

Research Paper

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Exploring Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) and its potential for understanding how shame affects the behaviours of women with lived experience of imprisonment

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, we want to acknowledge and thank the women who participated in our research, who's voices we have endeavoured to keep front and centre of this work. Research can only be founded in co-creation and co-authorship, and we honour this process and stand side by side with each woman as their words now arrive in the public domain.

For any of us to articulate shame, regret, accountability, understanding and learning is an achievement. So, for those who were not afforded many of the privileges of a safe, loving childhood, a consistent caring education and systems in place to protect them from violence - to then offer insight, as the women have done, is courageous and generous. The women's willingness to be part of a new understanding of shame, trauma and the subsequent behaviour is remarkable, and we have been humbled to spend time with them.

We write this now as the UK continues to face the epidemic of sexual violence that women have had to endure – as all the women we interviewed have endured. We have learnt that the inclination is always to keep shame hidden and silent – both as individuals and within society. Therefore, speaking about shame is in and of itself an act of disobedience and for the women to courageously do this is deeply commendable.

We are also very grateful to the Griffin's Society for the opportunity to look deeper into this area and to Christine Leeson for her support and patience throughout this research. Our supervisor Loraine Gelsthorpe has been a consistently wonderful, curious, questioning presence throughout this process and we could not have done this research without her.

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Abstract

Whilst connections between shame and violence have been well documented among men serving prison sentences, there is considerably less research concentrating on women - yet, as Walker and Knauer argue 'humiliation and shame are the core trigger and vulnerability for violence' (Walker and Knauer 2011:725). As we have seen incidences of self-harm and assaults in the female estate significantly increased in the second quarter of this year to 47% (Webster October 2021), there remains a critical need to explicitly address how shame can actively shape women's behaviours toward themselves and others. During our work with the Forgiveness Project prison programme RESTORE, it was clear there was a gap in understanding from prison staff as to how certain violent and challenging behaviours are rooted in shame. This gap in understanding hindered prison staff's ability to recognise shame, therefore affecting strategies to address shame based behaviour. This research explores Shame Resilience Theory (SRT Brown 2006) – a methodology for both speaking and working with shame to build resilience from shame's damaging effects – and its potential contribution to understand shame based behaviours of women in custody. Our desire was to identify effective strategies and interventions to support women, and offer recommendations to support staff in their direct work managing these challenging behaviours and violence. In order to do this we conducted a thematic analysis of data taken from semi-structured interviews with seven women's lived experience of imprisonment. The research highlighted disturbing and pervasive shaming experiences suffered by the women, however the data equally highlighted that despite these shaming experiences the strategies the women employed to become resilient to shame were effective and remarkable. Our recommendations point specifically to the potential influence of positive brief interactions between officers and the women in prison to dissipate certain behaviours that appeared to be rooted in shame. Therefore, we would recommend that SRT is specifically included in the Five Minute training Interventions in order to facilitate further the change that these interactions are designed to encourage.

Chapter 1: Introduction

For the last ten years we have been working as speakers/lead facilitators with The Forgiveness Project's prison programme RESTORE¹ - an intensive group-based programme that uses 'restorative narratives' to explore lived experience of trauma. Restorative narratives are stories that show how people and communities are learning to rebuild and recover after incidents of harm. Restorative narratives go much further than human interest stories; they address harsh realities and show a meaningful progression whether from revenge to forgiveness, or hopelessness to meaning-making. Due to the level of trauma we encountered in our work, The Forgiveness Project embedded a 'trauma informed' approach into all its processes. However, during the last five years running RESTORE in women's prisons, we became increasingly aware of the ubiquity of shame, particularly how it shaped women's engagement with themselves and one another. We also noted how difficult it was for women to speak about shame - the women guarded against being vulnerable, which made it difficult to connect with fellow prisoners; and yet as we adapted RESTORE in order to support them to let down their defences and find a way to speak their shame, connection was created.

As a result of these observations, we wanted to understand more about the dynamic of shame and discovered Shame Resilience Theory (SRT - Brown 2006) which defines an approach to managing and overcoming shame. This theory named our already established approach in RESTORE and gave us a language to name the processes and tools we were using. It became a vital resource in how we were able to understand how shame presents in women's behaviours and articulate shame to the women. We explore SRT in more detail in our literature review.

SRT represented for us the first concrete framework we had found in dealing directly with shame. However, it underscored our concerns that the women's outward presentation of behaviours was being labelled as unmanageable, violent and challenging by staff rather than being recognised as shame based. As a consequence of this some women were deemed unsuitable to attend the programme. Alongside these staff decisions we ourselves were often hesitant in allowing women who were displaying defensive and defiant behaviours to participate, because of concerns of the safety of the

¹ RESTORE is the award-winning prison programme developed and delivered by The Forgiveness Project. See <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/restore-programme/>

group. However, one particular case influenced us and widened our understanding of where these behaviours originated and how best to support them in RESTORE.

Early on in our work we met H, a woman serving an IPP sentence (imprisonment for public protection sentence which has an indeterminate length) who was already nine years over her tariff. She had heard about RESTORE from a previous participant and approached us specifically asking us to help her '*address her anger*'. She spoke of her uncontained rage and how this was '*getting her into trouble*'.² We were informed that her behaviour was violent, challenging and out of control – she was subject to 15 adjudications³ in the months prior to our meeting her. Due to this we were advised not to have her on our programme. However, as she had specifically sought us out and shown commitment and determination, we decided to offer her a place on the programme. During the following months we witnessed a significant shift in her attitude and behaviour – she had no further adjudications, engaged positively in work in the prison reception, gained enhanced prisoner status and the Parole Board recommended that she be transferred to an open prison. The Deputy Governor commented '*She is not the same woman we knew*'.⁴

In our conversations with H, it became clear that her previous reactions appeared to be connected to shame and actual or perceived humiliation – triggering an outward expression of anger and violence. Speaking her story and being listened to, connected her to where her anger came from and supported her to develop tools to regulate her emotions. It is important to note that H was one of many women who followed a similar trajectory of shifting from violent and challenging behaviour within our programme of work, as their capacity to speak of their shame and regulate emotional reactions developed.

Our observations of H's deep wounds, shame, anger and, crucially, resilience, was the beginning of our curiosity around where and how unprocessed shame can trigger violent and challenging behaviour in women. The psychiatrist James Gilligan, who has 25 years' experience studying and working with violent offenders is clear on the link saying, 'I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed or humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed.' (Gilligan 1996:110). However, Gilligan's work has been concentrated only on men.

² H's words during our first conversation.

³ An adjudication occurs when a rule has been broken within the prison. It is where the staff decide how they should respond and what punishment is deemed appropriate. They are serious and go on the individual's prison record – thereby affecting parole.

⁴ Deputy Governor in an email to Sandra Barefoot – programme manager of RESTORE. (December 2018)

Alongside this, increasing concern about violent/challenging behaviours evident in the female prison community led us to want to formally investigate the possibility of working with SRT in prisons. We began seeking out conversations with officers and staff in order to understand how they perceived what we were beginning to understand as 'shame based behaviours'. Through these discussions it became apparent that the link between shame and violence was not known or understood. In discussions with officers, and most notably a Senior Manager regarding women's behaviour on the wings, it was clear they were too inundated with the manifestation of the challenging behaviour and violence to particularly question its origins – their immediate concern was to manage behaviour as best they could. Officers we spoke to were clear that support was needed as they were struggling to control and manage challenging behaviour under the current system.

We believe that the research proposed by Ruth and Sandra can help us to design a package that meets the specific needs of woman who are both complex and challenging to manage. (Senior Manager, UK Prison 2018)

It was this growing concern and our sense of increasing despair around these issues, combined with our questions around shame and violence that highlighted a need for this research.

In the second chapter of this report, we turn to previous research literature which is relevant to our purpose. The third chapter focuses on the methodology employed, whilst the fourth chapter describes our main findings. In the fifth chapter we offer analysis of the findings and in the sixth chapter we draw out the implications of the research and set out some recommendations in relation to prison staff training.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Acknowledged shame ... could be the glue that holds relationships and societies together, and unacknowledged shame the force that blows them apart (Scheff, 2000:258)

2.1 The concept of shame

Our initial observations, made through our work and our reading, is that shame contains a strong sense of taboo and fear. Gershen Kaufman observes 'There is shame about shame, it remains under taboo ... The taboo on shame is so strict ... we behave as if shame does not exist' (1989:3-4). In our discussions with both officers and prison psychologists it felt clear that fear around explicitly naming shame was high, perhaps due to this taboo and the shame of shame. The taboo on shame is well documented (Kaufman 1989, Brown 2006, Pattison 2000, Scheff 2003) although the research literature is sparse on the effect of shame on women in prison specifically. Whether or not shame is acknowledged or spoken it is there, existing in a silent vacuum where it remains influential in many aspects of women's lives. The eminent sociologist Thomas Scheff who has written extensively on collective violence, mental illness and social psychology points out '[shame] does not disappear but merely goes underground' (Scheff 2000:255).

The process of recognising, naming and reintegrating shame appears key in much of the literature on shame (Braithwaite 1989, Brown 2006, Scheff 2003, Pattison 2008, Fitch, Nazaretian and Himmel 2018). Pattison (2008) is clear on the need for shame to be named and addressed in order to transcend or perhaps even recover from its effects.

It is not possible to address shame in individuals if its presence is unrecognised. Shame is a condition that is closely associated with the wish to hide or to conceal oneself in the face of unbearable psychological pain. The experience of shame, because it is so painful, is often avoided, denied or defended against. (p.156)

Leon Wurmser outlines a brutal cycle of punishment, shame and retreat which impacts levels of engagement. He says:

The punishing actions of shaming usually consist in exposing the person ... holding him up in the pillory to the mockery of the public. Every bit of his shameful and ignominy is dragged into

the light of day and exposed to public derision because 'laughter kills'. The second step is to send the person into hiding. The humiliated one is shunned. He is sent into solitude, outside human intercourse, discarded from the communality of civilized society ... Thus, one can expiate the sin of exposure of weakness by open degradation and subsequent disappearance ... This hiding is brought about by denial and repression or, more radically, by suicide, running away, or intoxication. (Wurmser 1995:82)

Tangney, Stuegwig and Martinez (2014) make a compelling argument that shame can exacerbate recidivism and inhibit taking responsibility, due to the proclivity to distance oneself from the pain of shame by blaming outward. And it is this outward expression of shame, how it impacts behaviour and the capacity to engage with interventions and rehabilitation that interested us.

2.2 Unbounded shame and aggression

Stephen Pattison has written extensively on shame, particularly chronic shame – sometimes referred to as 'unbounded shame' (Pattison, 2000, 2008; Man 2018; Fischer 2018) and is clear that 'unbounded shame' can become a 'deeply engrained habitual mode of reacting to self and others' (2000:110) This unbounded shame appears to arise from patterns set down in childhood and from repeated shaming (Gilligan 1996, 2003, Matos and Pinta-Gouveia 2010, Plat and Freyd 2012) and appears to set up patterns of relating that can then become problematic in adulthood.

As we look further, we note that Velotti, Elison, & Garofalo (2014) argue 'that many instances of aggression would be better understood as reactions to shame' (Velotti et al 2014:455). They call for further research on the link between shame and aggression and advocate the 'implementation of interventions with violent offenders that target shame-regulation' (Velotti et al 2014:455)

This connection between shame and aggression greatly interested us as it bore out what we were witnessing in the prison. Walker and Knauer argue that 'humiliation and shame are the core trigger and vulnerability for violence' (Walker and Knauer 2011:725) and crucially argue that understanding these complex dynamics are essential for promoting mental health among offenders. This connection was strongly advocated by Gilligan (1996) in his work looking at connections between shame and violence making the strong declaration that 'the emotion of shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence, whether toward other or self' (Gilligan 1997: 110).

We have witnessed first-hand the increasing strain placed on the female estate both for staff and female prisoners. Following the impact of changes to the wider prison system under Transforming Rehabilitation, staff across the estate have repeatedly reported an increase in violence and challenging behaviours, alongside high levels of self-harm and most distressingly, suicides.

Safety in prisons has deteriorated rapidly during the last six years. People in prison, prisoners and staff, are less safe than they have been at any other point since records began, with more self-harm and assaults than ever before (Bromley Briefings 2018:4)

2.3 Shame and trauma

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) report into women in prison's mental health and wellbeing (2020) states that 60 per cent of women in prison have experienced domestic violence and 53 per cent have experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse during childhood. PRT acknowledges that this is likely to be an underestimation of the trauma experienced by women prior to being in prison. Professors of Psychology Kim et al's (2009) research into women who have suffered childhood abuse indicates that 'shame significantly mediated the association between childhood sexual abuse and interpersonal conflict. Women with sexual abuse histories reported more shame in their daily lives which in turn was associated with higher levels of conflict' (Kim et al 2009:1).

There is further, more generalised research looking at the connection between trauma and shame (Saraiya and Lopez-Castro 2016, Matos and Pinto-Gouveia 2010, and Velotti, Elison, Garofalo 2014) which begins to offer greater insight into these connections. However, it appears not to have yet been embedded in the way we respond to, manage and interact with women who are suffering the detrimental effects of shame. The growing body of evidence connecting shame, trauma and behaviour begs further questions regarding how best to serve and support women in the care of the CJS and rehabilitative interventions.

2.4 Shame Resilience Theory

Our work has been strongly influenced by the professor, researcher and lecturer Brené Brown's (2006, 2007, 2009) extensive research regarding shame. Her research and subsequent development of Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) was a response to working with shaming feelings and behaviours as a way of both understanding and responding to shame. In order to develop resilience to shame and shaming, Brown identified four stages through which women could move: 1. acknowledging personal vulnerability

to shame, 2. critical awareness, 3. reaching out, and 4. speaking shame. She refers to these as 'The Four Elements of SRT' (Brown 2006). She describes SRT as 'the ability to recognise shame when we experience it and move through it in a constructive way that allows us to ... grow from our experiences' (Brown 2007:31).

Brown is clear that SRT can have uses in many settings as a way to address underlying difficulties and in a strongly worded advocacy insisted 'it is imperative that social work researchers and practitioners become more invested in both understanding shame and contributing to the growing body of shame research' (Brown 2006:43).

The goals for practitioners working with women on shame issues should be to help clients identify personal vulnerabilities, increase critical awareness of their shame web, develop mutually empathic relationships that allow them to reach out to others, and learn to speak shame. Given the focus on raising critical awareness and education, psychoeducational group work or a combination of individual work and psycho-educational group work should be considered (Brown 2006:51).

Brown notes shame is most effectively addressed, not through a one-to-one psychotherapeutic intervention, but through contact with those who understand and have had similar experiences, allowing for connection and empathy to self and other (2006:51). Through the process of sharing stories in RESTORE, the development of empathy – for both self and others – our aim is to facilitate acknowledgement and integration of feelings.

In an initial evaluation of the theory, Brown's 2009 pilot programme with 19 women in a substance misuse programme in California appeared to show positive outcomes on depression, shame resilience and internalised shame (Hernandez and Mendoza 2011). She is clear however that more research is needed in order to gather data on the efficacy of SRT. Our interest, having worked with this theory and seen some benefits of approaching shame in this way, was to understand the potential of utilising shame resilience theory within the prison community and see how this could perhaps benefit women serving sentences in prison.

Kaufman describes shame as '...a wound felt from the inside, dividing us both from ourselves and from one another' (Kaufman 1989:x) and SRT is a direct response to this division by offering methods to encourage congruence to self and connection to other. Scheff is clear on the possible connection that

can be found through the naming of shame saying that ‘acknowledged shame ... could be the glue that holds relationships and societies together, and unacknowledged shame the force that blows them apart’ (2000:258).

Acknowledged shame is supported by speaking out, being heard and connecting to others. Brown (2006) advocates the creation of mutually empathetic relationships which increases resilience to shame. RESTORE created a space where relationships could safely take root flourish, and women found strength within their vulnerabilities to be able to begin to positively shift their relationship to themselves and to others. It is perhaps this process of the recognition of self and other that is key to support shame to dissipate and allow for relationships to be built.

Mary Eaton’s (1993) research examining women’s experience of life after prison points to the importance of relationship in building a different identity and a new way of relating. This appears crucially impacted by the recognition of the women as individuals with potential to change. She notes it was ‘through recognition they began to think differently about themselves’ (Eaton 1993: 20). She points to a virtuous cycle where being recognised and treated as individuals enabled the women to not only see themselves in this way, but also respond to others in this way. Alongside this she emphasises reciprocal relationships, commenting that ‘the visible indicators of change were the results of the processes of redirection, recognition and reciprocal relationships through which each woman had achieved autonomy and a developed sense of self’ (Eaton 1993:101)

2.5 Restore

The Forgiveness Project’s prison programme RESTORE is an intensive group-based programme which uses a ‘restorative narrative’ approach to support the experience of bearing witness to each other’s lived stories of trauma, shame, and resilience within a safe, and non-judgemental space. As facilitators/speakers of RESTORE, with our own lived experience of trauma and shame we share our stories with participants, utilising creative arts and spoken word to support expression.

A process of reflection, critical discussions, and creative responses follow which form a tapestry of connections between ourselves and participants. This process supports participants to become aware of their own shame and find a new language to express their feelings and increase understanding about their relationships and behaviours – such as aggression towards self and others, substance misuse and nurturing discernment of who to trust when asking for support. Crucially this knowledge for participants in understanding how shame presented itself, and the importance of building reciprocal relationships was key to enabling the speaking and acknowledging of shame.

As this process develops it opens up the possibility for participants to take ownership of their shame and begin a process of taking responsibility for their own actions. To witness others and to be witnessed whilst being held within a therapeutic and empathetic group process, appeared to allow shame to begin to dissipate. This allowed women to begin a conversation about accountability, which previously would not have been possible due to the presence of shame. This link between shame and taking responsibility is one that was helpfully explored by Tangney, Stuewig and Hafez (2011) who advocated ‘enhancing offenders’ capacity to experience ‘shame-free’ guilt about harmful actions past, present, and anticipated future’ (2011:717). That is, to have space to explore reactions and interactions without shame potentially offers opportunity for women to deepen their understanding of their actions.

During RESTORE, women reported that there were no other spaces within the prison where shame could be safely shared and explored. The women expressed a need to ‘tell their stories’ in a space where they could be listened to and allowed to speak what feels to be unspeakable and un-hearable. As Brown (2006) expresses: ‘If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding shame can’t survive’. We observed when women began to speak their stories – linking and connecting their shame and vulnerability - their resilience appeared to grow. Brown in her later work looking at shame describes how SRT allows us ‘to move through the experience of shame without sacrificing our values – to come out on the other side of shame experience with more courage, compassion and connection than we had going in’ (Brown 2018:136).

After women had attended RESTORE, we observed this in their capacity to regulate their emotions when triggered by the highly reactive environment of a prison and their capacity to reach out to other women, understand the perspective of another and develop a sense of kindness to self and other. We witnessed how this understanding also impacted their relationship with officers and the prison system itself, as the women loosened the grip of shame upon their behaviours and became less reactive to requests from staff.

As we became aware of the depth and breadth of the shame that women, we worked with were encountering, we were at the same time having conversations with various members of staff at the two women’s prisons we worked in.⁵ A senior manager expressed his desire for programmes that would support the reduction in escalating violence and self-harm. However, it’s clear from Brown’s extensive

⁵ In total we have worked with 236 women across 2 establishments.

shame research (2006, 2007, 2009) that she advocates further research in order to understand the processes of shame recovery and how to facilitate that.

We began to consider if an understanding of shame, its impact on behaviour and relationships could be understood within the prison estate, what effect might this have on interventions and the quality of interactions on a day-to-day basis? Those of us working in prison now understand the importance of being Trauma Informed – what might be possible if we became shame informed?

To begin to answer this we looked at other established training programmes such as *One Small Thing – Trauma Informed Practice* (Covington 2014) which we have both been trained in and have embedded within RESTORE. One Small Thing is the key training provider for Trauma Informed Practice and while trauma is their focus in their most recent evaluation, they do note the importance of shame in their work.

One Small Thing's recent evaluation (Petrillo 2019) of Healing Trauma⁶ (Covington & Russo 2016) suggested that one of the 'most striking feature of the focus group discussions was how positively the women had experienced Healing Trauma: it provides a safe space to examine the most damaging and shameful aspects of their lives, where they can both speak up and hear other women's stories' (Petrillo 2019:7). It also recognised that follow-up research would help to understand the longer-term impacts of the interventions.

2.6 Observations from the prisons

We felt growing concern and despair as we witnessed daily interactions and tension on the wings, alongside anecdotal reports from women that made clear that women did not feel safe. Some of the staff we interacted with appeared to have little understanding of why women were distressed, and how these behaviours might have their roots in shame. The more we understood about shame based behaviour the more we realised the disparity between staff who had some understanding of shame, and others who did not. This attitude was not helped by an acute lack of resourcing and funding leading to significant under-staffing which many officers spoke to us about. This shortage meant that officers could not spend enough meaningful time with the women individually.

Alongside this our concerns were compounded by an increasingly prohibitive regime due to the staff shortages. This meant programmes were cut short, and the women were locked in their cells during the

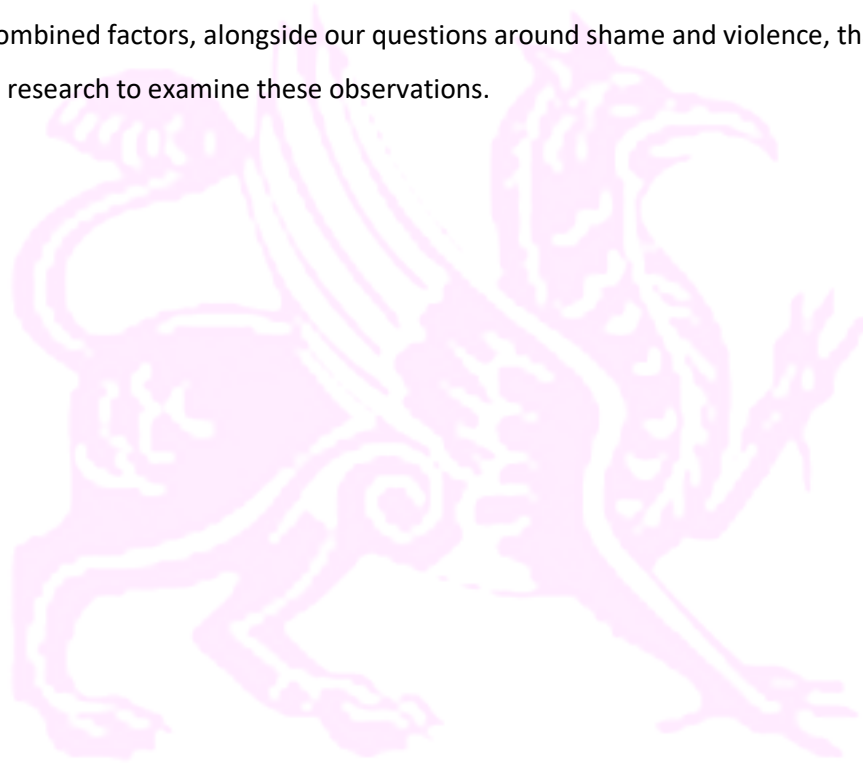
⁶ A brief, gender-responsive and trauma-informed intervention for women in prison

time when they were due to be in programmes and education. The House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee 2018 report states

Staffing shortages have forced overstretched prisons to run restricted regimes, severely limiting not only opportunities for prisoners to engage in purposeful activity, but access to health and care services both in and outside prisons. (2018:3)

This restricted regime served to increase the distress of the women, their isolation and their subsequent challenging behaviour. And for the many women already battling shame and the considerable difficulties that brings, the situation was extremely challenging.

These were the combined factors, alongside our questions around shame and violence, that led us to undertake formal research to examine these observations.



Chapter 3: Research Methodology

It was important to us that our research did three things:

- Contribute to the understanding of shame-based behaviour of women in custody.
- Develop this understanding to create more effective strategies and interventions to support the women in their recovery.
- Support staff in their direct work managing behaviour and violence.

It was vital to keep an awareness of both the care needed and the challenges of speaking about shame at the forefront of our research design and methodology. Our initial desire was to conduct the research in the main prison establishment in which we were working in order to better understand the experiences of women currently serving custodial sentences. However, we were unable to achieve this due to ethical concerns from the NRC, notably regarding the safety of people who were not professionally trained forensic psychologists openly speaking of shame with women who are already considered vulnerable. We therefore decided to conduct a set of retrospective interviews with women who had been released from prison, exploring their understanding of shame and how shame has affected their behaviour and interactions with peers, family members, prison staff, and self. Crucially these women would have experienced an SRT informed programme (RESTORE) to ascertain the potential impact of SRT on their time served and on release.

Having shifted our research to a focus on women released from prison, we came to the objectives and questions below:

3.1 Research objectives

1. To define SRT, understand its roots, competing perspectives and explore applications and uses in different settings.
2. To interview women who have lived experience of prison, and who have experienced an SRT informed programme (RESTORE), in order to explore whether or not SRT was useful to them both inside prison and on release.
3. To interview women who have lived experience of prison to explore the key factors that women identify have changed the way they have managed their behaviour during time served and subsequently on release.

We decided to use a Case Study Methodology with thematic analysis of data using a phenomenological perspective. This qualitative methodology allowed us to include analysis of archival data, captured from women's participation in RESTORE, including writings, poetry and visual art pieces.

We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven women seeking an understanding of a retrospective perspective of women's lived experience of shame and resilience, both whilst serving prison and then on release to the community.

All pseudonym names were chosen by the women to maintain their anonymity; every interview used the same questions and format to guard against bias.

We received ethical clearance from the Institute of Criminology's Ethics Committee (University of Cambridge) to undertake this research.

3.2 Research design

From the outset, acknowledging our situatedness – our biases, assumptions and subjectivity due to our relationship with these women in RESTORE – was critical to the design of this research. This situation however also afforded us the opportunity to gain richer data, as given the subject matter our prior relationship with the women meant there was a trust which allowed deeper sharing. Alongside our existing relationship with the women, we are also women with lived experience of shame, which undoubtedly impacts us as researchers. Our awareness of this was equally crucial.

In order to embed reflective practice within our research and to ensure our approach was as bias free as possible, we conducted pre and post interviews with one another before each formal interview with our participants. This proved vital in allowing us to consciously bracket our previous knowledge of the women we were interviewing, in order for this not to unduly influence either our interviews or our analysis of the data. This bracketing was assisted by our not having worked with the women for over three years (we last worked with the women selected for interview between 2014-2016). An important element to this process was also how it allowed us to bracket our own experiences of shame. This was key in, as far as possible reducing the influence of our own shame narratives on the research. To further assist this we kept reflective journals, using text and images, bringing to consciousness our own sense and feelings.

Our intention was to use our prior knowledge of both shame and the women we interviewed as a way of staying close to the material. Robert Romanyshyn, author and Emeritus Professor of Psychology at

Pacifica Graduate Institute is clear that the researcher is situated within the research and the ethics of this lie in the declaration and acknowledgement of this.

A poetics of research as opposed to empirics of research seeks to offer a plausible insight into the work by staying near it ... [we need an] ethical responsibility to acknowledge our participation in the bodies of knowledge we create (Romanyshyn 2007: 11-12).

At this stage of the research, it felt crucial for us to reflect on how our own hopes and expectations of involving these women who had left a significant imprint on us might impact the research. We needed to question our assumptions that despite knowing the women, we did not know of their unique lived experience outside of RESTORE, or what had happened to them since then in the many months and years that had passed. Keeping in mind what we did not know was crucial.

By creating this specific research design, we came to an understanding of shame's perniciousness, especially as we spoke about it to one another and became aware of how it worked between us. We witnessed how we experience shame differently, as did each woman we interviewed. We also realised shame itself can be seen as shameful, a phenomenon that can easily become embedded in one's sense of self (chronic or unbounded shame). Empathy and kindness became the crucial antidote for shame to dissipate between us, bringing into consciousness an awareness of each other's needs whilst undertaking this research.

Fischer's (2018) work on the impact of researching shame was important to us both personally and more broadly. At different points during the research, we found ourselves experiencing a sense of 'drowning' in shame, a deep and difficult process of over connectedness to the material. This required us to take turns transcribing and analysing the interviews, and to place boundaries around the length of time we listened to the interviews in anyone sitting. We discovered walking outside with the interviews lessened the impact of shame in the interviews interlocking with our own. We also ensured we designated time for each other to share what was arising personally for us. This process served our ability to simultaneously get close to the material whilst keeping our own processes as separate as possible. Fischer's description of working with shame greatly helped us;

Work on shame can be challenging, not least because of the "slipperiness" of shame, which makes identifying, defining, and analysing this feeling a necessarily inexact science, but also because of the affective toll it may take on the researcher. Shame is, notoriously, a painful emotion, and a sustained engagement with shame—even if this is at an academic, scholarly "remove"—can leave one vulnerable, even hurt, in its wake. (Fischer, C. 2018. P. 371-372)

3.3 Recruitment of the research sample

As our initial recruitment identified women who had previously participated in RESTORE, we were able to access these women through The Forgiveness Project's participant database. In each programme (ensuring GDPR compliance) we collect data which would allow us to stay in contact with participants if they consent. We also contacted the *Nelson Trust*⁷ to liaise with three women who had previously attended our community programme of RESTORE in 2016. We collected a potential list of 16 women in total who had served custodial sentences in the two establishments that we had worked in, all of whom had varying offences and lengths of sentencing.

3.4 Requirements for taking part

We were aware that we needed to ascertain any potential participant's psychological well-being in order to ensure ethical safeguarding and wellbeing for those taking part. This meant we could not include women whose mental health needs left them unsafe to explore these sensitive issues. This felt paramount as the women would be returning to their homes with children and families, some of whom were unaware of the women's experiences whilst in custody. To ensure this, as far as possible, we initiated a four-step process of contact with each woman. This involved: an introductory email outlining our initial purpose for this research to gauge if any of the women were interested; emailing/posting hard copies of more detailed information and consent forms in clear language to allow women to take time to consider participation; an initial phone call with each woman to answer any questions or concerns they had, and to ascertain their wellbeing and mental health; a second phone call, one week prior to the interviews to ascertain if anything had changed and ensure they were still feeling well enough to undertake this interview. We determined dates, timings and safe physical spaces that would suit each woman's individual needs.

Our reflections of this process noted how some women responded with a warm reminder of their memory of us and a keenness, as one woman described 'I will help you in any way I can'. These responses highlighted the strong motivation of women to be involved in this research and a desire to serve others in any way they could. During this process women openly spoke of their experiences, expressing relief at being able to speak about their time in prison. They shared how they had not been able to speak to family or friends; partly due to a sense they would not be understood, but also as a

⁷ Nelson Trust is a women's centre in Gloucester for women impacted by the criminal justice system.

means to protect those they loved who were unaware of the trauma the women had witnessed and experienced.

Their motivation was in part because of their previous relationship to us formed as part of the RESTORE programme. This highlighted a caution for us as researchers - we did not want this motivation to override any concerns the women might have of their understanding of the research aims and objectives and of their right to not be part of this process. Therefore, it was vital we initiated regular consent checks with the women at every stage of the research process.

As a result of this process, we recruited 8 women to interview. Unfortunately, when the time came, one woman was unable to attend the interview due to personal issues. The women's offences ranged from fraud to manslaughter with a breakdown of years in custody below (the names here are pseudonyms):

| Name | Sentence | License status at time of interview |
|----------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Martha | 8 years | On Licence |
| Penelope | 6 years | On licence |
| Sabrina | 30 months | Licence completed |
| Susan | 28 months | Licence completed |
| Frances | 11 months | Licence completed |
| Lauren | Multiple sentences | Licence completed |
| Hope | Multiple sentences | Licence completed |

3.5 Ethical considerations

As mentioned previously due to the nature of shame, caution is essential in order to cause no further harm. Therefore, ethical considerations were woven throughout the research design. There is a self-selective element to our research – the women who responded and who were able to partake all considered themselves resilient enough to undertake an in-depth interview regarding this aspect of their lived experience. Whilst this is limiting in terms of breadth of data it is necessary in order to

safeguard the women – the nature of the research already ruled out women who would not consider themselves ready or willing to look at this part of their experience.

3.6 Limitations of the research

We are aware of the limitations of a small number of interviews – this in no way is a wide scope piece of research. This is partly due to the heightened need for safeguarding and our need to alter our initial research proposal. We have always regarded this research as an initial inquiry into this material in order to further ascertain where to place further research.

We noted that the cohort of women we interviewed all had children and family. This limited our ability to look at those women who had no children or family and the impact this had upon their experiences. We also had a majority of five women who were in prison for the first time, albeit serving a mix of long and short sentences, with another two women who had served multiple sentences in prison.

Our situatedness was both a limitation and a benefit. We knew the women and had worked with them whilst facilitating RESTORE which, as we have discussed, meant we needed to be aware of any undue influence this gave the interviews. We needed to bracket our own experience of the women prior to and throughout the interviews. However, we acknowledge this is impossible to do wholly and we have no influence over how the women's knowledge of us might affect the data. However, we would suggest that it does not detract from what they express in terms of the difference experiencing an SRT informed programme made to their sense of self and the ability to have resilience against the shame they felt. Added to this our situatedness also benefitted our research due to the nature of the topic. In order to speak of shame, trust is needed, and the women trusted us.

A further limitation uncovered in the process of conducting the research, is that the women had a general lack of opportunities to participate in therapeutic programmes that might support their mental health and journey to desistance. In our interviews we were looking to ascertain if participating in an SRT informed programme, was useful to them – both during their sentence and on release. Our questioning was deliberately open in order to allow the women to refer freely to what they found the most helpful. The women answered this question fully in terms of their experience of RESTORE – the programme that we run. This highlighted our situatedness in interviewing as the women wanted to speak of their past experiences with us. However, they were uninterested in speaking about any other programmes they had completed. This is partly because their experience of programmes was limited, and partly because the issues they were looking to resolve in programmes were not addressed so they were not interested in speaking of them. Two of the women spoke of the helpful interventions provided

in one to one support through the Pathways Healthcare system and one woman spoke about completing a 'Healing Trauma' course.

This particular limitation of our research we believe reflects a wider limitation in custodial settings. There does not appear to be uniformity across the estates of programmes offered, it is dependent on the individual prison and sometimes the ability of the woman herself to put herself forward to be included in programmes.

3.7 The interviews

As part of our ethical safeguarding strategy for interviews to take place within safe spaces, we worked closely with each woman to ascertain what would be the most comfortable, safe and confidential space to conduct these. For the majority of women, the best choice of spaces was in therapeutic centres and women's centres. Two women were interviewed in their homes by choice with their children and partners absent on the dates and timings chosen. We discussed with each woman what support they had pre and post the interviews, especially regarding someone they trusted to talk through what they had experienced. We also offered follow up contact with each woman if they felt it was needed. We offered travel expenses for all women to attend where needed and a boots voucher at the end of the interview as a gift of gratitude for their time. They were not aware of the gift prior to attending the interview.

We made a conscious decision to jointly conduct interviews so that we could attend closely to the complex way women spoke of their shame. We alternated between one of us taking lead in questioning whilst the other could have a wider observation of the nuance of shame where it could not be spoken.

Devising our open ended, semi-structured questions for a retrospective interview involved a key reference to methodologist William Foddy (1993) whose work regarding constructing questions for interviews were very useful. He notes that 'Memory and recall processes...naturally fail with passing time' (1993:91) and 'the accuracy of recall depends upon the type and amount of processing at the time the learning takes place and the availability, at the recall stage, of cues associated with the memory trace' Foddy (1993: 95). We realised to support effective recall we needed to design working backwards from the present moment, as Foddy states 'working forwards is less likely to be as effective ... because respondents are more likely to find themselves in a position of having to confront memory failures and hence 'cue' failures early in the task' (1993:96).

Taking this into account, we supported the retrieving of memory traces by including the opportunity to re-visit visual and written poetry and journals that the women had written in prison and whilst participating in the RESTORE programme to allow for greater accuracy in introspection. We asked permission from the women to bring these items to the interviews as we were conscious of how producing these without warning might be challenging.

We had set up our interviews with the same conditions as we facilitated our RESTORE programme – using a trauma informed and shame resilient theory approach. We were guided by Thompson and Tulving suggestion that ‘no cue, however, strongly associated with the to-be-remembered ... can be effective unless the to-be-remembered ... is specifically encoded with respect to that cue at the time of its storage’ (Thompson & Tulving 1970: 255). It was important to recreate these conditions to enable the women to not only recall, but also feel safe and held in their recollection. As a result of these decisions, rich and in-depth interviews emerged, over 1.5 to 2.5 hours in length with each woman.

3.8 Data analysis

We transcribed the interviews ourselves, in order to spend time with the material and to ensure that we noted pauses, breath, laughter and silence. Shame lives within the nuance of what is not being said as well as what is said, and we needed to capture this nuance to ensure we could have as close an analysis as possible.

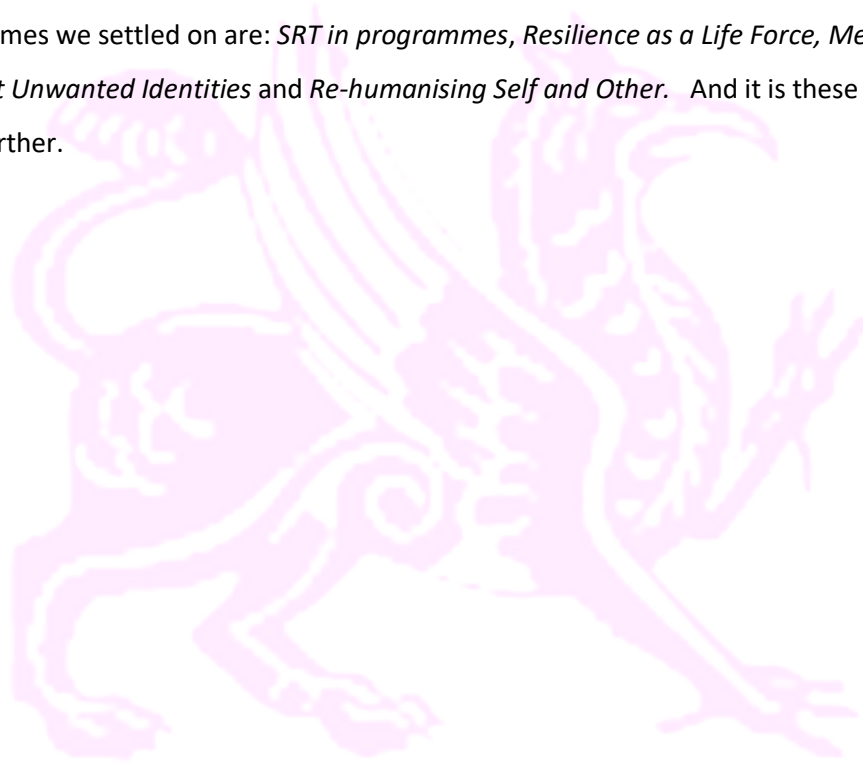
Our themes emerged using Braun and Clark’s (2006) six stages of thematic analysis. This analysis advocates immersion in the data in order to be able to identify emergent themes and patterns that perhaps at first glance might not be so apparent. Transcribing the interviews ourselves allowed us to familiarise ourselves with the data early on and in a detailed manner. After transcribing we began the iterative process of thematic analysis in order to identify emergent themes of shame and resilience which we honed into sub-categories.

We chose to employ a phenomenological methodology as this perspective does not seek to explain or analyse experiences but to describe the experience and subsequent feelings. Our aim was to keep close to the women’s lived experience and to, as Sundler et al (2019) advocates to cultivate a sensitivity to the meaning of the participant’s experience and maintain an ‘openness to the lifeworld’ of those we were seeking to understand (2019:3). Alongside this we wanted to look at what understanding or meaning might arise out of a descriptive process. As human beings we are continually trying to process and order our circumstances – a way of making meaning out of seeming chaos. As the interviews were being conducted in retrospect of women’s lived experience of prison, employing a phenomenological

perspective allowed them to explore, re-frame and reveal new layers of meanings from their experiences.

Using this iterative process, the themes we identified were numerous, due in part to the richness of the interviews and the complexity and diversity of shame-based events and behaviours experienced by the women. However, as we circled the data, each time interpreting the threads of meaning and experience of the participants, the repetition of patterns and themes across the interviews became more defined. Out of our sub-categories we identified ten major themes, which we then reduced to five as we were able to identify where themes were most prevalent across all individual data.

The main five themes we settled on are: *SRT in programmes, Resilience as a Life Force, Meaning Making, Resilience against Unwanted Identities and Re-humanising Self and Other*. And it is these which we will now elaborate further.



Chapter 4: Research Findings

In this section we will go through each of our five themes in detail. Overarching all these research findings is the umbrella theme 'meaning making'. It was clear in our findings that an ongoing process of meaning making was occurring from the moment they entered the criminal justice system. All the women described their arrivals in prison with an overarching sense of trying to make sense and bring meaning to what has happened in their life. However, what was clear to us was the new meanings that arrived as a result of experiencing SRT. This often arrived out of seeing a new perspective on an old meaning. So, whilst we have separated the themes into five distinct categories the thread of making meaning runs through all these findings.

4.1 Shame Resilience Theory in programmes

To begin we wanted to place SRT within the context of programmes the women experienced. As briefly noted in the limitations of our research, it was notable how when we asked the women about other programmes the questions were consistently dismissed. They answered the questions briefly and then moved on. This interested us. Was this because we were not the facilitators of those programmes so perhaps recall was hindered? Or was it because we were the facilitators of RESTORE so their leaning was to talk more of their experience with us? Or was it because their strength of feeling about RESTORE was the stronger resonance left in them?

A key influence that became apparent to us was how programmes were often inappropriate for the women's individual circumstances. Perhaps this arises from an insufficient assessment process resulting in little tailoring of suitability or readiness to participate. Added to this there appeared to be little uniformity of what programmes are available across the prison estate – some establishments having more available than others so depending on where you are will influence what is available to you.

Another aspect that was revealed was the programme's design struggled to be adaptable to participants circumstances. They were able to cover more generic aspects of trauma but offered little opportunity for the women to explore their own individual circumstances. The women expressed a need for courses that were tailored to them, to where they were in their lives and relevant to the issues they were facing. For example, one woman spoke of completing a healing trauma course which she said was 'pretty unhelpful' (Frances) due to her not being able to talk about her own situation. And another spoke of

being told to do courses that 'were nothing to do with my life, you know what I mean, they're just not real' (Martha).

Other courses mentioned were more lifestyle courses such as soap making and customer services. As we mentioned previously, two women spoke of the individual pathways for healthcare being helpful but that is not offered as a widely available course.

The women did speak of training courses concerning mental health that were run by Safer Custody and designed to support the women in their work⁸. However, the women who received that training and worked in these jobs, reported a more negative impact on their resilience. This impact was primarily due to the training focusing on the procedures to deal with the crisis of self-harm that had significantly increased in the prison at this time. Whilst this is clearly important, the result was that the training did not address the vicarious trauma the women experienced as they supported other prisoners who were at risk of suicide and self-harm. Added to this, due to staff shortages those working for Safer Custody were being called out, often late at night, more than would be considered safe for their mental health.

Sabrina, for example, described being in a cell at night with a woman who was extremely distressed and had a razor blade. Sabrina had to persuade the woman to hand in the razor, whilst all the time being locked in the cell with her, threatening her own safety. She described returning to her own cell after this experience extremely shaken and having no one to debrief with. She was expected to return to work the following day. Penelope described supporting another woman working with Safer Custody who herself had started self-harming again due to being overwhelmed and retraumatised in her role supporting others who were struggling with self-harm and without the necessary debriefing support.

Perhaps due to recalling this situation retrospectively the women were able to reflect more fully on the contrast of what they received and what they needed. They were aware at the time they were operating out of a crisis mentality, because the prison was, so they spoke about doing what they needed to do in order to keep women safe. However, as they reflected on the affect this had on them, they were clear that whilst this training was in some respects a mental health training it was not able to provide the support required to manage their work in Safer Custody and their own distress.

Our data revealed that the lack of programmes offering in depth, individualised support and tools to manage all aspects of their mental health resulted in a greater connection to RESTORE and subsequent notable recall of its impact upon them in prison and continued resonance after prison.

⁸ Safer Custody is the unit tasked with ensuring the women in custody are safe, do not self harm and are not at risk of suicide. The team works with serving prisoners who are responsible for attending to women in crisis.

The mutually empathetic relationship with us, along with the archival data from their participation in RESTORE, aided their recall and perhaps brought back their feelings of being seen and heard. We had not anticipated the women's recall to be so specific, especially after such a long time had passed since they had participated within RESTORE.

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Susan for instance still carried a quote she was given in the programme three years later. As she describes her route to find meaning and understanding:

The course [Restore] was the start of it because I took the quote from the course ... 'I didn't choose not to hate because I was a good person, I chose not to hate so as not to finish what they started so successfully' ... because that's the way I felt with my mum ... my kids were gone ... I'd end up in an early grave because ... it would have been what she wanted. [Susan is referring here to her mother, a relationship that caused Susan extreme distress and pain]

Susan goes on to describe how this quote began a process of resilient thinking:

All this holding on to the hate destroys your life ... you're not going to change what you want to change because you are holding on to your past basically ... so I think the day actually changed for me when I heard that quote ... If I continue to let her eat me up my life is just never going to be my own life and she's going to win, she's going to take everything from me' ... If I carried on hating her ... I wouldn't have got on top of my depression ... it would have been a big cycle and when I got out, I would have started it all over again basically.

It was notable for one woman that her recall of her experience of participating in RESTORE focussed on the shame she had felt trying to draw with pastels. As interviewers we had brought pastels and paper with us to support women to share experiences, they found difficult to verbalise, yet could express through colour, shape or image. This flexibility allowed more to be shared than if we had relied solely on the spoken word. It also allowed the women to keep safe as they were able to speak of difficult experiences without divulging details, they were not ready to share. As we took pastels out of our bag and gave them to her, she laughed. She took the box and revealed a moment where she realised her resilience to shame arriving:

I've never touched a box of pastels since... never... (takes out the pastels) I remember opening these up ... (sits on the floor) ... this was me ... paper I did this... I can't draw, I can't colour ... I can't do this I don't want to be here, this is stupid ... it looks stupid and its horrible ... (speaking her recall as she continued to draw) have you noticed one thing? I've covered the whole page ... what's not on it [she recalls the colours of a piece she drew in prison 'all black, all red... black squiggly lines that are now absent]. (Sabrina)



Oh ... I look at that quite proudly ... rather than what did I do that for ... you've helped me rather than I help you today ... you can say that ... this is what she does now... (Sabrina)

Another woman, whose writing poetry and drawing pastel images in RESTORE were an essential resource, had brought her personal notebooks to support memory recall. As she was invited to read one of her pieces called 'Walls' she said, *'I struggle so much reading that ... the fear that it's not good enough'*. As interviewers, we wanted to weave an echo of kindness to what was arising in this moment, allowing her to speak further. We waited until she said, *'shall I give it a go?'* It was in this process, halfway through she paused on a line that said, *'don't be afraid to take just a peek ... your foundations are rooted'* and realised how these walls were representing her life right now and where shame was situated. *'The process of those walls being there, the process of not wanting to shout it out, the process... it's really scary to look at so...I have a little look... have a peep actually its ok cos if you can see it, you can heal it if you can't see it, you can't heal it'*. (Penelope)

| Walls | |
|---|--|
| I can feel the walls again around me are tightening I wish I could cry even my tears are locked down | I know that's not good It'll scar my insides if I'm not careful It will eat me alive |
| This prison holds more It holds my heart and my head I feel numb and sad but I still cannot cry | Don't be afraid to just take a peak let me take care of you It's ok to weep |
| I want to let go to let it all out but there's anger in there I don't want to shout | let it go just a little A torrent may follow It's ok you know you want wash away |
| So I lock it all down I lock it away I keep it inside I keep it at bay | Your foundations are rooted well into the ground let the walls wash away and you will grow stronger |

As the women were able to identify aspects of this programme, we realised how the interview was mirroring the SRT process they experienced in RESTORE. During RESTORE the women were witnessed, they listened to other's stories, were encouraged to make connections and held in a safe non-judgemental space where understanding and empathy was nurtured. They experienced the programme as 'real', a safe space to challenge their own thinking and begin to imagine a different future. As Martha says, 'I thought okay this is real, this is real fucking people - this isn't an officer who I hate stood there telling me how to ... I was okay to be there ... you're actually listening'. Frances describes;

listening to other people's stories ... that gave me the positivity to keep going and that's strength again ... just keep going ... choose life ... just keep taking those steps ... that's what I took away from RESTORE more than anything ... Always choose life...' (Frances).

These same elements of witnessing, safety, 'realness' were present in the interviews, which perhaps then triggered the same level of perspective taking as the programme did, and their new sense of making meaning became apparent.

It is interesting to note that we did not anticipate that some of the women had not opened their notebooks or boxes of writings since leaving prison and were still not able to do so. This highlighted the difficulty of recalling memory and experiences that were steeped in shame. One woman described how she physically couldn't open the box as it contained letters written to her son with what she felt were false promises to not return to prison and the shame felt of having spent much of his childhood in

custody. Another woman, at the end of the interview, asked for the copies of her pictures she had drawn in RESTORE and she silently tucked them in her bag.

4.2 Resilience as a life force

ask a million women who have been to prison, and everyone would have a different answer ... but in some way it would all be the same thing like ... you've got to survive somehow whether you survive by blocking yourself, shielding yourself.... (Martha)

In all our interviews it was humbling to recognise that despite leading very traumatic lives, the women were able to access an inner resilience to fight in order to survive. This fight was despite their excruciating battle against their internal feelings of shame that one woman described as '*a sharp feeling like it goes in like I've been punched in the belly*', and '*physically I was so unwell with it. ... its toxic, its toxic shame*'. It is in this word 'despite' that we identified the life force of these woman that steered them to feel worthy to live – that they continue to fight despite how they feel about themselves and what has happened to them. As Lauren describes:

You're not battling the other prisoners but you're battling the system, and you're battling yourself. So, on every level you're fighting it's ingrained in you ... Fight, fight, fight ... I'll fight until I die.

This continues to the present day:

This fight that we know we have in us is the resilience to have the life we want to live ... this is the fight ... of life ... this fight of life, of love Fighting to stay here ... in the light.

Women described many varied and creative strategies they used in order to shield themselves, and it was apparent how the women applied these strategies as an everyday practice to survive. Women spoke of the need to know '*you can't falter, you can't push things away...you've just got to take life head on and tackle every issue as it comes up*'. With this everyday resilience to keep showing up, women described struggling with feelings that '*I deserved the shame*' and how only now in retrospect was one woman able to say - '*I set a boundary which is like no more shame. I refuse to be shamed ... like how many years do you let that consume you or control you?*' (Lauren)

The strategy of playing the game was seen in different ways with women describing how '*you sort of adapted, I'm here I've got to make the best of what I'm here for, what can I do to make this easier for myself*' and obtaining as much work as they could in the prison and volunteering for everything that was

possible. This in turn counteracted their feelings of shame as one woman observes *'if I'm good, good enough externally then it helps me to tell myself I am good enough internally'*. The theme of being a *'good person'* came up repeatedly as almost a mantra against the shame they experience internally and externally.

It's about being that pure person so it kind of makes up for the world that I came from that there was a lot of... you know it's not right, you know that what you're doing is not right and it doesn't sit right inside me that the life that I was living with that person wasn't the life I wanted to be living, it wasn't a life that had good things in it, it wasn't a life where people flourished it wasn't a life where ... there was not a lot of happiness and I think ... to try and balance that and put that right ... I have to come from a place of integrity ... (Penelope)

The women found a variety of strategies to maintain their sense of dignity and shield themselves from procedures deemed as *'safeguarding'* by the prison system, but often experienced as highly shaming by the women. One woman described this in regard to the officers making regular night checks on her⁹. She wanted to avoid someone entering her cell and touching her leg to ascertain if she was breathing:

They used to look through your night hatch ... I would cover up, make sure I was always fully dressed I used to make sure when they come round and check I was awake so I could move my arm... so they could see that I was in there 'I'm alright' (Hope)

The feeling of vulnerability the women had under the gaze of the male officers was also noted throughout the data in other ways, particularly in regard to their bodily appearance. One woman describes how everything changed for her in how people responded to her when her bodily appearance changed and the defiance this led her to feel:

I walked into that place as a scared little girl I was about I don't know 15 stone ... and from the second I was skinny and that just slightly a bit attractive it all changed.... Every one's view changed... in a terrible way ... maybe my confidence changed... maybe a bit more fuck off, I don't care, I wasn't the scared little girl... I constantly think what did I do, I didn't do anything... what did I do that caused them to try and make me feel that way? (Martha)

And after describing a litany of abusive situations throughout her sentence, Martha returned to the very place of her life force: *'I wanted my life enough so I fought for it, I wasn't going to cave in because an officer said something mean to me'*.

⁹ Night checks take place if a woman is deemed at risk. These can be anything between observations every 15 minute or once in the night.

It was noticeable that an enduring anger maintained a resilience born of defiance. Some of this anger was seen in relation to aspects of their convictions, the reporting about the conviction and towards those who were seen to have contributed to their situation. As one woman described someone *'blatantly lied'* in order to place her in the worst possible light. The anger came in particularly when it was felt they hadn't had the opportunity to respond to the allegation. This was very apparent for three women prior to sentencing taking place - as one woman who was advised to plead guilty to a manslaughter charge said *'I didn't get my day in court ... I was going to speak the truth and I was going to blow everything that they'd tried to do wide open'* (Martha).

Not one woman denied their guilt during their interview. In fact, the women repeated many times how wrong they had been and their regret. Yet they felt a strong sense they were good people, despite what they had done. From this place of knowing themselves, all the women spoke about lies that had been spoken about them – either in the press, or by family and friends or within the prison system. Their sense of self, alongside their strong sense of accountability, became a driving force of resilience to get through their sentence. This observation connects directly to meaning making as their understanding of their situation, what had caused their offending and what other contributing factors had occurred drove their resilience.

4.3 Making meaning

... healthy resilience...it's an awareness.. you can be aware actually of what you're doing ... that helps it be a stronger protective factor... it's a healthier layer to wear ... so you're not wearing the trauma, you're wearing the awareness (Penelope)

... the shame makes you resilient cos you want to get rid of the shame (Frances)

As we have previously noted the theme that threaded through all the data was how the women had reframed a new, restorative meaning of their experiences from the previous meanings they had formed whilst serving in prison. The process of finding new meaning out of their experiences was an overarching way of creating a new understanding of the 'why' of what had happened to them. This process appears as a route of resilience out of the shame – *'once you understand yourself more .. you understand the shame will go'* (Frances).

The research findings point to the fact that the women were making meaning continually throughout their time in prison. And by this positive reframing of their experience's resilience was built. This allowed them to be able to endure and survive.

It appeared this process of making meaning often started with a sense of being ‘at rock bottom’ particularly with a desire to take their own life. Several of the women spoke of the first night in prison and being determined to end their life:

I didn't get in the cell till like 11pm so everybody else was locked in so I didn't meet anyone ... I didn't sleep that night ... and I cried, and I cried, and I cried ... I just sat there all night and I thought ... I can't end it because who's going to fight for my kids ... again it wasn't for myself ... it was always somebody else that kept me going. (Susan)

However, each woman then spoke of what kept them from taking their own life – often it was a sense of not being able to ‘do that to my family’ or a sense of responsibility to children or dependants.

All the women spoke, in some form or another, about how going to prison saved them from the situations they were in. Once they were ‘safe’ and out of the sometimes very dangerous situations they had been living in they were able to begin to create meaning and understanding. Frances explains:

I can't regret going to prison, I regret all the hurt I caused everyone, but I can't regret going to prison because it has changed us [her family] for the better ... life would not be as good if I hadn't gone ... it probably would have carried on in a downward spiral and who knows where it would have got to.

This sense of retrospective understanding and meaning making allowed the women to see their experience through a different lens, developing a wider perspective and context of their life at the time of their offence – ‘I went to prison to deal with my mental health... I needed to get away from my partner and that was the only way’ (Susan). This understanding impacted their feelings of shame;

I used to feel shame. Now, I mean this might sound wrong to you, but it was mental health, it was something I wasn't in control off, you know ... it was something that stemmed in childhood and school. (Susan)

It was clear that the understanding and meaning they managed to find out of the experiences offered them a kinder more resilient sense of themselves. As a woman who served many sentences said ‘Without all that experience I wouldn't be the person I am today, I wouldn't have the children I have today ... I wouldn't be 38 years old with the strength of 10 men.’ (Lauren) It allowed the women to place their experience within the context of a restorative narrative – seeing their lives as a whole, framed within a bigger picture thus allowing some of the shame to ease.

The need for making meaning and creating understanding also creates further incentive to keep changing and working on themselves. Hope describes taking part in an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) ¹⁰evaluation and realising that her drug use had given her children some trauma. She says:

I needed to get out of it quickly before anymore trauma or anything could happen for them [her children] ... I own up to it ... I'm not proud of my past ... I got to look at my past as strength sometimes ... to remember where I have come from ... All the foundations aren't perfect ... sometimes you got cracks in the foundations ... and it's kind of patching them up isn't it. (Hope)

This sense of understanding interestingly increased their sense of responsibility. The meaning making and understanding was not about excusing or diminishing any culpability of guilt - all the women were clear about what had led them to prison and what they had done. However, the understanding allowed them to focus more strongly on what they needed to do now with their lives.

The time inside ... figuring it out and who I was and what I want in life. I probably would have kept going down the same route ... that time in prison gave me time to digest it and figure it all out. (Frances)

An interesting point to note is that all the women have children although three of them were either not allowed custody of their children or had restricted access and one woman has had a child since being released. The desire to survive and 'get better' for their children was a consistent theme that helped the women create and find meaning – that they would become better parents, provide a better upbringing for their children that they received, living for their child or proving themselves to be good parents to authorities that were challenging this: 'I need to change ... this has to stop now ... cos I need to live for my kids' (Hope); 'I am still living today because of [her son]. It's that simple' (Frances).

Being in relationship with others – both those inside and outside of prison - was another theme that supported the creation of new meaning; 'people in your life are precious and you can't give up on yourself because that means giving up on them' (Frances). All the women spoke of friendships made and finding ways to offer and receive support from one another thus creating meaning and connection. Lauren who endured a very chaotic and traumatic life commented on the importance of friendship in prison:

¹⁰ Adverse Childhood Experiences is a series of questions regarding experiences in childhood that is used to measure levels of childhood trauma that may impact adult life.

It's like camaraderie ... in the trenches way ... prison saved my life on many occasions because... that sense of community that I was always seeking, that I didn't even know that I didn't have I would have that in prison where we would do each other's hair, we would dance around'.

(Lauren)

This friendship and getting to know and understand other women alongside their own growing sense of self also enabled a wider lens and understanding of other women as Lauren says, '*putting things in perspective and that's what built my resilience*'. Martha, who had never been to prison prior to receiving a very traumatic sentence for manslaughter said:

[I thought] that everyone who went to prison were mean, they were naughty they belonged there ... and actually every story has a story, and everybody has a reason why they are there ...

A further interesting aspect to this thread of meaning making is that the interview itself was a meaning making process. All the women said that they rarely talked of their experiences, leading to a sense of isolation, feeling separate and alone. The women spoke of how difficult it can be to share aspects of their lives, due to shame or feeling that they might shock people. As Lauren explains '*some people can't bear your life, but sometimes it's quite unbearable, your own life, so you don't want to put that onto someone else.*'

This thread of making meaning was crucial to how they saw both themselves and others which led us to our next theme of rehumanising self and other.

4.4 Rehumanising self and other

There's some people who treat you like a human and there's some people who don't and some people who know your name and some people that call you .. when you've been there nearly 5 years it's just 'Oi'. (Martha)

This theme highlighted the disparity of experiences the women encountered in relation to officers - those that sought to humanise their existence and those who overtly de-humanised them. The language spoken by the women illustrated this very clearly - '*[he's] got my back*', '*believed in me*', '*treated me like a person*'. This is in sharp contrast to descriptions of other officers - '*some of them [officers] are vile*', '*she was vile – a brute*', '*they just wanted a hit*', '*I'm not even worth looking at*', '*there's all these officers and it was literally like throwing me into the lion's den*' and being told '*prison is for punishment*'. This highlighted a repeated theme that the women were not being treated like an individual person with individual needs; '*[how] the system is set up ... it's like, no, you're just a number*' (Lauren).

There was of a sense of being a number not an individual and the women gave many examples of how this was communicated - both overtly and covertly -especially in relation to their mental health needs. As Hope describes *'they'd always mention about the paperwork ... like how I been such a burden and now they have to go back and do all this paperwork on me'*. (Hope)

The women described their arrival at prison as extremely challenging and frightening, with no power or agency. Their sense of how they were received and seen by officers adding to this sense of powerlessness and dehumanisation.

You feel shame going in ... it's people's perceptions of you, it's the staff, it's the officers ... they have an automatic tendency to look down on you, speak down to you and make you feel very small and ashamed for the fact that you are there. (Penelope)

Lauren describes this further:

You're already operating on a level of feeling like shit, you've come smashed to those places ... I'd literally crawl in ... death's door ... And then you're treated like your sub-human ... power dynamic is massive ... I never used to have power.

This feeling of being treated as sub-human continues throughout her experiences:

If you've been conditioned into feeling or behaving like an animal.. you do [behave like that].

... telling her 'STOP' her noise and shut the flap ... which is the thing which is very much like ... you're invalidated ... not even worth looking at. You're not even worth looking at so we're going to shut the flap (this refers to the flap on the outside of the cell door used to communicate to the woman when she is locked in).

The levels of de-humanisation disclosed in the interviews were at times very serious with some very abusive examples – as Martha outlines here, following an incident where she was being perceived by some officers as being given preferential treatment by senior staff:

[an officer] calls me over and she says 'Oi you brown noser come here She gets out a marker ... [she says] I haven't got brown but its black ... let me paint your nose.... your nose is so far up his arse you might as well have shit on the end of it

We could suggest that some of these illustrations of de-humanising experiences are related to a systemic need within the prison system to depersonalise the officer - prisoner relationship in order to

safeguard levels of anxiety that arrive as a consequence. Isabel Menzies Lyth (1960) identified in her research within the NHS '*Social Systems as a defense against anxiety*', how specific defense mechanisms and devices are created to purposefully inhibit the 'development of a full person-to-person relationship between nurse and patient' (1960: 6).

This sense of not being seen as an individual is then felt by the women as a lack of relationship and care. As Frances describes

... I don't know why they're doing their job if I'm honest [laughs] but they don't try to build a relationship with you, they are there just to enforce... and just you kind of felt they were slamming the door in your face when they shut the door ... a lot of the officers are meant to say ... night or see you tomorrow take care...

However, the data is also clear that at the same time as there were disturbing examples of covert, overt and abusive dehumanisation, there were a few very important examples women shared of experiences of officers who showed empathy, compassion, kindness and consistent reliability. These officers were remembered clearly by the women illustrating how an empathetic relationship with officers aided their own ability to feel a sense of worth, value and care, and ultimately alleviating their feeling of shame.

One woman described two female officers; one of whom had taken time to help her choose a warm coat from the winter months on the internet and said, '*she was incredibly caring so I could go and have an emotional conversation with her*' and she explains how another officer came to her to offer her care for a situation that had taken this woman off an open wing and back into closed conditions. She describes:

She was incredible ... she said I'm not allowed to hug you but come here ... and said I really respect you and really really feel for you because you look after all of these women, you've done all of this and who is there to look after you? And she gave me this huge hug. (Penelope)

It is also noteworthy that witnessing kindness also had a big impact. One woman described witnessing another prisoner, who was very poorly, being taken to segregation and how she was treated by an officer '*he was lovely ... he was kind ... he would speak kindly to her, and I would remember that ... he wasn't abusing her and telling her negative messages*'. (Lauren)

It was notable that these acts of kindness were often seen in very subtle exchanges that took place on an everyday basis for women. One woman described how as she returned from a legal visit an officer '*opened the gate, said 'I just want you to know I think you are really brave*', whilst another officer in

charge of reception simply said, *'tough day yesterday'*. This woman goes on to explain *'just subtle little things ... gave me normality... they just ... saw me as a person'*. (Martha)

In all interviews the women spoke of the multiple ways they use to take agency and power over their situation. They spoke of behaving as a *'good person'*, *'the perfect prisoner'*. One woman described *'playing the system'* in order to get what she needed. They all spoke of quickly working out who the officers were who would support you and who would hinder your progress. This resilience was also seen in knowing how to put up a front so their vulnerability was not seen and so could not be taken advantage of by either officers or other women. As Lauren explains:

Because you're shamed for not being hard and being able to cope so I'd come out and have to pretend and put on this mask that I could cope with it when really at night I'd be devastated with and crying ... can't cope at all, emotionally unravelling, but the face that we have to present, the game face.

A notable place of resilience within de-humanisation came from a growing sense of self. All the women spoke of identifying with a self that was not of a prisoner - a resilient self, built around their admittance of their guilt, their honesty, integrity and clarity as to where injustice was held for them. As a result, they spoke of *'I am me, I am who I am and that's all I can be'*.

[it's] a weird feeling, you never really knew how to feel... it kind of taught me like... it really taught me you have to learn who to trust... just cos you're wearing a uniform that doesn't mean shit ... like you honestly feel like ... this big again ... and it's from people there who are there to look after you and that all comes with the resilience thing ... when you're stood in that moment on your own ... you've only got you. (Martha)

It was clear this sense of holding onto their sense of identity was essential in the face of some of their experiences to de-individualise the women. One woman described how she was not going to wear a prison tracksuit and opted to wear her own clothes, as a way of keeping her identity and then how she was spoken to as a result – *'who are you trying to impress they're not going to sleep with you mind, you're a prisoner, a prisoner don't forget that, you're a prisoner'*. (Martha) This phrase *'who do you think you are?'* was a repeated phrase in the interviews.

The process of re-humanising was shown also to arrive within the women themselves as they sort to find their connection to self and other – particularly within existing relationships *'I needed a lot of love*

and I kind of ... I show my kids a lot of love ... when I was in that dark place to try and get the feeling of them ... That's where I would feel the goodness almost' (Hope).

This led us to identify a specific theme – the resilience that arrives from unwanted identities given to them by their own self or by those of others.

4.5 Resilience from unwanted identities

I started realising ... you don't deserve to be treated like that ... no, you're not a bad person that was 10 years plus ago ... I don't deserve to be punished, like I have had enough consequences, I have had enough pain (Lauren)

A strong theme that emerged from the data was the pain of the separation from aspects of a healthy self-identity. It was apparent that the parts of the women they felt most shame about - their offence, drug use, secrecy and how family, friends and society viewed them - often felt separate from how the women either wanted to be seen or knew who they were inside, who they believed they were internally. As Penelope explains, *'I didn't do good things ... and now I'm doing good things so please don't judge me, please see me for who I am'.*

It was noted in the data where the women were able to creatively adjust their behaviour in order to survive their experiences and forge the new identities they needed to create. These creative adjustments could be viewed as defence mechanisms, developed as a defence against their situation, however we feel the data shows these to be resilient creative adjustments in order to survive. One woman described returning to the jail from her first ROTL (Release on a Temporary

License - used for work outside the prison or in the preparation for release) and the separation she felt from someone she had once been.

I was completely ok to be going back ... off I went, toddled with my little key back to my room... I was like this is ridiculous ... this is everything I never wanted ... I remember telling my Auntie ... [she said] 'don't be bloody ridiculous'... I said to her I feel homesick ... I remember feeling homesick [to return to prison]. (Martha)

In the interview we asked Martha if since leaving she has felt homesick for her room and prison - she emphatically replied, *'no!'*. Her resilience was her ability to creatively adapt to the unwanted identity, in order to survive the experience. Crucially however she has been able to shed that adaptation when it no

longer served her on her release. However, Martha went on to describe the protection she still feels she needs from how people might view her:

Everywhere I went ... why she looking at me? ... Cos, I got this thing, still to this day ... I don't approach people to say hi ... I will not be the first person to say hi because you might hate me ... you might not want to be seen talking to me so if you're going to say hello, I'll happily stop and chat, but I wouldn't put that on somebody ...' (Martha)

Alongside this desire to be seen as they really are was the painful view they often had of themselves, as Hope explains 'you kind of draw this ugly picture of yourself ... With the shame and the guilt.. what you put your children through ... all that carries a lot of shame'. This can be very difficult to shift as it can align with judgement from the public.

[A neighbour said] Ahh you're just a smack head anyway ... and [she] put a bin full of rubbish outside my house years on they still have that resentment and it's no good me going 'Oh I'm a reformed character now .. that stuff lasts in a community, and it lingers ... so it never goes away that old life. (Lauren)

Despite how others saw the women, the data showed that the resilience was found in the women committing themselves to keep changing; 'To figure out who you really are and to put that pattern together to give yourself something to live for' (Frances), 'to clean up the end of my street' (Hope). This resilience came through action, thinking and behaviour to create a more congruent picture of themselves and a sense of their capacity to hold onto who they feel they are at their core. As Penelope describes: 'I can rebalance that 'cause I lost myself for so long it's really important for me to keep a hold of my core and for me, integrity is really really, really important'.

A clear determination was seen in each of the women that they can only be who they are, work as hard as they can, be as strong and faithful to themselves as possible and keep moving forward. This supported their sense that shame could then be lessened. 'I want to prove my worth, or to show I am more than that.. maybe that's another way to deal with shame' (Lauren).

As the shame shifted and they worked on these aspects of themselves the resilience was further found in seeing the change in themselves and the impact that this has on their lives. 'I suppose in myself I feel a lot more beautiful now... cos I am doing beautiful things and I've got my kids back '(Hope). 'It's about being that pure person so it kind of makes up for the world that I came from' (Penelope). The resilience was seen in the determination to be the person they want to be.

I've learnt when I don't take drugs a day at a time, I don't cause trouble a day at a time and then I feel less shame because I think today, I have been a good person, today I haven't caused harm
(Lauren)

A crucial factor in this process was those they had around them. To identify even just one person – a family member, another woman on the wing, an officer or tutor who was willing and able to see them for who they are, rather than just as their crime or their behaviour. Each woman was able to identify one (or in some instances more than one) individual who enabled them to hold onto the sense of who they really are. When this thread continues on the outside through family, friends, rehab or women's centres the continued strengthening of self supported the shame that existed due to their crime and previous lifestyle. Lauren describes

[my] recovery community ... really helped me and women empowering me, being around strong women that believe in me when I couldn't believe in myself. Women who told me.. you're worth something .. they believed in me and loved me better .. ' (Lauren)

It was noted that a particular disturbance arose for us whilst looking at data that represented the view of women held by some prison staff and other female prisoners. This data showed aspects that were exploitative and demeaning to the women's identity as women. This was seen as Lauren talks about the hierarchy within the women

There's a massive hierarchy of women... like you're shit if you're a sex worker or sex offender .. you're at the bottom of the pile- or a grass- you're at the bottom of the pile .. or a peter thief [someone who steals from the cell]... the hierarchy is drug dealer, drug dealers have respect...

She had previously described how some male officers undermine and contribute to this sense of demeaning.

I take a deep breath in because it's like that feeling a powerful man and how they speak to you, they speak to you like you're shit and how that makes you feel like shit. You're already operating on a level of feeling like shit, ... the power dynamic is massive

This disturbing power dynamic, in particular how it relates to gender and female identity, was described by another woman who as part of her work within the prison, had gone onto a wing and was met by 5 male officers. She describes

They're all 'this is the one, this is the one' [referring to her crime] and I'm like 'the one what? 'Oh yeah, yeah fucking ... yeah, yeah giving it all this ... and I'm stood there, I'm stood there at the door. (Martha)

She goes on to say that one officer; *'came over and said 'add me on Facebook, I'll take you out for dinner and this that and the other' ... I just felt so uncomfortable so fucking uncomfortable'.*

This woman had previously described the shift in how she was seen once she had lost weight and began to take care of her appearance after an extremely traumatic beginning to her sentence. In one deeply disturbing example she gave of officers not letting her through gates;

There's times when I'd be stood at a gate ... and say 'can you let me through' and people would stand there and go, 'you have to go and suck someone's cock to let you through' and off they'd walk. (Martha)

This theme of the women who were deemed as particularly visible due to their appearance was a repeated theme brought out in the data. This plays into a more widespread conversation regarding women's appearance and how, in particular men respond to this. As Lauren describes *'for me everyone only placed value on how I look, how men perceive me so if I'm pretty enough, if I'm slim enough, if I'm accepted and validated enough by men, I am good enough'.*

There were notes in the data regarding the treatment of women as they changed their appearance by both other prisoners and the officers. However, it was also noted that women who were perceived as vulnerable often got softer treatment - *'the ones that were vulnerable she would love to pieces but then the one[s] that were more ... would fight for themselves ... tougher ... she did not like at all' (Sabrina).*

Each of the women spoke of versions of this behaviour and the demeaning of their identity as a woman. We as researchers and as women were deeply disturbed by the ubiquity of how this demeaning, in various forms, presented itself by both officers and other women. The women showed resilience to this by ensuring they had their own group, family member or had identified one officer who could support them to hold their own sense of self. The women who spoke of being corralled by five male officers was subsequently able to tell another male officer on her wing who then spoke up against this behaviour.

Connected to this theme of unwanted identities and how to strengthen a new identity was the theme of helping others. All the women spoke to their desire to support other women, and for the majority of the women this started within the prison either working in Safer Custody or in other supportive roles. As Penelope describes as she worked within safer custody;

I'm not a bad person, I do actually care, and I do, do good things so my resilience would have come through that even though there was a lot of trauma with the women I was working with and my own that's what really, really helped'

The women all spoke of the lack of care they perceived that those serving in prison received, *'it's very hard to get help in prison... you're literally on deaths door or threatening to kill yourself - you don't get anything'* (Frances). And it was often this lack of care that precipitated the women into trying to support each other where they could. Several of the women spoke of making amends, using their own experience to understand and support other women – either in terms of care and friendship or as one woman did make complaints about various situations in order to ensure no other woman had to endure what she had to. As Frances describes – *'I took it to the ombudsman... focussing on what I could do ... to do something to stop it happening again ... it helped my anger subside ... '*

Each of them spoke of how the process of using their experiences to support other women increased their self-esteem and their resilience to move away from old unwanted identities. Lauren was clear about wanting to support other women – *'so if I'm not giving back to other women what am I doing?'* and Frances stated, *'I don't want to achieve more in life ... I want to help more ... I want to make happiness'*.

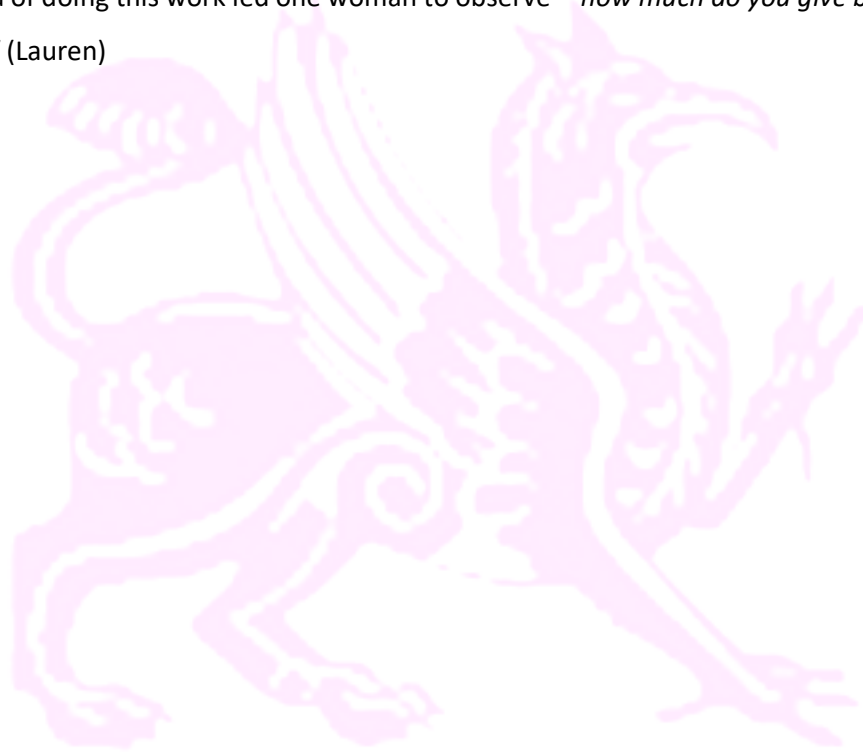
However, we noted a tension between the women's desire to be seen as a good person by supporting other prisoners with critical mental health issues, and yet not being adequately supported which risked them being re-traumatised. This showed mainly in the work the women did for Safer Custody¹¹ where the women reported little support was offered in the face of dealing with extreme situations. Sabrina spoke of being locked in a cell as a safer custody worker with a woman who was self-harming with a razor. She spoke of not being confident anyone would help her if the woman, who was very unstable, threatened her in any way. Added to this, due to confidentiality, she was then not able to discuss or debrief with anyone following this situation but went straight back to her cell where she was locked in. There was a sense of burn-out from the women as they tended the needs and unmet mental health issues they encountered on a daily basis, whilst not receiving appropriate support for their own mental well-being.

I've been locked in a room with someone and they've self-harmed in front of me ... another prisoner shouldn't be doing stuff like that ... obviously you have the training but there's many a girl who did the training and you know they shouldn't be doing it because you've obviously got to

know them, you know what their mental health is ... that person should not be doing this
(Sabrina)

Sabrina went on to speak of a woman who was active in the service of safer custody who self-harmed and, due to having to support prisoners who were self-harming, in the end returned to this behaviour herself. The women described walking a difficult edge of their own desire to ‘*be good*’ and ‘*give back*’ yet doing this without enough support for their own trauma and well-being. It was noted that the Listeners Service¹² was able to offer more support to their volunteers than Safer Custody offered.

This edge of the desire to show change, be a good person and make amends alongside the incredible strain and trauma of doing this work led one woman to observe - ‘*how much do you give back before you’re absolved?*’ (Lauren)



¹² The Listeners are Samaritans trained prisoners who are available to provide a Listener service to prisoners who are struggling.

Chapter 5: Analysis

A significant note we made in our analysis of the interviews was seeing how as situated researchers with lived experience of shame, we asked our questions in an indirect, roundabout way. This meant we often provided lengthy explanations to questions in order to intuit when it felt right to name shame explicitly or implicitly. Most commonly it took up to 40 minutes before the word shame was spoken by the women and for some it was not until nearing the very end of the interview until this word was linked with resilience.

Early in this analysis it became apparent that for women to speak was, in and of itself, an act of disobedience. They checked with us, that it was okay to speak and to share. Often, they spoke in a whisper, or in quiet tones, commenting how they do not generally speak of their offences or experiences. Despite some years passing, this place of silence still prevailed and explicitly evidenced how shame has no connection to time passed – it is in the very act of speaking that allows shame to loosen its grip and dissipate.

Our analysis provided a rich tapestry of complexity as to how women spoke of shame without re-experiencing shame itself. By using the SRT elements during the interview within our interview technique along with creative tools to facilitate expression, the women experienced the interview itself as a space where they were developing resilience from shame.

In the analysis we recognised a distinct pattern of how metaphor, gestural and visual language was expressed by the women as a way to articulate embodied feelings of shame. Pattison (2000) describes how the experience of shame does not readily present as an articulable experience. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Block Lewis suggests that the roots of shame lie in the 'primitive', pre-linguistic experiences of young children (Lewis 1971). This perhaps helps to explain its fundamental resistance to clear verbalisation and articulation in later life. Shame presents as a visual and imagistic experience rather than one that can easily be verbally articulated.

Laughter was noted as a crucial element to these interviews and a mechanism that we realised dissolved the shame spiral. Scheff (1990) notes that shame-spirals are interrupted by laughter. Furthermore, 'chronic shame is most effectively dispelled by good-humoured laughter' (p. 175). Within SRT, Brown

notes that sharing knowing laughter is part of 'the reaching out continuum - the measure of one's ability to reach out to others to both find empathy and offer empathy' (2006:49).

There were many examples of this – noting women would laugh when they were recalling memories of endearing connection to others or adversely situations that was not funny at the time but on recalling brought laughter. These latter situations were often at times where anger had been displayed, or an incessant feeling of, as one woman described 'ridiculous' situations that led to a disbelief that any of this happened. This laughter brought a mutual feeling of understanding of what was not being spoken in detail and yet was implicitly understood by us all.

Pattison (2000) discusses a 'means of escaping shame is that of humour and laughter'. This sense is noted further in literature (Lynd 1958; Nathanson 1992; Retzinger 1987; Scheff 1987) and when people laugh, it is argued, self-consciousness is left behind and shame is dissolved, producing a sense of self-unification and solidarity with others, at least temporarily:

At the very core of the process of reconciliation lies good-humoured laughter, especially laughter at oneself. The affectionate admission of one's own foibles in a way that leads to spontaneous laughter signals the completion of the shame response cycle and the possibility, therefore, of reconciliation not only with others, but with one's true self, the suffering, foolish, awkward, impossible animal that is the human being. At this moment, the pretension, ambition, greed, and bitterness that interfere with simple cooperation and mutual aid turn to dust . . . laughter may be a path toward survival. (Scheff 1987:148)

As we listened to the women speak of their experiences, with such courage and life force, we ourselves were affected by what Engstrom et al (2008) describe as 'vicarious resilience' (Engstrom, Hernandez & Gangsei 2008). In their work with torture survivors, they identified that the process of seeing 'where the resilience is, where the strengths are, and having enormous respect and admiration for what keeps people going' (ibid:19). This mirrors our experience. Our respect and care for each of these women, of whom we had previously built relationships to, was fundamental as we realised as it gave permission for them to speak of what they described as unbearable, as Lauren described '*who can you ever even talk to about this stuff ...you and Ruth ...are pretty much un-shockable...once it comes out to you it's not too much for you to bear*' (Lauren).

Chapter 6: Concluding Reflections and Recommendations

Our research clearly indicates that shame, spoken or not, exists, and that it causes affect and effect in the lives of women who have lived experience of imprisonment. The research appears to highlight that speaking, understanding and developing resilience in relation to the damaging, pervasive and corrosive nature of shame facilitates personal growth, responsibility taking, and an easier reintegration into community than would normally be anticipated.

Therefore, we would recommend that:

- there is a potentiality for SRT to be incorporated into intervention programmes within the female estate.

Our research pointed to the potential influence of positive brief interactions between officers and the women in prison to dissipate shame or behaviours that appeared to be rooted in shame. As recommended in the development of the practice of Five Minute Interventions (FMIs) these interactions can create the opportunity to:

Turn everyday conversations into opportunities for rehabilitation ... The aim is that with these FMI skills staff can take every opportunity to encourage the people in their care to strengthen their decision-making skills and build a stronger sense of self-efficacy while working with hope toward positive change. (MOJ 2017)

Therefore, we would recommend that:

- SRT is specifically included in the FMI training in order to facilitate further the change that these interactions are designed to encourage.

We would like to make these further recommendations:

- We would highly recommend that a more specific, larger cohort research looking at the explicit link between trauma and shame in women in custodial settings. This would include a wider cohort of women, offences, length of sentences and behavioural challenges. There is a sparsity of research on women and shame specifically within custodial settings, despite calls for further research (Brown 2006, Brown 2009, Elison, Garofalo & Velotti 2014, Fitch, Nazaretian, Himmel

and 2018 and Hernandez & Mendoza 2011). We would also recommend research looking specifically at links between shame and behaviour in order to further the understanding of this connection.

- We would recommend examining existing intervention programmes in order to ascertain the potentiality of incorporating SRT into their existing structures.
- This research has highlighted the need for uniformity across the female prison estate. We would recommend all women entering the prison system should have equal and fair access to high quality interventions that meet their needs.
- We would recommend that facilitators in intervention programmes that encourage women to share their stories or speak of their trauma receive training in SRT and facilitating the sharing of shame related issues. This would include offering spaces where shame free guilt could be explored in an explicit manner in order to encourage responsibility taking.
- We recommend establishing a training course for prison officers in Shame Resilience Informed Practice. This training would include:
 1. The development of a working understanding of shame; various ways it can present, impact on relationships, recognition of behaviours and increase skills in the ability to engage, and dissipate shame based behaviours
 2. Clarify and develop understanding the connection between shame and trauma, and resilience.
 3. Understanding the four elements of SRT (Brown 2006) – Recognition of personal vulnerability, critical awareness of shame in self and the wider environment, the development of mutually empathetic relationships and the ability to speak shame.
 4. The development of appropriate language to de-escalate shame based behaviour. This can be incorporated into Five Minute Interventions.

We hope this exploratory piece of work makes an important contribution to understanding further what might be needed to assist women in conflict with the law.

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