media representations of prison and prisoners, a typology of five prison myths was set out. The first of these was that prison rape is endemic. This was one of the most common

beliefs that the men held and caused them great distress both before going into prison, but also in terms of managing their identities once released from prison. Depictions of prison rape have become entertainment and are frequently joked about. The violence and inhumanity of rape is rarely recognised (Mason 2006c). Some of the men had to deal with 'jokes' about prison rape, whilst others adopted a hyper-masculine front in prison (Jewkes 2005), or transferred friendship groups when it was suggested that a prisoner with whom they were associated was gay. Furthermore, a number of the men discussed the bodily changes that occurred in prison, of bulking up, of getting bigger, of bodies that were becoming more hegemonically masculine.

Many of the men had experienced extensive trauma, deprivation and neglect in their lives and suggested that rather than being pampered by imprisonment it was simply a continuation of lives that had been let down by their families and the State. They also had to contend with the view that prison protects the public from dangerous, evil monsters. A number of the men discussed that they did not regard themselves as a danger to others and how the violent institution into which they had been put increased, rather than reduced the likelihood of further offending.

The fourth myth was that prison security is lax; there were a number of elements in this analysis including escapes, breaches of security such as

having access to drugs and mobile telephones, and risk aversion in terms of parole decisions. Some of the men discussed their own breaches of security – which fits into the literature on resistance in prisons – but some also talked about corruption amongst prison officers and being kept in prison beyond their Earliest Date of Release. The final myth was that prison is not a punishment, however, some of the men experienced mental breakdown whilst they were in prison or discussed the various humiliations that prison caused them.

An important feature in this analysis was not only the power of prison myths but that it is media representations of prisons and prisoners that people are most familiar with. Knowledge about prisons is mediated by powerful groups in society who misrepresent and distort understandings about imprisonment and those who have been incarcerated. Although stories about prison fascinate us, they also create a fearful figure, the ex-prisoner 'other'. Moreover, there is little meaningful reporting on prisons and into this representational silence and distortion about prison and prisoners this 'other' becomes monstrous.

The final substantive chapter considered life after prison. The use of the mythological concept of mutable identities allowed for exploration of ideas that are relatively familiar and have popular currency such as ex-offenders being tricky characters, or in need of complete transformation and reformation. I suggested that the emergence of

prison as a place of punishment coincided with the period when stories of metamorphosis significantly increased (Warner 2002) and that these two, apparently distinct, occurrences can be seen to be linked as the prison increasingly required the transformation of prisoners' minds, correcting and reforming them and creating 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1977/1991). As the prison developed as a site of punishment, demands for metamorphosis, from evil to good were made. We wish our offenders to turn their lives around; we want 'good stories' (Cohen 1985: 157). I set this mythological concept within the context of the criminological literature on desistance, as well as criminal justice practices and prison reform campaigns, and examined these ideas through Butch's narrative as someone who had identified as a criminal outlaw but who would go on to identify as a spiritual being who practiced meditation.

The other two mutable identity archetypes were those of the shapeshifter and the trickster. With the shapeshifter I returned to the image of the werewolf as one of the most well-known mythological shapeshifters. Andy discussed how his status as an ex-prisoner was at times a commodity, but how it was also a curse, something that had to be hidden, had restricted career opportunities and had marked him for life. The trickster is a complex character and can serve a number of purposes including that of the culture-hero (Ellis 1993). Required by the criminal justice system and wider society to demonstrate the requisite sense of remorse and guilt, to apologise for his behaviour,

Moses felt that he had to show these feelings, but in fact he believed that he had he had been let down by the criminal justice system and that justice had not been served. He had to perform the role of a reformed offender who would not do the same thing again, and show how he had learnt his lesson. The lessons he had most learnt, however, were that the criminal justice system had dealt with him harshly, that 'justice' had diminished his life opportunities in terms of housing, study and employment, and that some prisons were staffed by corrupt prison officers. Moses had to become a trickster, to present himself as someone who met the requirements of the transformed offender, if he was to successfully manage the ex-prisoner identity that had been put upon him.

Although all our identity work may involve shapeshifting or tricking others, these concepts have particular resonance for the ex-prisoner population. Shapeshifting is about the *lack* of control ex-prisoner's have over their identity. It is not something sought but imposed by others who frequently hold negative perceptions of that identity. For tricksters, it is the requirement to feel remorse and guilt and the demand for apology that can lead to ambiguity, operating at the edge, being an 'out' person who is a deceiver. Although they may experience misfortunes and therefore lie, cheat and deceive, this is not necessarily deliberate, it is something that is felt necessary due to the limited options available.

Whereas the voluntary shapeshifting many people are involved in regarding their own fragmented and fluid identity construction can involve an element of desire; mythological shapeshifting, and the ex-prisoner identity is one that is experienced as a bondage, based on (part of) an identity that cannot be escaped. Similarly, it is the complexity of the trickster role that is especially relevant to ex-prisoners. Moreover, we learn a great deal about the culture in which we live and the exercise of power and punishment through exploring this particular archetype. Thus meeting one of the elements of the trickster typology by informing us of something integral to human culture.

It is the concept of metamorphosis that is most pertinent to contemporary criminological theories as it relates closely to desistance – making good, redemption, transformation, turning, not only one's life around, but sense of self also. It is perhaps this requirement that makes the use of mythological analyses in exploring ex-prisoner identities particularly relevant. Collectively we may shape the society in which we live, but that same society forces change back on us as individuals. For ex-prisoners we demand that they feel guilt and remorse, apologise for their behaviour and transform themselves from what we believe to be monstrous individuals to redeemed human beings. There are few others in society who have so much put upon them.

Myth and mythology represent experiences of extremity, subvert established categories and challenge us to think again about what we

think we know. The experience of imprisonment has the power to shape, even to deny, an individual's potential to live a meaningful and purposeful life. By considering mythic ideas around mutable identities it is possible to see how ex-prisoners' lives confront issues around destiny and origin, what can be achieved, and what makes us fully human.

7.6   Conclusion

This thesis has been based on the belief that understandings about 'crime', punishment and justice can be significantly enhanced if we allow those who have been through the criminal justice system to speak for themselves. This is not always easy to achieve. As criminologists, we too have a role to play in ensuring such counter narratives are heard. We cannot understand contemporary meanings of 'crime', justice or punishment until we have listened to those who have had direct experience of these processes. The counter narratives of those who have been punished by imprisonment have the potential to challenge State sanctioned 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980: 133) and systems of justice that are unequally applied and seldom serve social justice. Criminology has had a 'dangerous' relationship with power (Hudson 2000: 177) and some criminologists have become oversocialized (Christie 1997). Some of the images produced by criminologists about the punished are themselves stigmatizing. In listening to the 15 men's stories and re-telling them in my own way I have sought to make links

between their individual biographies, and wider cultural understandings about punishment and crime.

This research has contributed to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what it is like to pass through the criminal justice system, and has challenged existing assumptions about ex-prisoners and how men cope with the deprivation of their liberty. Moreover, these narratives tell us about the social and cultural context within which punishment takes place, shining a light on the operation of power in society and on the cultural context within which that punishment is enacted. Individual life stories tell us far more than stories of individual lives (Coupe 2006).

The notable contributions of this thesis, then, are as follows: first it has given voice to those seldom heard; secondly, the construction of the ex-prisoner identity as a monstrous 'other' has been humanised; thirdly, the thesis provides the tools and framework with which to conduct future research into the identity of those most affected by the criminal justice system and has made recommendations for future directions in such research; fourthly, the contradictory tendencies inherent in any research on the human experience have been cherished rather than ignored; and, in doing so the final contribution of providing original insights into those who have been punished has been achieved.

Stories help us to create and interpret; they can also change our social, cultural, political, and personal lives. The power of narrative is both in revealing the world and also in helping us to revise the world.

As Kearney (2002: 156) says:

> Storytelling invites us to become not just agents of our own lives, but narrators and readers as well. It shows us that the untold life is not worth living. There will always be someone there to say, 'tell me a story', and someone there to respond. Were this not so, we would no longer be fully human.

It is in the telling, and the hearing of these stories of ex-prisoners, that greater understanding of the ex-prisoner 'other' has been achieved.

THE END

Appendix: Consent form

Agreement to participate in study about men who have been in prison

1.   I confirm that I understand the purpose of the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason

3.   I understand that information from the interview will be treated in confidence and that no individual will be identified in any publication unless they have specifically requested otherwise

_____

Name   Signature   Date

_____

Name   Signature   Date

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