



The  
University  
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**‘Lived Citizenship’ from the  
perspectives of men imprisoned in the  
Republic of Ireland & England**

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# Abstract

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Despite substantial discussion of the citizenship status of individuals with convictions, and academic debate around the contested notion of citizenship, little attention has been given to how citizenship is subjectively understood and experienced by those in prison. This thesis explores the meaning of citizenship for men imprisoned in the Republic of Ireland and England, and considers, based on these subjective understandings, whether citizenship is realised in their day to day lives during incarceration. In comparing two jurisdictions with different legal positions on prisoner enfranchisement, this thesis challenges the assertion that the right to vote is symbolic of citizenship by exploring whether this legal difference is reflected in the broader lived experiences of incarcerated men.

Drawing upon qualitative data collected from interviews with 64 men held in either an Irish committal prison or Category B local prison in England, the thesis highlights three main themes in participants' understandings of what is required to be a citizen: belonging to a self-defined community; opportunities to contribute to this community; and the maintenance of an identity beyond the status of 'prisoner'. The findings highlight the significance of autonomy and humanity to citizenship for those in prison and offer insight into the ways inhibition of a meaningful sense of citizenship during incarceration transcends national context. In addition, the thesis contributes to knowledge of the significance specific national and local arrangements hold in shaping individuals' understandings of citizenship and its relevance to their lives while incarcerated, furthering understanding of the contextually-situated nature of lived experiences of punishment.



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## **List of Abbreviations**

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ACO	Assistant Chief Officer
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CNA	Certified Normal Accommodation
CoE	Council of Europe
CPT	Committee for the Prevention of Torture
DJE	Department of Justice and Equality
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FNP	Foreign National Prisoner
HMCIP	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
HMP	Her Majesty's Prison
HMPS	Her Majesty's Prison Service
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IEP	Incentives & Earned Privileges Scheme
IPP	Imprisonment for Public Protection
IPRT	Irish Penal Reform Trust

IPS	Irish Prison Service
MC	Master of Ceremonies
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NPS	New Psychoactive Substances
OC	Officer Commanding
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services & Skills
OLASS	Offenders' Learning and Skills Service
OU	Open University
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PID	Prisoner Information Desk
PIMS	Prisoner Information Management System
POA	Prison Officers' Association
PRT	Prison Reform Trust
PSI	Prison Service Instruction
PSO	Prison Service Order
ROTL	Release on Temporary License
SFA	Skills & Funding Agency
SO	Senior Officer
SRPP	Strategic Review of Penal Policy

TD	Teachtaí Dála
VP	Vulnerable Prisoner
VPU	Vulnerable Prisoner Unit





# Chapter One

## Introduction

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### 1.1 Setting the Scene for the Research – Why Citizenship?

This thesis makes an original contribution to existing prison research, and citizenship research, by exploring the subjective understandings and experiences of citizenship for men incarcerated in the Republic of Ireland<sup>1</sup> and England. Notions of citizenship, crime and punishment have long been intrinsically linked. Crime is defined in relation to the standards of behaviour expected of citizens by the state, while the state's power to punish those who fail to reach these standards has implications for individuals' standing as citizens, legally, normatively and philosophically. Historical notions of the social contract and civic death continue to feature heavily in political and academic discourse around offending and imprisonment, raising the question of whether these conceptualisations of the relationship between citizenship and crime reflect the lived experiences of those who are convicted, and imprisoned, today.

Not only is punishment used against those who fall below the standards expected of citizens, but with the focus of changing individuals' behaviour being central to modern punishment (Foucault, 1977), places of punishment – such as prisons – are seen as a tool with which to “mould” individuals into citizens (Vaughan, 2000: 26; Bailey, 1987). Indeed, as Carlen (2012) notes, rehabilitation is often termed in relation to creating ‘law-abiding citizens’ suggesting an implicit distinction between citizen and offender. This connection of citizenship to rehabilitation, with the idea that individuals can be changed to become citizens, is evident in the way citizenship has become a core theme around which to orient the implementation of prison policy on ‘rehabilitative culture’ in England & Wales. For example, according to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) (2018a) HMP Stafford ‘delivers’ citizenship through its regime, with a vision of “returning citizens, not offenders to our communities”, an approach identified as good practice by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP) (2016). This dedication to a regime focused

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of brevity, hereafter referred to as ‘Ireland’. All references to ‘Ireland’ throughout the thesis relate to the Republic of Ireland unless otherwise stated.

on cultivating ‘citizenship’ builds upon a broader trend of various programmes described as “active citizenship schemes” being developed within prisons across various jurisdictions (Edgar et al., 2011: 5; Brosens et al., 2018).

Perhaps the most explicit discussions around the citizenship status of those in prison have been in the public debate which followed the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) decision in *Hirst v UK (No.2)* [2005] ECHR 681. In 2001 three prisoners brought a challenge to the High Court that, by preventing them from voting, S.3 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 breached their right to vote under Article 3 of Protocol No.1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). When this challenge was dismissed by the High Court, one of the prisoners – John Hirst – appealed and the case was heard by ECtHR in 2004. Describing the blanket ban on prisoner voting as arbitrary and disproportionate, whilst accepting that the right to vote under Article 3 was not absolute, the ECtHR ruled that the United Kingdom’s (UK) legal position on the disenfranchisement of those in prison was unlawful. The Grand Chamber rejected the UK Government’s appeal of this decision in 2005, which sustained the “*cause célèbre*” around prisoner voting in the UK (Bates, 2014: 503). The political and media response to the *Hirst* judgment was highly punitive, demonstrating a fervent opposition to extending the franchise to people in prison, with Prime Minister David Cameron saying that the thought of giving prisoners the right to vote made him “physically ill” (Hansard, HC Deb, 3 November 2010). Additionally, opposition to the ECtHR’s judgment also illustrated a resistance to accepting European control of voting rights (Bates, 2014). As such, the combination of ‘populist punitiveness’ (Bottoms, 1995), and fear surrounding Strasbourg as a threat to parliamentary supremacy, created a “perfect storm” around the debate of prisoner voting and furthered resistance amongst parliamentarians (Murray, 2012: 513).

The political, public and academic debate which followed the *Hirst* decision drew heavily upon differing notions of what it means to be a citizen, and the significance of this for a democratic nation, in the arguments presented both in support of, and opposition to, prisoner enfranchisement. These debates were played out in the discussion which led to, and followed, the introduction of the Coalition Government’s Draft Voting Eligibility (Prisoners) Bill. The Bill, which proposed a range of possible responses to the ECtHR judgment, was scrutinised by a Joint Committee who heard

evidence from a range of experts including academics, prison reform organisations, lawyers, parliamentarians and the Prison Governors' Association. Despite proposing the introduction of the right to vote for prisoners serving sentences of twelve months or less (Joint Committee on the Draft Voting Eligibility (Prisoners) Bill, 2013), based on the evidence heard, the Bill was not taken forward by the Government. It was not until 2017, following further calls from the ECtHR to rectify the situation, that a proposal by UK government was accepted by the Council of Europe (CoE). David Lidington MP (Secretary of State for Justice) proposed much more limited amendments to the position in the Representation of the People Act 1983, with the main effect of these proposals being that individuals on Release on Temporary License (ROTL) would be able to vote. These administrative amendments have resulted in the extension of the franchise to a very small number of people serving custodial sentences, estimated to be no more than one hundred at any one time (Lidington, 2017), while the acceptance of this position by the CoE has served to accept the continued disenfranchisement of most people in prison as lawful. This extremely limited change, resulting from the *Hirst* judgment and subsequent debate, seems to “reveal how the malaise towards enfranchising prisoners persists” (Adams, 2019).

The debate and discussion following *Hirst*, demonstrate the growing academic and political interest, in Ireland, England and further afield, in the legal citizenship rights of those in prison, the existence of volunteering programmes or prisoner councils in prison settings, and the extent to which those in prison can engage more broadly in active citizenship during incarceration. Despite these trends, there has been a dearth of research on what citizenship means for those individuals who are the subjects of prison regimes, with little evidence of the voice of incarcerated people in this discussion. This gap in the literature needs to be filled because, as I will argue throughout this thesis, there is value in listening to the voices of imprisoned people themselves to uncover the subjective meaning of citizenship for these individuals, and what factors in their lives impact on their sense of citizenship during incarceration. Research has also demonstrated that individuals' sense of self-identity in general (Farrall, 2005; Vaughan, 2007; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Stone, 2016), and as citizens specifically (Farrall et al., 2014), is influential in their journey out of crime. As such, understanding of subjective perception of oneself as citizen may also be important to informing the ways that desistance from crime can best be supported and encouraged.

By considering what citizenship means to individuals, this study highlights the complex and nuanced reality of facilitating meaningful citizenship within the prison setting, and the need to consider whether activities labelled as ‘active citizenship’ realise a sense of citizenship for those who take part in them. To demonstrate these complexities, this research privileges the lived experiences of individuals in prison, reflecting the important trend in citizenship studies to move away from legal or normative definitions of citizenship, to concern with the subjective citizenship of the everyday (Lister, 2007; Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011).

## **1.2 Privileging ‘Lived Citizenship’: Aims and Research Questions**

This thesis aims to advance understandings of the relationship between citizenship and imprisonment, by exploring ‘lived citizenship’ for men imprisoned in Ireland and England. Taking influence from the work of Hall and Williamson, the notion of ‘lived citizenship’ is used to inform the main research questions for this study by maintaining an emphasis on subjective perception and experience, thus prioritising the voices of participants. ‘Lived Citizenship’ is described by Hall and Williamson (1999: 2) as:

*the meaning that citizenship actually has in people’s lives and the ways in which people’s social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens.*

This notion of ‘lived citizenship’ has been used as a theoretical lens through which to explore the subjective citizenship experiences of various marginalised groups, being particularly suitable for such research due to its appreciation of social, cultural and circumstantial context. The approach has been particularly popular in research with an emancipatory aim or focused on those experiencing intersecting marginalities, including research on the citizenship experiences of women (Lister, 2007; 2009), children and young people (Lister et al., 2005), migrant women (Cherubini, 2011; Pun & Wu, 2004), those in poverty (Rubin et al., 2014) and probationers in the process of trying to desist from crime (Farrall et al., 2014). Scholars have tended to organise their explorations of lived citizenship around particular key elements of citizenship identified in the diverse theoretical approaches to the notion (Cherubini, 2011), while others have operationalised ‘lived citizenship’ into statements reflecting such elements,

to enable collection of quantitative and qualitative data on the extent to which individuals' views and perspectives reflect this operationalised 'lived citizenship' (Farrall et al., 2014). For the purposes of this research, the very core of Hall and Williamson's definition of 'lived citizenship' is drawn upon in its broadest sense as a guide for the research, that being the *meaning* that citizenship holds in individuals' lives. The thesis will prioritise factors identified by participants themselves when communicating their understandings of citizenship, and what it means to them, exploring these qualitatively rather than pre-determining key elements of citizenship through which to measure individuals' lived experience.

As such, this thesis is guided by the following core research questions which, when answered, will shed light on what 'lived citizenship' looks like for men in prison:

- 1) How do men in prison conceptualise citizenship (and their own position in relation to this notion)?
- 2) Do men in prison consider themselves to be citizens?
- 3) How, if at all, does the experience of imprisonment affect individuals' subjective sense of citizenship?

By using the lens of 'lived citizenship' to shape the research questions, the study enables consideration of issues identified by participants themselves as relevant or important to their lives as citizens. In doing so, it extends consideration of citizenship for those in prison beyond legal definitions focused purely on rights, nationality or residency, and normative definitions of citizenship based on pre-defined activities, which have thus far dominated academic discussion of citizenship and imprisonment.

While prioritising the understandings of citizenship posed by participants, this study takes an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998) and also draws upon existing theory on citizenship to explore its relevance to participants' lived experiences. As such, within the broad overarching aim of exploring 'lived citizenship' consideration is also given to individuals' experiences of various key elements identified in citizenship theories, through the following secondary research questions:

- 4) How do men in prison perceive, and engage with their communities during incarceration?
- 5) How do men in prison perceive, and engage with the state during incarceration?
- 6) What are the motivations for, or barriers to participation in active citizenship activities during incarceration?

An inextricable link has been drawn between notions of community and citizenship in existing literature, including that drawn in Hall and Williamson's (1999) work between 'lived citizenship' and 'lived community'. The prevalence of discussions around 'community' in prison research, both in relation to the prison environment itself and interactions with those beyond prison walls, provided further support for considering subjective understandings of this notion upon which theories of citizenship are so often premised. Consideration of this subjective experience, through the lens of 'lived citizenship', would be valuable for both men and women in prison (see discussion at section 9.5). However, the experiences of imprisoned men are the focus of this thesis due to their majority position in the prison populations of both England and Ireland, making the selection of broadly comparable national samples and sites more feasible. The female prison population in Ireland is so small compared to that in England<sup>2</sup>, with only two prisons holding adult females compared to twelve in England & Wales, that accessing and recruiting broadly comparable samples of imprisoned women would be particularly difficult. As such, for the rest of the thesis the discussion relates to the experiences of adult males imprisoned in England and Ireland.

### **1.3 Justifying Comparison of 'Lived Citizenship'**

These research questions were used to guide the research design and data collection for both jurisdictions, in order to enable the comparison of experience to answer the overarching question of this comparative study:

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<sup>2</sup> Across 2016, the average number of women imprisoned in Ireland stood at 140 (IPS, 2017: 5), while the female prison population in England & Wales stood at 3,803 in 2018 (MOJ, 2018b).

## How, if at all, does ‘lived citizenship’ differ for men imprisoned in England & the Republic of Ireland?

There has been substantial academic interest in prisoner disenfranchisement across a wide range of jurisdictions, including both the UK and Ireland (Behan, 2014a; Behan & O’Donnell, 2008; Easton, 2009; 2011). Despite a growing acknowledgement within criminology that citizenship is about far more than this opportunity to have a say in the democratic process of a political state (Behan, 2014a), the right to vote is often described as symbolic of citizenship (Stern, 2002; Easton, 2018). If the vote is truly symbolic of citizenship, a relationship between legal positions on prisoner voting and experiences of citizenship, more broadly, might be expected. Even where studies of legal positions in various jurisdictions have taken place (Ewald & Rottinghaus, 2009; Behan, 2014b; Dothan, 2018), there is no empirical cross-national comparison of the meaning citizenship holds for those in prison, or their lived experience of citizenship on the basis of these subjective understandings. The comparative dimension of this thesis will provide an indication of whether legal voting positions<sup>3</sup> are symbolic of individuals’ subjective sense of citizenship and understanding of their inclusion in, or exclusion from, citizenship status. As such, the study interrogates the symbolic value of the vote in reflecting ‘lived citizenship’ for those in prison.

In addition to shedding light on the extent to which legal enfranchisement symbolises something broader about citizenship for people in prison, the comparative focus of this study will allow for consideration of the ways that different contexts – national, local and institutional – shape understandings and experiences of citizenship. By comparing lived experiences in Ireland and England, the findings will shed light on how specific national and local circumstances, history, policies and arrangements shape individuals’

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<sup>3</sup> Not only are voting rights impacted by incarceration in England and Wales, but in both jurisdictions voting rights – and the particular elections that a person can participate in – are impacted by an individual’s nationality and formal citizenship status. In Ireland, Irish citizens are able to vote in all elections and referenda while for those who do not hold Irish citizenship participation is limited to local elections and, if a citizen of the EU, European elections. An exception to this is for British citizens, who are also able to vote in Dáil elections (Citizens Information, 2019). In light of these restrictions, three of the participants interviewed in Ireland for this research – as non-EU nationals – were only able to vote in local elections, adding further complexity to the distinction between enfranchisement and disenfranchisement of those in prison. Similarly, in England & Wales only British and Irish nationals, or qualifying commonwealth citizens, are allowed to vote in general and local elections, as well as referenda, while EU nationals’ participation is restricted to European elections (Electoral Commission, n.d.). As all participants in England were British nationals, they would have been eligible to vote in all elections were it not for their incarceration.

understanding of citizenship and its relevance to their lives during incarceration. However, comparison of these two jurisdictions is not only beneficial for highlighting difference. By considering ‘lived citizenship’ comparatively, this thesis also facilitates an understanding of commonalities in the experience of imprisonment across different jurisdictions. In doing so it explores whether there are particular inherent features of imprisonment which transcend national boundaries in their influence on individuals’ subjective sense of citizenship during incarceration.

#### **1.4 Importance and Originality of the Research**

This thesis makes an original contribution to the field of prisons research in two key ways. Firstly, while there have been numerous studies of the lived experience of imprisonment, few of these are focused specifically on how this experience relates to notions of citizenship. Those studies which have explored citizenship for those in prison have tended to focus either on the legal position of those in prison, in relation to citizenship rights (Easton, 2008; 2009; 2011; Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009), or the experiences of those in prison when engaging in activities that have been pre-determined as examples of active citizenship, such as volunteering (Edgar et al., 2011; Levenson & Farrant, 2002; Easton, 2018) and education (Costelloe, 2014a). Utilising the lens of ‘lived citizenship’, as discussed above, this is the first study to explore the way that citizenship is understood and experienced by people in prison, in reference to their own subjective understandings and experiences. This focus on the lived experience is key to distinguishing this study from existing studies of citizenship for incarcerated populations.

Secondly, this study is the first comparative study of lived citizenship for individuals in prison, and one of the first comparative studies to explore the lived experience of men imprisoned in England and Ireland. Prior to this research, comparative studies of citizenship during imprisonment have tended to focus on comparing legal positions on voting and other rights (Behan, 2014a; Ewald & Rottinghaus, 2009; Dothan, 2018; Lazarus, 2004). In addition, existing research has sought to draw a picture of the different types of ‘active citizenship’ activities available to those imprisoned across Europe (Brosens et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there is yet to be a study which compares individuals’ own understandings and experiences of citizenship during incarceration in



Ireland and England. Additionally, empirical comparative research has thus far been relatively limited in the area of prison studies, and as such this thesis provides an important contribution to furthering understanding of the national differences and commonalities in the lived experience of incarceration.

## **1.5 Mapping out the Thesis**

Following this introduction, the thesis is set out over a further eight chapters. The next chapter of this thesis, Chapter Two, will introduce theories of citizenship that have been developed and applied in existing research. Whilst the study of citizenship in social and political sciences is vast, the chapter focuses predominantly on those theories and notions of citizenship which have been applied to, or used to explain, the circumstances of individuals with convictions or serving a sentence of imprisonment. It then considers how subjective meaning is absent from discussions of those in prison as citizens or non-citizens, and presents the approach of ‘lived citizenship’ as helpful for understanding the experiences of those in prison. This chapter concludes by arguing that considerations of prisoners’ citizenship status have predominantly focused on legal positions, or pre-defined notions of active citizenship. Consequently, the chapter will argue for the need to explore citizenship for those in prison from their own subjective perspectives, through the lens of ‘lived citizenship’. Given the inextricable connection between traditional understandings of citizenship and community membership, Chapter Three provides a review of previous literature on the notion of community within the context of the prison. The chapter will consider previous seminal work on the presence of a solidary community within the prison setting, as well as considering the extent to which the notion of a ‘prison community’ is likely to hold relevance for participants in this research.

While Part One of the thesis provides the necessary context to this research and explains *why* this topic was selected for study, Part Two of the thesis is focused on *how* the research was undertaken and the national and local institutional contexts where citizenship during imprisonment was explored. Chapter Four provides a detailed account of the methodological decisions made when designing this study, which involved a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and the practical and ethical challenges associated with conducting research both

comparatively, and in closed prison settings that are usually impenetrable for the public. The chapter will then discuss my own positionality as a researcher in the prison setting, and the practical, ethical and emotional implications of this for the research process. There is a paucity of literature on conducting comparative prisons research, and as such the chapter will draw heavily on my personal experiences of this endeavour. Chapter Five is focused on the two countries that form the basis of this comparative study – Ireland and England<sup>4</sup>. The chapter will discuss the rationale behind the selection of these two jurisdictions for study, before providing a brief overview of the relevant policy context governing imprisonment in each jurisdiction. The chapter will then discuss the rationale for selection of the institutions where fieldwork took place – Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds, before providing background to the prisons, their regimes, and the characteristics of their populations. Finally, Chapter Five will introduce the sample of men interviewed during this research, providing an overview of their demographic backgrounds, sentence lengths, and levels of engagement in activities within the prisons.

Part Three of the thesis covers the findings of this research, drawing out the key themes that emerged from data collected in the two jurisdictions and discussing points of similarity and difference between Ireland and England. Throughout Chapters Six to Eight extracts from interview transcripts are used to illustrate the themes discussed and to make the process of interpretation transparent. Each chapter considers one of the themes identified by men in prison as pertinent to their understandings of ‘citizenship’ and what it means to be a ‘citizen’: community and belonging; opportunities for meaningful community contributions; identity beyond the ‘prisoner’ label.

Chapter Six explores participants’ experiences of belonging and community membership during their time in prison. Participants identified various ‘communities’ that they either were or wished to be part of, both within and outside of the prison environment. These different understandings of community are considered in turn, ranging from the whole of society to the immediate family unit. The men interviewed

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<sup>4</sup> Whilst the jurisdiction of England & Wales is covered by Her Majesty’s Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS - previously National Offender Management Service (NOMS) at the time of the research) and therefore subject to the same legislation and policy in relation to imprisonment, a Welsh prison did not feature in this study and therefore the findings relate to the experiences of those incarcerated in an English prison.

described many barriers to feeling that they belonged to any community outside of the prison, and both the social and institutional barriers are discussed. Finally, the chapter also considers the question of whether a ‘prison community’ exists within each of the prisons studied. In doing so the chapter distinguishes between the group identification based on physical proximity and shared incarceration that participants identified, and a more subjectively meaningful sense of community and collective interest which was prevented and undermined by individualised prison regimes.

Chapter Seven builds upon discussion of participants’ understandings of their own communities by considering the ways that those in prison felt able, or unable, to make contributions to their communities as they perceived them. The chapter considers a range of activity from informal peer support through to formal volunteering schemes and education, discussing the extent to which such activities were possible or perceived as meaningful, and relevant to a sense of citizenship, for the participants themselves during time in prison.

Chapter Eight considers the impact of imprisonment on individuals’ identities and sense of self, focusing on their ability to sustain and/or construct an identity beyond the ‘prisoner’ label during their time inside. The men interviewed discussed the significance of maintaining a human identity in the perceptions of others to retaining a sense of citizenship status, in addition to being treated as an individual, with many highlighting dehumanising practices that remove any sense of human status and treat all ‘prisoners’ as a homogenous group. This chapter also considers the prior identities that individuals sought to sustain throughout their prison sentences, in order that they might not be reduced to only a ‘prisoner’, and the various barriers that the experience of incarceration presented to maintaining these identities, such as father, partner or husband.

The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter Nine, will summarise the key findings of this study, before considering the implications of this research for understanding the positions of imprisoned people as citizens or not, and the utility of established theories of citizenship (as discussed in Chapter Two) for capturing the experiences and perspectives of people in prison. The chapter will then consider the implications of this

research for approaches to citizenship and imprisonment, before outlining the limitations of this study and future potential avenues for research in this area.

# Chapter Two

## Citizenship & Imprisonment: A Review of the Literature

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### 2.1 Introduction

The notion of ‘citizenship’ is one that is used widely, with little explanation, both in public discourse and academic scholarship. Yet the varied assumptions underlying this term have the potential to reflect markedly different ideas about the subject matter encompassed within it. As such, this chapter provides an overview of existing citizenship theories and the key debates within the field, focusing in particular on the distinction between understandings of citizenship as status, and citizenship as activity. This discussion gives an overview of the literature in order to determine the key approaches which have been adopted by those studying citizenship, along with some of the prominent critiques of these understandings. The extent to which these definitions of citizenship are inclusive or exclusionary of people in prison is considered, before positing the need for a synthesis of approaches to defining citizenship, in line with feminist literature which acknowledges the significance of interaction between status and activity in citizenship, and places central focus on human agency (Lister, 1997). Finally, it is argued that understanding the official status of an individual, and the activity they partake in, is insufficient alone to provide a holistic understanding of citizenship. This fails to take account of the subjective experience and understanding of citizenship for the individual, or the mediation of these by the contexts in which they exist. As such, the choice to explore the experiences of those in prison through the lens of ‘lived citizenship’ is explained.

### 2.2 A Contested Concept: Key Debates in Defining ‘Citizenship’

‘Citizenship’ is widely acknowledged in the political science literature as an uncertain or “slippery” concept (Riley, 1992: 180), with its meaning and constituent elements being broadly “contested” (Lister, 1997: 28). This is complicated greatly by the varying and inconsistent uses of the term (Faulkner, 2003), not only in academic or legal discussion, but also in political discourse (Janoski, 1998). The various definitions used

communicate different understandings of the nature of the relationship between the state and individual, and between citizens, as well as the criteria that one must satisfy in order to be considered a 'citizen'. Discussions of citizenship, in its broadest possible sense, bring into play questions relating to nationality, cultural identity, community membership and participation and, more recently, European or international communities. While this list is by no means exhaustive, it demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of the concept and its uses, which create difficulties in determining one clear definition of citizenship to be applied in empirical research; as Barbalet (1988: 108) notes there is "nothing which can be described as a *theory* of citizenship" that is broadly accepted as conclusive. There is huge variation in the definitions provided, from very narrow understandings focused purely on legal status in a nation-state, to extremely broad definitions encompassing a range of rights, obligations and opportunities. One of the difficulties which accompanies the popular use of the term 'citizenship' is that both of these extremes, and many definitions on the continuum in between, are accepted and widely used with little clarification. This chapter seeks to shed light on the assumptions behind the most prominent approaches to understanding citizenship, before concluding on an approach appropriate for the purposes of this research.

### **2.2.1 The Origins of Citizenship Definitions**

While citizenship cannot be reduced to one clear definition or theoretical explanation, this does not mean there is complete inconsistency in the approaches taken to theorising this concept. Citizenship has been used to discuss membership of a "common society" (Barbalet, 1988: 1) since long before the creation of nation-states, and the influence of early definitions remains evident in academic theory. These conceptions of citizenship tend to fall into two categories: those which conceive of citizenship as a status, dependent on rights, or those which view citizenship as desirable activity (Oldfield, 1990). While these two perspectives are often conflated in discussions of citizenship and its definition (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994: 353), they originate from two fundamentally distinct traditions which have shaped these dominant schools of thought: civic republicanism and liberal understandings of democracy. These approaches have their roots in the Roman Empire and Athenian Democracy, respectively (Schall, 2006),

and adopt substantially different understandings of the citizen's relationship with the state, and consequently divergent boundaries of eligibility for members or 'citizens' of a community.

## **2.3 Citizenship as a Rights-Based Status**

Underlying the liberal democratic tradition is an emphasis on the state's obligation to preserve freedom and choice as far as possible, through the absence of obstacles to freedom, described by Dietz (1987: 4) as a "negative liberty". This approach to citizenship is "individualistic" (Ewald, 2002: 1050), with the rights of the individual being of fundamental importance and demonstrating the ultimate worth of the individual in society (Dietz, 1987). As such, it defines citizenship as a status, to which these universal rights, granted and protected by the state, are attached. Individuals benefiting from these rights, and enjoying the benefits of state protection, are deemed to give their consent to adhere to the law and be under the 'social contract' (Locke, 1690). The liberal tradition is based on the premise that this contract, alongside the rule of law and tolerance of competing moral conceptions, provides a guarantee of equality manifested in universal rights (Schall, 2006). Liberal principles are evident in the rights-based understandings of citizenship as a status, demonstrated in a range of theoretical approaches to citizenship.

### **2.3.1 People in Prison as Citizens with Rights?**

A number of rights-based notions of citizenship, influenced by liberal principles, pose various issues when considering the potential inclusion or exclusion of those in prison. Consideration is now given to whether, based on these theoretical positions, those in prison could be considered to be citizens.

#### **The Social Contract**

While universal theories of citizenship *should* impact upon those in prison no less than any other individuals, there are many constructions of citizenship which require particular behaviour in order to maintain one's status as 'citizen', justified by social contractarian logic. Social contract theory, originating from the work of Hobbes (1651),

Locke (1690), and Rousseau (1762b), establishes the principle that in civil society, individuals yield their unconstrained freedom by agreeing to live by the laws laid down in society. This is in contrast to the laws of nature which are the sole limits on liberty in the “state of nature” (Locke, 1690: 332; Schall, 2006). Rousseau (1762b: 240) discusses the limits that have been placed upon this unconstrained liberty by various social changes, stating “man is born free, and yet everywhere he is in chains”— in order to restore the freedom which is constrained by these “chains”, submission of individual will to the collective will is needed. Rousseau (1762b: 246) notes that in human societies, such agreement is the “only foundation left for legitimate authority” of the government and the law. When citizenship is based upon this reciprocal agreement, criminal actions in opposition to the mutually agreed law result in a breach of the social contract and subsequently the offender will lose some, or all, of their contractual benefits.

This notion of the social contract has been discussed widely in literature relating to the position of incarcerated people in society (Easton, 2009; 2011; Behan, 2014a) and can be seen in discourse around the status of people in prison, particularly in relation to their voting rights. This is evidenced by the United Kingdom (UK) Government’s justification of disenfranchisement in *Hirst v UK (No.2)* [2005] ECHR 681, which stated that those convicted and sentenced to imprisonment have breached the social contract and subsequently should be considered to have forfeited their right to participate in governance (Para 50; see also Easton, 2011: 17). The maintenance of prisoner disenfranchisement laws, resembling “civil death” statutes, demonstrates the retained inferior status of those in prison on the basis of their contractual breach (Easton, 2011: 23). It would thus appear that people in prison could not be considered citizens under any model of citizenship that incorporates the concept of the social contract (e.g. liberalism). In fact this is not the case, and Schall (2006) highlights an intrinsic problem in applying social contract theory to the removal of felons<sup>5</sup> citizenship rights – it results in a situation where individuals are governed without their consent, undermining the legitimacy of the contract. This argument is also furthered by Easton (2009) who notes the difficulty in expecting those in prison to abide by rules

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<sup>5</sup> American term referring to an individual who has committed a felony, that being a crime which is of graver character than a misdemeanor and usually punished by imprisonment for over one year e.g. murder or burglary.



which they were not involved in creating, with this expectation failing to demonstrate the assumed reciprocity inherent in a contractual agreement. Such reciprocity is also required by contract doctrine, which does not allow individuals to be forced into performing their contractual duties, if the injured party does not also perform theirs (Schall, 2006). In addition, it is unclear as to why the normal criminal punishment is insufficient alone as a response to the broken contract (Lippke, 2001). Thus, there is a strong argument that people in prison should maintain citizenship status, even when looking at a model of citizenship based on social contract theory.

Nevertheless, where social contract theory is applied, by transgressing the law an individual breaches their contractual duties and consequently loses the associated benefits: “he ceases to be a member” of the state (Rousseau, 1762a: 159). Much discussion has been given to the results of a breach of the social contract, with the punishment of ‘civil death’ being particularly significant for incarcerated individuals’ claim on citizenship status, and working alongside the notion of the social contract to play an important role in defining the limits of citizenship.

### **Civil Death**

One of the behaviour-dependent qualifications to an exclusive conception of citizenship, which dates back to ancient Greece and Rome, is that of ‘civil death’. In ancient Greece, declarations of *atimia* were made for some offenders, which labelled the individual as “literally without honor or value” (Spears, 2014: 93) and resulted in the loss of the right to vote, the ability to partake in the legal process either as a jury member or to bring prosecution, or to appear in public places, including worshipping at a temple. *Atimia* constituted a “collective ‘forgetting’ of an individual” by Athenian society, with the offender forfeiting “both his honor and his political equality” (Pettus, 2013: 21). Similarly, in Roman law the punishment of *infamia* resulted in a loss of social and legal standing, and those declared to be ‘infamous’ would become “politically impotent” through the removal of their rights to vote, obtain public office, appear in court, assemblies, or temples (Williams, 2012: 112), and to serve in the Roman army (Manza & Uggen, 2004). Such punishments were available for “lesser criminals”, as well as those who had committed immoral acts that “diminished public esteem” (Itzkowitz & Oldak, 1973: 724). Influenced by *infamia*, civil death punishments were also created in Germanic tribes, during the Middle Ages, through the

use of *outlawry*. This involved the offender being denounced as ‘infamous’ and consequently deprived of all rights, including the confiscation of all property, before expulsion from the community. Outlawry left individuals in a position where they were no longer protected by the law, and thus exposed to injury or even death (Itzkowitz & Oldak, 1973; Pettus, 2013; Behan, 2014a).

In Medieval England, civil death was introduced through the punishment of *attainder*, as a result of which individuals experienced three penalties: forfeiture, involving surrender of all property; corruption of the blood, which prevented the inheritance or passing down of property; and ‘death in law’, meaning that the individual no longer had the right to vote or participate in the legal system in any way (Itzkowitz & Oldak, 1973; Pettus, 2013; Behan, 2014a). The United States of America (USA) also borrowed the punishment of attainder, placing some offenders outside of the realm of protection by law and extinguishing most of their rights, before moving away from the common law tradition to the creation of civil death statutes on a state-by-state basis (Chin, 2012).

*Atimia, infamia, outlawry, and attainder* all demonstrate the use of civil disabilities as punishment, and the long history of the notion of ‘civil death’ in the penal sphere. Such loss of rights was possible where an individual broke the social contract through criminal behaviour, and was often a “transitional status” through which to organise the individual’s affairs prior to capital punishment, which may help to explain the decline in the use of such punishments in modern society (Chin, 2012: 1797). Despite the removal of explicit punishments of civil death in many jurisdictions, Chin (2012: 1790) posits that civil death has “surreptitiously re-emerged” in the form of a change in legal status which takes effect through a “network of collateral consequences”. As these collateral consequences are not always explicitly framed as penal sanctions, this enables the state to apply them retroactively, and without notice. This lack of restriction on consequences, when combined with the rise of the regulatory state and mass conviction, arguably results in a situation where, despite eliminating a formal regime of civil death, “an equivalent system of legal deprivation” has taken its place (Chin, 2012: 1832). This is despite imprisonment being the predominant mode of punishment for offenders in many jurisdictions, as opposed to capital punishment. These considerations suggest that the concept of civil death is not limited to the disenfranchisement statutes discussed so

far, and is a notion potentially inherent in a number of non-penal civil disabilities experienced by those serving prison sentences.

### **Prisoner Disenfranchisement: The Modern Civil Death?**

Despite widespread acceptance that the use of traditional civil death punishments for people in prison faded during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Easton, 2011), and that elements of civil death have disappeared in response to the acknowledgement that individuals will eventually re-join society, the notion has lived on in what are often termed “civil death statutes” (Chin, 2012: 1798). In particular this refers to statutes which remove the right to vote as a direct result of conviction or incarceration (Behan, 2014a). While prisoner disenfranchisement laws operate in a number of jurisdictions, the most widely discussed are those across the USA where felons in the majority of states lose the right to vote during incarceration. In some cases this will continue throughout parole, or even indefinitely, resulting in a large number of American citizens who are unable to exercise their political rights, and are arguably subject to the archaic punishment of civil death. In 2010 it was estimated that 5.85 million Americans were unable to vote due to such restrictions (Uggen et al., 2010). In the UK, S.3 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 makes sentenced prisoners “legally incapable” of voting – again, a restriction on their rights which arguably constitutes a civil-death sentence. Easton (2011: 21) posits that this results in imprisoned individuals experiencing a “fundamental exclusion from society, both physical and symbolic”, resembling the ‘social death’ of slaves in slavery-based societies, such as that of 19<sup>th</sup> Century America (Easton, 2008). However, whether this constitutes social or civil *death* remains unclear in light of the temporary nature of the punishment, in contrast to US states where disenfranchisement is permanent.<sup>6</sup>

The origins of civil death demonstrate a long history of exclusionary definitions of citizenship which, these disenfranchisement statutes would suggest, remains evident in contemporary constructions of citizenship. This is the case despite criticism of such practices as archaic and incompatible with human rights obligations, as stated by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in *Hirst v UK*. The social contractarian

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<sup>6</sup> Despite the prevalence of lifelong felon disenfranchisement in US states, recent years have seen a move towards removal of such continued denial of voting rights. In 2018 a constitutional amendment was passed in Florida, to restore voting rights for felons (except those who had committed murder or sexual offences), and discussions around similar reforms are ongoing in Kentucky and Iowa. As such, Porter (2019) has highlighted this as a trend in state criminal justice reform in the USA.

logic used to justify restrictions on the citizenship rights of those in prison is evident in the UK government's response to the judgment of the ECtHR in *Hirst*. The result of such an approach is the denial of a fundamental right, despite universal suffrage being integral to the jurisdiction's system of democracy, based on the individual's actions. In this respect, both social contract theory and the notion of civil death present a construction of citizenship which is dependent upon the civic virtue of the individual concerned. Such an approach contrasts with the earliest conceptions of citizenship in ancient Athens, which focused on the role of citizenship in promoting virtue – virtue was held up as a benefit resulting from citizenship, rather than a prerequisite condition of this status (Easton, 2008).

### **Citizenship and Nationality**

Before concluding the discussion of rights-based notions of citizenship, it is necessary to draw attention to one definitional approach to examining citizenship, which alludes to legal issues that extend beyond the scope of this research – nationality-based citizenship status. While many of the legal definitions of citizenship focus on nationality or residency rights, and relate solely to a relationship with the nation-state itself, this study is concerned with citizenship more broadly, as understood by participants, resulting in consideration of a wide range of communities beyond the nation-state. This is not to say that nationality is entirely irrelevant, as such status may impact significantly on how an individual experiences this broader notion of citizenship or the meaning it holds for them. Research has demonstrated the particular significance of citizenship for foreign national prisoners (FNPs), who are likely to have experienced exclusion from a nationality-based citizenship status, resulting in a two-fold dehumanisation if combined with the exclusionary limits to citizenship discussed throughout this chapter (Kirkwood & McNeill, 2015). Again, while not the primary concern of this piece of research, the 'post-national' context is a mediating factor which may impact upon experiences of citizenship for those in prison, particularly in relation to the role of the Council of Europe (CoE), and the ECtHR, in upholding and protecting the rights of prisoners across Europe.<sup>7</sup> Whether such interventions impact upon

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<sup>7</sup> See following for examples: Recommendation Rec (2006) 2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Prison Rules; *Hirst v UK* [2005] (right to vote); *Dickson v UK* [2007] (artificial insemination); *Jerenovics v Latvia* [2009] (insufficient diet); *Dayanan v Turkey* [2009] (access to legal assistance on detention); *Frasik v Poland* [2010] (right to marry).

conceptions of citizenship and the position of those in prison in relation to this status is one question which deserves exploration, particularly given the negative portrayals of such intervention seen in Eurosceptic public discourse in the UK (McNulty et al., 2014; Anderson, 2004). The citizenship status of people in prison has often been likened to that of slaves in slavery-based societies (Easton, 2011) and as such, it would seem appropriate to draw on the experiences of the African-American population, from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, to illustrate the possible significance of supra-state influence on experiences of citizenship. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, the black population came to appeal to the federal government and view them as guarantor of their rights, rather than state-level government, despite the general fear of the “centralism”, of federal authority, held by the white population (Foner, 1987: 880). Throughout the Reconstruction era, from 1865 to 1877, the black population held a definition of federal authority “at odds” with mainstream white Republicans<sup>8</sup> (1987: 881). This was also illustrated during the civil rights movement in the 1960s, where federal government and courts continued to be the protectors of civil rights, rather than state legislatures.

Sometimes likened to the American federal system, the intervention of what has been termed the “United States of Europe” (Habermas, 2004: 17) is arguably comparable in some ways to the role of the federal government in the US system, where many argue for state sovereignty. As such, how people in prison identify with the notion of a European citizenship may well differ from that of the wider population, many of whom oppose the intervention of the ECtHR (and while separate, the often wrongly associated European Court of Justice). Over the last thirty years, people in prison have frequently sought protection of their rights in relation to prison life, by the ECtHR, despite far more losing their cases than winning (Livingstone, 2000). As people in prison approach the CoE bodies as guarantors of their rights, it may be reasonable to expect a more positive outlook on European citizenship from these individuals than the general public. This may be relevant when assessing the differences between the experiences of those incarcerated in England, and Ireland where there is generally a much more pro-European sentiment amongst the public, with 50% feeling totally positive about the

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<sup>8</sup> Refers to the Republican political party, rather than republicanism.

European Union (EU) compared to only 30% in the UK, and 70% feeling like a citizen of the EU, compared to 50% of UK residents surveyed (European Commission, 2014)<sup>9</sup>.

Providing a clear definition of citizenship is made particularly problematic in the “post-national” context we now live in, with many modern theories of citizenship taking the existence of the nation-state for granted (Roche, 1995: 716). While the concept of national citizenship is still of significance, “citizenship is not reducible to membership of the modern nation-state” (1995: 726) and when considering the ‘community’ of which citizens are members, we must also consider a “new kind of citizenship” in the European community (Meehan, 1993: 1). While the issue of nationality and international communities will have some influence on the citizenship rights available to people in prison in both England and Ireland, and may impact upon their conceptions of their own citizenship, or the social context shaping the citizenship experience, this research is not restricted to consideration of citizenship which is nation-state dependent. This does not, however, negate the relevance of a rights-based approach, and it is through a broader approach to the rights of the community that one of the most widely utilised definitions of citizenship has developed.

### **2.3.2 Universal Rights for the Community**

T.H. Marshall’s (1950) discussion of citizenship and social class, which arguably represents the first sociological theory of citizenship, is now used by many contemporary social scientists and viewed as a classic approach (Janoski, 1998; Lister, 1997). For Marshall, citizenship developed through the granting of different types of rights to individuals by the state between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, with each set of rights balanced with corresponding obligations. Marshall posited that civil rights developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, which included those rights necessary for individual freedom that are provided for by the rule of law, and the court system. Political rights followed these in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with rights to participate in the exercise of political power provided by parliamentary institutions, and finally social rights developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, providing for a particular standard of life ensured by the educational

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<sup>9</sup> While the European Commission’s report (2014) relates only to public opinion in relation to the EU, not membership of the Council of Europe, it is a useful indication of general attitudes to Europe given the frequent conflation of these two bodies in public discourse.

system and social services (Marshall, 1950: 10-11). The rights in question do not become ‘citizenship rights’ until they apply universally, and Marshall discusses the move towards universality for each group of rights over the course of the three centuries. This focus on universalistic, equal rights and duties, stands in opposition to class inequalities inherent in the capitalist system (Barbalet, 1988) and it is this “conflict”, or “contradiction” (Giddens, 1979: 131), which explains the development of Marshall’s (1950) citizenship, emphasising the centrality of industrialisation and civic progress to social change. This conception of citizenship presents the idea of independent citizenship rights which are not contingent on, or a secondary product of, civil rights, once reaching the third stage of his developmental model in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Marshall, 1950: 78). There is the potential that the process Marshall describes, through the framework of citizenship, may in fact be unfinished, and one must not presume “that the battle for civil and political rights has been won” or indeed lost (Giddens, 1982: 177). Nevertheless, this is now considered a classic theory of citizenship that has been applied, and extended, by a number of theorists.

### **2.3.3 Differentiated Universalism**

When considering the legal status of citizenship, and its accompanying rights, disenfranchisement and ‘civil death’ statutes, as discussed above, arguably constitute an exclusion of people in prison from a Marshallian legal citizenship status, particularly if we are to view the franchise as indicative of citizenship. While nationality-based citizenship is not lost, the fact that a right intended to be a universal good is removed indicates there is at least some change in the legal status of citizens upon their imprisonment. In recent years the increasing directions of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), and jurisprudence of the ECtHR, have demonstrated that there are efforts being made to protect the legal rights of those in prison, and arguably to recognise the legal position of these individuals at a European level (Livingstone, 2000; van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009; see also note 7). Drawing on the work of Kelk (2000), van Zyl Smit & Snacken (2009: 69-70) argue for the status of *Rechtsburgerschap*, or ‘legal citizenship’, as a means of protecting people in prison from unequal power relations, regardless of the reason for their incarceration. This concept of legal citizenship “supposes an unprejudiced image of prisoners as human

beings”, suggesting a universalistic rather than an exclusionary approach to citizenship (2011: 70). Kelk’s model of *Rechtsburgerschap* consists of three elements, all of which must be provided for those in prison to have effective legal status: material rights, procedural rights, and information about both types of rights, as without this information it “equals no legal position at all” (van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2011: 72). This approach to people in prison argues not only for the legal status of citizenship with accompanying rights, but also for information about these rights to ensure the individual is aware of their position and prepared to bring a case if they wish to do so. This provision of information may not be a formal indicator of citizenship, but is more likely to facilitate a lived experience of citizenship than the provision of legal status and rights alone. While Marshall’s (1950) presentation of citizenship rights could be considered “false universalism” in failing to account for the differentiation in experiences of citizenship rights by disadvantaged or marginalised groups (Lister, 1997: 38), the notion of rights-based citizenship presented by Kelk (2000) is one which recognises the need, and acceptability, of rights being particularised in reaction to existing disadvantages, in order to result in a “differentiated universalism” of citizenship (Lister, 1997: 28).

While the debates around rights and responsibilities, and a suitable balance, are significant and can offer important philosophical insight into the relationship between the state and citizen, they have the potential to detract from a significant issue in defining citizenship. If we are to consider the multi-faceted concept of citizenship in full, a broader interpretation must be taken, as citizenship is about “much more than rights, entitlements and obligations. It is about playing a role in the civic life of the community” (Behan & O’Donnell, 2008: 331). The literature on participation, active citizenship and social capital is now considered to examine this proposition further.

## **2.4 Citizenship as Activity**

Whether it is accepted that the notion of citizenship present in contemporary society is an inclusive one which enables those in prison to maintain the status of ‘citizens’, or one from which those who are imprisoned are excluded and sentenced to ‘civil death’, this definition alone is insufficient to settle the issue of whether an individual is a citizen



or not. In particular, this does not consider whether or not an individual can be said to be civically engaged in their communities or involved in active citizenship activities. There are a number of circumstances required to enable individuals to engage as citizens in civil society, in addition to the pure citizenship rights available to those who qualify for formal citizenship status.

In contrast to the liberal approach influencing rights-based notions of citizenship, civic republicanism focuses on Aristotle's understanding of citizens as individuals who are capable of ruling, as well as being ruled, with an emphasis on developing political community and civic bonds, rather than preserving the rights of individuals (Schall, 2006). Individuals become 'citizens' through their active participation in democracy, and it is this participation that legitimates the 'social contract' between the individual and the state; "without political participation, there is no citizenship" (Schall, 2006: 85). Given the emphasis on the common interest, this participation needs to further the common good, and as such virtue is necessary if one is to carry out their duties of participation and consequently attain the status of citizenship. In turn, participation is seen to enhance virtue (Schall, 2006). Individuals require autonomy, friendship and judgement in order to act out the role of citizen in a political community (Oldfield, 1990), and citizens must self-govern in order to maintain their virtue (Schall, 2006). Such conceptions of citizenship, contingent upon the ability to rule and be ruled, create a class of "law-abiding citizenry", who are distinguished from "the dangerous criminals" (Duff, 2005: 214). The requirement of moral virtue for citizenship status creates criteria for membership of the community, based on what it is to be a 'good' citizen (Shklar, 1991), which is exclusionary in its consideration of offenders, or those serving prison sentences, as citizens. Sykes (1958) notes the deprivation of autonomy as one of the pains of imprisonment, with behaviour restricted by the regime, and the removal of opportunities to make choices about one's own life. This pain, combined with the removal of responsibility (Pryor, 2001) raises doubt as to whether prison is an environment which would allow the necessary characteristics of citizenship activity to be practiced. Nevertheless, the influence of republicanism is evident in a number of approaches to citizenship as activity which are now considered.

### 2.4.1 Active Citizenship

In recent years, significant emphasis has been placed on the development of political community through ‘active citizenship’ initiatives such as the UK Conservative and Liberal Democrats’ ‘Big Society’ agenda (Cameron, 2010). This agenda has pushed for citizens to volunteer to help those who need care or support, replacing help that would previously have been provided by the state. Verhoeven & Tonkens (2013: 415) describe how this promotion of participation in society has “become the ‘ethical a priori’ in neoliberal policy-making in Western welfare states” (Rose, 2006: 159-60). Despite this increasing emphasis on ‘active citizenship’ there is no one clear definition of this concept, which is subject to different interpretations and meanings (Nelson & Kerr, 2006). However, it is commonly understood that active citizenship is fundamentally about participation and engagement (2006: 12) and definitions tend to describe “an eclectic of participatory activities” and emphasise the role of individual action (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009: 462). The requirement of such participation to be for the common good is evident in the definition given by Hoskins et al (2006: 10) as “participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy”. The concept has been likened to Putnam’s (1995; 2000) notion of social capital however, unlike active citizenship, social capital does not have a precondition of engagement being for the common ‘good’ of society. Thus social capital encompasses all participation, while active citizenship includes only that engagement which is based on these values (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009: 463).

These definitions leave a broad scope for the activities and actions which could be regarded as ‘active citizenship’, however traditionally these tend to focus on voting, participating in political debate, volunteering, or acting as a representative in governance of a particular group or institution. In the context of the prison experience, it is these sorts of activities which have been “overshadowed” by discussions around the vote (Behan, 2015: 2). Nevertheless, there have been a number of studies undertaken of opportunities for people in prison to perform active citizenship through volunteering (Farrant & Levenson, 2002; Edgar et al., 2011; Burnett & Maruna, 2006), arts projects (Turner, 2012; Anderson, 2013), peer-support schemes (Jaffe, 2012a;

2012b), and involvement in prisoner councils (Solomon & Edgar, 2004; User Voice, 2010). These studies have highlighted the benefits of such participation. However, it is unclear whether these activities can be considered participation in civil society, the community and political life, when undertaken from behind the prison walls. Lister (2007) posits that the key determinant of whether an act constitutes citizenship should not be where the act is done but rather what is done. If such an approach is taken then it would seem that people in prison are able to be active citizens, if opportunities for participation are accessible. Nevertheless, the logistical difficulties in providing such activities within prisons are substantial due to the requirements of institutions to prioritise security and order, and the physical restrictions of the environment. Whether we can consider those in prison to be active citizens depends on how we define the 'community' or 'civil society'. While imprisoned people may participate in the interests of the common good of the *prison* community, there are limits to their ability to participate in the wider community or civil society when physically removed from it. As social capital does not require the value of action for the common good, it may be more of the opportunities available to people in prison could be deemed to satisfy this notion.

#### **2.4.2 Social Capital**

While replacing local communities and associations, as the source of social rights in Marshall's (1950) theory of citizenship, might appear to render such groups irrelevant to citizenship, theories around social capital have suggested otherwise. Although various rights and duties may be presented to citizens, individuals are likely to require social capital to engage with these rights and duties. Social capital has been attributed various definitions by different theorists, and it is an emerging concept in the field of criminological literature (Farrall, 2004). While Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) both define social capital in relation to connections between individuals and the resources that develop from these, others have proposed definitions focusing on civic engagement as a broader activity, and the associations that take place as part of this engagement (Putnam, 1995). In his discussion of American society, Putnam uses the framework of social capital to discuss the civic engagement that is arguably necessary for democracy to exist. The concept of social capital has been defined by a number of

theorists prior to his work, but Putnam (1995: 2) defines social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. According to Putnam (1995: 2), the development of social connections, networks of interactions and associations provide opportunities for civic engagement and have the potential to “broaden the participants’ sense of self” as well as enhancing consideration of collective benefits. In the context of the decline of social capital in America since the 1960’s, Putnam discusses the various forms that social capital can take. Firstly, the relevance of political participation for social capital is discussed, and it is argued that it would be “incomplete and misleading” to consider only the vote (Putnam, 2000: 35). Collaborative forms of political engagement, such as partaking in public meetings and political rallies are also noted as constituting social capital by engaging the wider public interest (Verba et al., 1995). In addition to these explicitly political forms of social capital, various other activities are also included: civic participation through voluntary associations; religious organisations; workplace activities such as participation in trade unions<sup>10</sup>; informal social connections with friends and neighbours; volunteering activities and charitable work (Putnam, 2000). The “touchstone” of social capital, as experienced through these associations, is the notion of “generalized reciprocity” which is defined as doing things for others, without requiring an immediate favour in response, knowing that at some point in the future your help will be reciprocated (2000: 134). In addition, this generalized reciprocity requires social trust in other individuals based on a general community norm of honesty (2000: 136-137).

When taken in isolation, many of the activities or associations discussed may not appear directly associated with democratic citizenship, however correlations have been identified between levels of social capital and political participation, including exercise of the right to vote, while engagement with such activities or associations has also been found to influence levels of political engagement (Van Deth, 2001; Verba & Nie, 1972). This makes social capital a particularly “fruitful” concept for the exploration of citizen behaviour, and thus citizenship (Van Deth, 2001: 18). While the rights or duties associated with citizenship may afford opportunities for political participation or other types of association, citizens require social capital to engage with these ‘citizenship’

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<sup>10</sup> Putnam (2000) refers to ‘labor unions’, as these organisations are called in the USA.

opportunities. Therefore it is impossible to consider the concept of citizenship in complete isolation from that of social capital. This is the case even more so, if one adopts a broader definition of social capital, such as that preferred by Halpern (2005), including networks, norms and sanctions, both informal and formalised.

The associations identified by Putnam (1995; 2000) are reflected in his work, and by Tocqueville (1840), as being important for a “minimum level of civic virtue” (Van Deth, 2008: 155), making social capital of particular interest when considering citizenship from an exclusionary perspective. In fact, Putnam has himself argued that social capital is closely related to what others have termed ‘civic virtue’, with the key difference between the two concepts being that the former “calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital” (Putnam, 2000: 19).

In addition to contributing to an understanding of how citizenship is experienced, research has explored the significance of social capital for desistance, particularly in relation to family and employment (Farrall, 2004; Sampson & Laub, 1990). These institutions are argued to “encourage desistance by increasing an individual’s stock of social capital”, acting as both an enabling feature of probationers’ lives and a feature of the social ties enabled (Farrall, 2004: 61); Kirkwood & McNeill (2015: 10) explain that “greater connections are likely to lead to more opportunities and engagement in certain opportunities is likely to increase the quantity, quality and range of social connections”. While such research highlights the importance of those engaged with the criminal justice system having access to social capital, Farrall (2004: 68) notes the involvement of probation officers as activators of social capital, through their direct appeals to families of individuals, suggesting that criminal justice institutions could play an important role in assisting access to social capital. For these reasons, social capital should be of particular interest when considering the experiences of citizenship for those with convictions, in particular those in prison.

### 2.4.3 Participatory Democracy

While the theories considered thus far have contributed significantly to a *sociological* understanding of how citizenship has developed, and the conditions required for its expansion in a democratic society, less often discussed is the concept of democracy and its requirements when seeking to define citizenship. In her seminal work *Participation and Democratic Theory* Pateman (1970) argues, considering existing social theory on participatory democracy, that there must be a participatory society for democracy to exist. While the concept of ‘participation’ is not equivalent to citizenship, Pateman (1970) highlights the need for participation beyond direct representation through the vote. She posits that participation in alternative spheres has the potential to make individuals better aware of the links between the public and private spheres, as well as increasing political efficacy through its educative function. These links suggest that participation in alternative spheres is vital if individuals are to join in with the most common way of acting out citizenship, through voting (Verba et al., 1995), and thus perform as active citizens. Pateman (1970: 71) argues for a participatory democracy, rather than a representative democracy, where full participation is “a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions”. Involvement in this type of decision making in non-governmental structures is needed to foster “psychological qualities required for participation at the national level” (1970: 50), and not only is this participatory society desirable, but without this, Pateman (1970) posits that democracy could not exist.

Other theorists have noted the importance, in a democratic society, of having an effective voice in the institutions that govern (Pitts, 2000) and it is in this context which Pateman’s definition of participation might have some hope of realisation in the prison context. The denial of the vote for those incarcerated in some jurisdictions, including the majority of incarcerated people in England & Wales<sup>11</sup>, no doubt limits the ability of these individuals to have an effective voice in the governing of the country. In Ireland, limited contact with Teachtaí Dála (TDs) (Behan, 2012) due to their reluctance to engage with the prison population, and the physical constraints of the prison on an

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<sup>11</sup> In a compromise accepted by the ECtHR in 2017, prisoners on temporary release on election dates will now be eligible to vote.

individual's ability to take part in organised demonstrations, also suggests that prisoner influence on parliamentary government is extremely limited even where the right to vote is granted. If prison is understood as a "total" institution with a "barrier to social intercourse with the outside" (Goffman, 1961: 15), then the ability of incarcerated people to engage in acts of organised, political struggle, in a way that is visible to wider society and thus potentially influential on democratic politics, is substantially limited. As such, academics and penal reform organisations have argued for the need to give an effective voice within prisons through prisoner councils (Solomon & Edgar, 2004; Solomon, 2004; User Voice, 2010).

In this thesis, opportunities for democratic participation within prison, as well as the extent of their facilitation, are considered from the perspectives of imprisoned men themselves. However, at this stage it is important to consider that regardless of how many citizenship activities are presented to people during prison sentences, a key question is which community these activities enable them to be members of; do men identify as members of a prison community (Solomon, 2004), or that of wider society? This has significant implications for the reality of a person's 'lived citizenship' experience, as discussed in Chapter Six.

#### **2.4.4 People in Prison as Active Citizens**

The notion of *Rechtsburgerschaft* outlined above is not sufficient alone as a conceptualisation of citizenship that enables those in prison to be 'full' citizens, for various reasons. Firstly, this concept focuses predominantly on rights, with little attention given to the obligations or participative role of the individual as citizen. These are vital if citizenship is to be viewed as a status which individuals are actively involved with, and if those in prison are to be viewed as autonomous and responsible individuals. Secondly, with the exception of the requirement of information, this legal notion of citizenship focuses purely on formal rights, legally granted, while there are aspects of citizenship which would be classed as more informal but are no less important, for example political participation and civic association, and the other activities and connections associated with 'social capital'. Incarcerated people's capacity for participation, both politically and more broadly, is largely dependent on the conditions

of imprisonment and the opportunities that are available in a particular institution. This requires consideration of the specific context in which an individual is placed, the opportunities for participation that are available to them, and the extent to which these opportunities can be taken up in practice. Even in prison institutions with a variety of activities, security concerns, overcrowding and the restrictions of a structured regime limit the extent to which people in prison can participate in social and political life, while levels of individual engagement will likely be influenced by social capital outside of the prison (Behan, 2012). The same must also be considered in terms of individuals' experiences of the civic association aspect of citizenship, integral to building social capital. While prisons often have associations of various sorts, related to hobbies, demographic characteristics or religious beliefs, the group of individuals who may potentially associate with one another is predominantly limited to those within the prison. In addition, it is relatively common for people in prison to be locked in their cells for up to 22 hours per day in England & Wales (HMCIP, 2018: 8), while those on restricted regimes in Ireland may spend 23 hours per day in their cells (IPS, 2017). Time for association with others is limited, and thus even if individuals do have a right to partake in these citizenship activities and associations, this will not necessarily be reflected in their lived experience.

## **2.5 The Inclusion or Exclusion of Imprisoned People in Notions of 'Citizenship'**

Despite the many theoretical debates surrounding the concept of citizenship, little of the literature discussing the position of those in prison takes a clear stance on the definition of citizenship. In contrast to Easton's (2011) discussion of the theoretical development of citizenship, and its relationship to those in prison, the exploration of citizenship as a legal status undertaken by van Zyl Smit and Snacken (2009), and Behan's (2015) examination of 'soft' citizenship, much of the literature relating to enfranchisement and various forms of participation of incarcerated populations uses 'citizenship' regularly, as a broad, all-encompassing term to cover the place of imprisoned people in society, without any firm indication as to the meaning or significance of this label. In addition, the use of the term in public and media discourse around those in prison as having 'given up their rights' when they commit a crime, adds



an additional level of uncertainty as to what is actually meant by the concept of ‘citizenship’ and whether people can be said to maintain this status throughout their incarceration.

### **2.5.1 Exclusionary and Inclusionary Approaches to Defining Citizenship**

Marshall’s (1950) theory of citizenship, focused on opposing inequality in the capitalist system, offers a more inclusive model of citizenship and acknowledges the significance of social rights which go beyond those rights traditionally associated with citizenship in the liberal and republican models. When considering this model in relation to people in prison, it is unclear whether these individuals can be deemed to have citizenship status. On the one hand, the equality-based model should not exclude them, however the chronology of the development of rights in Marshall’s model does not fit with the experience of imprisoned individuals where certain social rights are satisfied, despite a lack of political rights.

Highlighting the significance of individual behaviour and virtue to the maintenance of citizen status, Vaughan (2000: 26) argues that those undergoing punishment for a criminal offence occupy a “purgatory” position of “conditional citizenship” in order that punishment might be used to mould the offender into a full citizen. Punishment itself reinforces ideas about who is, and who is not, worthy of citizenship, and Vaughan (2000) puts this role of punishment down to the emergence of trust and egalitarianism as essential principles of modern citizenship itself. Vaughan (2000: 36) asserts that this has led punishment in an increasingly exclusionary direction to the point that it “is now being used not upon those who are thought to be conditional citizens with a view to reintegration, but against those who are thought to be non-citizens to disable or exclude them.” Lister (2007: 2) highlights the “tension between citizenship’s inclusionary and exclusionary sides”, while Isin (2005: 381) argues that “the idea of inclusion relentlessly produces exclusion” when viewed from the standpoints of the marginalised. Lister (2007: 3) posits that an inclusive citizenship would be about “recognition as [much as] about access to formal rights”, and this would involve a greater emphasis on more informal aspects such as meanings, identities and norms (Lister, 2007; Isin & Turner, 2002). There is a need to challenge the idea that those in prison have forfeited

their right to citizenship, which justifies the principle of ‘less eligibility’ for those who are incarcerated (Faulkner, 2003; Vaughan, 2000), and the model of ‘inclusive citizenship’ discussed by Lister (2007) suggests that it is through consideration of lived experiences that this could be done.

## **2.6 A Synthesis of Citizenship: The Argument for Integration**

While providing different approaches to theorising citizenship, both the traditional liberal and republican models have been widely criticised due to their representation of a clear separation of the public and private spheres and failure to consider the gendered nature of citizenship (Okin, 1992; Pateman, 1989; Dietz, 1987). This criticism of established models of politics and citizenship provided an impetus for the development of new alternative conceptions of citizenship, and a move away from the rigid distinction between citizenship as rights, or activity. Mouffe (1992) highlighted the need to look beyond the liberal and republicanism dichotomy, to take a pluralistic approach building on the strengths of both approaches, which acknowledges the inherent connections between the two definitions which are ignored by their distinction. For example, participation in the political process is still a central feature of liberal citizenship, particularly in relation to its role in the protection of other rights (Lippke, 2001); citizenship activity is needed to maintain citizenship status.

### **2.6.1 Struggle for Rights as Citizenship Activity**

While Marshall’s (1950) theory focuses on the conflict between principles of capitalism and citizenship, he also acknowledges the role of the struggle to win rights in stimulating the expansion of citizenship. This idea of the struggle for citizenship rights is, however, paid much greater attention in subsequent work, which criticises Marshall for failing to emphasise the substantial degree to which citizenship rights were achieved through struggle, and “the efforts of the underprivileged to improve their lot” (Giddens, 1982: 171). Giddens thus posits that the class system needed to develop in order that a group, able to fight for their political rights, might exist (Giddens, 1982; Barbalet, 1988). Turner’s account of citizenship (1986) places a more explicit focus on conflict, and the role of social movements in its development, in which he also examines the

conditions important for the struggling groups: Egalitarian, universalistic and secular ideologies. In a later discussion of the relationship between citizenship and inequality, Barbalet (1988) highlights that the extension of citizenship, as a result of struggle, is only likely to lead to rights if such an extension is in the interests of the powerful. Thus these interests are just as relevant as those of the lower-class, as discussed by Turner (1986), in understanding modern citizenship (Barbalet, 1988).

Such a conception of citizenship as based upon conflict, and developed through social movements, may apply to some marginalised groups who have fought for citizenship rights over the last few centuries, such as those involved in the women's suffrage movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, or the civil rights movement in America in the 1950s and 1960s. However, when thinking about the development of citizenship rights for those in prison, the concept of struggle and organised social movements becomes rather more problematic. Due to their incarceration, people in prison are in a more restricted position in terms of their ability to take collective action to 'struggle' for citizenship rights in the way that minority groups in wider society have been able to. There have been a number of significant instances of organised resistance behind bars, such as the resistance of those imprisoned in Robben Island during Apartheid (Buntman, 2003) and the hunger strikes in Irish prisons during the civil war (Rogan, 2011). However, in some cases struggles for prisoners' rights have been fought by third-sector organisations and penal reform pressure groups, rather than those in prison themselves (Ryan, 2003; Mathiesen, 1974). In England & Wales, the work of organisations such as the Prison Reform Trust (PRT), and the Howard League for Penal Reform, demonstrate the significance that such organisations have in the struggle for prisoners' rights. This can result in movements which do not accurately reflect the needs of those for whom the struggle is taking place, as reflected in the distinction between the priorities of 'citizen' activists and 'prisoner' activists in the work of KRUM<sup>12</sup> in Sweden (Smith, 1977). Opportunities for people in prison to demonstrate their struggle are limited to prison-based protests, and due to their inherent separation from the rest of society during incarceration, such protests are unlikely to contribute to an efficient organised 'struggle' or social movement, such as those discussed above.

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<sup>12</sup> Swedish abbreviation for "The National Swedish Association for Penal Reform" (Mathiesen, 1974: 45).

Jacobs (1980: 432) notes that in the USA, the cause of those in prison has been linked “to the plight of other powerless groups” which may allow for struggle on behalf of incarcerated people, by other powerless individuals, however this is still significantly different to being involved in a collective social movement together.

Despite the difficulties for incarcerated people to develop the required social movement suggested in Marshall’s (1950) analysis, Marshall still offers a strong alternative to earlier theories in that he begins to stretch the concept of citizenship away from the early models based on a more exclusionary, contractarian approach. However, while emphasising the equality of all citizens, Marshall’s analysis is still predominantly focused on rights and the associated duties. There are two issues that are highly contested, relating to the relationship between citizenship and rights. Firstly, there is still no widespread consensus as to the balance of rights and obligations as factors attached to citizenship. The extension of citizenship rights is a contentious issue and some theorists have argued for a greater emphasis on obligations rather than inflation of rights, so as not to “devalue their moral claims” (Etzioni, 1993: 5; Janoski, 1998). While those of this opinion argue the need for limits on the expansion of citizenship rights, others posit that following the development of international policies, human rights are in fact opposed to, and more universal than, citizenship rights (Turner, 1994). This view of rights as separate from citizenship has also been used to discuss how rights are needed to counteract the unequal effects of citizenship status, which reflects the inequalities of the community. In her work on the ‘invention’ of human rights, Hunt (2007: 19) discusses how human rights became “self-evident” and how this only occurs when rights gain political content. Hunt notes the paradox between the apparent self-evidency of human rights, and the need to make the assertion that human rights existed with limits to whom these rights applied. These contested issues within the field of citizenship literature only further the difficulty in determining a clear definition of citizenship.

### **2.6.2 Agency and Citizenship**

In advocating for a synthesis of status and participation in conceptualising citizenship, Lister (1997) highlights the role of human agency in knitting these two approaches

together. She posits that citizenship rights or status enable individuals to act as agents, while participation is “an expression of human agency in the political arena” (1997: 35), and as such there is an interaction between the two. With a particular concern that this conceptualisation of citizenship is appropriate for subjugated groups, and in particular women, Lister acknowledged the ability of participation to increase women’s rights, and vice versa. The centrality of agency to this synthesis acknowledges the role of individuals as agents in their own lives, rather than objects, while still maintaining an appreciation of the structural economic, social and political contexts which must be negotiated by the individual (Lister, 2001).

This appreciation of citizenship as a “contextualized concept” (Siim, 2000: 1) and an understanding of the dynamic relationship between citizenship rights and participation, moves citizenship theory towards a more holistic appreciation of citizenship as it is experienced by the individual, and Lister’s work highlights that the approach which best encompasses this holistic understanding is that of ‘lived citizenship’.

## **2.7 ‘Lived Citizenship’: The Centrality of Context to Citizenship**

Despite a lack of consensus as to what constitutes citizenship, how citizenship has developed, and the criteria for having the status of ‘citizen’, there are key themes identified from across the literature as potentially being part of ‘citizenship’: membership of a community; legal status with enforceable rights; obligations and opportunities to take responsibility; knowledge of rights and obligations; participation; an effective voice in governing institutions; civic association; inclusion. However, examination of these features in isolation would be insufficient to understand a particular individual, or group’s experiences of citizenship, without considering the significance or meaning that the notion of citizenship holds for these people themselves, excluding subjective understanding of citizenship.

### **2.7.1 The Role of the Subjective in Understanding Citizenship**

Although the theories outlined have highlighted a range of approaches to conceptualising citizenship, none of these draw on the subjective experience of the

individual to assist in defining the concept. It is insufficient to consider these theoretical approaches alone if we are to develop a genuine appreciation of a particular group or individual's lived experience. As noted by Lister (1997), however, the subjective understandings and experiences of citizenship status, and participation, can be explored using the notion of 'lived citizenship' as posited by Hall and Williamson (1999).

In their work on *Citizenship and Community*, Hall and Williamson (1999) propose three key ways of thinking about citizenship. In keeping with the discussion thus far, the first two of these reflect the debate between rights ('legal citizenship') and citizenship as activity ('normative citizenship'). The final of the three approaches, however, is focused entirely on the subjective experience of the individual. 'Lived citizenship' is defined as "the meaning that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens" (Hall & Williamson, 1999: 2). By placing emphasis on the contextual circumstances in the lives of individuals, this notion of citizenship is not universal but an experience characterised by the inequalities of the "here and now" (Hall & Williamson, 1999: 2). In doing so, this approach acknowledges the different "vocabularies of citizenship" and ways that the notion may be understood (Lister et al., 2005: 114), as well as the inherent differences that will exist within and between societies (Lister, 2001).

Hall and Williamson's notion of 'lived citizenship' (1999) has been utilised in various areas of research to develop understanding of how context impacts on day-to-day experiences of citizenship, including for those involved in offending and the criminal justice system. In their study of desistance from crime amongst probationers in England & Wales, Farrall et al. (2014) explored the connection between probationers' subscription to a liberal conception of citizenship and their future offending or desistance. In order to explore citizenship for participants in this study, Farrall et al. (2014) operationalised the notion of 'lived citizenship' into a selection of statements, using Likert scales to explore how participants felt about the state's involvement in their lives and their own involvement in, or influence on, society. These statements enabled an assessment of how important each pre-determined issue or activity was to participants, and how far individuals agreed with what were broadly defined as liberal citizenship values. The findings demonstrated connections between individuals'

criminal trajectories and the extent to which individuals subscribed to liberal citizenship values, concluding that desistance from crime seems to be associated with citizenship. The approach taken by Farrall et al. (2014) is valuable for exploring experiences and views of values conventionally associated with ‘citizenship’<sup>13</sup>, and illustrates the significance of exploring ‘citizenship’ for those engaged in the criminal justice system. However, by pre-defining the statements or activities reflective of ‘lived citizenship’, the operationalisation used by Farrall et al. (2014) does not provide an opportunity for participants to explain the meaning of citizenship for themselves, in their own subjective terms – a central element of Hall & Williamson’s (1999) definition which allows for an appreciation that citizenship may mean different things to people in different contexts. It is this core subjective meaning of citizenship that is the focus of this research, and as such an alternative approach to researching ‘lived citizenship’ is utilised.

### **2.7.2 The Lens of ‘Lived Citizenship’ in this Research**

While ‘lived citizenship’ will be the focal point for exploration in this study, it is necessary to consider the connections between this experience and the notions of rights and opportunities for activity as citizenship discussed thus far. Taking influence from Lister’s work on the synthesis of citizenship (1997), ‘lived citizenship’ will be explored in a way which takes account of how citizenship, which may involve but is not limited to rights and participation, is understood and experienced by the individual. Legal and normative notions of citizenship are not, however, irrelevant to this experience. Lister (1997) has argued that in addition to feeding into this ‘lived’ experience, there is the potential for legal citizenship status and citizenship activity to interact and shape each other, impacting on subjective experience, and as such it will be considered whether such concepts are evident in participants’ responses. While an individual may feel like a citizen, this may be limited where they lack the opportunities for citizenship activity, and similarly individuals may engage in citizenship activity to protect their formal citizenship status. By allowing for consideration of these two traditional perspectives

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<sup>13</sup> It was for this reason, in addition to the potential connections between these pre-defined citizenship values and desistance (Farrall et al., 2014), that these statements were used as a basis for discussion during focus groups despite not guiding the overall conceptualisation of ‘lived citizenship’ in this research (see Appendix Two; discussed further at section 4.6.2).

on citizenship, within an overall focus on subjective understandings of participants, ‘lived citizenship’ also allows for an exploration of the gap between rights or participation as they appear and the “really existing citizenship” in the subjective perception of the individual (Molyneux, 2000: 122).

The proposed approach for exploring the experiences of people in prison, through the lens of ‘lived citizenship’, will also ensure that the individual is not viewed as a passive object whose ‘lived’ experience is entirely dictated by the formal existence of rights or activities. Rather, it allows for consideration of how human agency influences the experience of ‘lived citizenship’ itself, particularly important in prison where agency may be structured by the institution (Rubin, 2017). Lister (2007: 8) has added to this definition, the importance of “how people understand and negotiate rights and responsibilities, belonging and participation”. By exploring not only whether individuals ‘feel’ like a citizen, or what they perceive citizenship to be, but also the ways in which individuals negotiate their rights, status, or participation, this acknowledges individuals as active subjects operating within the confines of the structural context (Lister, 2001).

This approach to examining citizenship prioritises the subjective experiences of those being studied and enables consideration of the relevance that notions of citizenship actually hold in the everyday lives of people. This is in contrast to many of the theories previously discussed which outline strict notions of citizenship leaving little room for flexibility or subjective experiences where circumstances mediate between formal rights or opportunities for participation, and how these are then experienced by a particular individual or group. In order to explore the lived experience of citizenship, the particular setting in which citizenship is examined is important, and both Lister (2007) and Easton (2011) acknowledge the significance of contextual factors in citizenship experiences, with a need to consider social, political and cultural context; the lived experience of citizenship cannot be divorced from its context (Desforges et al., 2005; Lister, 2007). Consideration of context is not only necessary to understand what it means to be a citizen in a particular jurisdiction, culture, or setting, but also enables a better understanding of how individuals define and experience citizenship within these particular contexts. A number of contextual factors will be necessary to consider in order to understand the extent to which meaningful conceptions of



citizenship are realised in the lives of men in prison, in England and Ireland, in the present study, including sensitivity to the national political, social and cultural contexts, as well as consideration of the spatial context – the fact that prisoners are physically separated from the rest of society through their incarceration. While individuals consulted may have a largely similar citizenship status in official terms, the intersectionality of these various contextual factors has the potential to result in markedly different subjective understandings and lived experiences of citizenship.

Faulkner (2004: 309) argues that a civilised society requires a “shared sense of citizenship” along with the resources of civil society and social capital, which treats all citizens as people of equal value, and with emphasis on respect and mutual responsibility. It is posited here, however, that the provision of formal rights and responsibilities is not sufficient for this model of citizenship to exist, but that this “shared sense of citizenship” (2004: 309) must be apparent in the subjective lived experiences of all citizens, including those who are living behind bars.

An investigation of ‘lived citizenship’ for people in prison will provide for a broad exploration, focused on how incarcerated individuals interpret citizenship and what it means to them personally. As such it will facilitate an understanding of what is needed for a meaningful sense of citizenship, without adhering to a preconceived definition, such as those discussed so far, which would limit the scope of the research to particular rights, obligations or activities. The lived experience may well incorporate the mediated meaning and interpretation of rights, obligations and activities which are still of relevance in considering the individual’s formal position as citizens, and thus an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998) is used in order to combine study of subjective understandings of citizenship with consideration of how various features of existing literature on citizenship are experienced, and whether these hold relevance for realising a meaningful sense of citizenship amongst participants (See further discussion in Chapter Four). This approach will be used to reflect the reality that citizenship is neither based solely upon formal rights, nor is it dependent upon more informal engagement alone, but most importantly it is defined by the meaning it holds in the lives of individuals and whether a meaningful sense of citizenship is experienced in their day-to-day lives.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, an overview of the literature on citizenship theory has been conducted to demonstrate the complications surrounding attempts to define citizenship, and the various assumptions which underpin the main perspectives on citizenship that have been prevalent throughout the literature thus far. While traditional liberal and republican approaches have been criticised for a failure to acknowledge context and inequality, through adopting the notion of ‘lived citizenship’ (Hall & Williamson, 1999) an understanding of the individual’s subjective citizenship experience can be gained. Utilising this framework for empirical study will enable consideration of “subjectivities and dimensions of the individual and collective life, conventionally excluded from mainstream definitions” of citizenship (Cherubini, 2011: 128). While much theoretical discussion has been undertaken in this area, empirical understanding of the ‘lived citizenship’ experience for a range of groups is sorely lacking (Jones & Gaventa, 2002; Conover et al., 1991). This chapter has demonstrated that this applies to the experiences of those in prison, evidencing how this thesis will provide an original contribution to understanding, by utilising the lens of ‘lived citizenship’ in the study of the prison experience, and providing an account of citizenship experiences which is grounded in the subjective experiences and particular context of those incarcerated, in their own terms.

# Chapter Three

## Community in Prison: A Review of the Literature

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### 3.1. Introduction

Many established theories of citizenship are premised upon the idea of membership of, or belonging to, a particular community. Within the context of the prison, understandings of one's community are complex, and the existence of a community within the prison itself has received substantial academic attention. The use of collective terminology to describe the social relations within prisons is prevalent in the literature on prison life, with *The Prison Community* (Clemmer, 1940), *The Society of Captives* (Sykes, 1958), and *The Prisoner Society* (Crewe, 2009) all providing examples of deference to this language of collectivism when seeking an overarching description of the social world within prisons. This language has come to be used in much of the prisons literature, despite lots of individuals from different backgrounds, places and social groups, held together in the same carceral location – a wholly unnatural situation. Whilst the social relations within prison are largely restricted and thus constitute a distinct social world, the use of the term 'community' to describe the prison is particularly problematic, as notions of community are far more complex than simply defining a group of people present in the same location (Bell & Newby, 1972).

This chapter will review the literature on life in the prison 'community', considering the seminal works on the sociology of prison life, and the ways these scholars frame and explain the social world within the prison. The chapter discusses the extent to which a community can exist within the prison setting, and considers the implications of this for engagement in voluntary activities, often associated with citizenship. Finally, the chapter will advocate for a greater emphasis on lived experience in order to determine how people in prison define their own experience of community, or indeed individualism, in their day-to-day lives in prison, and the impact this has on their understanding and lived experience of citizenship during incarceration.

### **3.2. Community during Incarceration?**

The study of prison, and the experience of imprisonment, has developed substantially since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with the sociology of prison life casting light on the experiences of prison as a social world itself and the symbolic position that the prison holds in systems of punishment. This has resulted in a rise in prison populations as the symbolic significance of the prison is perpetuated and reinforced by the mainstream media, and renewed political emphasis has been put on the prison as a site for reform and rehabilitation. Despite challenges to the potential of prison to satisfy these functions, what Drake (2012: 15) terms the “hegemony of imprisonment”, characterised by consensus on the suitability of imprisonment to tackle problems of crime, has been accompanied by growing reliance on the use of prison across many jurisdictions. As such, an understanding of the hidden social world within prison, and the interactions and experiences of those who form part of this world, have drawn increasing academic attention since Clemmer’s seminal study (1940). Whether framed as a microcosm of the wider social world, or a sub-cultural bubble characterised by factors specific to imprisonment, prison sociology frequently refers to the social world within the prison in terms of a ‘community’ or ‘society’ (for examples, see Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Crewe, 2009). This is created from the incarceration of people with a diverse range of attitudes, in an enclosed space separate from the rest of society. The concept of community itself, and its relevance to the incarcerated population, has been approached in conflicting manners in scholarship, yet the notion of a social collective, bound together by more than their physical incarceration, is central to these explanations of prisoner culture, power, agency and interaction.

Despite this consistent emphasis on the existence of a prisoner ‘community’, little consideration has been given to prisoners’ own understandings and perceptions of their communities. However, when considering the multiplicity of meanings attached to this collective term, the need for a critical discussion of the prison ‘community’ is clear. Hand in hand with this notion of the prison community goes the assumption that prisoners are no longer part of any outside ‘community’, with the physical separation characteristic of a ‘total institution’ resulting in an inability to interact with, or participate in, community life outside of the prison (Goffman, 1961). The physical separation from wider society, characteristic of Goffman’s (1961) ‘Total Institution’,

involved in incarceration is extensive for the vast majority of those in prison, with opportunities for contact with those outside the prison often restricted to officially sanctioned visits and limited numbers of phone calls. As such, the world of those held in prisons is predominantly restricted to the site of the prison itself and, often, the wing on which the individual is held. In many respects, the physical space that constitutes the prison is far more clearly delineated than the boundaries of what we might refer to as ‘communities’ on the outside. However, whilst ‘community’ is often used to refer to groups based purely on shared locality or demographics, Clark (2007:2) highlights that the concept of ‘community’ is complex and confusing, encapsulating “...issues of identity, and belonging, similarity and difference, inclusion and exclusion, place and time, processes such as modernization, and has been considered as both a spatial and social phenomenon”. Whilst it may not seem problematic to consider the prison to be a community in spatial or temporal terms, with the prison population at any one point in time being present in a clearly bounded location, Clark (2007: 5) makes clear that this alone is insufficient to constitute a *social* community, where individuals have ties to the space, or other people, nearby. As such, Jaffe (2012a: 60) posits the importance of not presuming “prisoners are a ‘community’ simply because they are held collectively together and bound to the same location” – a point which has been given scarce *explicit* attention in the use of ‘community’ rhetoric throughout prison sociology. This thesis will contribute to furthering understanding of the ‘prison community’ by considering how prisoners define their own communities, and the extent to which they perceive there to be a community within the prison setting.

This will contribute to the body of research which, since Clemmer’s (1940) seminal work, has contributed much to an understanding of the prison ‘community’, in a broad sense, the interactions that take place within it, and the ways that individuals negotiate identity within this prison ‘community’. Consideration is now given to the ways that the existence of community, or its absence, has been discussed throughout the prison research thus far.

### **3.2.1. A Cohesive Community Behind Bars**

Much of the early ethnographic or observational research exploring the social world of the prison, emphasises the role of adaptation to a culture within the prison – and the ‘inmate code’ – as being central to understanding relationships and the workings of the

collective within the institution. In *The Prison Community*, Clemmer (1940: 114) explores social relations in the “unique community” of the prison, with an emphasis on uncovering “the nature and extent of informal group life” which differs from that outside. Clemmer (1940) coined the term ‘prisonization’ to refer to the adoption of the institution’s culture – practices, beliefs, attitudes, norms and values – by those in prison, during their incarceration. This process of ‘prisonization’, which occurred to varying extents and in different patterns for individual prisoners, was linked substantially to membership of a “prison primary group” in which affiliation arises from the circumstances in which individuals find themselves (Clemmer, 1940: 128). The experiences of people in prison during their incarceration, and interaction with this primary group, made them increasingly socialised into the community the greater the length of time they were exposed to the prison culture (Clemmer, 1940). This approach to understanding group interaction in the prison setting highlighted the connections between anti-authoritarianism and collective cohesion amongst imprisoned people themselves, and thus develops what is referred to throughout the book, as “The Prison Community” (Jaffe, 2012a: 55). Clemmer was clear that in-prison groups were not comparable to primary groups outside, and in doing so appeared to strengthen the argument that the *prison* community is fundamentally distinct from wider society as a result of the particular nature of imprisonment (1940: 128).

This approach of conceptualising social life in prison as distinct from the outside community, and prison culture as something which inmates are socialised into, was further explored in what is commonly described as a seminal text for the study of prison sociology (Crewe, 2007a; Sparks et al., 1996). Sykes’ (1958) study of an American maximum-security prison developed on Clemmer’s (1940) work by considering both the features *and* origins of the prison culture. Sykes (1958: xxxii) situated this within the context of totalitarian control, highlighting that “the maximum-security prison represents a social system in which an attempt is made to create and maintain total or almost total control”, and thus drawing attention to the gulf between the “rulers and the ruled” in such an institution, which consequently impacts on social relations in the prison. However, in exploring the social world of the maximum-security prison, one of Sykes’ key observations was centered on the defects of total power, with the notion that custodians have complete supremacy and control over their captives concluded to be “more fiction than reality” (1958: 45) – the dependence of guards on prisoners for

passable performance of their role and duties created substantial holes in the web of power within the institution, leading to compromise and reciprocal ‘agreements’ which fundamentally challenge the notion of total power within the prison. Furthering Clemmer’s exploration of social relations and adaptation to a prison culture defined by the precise conditions of incarceration, Sykes (1958) outlined the ‘pains’ of imprisonment in which the origins of this prison culture lay, and which were intrinsic to the context of imprisonment. These deprivations constituted the removal of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relations, autonomy and security, and it was the responses to these ‘pains’, in line with the ‘inmate code’, which galvanised the collective organisation within ‘the society of captives’ (Sykes, 1958).

This inmate code functioned to guide social relations, rather than providing a description of inmates’ behaviour (Sykes & Messinger, 1960), and the rules within it emphasised the significance of solidarity amongst the prisoner population, along with collective opposition to their captors. This appears to support the existence of a prisoner community within the institution, which is distinct and opposed to officialdom – it is this opposition that is intended to bind the individuals together and thus create the sense of shared purpose and values on which ‘community’ may be based. As already noted, however, the inmate code served only as a guide and prisoners’ adaptations to the ‘pains’ of imprisonment varied substantially in the extent to which they were consistent with this code. Sykes (1958) demonstrated these variations through discussion of Argot roles within the prison, separating the inmate population out into the roles of: *rats* and *centre men*; *gorillas* and *merchants*; *wolves*, *punks* and *fags*; *ball busters* and *real men*; *toughs* and *hipsters*. Of particular significance in the discussion of these different Argot roles, is the distinction Sykes (1958) makes between the individualistic ‘alienative’ adaptations, or responses to the deprivations intrinsic to incarceration, and the adaptations of the *Real Men* who value cohesion of the prisoner population above all else, arguing that the latter range of ‘cohesive’ responses enable a meaningful social group to be established, which facilitates escape from isolation, and softens the deprivations of imprisonment:

*...the greater the extent of “cohesive” responses – the greater the degree to which the society of captives moves in the direction of inmate solidarity – the greater is the likelihood that the pains of*

*imprisonment will be rendered less severe for the inmate population as a whole.*

(Sykes, 1958: 107)

In his discussion of adaptations, Sykes paints a picture of those in the role of *Real Men* creating a cohesive community of individuals, bound together by the similarity of their shared predicament – the pains of imprisonment to which they are all subjected. This “structural solidarity” (Crewe, 2007a: 141), generated by the shared predicament of the incarcerated population, is borne out of the fact that the shared values are in opposition to those of the system and those who wield the power over the regime (Sykes, 1958). However, the more individualistic adaptations appear to challenge the notion of one coherent prison ‘community’, unless it is along the lines of these adaptations that the boundaries of exclusion from, or inclusion in, this community are drawn (Clark, 2007: 60). In considering the criteria for exclusion or inclusion in a ‘prison community’, there are clear distinctions found between particular groups within the prison setting. For example, Sykes (1958) notes that one of the key features of the prison community, which binds together its members, is the mentality of ‘them’ versus ‘us’ which exists between prisoners and staff members.

The manner in which people in prison adapt to their incarceration is approached rather differently by Goffman (1961). Unlike the work of Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958), Goffman’s explanation of the changes to social relationships, and culture, within total institutions was attributed not to socialisation into the culture of the prison, but through what he described as the process of “mortification” (1961: 24-25). This process relied on the notion that inmates enter the prison carrying with them the culture of their ‘home world’, and by stripping the individual of the circumstances that make possible an individual’s sense of self, “his self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified” by the institution (1961: 24). Through this process, involving acts such as issuing of uniform clothing, requiring verbal acts of deference, and a regime which removes autonomy to an extent that is unnatural for an adult, the institution ‘shapes’ and ‘codes’ the individual in a way that strips them of their presenting culture. This results in the creation of an aggregate of inmates, whose behaviour is both standardised and compliant, to be “fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment” (1961: 26). As such, the social relations of the prison are shaped not by adaptations to the prison establishment as such, but through the removal of opportunities for individuals



to demonstrate the 'self' consistent with their presenting culture at time of committal. It is the removal, or stripping, of culture by the 'total institution', rather than the adaptation to the deprivations of imprisonment, which shapes social relations within the prison. Goffman (1961: 69) further discusses the centrality of a system of privileges and punishments to rebuilding an inmate's sense of 'self' in a total institution, and the significance of responses to this system in influencing the "cultural milieu" that develops in the institution. In particular, secondary adjustments provide vital "evidence that he is still his own man, with some control over his environment", and these practices that enable forbidden satisfactions to be obtained are central to the social relations and stratification of inmates, as well as the code of conduct that arises to ensure these secondary adjustments can continue without staff opposition (Goffman, 1961: 55-57). The development of this hierarchy and code, is one example of what Goffman refers to as "fraternisation":

*[a process through which] socially distant persons find themselves developing mutual support and common counter-mores in opposition to a system that has enforced them into intimacy and into a single, equalitarian community of fate.*

(Goffman, 1961: 57)

In this explanation of 'fraternisation', Goffman highlights the significance of opposition to officialdom in the development of solidarity amongst inmates in a total institution. The views proposed by Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958), of prison culture and adaptations developing out of the particular context of imprisonment and the deprivations faced by inmates, have had influence over much of the sociology of closed institutions. This is evident in the work of Goffman (1961) which, despite placing the explanation of the 'cultural milieu' in the denial of opportunities to express the self, emphasises the role of the institution in shaping social interaction, rather than external influences. In doing so, much of the literature relating to prisons explains prison culture, and subsequently the relationships and interactions within this environment, as situational and particular to the context of imprisonment. This suggests, if we are to consider the prison to be a community, it is one distinct from, rather than an extension of, communities in wider society.

However, this notion of prison culture as developing through the deprivations inherent in incarceration has been the subject of debate within prison sociology, with some scholars propagating the view that culture is brought into the prison by the incarcerated

population. As such, it has been argued that identities and the means of adaptation to prison are drawn from prisoners' experiences and backgrounds prior to being imprisoned, rather than developing purely as a consequence of the institution (Irwin, 1970; Irwin & Cressey, 1962). In their assessment of the literature in this area, Irwin and Cressey (1962) argue much prison research places too much emphasis on the idea that the inmate code and adaptations of individuals are solely a response to the particular conditions of imprisonment. Whilst acknowledging that the collective of relationships creating the 'inmate society' is a response to the challenges and deprivations of the carceral environment, Irwin and Cressey (1962: 145) posit that the "latent culture", gained from prior experiences such as deviant subcultures outside of prison or other correctional institutions, are also determinants of responses to the problems of imprisonment. In order to illustrate the significance of such external influences, Irwin and Cressey (1962) make the distinction between the *thief culture*, which functions as an ideal which many pay 'lip service' to and whose values correspond with many identified in Sykes' (1958) 'inmate code' on the one hand, and the *convict subculture* on the other. This *convict subculture* is premised on utilitarianism and "flourishes" in carceral environments where the deprivations place men on what appears to be an equal footing, requiring them to achieve status through the means within the prison (Irwin & Cressey, 1962: 147). They explain that due to the relatively frequent reality of imprisonment for those in a *thief subculture*, the subculture itself provides patterns of behaviour to respond to these circumstances and how to do time which is then shared around different institutions (1962: 146-7), and that even where the *convict subculture* is in play, such utilitarianism may also be brought in from particular groups outside. Whether or not individuals are exposed to the *thief subculture* will depend on their previous carceral experience, as those institutionalised from a young age may not have experienced such a culture, and this will consequently impact on their behaviour. Finally, Irwin and Cressey argue that the *legitimate subculture* exists where individuals reject both *thief* and *convict* subcultures during incarceration, and seek status by acting in ways the authorities would expect of a 'good' prisoner rather than through the means utilised by those oriented to the *thief culture* – seeking status in the wider criminal world beyond the prison – or *convict culture* – seeking positions with privileged access to information or resources within the prison. Whilst these cultures may blend together, depending on the particular institutional environment, the range of prison 'subcultures' demonstrate the relevance of external

culture to the social world within prison; the “total ‘inmate culture’ ...[represents] an adjustment or accommodation of these three systems within the official administrative system of deprivation and control” (Irwin & Cressey, 1962: 153).

In addition to calling into question the development of a shared inmate code presented in the work of Clemmer (1940), Sykes (1958) and others, Irwin and Cressey (1962) also challenge the notion that there is a distinct prison ‘community’, or the entire separation from the wider world characteristic of Goffman’s (1961) total institution. Whilst those who are oriented to *convict culture* seek their status within the prison, and consequently might be seen to be carving out their place in the prison ‘community’, the position of those oriented to what Irwin and Cressey (1962) term *thief culture* is somewhat different. By nature of the fact these individuals are concerned with their status in the wider criminal world, this surely suggests a primary affiliation, or commitment, to a social group, or community, which is fluid and exists both inside and outside of the prison, despite their physical location behind bars. This notion of latent cultures, and related attachments, challenges the notion of the prison ‘community’ as distinct, and entirely separate, from communities outside. In addition, it highlights the plurality of values and social groups prioritised in attempts to seek status. As such, it may be more appropriate to refer to multiple prisoner ‘communities’ when describing social life in a prison.

Alternatively, such fractures in the cohesion of prisoners may well be indicative of a lack of ‘community’ within the institution; the absence of a coherent prison culture calls into question the extent to which notions of belonging, similarity, identity or shared norms and values are present in this context. Through the various typologies of adaptations presented in the classic prison sociology texts, it is evident that not all prisoners interact with fellow inmates, or staff, in the same manner, and as such their solidarity with other prisoners exists on a continuum. Despite emphasis on the power discrepancy between prisoners and staff as fueling cohesion in the prison, none of these classical works claims there is “perfect solidarity” amongst prisoners (Sykes, 1958: 83. See Goffman, 1961; Clemmer, 1940).

Despite the prevalence of the seminal literature discussed in academic research on the prison community and the prison social world, it is worth noting that many of the works discussed emanate from studies of American penal institutions in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century,

often focused predominantly on those serving long-term sentences. As such, conclusions about the existence or lack of a solidary prison ‘community’ in these seminal works should not result in uncritical assumptions that this is reflected elsewhere. The relevance of this work to contemporary and diverse experiences of imprisonment has been called into question, particularly by scholars exploring incarceration in the Global South. In an exploration of the social world in Brazilian prisons, Darke (2013; 2018) has illustrated how material deprivation, domination by prison staff, and abuse of power – ‘pains’ central to much analysis of the western, Anglophone imprisonment experience – did not characterise the experiences of those incarcerated in Brazil. Rather, the day-to-day social world of the prison was characterised by cohabitation, employment by state or private agencies, and avoidance of violence or conflict for survival in an under-resourced system – characteristics which result in governance of the institution being shared between prisoners and officers, and interactions focused on mutual reciprocity. Additionally, O’Donnell (2019: 282) has argued for a more “variegated understanding of prison life” by detailing the nuances in how the ‘pains’ of imprisonment, argot roles and stability differed in an Ethiopian Prison, with some deprivations being more or less pronounced than in Sykes’ (1958) account of the 1950s New Jersey prison he studied. O’Donnell’s (2019) reflections, as well as other studies of imprisonment in the Global South also demonstrate how boundaries between prison and community might be less physically ‘total’ than one would expect from the prevalent use of Goffman’s (1961) work in prison sociology, with low levels of staffing; the totality of staff control and oversight is challenged by research on jurisdictions where the “paucity of staff” (King & Valensia, 2014: 510) or lack of technology inhibits such surveillance leading to differing models of governance in the prisons (Crewe & Laws, 2018). The universal relevance of theoretical contributions on the *importation* of culture in the prison context, such as that by Irwin & Cressey (1962), has also been called into question by emerging research on prisons in other parts of the world. Scholars have highlighted how the prevalence of gang affiliations in some jurisdictions’ prisons can result in unique prisoner hierarchies and prisoner-staff relations (Darke, 2013; Jones, 2014; King & Valensia, 2014; Lindegaard & Gear, 2014) which diverge from the discussion of ‘inmate cultures’, conflict and power in the US literature, particularly where gang affiliation becomes a “defining feature of prison leadership” (Akoensi, 2014: 35).

The identification of varied models of governance, interaction and power-relations within prisons in the Global South demonstrates the importance of nuance and context when considering the application of seminal works to exploration of the prison ‘community’ in other national contexts, and challenges Sykes’ (1958: xiii) assertion that prisons share “basic similarities which...override the variations of time, place, and purpose”. The emerging literature highlights points of convergence and divergence in imprisonment experiences which render it crucial that these Anglophone models are not uncritically assumed to apply universally, and that there is value in moving beyond the “stale debate” of *deprivation* versus *importation* which has characterised much discussion of life in the prison ‘community’ and social world thus far (Crewe & Laws, 2018: 138). Whilst the jurisdictions studied in this thesis are both Western nations with prison systems sharing many characteristics with those upon which the core prison sociology has focused, the particular national contexts may influence one’s experience of the prison ‘community’, or indeed any other community individuals identify themselves as belonging to.

### **3.2.2. The Boundaries of Prisoners’ Multiple Communities**

Efforts to explain the existence of a singular cohesive community and shared culture within prisons have been contested. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that solidarity can be witnessed within a range of what might be termed ‘communities’, inside the institution, due to the influence of imported characteristics on adaptations to the deprivations of incarceration. There is significant variation in perspectives as to how these communities develop, the extent to which they demonstrate solidarity, and the stability and longevity of such group relations in the prison context.

In his discussion of ‘fraternisation’, Goffman (1961: 59-60) highlights that solidarities may develop amongst “administered groups” within institutions, such as wings or those serving similar sentences, with the “sense of common fate” being central to cohesion amongst these groups. Consequently, Goffman’s work suggests the potential existence of multiple ‘communities’ within the prison environment, defined along the lines of these ‘administered groups’, while also highlighting the significance of institutional powers in shaping the form of group relations. Goffman (1961: 60) posits that while such groups do exist, and solidarities are formed to an extent, the development of strong solidarity amongst such groups is prevented by staff, due to fears

of such cohesion facilitating collective activity that would cause disruption or present a challenge to maintenance of the ‘total’ regime – such concerns are particularly relevant in light of the opposition to staff which binds these groups together.

While Goffman’s work emphasises the formation of groups or communities as a result of the organisation of the institution, others have challenged the idea, central to deprivation theory, that the ‘prisoner’ identity assumes the greatest significance in prison social relations. These scholars have highlighted the significance of imported characteristics, experiences and background on the formation of distinct social groups within the prison, with ethnicity, religion and local area being some of the key factors around which prisoner allegiances are developed. Arguably the most prevalent of these factors in the prison literature are race and ethnicity, which have been noted as influential in the formation of social groups within prison to varying extents. In his study of Illinois State Penitentiary, Jacobs (1977: 1) found racial and ethnic divisions to be a defining feature of US imprisonment, with differing norms and inmate codes in different racial groups within the prison resulting in a situation where the shared identity of ‘prisoner’ was subsumed by racial identity, and prisoners of different races lived in “separate conflict-ridden social worlds” within the institution. A number of other studies have similarly identified race and ethnicity as key factors in the development of relationships and social groups within the prison, however highlight this is not necessarily a result of any sense of difference in identity on the basis of race alone. Rather, a number of assumptions attached to race, in relation to culture, music, or experience of family life, lead individuals to assume commonalities of experience with other prisoners of the same race or ethnicity (Genders & Player, 1989; Crewe, 2009; Phillips, 2008). Crewe (2009: 327-329) has noted how, outside of close social groups within the prison, connections on the basis of ethnicity were visibly expressed in exchange of greetings in public places around the prison, even in some instances where individuals were from “rival clans” in the outside community. Similarly, both Crewe (2009) and Phillips (2008) identified cohesive groups on the basis of religion, particularly with Muslim prisoners. In addition to the commonalities of experience that may be assumed based on religion, the shared time and space at Muslim prayers may also provide greater opportunity for such cohesive community relationships to flourish. This highlights how shared characteristics have the potential to influence institutionally

dictated opportunities for social interaction and development of community or solidarity.

Additionally, and arguably most significantly for the development of solidarity, Crewe (2009) also identifies the centrality of locality and prior connections to the development of social groups, or communities, within the prison setting. Crewe (2009) notes how the ability to gain an understanding of an individual, through discussion of mutual friends or associates, can go some way to counter-acting the lack of evidence of integrity present when meeting those in prison, which hinders the development of anything more than wary, situational friendships. Thus far, discussions of the multiple communities scholars have identified within the prison environment focus purely on social communities including individuals who are themselves incarcerated, however the strength of solidarity developed amongst those from the same local area outside of prison suggests the interaction between community inside and outside is far more complex than this. Despite the clear physical boundaries which separate those in prison from wider society and restrict who can enter the prison space, acceptance of the notion that any prison community only includes prisoners (or potentially prison staff) ignores the complexities of prison life. It fails to take account of the intermittent involvement of others in the day-to-day lives of those in prison, in addition to the potential multiplicity of community identification for incarcerated people; individuals may identify as members of multiple, distinct communities concurrently, whether inside or outside the prison. This complexity in prisoners' own perceptions of their community membership is to be expected if it is acknowledged that various aspects of culture within prison are imported, whilst others result from adaptation to the institution itself.

Turner's (2013) work goes some way towards demonstrating the complexity the notion of community might hold for those who are separated from wider society through incarceration. Turner (2013: 485) refers to a "Prisoner Dyspora [sic]", utilising terminology often used to describe the experiences of immigrant populations and thus suggesting that the experiences of prisoners are comparable to those who have emigrated, and thus exist with tensions of belonging that continue beyond release from prison. In considering one's position through this lens, Turner acknowledges the potential for individuals to feel a sense of belonging to different communities, whether within or outside of the prison. This highlights the significance of considering social or

relational definitions of community, rather than those based solely on place, if we are to understand the complexity of the prisoner's position.

While scholars have begun to consider the complexity of 'community' for those in prison, the existence of any solidary community within prison itself has been called into question. Consideration is now given to the literature which suggests that community in prison is limited merely to a territorial or geographical community, rather than one based on relational connections and solidarity.

### **3.2.3. Atomised Community and Responsibilisation**

Whilst the prisons literature predominantly focuses on explaining a shared social world within prison, and explores the content and development of a shared 'inmate culture', it does acknowledge the limits to the cohesion of the prison community, stopping short of identifying an absolute solidarity amongst incarcerated populations. In particular, prison scholars have highlighted the fragility of any group cohesion within the prison setting due to the individualised nature of imprisonment (Clemmer, 1938; Sykes, 1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1960).

By highlighting the various argot roles prisoners adopt in response to the pains of imprisonment, and noting the role of the inmate code as merely a guide rather than an explanation (Sykes & Messinger, 1960), Sykes (1958: 83) makes clear there is no "perfect solidarity" exhibited in prison. Rather, there is an "uneasy compromise" between this and exhibiting as a "warring aggregate", which is in constant flux due to the scattering of prisoners along the broad continuum between collectivistic and individualistic adaptations (1958: 83). Pertinently, in the post-script to the 2007 edition of *The Society of Captives*, Sykes also posits the significance of changes to criminal justice that have led to the increasingly fractured solidarity of inmates. This insinuates the expressions of solidarity, otherwise observed in Sykes' work, may be less (or more) present in the day-to-day experiences of prisoners today.

Just as Sykes (1958) highlights the limits to solidarity in the prison setting, and the potential weakening of prisoner solidarity in recent times, Clemmer (1940: 297-8) too acknowledges that opposition to officialdom is not always sufficient to maintain solidarity amongst the prisoner 'community' when the experience of imprisonment is such an individual or, as he says "atomized", one:



*The prisoners' world is an atomized world. Its people are atoms interacting in confusion...There are no definite communal objectives. There is no consensus for a common goal. The inmates' conflict with officialdom and opposition toward society is only slightly greater in degree than conflict and opposition among themselves...It is a world of "I", "me", and "mine", rather than "ours", "theirs", and "his".*

Nevertheless, the subcultural literature, which has shaped much academic discussion of imprisonment, still gives substantial attention to the role of solidarity in shaping social interactions within, and adaptations to, the prison environment. In addition, it also centres on the notion of a distinct 'inmate culture' – considered different from that of the wider community – that defines the prison population, whether imported or developed in response to carceral deprivations. The combination of these two factors leads this body of work to support, to some extent, the existence of a prison 'community', not only in territorial terms but also in a relational capacity.

In contrast, a number of key works have gone further in questioning the existence of, or potential for, a cohesive, solidary community behind bars. In his study of Norwegian prisons, Mathiesen (1965: 124) argued the social world within prison features "a surprising lack of peer solidarity"; although some small groups demonstrated the cohesion necessary for peer solidarity, these tended to be unstable and easily disrupted, while many other prisoners lived in relative isolation (1965: 122-4). This was the case, despite the fact peer solidarity would serve an instrumental purpose in enabling prisoners to challenge the decision-making power of staff in the distribution of rewards and punishments, by making them feel forced to change their decisions in a way viewed as more legitimate by prisoners themselves. Mathiesen (1965) posited that, despite some shared norms and culture, the individualised conditions of imprisonment were such that prisoners tended to challenge this power through a functional alternative to peer solidarity – censoriousness. Through censoriousness, the prisoner relies on established norms the ruler would be expected to adhere to, and points out how they have failed to do so. This convinces the staff that the way they have distributed benefits and punishments is illegitimate, and encourages decision-making more in line with prisoners' perceptions of legitimacy. Whilst Mathiesen (1965) acknowledges this practice of censoriousness *may* exist alongside peer solidarity, as one of two possible responses, the fact censorious claims rest on the comparison of one individual's

treatment against another means such a response is not conducive to fostering solidarity amongst peers, and can in fact hamper its development.

Mathiesen's (1965) critique of the notion of a solidary prisoner community contravenes previous works in a number of important ways. Firstly, Mathiesen's position contradicts much of the prison sociology's assumption that the prisoner community holds values, or a culture, distinct from those of wider society, and that it is from adherence to this distinct culture that solidarity arises. In doing so this creates a clear barrier between conceptions of prison culture, and that guiding communities of individuals outside of prison. Rather, Mathiesen's theory of censoriousness emphasises the shared value system that exists between staff, as members of the free community, and prisoners, arguing it is this appeal to shared values which makes acts of individual censoriousness so effective in altering staff decision-making. As such, Mathiesen's assessment of the prison social world has substantial implications for how we understand prisoners' relationships with wider society, suggesting the prison social world operates in consensus with the dominant value system of the society in which the prison is situated. The notion of a coherent inmate culture in opposition to staff, and wider society, proffers this idea of prisoners as opposed to society's morals and values, and Mathiesen's position does not sit comfortably with much of the rhetoric and sentiment of criminal justice which seeks to emphasise the *difference* in values of the incarcerated population who are seen to have acted *in conflict* with the moral fabric of wider society. Secondly, despite an acknowledgement that solidarity is at a surprisingly low level in the prison setting, Mathiesen (1965: 222) notes when this "brittle" solidarity does occur it is a functional response – it serves the function of forcing staff to change their way of decision-making in a way desirable to the inmates. As such, Mathiesen's conception of peer solidarity is a functional response to the prisoners' subordinate position, rather than the expressive solidarity discussed by Sykes (1958) which concerns the collective adaptation to, and coping with, the prison institution, rather than effecting changes to the application of staff power.

As such, the question of whether the social world within the prison constitutes one of 'community' is a contested matter, and the use of a term with implications of a cohesive, solidary grouping, to describe the social world within prisons, is inherently problematic. Whilst the label of the 'prison community' used by Clemmer (1940) might

have been slightly more appropriate in the post-war era when prisons established stable, albeit severe, regimes (Marks, 2004), the changes to imprisonment since have resulted in a far different social environment, which for years received little attention from academia and certainly scarce consideration of the extent to which this notion of ‘community’ remained relevant to the prison context. In particular, the increasing emphasis on responsabilisation and self-governance in the penal realm appears to have strengthened the individualised character of imprisonment and consequently further obstructed the development of solidary prisoner communities within, or across, institutions.

Crewe’s (2009) research in a Category C Prison is one piece of rich, detailed work that highlights the resurgence of ethnographic prison research in the UK, compared to the “eclipse” described by Wacquant (2002: 371) in the USA. This study goes some way towards breaking down this notion of a ‘prisoner community’ based on cohesion and solidarity, in the context of the increasing individualisation of imprisonment in England & Wales. In his study of power, adaptation and social life at HMP Wellingborough, Crewe (2009: 8) sought to provide a “snap-shot” of prison in the late-modern era and thus explore the influence of managerialism and risk-aversion on the reality of social life behind bars, as experienced by prisoners and staff. In doing so, Crewe took influence from both *deprivation* and *importation* models for understanding the development of prison culture, arguing for the need to join up consideration of imported individual experiences, and institutional conditions, in order to understand social life and adaptation in the prison – this marks a substantial departure from the debate which has taken such a central role in the classic sociology of imprisonment. Combining a consideration of both personal histories, and the institutional context of this Category-C prison, Crewe explores the effects contemporary changes in the nature of imprisonment have had on power, adaptation, prisoner culture and the prisoner community. While *The Prisoner Society* follows previous seminal literature in the presentation of a typology of adaptations, Crewe (2009: 220) is clear that there is an element of fluidity to these examples, with the “messy realities” not necessarily fitting neatly into a single category, or changing between categories over time, while he is equally insistent there is no such thing as one prison culture, due to this interaction between social structure and biography.

Whilst this combined approach to understanding the social world of the prison is a substantial development in prison sociology, which has led to the lauding of Crewe's work as likely to become a "much-read classic" in the field (Crawley, 2012: 116), further discussion of this work is required in order to consider its implications for the notion of the prison community, what this means, and whether or not such a community exists at all. Unlike much of the previous literature, which accepted the cohesion of prisoners in a community to varying degrees, Crewe begins to unpack this notion through his discussion of the way in which power is utilised to maintain compliance within the institution. Central to this maintenance of compliance in the contemporary prison system is the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme (IEP), introduced in 1995 and currently set out under Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 30/2013 (NOMS, 2013), which removes or lessens deprivations in return for compliant behaviour. A similar system of incentives, and opportunities for progression to enhanced regimes, was implemented in Ireland, in 2012, under the Incentivised Regime policy (IPS, 2012b; 2013). Whilst the notion of punishments and incentives as shaping behaviour and social relations has been discussed previously (see Goffman, 1961), Crewe (2009) argued this system had implications for the sense of cohesion amongst prisoners at HMP Wellingborough, by placing an increased emphasis on individual self-regulation rather than collective identification. This emphasis led to a tension in the institution between the respect attached to collective ideals by prisoners, and weakened solidarity in a system where individuals have more to lose than gain from collective involvement; a culture of self-interest prevails as a result of the IEP scheme. As such, Crewe's work challenges the notion of the prison as a 'community', noting that the ideal of solidarity does not materialise in collective identification within the institution, except where it serves as an instrumental means to improve individuals' self-interest:

*In parallel with citizens at large (Beck 1992), prisoners have become relatively discrete, divided units. Collectively, they are an aggregate rather than a 'community'. The standardization of their experiences means that they have common interests, but not social solidarity as such. Their atomization has not been absolute and their world has not disintegrated into a state of granular anomie, but it has crumbled into a range of apathetic social cells with few collective bonds.*

(Crewe, 2009: 455)

This suggests that while, at first glance, there may appear to be a ‘prisoner community’ on the basis of shared predicament and similarity this is dependent on the particular social, political, national and/or temporal context. Any semblance of community is likely to be fractured where institutional policy functions to encourage self-interest in relations between those in prison. If assessing community in social rather than territorial terms, as a mode of relating to one another (Calhoun, 1998: 391), the notion of a ‘prisoner community’ seems somewhat out of sync with Crewe’s findings. After all, where prisons function under an individualised and incentivised regime, shared norms, or the “comforts and cushions of social relations”, cannot alleviate the “distinctive” pains of modern imprisonment (Crewe, 2009: 456).

### **3.3. Engagement in, and Contributions to, a Prison ‘Community’**

Underneath an increasing emphasis of UK government discourse on individual responsibility, and the expectations of community members to do their part for the ‘big society’, the status of citizenship is increasingly portrayed as entailing responsibilities to play an active role in the community. The closed environment of the prison not only limits interactions with the outside community, and thus limits opportunities to contribute, but also calls into question whether any participation can truly be considered voluntary, or a free, altruistic choice, when the environment operates to control and restrict the individual. Individuals convicted, and sentenced to imprisonment, generally have lower levels of civic engagement when compared to the general population, and it has been argued that prison furthers this disengagement by emphasising a lack of citizen status (Behan & O’Donnell, 2008: 334). Nevertheless, there has been an increasing emphasis on constructive activity across penal policy both in England & Wales, and Ireland, which, when combined with an agenda of responsabilisation – and in England & Wales, marketisation – provides a political climate which could potentially strengthen the emphasis on community contributions by prisoners.

#### **3.3.1. How Can Prisoners Contribute to Community Within Prison?**

The notion of prisoners as active contributors to the prison community has been explored in relation to various activities in prisons across the developed world. These include volunteering (Farrant & Levenson, 2002; Edgar et al., 2011; Burnett & Maruna, 2006), arts projects (Turner, 2012), peer-support schemes (Jaffe, 2012a; 2012b), and

prisoner councils (Solomon & Edgar, 2004; User Voice, 2010), as well as through acts of political engagement, whether in the running of the prison (User Voice, 2010; Schmidt, 2013), or through acts of political resistance to the regime itself (Behan, 2014a).

Despite an abundance of research on the experience of volunteering for various groups in the wider community, and the benefits such community engagement has, the body of literature relating to levels of involvement in volunteering within the prison environment is at an early stage of development (Jaffe, 2012a: 102). That being said, research demonstrates a very small proportion of prisoners in England & Wales undertake some sort of voluntary activity; whilst the Listener scheme is by far the volunteering scheme with the highest number of volunteers, this included one in fourteen prisoners when Farrant & Levenson (2002) conducted their study of active citizenship in prison settings. While directly comparable evidence is not available for prisoner volunteering in Ireland, Behan noted 52% of his sample had been involved in some sort of voluntary or charity activity (2014a: 152). Of the opportunities to contribute to the community in prison which have been documented thus far, these include a range of those organised on a local institutional level, by national prison services, or by external community organisations, thus varying in the extent to which they facilitate a crossing of the boundary between prison and the wider world in prisoners' engagement, or take community *within* prison as the focus of involvement.

One programme which provides opportunities for prisoners to support fellow prisoners, and which operates similarly across both jurisdictions studied in this thesis, is that of the Listener Scheme. The scheme, through which Samaritans train prisoners to provide confidential, listening-ear support for those struggling emotionally, is a key form of peer-support in prisons across both England & Wales (Jaffe, 2012a), and Ireland (Behan, 2014a), with almost all prisons partaking in the scheme. As such, the scheme itself is often viewed as “synonymous” with peer-support schemes in the prison environment (Woodall et al, 2015: 32) and in the UK has received much academic attention (Davies, 1994; Dhaliwal & Harrower, 2009; Jaffe, 2012a; 2012b; Perrin & Blagden, 2014; Woodall et al, 2015). Despite its prevalence in Ireland, the Listener scheme here has received little dedicated study - an area which this thesis contributes to, through interviews with a number of Listeners, as well as those participating in other volunteering schemes (see Chapter Seven). One of the key factors which makes this

programme of interest in relation to the notion of citizenship during imprisonment is the fact this role is taken – unlike a number of other peer-mentor positions – on a voluntary basis, often in addition to paid employment, or education, within the prison.

The majority of the existing literature on volunteering in the prison environment emphasises the benefits of such participation for the prison population suggesting, in addition to any benefits of programmes for others, there are also benefits in the act of volunteering. Whilst there is a plentiful literature detailing the benefits experienced by volunteers, in various contexts, the value of volunteering for prisoners, specifically, begins at its potential to mitigate the exclusion of marginalised groups in society (Institute for Volunteering Research & Volunteering England, 2007). As such, despite emphasis on the constructive use of time by prisoners, in political speeches and penal policy (Cameron, 2016; Gove, 2016; IPS, 2016c), substantial benefits have been highlighted in much of the literature which are heralded as having implications beyond the immediacy of prison life, and enabling prisoners to move from being a “passive recipient to a contributor to society” (Edgar et al., 2011: 21). As such, the existence of prisoner volunteering within institutions may well provide an indication there is, to some extent, a sense of community within the institution, as individuals move from a passive role to give their time in a manner which benefits the collective of prisoners. However, a consideration of involvement in schemes such as the Listeners is complicated significantly when taking place within the prison environment, where such work may also benefit, or involve working with staff, and where the extent to which prisoners can act voluntarily is questionable.

### **3.3.2. Blurring the Boundary Between ‘Them’ and ‘Us’**

Despite the benefits to volunteers identified in much of the literature, taking on the role of a volunteer within the prison environment can also be problematic, given the manner in which it might be perceived as contravening some of the key principles of the ‘inmate code’, particularly if the view is taken of a society of captives united in opposition to their rulers. As Jaffe (2012a) discusses in her study of the Listener scheme in multiple prisons across England & Wales, whilst it might be expected that the peer support involved in certain volunteering roles would foster a sense of solidarity or community amongst prisoners, due to the benefits for members of this community resulting from such work, there is also the potential for it to have the opposite effect due to the distance

it places between volunteers and other prisoners. Whilst there are some volunteering opportunities within the prison setting which involve providing help, guidance or emotional support to other prisoners, and thus increasing the empathetic understanding amongst the cohort, those taking on these roles are likely to receive additional benefits that go hand in hand with being granted such a trusted position within the establishment, such as enhanced regime status, increased time out of cells, freedom to move around certain areas of the prison without officers, higher weekly spending money, or additional opportunities to engage with family or members of wider society. In providing such benefits for prisoner volunteers, a divide may be created between 'ordinary' prisoners, and trusted volunteers who may also have increased interaction with staff, blurring the line between 'them' and 'us', and consequently situating them in a different position on the institutional hierarchy to the majority of prisoners.

Such influence on an individual's perceived position within the prison is likely to be particularly problematic if the prison community is viewed in the terms of Sykes (1958) or Clemmer (1940), where the shared culture of inmates is ultimately predicated on their shared experience and an anti-authority stance of opposition to prison staff. Sykes and Messinger (1960) highlight two central tenets of the inmate code as being loyalty towards other inmates and distrust of staff, within which come the expectations that prisoners will not 'rat' or 'grass' on one another, and will demonstrate limited communication or contact with staff unless absolutely necessary. By taking on a volunteering role within the prison setting, prisoners may be viewed as contradicting some of these shared norms and thus not complying with the inmate code - a factor which could place individual prisoners in a difficult or potentially dangerous situation when it comes to their fellow prisoners, or which may deter individuals from taking on such roles within the prison. Nevertheless, prisoners in both England and Ireland do take on such roles through a number of volunteering programmes, or work placements, during their sentences, giving weight to the argument that individualisation of imprisonment has weakened this 'ban' on communication with prison staff and fostered an environment where individual interests trump those of the collective (Crewe, 2009; Mathiesen, 1965). As such, the benefits of community contributions, discussed above, are strengthened in an individualised regime, while the risks of participation are weakened. While this may sound like a positive change, if we are to view such involvement as beneficial for the individual and the wider prison community, this must



be viewed within the context of an increasing emphasis on responsabilisation of the prison experience, and the replacement of deprivations with requirements (Crewe, 2009). This calls into question the extent to which involvement in such activities can be deemed voluntary community contributions, or contribute towards a meaningful sense of citizenship for those in prison.

### **3.3.3. Responsibilisation: Compliance or Community Contributions?**

Since the 1990's, England & Wales has seen an increasing emphasis on the need for 'constructive activity' during prison sentences – a position particularly evident in speeches by David Cameron (previous UK Prime Minister) and Michael Gove (previous UK Secretary of State for Justice) where prisoners were referred to as “assets to be harnessed” as opposed to “liabilities” (Gove, 2015b). Similar rhetoric has also been witnessed in Ireland, with the Minister for Justice praising the decision to construct a new prison in Cork on the basis it would provide the infrastructure for “constructive activities for prisoners” (Shatter, 2014). Whilst many have viewed this as a positive move forward in rhetoric, acknowledging the ability of individuals behind bars to take responsibility and make positive contributions to society, the economic connotations of the term 'assets' hint at the neoliberal agenda of responsabilisation on which such rhetoric is based (Rose, 1999; Garland, 2001; Wacquant, 2009). However, when considered within the broader policy emphasis on responsabilisation, and the context of the carceral space, the role of volunteering by prisoners may be viewed far less positively or in some circumstances, as a potentially damaging method of social control embedded within the structures of exclusion inherent in the criminal justice system.

These increasing requirements placed on individuals mean involvement in 'voluntary' activities may not in fact be entirely voluntary when situated within a coercive environment. The increased prevalence of incentivised regimes, in both England and Ireland, now place strict requirements on how individuals spend their time, with individuals needing to demonstrate engagement with constructive or purposeful activity, not only to satisfy Parole Boards, but also to improve the material conditions of their imprisonment. The associated incentives, which might help to soften the prison experience in some way, are contingent on good behaviour and engagement with constructive activity, a situation which Crewe (2011a) has described as increasing the

‘tightness’ of the prison experience. As such, when considering citizenship as activity in the context of prison, it must be considered that engagement may be shaped by this incentivised context. Individuals may be involved in these activities in order to comply with the requirements of the incentivised regime, rather than out of a meaningful sense of citizenship. This was illustrated in Behan’s (2014a: 173) research on active citizenship in an Irish prison, where he found that “Prison seemed to create short-term compliant rather than active citizens.” As such, while individuals may appear to be actively engaged in activities that cultivate a ‘community’ within prison settings, these contributions must be understood within the context of responsabilisation; what initially seems to demonstrate a sense of community may in fact be a response to increasingly demanding prison regimes where active engagement is required for individuals to be deemed compliant. As such, it is vital that we gain an appreciation of the subjective understandings of community for those within prison.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

Although more recent research may challenge the sub-cultural descriptions of the prisoner community in collective terms, it does much to highlight the normative similarities between the outside world, and the regime and culture of the prison – both operate in a way which instils an emphasis on independence, individual success, and foster little concern for supporting others at the expense of one’s own resources or interests. As such, when seeking to explore the ways prisoners define, and engage with, community during their time in prison, it is necessary to consider this within the broader context and the societal culture the prison is situated within. An acknowledgement of context is vital if we are to avoid an assessment of the prison which expects ‘community’ in its purest form, and makes a judgement of prisoners as in opposition to members of wider society. Those in prison should not be held to a standard of community-oriented, pro-social behaviour exceeding that prevalent in wider society, and which is stunted under the current economic systems of many Western nations.

Despite the term ‘community’ being used to describe the social world within the prison in much of the literature, the connotations of solidarity and cohesion this term implies are not encouraged by contemporary prison systems where the aim is to avoid disruption or challenge to the system, through making it more beneficial for inmates to comply than organise in resistance against the system. It is within this context of an

individualised system, which rewards compliance, that contributions to, and interactions within, the prison community must be understood. Whilst there is a strong history of observational and ethnographic research exploring the social relations between prisoners, and with prison officers (e.g. Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Sykes & Messinger, 1960; Goffman, 1961; Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Irwin, 1970; Crewe, 2009), there is no study which seeks to explore whether, within the context of modern, individualised imprisonment, the prison constitutes a community from the perspective of the incarcerated population themselves, or has the conditions necessary (from their own perspectives) to have community ‘spirit’ within an institution. The use of the term ‘community’ tends to be a way by which individuals can be sorted into particular groups by others e.g. a member of the community in [location], a member of the black community, a member of the Traveller community, a member of the prison community, while there is a dearth of research exploring how prisoners themselves define their own communities, and the implications this has for their everyday lives and views of their own position in relation to wider society. As such, while accepting the contemporary penal context encourages individual rather than collective interests, this research will seek to uncover the lived experience of individual prisoners within this broader policy context. In doing so, the thesis will contribute to the existing debate within the literature, between the existence of a cohesive community or an aggregate of atomised individuals, by uncovering “the character of shared life as...[prisoners] actually experience it” (Hall & Williamson, 1999: 4) and the relevance of this for participants’ sense of citizenship.

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature on community in the context of imprisonment, and has considered the ways that the prison has been identified as a cohesive or atomised community within prison research. The chapter has demonstrated how developments in the individualisation of the prison experience have been argued to re-shape this experience of community, before considering the potential relevance of this for prisoners’ participation in the prison community. By considering existing literature on the prison community, and the absence of consideration of prisoners’ own definitions of communities within this setting, the chapter demonstrates the contribution that this thesis makes to furthering understanding of the prison ‘community’ as subjectively experienced and defined by imprisoned men themselves.



# Part Two

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Part Two of the thesis provides an overview of the empirical research upon which the discussions in Part Three of the thesis are based. Chapter Four explains the methodological decisions informing how the research was undertaken, and the practical reality of researching in the prison environment. Chapter Five provides a brief introduction and background to the particular national and institutional contexts in which ‘lived citizenship’ is explored in this research, as well as introducing the sample of men whose experiences this thesis is based upon.



# Chapter Four

## Methodology

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### 4.1 Introduction

In the early stages of this PhD research, armed with a structured plan for how the study would play out, I underestimated how complicated the process of prison research could be. Social research is a “messy” process (Layder, 1998: 28), fraught with obstacles and challenges to overcome as well as the many rewards and insights it offers. These hurdles are even greater when researching within the prison setting which presents a plethora of unique challenges and “methodological landmines” (Schlosser, 2008: 1501). This chapter will provide an account of the design, data collection and analysis stages of the empirical research on which this thesis is based. Additionally, extracts from fieldwork reflections will be drawn upon to provide insight into the practical, methodological and emotional ‘messiness’ of the research process. The chapter begins with an overview of the aims and objectives of the research, and the key questions that guided data collection. This is followed by a discussion of the chosen research design, its suitability for the research aims, and the challenges of accessing and recruiting participants in the prison context. Consideration is then given to some of the ethical considerations when working with a captive research sample, before providing reflections on my own identity, neutrality and emotions as a researcher within the prison setting. Given the comparative nature of this research, there were additional challenges faced in the research design, fieldwork process, and analysis, which required attention to ensure the comparison of England and Ireland did what was intended: to represent, as faithfully as possible, the similarities and differences in experiences of individuals imprisoned in each jurisdiction. Throughout the chapter, consideration is given to similarity and difference of my research experiences in England and Ireland.

### 4.2 An Overview of the Research Design

This is a comparative, qualitative study of the meaning ‘citizenship’ holds for men imprisoned in England and Ireland, and how a subjective sense of citizenship is realised (or not) in the day-to-day lives of men in prison. Within this broad aim, the focus of the

research was narrowed down through consideration of the weaknesses of existing work in this area – in particular, the emphasis on the legal citizenship status of prisoners and participation in pre-defined ‘citizenship’ activities while in prison, rather than exploring the experiences of people in prison in relation to their own subjective understandings of citizenship. Frosh (2001:62) posits if the notion of citizenship is to hold more significance “than a totting up of rights and duties” then its study must “embrace the realm of the subjective”, and that is what this study aims to do. Driven by this aim of uncovering the lived experiences and subjective realities of participants, this research falls within the broad epistemological school of interpretivism; it seeks to understand individuals’ interpretations of, and the subjective meaning given to, human action. Specifically, this approach is underpinned by the ontological assumption that social phenomena do not have an absolute or fixed meaning, but meanings are socially constructed through social action and interaction. As such, there is no singular objective meaning or reality “out there”, which exists in a social vacuum separate from the social actors involved in its construction, that can be studied (Bryman, 2012a: 37). Rather, the intention is to explore the multiple subjective realities, as constructed by the individuals participating in this research, in the particular contexts of both the jurisdictions and institutions in which they are imprisoned. By rejecting the existence of an absolute objective reality, phenomena which might appear similar can hold entirely different meanings for different people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and the notion of citizenship is no exception. As such, this study explores how men in prison understand citizenship, and how they make sense of their position in relation to this concept, drawing upon the notion of ‘lived citizenship’ (Hall & Williamson, 1999) to guide the inquiry. Whilst the subject matter of this research lends itself to an interpretivist approach, this is also valuable in the context of comparative research. Presenting a typology of methodological approaches to comparative criminological research, Nelken (2007: 144) argues there are three ways researchers can approach comparative research on crime and criminal justice: positivist, ‘behavioural science’, testing explanatory theories of crime; an ‘interpretivist’ approach focused on how meaning is situated in changing contexts; a ‘legal comparativist’ or ‘policy researchers’ approach, to learn from criminal justice in different jurisdictions. Nelken (2007: 150) advocates the use of the interpretivist approach to understand meanings attached to concepts within their particular national context in comparative research, as it seeks to “uncover the inner meaning” of facts taken as a given by positivist researchers. As it is the inner meaning



attached to the concept of ‘citizenship’ that this research is fundamentally concerned with, in a cross-national context, it is further justified that it is an interpretivist approach which predominantly defines my methodology. However, by comparing the experiences of men imprisoned in England and Ireland, and the ways in which their experiences of incarceration shape a meaningful sense of citizenship, this study also provides an opportunity for cross-national learning where elements of this experience are conducive to meaningful citizenship. As such, the ‘international comparativist’ approach (Nelken, 2007) is also adopted to some extent.

A grounded theory approach is frequently utilised by qualitative, interpretivist researchers, as an inductive approach to creation of theory disregarding prior theoretical concepts, approaches or influences (Glaser, 1992). However, I came to this research with an understanding of a range of theoretical approaches to the study of citizenship, in various contexts, as well as a grounding in the prison sociology literature. As such, the process of theory creation in this study was not exclusively inductive in nature, as would be expected in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but rather took the approach of ‘adaptive theory’, advocated by Layder (1998: 133) as a means of blending deductive and inductive procedures, thus allowing the “dual influence of extant theory (theoretical models) as well as those that unfold from (and are enfolded in) the research”. As such, I went back and forth between the extant literature and the primary data throughout the research process, to draw upon theory which would illuminate my findings. The influence is one which is more iterative than a purely inductive or deductive approach, allowing adaptation to circumstances as they unfold; knowledge of relevant theory serves as a beneficial influence in the collection of data, and any explanatory theoretical model is in turn influenced by the ongoing data collection (Layder, 1998). As such, during this study, the processes of data-collection, analysis and consultation of literature took place in a cyclical, ongoing process as I refined my ideas and allowed frequent return to extant literature to enhance my understanding of the empirical data.

Utilising this approach of adaptive theory, I began my research by considering the theoretical perspectives on citizenship, and the ways such theories had been applied and developed in relation to the fields of imprisonment and other penal sanctions. This approach was necessary to ensure interviews were informed by my knowledge of the existing literature, and appropriately focused so as to ensure discussions addressed

relevant issues – this was especially necessary given the restrictive regimes in which interviews took place, meaning opportunities to go back to participants with subsequent questions or queries were often extremely limited. As the research progressed, and as empirical data collection took place, I considered the potential application of existing concepts and theories used to discuss citizenship and community, and whether these would be appropriate for explaining the experiences of incarcerated populations; the process of doing so influenced the data analysis itself, with codes and themes taking into consideration where the data alluded to pre-existing themes in the literature (see section 3.6), whilst those themes emerging directly from the data aided consideration of the refinement which might be needed for existing approaches to citizenship to hold relevance in the context of imprisonment in England and Ireland. With a view to uncovering subjective experience from participants themselves, the following key questions directed the research:

- 1) How do men in prison conceptualise citizenship (and their own position in relation to this notion)?
- 2) Do men in prison consider themselves to be citizens?
- 3) How, if at all, does the experience of imprisonment affect individuals' subjective sense of citizenship?

In line with an adaptive theory approach (Layder, 1998), secondary research questions also took influence from key themes identified in existing 'citizenship' theory, to provide an assessment of how these issues were experienced, or relevant, to the lives of men in prison. These secondary questions were as follows:

- 4) How do men in prison perceive, and engage with their communities during incarceration?
- 5) How do men in prison perceive, and engage with the state during incarceration?
- 6) What are the motivations for, or barriers to participation in active citizenship activities during incarceration?

These research questions were used to guide the research design and data collection for both jurisdictions, in order to enable the comparison of experience to answer the overarching question of this comparative study:

*How, if at all, does 'lived citizenship' differ for prisoners in England & Ireland?*

The comparison of participants' experiences and perceptions was undertaken with attention to local and national social, cultural, political and economic context, with discussion of such contextual factors being drawn upon in analysis and discussion of the data where similarity and/or difference of experience appeared to be shaped by these particular contextual factors. As such, the findings were able to shed light on the extent to which broader national context shapes an individual's experience of incarceration, while also highlighting experiences so intrinsic to the prison experience that they transcend national boundaries.

### **4.3 Qualitative Research**

The methodological decisions made in this study were driven by the desire to give voice to the subjective experiences of men in prison, in England and Ireland, and as such qualitative methods were used enabling the study of "things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3). As Mason (2002: 24) describes, qualitative research results in data that is "characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive", making it suitable for developing complex, context-contingent, and in-depth understandings of people's experiences, from their own perspectives (Bryman, 2012a). Given the emphasis of the research on perceptions and experiences of men in prison, and the nationally and institutionally situated nature of these experiences, it was decided qualitative research methods would allow for the voice of men in prison to be most clearly heard, and contextualised, in the findings.

Initially, a structured, sequential research design was planned (focus group, followed by questionnaire, followed by interviews) to incorporate the breadth quantitative data could offer, and provide opportunities for the issues of greatest importance to participants at stage one, to inform stage two and so on. Unfortunately, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) requirements of separate ethical approval for

each stage made this research design impracticable in the given time. Qualitative methods were prioritised, with the flexibility of semi-structured methods allowing the pursuit of new lines of enquiry as they arose, immediately, without delays for ethical approval. This is one of the key benefits of qualitative research, as discussed by Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 4), with the qualitative researcher acting as a “bricoleur”, constantly adapting to new opportunities to gain understanding as they arise by “deploying whatever strategies, methods and empirical materials are at hand”. Given this flexibility the qualitative researcher employs, and the emphasis on data-driven inquiry, directed as much by participants as by preconceptions of the researcher, “it would be inimical and impossible to write an entire advanced blueprint” when undertaking qualitative research (Mason, 2002: 24). As such, whilst the research design settled upon was based upon interpretive qualitative inquiry, with plans to collect data through focus groups and interviews, understanding to supplement these discussions was also gleaned from time spent familiarising myself with the prison environment, observing day-to-day life in prison, and engaging in informal interactions with staff and imprisoned men. This familiarisation process was vital to the research, contextualising and re-affirming the experiences shared in interviews and focus groups, as well as in the process of recruiting participants (discussed at section 4.5).

#### **4.4 Access, Gatekeepers and Negotiations**

Restrictions on access to prisons are justifiable and necessary in many respects, not least to protect the privacy and autonomy of those imprisoned (Sloan & Wright, 2015), however the challenges and procedural hurdles of gaining access may deter many prospective researchers from the field (Pattenaude, 2004). Gaining access to complete fieldwork was by far the most complicated hurdle I faced during this research, with these challenges being multiplied by the need to visit two separate prisons, in different jurisdictions with their own review process and unique challenges. Alongside the caution of ethical review panels, this made for a lengthy, and at times uncertain, start to the fieldwork process as the power over access lay “in the hands of the officialdom” (King & Liebling, 2008: 433).

The goodwill of gatekeepers was vital to securing access (Buchanan, 1988) and early contact with individuals working at the prisons provided helpful support for my official access applications. Communication with a former colleague of my PhD supervisor was

invaluable in determining the viability of conducting research at Mountjoy Prison and demonstrated to the ethics committee that I had someone within the prison willing to facilitate my research. Gatekeepers were also invaluable in the ongoing micro-negotiation, and re-negotiation of access which took place on a day-to-day basis when visiting new parts of the prison or coming across staff members who did not recognise me (Drake & Harvey, 2013). At HMP Leeds, an informal letter to the Governor resulted in his expression of support for the research, which was vital given the authority to grant access ultimately lies with the Governor, regardless of NOMS approval (Sloan & Wright, 2015).

Formal applications were made to the Irish Prison Service (IPS) and NOMS<sup>14</sup> including details of proposed research questions, methodology, practical and ethical considerations, along with proposed research tools and documentation. In addition to the issues considered in application for ethical approval from the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee, these applications also required demonstration of links to the strategic priorities of each prison service, and proposals for practical solutions to minimise impact on resources – a challenging task when unfamiliar with the day-to-day workings of the prison regimes. Contact with other prison researchers in England and Ireland, and the study of researchers' accounts of prison research, helped greatly with these questions. Few prison researchers go into this field without a desire to improve the system in some way and I was confident my research would provide information of benefit to the prison authorities through enhancing understanding of prisoners' experiences, and highlighting examples of good practice or areas for improvement. However, as a qualitative researcher exploring subjective understanding, satisfying necessary links to strategic priorities (See MOJ, 2012 and IPS, 2016a) and demonstrating the usefulness of research was difficult within application processes that seemed geared towards quantitative or evaluative research, and – in the case of England – were reviewed by psychologists rather than fellow sociologists or criminologists.

The challenges I faced in progression of access applications differed greatly between IPS and NOMS. Having maintained contact with my main gatekeeper at Mountjoy prison, via my supervisor, I was aware the IPS ethics committee had approved my

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<sup>14</sup> NOMS has now been replaced by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

research without amendments but faced significant delays in receiving official communication of this decision. Making contacts can be very important for new researchers seeking to access prisons (King & Liebling, 2008) and as such I travelled to a conference in Ireland, where I was confident I would meet the individual processing my application. I was able to speak with him and communicate the urgency of progressing my research due to funding restrictions and university deadlines. The following week I received confirmation that access had been granted by the Director General of IPS, enabling me to make arrangements for beginning fieldwork.

Although still a lengthy process, communication with the reviewer for NOMS was frequent and enabled the provision of clarification and additional information as needed. Within two months I received notification of changes required before access would be granted. Most amendments requested were minor, however some proposed changes were substantial and would require time that was unavailable. This was explained and accepted by reviewers and my access application was approved a few months later. Despite approval, concerns were raised around the potentially political nature of my work due to ongoing debate around prisoner voting rights<sup>15</sup>, and the proposed comparison with Ireland. This had also been noted as a likely reason for lack of governor support in earlier efforts to approach possible sites through personal contacts. Despite reflecting the experiences of other researchers who have struggled to access prison when exploring sensitive or controversial issues (Stevens, 2012), this did not ultimately prevent access. The reviewer requested the National Research Committee<sup>16</sup> comment directly on this issue but such comment never arrived. Nevertheless, noting these concerns I made assurances to the reviewers that results would be presented responsibly, without drawing over-reaching conclusions, in the final thesis and resulting publications.

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<sup>15</sup> At the time of application, the UK government had not yet made changes in response to the European Court of Human Rights in *Hirst v UK*, which ruled that the blanket ban on prisoner voting breached Article 3 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights. As such, the political debate around prisoner voting and how to respond to this judgment was ongoing. Since, the Council of Europe have accepted the UK's proposal to allow a small number of individuals in prison to vote while released on temporary license (Lidington, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> The National Research Committee is the central body that deals with applications for research in any of the HMPPS (at the time, NOMS) institutions, across the prison estate and probation areas.

Having overcome the hurdles of gaining initial access to the prisons, the negotiation of micro-access arrangements continued throughout both periods of fieldwork (Drake & Harvey, 2013). In practice, daily access varied depending on the staff members I encountered, and I had to remain flexible, adapt quickly, and negotiate on a continual basis with each staff member. Although accompanied to Mountjoy prison each morning by teaching staff, some officers would question my reasoning for being at the prison, making the task of gaining entry an ongoing negotiation. My presence in the prison was met with particular surprise when visiting the ‘base’<sup>17</sup> or Medical Unit<sup>18</sup> and requesting interview space, with some officers allowing me to use an interview room or to sit in a prisoner’s cell, while others refused to allow this due to my gender making me ‘vulnerable’ and therefore a greater demand on resources (See further discussion at section 4.9).

Similar negotiations were necessary during my initial visit to, and tour of, HMP Leeds during which staff suggested interviews should take place in groups with staff supervision. When I explained the associated problems of confidentiality (discussed further at section 4.7), I was told staff would not allow me to be alone with participants, again due to my ‘vulnerability’ as a young woman. I listened to and respected the safety concerns of staff, which King and Liebling (2008) highlight as essential in prisons research, but by arguing the importance of privacy was able to negotiate a compromise. Three suitable locations for interviews were agreed – the library, chaplaincy group room, and centre area in the new part of the prison – which would provide enough privacy to maintain confidentiality, whilst allowing staff supervision from a distance. For the most part staff were happy for me to take men off the wings to these locations for interviews, however in some instances access to individuals on Basic regime, or in segregation, was denied based on the potential risk they posed to me or to the maintenance of order in the prison.

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<sup>17</sup> The ‘base’ was a term used to refer to cell accommodation in the basement of the prison which, at the time of fieldwork, held those who were in segregation for their own protection due to gang involvement, debts or threats to their lives. Those held in the base had far less time out of their cells and very limited access to any activities within the prison.

<sup>18</sup> At the time of the fieldwork, the Medical Unit was a drug detoxification unit based at a three-storey building, within the Mountjoy campus but separate from the main prison. Individuals would often have to complete a detoxification period at the Medical Unit before they were able to ‘graduate’ to semi-open conditions at the Training Unit.

## 4.5 Sampling and Recruiting Participants

Self-selection sampling was used in both jurisdictions, to reduce power inequalities in the research process and ensure men had control over their engagement, or lack thereof, with the research (Bosworth et al., 2005). The sample criteria used to determine volunteers' suitability were relatively broad, with the only requirement being that the men had been sentenced to a period of incarceration. As such, the sample covered a wide range of ages, sentences, offences, and levels of engagement with activities in the prisons (see section 5.4). To ensure a sample that best reflected the diversity of the prisons' populations, the sampling strategy evolved during fieldwork as possible lines of recruitment were identified. Initially I had intended to use a combination of strategic and self-selection sampling, with a quota to ensure participants covered those who were, and were not, engaged in what might be considered active citizenship activities in the prisons though in practice this distinction was not clear cut.

I sought to recruit participants via responses to posters placed in various locations around both prisons (see Appendices Six and Eleven), however in reality most interviewees were identified and recruited in person, either on the wings at HMP Leeds or in the school at Mountjoy Prison while I was interviewing other participants. While at HMP Leeds I was able to move around the prison to put posters up on every wing, and spend time 'hanging around' and explaining my research to anyone interested on these wings. My limited access to areas outside of the school at Mountjoy Prison, however, meant my posters were not a sufficient recruitment strategy for identifying participants who were not engaged in education, as I had hoped to do. I found face-to-face introduction to be the most effective way of informing individuals about my research and consequently recruiting participants. This enabled me to explain the research in an informal manner, and sparked interest amongst potential participants. Whilst my initial interviewees were recruited through participation in education classes I had attended at Mountjoy Prison, or during my initial wing visits at HMP Leeds, I was soon able to recruit a wider sample through snowball sampling. Having recruited an initial sample, I continued to spend time on the wings at HMP Leeds or in the Mountjoy Prison school, and after a few days of making a regular appearance at each prison individuals were keen to tell those on their wing or classmates that I was 'alright' and encourage them to take part in an interview. By building up a rapport with initial



interviewees, I was able to overcome the suspicion or mistrust of outsiders, in this case researchers, which is often present amongst those in prison (Day et al., 2005). For the most part the men were keen to take part, and by the latter stages of the fieldwork in both prisons, the main challenge was turning down those who I would not be able to interview due to time constraints.

Despite initial plans to schedule interviews for specific dates and times, I soon became aware that such a structured approach was unsuitable for the prison environment. On-the-spot recruitment worked well in the chaotic environment of the prison, as I was able to interview individuals as and when they wished to talk, and did not require prior arrangement of staff to escort them outside working hours. Many participants described how they would take each day as it comes, and when I did arrange interviews in advance, participants did not remember our plans. At HMP Leeds, where I held keys and was able to move around the prison more easily (discussed at section 4.8), I could go onto wings to remind individuals of interview arrangements, however at Mountjoy Prison I was unable to leave the school unaccompanied and was depending on individuals remembering to come to the school that day. As such, my recruitment strategy did not reflect my initial expectations, requiring great flexibility. If a suitable space was available, I would offer an interview immediately to individuals I met that day.

Self-selection sampling did present challenges, particularly when snowballing meant my sample was determined by who initial participants deemed 'suitable' for subsequent interviews. Some men became quite protective of me, wanting to ensure I was not speaking to 'bullshitters', whilst the initial recruitment methods also failed to reach many groups outside of the prison school. Additionally, most of the enthusiastic volunteers who initially approached me were those actively engaged in a range of activities which they wished to tell me about, and attended school or prison work regularly. While I could speak to staff on wings at HMP Leeds, to identify individuals who were not engaged, or attend the wings at times where all active participants in education or work were away at the education unit or workshops, this was more challenging at Mountjoy Prison where my location at the school was not so conducive to recruiting a sample representative of the prison population. After discussion with prison staff, I was able to recruit individuals who were less engaged with such activities by attending the Medical Unit and protection wing of the prison. In these locations I

would approach individuals during time out of cells, often accompanied by a teacher delivering materials to others in this area of the prison, or through co-operation of officers on duty who would ask around for interested volunteers. Whilst placing the selection of participants into the hands of staff or random selection through prison databases might have provided a more varied sample, this would have created difficulty in determining whether prisoners were participating entirely voluntarily, or whether their involvement was influenced by direct coercion on the part of staff, or a more subtle pressure embodied in the inherently coercive prison regime (Moser et al., 2004). I was confident those taking part were happy to talk to me, with self-selection reducing the power inequalities inherent in the research process by putting control over participation into the hands of the men themselves (Bosworth et al., 2005). Through this combination of self-selection and snowball sampling, I ended up with a sample of 64 participants across the two prisons. This sample size, of 32 participants in each jurisdiction, ensured the sample reflected, as far as possible, the heterogeneity of the populations at the two prisons (Bryman, 2012b) and as such included participants with varying levels of involvement in education, prison work or voluntary activities, including those in 23-hour lock-up through to the 'model prisoner' who was actively engaged and received a high level of trust from officers.

As is necessary in comparative research if the two samples are to answer the research questions sufficiently in their own right, the comparative element of this research resulted in the need for a larger sample overall. While it had been anticipated that approximately 25-30 interviewees in each jurisdiction would provide sufficient insight from which to draw conclusions and identify key themes, a further two interviews were conducted in each institution where opportunities were presented to incorporate a different perspective and enhance the reflection of the prison population's heterogeneity.

However, it is important to note that my location and access will inevitably, along with self-selection bias, have led to a sample which over-represents the more articulate and compliant men imprisoned at each institution. This was particularly likely to be the case in the sample at Mountjoy Prison, with a small proportion of the prison population attending the school where I completed the research, while officers' decisions to refuse access to more challenging individuals at HMP Leeds meant that the sample did not accurately represent the experiences of those across all regime levels operating at the

institution. Despite the restrictions on interviewing those outside of Mountjoy School, or those on Basic Regime at HMP Leeds, the samples did include a number of participants who had recently come off Basic regime or who demonstrated very limited engagement with educational activities despite being physically present in the school area of Mountjoy Prison. As such, although gaining a wholly representative sample was not possible, the variety of experience reflected in the final sample was greater than might be expected given these access limitations. Nevertheless, the experiences reflected in the findings of this study may not be generalisable to all men imprisoned at the two institutions, or to those incarcerated elsewhere, due to the impact of access arrangements on the samples recruited. As such, care has been taken to highlight the particular conditions in which participants were imprisoned, and their levels of engagement, in the presentation of findings.

## **4.6 Research Methods**

Consideration is now given to the particular research methods used to undertake this research, the rationale behind the selection of interviews and focus groups over other qualitative methods, and the practicalities of using these research methods in the prison setting.

### **4.6.1 Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews can allow for “deeper and more genuine expressions” of participants’ subjective experiences and understandings to emerge through dialogue (Howe, 2004: 54) which is facilitated through the degree of flexibility they allow compared to more structured or quantitative methods (Crow and Semmens, 2008). Given the centrality of subjective experience and understanding of meaning to the research aims of this study, semi-structured interviews were used to elicit participants’ own perspectives on citizenship. An interview schedule was developed, with a view to exploring key relevant issues while providing the space and flexibility for interviewees to raise issues of importance to them rather than being restricted to those pre-determined by the researcher. As such the interviews were relatively informal in nature and took the form of a “conversation with a purpose” (Burgess: 1984: 102) which ensured collection of relevant data, while allowing for unanticipated contributions leading to a more “organic” dialogue than structured interviews would have allowed

(Mason, 2002: 64). To ensure the focus of this dialogue on relevant issues, an interview schedule was developed (See Appendix One). Interviews began with a request for participants to talk through their usual daily routine in prison. This was intended to provide context of the regime at each institution, the individual's level of engagement, any activities or comments that may warrant further discussion, and to provide an opportunity for individuals to acclimatise to answering questions at length. The schedule was broken down into sections, informed by various themes central to conceptions of citizenship in existing literature (see Chapter Two) in order to explore the relevance of these notions in participants' own understandings and experiences. While the priority was for the interview to be driven by participants' own understandings of citizenship, and as such these took precedence in determining the issues discussed, the interview schedule contained sections which dealt with various aspects of relevance to 'citizenship' in turn: engagement with communities; having a voice over institutions that govern; and political participation. Each of these issues was considered in relation to life within prison, as well as outside, in order to gain understanding as to how participants distinguished these spheres of life. Whilst the same schedule was used for interviews in England and Ireland, minor amendments were made to take account of national context. This involved considering the need to make the design appropriate to two distinct national and political contexts, and the difficulty of familiarising myself with the subtle differences between the two prison systems. This presented specific challenges when seeking to determine functional equivalents which would make a 'like for like' comparison possible, if these existed, and decipher where surface-level similarities in fact constituted substantial differences in practice (Nelken, 2010). During interviews, this often-required clarifications in terms of terminology – both formal and slang – used to describe elements of the prison systems in each jurisdiction.

One pilot interview was undertaken at each institution which confirmed the suitability of the questions chosen for exploring 'lived citizenship' from the perspective of imprisoned men, while also highlighting some of these important semantic differences between the two jurisdictions which informed the phrasing used in future questioning of participants. For example, during the pilot interviews participants in each jurisdiction used the term 'pad', however it became clear that this held subtly different meanings in each jurisdiction – in England the interviewee used this term to refer to any ordinary

prison cell, while in Ireland the pilot interviewee used this term to refer specifically to solitary confinement or segregation cells. As such, while the pilot interviews did not identify the need for any substantial amendments to the interview questions, it highlighted the need for sensitivity to such subtle semantic differences between jurisdictions and informed my approach to clarifying and questioning the use of such potentially ambiguous terms in following interviews.

64 semi-structured interviews were undertaken across the two prisons (32 at Mountjoy Prison, and 32 at HMP Leeds). These ranged in length from 15 minutes to two and a half hours over multiple sittings, depending partly on how open and talkative participants were, but also due to interruptions, with some interviews cut short to ensure participants did not miss appointments or mealtimes for example. Generally, interviews at HMP Leeds were longer as there was less movement around the interview locations and consequently fewer interruptions from others passing by.

At Mountjoy Prison, most interviews took place in the prison school, either in an unused classroom, the sports hall, or the stage area, which all provided a relatively private space. In the fitness hall and stage area, the background noise of loud music and movement in exercise classes could often be heard, however the degree of privacy afforded by these spaces made them preferable to the classroom in allowing for interviews with fewer interruptions – these were frequent where other men could see myself and participants through a window in the classroom door leading onto the main school corridor. A few interviews took place in other locations of the prison, which provided greater privacy, including in wing offices, the Medical Unit classroom, and in the entrance of a participant's cell.

At HMP Leeds, interviews were conducted either in the chaplaincy group room, library, the 'centre'<sup>19</sup>, or in staff offices. The latter two areas provided ample supervision to satisfy staff concerns about my safety, however presented challenges due to noise, movement and sometimes the presence of staff within earshot. Alarms, shouting and general background noise also made transcribing interviews a particularly difficult and lengthy process in these cases, while raising ethical questions in relation to privacy and confidentiality (see section 4.8.2). Interviews were mainly recorded using an electronic

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<sup>19</sup> Central area of the prison where all the wings, and main corridors, join.

dictaphone, or tape recorder<sup>20</sup>, allowing attention to be focused on active listening and encouraging detailed explanation. Where participants did not want to be recorded, detailed notes were taken and immediately typed up upon leaving the prisons.

During interviews, I allowed participants to speak, uninterrupted, for long periods and often used follow-up questions to prompt detailed explanation and ensure the richness of data collected (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In a few interviews, particularly early on in my research, this non-interventionist approach was somewhat problematic in that participants would speak at length about issues unrelated to the research. During some interviews the boundaries of the researcher-participant relationship were called into question as individuals used the time to get things off their chest, sharing deeply personal stories of their lives with me; participants shared with me stories ranging from a lengthy account of a previous career in the army, through to detailed stories of previous failed romantic relationships. Wherever possible, I used “steering probes” to guide participants back to the research focus by referring to earlier comments and asking for further explanation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012: 140). However, in a small number of cases where participants had made very emotional and sensitive disclosures, such as an interview during which one participant disclosed sexual victimisation as a young prisoner, it seemed inconsiderate and disrespectful to abruptly cut participants off, and I allowed these discussions to come to a natural end before continuing the interview, if appropriate:

*The interview questions really didn't matter...showing that I cared and was there to listen to his story felt so much more important. To force my questions into that openness would have seemed harsh, insensitive and, to an extent, exploitative - I wouldn't have been treating him as anything more than an information source.*

(Research Diary, Ireland)

This space to talk was appreciated by participants, with a number affirming Crewe's (2009) assertion that participating in research can be a therapeutic or cathartic

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<sup>20</sup> In discussions with teaching staff at Mountjoy Prison, it became clear gaining security clearance for an electronic Dictaphone would be difficult and further delay my fieldwork. As such, the decision was made to use a tape recorder already cleared by security and located within the school, before removing the cassettes at the end of each day. While avoiding the delay of seeking further security clearance, this approach resulted in greater difficulty during transcribing due to the poor sound quality when compared to interviews recorded on the digital Dictaphone.

experience for those in prison. Andrew<sup>21</sup> explained how this time to talk about his thoughts and experiences made the interview experience enjoyable for him, saying “I was able to get things off my chest that I can't out there so...yeah. It's been beneficial to me as well.”

Overall, the interviews proved to be very informative and generated a wealth of data on issues both pre-empted by my prior knowledge of the literature and relevant to the research questions, as well as those that were unanticipated or related more broadly to the experience of imprisonment. Despite the initial challenges of accessing participants, discussed in section 4.4, the men I encountered were predominantly very willing to speak openly and at length, with some even requesting follow-up interviews when they had additional comments, or reflections, they wished to share. Additionally, a few interviewees who showed a sustained interest in my research volunteered to take part in the focus groups that followed completion of interviews in each jurisdiction.

#### **4.6.2 Focus Groups**

Whilst the vast majority of data addressing the research questions was gained through one-on-one interviews, the use of these focus groups was an attempt to gain a more dynamic picture of how the meanings and understandings held by individuals are presented, developed or altered through interaction with others (Crow & Semmens, 2008), while also providing an opportunity to see whether different themes would arise in a group context (Morgan, 1988) where participants can exercise a degree of control over the interactions (Montell, 1995). Given the significance of issues around group membership, relationships, and interaction to the topics of citizenship and community, it seemed appropriate to explore how participants discussed these issues with others living in the same social context.

One focus group was conducted at both Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds, with five and three participants, respectively. Due to differing access arrangements, the focus groups were undertaken in slightly different circumstances in each jurisdiction. At Mountjoy Prison, one of the teachers allowed me to use her lesson as a forum for the

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<sup>21</sup> Names used throughout the thesis are pseudonyms, with all data having been anonymised on transcription (see section 4.8.2).

focus group and remained in attendance throughout, contributing to the discussion and providing a supervisory role, removing the need for uniformed staff presence. This also meant there was a room of students to invite to participate, as well as those who attended specifically for the research. At HMP Leeds the focus group took place in the chaplaincy group room without staff supervision, however the officer in charge was made aware of my location to ensure assistance if needed. The group was made up of individuals who had expressed an interest in taking part in the research who I was able to locate on the day. Unfortunately, some participants were not unlocked by staff as planned, had been sent to work, or decided they would rather not take part in a group discussion, and as such the focus group was smaller than originally anticipated.

To provide some prompts for relevant discussion in the focus group, a schedule was used (See Appendix Two) which included a range of statements utilised in previous research to explore ‘lived citizenship’ in relation to desistance from crime (Farrall et al., 2014). These statements were selected for use in the focus groups on the basis that they related to issues discussed in detail during interviews, but that statements taking a clear position might be more likely to provoke a lively discussion amongst participants, whether of agreement or disagreement, than open questions. The focus group provided an opportunity to observe and listen to how participants discussed these statements amongst themselves, which could not be done in individual interviews (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). This highlighted consensus or diversity of views within the group through the men challenging each other’s opinions, and encouraged depth of explanation as the men elucidated their positions for other participants (Morgan, 1996). As well as providing an opportunity to observe how issues were discussed collectively, the groups also enabled the testing of themes emerging from interviews, thus contributing to the triangulation and validation of the data (Morgan, 1996).

#### **4.6.3. Initial Observations and Triangulation**

Whilst observation had not been an intended method of data collection, given the fact that my research questions were primarily concerned with prisoners’ own subjective perceptions and understandings, an initial period of observation was planned to familiarise myself with the prison environment, the “geography of the place” (Martin, 2000: 225), and to gain some contextual understanding of the regime and environment in which participants’ perspectives were situated. During these initial familiarisation



periods at Mountjoy Prison, over three days, I observed and participated in education classes in both the main school and Medical Unit, and accompanied teaching staff visits to the protection unit. This was in addition to 19 days spent at the prison, across two months, while completing the interviews and focus group.

At HMP Leeds, I spent four long days on each wing of the prison familiarising myself with the day-to-day regime in place, and the environment in which men in prison were living, in addition to the 18 days during which interviews and the focus group took place. Often this also served as a useful opportunity to meet the men and tell them about what I was doing, whilst making me more visible on the wings and demonstrating to staff and potential participants the extended period of time I would spend at the prison – as King and Liebling (2008) note, it is important to be seen to be doing your time. Unlike at Mountjoy Prison, where my access was restricted to school opening times, at HMP Leeds I spent time on the wings through from early mornings before unlock, to evenings after lock-up, and in doing so provided the broadest opportunity for those with all day working commitments to take part in the research without missing out on any payment from work or education. Whilst these periods had not been intended as a form of data collection, but rather a means by which to familiarise myself with the environment, my experience echoed that of other prison researchers with the observation supplementing and enhancing the data collected during interviews, through providing me with a richer understanding of the prison environment and life within it (Crewe, 2009). During this time, I was able to engage in informal discussions with a wide range of individuals in the prison, including imprisoned men and staff, and witness the interactions and practices ongoing in this environment in a way which provided vital reference points and context for my discussions with participants during interviews.

In addition to the triangulation of data which was possible through ongoing observation and immersion in the prison environment, following completion of fieldwork I returned to Mountjoy Prison to discuss some of my early findings with students at the prison school, some of whom had taken part in the research themselves. This provided an opportunity to receive confirmation that my interpretations of the data, and conclusions drawn from it, accurately captured the lived experience of those held in the prison.

#### 4.6.4. Reflections on Prison Research Methods and ‘Epistemic Privilege’

Ethnography is heralded by many scholars as the most superior means of gaining understanding of the prison social world due to the “epistemic privilege” it is deemed to give those who embed themselves within the community of study (Hammersley, 2015: 22). However, in this research ethnography was not considered to be possible or appropriate, despite the substantial time spent within the field and taking in day-to-day life in prison. Describing how ethnographers should work within the prison setting, Ugelvik (2014: 471) explains:

*An ethnographer needs to participate, to immerse herself or himself into the cultural web of the prison, and to become a part of it as far as possible. She or he should strive to think, act, communicate, and feel as someone positioned in the web.*

As a researcher, I was conscious that I could not think, act or feel exactly as an individual who is part of the cultural web of the prison, when not thinking, acting or feeling within the same constraints and circumstances as individuals who are unable to leave the prison space. Despite the invaluable insight gained from the experience of being within prisons, and the in-depth understanding of individuals’ experiences gained from spending time with them and listening to their own perspectives, this research does not claim to provide an ethnography of prison life. Richards (2012: 6) notes that a central element of “true” ethnography is “the search for a ‘native perspective’”, however to gain such an embedded, native or insider perspective was impossible when I was not subject to the constraints of the imprisoned men I spoke to. As a female who has never received a criminal conviction, let alone a prison sentence, and who entered the prison environment voluntarily with the ability to leave at any moment, I felt that to claim an epistemic privilege of having experienced prison as imprisoned men do would be inappropriate. This would overstate the explanatory potential of my research, and understate the distance between my own experience as researcher and those of my participants. This distance should not devalue insights gained from the study, but the inevitable distance between myself as researcher and participants needed to be considered reflexively throughout the data collection, analysis and writing process.

Nevertheless, although this research did not intend on collection of data through participant observation and does not claim this epistemic privilege, the fieldwork undertaken does demonstrate features which are often associated with ethnography. These included the extended periods of time spent in the setting, participation in aspects of prison life, “direct and experiential” learning about the prison (Crewe, 2009: 477) and the attempt to give voice to those in prison, a marginalised population, which Hammersley (2015: 25) argues has been reformulated as the “primary task” of ethnography. Despite my own work sharing elements of what ethnography seeks to achieve, it does so without seeking to experience imprisonment myself as those in prison do. This would be impossible. Therefore, whilst the research design follows mainstream qualitative inquiry, and draws upon some key principles of ethnography in the process of *bricolage* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 6) to contextualise and complement the data collected, I would stop short of claiming this work is ethnographic. To make such a claim would risk attributing expectations to the research which it could never meet. As such, this popular method of prison research was not considered appropriate for exploration of participants’ subjective understandings and experiences in this study.

#### **4.7. Data Analysis**

All interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and anonymised before systematic thematic analysis was undertaken. However, given the qualitative nature of this research, analysis was not restricted to this organisation of data *following* collection, but started at the moment fieldwork began as themes emerged organically during discussions. Following completion of the fieldwork, a number of months were spent immersing myself aurally and textually in the data. During this period, I began by doing what Layder (1998: 54) describes as “pre-coding”, highlighting sections of transcripts which seemed relevant or important in a “tentative attempt” to organise the data into classifications. During this process I did not begin from a ‘clean slate’ as is characteristic of a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992) as I had already gained knowledge of existing literature on the areas of study and to think it possible to eradicate this influence from the analysis process would be naïve. Rather, the “theoretical baggage” I brought to the analysis was drawn upon to identify links to existing theory (Layder, 1998: 80). Following pre-coding, the data was organised more systematically

and a clear set of themes emerged which were manually coded. These codes and themes were constantly reviewed and refined, incorporating links to extant theory as well as emphasising issues that emerged inductively from the data, as I reflected on the key themes and relationships between them. In order to avoid the potential for drawing out only similarities across the two samples, and falling into the trap of occidentalism on the basis of similarities the two places did demonstrate (Cain, 2000), each data sample was analysed separately at first, to identify the pertinent themes across each group of participants. Once codes and themes for each of the samples had been identified and refined, I then compared the two sets of data, drawing links between similar codes and noting differences between the issues emerging in the two national contexts, to guide the writing up of the research findings.

The approach used in analysis of data allowed for both inductive and deductive identification of issues and themes relevant to the aims of this research. My concern with the subjective meaning that the notion of ‘citizenship’ holds for individuals, required inductive analysis to ensure conclusions were not pre-determined by existing, broadly accepted definitions. However, in line with adaptive theory, data was also coded using prevalent themes in the existing citizenship literature, to determine the relevance of such discussions to the lived experiences of participants.

#### **4.8. Ethical Considerations**

As Brinkmann and Kvale (2008: 262) have noted, there has been a tendency to “portray qualitative inquiry as inherently ethical, or at least more ethical than quantitative research”, however such an approach is criticised by Denzin and Lincoln (2017) as a romanticised view of qualitative research. In reality, every research project presents a vast array of ethical challenges which must be addressed to ensure all parties involved in the research are protected and any risks to their wellbeing are managed and minimised sufficiently. However, these ethical considerations are often magnified in the context of research with incarcerated populations (Towl, 2004, cited in Ward & Bailey, 2012) due to the extent to which participants’ lives are administered by the state and their freedom limited.

#### **4.8.1. Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent**

Aside from the fact that many people in prison have complex needs, they may also be vulnerable to coercion by those governing them or more subtly through the inherently coercive prison regime (Moser et al., 2004). As such, consideration was given to this vulnerability when deciding how to identify and recruit participants, in order to ensure participation was truly voluntary and participants were providing genuine informed consent. Prior to interviews with participants, a detailed information sheet was used to explain what the research was about, provide details of the researcher, funders, and relevant contact for any concerns, and to explain how the information provided would be used, stored and protected (Appendix Three). A written information sheet, detailing a summary of this information, was also given out (Appendices Five & Ten), with a verbal explanation to ensure those with low literacy levels understood<sup>22</sup>. Prior to beginning the interviews participants were given an opportunity to ask questions about the research and their involvement, and it was explained that they could refuse to answer or withdraw at any time without consequence. Once participants were satisfied they understood the details of the research, each interviewee was given a consent form (Appendices Seven, Eight, Twelve & Thirteen), which was also read out to them, to sign.

#### **4.8.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

While the promise of confidentiality is standard practice in social research, the importance of confidentiality is heightened in prison due to the close supervision by authorities and the volatile environment where public knowledge of individuals' vulnerabilities could put them at risk. While staff had to know which individuals were being interviewed, for safety and security reasons, all details of interviews were kept confidential and it was explained to participants that any use of individuals' comments would be anonymous. However, this promise of confidentiality was not absolute and participants were informed it would be broken should they disclose a risk of harm to themselves or another person, or a security breach. For interviews at HMP Leeds an

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<sup>22</sup> Over half of people entering prison in England & Wales are assessed as having literacy levels equivalent to an eleven-year-old (PRT, 2018), while the Prison Adult Literacy Survey demonstrates that a large number of men imprisoned in Ireland are either illiterate or have a poor standard of literacy (Morgan & Kett, 2003).

additional limit to confidentiality, in cases where illegal acts or acts against the prison rules were disclosed, was added at the request of the NOMS reviewer.

Prior to beginning the focus groups in both prisons, a similar process was followed – I used a detailed information sheet (Appendix Four) to explain the details of the research and how the focus group would run, also providing a summary information sheet for each participant (Appendices Five & Ten) and asking them to sign a consent form (Appendices Nine & Fourteen). In addition to the ethical considerations highlighted in the explanation prior to interviews, participants were also made aware of the practical limits of confidentiality in a group setting. Whilst the groups were asked to respect the privacy of other participants, all focus group members were informed that they should not share anything they wanted to remain confidential, due to my inability to control the flow of information.

To further protect participants' confidentiality, data was stored securely either on cassette tapes kept in a folder carried with me at all times (Mountjoy Prison), or on an encrypted Dictaphone (HMP Leeds). Data was transported in a locked bag before being transferred to a secure filing cabinet at the University of Sheffield. All recordings were converted to digital files and stored in password-protected, encrypted computer folders, with participants' details stored in a separate encrypted folder. All interviews were anonymised during transcription, and each interviewee given a pseudonym. In order to try and reflect the jurisdiction the participants were interviewed in, the pseudonyms used were taken from lists of popular names in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2017) and England (Office for National Statistics, 2017). Any names that featured amongst the list of participants' real names, or those of individuals featuring in fieldwork notes or involved in the research through facilitating access, were removed from the lists and the remaining names were used for the 64 transcripts. The necessary exclusion of names reflected in the sample itself, from these lists, did result in an imperfect selection of names which failed to fully reflect the various dimensions of interviewees' backgrounds and demographics. While other scholars have utilised alternative methods for naming participants, including the use of place names (Edgar et al., 2003) or allowing participants to choose their own pseudonyms (Allen & Wiles, 2016), the selection of popular names by country was thought to be the most appropriate method for this comparative study, where the national context of the interviewee is key to analysis and thus should be reflected in the presentation of data.

### 4.8.3 Participant Wellbeing

Protecting participants' wellbeing also becomes more complex within the restrictive conditions of a prison regime. Given the potential impact on their time in prison, I did not want research participants to miss work, educational or other commitments and as such most interviews took place outside of individuals' working hours or, at Mountjoy Prison, where teachers had confirmed that students were able to take time out of lessons. In the few cases where individuals were working, permission was sought from the wing Senior Officer (SO) to ensure the individual would not be penalised in any way.

The potential vulnerability of participants was not only due to incarceration itself, but those in prison are also disproportionately drawn from disadvantaged backgrounds and disproportionately likely to have experienced abuse, violence, homelessness or other adverse experiences.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, I was concerned about the potential of these issues arising during interviews, only for participants to be returned to the isolation of their cells without guaranteed support. Whilst the limits of confidentiality were made clear, efforts were made to familiarise myself with the support services available at each prison so I could signpost individuals to suitable provision should difficult or emotional issues arise during interviews. I found that participants were very forthcoming in sharing personal stories of abuse or other traumatic events in their lives, as other prison researchers have noted (Jewkes, 2002; Crewe, 2009; Liebling, 1999). In these instances, I reiterated my role as a researcher, but explained the support available should individuals wish to access this. However, at times drawing the line between affective presence and listening support was challenging, and I struggled to avoid slipping into a support worker role. This was particularly challenging when one participant disclosed experience of sexual violence during a previous sentence, and demonstrated many of the emotions I had seen when supporting victims of sexual violence as a volunteer for Victim Support. The structure of the interviews helped to ensure that discussions did not remain focused on such difficult issues through to the end of interviews, with the final few questions intentionally broad to facilitate the

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<sup>23</sup> Analysis of official statistics in England & Wales demonstrates the high levels of sexual or violent abuse reported by those who are held in prison. In an official report from 2012, it was found that 27% of men in prison reported experiencing emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child, while these figures were even higher for women in prison, with 53% of women reporting childhood abuse (Williams et al., 2012). The disproportionate representation of those who have experienced poverty, or homelessness, in the prison population has been highlighted in the Republic of Ireland (IPRT, 2012).

transition to a more informal chat as I said ‘goodbye’ or walked participants back to their wing or classroom. After the pilot interview at HMP Leeds, I also took on board a participant’s feedback that he would like to be asked about his hopes and plans for the future, as he felt this related to ‘citizenship’. Whilst many participants had already discussed this in their responses, where interviews had taken a more serious, emotional turn, this suggestion provided a useful way to bring the discussion back to something positive and forward-looking – a factor which seemed important to many men during imprisonment.

Despite concerns at the time of interviews when they had brought up difficult memories for participants, or resulted in displays of sadness or anger, participants were overwhelmingly positive about the interview experience. As well as appreciating the opportunity to talk to someone independent, a number of participants also commented on the subject matter of the interviews as being interesting and enjoyable, providing them with an opportunity to discuss issues they had not considered, or been asked about, in detail before.

#### **4.9 Keys in Prison Research: Benefit or Burden?**

The question of whether researchers should hold keys has been widely discussed in accounts of prison research, with no clear consensus on the issue (Wilson, 2011; Scott, 2015; Carr, 2015; Mann, 2012; Mills, 2004). By undertaking fieldwork in two prisons, with different access conditions, I was able to experience the research process both with and without carrying keys, discovering the benefits and challenges of both approaches. At Mountjoy Prison, I was based in the prison school and was accompanied into the prison by teachers each day. Apart from keys to individual classrooms and offices, access around the prison was by a keypad and hand scanner system, and as such even those escorting me were not carrying keys. I hoped this would distance me from prison staff, however this limited my flexibility during the research, spatially and temporally, while also placing a burden on teaching staff.

In order to minimise reliance on staff by removing the need to be escorted, my access agreement at HMP Leeds was conditional on completion of training to carry keys. I was initially extremely anxious about this, not only because of the responsibility involved but also the assumptions that could be made about my identity when



possession of keys “is so symbolic of the difference between freedom and captivity” (King, 2000: 305), and the “side” of custodian that I might be deemed to have chosen (Wilson, 2011: 16). Despite these concerns, holding keys did not have the effects I anticipated – unlike staff at Mountjoy Prison, at HMP Leeds all uniformed and non-uniformed staff, paid and voluntary, carry keys and as such this did not immediately mark me out as part of the system. I also made efforts to minimise the impact of keys on interactions with participants, wearing clothes that covered the security belt or made the keys less noticeable, and participants noticed these efforts. Talking about keys, and the power they symbolise, one man at HMP Leeds commented “they look different on you” in reference to the way I had tried to distance myself from power-holding staff in the prison, both through hiding the keys and dressing more casually.

Overall, the holding of keys came with a number of benefits in terms of facilitating a richer understanding of the institution, and allowing me to be much more self-sufficient during fieldwork, however this also brought with it great anxiety as well as discomfort over role tension (Discussed further at section 4.10.1). After a few days spent at HMP Leeds, I wrote about this struggle in my fieldwork diary:

*All the time I'm worried I'm going to do something wrong – checking all the gates over and over again, even though I hate having that control. I feel like I'm complicit in incarcerating these people every time I lock a gate or door while prisoners are stood around. I don't feel comfortable wielding that power – both in terms of the distance it places between me and the prisoners, but also the risk that I now pose to security if I mess anything up – it's quite stressful, but at the same time it gives me a lot of freedom. Freedom. That feels like a strange word to be using when talking about time in prison – it seems unfair to be grateful for being given something which gives me the freedom to move around, by nature of the fact it enables me to lock people inside and ensure their incarceration is sustained.*

(Research Diary, England)

One of the greatest difficulties I struggled with while carrying keys was this overwhelming feeling that I was complicit in restricting the freedom of those in prison, particularly when I locked a gate behind them or had to refuse to let them through to another area of the prison. This became more difficult as time went on and people got to know me and my role at the prison – while initially I could genuinely claim ignorance and therefore not let people through, over time there were increasing expectations –

from both imprisoned men and staff – that I would be aware of who was allowed to go where, and the procedures for checking this. This was particularly challenging when the levels of staffing at HMP Leeds were so low, and staff would sometimes shout to me to let someone through as I was unlocking the gate at one end of a wing. Finding the balance between being helpful to staff, while also stringent about security, and trying not to damage the rapport built up with the men in prison was challenging. This was a dilemma which frequently resulted in me spending additional time searching for officers to see whether individuals – sent from other parts of the prison – could be let on to the wings, making me acutely aware of my discomfort with the responsibility and power that came with the ability to physically lock or unlock a gate.

Nevertheless, overall being able to hold keys enhanced my research substantially and it is likely that, given the pressures on staffing, a decision to refuse keys would have also been a decision to give up research access at HMP Leeds. As such, holding keys was an “inescapable compromise” (Carr, 2015: 379). While I never got to the point of feeling comfortable carrying keys, doing so provided me with the opportunity to move around the prison without supervision, choosing where and with whom I wanted to spend time on that particular day. Whatever power the carrying of keys gave me, the ability to move around the prison on my own and demonstrate my self-sufficiency to the men seemed to be far more important as evidence of my distance from staff, providing me with the flexibility to begin discussions independently of staff coordination. As such, the associated challenges were a necessary hurdle, which ultimately provided me with the freedom (albeit an uncomfortable term to use in this context) and autonomy to develop a greater depth of understanding of the institution, and deeper, more open relationships with the men held within it.

#### **4.10 Reflections on the Research Experience**

Despite having read the methodological reflections of many other prisons researchers prior to beginning fieldwork, the emotional impact of the experience, and the way it would force me to consider my own biography and identity, was hugely significant and thus requires discussion in this chapter.

#### 4.10.1 Role Tension, Identity and Relationships

Having never before spent time in a prison environment, or anywhere similar, the fieldwork process involved a great amount of learning and familiarisation for me as a researcher. In some ways this lack of familiarity was beneficial as I had not become normalised to aspects of the prison experience, putting me in a strong position to retain critical distance. However, it also created confusion and uncertainty around my identity during the research, both for me and those within the prison. Finding a place within such a new and profoundly different environment was a struggle, and at times my presence felt voyeuristic or intrusive when observing the suffering of those confined within the prison (Wacquant, 2002: 378; Hammersley, 2015: 31). I felt this particularly strongly during time sat in an office, when an officer asked personal questions to a young man while I was in the room:

*I felt particularly invasive when the officer proceeded to talk to him about bullying etc. while I was there, to which he said “I’ll talk to you about it alone, if that’s OK?” before turning to me and saying “no offence, Miss”. I obviously didn’t take any [offence] but felt immediately apologetic about my presence – I was invading the privacy of someone who already has v. little private life – this small time out of his cell had been invaded by me.*

(Research Diary, England)

During fieldwork, I was conscious of the persona I was presenting to staff members and imprisoned people, and sought to manage this in a way that balanced the need to appear professional yet approachable, and informed yet willing to learn. The tension between these competing aims in an environment of contested identity (Carrigan, 2015) was particularly tangible when managing situations in the presence of both staff and prisoners, with a sense of “role strain” as I sought to build trust and rapport with all those working and detained in the prisons (Drake & Harvey, 2013: 496). I felt this strain strongly in the first few weeks of fieldwork. During this time my concerns about what first impressions of my role would be were particularly salient, and impacted significantly on the emotional experience of fieldwork:

*Trying not to walk too fast through the wings, because I’ve been told that’s when you attract attention because you seem scared, but also trying to look like I know where I’m going and what I’m doing when a lot of the time it doesn’t feel that way. Also feel like I need to dress*

*in a way that minimises my femininity – at so many stages I’ve heard that it makes me vulnerable or at risk, but then I also want to be comfortable and try to be myself. It’s exhausting. Trying to balance what I can share and what I can’t share with people – be me enough that people see I’ve got integrity and am genuinely interested, but also don’t give anything away that is too personal. I feel pathetic for struggling with this so much, when I’m only here temporarily and can leave whenever I please, but there’s so much I feel like I have to manage in how I present myself.*

(Research Diary, England)

Despite efforts to eradicate misconceptions about my identity, like many other prison researchers my presence in the prison environment was interpreted in a myriad of ways which also had implications for my interactions with the men in prison (Rowe, 2014; Sloan & Wright, 2015). When beginning my research at HMP Leeds, my reception was more varied, and echoing the experiences of Sloan and Wright (2015) and Phillips (2012), I was often presumed to be something I was not, being frequently mistaken for a probation officer, drugs worker, or Catch 22<sup>24</sup> worker. On my arrival at Mountjoy prison school, I was immediately assumed to be a new teacher and was addressed as ‘Miss’, before being asked what subject I taught. While I corrected the men, introducing myself as ‘Abi’ and explaining my role as a research student, this association continued throughout the fieldwork period with individuals frequently interrupting interviews to ask if they could join my class. This association seemed beneficial for building rapport with participants, who tend to have a more positive relationship with educational staff than prison officers (Behan, 2014c), as well as minimising disruption or concern for prison staff. My location in the school eased the common challenge for prison researchers of negotiating the balance between the two inherently conflicting groups of staff and prisoners (Rowe, 2014; Sparks et al., 1996). This association was also held by security staff on the gates of the prison, and in some instances school staff themselves, with one teacher commenting that I had become ‘one of them’ on my final day of fieldwork. My association with the prison teachers put me in a position which was respected, and sufficiently independent of the prison service itself, which I have no doubt positively influenced my reception by participants, particularly when I was introduced by teachers they deemed to be ‘on their side’ or ‘for the prisoners’. This

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<sup>24</sup> Catch 22 is a non-profit organisation who work to support men in their resettlement following release from prison.

resulted in several men maintaining friendly contact throughout my period of fieldwork, waving or saying 'hello' when passing in the corridor on a daily basis, with a few even coming up to the school to say goodbye and wish me good luck on my final day at the prison. Similarly, once I had established my researcher identity at HMP Leeds, men on the wings were friendly, keen to talk to me, and continued to offer their thoughts on the research until I left the prison.

#### 4.10.2 Gender

Despite concerns that I would be perceived as having a position of power, or being part of the system, it was the rarity of having a non-staff female in the prison setting that played the most substantial role in men's perceptions of me, as illustrated by passing comments on the wings at the start of fieldwork:

*It's clear that my identity as a young woman affects things significantly, as references to my gender have been made in slightly sexualised comments. One guy said "I'll talk to you any day of the week, Miss", while looking me up and down, and an older PID worker said "oo...when a lady smiles at me like that!"*

(Research Diary, England)

Phillips and Earle (2010) have discussed their experiences of being confronted by attitudes to race and ethnicity by which they were offended and made uncomfortable, and whilst passing comments such as those above were relatively easy to ignore, there were some instances when I was exposed to objectifying comments relating to my gender that made me feel uncomfortable. Outside, I would have challenged or vocally opposed such comments but felt unable to do so in the prison setting for fear of damaging the rapport I had built or tainting the un-phased and approachable persona I had presented thus far. This was also challenging when exposed to views on sexual violence and consent akin to victim-blaming from those convicted of sexual offences. While this appeared to be how individuals sought to neutralise their behaviour through denial of responsibility (Hulley, 2016), it was challenging to hear these views being generalised to women in a context where I didn't feel able to demonstrate my own disagreement with the assertions made, both as a woman and an outsider to the prison environment.

My gender also played a substantial role in staff attitudes to my presence in the prison, with some noting that my gender made me ‘vulnerable’ therefore precluding the possibility of using a private room for interviews. Whilst this protectiveness is to be expected at a time when prisons face high levels of violence (MOJ, 2017a: 6), and prison staff are under increasing pressures to maintain safety in an overcrowded environment with fewer resources, I struggled with this categorisation of myself when it was solely dependent on my status as a woman and ideas held about my inability to defend myself, despite having received the same security and personal protection training as all new staff. As such, like Sloan and Wright (2015: 152) I felt the need to minimise my femininity (and consequently my perceived vulnerability), dressing in gender neutral clothing, tying my hair back, and wearing no make-up – small acts which felt necessary, yet did not reflect my true identity and made me feel somewhat disingenuous. Whilst I had not felt this to the same extent during my time at Mountjoy Prison, perhaps because my status as an *English* woman attracted greater attention in this foreign setting, there were a few instances where my research was compromised somewhat by staff concerns over my safety as a woman, depending on the particular officers present at a given time (see discussion at section 4.4).

However, for the most part when communicating with men during interviews and initial observations, my status as a young woman seemed to prompt a useful intrigue about what I was doing, and why someone like me would want to come to a male prison. This perception of my naivety seemed particularly beneficial in terms of encouraging openness in participants’ discussions with me, as well as in building trust with those I was interviewing – a number of men mentioned that the fact I was a young woman coming into a prison was “impressive”, and showed I wanted to make a difference, as most wouldn’t do this. Amongst those engaged in education, the realisation that I was there to undertake research for a PhD, rather than an undergraduate project, surprised and impressed them, seeming to increase their desire to talk to me both about the research and their own experiences, with some of the younger prisoners using our conversations as an opportunity to talk about university level education, the law, and their own academic ambitions.

### **4.10.3 Emotion, Neutrality and the Personal Journey of the Research**

Despite these many differences between myself and the men in prison, highlighted above, in many respects the identities or experiences that I shared with participants proved to be some of the most challenging, particularly in determining how much of my own identity and background I could, or should, reveal (Whetter, 2015). For example, on meeting another prisoner from Manchester he very quickly picked up on my accent and began to ask questions about the area that I grew up in, presenting the difficulty of balancing my own protection, by not disclosing personal information, with a desire to maintain the rapport that this discovery of shared identity had helped to build. Many of the men I spoke to in Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds were also of a similar age to me, and as such there were various shared cultural references from our childhood. This helped to limit the distance between myself and the men, and assisted the development of rapport. However, at times these moments emphasised the stark differences between our lives, despite these shared characteristics and references, consequently heightening some of the emotional challenges inherent in prison research.

Despite the prevalence of arguments that the social sciences should strive for objectivity, in order to satisfy the requirements of scientific empiricism, the reality of social research is rarely so straightforward, with many factors making complete neutrality very difficult. As Becker (1967) has argued, we cannot remain neutral when conducting research, as our political and personal sympathies will always ‘contaminate’ our research. In fact, as sociologists we have a responsibility to give voice to the position of the subjugated – the pertinent question being not whether we should take sides at all, but rather “whose side are we on?” (1967: 239). As such, while there is no explicit claim to stand against the prison authorities in this research, the emphasis is on giving voice to the subjective experiences of those who are held at the hands of the state. In focusing on the experiences of imprisoned men, I accept that the research does not provide an overall view of the social world within prison from a ‘balanced’ viewpoint which demonstrates neutrality, however this was not my intention. This piece is intended to convey the voices of a group who are largely silenced in discourses around punishment and penal policy, and by doing so it is their ‘side’ which is reflected, albeit with no claim of these subjective experiences representing unquestionable truth (Sim, 2003). Criminologists often “pursue particular research agendas precisely because they are drawn to marginalised, exploited, or dominated groups” (Jewkes,

2011b: 65), and it is likely that my own “moral compass” will have influenced the way that my discussions and observations within the prisons were interpreted, but also analysed (Scott, 2015: 40).

To claim neutrality during social research would also take away from the human features of the emotion involved. Whilst there is a tendency to refrain from discussion of one’s own emotions during the research process, a number of prison scholars have recently highlighted both the value and importance in acknowledging the impact that undertaking prison research has on the researcher, who is working independently, in a new environment, often with little opportunity to debrief or discuss the experience with others due to strict confidentiality requirements (Jewkes, 2011b; Sloan & Wright, 2015). Well-established prison researchers have noted the varying ways that the emotions of prison research manifest themselves, from increased drinking at the weekends for the release of stress (Crewe, 2009: 485) through to physical manifestations of these struggles in illness (Piacentini, 2007). Such effects are not surprising given the affective presence that is required of the researcher throughout the fieldwork period, in order reach a deep understanding or state of *verstehen* in relation to the experiences of research participants (Liebling, 2001).

Prior to beginning my research, I had been informed by several other prison researchers that “prison damages people” (Behan, 2002: 1), and that I would need to be prepared for the emotional impact that the experience of researching in this environment might have for me personally. Indeed Liebling’s (2013: 22) idea of “emotional edgework” strongly resonates with my own experience of prison research – an emotional endeavour, with exposure to individuals’ sadness, hopelessness, and accounts of the traumatic experiences in their lives often leaving me emotionally drained and feeling heavy with the burden of these stories that I could not share without breaching confidentiality. During fieldwork I kept a reflexive diary, in which I wrote openly about the emotional challenges of the research and being in the prison environment. The diary provided a means by which to “purge” myself of the emotional effects of the experience, without compromising the confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Sloan, 2016: 28), whilst going for long runs or walks provided much-needed headspace to process, and in some cases escape, what I had heard each day, particularly during periods of fieldwork in Dublin where I was away from friends and family.



While these strategies provided some immediate emotional release, the emotional impact of prison fieldwork continued long after I left Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds. As Bennett (2015: 302) notes, the act of leaving the prison is “not simply a technical task” but can instead form “part of a personal journey”, and this personal journey involved a messy myriad of emotions including guilt at being able to leave the prison so easily when participants were still struggling inside, gratitude at the willingness of men to share personal stories and thoughts with me, and sadness at my inability to make any immediate instrumental change to improve participants’ circumstances. These emotions played out constantly throughout the fieldwork process, and following my exit from the field, with the struggles of those I had spoken to returning to my mind while transcribing, reading and analysing my data, while I also continued to dream about the prison environment and those held within it. Although this continued emotional connection to the prison can feel like being “haunted” (Jewkes, 2005: 384), Sloan and Wright (2015) also note that this can be a positive reaction which can help to enrich words with human feeling when writing up findings. For this reason, I continued to use my research diary for a number of weeks following completion of fieldwork so the impact of these places and individuals on my own thoughts was documented and could serve as a guide to, or valuable source of data (Liebling, 1999) in analysis and writing of this thesis.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the methodological and ethical decisions involved in the design, data collection, and analysis stages of the research process. The research process was certainly not an example of the perfect skill, confidence and organisation that I had hoped to maintain throughout. The hurdles and challenges presented by the fieldwork were far greater than anticipated, but nevertheless, my status as an outsider seemed to facilitate an openness from participants that led to the development of strong rapport, deep, informative and often emotional experiences being shared, and in some cases friendly interactions which continued up until leaving the field. The candid discussions that I was therefore able to have with participants have enabled me to gain rich insight into the lived reality of imprisonment for the men involved in the research, and their own understandings of citizenship, which are now discussed in the following chapters.



# Chapter Five

## Outlining the Research Context: Where, Who and Why?

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### 5.1 Introduction

Comparative empirical studies of imprisonment are scarce, and there is very little work providing insight into how citizenship is understood and experienced for those imprisoned in different jurisdictions; most existing comparison is based on analysis of policy or legal positions in different jurisdictions. Perhaps one of the reasons for this dearth of research is that comparing the understandings and experiences of prisoners raises a number of challenges inherent to the practice of comparative research, particularly in the field of criminal justice. Jurisdictions have different processes for categorisation of crime and punishments which may also change over time, making direct comparison of sentencing or crime statistics particularly problematic (Westfelt & Estrada, 2005). Consequently, ‘functional equivalents’ create difficulty in determining the differences and similarities between punishment practices (Nelken, 2007). To overcome these challenges it is vital to consider the context in which these differences exist, in order to make sense of difference or similarity (Zedner, 1995; Nelken, 2010). Such consideration is also important to avoid the assumptions of ‘occidentalism’, that all societies are like our own, or ‘orientalism’, that all societies are different, that can attract criticism in comparative research (Cain, 2000; Nelken, 2007). This chapter provides a brief introduction to the particular national and local contexts within which fieldwork for this thesis was undertaken. The rationale for the selection of England and Ireland as jurisdictions for comparison will be explained, before a brief introduction to imprisonment in each jurisdiction. In particular, this introduction focuses on the key difference which informed the choice of jurisdictions – the legal positions on prisoner enfranchisement. Consideration is then given to the prisons where fieldwork was undertaken. The rationale for the selection of Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds will be explained, and a brief introduction to the prisons themselves, their regimes and facilities will be given. Finally, the characteristics of the samples in each institution are discussed in order to provide an introduction to the men whose experiences are explored in this research.

## 5.2 The Selection of Jurisdictions

There are a variety of reasons why Ireland and England & Wales were chosen as suitable jurisdictions through which to explore ‘lived citizenship’ for imprisoned men comparatively. Having lived, studied and worked in England for my whole life, I am familiar with the criminal justice system in England & Wales, and understand the cultural, social and political context within which the system operates. Taken alongside the fact that my interest in citizenship and imprisonment had developed out of the UK’s insistence upon denying those in prison the right to vote, this made England & Wales a sensible jurisdiction for study. Although many comparative researchers select jurisdictions for comparison on the basis of a clear, overwhelming difference in approaches to punishment, the rationale behind the choice of jurisdictions in this study was very different. In fact, the similarities between Ireland and England were key to their selection for comparison.

Influenced by Ireland’s history of British rule until 1922, when Ireland gained effective independence, the two countries share similar legal and political traditions (Behan, 2014b) and have demonstrated similarities in penal policy through increasing reliance upon imprisonment (O’Donnell, 2004). Further, both jurisdictions are also members of the Council of Europe (CoE) and, at the time of the research, the European Union (EU),<sup>25</sup> and are consequently both subject to jurisprudence and regulation which seek to harmonise legal positions and practices on a range of issues. In the area of criminal justice specifically, membership of the CoE is particularly relevant due to the existence of the European Prison Rules as guidance which both jurisdictions are expected to follow in the running of their prisons, and the oversight of prison conditions and regimes by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). The Irish prison system has been identified as having similarities to other Western, democratic jurisdictions – such as England & Wales – in the regimes operated and management of individuals in prison (Butler, 2016). Such similarity is particularly apparent in the adoption of practices, by the Irish Prison Service (IPS), that are based upon regimes in England & Wales, for example in the area of Incentivised Regimes (Behan & Bates-Gaston, 2016).

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<sup>25</sup> At the time of writing the UK remains a European Union (EU) Member State. However, following the referendum on leaving the EU on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016, and the triggering of Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union, the UK is due to exit the EU on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

Despite the proximity of the two countries, and these many shared characteristics, there is a striking difference in the way that Ireland and England & Wales approach the legal enfranchisement of individuals in prison (Behan, 2014b). Until 1963 both countries shared the same legal position on prisoner voting under the Forfeiture Act 1870. While these similarities make these jurisdictions suitably comparable, distinct approaches to the enfranchisement of prisoners have now been adopted; all prisoners in Ireland have the right to vote, and the exercise of this right by the postal ballot is facilitated (Electoral (Amendment) Act 2006), while the majority of sentenced prisoners in the UK remain subject to a ban on voting (Representation of the People Act 1983). Consideration of legislative reform to achieve compliance with the judgment in *Hirst v UK* has faced huge opposition, and resulted in prisoner voting becoming a highly sensationalised issue. The UK government's response to the judgment was one of strong resistance to enfranchisement, with the eventual compromise being to amend the blanket ban by allowing a tiny number of sentenced prisoners, those who happen to be out on Release on Temporary License (ROTL) on election day, to vote (Lidington, 2017). In practice there is still a largescale ban on voting for the UK prison population. Conversely, the enfranchisement of prisoners in Ireland occurred with little controversy (Hamilton & Lines, 2009) and in the context of an emphasis on creating responsible prisoners (Behan & O'Donnell, 2008), with prisoners taking to the polls for the first time in 2007. This distinction makes the two jurisdictions a suitable choice for comparison, as they represent both ends of the broad spectrum of legal positions on prisoner voting in Europe.

Following the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruling in *Hirst v UK*, I was interested in the fact that the UK was one of very few places within the CoE to maintain this absolute ban on voting for those in prison, whilst so many jurisdictions which might appear geographically, politically or culturally similar took very different approaches. It is this striking difference in the legal positions of those imprisoned, despite similarity in legal traditions and prison regimes, that informed the selection of Ireland and England as suitable jurisdictions for comparison. It was decided that by using this legal difference as the differentiating point, or hook for comparison of experiences – in two prison systems which, at first glance, appear not to be dissimilar – it might be possible to uncover whether the legal positions on voting rights reflect anything broader about individuals' lived experiences during incarceration in these jurisdictions. As such,

comparison of lived experience of imprisonment, in two jurisdictions with contrasting positions on (dis)enfranchisement, furthers understanding of whether the right to vote can indeed be considered symbolic of meaningful citizenship for those in prison.

As well as being the most suitable jurisdictions for comparison in this particular piece of research, England and Ireland were also suitable choices for comparison due to key practical considerations. While the geographical proximity of Ireland meant that visits to prepare for fieldwork and speak to gatekeepers were possible, having a shared language meant that during fieldwork in Ireland I was able to work independently, without the need for translation. This meant I was able to immerse myself in the prison environment and communicate with others in Ireland, just as I did in England. While I lacked the in-depth familiarity with Ireland that, being English, I had with England & Wales, the guidance of a supervisor from Dublin meant I had someone to consult with where there was a need for basic understanding of cultural differences, and key differences or similarities in the workings of the Irish criminal justice system, that I was not already familiar with.

Notwithstanding the similarities between England and Ireland's criminal justice and prison systems, there are also important variations in imprisonment and penal policy which are worthy of consideration – in particular, the influence of politics on penal policy, differences in the bodies involved in running the prison estate, and difference in the scale of the prison system. The following sections will provide a brief introduction to the recent policy context of imprisonment in Ireland and England, with a particular focus on contextualising some of the policy developments referred to in the narratives of participants interviewed for this thesis, and thus subjectively important to their lived experience. Additionally, consideration will be given to developments relating to the key difference which forms the basis of their choice as jurisdictions for comparing the 'lived citizenship' of participants during incarceration – the right to vote.

### **5.2.1 Republic of Ireland**

As a result of British rule until 1922, the Irish criminal justice system bears resemblance to that of the UK in many respects, having developed from legislation in place at the foundation of the state (Rogan, 2012) and the institutions themselves reflecting

“English penological thought” on the organisation of punishment in the Victorian era (Osborough, 1985: 181; Rogan, 2012). However, Irish penal policy has since varied from that of England & Wales, with the particular political context playing a significant role in its development – indeed it was the very lack of political influence that has been identified by many scholars as influencing penal policy most clearly. This may have played a part in protecting Irish criminal justice from the ‘punitive turn’ experienced in other Western nations, such as the UK and USA (Hamilton, 2016), reflected in the comparatively low rate of imprisonment the country saw, while a limited body of academic research on criminal justice may also have served to shield it from punitive policies introduced in other neighbouring jurisdictions (O’Donnell, 2011). With the penal system remaining a marginal area of public policy for many years after independence, there was a climate of “stagnation” where penal reform was concerned, accompanied by limited academic research in this area (O’Donnell, 2008: 121).

In contrast to this long period of limited reform, or lacking in “imagination” where penal policy was concerned (Rogan, 2012: 9), there has been significant reform since the 1990s. O’Donnell (2004) notes that this shift can be marked by the politicisation of debate in 1996, following a period of high crime rates, overcrowding and concerns over the safety of Temporary Release practices. This move towards more politicised policymaking, and improvements to the fiscal climate, which may previously have “tempered” punitiveness, saw a period of penal expansion (O’Donnell, 2004: 264). This was reflected in a substantial increase in the prison population and an extensive prison building programme, with the preoccupation of government being to fund the prison expansion necessary to satisfy public concerns in a newly politicised sphere. While this commitment to penal expansion continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as governments sought to respond to overcrowding by finding more prison places (Rogan, 2011), from 2011 onwards the policy direction changed towards a focus on a longer-term strategy, which had previously been lacking (O’Donnell, 2008). The newly elected Fine Gael-Labour coalition government made a commitment to reducing the prison population through use of non-custodial penalties, and to improve prison conditions (Jesuit Centre for Faith & Justice, 2013), while the IPS published their first ever strategy in 2012 which provided a clear direction and overarching vision to tackle issues beyond capacity. While a key aim was to reduce overcrowding, the other five aims prioritised prisoner progression, prisoner programmes, management and staffing, prison estate and capital

expenditure, and legislative consolidation (IPS, 2012). It is in the context of this strategy that one key reform relevant to the experiences of participants in this study, took place – the introduction of incentivised regimes in prisons across Ireland in 2012, to encourage participation, good behaviour and a “more pro-social lifestyle” by prisoners (Behan & Bates-Gaston, 2016: 364). This meant that, while previously individuals’ entitlements were not attached to participation or engagement, access to activities, contact with those outside of prison, and conditions of accommodation, are all now influenced by the level of regime an individual is on, from Basic to Enhanced (IPS, 2012). Based on the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme which has operated in England & Wales since 1995 (NOMS, 2011), individuals are expected to maintain particular behavioural standards, and engage actively during their prison sentence, in order to improve their circumstances. At the time of fieldwork, the Incentivised regime was fully operating, however for several participants who had been inside since before its introduction, the transition to this system was an important influence on their experiences relevant to the findings of this study.

In the few years before fieldwork in Ireland took place, a number of reforms were introduced which focused on reducing the prison population and managing the cost that penal expansion had created. One significant reform intended to ease the population without simply building more prisons, which was also identified by participants themselves as relevant to ‘lived citizenship’ during incarceration, was the introduction of the Community Return scheme. Run by IPS in partnership with the Probation Service, the Community Return programme is an incentivised scheme which enables supervised and supported early release from prison in return for a period of unpaid work in the community. The scheme also includes an opportunity for increased remission of sentence, on top of that provided for in the Prison Rules 2007, with each week of community service through the scheme being substituted for two weeks served in prison. As such, it serves as a ‘back door’ measure through which to reduce the prison population, aiming to encourage reparation, reintegration and promote an alternative to imprisonment, with an emphasis on non-profit work which will benefit the community (DJE, 2009; IPS & Probation Service, 2014). The scheme began with a pilot in October 2012, from where it then spread across the IPS (Mulcahy, 2013; IPS & Probation Service, 2015). During my fieldwork in early 2016, the scheme was being discussed by participants as a new opportunity that some of them were working towards and viewed



as having potential relevance to realising citizenship, as was supported by the findings that the scheme enhanced participants' "social capital" (McNally & Brennan, 2015: 154).

In addition to being shaped by the context of the economic crisis, requiring a need to avoid the costs of further penal expansion (McNally & Brennan, 2015), recent policy changes in relation to imprisonment have also been put down to the work of policy entrepreneurs – individual ministers and policy-makers who have demonstrated a commitment to a more humane, rehabilitative focus – as crucial in the changes that have taken place (Mulcahy, 2016: 16; Rogan, 2011). For example, Alan Shatter (Minister for Justice & Equality) played a significant role in establishing the Penal Reform Review Group which would go on to produce a Strategic Review of Penal Policy (SRPP), recommending a strategy to reduce the numbers of people in prison (DJE, 2014). In particular, this review emphasised the need for a coherent approach to penal policy which it considered to have been lacking thus far. One area noted in the SRPP where tangible changes were evident in participants' experiences was that of prison conditions. At the time of fieldwork, renovation work had just been completed at Mountjoy Prison, enabling the eradication of 'slopping out' in the prison. Whilst many of the efforts to implement the group's recommendations are still works-in-progress, it is in the context of early implementation that fieldwork was undertaken in Ireland.

### **Ireland's Prison Population**

Despite having a relatively small prison population compared to European neighbours, the prison population in Ireland has seen considerable growth in recent years with a 68% increase of those in custody since 1997 (IPRT, 2019). This has been accompanied by a reduction in the use of community service orders, despite the recommendations of the SRPP. Nevertheless, Ireland's rate of imprisonment is closer to those of the Nordic countries than England & Wales, at 80 per 100,000 of the population in January 2019, with a total population of 3,911 (World Prison Brief, 2019). The prison population of Ireland is, in this regard, relatively small, but it is characterised by very high turnover with individuals moving in and out of the system. While the Fines Act 2014 made provision for alternative arrangements for fine payment, resulting in reductions in committals to prison for non-payment from 8,436 in the year of fieldwork – 2016 – to

2,261 in 2017 (IPRT, 2019), the Irish Penal Reform Trust (2018) have argued that the sustained high turnover levels demonstrate imprisonment is not being used solely as a last resort. The high turnover, ‘revolving door’ prison population described was a feature of life discussed by participants as impacting upon ‘lived citizenship’ during their time in prison.

The Irish prison population is overwhelmingly drawn from the most economically and educationally deprived sections of society. Although there is little recent data on the demographics of the Irish prison population, independent studies of individual institutions have provided an indication of these characteristics. O’Mahony’s study of Mountjoy Prison demonstrated various dimensions of deprivation for those incarcerated, with 56% of inmates coming from the six most economically deprived neighbourhoods in Dublin (O’Mahony, 1997). O’Mahony described the homogeneity of the Mountjoy prison population, with the population being primarily Irish, and predominantly from particular urban, working-class areas of Dublin. While this research took place nearly two decades ago, there is more recent evidence to suggest that these demographics are still prevalent within the prison population. O’Donnell et al. (2008: 130) also noted a number of indicators of deprivation amongst those incarcerated, with 54% having left school without completing any state examinations, and half of the prisoners studied being unemployed before beginning their current sentence. Not only do such figures warrant the categorisation of most prisoners as part of the “marginalised working-class” (O’Mahony, 2002: 607) but O’Mahony’s study suggested that individuals from such deprived backgrounds are concentrated in the prison system to a far greater degree than is the case in the UK (O’Mahony 1997; 2002). On the basis of these figures, as McCullagh (2002: 595) aptly states, “[t]he Irish penal system can only with slight exaggeration be characterized as mainly a means through which the poor are punished.”

Despite demonstrating greater diversity in terms of nationality and foreign-born nationals<sup>26</sup>, and significant increases in the diversity of the nation over the past two

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<sup>26</sup> According to the Central Statistics Office (2018), 12.2% of the total population in Ireland (in April 2018) were made up of non-Irish nationals, while 17.3% of Irish residents are foreign-born (Central Statistics Office, 2017b: 46). In England & Wales, 9.6% of the population are non-British nationals, with 14.9% of the population being foreign-born (Office for National Statistics, 2019).

decades (McGinnity et al., 2018), when compared to England & Wales Ireland is less diverse when it comes to ethnicity; 91.7% of the population identify as being of White ethnicity (Central Statistics Office, 2016) compared to 86% in England & Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2012). This is reflected in the fact that Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals make up a much smaller proportion of the prison population than is the case in England & Wales<sup>27</sup>, while the levels of foreign nationals in the broader population are not reflected in the prison system with 89.6% of the Irish prison population in 2012 being Irish nationals (IPS, 2012a). Nevertheless, one minority group which is overrepresented within the prison population is that of Irish Travellers, and research has highlighted the problems with discrimination of this group by prisoners and staff, and the difficulties that Travellers face in the prison system (Costelloe, 2014b).

The fact that the majority of the Irish prison population are from deprived urban areas, and backgrounds of economic and educational deprivation, is reflected in the types of offences, and lengths of time, for which most prisoners are incarcerated. The figures for the sentence lengths of those in custody on any given day, and those for committals on the basis of sentence length, demonstrate that the largest group of prisoners in Ireland are serving sentences of under three months. As might be expected, given the demographic characteristics of the prison population, the vast majority of these sentences will be for non-violent offences and, particularly in Dublin, many will be drugs-related. As a result, there is a very high turnover of prisoners, particularly in committal prisons such as Mountjoy, with many prisoners staying for a very short time (IPRT, 2018).

### **5.2.2 England and Wales**

The recent history of penal policy in England & Wales has been characterised predominantly by penal populism, with policies based on incapacitation and deterrence over those with a focus on welfare being prioritised as political parties compete to appear “tough on crime” (Newburn, 2007: 425; Jacobson & Hough, 2018). This is

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<sup>27</sup> Exact figures are unknown as this data was not, at the time of the research, published by the IPS. While a mechanism for recording ethnicity data using the Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) has been introduced, this has been criticised on the basis that the categories are “obscure” and do not correspond to those used in census data (Lalor, 2017: 8).

despite an emphasis on parsimony in the use of custodial sanctions in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (Jacobson & Hough, 2018). Following this “punitive impulse” (2018: 177), or ‘punitive turn’ (Downes, 2011; Loader, 2006), have come several other key policy trends which have shaped much about how the prison system in England & Wales currently operates. A number of these hold relevance to the experiences of men interviewed in this research, in particular the increased influence of responsabilisation, privatisation and austerity, but also the ongoing attempts to combine rehabilitation and punishment in the prison setting.

As briefly touched upon in discussion of Ireland’s incentivised regimes, the IEP scheme was introduced across prisons in England & Wales in 1995 providing a structured system for the award of privileges for good behaviour within prison. The policy was developed with a view to encouraging responsible behaviour, hard work and constructive activities, but also to improve discipline and control within the prison environment (Liebling, 2008). This scheme has been viewed as part of a broader web of initiatives to responsabilise the individual, placing the onus on the individual to make choices and take responsibility for their rehabilitation (Bosworth, 2007). As with Ireland, and demonstrated in the findings of this thesis, the incentivised regime had significant bearing on ‘lived citizenship’ for those incarcerated at HMP Leeds.

As part of a broader emphasis on managerialism and efficiency in criminal justice, seen through the encouragement of ‘contestability’ in the Carter Report (2003), the penal sphere has also seen the increasing involvement of the private sector over the last 15 years. The increased role of the private sector has been seen through the private building of prisons through Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts, the contracting out of fourteen prisons to companies such as Serco, Sodexo Justice Services and G4S (HMPS, 2017), and in the marketisation of various services within public prisons including prisoner transport, resettlement services and, of particular relevance to the experiences described by participants in this study, prison education. Within the broader context of managerialism and accountability, the marketisation of such services in the prison setting has heightened the significance of meeting targets at the lowest cost possible. This has resulted in substantial variation in provision across the penal estate, with different private or third-sector organisations delivering education at each institution (Stacey, 2012), and has been criticised as resulting in significant harms due to cost-

cutting (Chambers, 2014). Nevertheless, within a harsh economic climate the potential cost savings and consumer choice of contracting-out such provision have resulted in its continued appeal (Corcoran, 2014), with awareness of the impacts this had on prison time being tangible in interviews with participants at HMP Leeds.

Unlike in Ireland, where tougher financial times have been accompanied by an emphasis on reducing the prison population, such discussion has been limited during the period of austerity in England & Wales. That is until the recent suggestions from the former UK Prison Minister, Rory Stewart, that prison sentences of less than six months could be gradually phased out in order to alleviate the pressures of the vast prison population (Hansard HC Deb., 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019), albeit no firm proposals have been made. In the context of austerity, the prison system in England & Wales has continued to hold a very large population with reduced resources and staffing levels, as spending on prisons has reduced by 16% in real terms since 2009/10 (Institute for Government, 2018). Consequently, many prisons in England & Wales, including HMP Leeds, are operating at low staffing levels and with reduced continuity of staffing. This impact of austerity, in addition to the impact of cuts on conditions, was referenced by participants during interviews as a broader change in the penal landscape which impacted substantially on their lived experience of imprisonment, and indeed citizenship. The developments discussed provide a brief introduction to the policy context within which research was undertaken at HMP Leeds, drawing on the key features of policy development that emerged from the research as relevant in shaping the experiences and perceptions of participants.

### **The England & Wales Prison Population**

With a rate of incarceration at 139 per 100,000 of the population, and a total population of 82,472, England & Wales has one of the highest rates of incarceration in Western Europe (World Prison Brief, 2019). As a result of increased use both of long sentences and indeterminate sentences which have the potential to keep people in prison for significantly longer periods than their tariff, the UK prison population doubled between 1993 and 2016 (MOJ, 2016). As is the case in Ireland, a substantial number of the prison population are currently serving short sentences with 47% serving under six months, while 71% of the prison population have not committed a violent offence (PRT, 2018). As such, similarly to in Ireland, it is clear that prison is not being used as a last resort.

This prevalence of short-term prisoners contributes to a high turnover in the prison population, which has also been heightened by high levels of recall to prison. Following the introduction of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014, and the requirement for those serving sentences of all lengths to receive supervision in the community, recall figures had been increasing dramatically in the few years prior to fieldwork (MOJ, 2016). In addition, due to the high levels of reoffending for those serving short sentences, with 63% of those serving sentences under twelve months reoffending within a year (MOJ, 2017), the disruption caused by such ‘revolving door’ incarceration impacted heavily on participants’ lived experiences in this research.

Despite political rhetoric focused on tackling the social causes of crime (Blair, 1995), or creating a “one nation” justice system that works for all (Gove, 2015a), it remains the case that certain groups are significantly more likely to be incarcerated in England & Wales, than others; “penal establishments [are]...reserved for the poorest and most economically and socially marginalised members of society” (Bell, 2013: 58). Two-thirds of those incarcerated are unemployed prior to imprisonment, and many have experienced homelessness or financial difficulties (PRT, 2015). Furthermore, within the current prison population, black or minority ethnic backgrounds are also disproportionately represented, making up 26% of the incarcerated population compared to one in ten in the wider community. Despite many years having passed, Sim and Ryan’s (1995: 93) criticisms of the prison system as impacting repeatedly on the “usual suspects” – predominantly those who have already experienced some sort of deprivation, marginalisation or abuse – are certainly still valid today.

In addition to the disproportionate representation of marginalised groups, the prison population in England & Wales has faced significant challenges in recent years, particularly in relation to the substantial increase in older prisoners. People over the age of sixty are the fastest growing group in the England & Wales prison population and are predicted to rise as increasing proportions of the prison population through to 2021 as a result of increased reporting of sexual offences (MOJ, 2015). As discussed at section 5.4.2, this was reflected in the sample of participants from HMP Leeds and as such the challenges faced by this group of the prison population hold relevance to the findings of this research.

### 5.3 The Selection of Institutions

Having established two jurisdictions which would form the basis of this comparison, it was necessary to consider potential sites of research within each jurisdiction. The fieldwork on which this thesis is based was conducted at two prisons – one in each jurisdiction – which were selected for reasons ranging from their suitability for the given study and comparability, to practicalities of fieldwork completion. The two prisons identified as suitable for this research were Mountjoy Prison in Dublin, and HMP Leeds in West Yorkshire. Whilst prisons in Ireland cannot easily be directly compared to those in England given differences in categorisation<sup>28</sup>, there are a number of key similarities which made the chosen institutions suitable for comparison. Not only did they bear a close resemblance to each other in terms of architecture, both being publicly run, and both operating a medium-security regime, but the functions served by the institutions were also very similar. Both prisons housed committals from the local courts and, as such, the populations held at the institutions demonstrated similar variation in sentence lengths. Importantly, by choosing committal prisons as the locations for study, this research explores experiences and perceptions within a type of environment which all prisoners will be exposed to at some stage, whether only for a brief period following initial committal or for the entirety of their sentence. Thus, although the research is not generalisable to all prisons in Ireland and England, it sheds light on the experiences and understandings at a point in the prison system which the overwhelming majority of those convicted, in both jurisdictions, will experience at some point.

Having discussed the comparability of the chosen prisons as sites for this research, consideration will now be given to each prison in turn. Given that no two prisons are exactly the same, with all institutions differing somewhat in their regimes, activities, facilities, culture and populations, it is important to provide some context to the particular prison settings within which participants in this study were held. An introduction is now given to each of the two chosen institutions – Mountjoy Prison and

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<sup>28</sup> HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) categorise prisons in relation to their security level, with Category A indicating the highest level of security and Category D indicating the most open conditions. However, IPS does not have this same process of categorisation. Rather prisons are described as high, medium or low security, and open or closed institutions.

HMP Leeds – in order to provide an understanding of the particular institutional contexts by which participants’ understandings and experiences were influenced.

### 5.3.1 Mountjoy Prison

The Irish research took place at Mountjoy Prison, a closed, medium security prison in Dublin city, which serves as the main committal prison for adult male prisoners (18+) in the areas of Dublin city and county. Individuals may spend the whole of their sentence at the prison, or be moved on to other IPS institutions sometime after their initial committal. As such, the prison houses men serving sentences of varied lengths, who have committed a wide range of offences, with the population at Mountjoy Prison ranging from those serving a few months through to a life sentence. The institution also holds those on remand while awaiting trial. Mountjoy Prison opened in 1850, intended to be Ireland’s own “Model Prison”, having been greatly influenced by Pentonville Prison in London (Carey, 2000: 37). The architecture mimics that of Pentonville, with the radial Victorian structure and the large heavy gate which is still used today as the main point of entry to the prison. The area surrounding the prison has been developed to hold a women’s prison, the *Dochas Centre*, an additional closed prison building known as *Mountjoy West*<sup>29</sup>, and – at the time of the research – a semi-open Training Unit<sup>30</sup>, which alongside the main prison make up the Mountjoy Campus. The central area of the main prison, the circle, has gates leading off onto the residential wings, as well as to the main corridor of offices for prison staff. At the time of fieldwork, the prison had four wings for general population prisoners, a high support unit for vulnerable prisoners, and a challenging behaviour unit which replaced the former segregation unit<sup>31</sup> and was located in D-Base at the time of the research. This name denoted the basement area of the prison, underneath D wing, and – alongside the

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<sup>29</sup> Mountjoy West has since been repurposed to accommodate those previously held in semi-open conditions at the Training Unit.

<sup>30</sup> The Training Unit has since been closed, with a view to building a dedicated facility to accommodate older prisoners.

<sup>31</sup> This wing holds those held “on protection” who must be housed separately from the general prison population. Individuals are held on protection if they are considered to be at risk due to their association with particular gang activity, their debts to other men in the prison, or their involvement in trials of others as witnesses. In Mountjoy Prison, the use of protection regimes is particularly high due to the prevalence of gang activity both in Dublin and, as a consequence, within the prison (Gallagher, 2018). Those on Protection Order are subject to a restricted regime and are unable to access structured activity in the prison, spending up to 23 hours of the day locked in their cells.



other basement areas, including C-Base where interviews were undertaken with men on protection – this was referred to by prisoners and staff during my fieldwork as ‘the base’. Accessed separately to the main prison, there was also a Medical Unit which consisted of residential areas as well as a small education space<sup>32</sup>. Men are housed in single occupancy cells which all, since 2015, have in-cell sanitation. At the time of the fieldwork one residential wing had recently been refurbished, with some individuals awaiting transfer to the new cells, and the building of a new work and training building was approaching completion. In addition to the residential accommodation on the wings, there is a school within the prison as well as workshop facilities. The school has several classrooms, as well as a room with computer access, an office space, and a library, which was predominantly supervised by a dedicated school officer.

The operational capacity for Mountjoy Prison is 554, with the daily average population in 2016 – the year this fieldwork took place – being 515. This figure had reduced since 2011 when the prison was at 137% of its official capacity, a number which is based on the numbers of beds or bunks available, rather than taking account of cell size, international best practice or human rights rulings of the ECtHR or CPT (Inspector of Prisons, 2011: 12-13).

### **5.3.2 HMP Leeds**

The English research was conducted at HMP Leeds, also known as Armley prison, a category-B local prison for adult males, run by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)<sup>33</sup>. Located near Leeds city centre, the prison accepts committals from all West Yorkshire courts before triaging prisoners to the appropriate institution at which to serve the rest of their sentence, or housing prisoners for the duration of shorter sentences. Despite this official function, in practice prisoners can spend months, or even many years, at HMP Leeds, as I found during my interactions with many prisoners. As such, the prison population ranges from the majority who are serving short sentences, up to those serving much longer sentences for serious offences. In addition, HMP Leeds

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<sup>32</sup>The Medical Unit on the Mountjoy Campus functions as a detoxification unit where prisoners are sent to complete a drug detox programme, with a view to progressing to semi-open conditions in the Training Unit upon ‘graduation’. The Medical Unit has education classes and recreational facilities, but on a smaller scale than the main prison.

<sup>33</sup> HMP Leeds is publicly run, however in England & Wales there are 14 prisons which are currently contracted out to private sector organisations.

has a large remand population. Opened in 1847, the prison is built on the Victorian radial style with the wings branching off the central area of the prison and embodies many of the features typical of an old British prison, such as high walls, barred windows, barbed wire lined outer walls and, whilst no longer used, the large heavy archetypal main gate, in addition to heavy metal gates which must be passed through throughout the prison. In addition to the four wings in the original prison building, there were also two additional wings which had been added to the prison at a later date. The wings provided accommodation for general population prisoners, as well as a first night centre, a segregation unit, a healthcare unit, and a vulnerable prisoner unit (VPU) which had extended on to the upper landing of a general population wing due to the increasing numbers of vulnerable prisoners (VPs). Cells each housed a minimum of two prisoners, and include bunk beds, a desk, a sink, and a toilet. According to some participants, a few cells even housed three prisoners, leaving individuals with little personal space or privacy. In addition to residential accommodation, the prison also has an education block, a number of workshops, two libraries and a multi-faith chapel.

The listed operational capacity of the prison is 1212, however at the time of the research the population stood at 1145, whilst the Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) level was that of 669 – a figure which should indicate how many prisoners can be held in safe, decent accommodation. Overcrowding was, and still is, a significant challenge affecting the prison estate across England & Wales. However, with a population at 171% of CNA capacity, HMP Leeds was listed as the most overcrowded prison in the country at the time of fieldwork (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2016).

## **5.4 The Men**

The sample for this study included participants from a variety of backgrounds, with varied characteristics and serving a wide range of sentences. While participants were not specifically asked about their offences, it was clear from the range of sentence lengths, wing locations and the voluntary testimony of some participants that the sample also included those in prison for a variety of different offences. As such, the study sheds light on a range of subjective experiences, rather than treating men in prison as a homogenous group. As noted in Chapter Four, 32 men were interviewed at each prison. Focus groups were also conducted at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds, with

five and three participants respectively. As this research was qualitative, and did not require controlling for demographic factors in statistical analysis, demographic and sentence information was not sought from official records. Nevertheless, an overview of demographic and sentence information was gained from participants during interviews where they were willing to share these details. The demographics and characteristics of each of these samples are now considered in turn, in order to provide an introduction to the backgrounds of the men whose experiences are explored in Part Three of the thesis.

#### **5.4.1 Mountjoy Prison**

All 32 of the men interviewed, and the two additional participants who took part in a focus group, at Mountjoy Prison had been sentenced for at least one offence prior to participation in the research, while some were also awaiting trial for additional charges brought against them. The sentences being served by participants ranged from one year and three months, to Life. As such, the sample reflected a wide range of sentence lengths, but does not include those serving sentences of under one year, who make up a large proportion of committals to Irish prisons (IPS, 2017). As discussed in Chapter Four, this was a limitation of the access arrangements at Mountjoy Prison which made recruiting those serving shorter sentences extremely difficult. While some participants had spent their whole sentences at Mountjoy Prison, a number had also spent time at other prisons across Ireland, or at Children's Detention Centres, before transferring to Mountjoy Prison. Four of the men highlighted that they were serving their first prison sentence, while others had been committed to prison on multiple previous occasions since childhood. The ages of participants ranged from early twenties, the youngest participant being 22, through to early fifties, with the oldest participant being 51. The vast majority of participants described their ethnicity as White Irish (n=26). Although this sample may seem to lack diversity when compared to the ethnicities represented in the English sample, this reflects the lower levels of diversity in the Irish prison population more generally. So few of the Irish prison population are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, that at the time of fieldwork IPS did not collect or publish any statistics on the ethnicity of the prison population. Three BME participants were interviewed, all of whom were foreign national prisoners (FNPs). In addition, three of the sample interviewed described themselves as Irish Travellers – a

group that, despite the absence of conclusive data from IPS (Bracken, 2016), are thought to be disproportionately represented in the Irish prison population (Lalor, 2017).

Although levels of engagement during imprisonment could not be quantified in clear-cut terms, interviews in Ireland took place with those engaged to varying degrees in activities within the prison setting. These ranged from the two participants on protection, with extremely limited access to any activity within the prison, through to those who were involved in school programmes on a daily basis, along with a wide range of voluntary activities. In between these two extremes, a number of individuals I spoke to said that they engaged minimally in education or other available activities, despite the fact that I had met them in the school environment, demonstrating the variation in imprisonment experiences of those interviewed.

#### **5.4.2 HMP Leeds**

Of the 32 men interviewed at HMP Leeds, and the two additional participants involved in a focus group, all had served a sentence at the prison at some point. While most participants were currently serving a sentence (n=30), two individuals who described themselves as ‘remand prisoners’ argued strongly for their suitability to complete an interview based on a recent sentence at the prison, or the fact that their charge coincided with recall to prison as part of an existing sentence. The housing of those on remand alongside the sentenced population made it particularly difficult to determine an individual’s status, especially where they had been in and out of the prison on numerous occasions. Given the centrality of subjective experience to the research questions, it seemed inappropriate to exclude those who subjectively identified themselves as having an experience no different to that of sentenced prisoners, and discussions during interviews confirmed that their experiences were very similar to those serving sentences. In addition, four participants in the sample explained that they had been recalled to prison, reflecting the high levels of recall taking place in the English prison system (MOJ, 2016). Sentence lengths of those interviewed at HMP Leeds ranged from two months to life, while one focus group participant was serving an Indeterminate Sentence for Public Protection (IPP). However, only four participants also explained that they were serving their first prison sentence, while the remaining 28 had served

sentences in prison before. A common thread in many participants' narratives was that they had been in and out of prison for many years, some from as young as eleven. In terms of age, the sample in England was broader than that in Ireland with participants ranging from the age of 22 to 64. When compared to the sample at Mountjoy Prison, those interviewed at HMP Leeds provided a larger representation of those over the age of 50 (n=6), perhaps reflecting the increase in the older prison population across England & Wales over the last decade (Public Health England, 2017). Unlike the sample in Ireland, all participants were British Nationals, however there was greater diversity in ethnicity with the sample including Asian (n=1), black (n=5) and mixed race (n=2) participants, as well as two individuals who identified themselves as Travellers. As such, the sample reflects the greater diversity in the England & Wales prison population where those from BME backgrounds are disproportionately represented (PRT, 2017: 7).

As with the sample at Mountjoy Prison, quantifying levels of participation by participants was not possible. Nevertheless, it was clear that across the sample there was substantial variation in levels of engagement; interviewees included those who had recently been on Basic regime spending 23.5 hours a day in their cells, through to individuals working in trusted positions, contributing to volunteering activities and decision-making processes, and able to move between wings unaccompanied. As such, the sample enabled consideration of 'lived citizenship' for individuals with various levels of engagement within the prison.

The sample characteristics described provide a basic introduction to the characteristics of the participants in this study, and demonstrate the heterogeneity of the individuals whose experiences are discussed in the following chapters.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the national and local, institutional contexts within which the empirical research for this thesis took place. Consideration has been given to the rationale behind selection of Ireland and England as countries for comparison, while a brief overview of the policy context in each jurisdiction was

provided, with particular focus on the differences in approaches to prisoner voting which made comparison valuable when considering 'lived citizenship'. The chapter has also provided an introduction to the particular institutions in which fieldwork for this thesis took place, explaining the rationale for selecting these specific prisons and providing a brief overview of the context in which the men interviewed in this study were living. Finally, the chapter has provided an overview of the characteristics of the sample of men upon whose experiences this thesis is based, demonstrating the heterogeneity of the experiences represented within this thesis.

# Part Three

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This part of the thesis explores the meaning of citizenship, and the factors identified as important for the realisation of a meaningful sense of citizenship by the men interviewed in this study. Chapters Six to Eight discuss each of the three key themes that emerged in participants' explanations of the meanings that citizenship held for them, and the conditions considered necessary for an experience of 'lived citizenship' in individuals' day-to-day lives: belonging, engagement in community, and maintenance of an identity beyond that of 'prisoner'. The chapters discuss how each of these factors was considered to be a central facet of citizenship for participants, before considering the extent to which these features of citizenship were reflected in participants' lived experiences of everyday life in prison. Throughout the chapters, consideration is given to how each key feature of 'lived citizenship' was contextually influenced both by the social and cultural context of the jurisdiction, and the specific institutional context of the prison. The concept of *prison citizenship* is proposed as a way of conceptualising the specific meaning of citizenship within the prison setting, when the prison itself predominantly serves as an impediment to the realisation of a meaningful sense of citizenship based on participants' own understandings.

By considering participants' initial perceptions of their own citizen or non-citizen status, and the key factors emerging from discussions of the meanings citizenship held for these individuals, this part of the thesis demonstrates the differences between prisoners' perceptions of whether or not they are citizens, and their perceptions of their ability to experience day-to-day life as citizens during their time inside. Although some initial responses suggested identification with an abstract notion of citizenship as central to human life or nationality, further discussions revealed more complex realities of the ability of individuals to identify as citizens within the context of prison. In highlighting this difference, this part of the thesis demonstrates the importance of a focus on an "embodied" view of citizenship rather than a purely "abstract" status (Kabeer, 2005: 11). By drawing on the subjective meaning of citizenship for participants, the findings presented show how reliance on legal notions of citizenship alone fails to embody the true meaning and complexity of citizenship for the day-to-day lived experiences of men in prison, which is influenced substantially by context.





# Chapter Six

## Community and Belonging, Inside and Outside Prison

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### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings demonstrating the significance of belonging to a community for participants' self-identification of citizenship status, and considers whether a sense of belonging was realised in their lives during imprisonment. Findings are presented on participants' perceptions of their communities, allowing for communication of their lived experiences of inclusion in, or exclusion from, communities both outside and within prison. Throughout the chapter, discussion focuses on the significance of a subjectively experienced sense of belonging to the communities identified as important by participants, rather than pre-determined categorisations of community membership based on residency or nationality. Only by considering individuals' own definitions of their communities can an understanding of the connection between their perceived inclusion or exclusion from citizenship status, and their everyday lived experience, be gained.

### 6.2 Citizenship and Belonging

Firstly, consideration is given to the significance that belonging and community held to the understandings of 'citizenship' communicated by participants in this study. The notion of 'community', and membership of or affiliation to communities, features in many academic discussions in relation to imprisonment as described in Chapter Three. Scholars have explored the impact of incarceration on individuals' connections to outside communities, the existence of a 'prison community' behind bars (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958; Crewe, 2009), and the process of rejoining external communities following a period of incarceration. A prominent theme in the responses of participants involved in this study, was that their understandings of citizenship rested on belonging to, or being part of, a collective which was greater than themselves. Whether this collective must include the outside community, or could be that of a prison community,

was a point of contention amongst participants, but the necessity of belonging to *something* was overwhelmingly clear in responses of men in England and Ireland. Significantly, it became apparent that subjective understandings of one's own community membership or belonging were fundamental to whether participants perceived themselves as a 'citizen'. Louis (England) was one of many participants, across both jurisdictions, to place community membership or belonging at the forefront of the meaning citizenship held for him:

*In my mind a citizen is... just a normal person...Someone who...got a belonging, a purpose.*

*AS: When you say a belonging, what do you think being a citizen means you belong to?*

*Where I am, you know, and where I live, where my country is...the people I live around...the circle that I'm around, you know what I mean? ...The people that I'm around.*

In highlighting the potential for belonging to a physical location, or a 'circle' of people, Louis also illustrates the multiplicity of ways that individuals might engender a sense of belonging, and thus identify as a citizen. The notions of citizenship and community are inherently intertwined, with connections between the two concepts identified in citizenship theory, ranging from conceptions of citizenship as signifying membership of a political community (see Chapter Two) through to understandings of 'lived citizenship' as connected to, and dependent on, 'lived communities' (Hall & Williamson, 1999). Louis' comments affirm Hall and Williamson's (1999) conceptualisation of 'lived citizenship' as particularly useful in understanding the realisation of citizenship within prison. This is due to its acknowledgement of an intrinsic link between the concepts of citizenship and community, and an acceptance of the potential multiplicity of community identifications based on lived experience.

Clark (2007) has discussed the variety of ways that individuals may be bound together, in order to transcend the nature of a mere aggregate group and constitute a community to which they all belong. While some may define their community in spatial terms, as sharing a local area, a *social* community will require individuals to have ties to the space itself, or other people. As such, one person may define their community differently to another, and it is certainly possible for individuals to identify themselves

as belonging to multiple distinct communities, bound together in various ways from geographical proximity to shared experience.

Participants' responses to the meaning citizenship held for them in their day-to-day lives made clear that belonging to something bigger than oneself, or a community of sorts, was a necessary condition for an individual to experience citizenship. However, the characteristics and boundaries of the community to which these individuals felt they had to belong varied significantly from broad, abstract notions of society, to legally delineated national political communities more frequently considered in research on foreign national prisoners (FNPs) (Bosworth, 2011; Turnbull & Hasselberg, 2017). Additionally, when asked about the way that they themselves defined their community, it was clear participants sometimes identified, to greater or lesser extents, with multiple distinct, albeit sometimes overlapping, communities. This created complexity both in participants' perceptions of their own citizenship status, and in defining their own place in relation to communities and/or wider society, with this blurred line between outside and inside life featuring heavily in men's discussions of their own community membership. The complexity of defining participants' communities, and the impact that imprisonment had on participants' sense of belonging to these communities, is now considered.

### **6.3 Defining Participants' Communities Beyond the Prison**

Literature on community across the social and political sciences has demonstrated how individuals perceive and interact with communities formed around places, religion, common interests, close friendships, or shared culture and traditions. Scholars have identified how the term 'community' generally has two main uses by which it can be distinguished – territorial and relational (Gusfield, 1957; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). While the notion of territorial community often relates to a particular location, such as a town, city or neighbourhood, relational community refers to the social bonds developed as a result of something other than location – Gusfield (1957: xvi) states that uses of community in this context are concerned with the “quality or character of human relationship, without reference to location”. The understandings of participants, as to the type of community belonging required for citizenship, made reference to both territorial and relational notions of community, however the importance of an attachment or sense of belonging to a wider group, extending beyond the mere

circumstance of sharing a location, was clear in determining the sense of belonging participants perceived as necessary for meaningful citizenship. A discussion of the myriad ways participants defined these communities, and the impact of incarceration on their sense of belonging to such communities, now follows.

### **6.3.1 Part of ‘Society’**

For some participants, being part of something was connected to the idea of citizenship as based on personhood, with an abstract notion of ‘society’ as a broad population which is constituted of all present by virtue of their being, rather than being restricted to any particular nationality. This connection between personhood and citizenship seemed to reflect the approach taken by the South African Constitutional Court in their declarations on prisoner enfranchisement, that “The vote of each and every citizen is a badge of dignity and of person. Quite literally, it says that everybody counts” (*August v Electoral commission*, CCT 08/99, 1999 cited in Behan & O’Donnell, 2008: 320). For Ethan, a remand prisoner in England, to be a citizen was “just to be a member of society really” while George, serving a sentence at HMP Leeds, noted the universality of citizenship, incorporating those who are “part of life, part of the world, part of the population around me.” Similarly, Joshua (Ireland) confirmed his perception of himself as a citizen by drawing on an inclusive definition of citizenship, saying “we’re all part of society, like”. However, this perception of holding an unconditional position as a member of society, by virtue of being, was not consistent across all participants, with many suggesting that it is not simply *being* which provides the sense of belonging they associated with citizenship, but a feeling of being *part of*, or belonging to, a community of individuals.

As Clarke (2007) has noted, the notion of community encapsulates a wide range of factors which bind individuals together as a collective, and therefore communities can take various forms, with particular spatial or social elements determining someone’s sense of belonging. For some participants, the notion of citizenship was contingent upon a connection or belonging to a community *outside* of prison. In his discussion of the fact he did not identify himself as a citizen, Isaac – serving a sentence for a civil offence in England – asserted that being a citizen required belonging to a collective that went beyond the prison walls:

*My observation of the word citizen is a citizen [is] a part of, or belonging, of something on the external. Not somebody that's cooped up like an animal in a cage. How can you...? It just doesn't work with that term really...it feels wrong. An inmate works [laughs] or somebody that's incarcerated, yeah, but a citizen? Na.*

Similarly, Edward who was a first-time prisoner in England said he would not describe himself as a citizen because of “the segregation and isolation” from external communities. This need for contact with, and belonging to, an external community in order to identify as a citizen, was evident both for Edward, and a number of other participants. Providing his own definition of citizenship, Jack (Ireland) discussed how maintaining contact with the external community provided a sense of belonging to a collective beyond the prison, which thus allowed him to view himself as ‘on holiday’, rather than completely excluded, from citizenship:

*[Citizenship means] that I'm a part of somewhere... If you want to put it that way I am just on holiday when you think about it, but I'm a citizen on this holiday, you know what I mean? But, it's just...being able to talk to people, being able to make phone calls, being able to get visits. Just all them there sort of things, they make you realise that I'm still part of the community. People still like me on the outside, people still want to talk to me you know.*

This need for membership of society more broadly was also identified by some participants as necessary in order to be a *full* or *complete* citizen. As such, Ciaran (Ireland) described how he felt – being in prison – he lacked this membership of society and consequently *full* citizenship: “I’m not a part of society...I’d say I’m less than a citizen.” Ciaran’s comments reflect the significance that being ‘part of society’ held in participants’ understandings of citizenship and how one can identify as a citizen. It was the sense of exclusion from society as a whole – of being seen as separate or *othered* from society – that led to his perception of himself as being less than a citizen or having a qualified status in relation to the rest of society. This emphasis on belonging to, or membership of, society in the broadest sense demonstrates clearly the significance of participants’ feelings that one must belong to a collective bigger than oneself in order to identify as a citizen. However, the perceptions of other participants sat in contrast to this broad notion of citizenship as being based on membership of society, or the ambiguous notion central to the definition of rehabilitation as “readying prisoners to

rejoin society, as useful and law-abiding members of the wider community.”<sup>34</sup> For many other participants the community membership they considered vital for citizenship was more clearly delineated than this, and was focused on nationality and the sense of national identity and pride that accompanied such legal categorisations.

### 6.3.2 National Community

As in Faulkner’s (2002) work, this study does not attempt a comprehensive discussion of issues relating to nationality-based citizenship for those who are, or are not, considered national citizens based on birth or residence status. Rather, this thesis is concerned with individuals’ lived experiences of incarceration and, as demonstrated by participants’ accounts, the lived reality of citizenship is experienced as more than a legal, nationality-based status. Nevertheless, as Bosworth et al. (2016) note, nationality is not only important for those abroad, but also holds significance for those who hold nationality of the jurisdiction in which they are incarcerated. After all, when citizenship is conceptualised in nationalistic terms, prisoners occupy the uncomfortable position of being incarcerated by the very state to which they are supposed to belong as a citizen, in an institution which itself acts as a “projection of national sovereignty and an expression of state power” (Bosworth et al., 2016: 4). Despite this tension, nationality or a sense of attachment to the jurisdiction in which participants resided, did feature in initial responses with a few participants in England deferring to the formal ethnicity-based categorisation of ‘White British’ when describing themselves as citizens. Such initial deference to formal, official categorisations of nationality-based definitions is not surprising when, as Cheney (2008: 141) notes, few people consciously think about the concept of citizenship beyond what is stated on our passports or required of us for monitoring forms. This itself is justification for exploring the subjective meaning that citizen status holds for individuals if we are really to understand ‘lived citizenship’. While reference to nationality in official terms was seen in some responses from men imprisoned in England, far more nuanced references to nationality, residence and national identity were prevalent in responses of Irish participants, including those of

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<sup>34</sup> In 2004, the Home Affairs Committee carried out an inquiry into the rehabilitation of prisoners as “law-abiding and useful members of the community”. At para 9 they provided a definition of “rehabilitation” as follows: “‘Rehabilitation’ means literally ‘re-enabling’ or ‘making fit again’ (from the Latin *rehabilitare*). In the prison context it means readying prisoners to rejoin society, as useful and law-abiding members of the wider community.” (Home Affairs Committee, 2004: 10).

Irish origin and FNPs. Amongst these participants, references to nationality were used alongside assertions of personhood as humans, as another means by which participants minimised the difference between themselves and non-prisoners when responding affirmatively to questions of their own citizenship status; connection to, or residence in, a particular country provided a point of commonality with the rest of the population.

When asked whether or not they were citizens, a number of participants in Ireland responded with reference to pride in their country and attachment to a national identity. When asked what it meant to him that he identified himself as a citizen, Ryan seemed to be providing political comment on Ireland's independence saying "Citizen of Ireland - Free State!". While demonstrating the importance of his Irish nationality to his views of citizenship, Ryan's quote also appears to suggest that his view of citizenship is tied closely to the importance of full Irish independence. The term 'Free State' had been used in the period before the republic was declared in 1948, for the 26 counties that had become the Free State under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, and came into force on Easter Monday 1949. Use of this term had led to significant political tensions when used in place of 'Ireland', particularly in discussions of citizenship (Daly, 2007). By referring back to a time before the republic was declared, and using a name which seems to allude to the aim of full independence for the island of Ireland being not yet realised, Ryan has demonstrated how his understanding of citizenship is linked to nationalism. However, this is not just in terms of legal nationality, but also his particular political view on Ireland's independence – Ryan's comments allude to a desire to see a united Ireland, a Republic which he believes will come about with an end to British rule in Northern Ireland.

Ross also noted how for him, and others, the political history of Ireland was integral to their sense of citizenship: "It's about...a lot of us think about what happened in 1916<sup>35</sup> and that, so that has a lot to do with it." Whilst the prevalence of references to 1916 and political figures in Irish history might have been somewhat heightened, due to the timing of the research which took place shortly before the 1916 centenary, the

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<sup>35</sup> 1916 marks the year during which the Easter Rising took place in Dublin. During the rising the Proclamation of the Republic was issued, which proclaimed Ireland's independence from British rule. The Easter Rising was a key historical moment in the journey towards the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, with the response of the British army – and the resulting civilian deaths – turning public opinion against Britain. Fieldwork at Mountjoy Prison took place in the period running up to the centenary celebrations of the Easter Rising in 1916.

importance of national pride and political views on Irish independence to understandings of citizenship was evident and contrasted the rare mention of British identity from participants in England.

This connection to national identity also translated to participants' day-to-day experiences as citizens in Ireland, with Thomas highlighting that the point in the day he felt most like a citizen was when he was reminded of his nationality and the religious community he linked closely to this:

*No...no. When the Angelus<sup>36</sup> come on at the 6 o'clock news you know? The gongs for the news [laughs]... Well you don't get that anywhere else. It's only in Ireland the Angelus let you know it's 6 o'clock. It's a religious thing like.*

AS: *So like that reminds you...?*

*...that you're a Catholic!*

Conversely, Ciaran's experience of deportation from England as a result of his imprisonment demonstrated how significant rejection from a national community could be for a lived citizenship experience in day-to-day life:

*Well, thinking back to England – I grew up there and lived there for 20 years. Then I got a letter from the Justice department saying I was “a non-desirable” and I'd be deported at the end of my sentence. Now that is not a nice feeling. When I applied for repatriation in Ireland and I got citizenship that made me feel good. But that word “undesirable” – I really didn't feel like a citizen. Where you're from – you're a citizen of that country but when you're a prisoner you don't feel like it. You're locked away. They don't want you...I feel better in Ireland...I felt a little bit part of society in England, but they didn't want me.*

For many participants, national identity seemed to provide a means by which to assert commonality, and minimise difference from those who would be considered citizens outside, in a similar way to individuals' assertions that everyone is a citizen by virtue of being. Although discussed in the language of nationality-based categorisations, which are often associated with exclusionary practices, participants' use of belonging to a national community largely appealed to a universalist conception of citizenship

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<sup>36</sup> The Angelus is a Roman Catholic prayer of devotion which is usually preceded by the ringing of church bells. The Angelus bells are played daily at Midday and 6pm on RTÉ – one of the main radio and television channels in Ireland.



which emphasises commonality (Bell & Scott, 2016). Some participants even noted that, in their understanding of citizenship, one could be a citizen in any country, with national community membership being about more than legal status. Fionn (Ireland) explained his view of this:

*I see myself as a citizen of a community...Well...you're Irish, you know what I mean. You're part of the community and you're moving around, you're doing things, you're out buying stuff, you're making communities grow, but...[pause] you could be a citizen in Spain!*

Fionn's response reaffirmed that while being Irish was a way that many participants initially identified themselves as a citizen, this was about asserting commonality with others in a community bigger than oneself. As such, it was not so much legal nationality-based citizenship which determined one's sense of citizenship, but a sense of being part of a larger collective with others in the country where they resided, wherever that may be.

While nationality played a significant role in many participants' perception of citizenship and community, especially those in Ireland, others viewed community as something much smaller and more intimate. For many participants, community was something small, tight-knit and based fundamentally around those who were closest to them, cared about them, and often those they had known since childhood. In many cases, maintenance of ties and existential connection to these groups was what provided participants with a sense of community and belonging. The following section now considers the nature of these tight-knit communities that individuals identified as important to their understandings of belonging and, consequently, lived citizenship.

### **6.3.3 Tight-Knit Communities and Pre-Prison Identities**

A large number of participants explained that they considered themselves as ongoing members of external communities, often in the form of the local areas that they had grown up in. Participants spoke of how being known in these communities, and the tight-knit relationships upon which they were based, enabled their continued membership. For several of the participants at Mountjoy Prison, these assertions of community membership were made with explicit reference to the fact that individuals had grown up in the area or had spent substantial periods of time living in these neighbourhoods, often since long before their offending behaviour began. Scholars

have argued that such a sense of connection to the place individuals grew up is not uncommon amongst the public generally, even in a globalised world where individuals move around, and that this attachment to place is still very important to individuals' sense of identity (Inglis, 2009). Expressions of belonging to communities lived in during the early stages of life were often combined with indications of the role or identity that people had held in that environment, and seemed to indicate their acceptance as a member of a community in a way which may not be possible elsewhere given their offending behaviour.

Oisin (Ireland) talked about how, despite having uncertainty about belonging to a community on his release, he would always be accepted in the area where he grew up, highlighting the role he took in looking after the older women in the area:

*...what I had before I came to prison is gone. So I don't know if I belong to a community. I know I'd always have my parents. There's no problems staying there...but community in general. I dunno. I'd always be accepted back into where I'm from like. My mother's friends and all, they're all like "Oh there's Oisin!" They love it you know. I'd always help them out with bingo money and stuff like that...make sure they were alright...And they all knew what I was like, they'd say "There's Oisin. He does his own, leave him alone"...So there was a bit of respect there, with the community. They know you're not a bad fella.*

It seemed to be the very fact that locals in his parents' area knew the helpful and supportive Oisin, rather than identifying him by his crimes, that provided Oisin with this unconditional sense of belonging to the particular area described. Oisin does, however, highlight that this acceptance may not have been so freely granted, and as such this sense of belonging not sustained, had he grown up in a different 'type' of community:

*Well...again in that type of community's eyes you're not a bad fella, but if you were in a different community they'd say "Jeez, how dare you do that!" you know? It's depending on where you're from again.*

By drawing a distinction between the community he grew up in – a relatively deprived, working-class area – and 'different' communities, Oisin suggests that there may be a socio-economic or class element impacting the extent to which individuals would

expect to be accepted into their childhood community following conviction and imprisonment. Oisín's background reflected that of the majority of those held at Mountjoy Prison, whom previous research has demonstrated are predominantly drawn from a small number of urban, inner-city, working-class areas in Dublin, all of which are characterised by high indices of relative deprivation (O'Mahony, 1997: 40; O'Donnell et al., 2008). Additionally, a number of participants described the prevalence of crime in their local areas, such as Ryan (Ireland) who explained that in his community "it's all stealing cars, taking coke and back out doing the same the next day." Although this was viewed as problematic by many in relation to desistance from crime, ways of conceptualising community are by nature subjective and contextually influenced, and the boundaries of belonging vary from one community to the next. Oisín's comments suggested that while imprisonment might exclude individuals from society as a whole, it may not limit their acceptance as a member of the community in working-class, deprived areas, as their behaviour was less likely to damage or inhibit their acceptance by individuals in these neighbourhoods where crime was a frequent occurrence. This contrasts greatly with the findings of a UK report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that people are less likely to feel a sense of attachment to deprived areas than those which are more affluent, and areas with higher perceptions of crime and insecurity (Livingston et al., 2008), perhaps demonstrating a national difference in the way membership of such communities is perceived.

Similarly to Oisín, a number of other participants referred to the fact that they had grown up in particular places and as a result could find acceptance from some in spite of their offending behavior. This was echoed in Shane's comments about his local neighbourhood in Ireland:

*Well it's a residential area – I grew up there all of my life. There are lots of people there thinking that I messed up but that when I've paid for it I'll be welcome back. You know there'll always be some people who won't think that but... people make mistakes... Some people are willing to forgive and forget. Some not. Generally, if you show that you've changed, I think most people respect you.*

Even for those who did not consider themselves to currently retain *membership* of an external community, several still felt a strong affinity to their community, and had a confidence that acceptance – and the associated sense of belonging – would be possible

upon release. For these individuals this perception was based on the role they had filled in that community previously. Jake, a young prisoner in Ireland, identified his home area as his community, explaining the role he took within the neighbourhood:

*Everyone looks up to me down there, like all the teenagers and that. The teenage girls come to me to help them with boyfriend problems...I'm well-respected in [Area] I am.*

AS: *So, would you say even though you're in prison now, you're still part of a community there?*

*No...I wouldn't say I'm part of the community. I will be when I go back though. When I go back I'll do my best.*

Whilst mention of belonging to geographical communities, where individuals had lived for long periods of time, was also made by participants at HMP Leeds, this was far less frequent and rarely referred to having grown up in these places. These participants in England did not often speak of having the acceptance, respect or role within an area that many Irish participants did. Whilst data on the specific geographical backgrounds of men imprisoned in HMP Leeds is not available, participants in this study frequently referred to the same estates or neighbourhoods, predominantly in Leeds and surrounding areas, which data indicates suffer high levels of deprivation (Leeds Observatory, 2015), and often described their lives in these places as being chaotic, characterised by addiction, poverty and crime. This is widely supported by both academic literature, and official data sources, which illustrate that people in prison are disproportionately drawn from the most socially deprived areas of the UK (Centre for Social Justice, 2010; Houchin, 2005). As such, it might have been expected that individuals would not feel a sense of attachment to communities on this basis (Livingston et al., 2008). This sentiment was particularly pronounced in the experience of Mason (England), who explained how he did not belong to a community outside or feel safe in the outside 'community' due to the chaos and insecurity which characterised his life before incarceration:

*Outside I have no family, addicted to drugs, and I'm homeless – this is a safer environment for me, and that's why – as bad as it sounds – I'll never change.*

While this comparison of prison as ‘safer’ than external communities was not prevalent amongst participants’ responses, the lack of attachment to ‘community’ in deprived areas was also described by others, including by Logan in his description of the area he was brought up in, compared to the area he had moved to. In contrast to Oisín and others’ comments about acceptance in the deprived areas they had grown up in Ireland, Logan (England), who had managed to maintain a non-criminal identity within a new area as a result of his mother’s tactful communication with local people, considered this ‘nice’ area to have a greater sense of community. This was despite concerns that his Jamaican-British ethnicity would make acceptance in this place difficult:

*AS: Do you consider yourself to be part of any community in wider society?*

*Well I was brought up in an area that was kinda rough, and then we moved to this nice area further out – it’s a little village. At first I didn’t wanna go there – I was just small minded about it and thought it would be racist, but then I went to walk the dog around the village one day and every[one] said “morning” and then it did feel like a community, but before in the other area – no chance!*

*AS: So do you feel a part of that village community now?*

*Yeah, I still do, It’s a small place. When I went away [to prison] the last time, the shop keeper would be asking after me and where I was, and my Mum just said “aw he’s gone back to Jamaica for a bit” [Laughs].*

For Logan, the role of others in maintaining his non-criminal identity within the village community was of huge significance to being able to retain his sense of belonging there. Here, his mother acted as a shield to his real situation, providing an alternative explanation for his absence that would not damage his reputation, or sense of belonging. As such, while this community was identified as meaningful to Logan, these comments suggested that his sense of belonging was, in part, based on somewhat inauthentic and idealised presentations of self which masked the reality of his conviction and incarceration. This also suggests that familial connections and maintained contact with others in the community who are willing to protect one's reputation, have significant implications for a maintained sense of belonging during incarceration.

For other participants, the tight-knit communities to which they considered themselves

to belong were not characterised by a local area, but rather an attachment to a specific ethnic or cultural community. The connection to community identified amongst those from Traveller communities was particularly strong, and was evidenced both in England and Ireland. In Ireland, where Travellers make up a disproportionate 10% of the male prison population (Holland, 2017), all participants from a Traveller background described the strong connections and continued sense of belonging to the Traveller community that they felt, despite their physical separation, throughout incarceration. Ciaran (Ireland) noted the importance of cultural traditions, and involvement, to maintaining this sense of belonging:

*Yes, I do belong to a community. I have strong connections to my family in the Traveller community, though I do feel a bit excluded in here. There are strong traditions and culture though and I'm lucky that my wife stuck by me so I have a say in my kids' lives. Like I'm pushing education quite a bit [...] I've got a different perspective now but I'm still very involved in my community.*

This close affinity with the Traveller community, above all else, was consistent across all responses from participants who identified as Travellers, both at HMP Leeds and Mountjoy Prison. Owen, a middle-aged man, who had spent his life in and out of prison in England, said that Travellers "always have been" his primary community, indicating the continuation of his sense of belonging to this group throughout periods of incarceration. He highlighted that the thing maintaining his membership of this community was that those he considered himself close to were also Travellers: "I'm still in the Traveller community cos all my people, all my friends, are Travellers". This sense of belonging through associating predominantly with other Travellers in prison was also echoed in Stanley's (England) comments about community both inside and outside prison:

*We like to stay with each other, instead of mixing. It's just one of them things.*

AS: How does that affect your time in prison then?

*It doesn't. 'Cause...half my mates in here are like my family anyway!*

AS: OK, so would you say you have a Traveller community in prison as well?

*Yeah.*

This lack of a clear distinction between an outside community, or one within the prison, emphasised the complexity that accompanies some prisoners' position on the boundary of two communities, or worlds. This experience of crossover between inside and outside communities was not unique to Travellers, but was also noted by those with strong attachments to local areas in Ireland and demonstrated how, for some participants, their external communities were characterised by the same features of crime that were prevalent within the prison setting. For Fionn, it was the fact that large numbers of people from the community to which he belonged outside of prison were now with him inside, also serving prison sentences in Ireland, that led him to feel that he was "living citizenship" during his time behind bars:

*Would I say I'm living citizenship? ...yeah, because a lot of people I know from the area out there like [laughs]....You'll see them when you get out, and hopefully won't see them if I ever come back – I don't plan on coming back! ...There is sort of a little community in here...there's certain people, you know what I mean, from certain areas and that.*

However, this sense of tight-knit community was not as prevalent amongst the majority of participants in England, as was the case for those in Ireland or those who identified as Travellers. Instead, as with some Irish participants, many demonstrated a concern with belonging to a much smaller, immediate collective of their family unit. Despite some participants highlighting that they felt remembered, cared for and thought of in their external communities, for many their meaningful sense of attachment to the external was limited to the immediate family unit, with little sense of connection to a community beyond this. This was illustrated in the comments of Cian (Ireland) who, when asked about whether he belonged to a community, described his 'version':

*I don't really because I go about my own business... I suppose me kids and then, sorta me family and that. That's a community like, that's the only version I'd have.*

This sentiment was echoed in responses from men in England, who, in some cases, responded to questions about community with comments about the quality or strength of their attachment and belonging to family:

AS: *Would you say you belong to a community outside then?*

Blake: *Yeah. I've got a good family, me.*

In order to understand the meaning that was held by this term 'community', men were asked to explain why they understood their community to be their family. A number of participants explained that this was to do with who they cared about or felt closest to – feelings that they did not hold in relation to the broader community beyond their family and/or close friends. This was highlighted by Harrison (England) when discussing why he considered his immediate family to be his community:

*Just that's what I prefer...It's family innit...It's the only thing I really give a fuck about.*

Consideration of family as an individual's 'community' was also, for some, contingent on the permanence of attachment or belonging to family, regardless of time spent away. Lucas (England) contrasted this to the relationships he had developed in prison with 'associates':

*I belong to my family...as opposed to a community... 'Cause them are the people that are the closest, that I love and that even though I'm not with them directly. I might be hundred miles away...associates here may be a temporary community...but they're still my people, my community.*

Discussions of communities external to the prison must not be isolated from the broader context of an increasingly globalised and mobile society, where it has been argued that the family unit is becoming "disembedded" from wider community (Giddens, 1991: 146), with traditional forms of community beyond this unit disappearing (Beck, 1992). Participants identifying a lack of connection to the broader community, or society as a whole, may seem unsurprising given these broader trends and, in particular, the deprivation, crime and social exclusion which characterised the areas in which many participants had lived prior to incarceration (O'Mahony, 1997; 2002; IPRT, 2017; PRT, 2017; Centre for Social Justice, 2010). As such, this calls into question the reasonableness, or feasibility, of the expectations placed on prisoners to be 'rehabilitated' – a term which insinuates 'habilitation' prior to offending – and to become law-abiding members of an ill-defined, broad 'community'. Further, this notion



is problematic when considering the characteristics of individuals' external areas, or communities, which may not be wholly positive or conform to aspirational normative ideas of cohesive law-abiding community. Given the disproportionate representation of those from deprived and chaotic backgrounds within the prison population, it is clear that for many their meaningful communities are far from perfect, despite close bonds and a sense of belonging, further complicating the idea that individuals can be rehabilitated to become law-abiding members of cohesive communities upon release.

While many participants described their communities as based around these tight-knit connections to individuals, in particular their families or local areas, for many the defining feature of their sense of belonging to these communities was based on being remembered, or thought about by those outside of the prison. Participants' experiences of being remembered, or forgotten, by those close to them are now considered.

#### **6.3.4 Forgotten Community Members: The Importance of Being Known, Remembered and Accepted.**

Despite the deprivation and chaos which characterised the local areas and social circles of many participants, the importance that a continued position in these communities held was clear in the narratives of the men interviewed. Discussion now focuses on the significance that being known, remembered and accepted, by people in external communities, held for individuals' sense of belonging during their time in prison. Central to the identification of tight-knit family and friendship groups as individuals' communities, was the need to be thought of and remembered; a number of participants in both jurisdictions cited the acknowledgements of care and thought by others as significant in determining their perceptions of whether or not they belonged to a community. For Charlie (England), the knowledge that he was missed by people outside of the prison was important to his maintained sense of membership of the community when there, suggesting that the period of incarceration constituted time away from the community rather than a total removal from it:

*I'm here aren't I. But I'm still a member when I'm there... People still asking about me and stuff. I'm just missed in the community... It*

*makes you know you're wanted dunnit. That's why it hurts so much in here, cos you're hurting other people out there.*

Similarly, for some the lack of contact that they had with members of their local communities – perceived as indicating a lack of care or concern – was noted as the reason for a lack of maintained belonging to an outside community. This was a source of anger for some, which led to a sense of fatalism about engagement with communities upon release. Thomas, serving a long sentence in Ireland for a violent offence, felt strongly that whether you belong to a community depended on the place you are living in, and the people there:

*[It depends on] Whether you're engaging with them [in that place you're living]and whatever's going on in that community.*

On this basis, Thomas asserted that he would not be involved with the community he had previously identified as his own on release, due to the lack of attention or communication he had received from community members following his incarceration. When asked if he wanted to be part of the community on his release he responded negatively:

*No. While I'm in prison no-one wrote to me or sent me up anything or came to visit me so...go to hell!*

For many individuals, their ability to conceive of themselves as members of a community depended on the extent to which they believed they maintained a presence within that community, whether through making contributions to their families (discussed further in Chapter Seven), performing particular roles, or simply being present in the thoughts, concerns and decisions of those who they had considered their community before their prison sentence. Yet, the fact that time had continued to pass in individuals' outside communities presented barriers to some participants confidently asserting a sense of belonging to a community. The maintenance of ties to individuals or places outside was sometimes insufficient to maintain a sense of belonging to an external community, as this was disrupted by the changes that had taken place in their lives, and those of others in these communities, since their imprisonment. Oisín highlighted how the changes in his personal life, over the course of a long sentence, led

to a lost sense of belonging to a geographical community, and a sense of uncertainty as to community membership following release from prison:

*Do I feel part of the community outside? It's hard to know because so many things have changed since I've gone to jail. First me and my wife were still together...she's moved on with someone else then and the house we had, that's gone now...So...out there, I don't even know where I'll be living when I get out because what I had before I came to prison is gone. So, I don't know if I belong to a community. I know I'd always have my parents. There's no problems staying there and that, but community in general? I dunno.*

This feeling was particularly prevalent amongst participants in Ireland for whom connection to childhood communities was identified as important. When asked whether he considered himself to belong to a community outside, Thomas, serving a long-term sentence, noted how changes in his family's location and geographical communities had disrupted his sense of connection to a community outside:

*Errr no. Cause my family's after moving. We were all living in [place] so I would've been a part of a community over there in [place], but we're down in [place] now and I don't know anyone. I've never lived in [place] myself so I'm not a part of that community.*

Thomas' lack of a sense of belonging to any community, as a result of his family's movement, demonstrates how the length of time spent in an area before incarceration had significant consequences for whether or not an individual felt able to maintain a sense of belonging during their prison sentence, a sentiment also later echoed in participants' discussions of movement and disruption *within* a prison 'community' (see section 6.6.2). The experiences of Thomas and Oisín demonstrated that despite any strong attachment to tight-knit communities prior to incarceration, the changes that continued to take place outside during their incarceration had the potential to disrupt any meaningful sense of community for them, creating a sense that external communities beyond the prison were also disconnected, particularly for those serving longer sentences. The lack of control over such changes, while separated from these communities, was a source of upset and frustration which added a layer of complexity to participants' understandings of their communities.

Consideration has been given to the significance of a variety of external communities for individuals' understandings of themselves as citizens during imprisonment. While many considered connections to external communities – national, local or familial – to be a necessary feature of citizenship, participants also made reference to the existence or lack of a 'prison community' to which the attention of this chapter now turns.

#### **6.4 The Prison 'Community'**

Having examined participants' diverse understandings of, and attachments to, communities beyond the prison, consideration is now given to the question of whether a community exists within the prison environment. Discussion will consider the extent to which the men interviewed perceived communities to exist within HMP Leeds and Mountjoy Prison, the meaning that any such communities held for those interviewed during their incarceration, and the contexts in which communities were cultivated within the prisons. Following this, consideration is given to the factors which prevented many participants from identifying a meaningful or positive sense of community within the prison environment, and the ways that the prison context itself prevented the cultivation of a meaningful sense of community amongst those held within the institutions.

The question of whether a 'community' exists within the prison environment has received substantial academic attention, with studies considering the extent to which social life within the prison is structured by hierarchy, the nature of relationships in this environment, and the extent to which the distinct culture of the social life in the prison is imported or intrinsic to the environment itself (see Chapter Three). When asked about the existence of a community, or community spirit, at HMP Leeds and Mountjoy Prison, participants' answers demonstrated great complexity in notions of community behind bars. In particular, these included variation in understandings of how a sense of community is cultivated, and the extent to which belonging to the prison community/ies is desirable or beneficial. Participants' responses demonstrated the potential for identifying oneself as part of the prisoner community to be beneficial to survival of the prison environment and, in some cases, necessary. Nevertheless, others identified the communities in existence behind bars as negative and suggested that avoidance of community membership was an act of self-preservation which enabled them to

maintain a sense that their incarceration was a temporary distraction from their lives and communities outside.

For participants who identified themselves as no longer belonging to an external community, some used their membership of the prison community as a means by which to demonstrate that they could live as citizens during incarceration. While Callum, a young prisoner in England, initially said that he was not a citizen as this required membership of a community, he later changed his mind, returning to universalist notions of any community, or lifestyle, as allowing the realisation of citizenship status:

*No... 'cos a citizen's part of the community... But then, you see, now that I've said that I'd say yeah, 'cos I'm part of this community.... So yeah and no. I'm a citizen in a different community than another citizen... The prison community.*

This demonstrated that understandings of 'citizenship' for those in prison were both complex and contested. There were a number of ways individuals identified a community, or communities, to exist within the prison, which arose out of the particular challenges that the prison environment presents. Findings demonstrating the necessity of cultivating an instrumental 'community' within the unique environment of the prison are now discussed, followed by consideration of how meaningful communities which transcend this instrumental purpose were seen to develop in particular areas, or groups, within the prisons.

#### **6.4.1 Bound Together Through Necessity**

For many participants, there was a sense that being part of a prison community was an inevitability of incarceration. Some noted that they had to accept that they were inherently part of the prison community for the duration of their sentences due to the control asserted over them by the system; its characteristic 'total' nature resulting in regimentation and control of not only the daily activity of prisoners, but also the make-up of the prison population of which they would now be a part and the institutional recognition of their shared identities as such (Goffman, 1961; Sexton & Jenness, 2016). However, the data suggested that this understanding of a forced community related to being in a shared location, rather than any deeper sense of connection or social network. For some participants this was part of coming to terms with their incarceration, and

accepting that they would be separated from wider society, and their communities of choice, for the duration of the custodial element of their sentence. Yet, for many participants, recognising themselves as part of a prison community served a primary function of supporting physical, social, and psychological wellbeing in order to ensure survival in the damaging world of the prison, and mitigate the inherent pains of incarceration. Ethan (England) described this instrumental community as being “bound together through necessity”.

The responses of participants demonstrated that there were two main reasons that the development of an instrumental community was a necessity in the prison environment, and both related to the prevention or minimisation of the greatest physical and psychological harms that the prison can inflict on individuals (Toch, 1992; Sykes, 1958; Edgar et al., 2003; Crewe, 2011a). These were the development of community as a means of coping with the damaging environment of the prison, and the maintenance of civility with other prisoners to avoid the potential dangers of conflict with prisoners and/or officers.

For some participants, being part of the prison community constituted ‘getting on’ with others and maintaining a level of civility despite saying that they lacked genuine friendships or did not trust others behind bars. As Louis (England) explains, maintaining a sense of civility was important to avoid the violence and ‘havoc’ that could otherwise result from the prisoner hierarchy:

*You have to have community in prison, because everyone has to get on, otherwise it would just be like a free for all, wouldn't it!...in some prisons that I've been to there's been like hierarchies on the wings and what not yeah? ...But in this prison I don't think there's anything like hierarchy and all that carry on. I think sometimes it just boils down to people having respect for people...So when it comes to community, yeah, there's always gonna be people there that will have a lot more influence, but you have to have the community feel - the reason being because you're all living together aren't you? So, once you're all living together, you have to get on with each other...But you have to have that community feel in here, because if you didn't...pffff it'd be havoc, man.*

Louis went on to explain how maintaining this sense of community in prison alleviated some of the difficulties of incarceration, making for an easier way of doing time:

*I think I belong to a community in here, yeah...because in here I think you have to belong to a community, to be able to make life easier for yourself...because you can't deal with everything on your own when you're in prison... You need people around you, that can always help you... if you was left on your own and you wasn't involved, you know what I mean, you'd be living an 'ard life!...So in reality, belonging to part of a community in here, it makes life a lot easier for you.*

One of the ways that participants highlighted the existence of community, and its role in mitigating some of the struggles and pains of incarceration, was through the use of humour within the prison. This was a feature of interactions amongst men in both jurisdictions and a number linked this explicitly to the ability to create a sense of community within the prison. Fionn (Ireland), when discussing the use of banter on the wings, explained how this allowed for a sense of community to cut across pre-existing communities from outside of prison and lighten the mood in the difficult context of imprisonment:

*There is sort of a little community in here...there's certain people, from certain areas and that...you'll have a bit of fun slagging their football team or, you know, if they do something wrong...if someone gets caught with a phone that you're not meant to have and you walk by...you'll go "ahh I'll give you a ring later!" [laughs]. You know what I mean? But, it's things like that...to me... it's a bit of banter!*

The role of humour in cultivating a sense of community, that Fionn identified, demonstrates similarities with other external 'communities' or professions where humour is also found to create a sense of solidarity or togetherness, particularly where there is a need for a group to distance themselves from traumatic or difficult situations to cope with their circumstances, or to relieve tension (Charman, 2013; Kinsman Dean & Major, 2008; Sanders, 2004). This role of humour as creating a sense of community in the prison context was echoed by Oisín, who mentioned how banter was one indication of how communities existed on the particular landings on which one was housed:

*It's a community yeah. You'll have your bit of banter on the landing, you'll have your little...a couple of coppers on the match and that. You know stuff like that, a bit of banter, a bit of craic.*

For many of those who asserted that there was indeed a ‘community’ or sense of ‘community spirit’ in prison, they considered this to exist on the level of their wing or, as Oisín said, “on the landing”<sup>37</sup>. The focus placed on the wings or landings as the nexus of community speaks to the notion of ‘administered groups’ which Goffman (1961) posited as the basis for the development of solidarity existing between prisoners. These comments demonstrate the impact that the structure of the prison, and its architecture, have on restricting the extent to which individuals can act autonomously in their development of community, by choosing who to develop social connections with and when, through physically constraining the groups of individuals with whom they can interact.

For a number of the participants who identified themselves as belonging to a community within the prison, their perception of the existence of a community was based on the actions of some imprisoned men in helping others in various ways. For many of those viewing community as a necessity in prison, it was these very actions which made prison life somewhat ‘easier’. One way this was illustrated was through the sharing of material goods in the prison environment, in particular food and drink. Kyle (Ireland) explained how it was this movement and interaction, based around the sharing of such items that justified his description of the prison wing as a ‘community’:

*you get people running around looking for tobacco and milk, sugar, tea bags...all sorts! Your next door neighbour, you know what I mean! You need to help them...and he helps you out when you're stuck.*

This example of those in prison helping each other out, and looking out for each other, demonstrates evidence of generalised reciprocity that could, as Putnam (1993) argues, be indicative of civil solidarity. While this example of sharing food was highlighted as evidence of the *existence* of a community in prison, these acts of support and sharing will be discussed in more detail when considering opportunities for *contributions* to the ‘prison community’ in Chapter Seven.

The findings discussed in this section demonstrate that where participants identified the existence of a community within the prison setting, this was by the purpose that

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<sup>37</sup> The ‘landing’ refers to the level or floor that an individual’s cell is located on, within a particular wing.



communitarian behaviour served in alleviating some of the pains and deprivations of the prison environment. This was demonstrated by the sense, across participants' narratives, that the existence of a community was necessary to prevent a destructive and chaotic prison environment, rather than as a collective good that had intrinsic value or meaning beyond these purposes. This may not be entirely distinct from the development of community in some areas beyond the prison, where instrumental solidarity may serve the purpose of mitigating the strongest effects of crime, disorder and poverty in communities, however there was a sense that external *relational* communities were meaningful in a way which was not replicated across the prisons, with the "quality and character of human relationships" (Gusfield, 1975: xvi) in these contexts holding greater significance in participants' subjective understandings of community. Nevertheless, some participants identified particular geographical areas or social groupings within the prison environment, where they considered there to be a more meaningful sense of community. The next section of the chapter discusses where and how these pockets of community were considered to exist at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds.

#### **6.4.2 Pockets of Community in an Otherwise Individualised Environment**

Although the findings thus far demonstrate that any broad sense of 'community' in the prison setting was instrumental to ensure survival of the prison environment and mitigation of its most serious harms, the data highlights that there were also smaller pockets of meaningful community that could be identified within the prisons. Often these were based around physical spaces in the prison setting which allowed some autonomy in cultivating 'communities' beyond administered groups, or through participants' shared characteristics beyond the fact of incarceration. Consideration is now given to each of these, beginning with a discussion of how the geography of the prison impacted understandings of community inside.

One of the themes which was evident in participants' assertions that meaningful communities did exist within the prison setting, was that the sense of community described was often focused around a particular location within the prison, with these being highlighted as exceptions to the lack of a community feel within the prison environment more broadly. In line with work that has considered the "emotional geography" of the prison – with emotions felt and performed differentiated by the

“emotional zone” of the prison space (Crewe et al., 2014: 67) – the findings of this study suggest that the prison environments were also socially or relationally differentiated; some spaces within the prison facilitated cultivation of a sense of community that was absent in the prisons as a whole.

One area which was identified as fostering the creation of communities within the prison environment was that of education, with references made to both a school community, or that developed between groups of men in particular classes or workshops. While education can encompass far more than formal academic study, it must be noted that the provision of formal education operates rather differently at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds, partly due to the procurement arrangements, but also due to the sentence lengths for which each prison is intended. Whilst HMP Leeds is predominantly, but not entirely, populated by those on remand or serving sentences under 12 months, Mountjoy Prison takes all committals from the local courts and thus imprisons those serving all lengths of sentence. This, to some extent, explains the difference in length of courses available, and the range of education provision. However, seemingly more significant is the difference between jurisdictions in terms of responsibility, and procurement, of education in prisons. Prison Education in England<sup>38</sup> is provided by various colleges and private sector organisations under Offender Learning & Skills Service (OLASS) contracts<sup>39</sup>. These are awarded by the Skills & Funding Agency (SFA) and governed by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services & Skills)<sup>40</sup>. OLASS providers are expected to provide core education in basic skills (English, Maths and English for Speakers of other Languages), vocational qualifications and employability skills, and this is reflected in the educational opportunities available to men imprisoned at HMP Leeds.

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<sup>38</sup> Whilst within the same jurisdiction, and sharing common practice in many areas of the criminal justice system, provision of prison education in Wales differs, due to the devolution of responsibility for education (Coates, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> While plans were made to hand prison governors responsibility for choosing education providers, before the Prison and Courts Bill (2016-17) was dropped, giving them more freedom to determine the shape and nature of educational opportunities available to individuals held within their institution, this continues the role of the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service in the delivery of education for those in prison.

<sup>40</sup> During the period of fieldwork, education at HMP Leeds was provided by Novus, a not-for-profit social enterprise that previously operated as The Manchester College.

Contrastingly, prison education in Ireland is provided by the Prison Education service, which forms part of the Educational Training Boards (ETBs), and teachers are provided by the ETBs. This results in Education Units at prisons enjoying substantial independence from the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE), with a more holistic curriculum following a liberal model of Adult Education focused around choice and autonomy of the individual, rather than the ‘needs’ determined by the prison authorities (Behan, 2014c). Scholars have recognised the potential for school environments to be preferred by those in prison when compared to wings (MacGuinness, 2000), as they provide a place of sanctuary or escape from prison life (Crewe, 2009), and reflect a different “ethos” or “atmosphere” to other areas of the prison (Behan, 2014c: 24). Like Behan’s participants (2014c), many of the men at Mountjoy Prison identified the school environment as different from that of the rest of the prison, with one key difference being that this was a place where they identified a sense of community. This was prevalent in participants’ comments during interviews and focus groups, with the school being described as a community due to having “community spirit” (Alan) and being a “haven” (Bobby) compared to the rest of the prison. Fionn highlighted how the school was a place that individuals could see those from other wings regularly, thus contributing to a sense of community that participants did not identify in the majority of the prison environment:

*Yeah...I'd say my community at the moment is in here, because you do see certain people every day...in class, so you sort of have a little school community, and you know people off different wings...but most of the people are, I'd say a load that I see up in the school, but I know a few others around like. I just buzz up to the school you know what I mean...it's pointless sitting around there [on the wing].*

Whilst this sense of belonging to a school community was not identified in the same way by participants at HMP Leeds, some did note the importance of involvement in education classes for determining the individuals whom they considered to be part of their community in prison. However, these were limited to the education classes that individuals identified as allowing them choice and autonomy in the way they spent their time (discussed further at Chapter Seven). Several participants, however, highlighted the Prisoner Information Desks (commonly referred to as ‘PID desks’) as a location on the wings where they were able to cultivate a sense of community. Alex explained how,

for him, seeing the way people interacted around the PID desk demonstrated a sense of community on the wing:

*Yeah definitely a sense of community on that wing, yeah. I think it's the lads that's on the wing. In itself, and some of the lads that are on the wing are like tryin' to make it...I don't know trying to make it a bit better, but they have a laugh and a joke don't they? Like you see round that PID desk certain people sat round there having a laugh and a chat. You don't see it on other wings do ya?*

Highlighting the more laid-back interactions between individuals when sat around the PID desk, Alex's comments demonstrated that there was significance attached to this physical space in terms of the social interaction it facilitated. When asked about its significance, Alex explained how the PID desk provided a change from the problematic nature of architecture and layout on the wings:

*I just think it's a place for people to congregate kinda thing ain't it? 'Cause you've got the meds thing, and then you've got the PID desk where people are sorta like congregating haven't ya?...It's somewhere like to sit, kinda thing, isn't it? 'Cause there no...If you look on that landing where are the chairs for anybody to sit down on?*

Alex's observations demonstrated how something as simple as creating a space to sit on a wing which was otherwise bare, could serve the purpose of bringing people together physically in a way which was conducive to developing a sense of relational community. This suggests that the architecture and spatiality of the prison wing can be just as important to shaping experiences of relational community as the layout of furniture in visiting rooms can be to fostering positive interactions with family members (Moran, 2013b).

Finally, another location which participants in both jurisdictions identified as having a sense of community was the prison gym. Isaac (England) illustrated this point when he described the shared interest around which time in the gym was focused:

*The only community I really belong to in here is the gym - the guys that go to the gym. So you've certainly got something in common there with the people that are attending, whereas on the day-to-day I have nothing in common with the people I'm living here with.*

Isaac's comments reflected the view of several participants that it was within the gym that individuals could find commonality, and common purpose, even where they felt this was lacking in the prison more broadly. However, despite some individuals in both jurisdictions highlighting this sense of shared interest or purpose as indicative of a community within the prison gym, the meaning that this 'community' held was limited. Cian (Ireland) felt that this was "nothing really" other than a "bit of a laugh":

*It's the same routine...I do a bit of training up here in the gym, circuits and that - we do have a bit of a laugh and banter in there like between us all, but there's nothing really. You're here. You know what you're here for, so what do you do like?*

Cian's comment that "you know what you're here for" demonstrated a broader theme in participants' responses that these 'communities' created in prison were limited in their meaning for participants. While they may provide a momentary sense of belonging to a collective, there was a perception that these glimpses of community spirit were somewhat superficial, masking the reality that it was only by nature of a shared presence in the prison – and a shared history of criminal acts – that these people were together. As such, even when smaller spaces enabled the cultivation of more relational community within prison, the meaning this held for participants was limited as it arose out of being put in a particular location against their will – a location which by its nature pointed out the negative, and potentially untrustworthy behaviour of those participants were living, studying or working out alongside.

For a number of participants who identified a sense of collective belonging to a community in prison, this was in relation to a group of individuals much smaller than the total population of the prison or even wing. However, some participants suggested that these smaller communities could be directly opposed to, or in conflict with, a broader sense of community due to their negativity – a situation which further contributed to a sense of atomisation within the prison. The following discussion will consider the ways in which communities within the prisons were viewed as negative and consequently avoided by participants.

## **6.5 Avoiding belonging: The Negativity of Community in Prison**

The findings in this thesis demonstrate that a sense of community was not always viewed as positive, and the development of community, or collective efficacy, was in some cases actively resisted by participants who viewed potential communities as predominantly negative. Whilst this view was also taken of external communities in some cases, there were two key ways that potential prison communities were identified as particularly problematic and to be avoided during incarceration – the enforced and inescapable nature of collective living in the prison setting, and the organisation of ‘communities’ in prison around the use of drugs. Each of these issues is now discussed in turn.

### **6.5.1 Inescapable Community**

Despite the emphasis on isolation in the use of prison for punishment, the prison environment is somewhat paradoxical in this respect, with the potential to create profound isolation, loneliness, and disconnection from individuals’ loved ones, while also forcing individuals to live amongst those they may not otherwise have chosen to interact with. Sykes (1958: 4) describes how this, as opposed to isolation, could create pains for individuals during incarceration:

*The society of prisoners...is not only physically compressed; it is psychologically compressed as well, since prisoners live in an enforced intimacy where each man's behaviour is subject both to the constant scrutiny of his fellow captives and the surveillance of the custodians. It is not solitude that plagues the prisoner but life en masse.*

Supporting this idea that living alongside others in fact ‘plagued’ individuals during incarceration, some participants highlighted the challenges when this forced collective social life of prison is inescapable. For these individuals, the inability to remove themselves from the prison community and associated interactions made the existence of community in prison problematic when compared to those in existence outside. Declan (Ireland) discussed how in some instances the methods used to cultivate a sense of community spirit within the prison were problematic:

*Well there can be community spirit, but sometimes there's too much community – they never stop talking sometimes! Even when you're locked in your cells they'll be shouting out the window to each other, or the other day when we were all watching the match they'd be kicking the doors when a goal is scored. Sometimes it's a buzz, but other times it's too much.*

Alluding to the significance of sound in prison as a source of tension (Rice, 2016), Declan's comments illustrate the way that the particular context of incarceration can make the cultivation of community something negative – individuals lack control over the times and places in which they can remove themselves from communal life. Despite physical removal from collective activity during lock-up periods, Declan demonstrates how the sounds of the prison environment can create a lived experience of inescapable collective presence, with banging on doors providing a constant reminder of the fact that these individuals are never truly alone. This highlights a contrast to the outside world, where most participants were more able to differentiate between the time, space and circumstances within which they choose to engage in a community, and those where those who have them can seek out the privacy of their own homes, albeit the lack of secure housing for some participants would make this a significant difficulty outside of prison too. As such, the existence of a prison community is not subject, in the same way, to the public/private divide that has “underpinned the traditional association of citizenship with the public sphere” (Lister, 2007: 56). Rather, common living pervades all aspects of individuals' lives, whether physically, emotionally or aurally. Both Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds have the heavy metal gates and cell doors characteristic of a Victorian prison, with the architecture of the building amplifying the volume and intensity of noises on the wings. As Carrabine (2005: 897-898) notes, the prison “generates intrinsic and fundamental conflicts, not least since imprisoned people are confined against their will, with people they would normally not choose to be with, in circumstances they can do little to change and are governed by custodians who police practically every aspect of their daily lives.” Declan's comments demonstrate how this collective living could generate such conflicts through noise, while many participants, in both jurisdictions, highlighted one particular type of community within the prison setting which created particularly negative circumstances fueling the fundamental conflicts Carrabine (2005) describes – a community built around drugs.

## 6.5.2 A Community of Drugs

Levels of drug-use by those in prison are significantly higher than for the general population, and research has shown that drug-use during incarceration is common, with 26% of the England & Wales prison population surveyed saying that they had taken either illicit drugs or medication in their current prison, and many arriving at prison with a history of substance misuse (HMIP, 2015). Similarly, high levels of life time drug-use are evident amongst men in prison in Ireland (72%) when compared to men in the general population (14%) (Hannon et al., 2000; National Advisory Committee on Drugs & Alcohol, 2014). The relatively recent emergence of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), in particular 'Spice'<sup>41</sup>, has also been identified as having significant impacts on the social dynamics of English prisons through its role in debts, bullying, violence and deaths in custody in England & Wales (Norton, 2016; Ralphs et al., 2017). Additionally, the use of NPS has been identified as increasing, in contrast to traditional drug use, in Irish prisons (Fagan, 2017). The prevalence of drug-use was spoken about frequently by participants at HMP Leeds and Mountjoy Prison. For Isaac (England) the use of drugs was so prevalent that he felt this was the “biggest” indication of a community within the prison setting:

*The biggest community that's evident to me is...is people that want to get their hands on drugs!... That's the community, really...you do get all the guys together that want to do drugs together...It's a social community in here. It's cos everybody shares the same common theme...I hadn't even heard of spice 'til I came in here, that's how bad I were!*

This perception of how drugs can shape the development of prison social groupings, and impact on the character of social life in prison, echoes Munson et al.'s (1973: 197-8) consideration of drugs as creating community:

*it provides a community activity that binds together, at least the younger cons, into a working system that exalts cunning and ruthlessness in the service of inmate solidarity.*

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<sup>41</sup> 'Spice' is a synthetic cannabinoid which was originally designed as a legal high intended to mimic the effects of cannabis. In the UK spice and other NPS have now been criminalised under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016.



Other participants' comments about the way prison 'used to be', particularly from older men, suggested the community-cultivating effect of drugs in the prison environment was indeed limited to those actively involved in this 'community', predominantly perceived to be the younger men in the prisons as Munson et al. (1973) posited. The use of drugs was noted as particularly disruptive for those non-smoking prisoners who were sharing cells with individuals using illegal substances, especially Spice. Responding to the question of whether there was community in prison, Logan (England) discussed the community characteristics of the different wings, and the problems this posed for some in relation to Spice:

*There's A,B,C,D wing, and there's different Spices on every wing...The thing is, with the people doing spice, they wanna do jail different to probably the people you've interviewed, or than older people or new prisoners. The thing is though, if you're a new prisoner you can't just go to the office and say to an officer "my pad mate's doing spice, can I be moved?" ...It's difficult, cause one of my pals – he doesn't smoke it, his pad mate did and then when he did a piss test he failed it cause it was in his urine, cause his pad mate smoked it. You know there needs to be some structure to how you wanna do your jail time, cause at the moment they just mix all the good prisoners up with the bad prisoners.*

The significant impact NPS and Spice were perceived to have on the sense of community at HMP Leeds, echoes Crewe's (2005a) findings about the impact of the presence of heroin on social life at HMP Wellingborough, demonstrating how such drugs create a community amongst those who use them but present divisions, tensions and resentment amongst others in the prison environment. This research furthered Crewe's findings by demonstrating that the impact of the negative communities built around drug use also served to disrupt a broader sense of community spirit within Mountjoy Prison. Thomas (Ireland) explained how the influence of illicit drugs in the prison environment stood opposed to the development of a solidary community within the prison, with the intoxication of individuals being put forward as the dominant feature of the environment, except for small pre-existing communities developed outside of the prison space. When asked about the existence of a community in prison, he said:

*Erm...not really. There's no, what's the word...[whistles]...there's no community spirit here. It's every man for himself! The lot of them are like friends from outside, so if one of them's gonna be fighting then*

*their little community will help them out like but, other than that...it's just everyone gets stoned out of their heads.*

As Crewe (2005a) found, Thomas' comments illustrate how drugs can serve to erode solidarity between prisoners, as individuals are increasingly concerned with illicit substances. His reference to individuals' intoxicated states of being 'out of their heads' also suggest a practical difficulty in cultivating any meaningful sense of cohesive community when individuals are not 'with it', or sober enough to interact in a way that forms meaningful relationships. This perception can, however, be contrasted with that of Isaac (England) who identified a 'community of drugs' in the prison as a way those with shared interests, and similar outlooks on how to do their time, were brought together through commonality to develop a collective of social interaction. As such, the impact of drugs on the prison environment was seen to cultivate community amongst drug users, while creating tension and distance with those who did not engage in drug use.

Whilst this was identified as particularly problematic within the prison context, this negative 'community' was not something unique to participants' experiences in prison with a number noting how their external local communities were characterised by a similar tension between negative 'communities' of those involved in drug-use and others wanting to avoid this 'community'. As Ronan (Ireland) said: "Growing up my community had fuck all – just drugs and violence". This was particularly prevalent in the responses of those from inner-city areas around Dublin where drug-use has been identified as extremely common among young people, and a major social problem impacting on communities (Connolly, 2002; O'Gorman, 1998), to the extent that drug-use has come to be seen as normal in these areas (Bowden, 2019). In addition to the harm and disruption caused to external communities by drug use, in some instances this also resulted in an apprehension about returning to one's external communities, with the same negative circumstances of drug-use being prevalent, heightening chances of relapse where individuals had previously managed to successfully avoid the negative 'community of drugs' in prison, and thus further restricting their opportunities to make positive contributions to their external communities:

*I got out here and my brother was dying of cancer and the other brother was addicted to heroin too, and I was clean after doing eight and a half*

*year in here so...when I got out it was a bad vibe, like getting out to two of them on drugs...so that's why I ended up back in.*

(Joshua, Ireland)

Joshua's reflections on his previous release demonstrated how, for some participants, the challenge of avoiding becoming part of a 'community' organised around drugs was heightened, and extended into post-release life where individuals would be returning to communities with prevalent drug use, whether in their local area or family. As such, while the prison 'community' was identified as negative, chaotic and volatile as a result of drug use, this was not necessarily in contrast to the 'communities' individuals spoke of outside.

This section of the chapter has demonstrated that there are a number of ways that prison within the community setting is seen as a negative to be avoided, rather than something to be actively sought out or encouraged, and the challenges that are associated with attempts to avoid the negative consequences of involvement with such a 'community', an issue which also extended to external communities for some participants. While networks and connections are built up within the prisons in a way which might reflect understandings of social capital, this capital is not necessarily conducive to the common good (Fukuyama, 2000). Having considered the existence of community within the prison setting, positive and negative, discussion now turns to the various factors which were identified by participants as restricting the extent to which a sense of collective community could be developed in prison, or which served to disrupt any collective solidarity developed in this environment, resulting in the atomisation of men in prison.

## **6.6 Individuals in an Atomised 'Community'**

Despite noting the existence of some sort of prison 'community', whether cultivated out of shared experience, genuine acts of goodwill between prisoners, or necessity for survival, several participants argued there was in fact no sense of community in prison. Interestingly, these individuals did not necessarily deny the existence of a collective identity but problematised the notion that any 'community' in existence would result in collective efficacy or instill action in the collective interests ultimately. As Ethan (England) said: "This might be a prison community, but there ain't no community in

here”. This suggested that while the prison as a location might constitute a *geographical* community, it was not perceived to hold the significance of a *relational* community in the same way (Bell & Newby, 1972). There were several reasons, identified by participants, for the lack of relational community in the prison setting, which related to the particular social and institutional context of the prisons themselves. These are now considered in turn.

### 6.6.1 Individualism and Lack of Trust

Despite claims that friendships developed in this environment can lead to the development of a collective, or community, prison research often comes with a substantial caveat relating to the fragility of the relationships upon which any prison community is built (Mathiesen, 1965; Crewe, 2009; Jewkes, 2011a). Whilst relationships may be developed amongst individuals incarcerated alongside each other, many of those interviewed highlighted how these relationships either constituted situational friendships or mere associations which enabled interaction and civility during imprisonment but would not be perceived as genuine enough to warrant trust or continue outside of this environment.

A number of participants demonstrated a willingness to distinguish themselves from others on the basis that their behaviour could not be trusted. Oliver (England) explained how he could not consider there to be a community in prison, because of this lack of trust, with his own ability to consider himself part of a prison community damaged by the behaviour of others:

*Yeah. I would never describe this as my community...in jail...I'm not part of these...Most of these are like animals! [laughs] ...I've got a good six or seven...there's about ten of us on the wing what I would say that's my community - I am friendly with them. I've got a couple of people on each wing who I'm friends with, but apart from that no...You couldn't trust anybody in here. You can't trust 'em. Like I can leave my door open cause we've got five...we've got ten of us on the wing who are all friends so they won't go in me pad, but...if you left summit. Like if you left summit in here and walked out, it'd be gone...They'd pinch off their own mums, half of 'em.*

This lack of trust was heightened when individuals lacked control or autonomy over the choices of who to leave access to their cells to, for example, making suspicion of

all necessary. In light of this suspicion, some participants felt it was dangerous to appear too friendly, with Ethan explaining how this made the cultivation of a sense of community, or even friendship, difficult:

*There's one or two that I've got certain things in common with...but I certainly wouldn't class that as a community...But na I'd say I don't feel part of any community, definitely when you're here you know...it sorta breaks it. It sorta waters down community this...It's very...it's all one...individuals are out for themselves... it can sort of break down every sense of community what you thought that you had, or that you did have. And if you try to establish them while you're in here, no...you're leaving yourself open to be attacked really in many ways...If you try to be over-friendly, or if you try to sort of empathise too much with people, then it's definitely looked at with suspicion, so... yeah there might be a prison community, but there ain't a community in here[...]You might be all in the same place, but it's extremely fractured within that...within this space, you know. There's nothing to band us all together.*

In addition to the limitations placed on the development of any sense of community because of widespread distrust in the prison community, participants also drew attention to the individualised environment prisons ultimately presented. Prisoners in Ireland and England frequently used the well-used saying of ‘doing your own time’ to describe their own, and others’, approach to life in prison – a maxim which is at odds with the development of the solidarity or collective efficacy that might be expected of a cohesive community. When asked if he considered himself to belong to a community, Matthew (Ireland) said:

*No – not at the moment. It used to be a community in prison with everyone mixing together and that, but not anymore. Now it's every man for himself.*

Descriptions of how the culture within the prison had changed to disrupt a meaningful sense of community was evident in the narratives of a number of Irish participants, who referred to the introduction of incentivised regimes during the course of their sentence (IPS, 2012b; 2013) as disrupting any solidarity that had existed beforehand. During a focus group, Bobby (Ireland) referenced the point of the incentivised regime’s introduction as a definitive point at which community within the prison was eroded. When asked whether there was a community within prison, he said: “No, not since this enhanced regime. It’s all changed – everyone just looks out for themselves.”

Bobby and Matthew's comments demonstrate that by seeking to regulate behaviour through a regime which is focused on achieving improvements to one's individual circumstances, the incentivised regime had removed the willingness to prioritise collective interests within the prison. This presented an uncomfortable tension with the idea of engagement in constructive activity – demonstrating the beneficial engagement needed to work up the regime levels – as something which fostered community. While the benefits of these activities for fostering a sense of community were described by those involved (discussed further in Chapter Seven), the regime encouraged men to prioritise individual interests. Although the prioritisation of individual interests may not be unique to the prison environment, with individual families becoming more distant from wider communities (Giddens, 1991; McCold & Wachtel, 2003) and individualistic interests being encouraged by the neoliberal economic models operating in both jurisdictions (Bauman, 2001; Sennett, 1998), this seemed to be more pronounced in the prison environment where adherence to sentence plans, following prison rules, and engaging in constructive activity have immediate and material implications for individuals' day-to-day living conditions, and ultimately their liberty. Such embedding of individual interests into the incentivised regimes thus worked to fracture collective interests in a much more pervasive way than in participants' perceptions of their external communities.

While the incentivised regimes of both jurisdictions were evidently impacting on the sense of meaningful community within the prisons, participants also identified various other features of the prison environments that illustrated their individualised or, as Mathiesen (1965) and Clemmer (1940: 297) posit, “atomized” characters.

### **6.6.2 Institutional Prevention of Community Formation**

In addition to the increased individualisation of the prison regimes, and the emphasis on enhancing individual, rather than collective interests through compliance, participants at HMP Leeds identified a number of other features and functions of the institution that hampered development of a cohesive sense of community amongst prisoners. These relate, in part, to the particular nature of HMP Leeds as a local Category B prison and the functions it serves, but also highlight architectural and cultural features present in many prisons in England & Wales and beyond.

Participants noted the lack of opportunity for unstructured association, during which individuals could undertake the ordinary social interaction they considered necessary to the existence of a community. While some highlighted how prisoners ‘chat’ to each other as a way of drawing parallels with external, residential communities, others felt the time spent out of cells was insufficient for this to constitute a community. Alex (England) commented how the one thing which would make him ‘feel’ more like a member of a community was if there was “more sosh<sup>42</sup>” to allow for increased interaction between prisoners.

Other participants also noted the impact of official advice and guidance, both on reception into prison and during one’s sentence, in hindering the development of a sense of community or collective identity within the prison environment. Some participants explained how, during their time in the First Night Centre on D wing, they had been advised by staff to ‘keep your head down’, to stay out of trouble and avoid conflict during the course of their sentence. Whilst a number of participants did indeed note that such a tactic had allowed them to avoid confrontation or conflict, this led to a situation where individuals actively avoided interaction or the development of friendships with those living around them, thus exacerbating the culture of mutual mistrust and aloofness that has consistently been found to characterise prison environments (Crewe et al., 2014; Crewe, 2005; Day et al., 2005; Greer, 2000; Phillips, 2007). Isaac (England) explained how this presented challenges when his efforts to keep his head down led to suspicions that he was in fact a police officer – a label which would attract significant negative attention in the prison setting, and place him in a potentially dangerous position as illustrated by the fact that former police officers are considered to be within the remit of Vulnerable Prisoner (VP) definitions (Gibson & Cavadino, 2008: 204).

*You hear people say "Just keep your head down and get on with it". Well that's exactly what I've done, now look how that's reacted for me! Because I won't be part of that community, because I won't be seen to be playing in the drug scene or blah blah blah all of a sudden you've got somebody saying "oo why not? Why is he not with us? Why won't he play?"*

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<sup>42</sup> During fieldwork at HMP Leeds, prisoners frequently referred to association time (time spent out of cells, on the wing, with no structured activity) by abbreviation as “Sosh” – a term widely recognised across prison establishments in England & Wales (see Cattermole, 2015: 6; Harvey, 2007: 68).

Staff guidance to keep one's head down serves to reinforce the idea that, within the prison environment, there is often more to lose than there is to gain from collective involvement (Crewe, 2009). However, this also creates a tension for those imprisoned given the potential benefits of a prison community, even if merely instrumental, for individuals' survival in prison (as discussed at 6.4.1). Isaac's comments demonstrated how following institutional guidance which furthered individualisation may ensure compliance with the regime, however it could also put men in particularly vulnerable or dangerous positions depending on how this was perceived by others on the wings.

Despite the associations that individuals spoke of having in prison, whether cultivated within the institution, other prisons, or outside, a number of participants described institutional rules, culture and characteristics that disrupted any sense of community within the prisons. They spoke of the transitory nature of the prison environments – as a Category B local prison, men should only spend six months at HMP Leeds before either being released or transferred to another prison for the rest of their sentence, while Mountjoy Prison also took daily committals from the local courts and thus the vast range of sentence-lengths resulted in constant flux. Participants in both jurisdictions spoke of how individuals would come and go, with the reality of the situation being that long-term company could not be counted on, meaning genuine friendships or stable communities were unlikely to be cultivated. Cian (Ireland) described Mountjoy Prison as a “big circus” with “different clowns coming every day of the week”. Isaac (England) noted how the disruption of any community was felt acutely at HMP Leeds due to the frequency with which individuals had to adjust to a new pad-mate, as one whom they had got to know and be used to was either released, ‘shipped out’<sup>43</sup> or, in the scenario described here, moved onto Basic<sup>44</sup>:

*The disruption is intended to be against the perpetrators, but it also inevitably will affect the wider community won't it?... You're not just*

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<sup>43</sup> In England, the phrase ‘shipped out’ was used to describe situations where individuals were moved from one prison to another. They were considered to have been ‘shipped out’ of HMP Leeds, to another prison. This phrase was used frequently by those within the prison, whether individuals had been moved due to their behaviour or to progress to another institution as part of their sentence.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Basic’ refers to Basic Regime, which is the lowest of the different privilege levels in the HMPPS Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme. Individuals are held on basic regime if they have not met the local requirements for admission to Standard or Enhanced level. Under section 2.4 of PSI 11/2011, those on Basic receive the minimum statutory and decency requirements for a normal location regime e.g. not in segregation (NOMS, 2011).



*punishing the guy that's done wrong, but the guy that he's padded up with – he's the one on his own waiting for the next guy to come in. You're disrupting the whole...if you wanna call that a community, you're disrupting it all the time.*

Whilst such disruption of developed connections is arguably an inherent feature of dealing with the high-turnover of committals characteristic of prisons like HMP Leeds and Mountjoy, participants also identified ways that staff disrupted the development of communities within, and outside of, the prison through enforcement of official guidelines. Although the only participant to highlight this disruptive rule, Andrew – an English man in his 60s on the Vulnerable Prisoner Unit (VPU) due to conviction for a sexual offence – noted how prison rules on communication between prisoners made the development and maintenance of meaningful communities during imprisonment extremely difficult, even though real friendships could be developed behind bars:

*Because of the peculiarity of the [VP] wing, you're not allowed [to develop friendships]! Once a person leaves here, it's very hard to keep in touch wi' 'em. Say they get shipped out to Moorlands<sup>45</sup> or something like that...you've got to have the Governor's permission to write to them...You're not supposed to associate with a fellow criminal. So friendships are gone, as soon as that person's shipped out, as soon as you get out of prison...which is wrong.*

Underpinning this barrier to the development of meaningful sustained friendships, and consequently the development of a meaningful long-lasting community amongst those within prison, is an assumption about individuals' suitability as potential influences on one another's behaviour. Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 49/2011, at s.2.24 (NOMS, 2018), explicitly states that governor permission should not be withheld "unless there are reasons to believe that such correspondence will seriously impede the rehabilitation of either prisoner, or where it would be desirable, in the interests of security or good order and discipline". Andrew's experience here demonstrates how the very fact of an individual's incarceration, or conviction for a particular type of offence, taints them as immediately unsuitable for other men in prison to communicate with outside of the highly-controlled prison environment. Having these restrictions on sustained

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<sup>45</sup> HMP Moorland is a Category C Prison and Young Offender Institution in South Yorkshire. As such, this was one institution identified by participants as a location individuals may move on to from HMP Leeds, after their initial committal.

relationships, written into the governance of the prison, presents a structural impediment to the development of any meaningful sense of community, solidarity or friendship, alongside the various social barriers that already exist within the prison.

Overall, prison creates a situation where, despite being unable to avoid the collective aspects of prison life or seek out privacy, individuals also find themselves in a context where the development of genuine bonds viewed as cultivating ‘community spirit’ are disrupted. This occurs not only by features of prison culture, but also by structural features of the regime which prioritise individualism whilst discouraging friendships or meaningful interaction.

### **6.6.3 Austerity & Industrial Action as heightened disruptions to a Prison Community**

The economic and industrial contexts in which this research took place appeared to have a bearing on participants’ responses as to whether a community existed in prison, and the extent to which they identified as belonging to a community outside. At the time of fieldwork in Ireland, there was an ongoing dispute between the Prison Officers’ Association (POA) and the Irish Prison Service (IPS), with regards to stagnation in wages, which had resulted in a work to rule industrial action reducing officers’ involvement in additional activities such as the Red Cross initiative<sup>46</sup>, identified by some as beneficial to cultivating a sense of community within the prison. In addition, during my fieldwork I was made aware of issues with staffing levels; due to low staffing levels, resulting in high levels of over-time, officers were owed substantial periods of time off work. This resulted in a particularly low number of officers working on the last weeks of the quarter which had a knock-on effect for the viability of particular activities at the prison.

In early 2017, when fieldwork was undertaken at HMP Leeds, the prison estate across England & Wales was in what has widely been described as a state of ‘crisis’ as

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<sup>46</sup> The Irish Red Cross Scheme is a volunteering programme which operates across a number of prisons in Ireland, running health-based initiatives such as HIV awareness raising, first-aid training, and campaigns to improve hygiene in prison. Further discussion of participants’ involvement in this scheme is given in Chapter Seven.

austerity measures resulted in cuts to staff numbers (Khomami, 2017; Travis, 2016; Garnier, 2017). This was attested to in conversations with participants and staff during my fieldwork and was also evident from my own experiences and observations on the wings. In addition to the overall reduction in staffing levels, HM Prison and Probation Service were finding it difficult to recruit and keep new members of staff and were required to bring in officers from other prisons to help, or ‘guest’ as often referred to by interviewees. Observations made by participants regarding staffing levels, and reliance on ‘guesting’ officers, highlighted a connection between levels and consistency of staffing and the development of a sense of community behind bars. While much of the existing literature on the prison community focuses on the sense of community or solidarity *amongst* prisoners, an unexpected feature of some interviews was the reference to staff members, and changes to their circumstances, as having a significant bearing on the extent to which a solidary community could exist in the prison environment. A change in the dynamic of prisoner-staff relationships over time has been noted in prison research (Crewe, 2005b; 2006; 2011), with the oppositional culture of ‘them’ v ‘us’ no longer holding the strength of position that it might previously have been considered to within the code and values shared by prisoners (Sykes, 1958). Researchers have identified how the individualisation of the prison experience, including the increasing emphasis on responsabilisation and incentivisation, has led to a situation where staff are not feared, or viewed as the enemy, to the same extent that previous studies would suggest (Crewe, 2011a). Nevertheless, literature indicates that there are still clear limits to interaction and identification with staff as this relationship between the two groups remains problematic, and sometimes hostile (Sim, 2007); as the ambiguity of these relationships heighten, becoming less authoritarian and rigid, interactions can be experienced as “head games” for those in prison (Crewe, 2011a: 458; 2006). Interestingly, a few participants in this study identified the changes to staffing during their time in prison, as having a detrimental effect on the development of community behind bars; for them, the reduction of staffing levels, and inconsistency in staff, had damaged any sense of community that might previously have been shared *with* staff members. This was evident in Andrew’s comments about how staff shortages had “very much” had an impact on the erosion of the community he felt had existed when he was first sent to prison. When asked if he currently belonged to a community, Andrew (England) responded:

*No. It used to be when I first come in...Because they had people like the over 60s rep, mentors...they was fully staffed...and if you had any problems there was people there for you. Not anymore because they're short staffed...There's no mentoring system. The only help you've got on here is Listeners, or if you can find a decent officer that has got the time.*

Blake (England) also highlighted the significance of staff shortages when he said that there was no community in prison “like it used to be”, due to the lack of consistency in Senior Officers (SOs) working on the wings:

*I think with all the staff shortages...cos you don't know what SO you're gonna get on there! There's a different SO on every day. "I'm just guesting. I'm just guesting."<sup>47</sup> There's only Miss \_\_\_ who's on half the time!*

It should be noted that, during the research, concerns over staffing levels were likely to be heightened at HMP Leeds given its position as the most overcrowded prison in England & Wales, at 171% of Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) capacity (Howard League, 2017). These pressures on staffing were evident during the fieldwork period and regularly attested to by both staff and participants, in anecdotal discussions as well as in the interview context. However, this inclusion of prison staff in perceptions of a prison community did not translate to a complete erosion of the ‘them’ v ‘us’ culture. Whilst scarce resources had negative impacts on opportunities to cultivate a sense of community, viewed as positive by prisoners, the frustrations that arose from the failures to facilitate a decent and constructive regime enabled the cultivation of a sense of solidarity and community based on opposition to the system and the prison officers, who are the most immediate nearby representatives of this system. Having said he thought there was little community in prison, due to the individual focus of life inside, Ryan (Ireland) noted that in anger and frustration at conditions, such as lack of time out of cell, collective opposition to staff control could create a sense of a distinct prisoner community:

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Guestring’ was a term used to refer to staff who had been deployed to work in a prison, or part of an establishment, that they were unfamiliar with and was not their usual place of work. This was a problematic feature of daily prison life at HMP Leeds, which also presented methodological challenges and role tension where faced with a situation where I, as a researcher, was more familiar with the particular prison environment than some of the officers present (discussed further in Chapter Four).

*AS: So would you say the community is just the prisoners or the prison staff too?*

*All of them – prison staff and teachers too. But don't get me wrong, if it kicked off with the officers then we'd stick together.*

Ryan's comments demonstrated how solidarity was something that arose where necessary in opposition to the system, seeming to reflect Goffman's (1961) descriptions of how inmates fraternise in opposition to the system within total institutions. This suggested that despite more amicable relationships with prison officers than the work of Sykes (1958) or Goffman (1961) might predict, ultimately imprisoned men would band together where necessary. This ultimate oppositional distinction between prisoners and staff as inherently different was also echoed by participants in England. As George said "we're seen as the criminals and the prisoners, and they're the staff".

## **6.7 Defining 'Home', Liminality and the Multiplicity of Community Identification**

Despite the fact many individuals identified the creation of a sense of community, through developing bonds and associations based on shared experience, other participants voiced a fervent opposition to identifying themselves as part of a community in prison. For these participants, identification as belonging to the 'prison community' signified an acceptance of prison as the space within which ones' life would be lived. By considering oneself part of the prison community, individuals were considered to be accepting prison as their home – an expression Blake (England) suggested would indicate that he was institutionalised when asked if he belonged to a community:

*Na I'm not institutionalised me. I class this as I'm in transit, me! I never make this place home...Once you make it home it's game over. I'll never make it home. I'll make it comfortable as it is – I've got my own clothes, trainers, everything I need, but that always gets give away, and then I go home and make a fresh start, you know what I mean?...Yeah. It's never home! Some people that make it home, never...they're back and forth all their life.*

This resistance to developing a sense of community in prison, due to perceived connections with institutionalisation, speaks to the reluctance that Turner (2013)

identified of individuals to accept prison as their ‘home’, due to the fact this might make it harder to reintegrate into communities outside. This tension between two communities can be particularly problematic where the distinctions between inside and outside are not definitive, with liminal spaces “betwixt and between” (Thomas & Christian, 2018: 273) presenting an uncertain connection or joining of the prison world and external communities that complicate one’s sense of belonging.

This multiplicity of community identification, and the complexity of liminality that accompanies such dual-identification, was a theme prevalent in the narratives of the men interviewed in this study. For a number of men interviewed, the question of whether they belonged to a community, and what might constitute this community, was particularly complex, and drew upon a number of different environments, people and membership identities by nature of the limbo situation in which prison holds individuals (or at least those who can reasonably expect to be released into wider society at some point in the future). This perception of prison as limbo or purgatory is not surprising given the vast majority of prisoners will be released into society at some point, with only 59 of the current prison population in England & Wales serving whole-life sentences (MOJ, 2017b) and no equivalent tariff available to sentencers in Ireland. As such, the vast majority of prisoners occupy the position of having been removed from their external communities, with the intention being that prison will provide only a temporary community before they return. However, this temporal distinction between membership of one community or another does not account for the maintenance of emotional, cultural, relational and practical connections to communities beyond the prison which prison systems in both jurisdictions claim to encourage as a means of reducing recidivism. This paradoxical situation of being physically removed from, yet connected to outside communities led to feelings of being stuck ‘in between’, where participants experienced disorientation or ambiguity as to their sense of belonging to a particular community, or a sense of identification with a number of distinct communities within and outside of the prison walls. This adds further complexity to discussions of rehabilitation as focused on transforming prisoners into law-abiding members of *the* community, or sending individuals back into a community (which, as discussed further at section 6.3, may not exist as a collective in the lived experience of those individuals).

In both jurisdictions, several participants identified themselves as members of multiple communities during their time in prison, with many noting that membership of their 'own' community, however they defined it, could be maintained simultaneously alongside membership of the prison community. As Sam (England) said : "I belong to community in jail and outside I do", while Aaron (Ireland) specified membership of his local area as continuing during his prison sentence : "I'm part of the prison community and on the outside community where I grew up." While this was presented by many, including Aaron and Sam, as an unproblematic situation, for some participants this affiliation with multiple distinct communities was presented as a 'split' sense of belonging, evoking the feeling of neither belonging being full or complete. This suggested that the very idea of belonging to the prison community was at tension with membership of the wider community (or outside community as defined by the individual), thus leading to a situation where belonging to one reduced the sense of belonging to another. In his explanation of connection to his outside community, George (England) described how he felt he was 'split' between two communities:

*In a sense it's split, because obviously I've got my partner and...basically I hold onto her...She keeps my head out, basically. She keeps me alive in a sense, d'ya know? The feeling, when I phone her on the phone and hear her voice, it's like an engine that just starts back up inside me that...I've got a reason to keep going, you know? I've got something there to drive...So yeah, I am part of that community there, but at the same time I'm part of a prison community...cos I've got associates inside, d'ya know? I've got a job. I've got a purpose, so I've got a community around me... So I'm split basically.*

George's comments spoke to the concept of 'diaspora', as used by Turner (2013). By exploring the process of resettlement through the lens of a notion predominantly used in research on migration, diaspora explains the situation of individuals who have left one community to join another. They retain some sense of belonging to the community which is left behind while not yet having achieved a status of total integration into their new community, occupying what can be understood as "the space between" (Turner, 2016: 15). Turner (2013: 485) has argued high levels of recidivism and return to prison support the idea of the prison wall as a "kind of border", and uses this migration-based approach to argue that the hybridity of prisoners' constructions of 'home' and 'belonging' can be experienced as a "prisoner dyspora [sic]". Some participants'

responses indicated that this sense of ‘diaspora’ was felt through a reluctance to embrace full membership of either community due to the negative consequences this would have for their own wellbeing – either during their time in prison, or in their resettlement on release. Blake (England) indicated an opposition to making his ‘home’ in the prison community through fear that acceptance of oneself as a member of the prison community would result in becoming institutionalised and therefore unable to adapt to wider society on his release. Emphasising the fact he viewed the prison as a temporary community, a view likely influenced by his history of repeated short-term sentences separated by periods in the community, Blake said “I class this as I’m in transit, me!”. This feeling was particularly prevalent at HMP Leeds where the turn-over of prisoners was high, and the men knew that, if not released within a few months, they would likely be moved on to another prison. Talking about connections to the outside ‘world’ as he termed it, Rory (England) noted how the turn-over of prisoners, particularly those with whom he was sharing a cell, made it particularly difficult to get ‘settled’ in the prison. Just as participants identified movement in, or from, their external communities as disruptive to a sense of belonging (section 6.3.4), this was something Rory identified as relevant to belonging to a community within prison:

*There is...especially with this prison because people are gettin’ out every day. Where if you go...when I go to my next prison, obviously it’s gonna be Cat B...no-one’s getting out for a long time. Everyone you speak to is doing longer than you, or same time as you, so no-one’s thinking about that outside world. The only thing they’re thinking about is a visit. Not thinking “Ahhh I can’t wait to get out next week”.*

*AS: Right. So do you think because of that, because there’s people leaving, there’s that thing of you’re all still part of the community?*

*Yeah, ‘cause obviously someone comes in and tells us a story of what’s just happened out there, yesterday. So like you get into it, and you’re kinda like still living in that outside little bubble, but really I don’t want to be and I’ve...I’ve had like four pad-mates in a month! And like, ‘cause you’re getting out, then he’s getting out, then he’s getting out...I’m like it just does my head in! I need to be settled. You’re not settled.*

Rory went on to explain that he did not anticipate this sense of tension with the outside community to exist to the same extent in other prisons, and that he would be able to



‘settle’ once he moved on to another prison for the majority of his sentence. When asked whether he thought he would ever be able to be settled in prison he said:

*Yeah, when I move on to the Cat B. ‘Cause when I move there, I know for a fact I’m gonna be there for like two to three years in that one pad.*

Rory’s response suggests it is the transitory nature of the environment at HMP Leeds, as with Mountjoy Prison, which blurs the boundaries between communities, suggesting at committal prisons the boundary between external communities and the prison may not be so solid. This seemed to contribute to participants’ sense of diaspora in this environment, feeling caught between two different worlds, but also suggests the experience of community attachment may well be different at other prison institutions where individuals are in one place for a much longer period, and are surrounded by others in a similar position, thus weakening the constant reminders of return to external communities and sense of attachment to these communities.

This sense of being split between two different worlds, or communities, was evident throughout several of the men’s narratives. Participants’ feelings of being caught between two communities, and the sense of a maintained connection to communities beyond the prison for some, suggests prisons are not quite as ‘total’ as Goffman (1961) suggested. The notion of a ‘total institution’ suggests a binary distinction between the inside and outside of said institution which is over simplistic when these connections and feelings of belonging to communities beyond the prison are considered. As such, these findings support scholars’ criticisms of viewing the prison as a ‘total institution’ in Goffman’s terms due to its binary view of inside and outside, preventing consideration of the spaces between prison and the outside world which demonstrate interconnections between two worlds that in Goffman’s terms would be entirely isolated (Baer & Ravenberg, 2008; Moran, 2013a; Gill et al., 2013).

For some participants, this diaspora was tempered somewhat by the fact many of their community members shared the same hybridity of communities, for these men ‘friends’ or ‘associates’ outside of prison were also those with whom individuals spent time

during incarceration – they too being involved in offending and frequently spending time in prison:

AS: Yeah. So would you say that you feel...or...do you belong to a community do you think?

Kyle: *Yeah, my own community. My own group of friend[s]...In here and on the outside like...*

AS: Yeah, and are some of them the same people?

Kyle: *Yeah [laughs].*

Kyle's experience demonstrates how, for some participants, the contrast between external communities and those within prison is far from stark. Despite the instrumentality of the prison 'community', described by many participants as distinct from their communities outside, the gap in meaning attributed to these two communities was not so vast for those whose social circles outside were predominantly made up of others for whom imprisonment had become a regular feature of life. Kyle's whole community, as he defined it, appeared to be in a state of diaspora, with a fluid positioning between the outside world and that behind bars. As such, Kyle demonstrated a greater level of clarity in terms of his community membership than other participants who were seeking to bridge the space between a hidden prison community which they viewed as largely separate from their family, or the 'law-abiding' community outside. This was echoed by other participants who highlighted the similarities of what they perceived their communities to be, both inside and outside prison, in particular *who* made up these communities.

Nevertheless, for those who viewed their community within the prison as being separate from their external communities, the challenge of resisting making prison 'home' as Blake describes, while also embracing the instrumental community within the prison to assist with survival of the pains of incarceration represented a struggle and conflict in their understandings of their community. In some respects, this was experienced like a tug of war – while individuals sought to keep a focus on their external communities, to do so often required individualised behaviour and keeping one's head down as advised by the system in both countries, as well as a conscious effort to avoid making the prison community 'home'. However, in an environment where any usual comforts of daily life

are removed, and the day-to-day is characterised by deprivation, the draw of the instrumental benefits of the circumstantial and fragile community in prison may well be strong. Data suggested that the further individuals were pulled into one community, or the other, the harder it was for them to stay standing, or integrate and survive, in the other. As such, communities inside and outside of prison were seen to hold very different meanings for participants, even where some similarity or cross-over between communities existed. Whilst identification with communities during time in prison were multiple for participants, they were not free from conflict and contradiction, as this chapter has discussed.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the extent to which participants identified themselves as having a meaningful sense of belonging to community. The chapter demonstrated the significance that belonging to something bigger than oneself, and a sense of belonging to a self-defined community, held in participants' understandings of citizenship. Furthermore, the chapter has provided an exploration of the ways in which participants defined their communities and experienced inclusion, or exclusion, from them. This demonstrated that there was a substantial difference between the community attachments of participants in Ireland and England, with Irish interviewees being far more likely to demonstrate a sense of belonging to an area in which they had grown up. In contrast, participants in England were more likely to identify their primary community as being their family or those close to them. Even where external communities were exposed to substantial deprivation and, in some cases, volatile circumstances, these external communities were overwhelmingly identified as those which were most meaningful for participants. After considering the external communities individuals identified, an assessment of participants' views on the existence of a community in prison was made. Participants' responses demonstrated that there were a range of features of both prison environments which worked against the creation of a meaningful community, however a community which had instrumental purpose but lacked meaningful relational connections was identified in participants' responses. This instrumental community served to lessen some of the pains or deprivations associated with imprisonment, but held little meaning for most participants

beyond the immediate circumstance of imprisonment. In addition to the overall consideration of a prison or prisoner community, discussion also highlighted the smaller communities which were described by the men interviewed. While some of these were negative, and eroded a broader sense of community in the prison, the others were spatial, highlighting the significance of particular areas of the prison in cultivating meaningful social interaction. Finally, this chapter has demonstrated that the definitions of community for men in prison can be multiple, overlapping and complex, creating tensions for many between survival of the prison environment, and maintenance of connections to meaningful communities beyond the prison walls, while for others their communities in prison reflected their communities and social circles outside of prison.

However, this understanding of citizenship as membership of a community was not universal, with some feeling there was an important distinction between the two, with membership of a community not necessarily equating to citizenship. For Aiden, a 30-year-old English prisoner, the notion of citizenship had intrinsic moral connotations he felt excluded him, which were not necessarily relevant to being part of a community, particularly when defined in spatial terms:

*Yeah, I suppose [when I'm released] I'll be a member of the community. I wouldn't really call myself a citizen, but yeah...A citizen to me is like...you know somebody who's doing their bit. Like you! Legal, honest, hard-working...Member of the community to me is just like me being Aid, and I live at number six. You know what I mean?*

For some participants, this moral requirement to be doing something for the community was central to their understandings of citizenship and served to heighten the distance between them, as prisoners, and law-abiding members of the community. The following chapter now considers the significance participants attached to 'doing their bit' in the community, and the extent to which meaningful contributions were possible during incarceration.

# Chapter Seven

## Community Contributions During Incarceration

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### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings on the availability and meaning of opportunities for participants to be actively involved in their communities, both inside and outside of prison, whilst incarcerated. In line with much of the existing literature on citizenship, participants in this study identified their ability to contribute to their communities as important to self-conceptualisation as a citizen during imprisonment. Given the significance of positive contributions to, and participation in communities for participants' understandings of citizenship, this chapter considers the opportunities identified by men in prison as enabling such contributions. The chapter firstly considers the limitations of opportunities for prisoners to contribute to their communities outside. It then discusses participants' experiences of activities identified as relevant to citizenship and community whilst in prison. Finally, the chapter presents the themes that emerged as important in determining whether activities were perceived as constituting meaningful community engagement by the men held at the two prisons.

To ensure activities were not assumed relevant to citizenship on the basis of institutional rhetoric or existing research, participants were asked to identify *any* activities or aspects of prison life they felt allowed them to contribute to their communities. In the spirit of adaptive theory (Layder, 1998) which takes an iterative to-ing and fro-ing approach between extant literature and empirical data, participants were also asked about key features of 'active citizenship' identified in the existing literature – pro-social activity and having a voice in decision-making. As Manza and Uggen (2006) posit in their study of prisoner disenfranchisement in the USA, the restrictions on liberty and rights do not entirely stop individuals from being able to engage with society, with civic engagement opportunities taking many forms which have been evidenced in prison environments across the world (Farrant & Levenson, 2002; Edgar et al., 2011; Burnett & Maruna, 2006; Behan, 2014; Jaffe, 2012a; Turner, 2012; Solomon & Edgar, 2004; User Voice, 2010). Despite studies which highlight

opportunities for people in prison to engage in activities associated with citizenship, this was not experienced by all participants in this study, with many arguing they were unable to contribute to the community or have a voice in society – two forms of engagement which they identified as important to the realisation of citizenship during imprisonment.

Given the multiplicity of community identification for those interviewed, mention of community contributions was often followed with the question ‘The prison community? Or outside?’, and for this reason consideration is given to opportunities to contribute within, and outside of, the prison. For many participants this marked a key distinction in terms of whether contributions were possible, and/or meaningful, with physical separation from the wider community influencing their experiences substantially.

## **7.2 Citizenship and Opportunities for Community Contributions**

Participants in both jurisdictions identified doing good, or making some sort of contribution to their communities, as a necessary condition for the realisation of citizenship status. Describing his lack of citizen self-identity, Aiden (England) explained that he felt there were expectations attributed to citizenship status in terms of contributing to society, or one’s community:

*I wouldn’t really call myself a citizen, but yeah...A citizen to me is like...you know somebody who’s doing their bit.*

Those who identified this requirement held a view of citizenship as inherently related to a collective of individuals, and drew on communitarian rhetoric in their discussion of the meaning citizenship held for them. The communitarian link between individual and community was particularly evident in the meaning citizenship held for Declan (Ireland), which made clear that working for the community’s improvement rather than an individualistic approach to life, was central to living as a citizen. When asked what being a citizen meant to him, he said:

*Well to be a citizen of a country it's like being part of a country. I'd like to be able to help, and my future aim is to contribute to making the community better...it's about bettering the community, not just making myself better.*

Declan's narrative spoke to the idea of 'making good' the damage he had done through his offending (Maruna, 2001) by making a positive contribution to improving the community. A range of community contributions were identified by participants as taking place at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds. These can be separated into two categories: engagement with formal programmes, and informal contributions made of the individual's own initiative. Within these categories, the activities identified ranged from those focused on helping others or making one's voice heard, to opportunities for self-improvement in preparation for future contributions on release. While some participants saw themselves as able to continue contributions beyond the prison, sufficient for subjective realisation of meaningful citizen status, others felt their contributions were limited to the prison community making their subjective experience that of 'prison citizens'. Although the activities highlighted by participants are largely consistent with those discussed in the active citizenship literature, there were a range of contextual factors which impacted the degree to which these activities were meaningful for those participating. In turn, these had implications for the extent to which activities fostered a sense of citizenship, or individuals could adopt a citizen identity, being linked to other features identified by participants as necessary for meaningful citizenship (see Chapter Eight).

### **7.3 Contributions from Within the Prison**

When asked whether opportunities existed to contribute to their communities during imprisonment, a substantial number of participants, irrespective of country, responded negatively; participants felt such engagement was not possible while incarcerated. This impossibility was attributed to various factors, ranging from their physical removal from communities to the lack of organised programmes for contributions. Participants' responses did, however, vary significantly depending on whether they were referring to contributions to communities outside, or within, the prison. A large number of participants explained how their physical removal from external communities, and lack

of contact with the outside world, made it difficult to make contributions beyond the prison. For Mason (England), who had a long history of offending and substance misuse, the fact he could not contribute to the community while in temporary exile was central to his self-identification as a non-citizen:

*I'm not a citizen in the community anymore, no. I'm not there enough to be a citizen. I don't contribute to the community cause I'm not there long enough to be honest with you.*

Although there is provision for temporary release from the prison environment, allowing time for individuals to be present in their external communities for building family ties, making arrangements for release, or engaging in work, in both jurisdictions, the approaches to its use differ, reflecting national political cultures and dominant media discourses; in England the use of Release on Temporary License (ROTL) has often been approached cautiously and restrictively, with an emphasis on risk and 'less eligibility', while in Ireland the routine use of Temporary Release over the Christmas period has been "largely uncontroversial" (O'Donnell & Jewkes, 2011: 75). O'Donnell and Jewkes (2011: 76) have argued that "the willingness to exercise discretion in favour of prisoners and their families says something about the emphasis a prison system places on trust", suggesting a greater level of trust is afforded to prisoners in Ireland than England, and as such greater facilitation of release for community contributions might be expected. However, in practice few individuals are able to avail of provision for temporary release to facilitate resettlement and enable work or volunteering in either jurisdiction (HMPS, 2005; Citizens Information, 2015). In their study of volunteering in prisons across England & Wales, Levenson and Farrant (2002) found only one in ninety-five people in prison were granted ROTL for volunteering. A substantial decline in the overall use of ROTL in England & Wales since 2013 (PRT, 2017: 15), and in Temporary Release in Ireland over the last three years (IPS, 2018), suggests the number of individuals released for volunteering is unlikely to have increased, while voluntary sector organisations have highlighted how increased restrictions on use of ROTL (NOMS, 2015; HMPS, 2005) have made it more difficult to facilitate volunteering in the community (PRT & Clinks, 2016). In Ireland, several participants highlighted community contributions as something associated with the Community Return programme, but that was not possible during time in prison. When asked about opportunities to contribute to his community during time inside, Darragh (Ireland)



explained that this was something he could not do now but would be able to do through Community Return:

*Well, when I get out I will have to do community work, cause I'm after the community return, but that's no problem – I'm not afraid of hard work.*

This view of Community Return as a way that contributions could be made, as opposed to from the prison setting, was also echoed by Cian, Jack and Declan who all talked about the positive opportunities for contributions while physically in external communities. Such an emphasis on undertaking these contributions *outside* of prison suggested that in participants' subjective understandings of citizenship *where* contributions took place did matter, in contrast to Lister's (2007) claim that it is *what* is done, not *where*, that determines whether an act constitutes citizenship. Nevertheless, not all participants were optimistic about the possibility of these future contributions through Community Return due to its limited use and restriction to certain sentence lengths. Declan explained the difficulty in getting onto the Community Return scheme when discussing the opportunities to contribute to communities during incarceration:

*There's that community return - that's not doing too bad for some people like, dya know...but then not alot of people can qualify for it either like. It's another hurdle they're putting in front of you like.*

As such, while Community Return was identified as a new policy which could potentially contribute to a meaningful sense of citizenship, due to the perception that it would enable contributions to external communities, the perceived difficulty of securing release on Community Return led to a pessimism from participants about their potential to contribute meaningfully to their external communities. It was clear from participants' responses, in both Ireland and England, that the majority of opportunities to contribute to external communities during incarceration were from within prison. This perception echoes Behan's (2016: 160) findings in Irish prisons, that where prisoners "wished to participate, it was from confinement" as opposed to in wider society.

Some participants described opportunities to send material or financial contributions as a form of indirect involvement with, or benefit to external community members,

however this did not involve contact between participants and the broader community to establish a meaningful connection. Nevertheless, opportunities to send material contributions to external communities were identified as meaningful and identified one way that activity within the prison setting was linked with, or not entirely separate from, external communities. While explaining the lack of opportunities to contribute to the community during his time at HMP Leeds, Evan described how previously, at another prison, he had been able to contribute by producing art work for a local community exhibition:

*[at] one prison you could do art, and then they did this exhibition in the village hall and members of the community could come in and look at it – some of it was dead good.*

The importance of material contributions was echoed by some men at Mountjoy Prison, who explained how products of art classes were sent out to benefit the local community, or their families. Darragh, who had been in prison for three and a half years, explained the significance his artistic contributions held as a contribution to the local community, but also in shaping his children's understandings of how his time away was spent:

*I made a plaque for my local football club in mosaics class. My mum and dad took it down there and they were really happy with it... It's up at the club now...and then I also made one for the clubhouse. It's nice because in years to come I can say that I did that...like to my kid and that. I don't want the kids to know where it was that I did it. I mean she's gonna know when she gets older that 'my daddy's in prison'...that's what haunts me.*

For a few individuals, these activities of sending out creations or money were the only ways they felt able to cross the prison boundary and make contributions to their communities beyond the prison wall. As such, they saw these as a way to demonstrate to their loved ones that they were doing something worthwhile with their time during incarceration while unable to contribute in many of the other ways that they would otherwise support their families.

Some participants discussed the need to make contributions to society in the terms of employment and tax, through the structures already in place for making financial contributions. For Matthew (Ireland), working with this system and making financial

contributions was a condition of citizenship he identified himself as not having fulfilled: “You have to work and pay your way to be a citizen. I robbed the banks instead of giving and taking from them – I was working against the system”, while Declan (Ireland) said how he “always worked before, contributed to tax and stuff” in support of his claim that he aimed to be a “well-rounded citizen”. For many of those who referred to tax and employment as necessary contributions to society, as part of citizenship, this seemed to be linked to understandings of what ‘normal’ life consisted of – something which many participants aspired to (see section 8.6). This was a theme which emerged in responses from participants in both jurisdictions. For Adam (England), contributing by paying taxes was situated as part of a broader description of citizenship as being part of day-to-day routine life in a community, which he felt prisoners were excluded from:

*‘Cause you’re excluded from being a citizen innit, like. You’re not doing the daily routines as a normal citizen, you know? Like for instance pay a bill. Go pay a bill like, or pay your council tax, d’ya know what I mean? You’re not...we’re shut off innit. We’re not part of it. We’re not part of it as of yet.*

The sense that the physical exile of imprisonment restricted opportunities to contribute to one’s community was even more pronounced in responses of participants removed from the general prison population due to offence type, vulnerability, or gang affiliations. When asked about opportunities to make contributions to one’s community, Rhys (England), separated from general population due to gang involvement, said:

*Not on this wing, no... ‘Cause it’s the VP wing, you don’t get any community access of any type. So...like, we don’t deal with the community, or it’s not very often the community comes in here to see us or anything like that. No benefit whatsoever.*

Opportunities to indirectly contribute through self-improvement (see further discussion at section 7.8) were also limited for men held on the Vulnerable Prisoner (VP) wing, due to its location and the restrictions on movement around the prison<sup>48</sup>. Andrew

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<sup>48</sup> Those imprisoned on VP wings must be moved around the prison at a time where there is no risk of them crossing paths with ‘general population’ (the rest of the prison population). This is due to the assumptions made about their offence being one of sexual violence, based on location on a VP or

(England) described how difficult it was for VPs to engage with activities beyond the wing:

*Well the activities, the jobs basically, is very limited because of that reason. They don't have the buildings or...sort of in place, in the right place, for people to work from here. Because we've moved wings from A wing to down here, because this is a bigger wing, they've been taken away from the workshops, which was right next to the wing. Now they have to go all the way round and it's like a gauntlet that they have to...with the different wings and...Well, basically every activity, where it involves going off the wing, is horrendous.*

These limitations on participation in various activities identified as opportunities to make positive contributions, reflects the heightened stigma attached to sexual offences inside and outside the prison environment (Ievins, 2014). Given individuals convicted of sexual offences are likely to face even greater hurdles to reintegration than others with convictions, for example in gaining employment (Brown et al., 2007), the absence of opportunities to foster a meaningful connection with the outside world is particularly problematic in this context. This sense of heightened exclusion from opportunities to engage with, or contribute to communities was also evident in responses of men serving time on protection in Ireland, due to the potential threats faced in the general prison population. Matthew, who had spent time in prison in England before beginning a three-year sentence at Mountjoy, explained how opportunities for participation in education or prison work were severely restricted for anyone separated from the general prison population:

*If I go back to work, yeah – I would feel like a citizen then. There's just nothing you can do in here for a job. I mean she [gestures to teacher] can bring in some Mickey Mouse papers from the teachers, but it's not school is it. The thing is down here in protection, you've got lots of guys from gangs and stuff, that they can't be out at the same time so they wouldn't be able to accommodate school here. It's harder jail this.*

The experiences of those held in more restrictive conditions, in both jurisdictions, demonstrate that not only does incarceration affect the opportunities available for individuals to contribute to their communities, but the specific location and regime under which individuals are imprisoned also further restricts them. These were not,

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protection wing, and the fact that this could make them vulnerable to abuse or violence from those in the general prison population. As a result, men housed on VP wings are often able to access fewer areas of the prison, or may have access to particular areas for more restricted periods, than those in general population.

however, the only variables affecting individuals' ability to contribute to their communities. Some participants perceived community contributions and active involvement with community beyond the prison to be reserved for those with limited histories of offending behaviour. Matthew (Ireland) explained how contributing to the community was also not an option for him due to his offending history:

*...contribute to the community? Not at all. I've never been asked, never offered...they only do that sort of stuff for first time offenders, and even when that was me I heard nothing...You just sort of do your own thing.*

For some participants who had been embroiled in the criminal justice system from a young age, the idea of contributing to communities beyond the prison, or engaging actively as a citizen, was something which held little meaning. For Cathal (Ireland), his long offending history presented a substantial barrier to making community contributions given its connection to his longstanding drug addiction:

*There's [no opportunities] for me, for people like me, in prison. I'm locked up since I'm thirteen, Abi...but what I'm saying is there has to be something else now, before prison, for myself and others like me. There just has to be! Cause we're just wasting away in prison, in prisons, when we could be getting better and contributing to society! D'ya know what I mean? Even now...I know I've got a lot to give to society, once I get the proper help.*

Cathal's response typically demonstrated how, for many, there were other issues that needed addressing before community contributions were possible and that the barriers to their contributions were not restricted to the period of their imprisonment – hurdles such as overcoming addiction were problematic when considering contributions within external communities too. Despite this pronounced sense of exclusion and disengagement felt by many participants as a result of their incarceration, and in some cases addiction, others identified contributions that spanned communities within and outside of the prison. At the two prisons studied, the opportunities identified by participants as 'citizenship activity' or opportunities to contribute to the community varied significantly, and included both formal programmes and informal activity amongst men in prison. These included volunteering, participation in education and prison work, sustained involvement with family, and peer-support within prison

communities. While some felt able to contribute in these ways during time in prison, for others this was indirect and about self-work or preparation, through education or training, for future contributions to communities upon release. Although the activities listed were initially identified as potential opportunities to contribute by participants, this potential was not always substantiated in their lived experiences of participation. Many felt these opportunities intended to, or were labelled as able to facilitate, but in practice did not allow genuine contributions to the communities that were subjectively meaningful to the men themselves. Consideration is now given to each of the key areas of community involvement identified by participants, the reasons for and conditions of participation, and factors that prevented individuals from participating or identifying participation as meaningful. In doing so, the chapter considers whether each activity was subjectively experienced as a community contribution and, consequently, the extent to which participation contributed to a meaningful sense of citizenship during participants' incarceration.

#### **7.4 Prisoner Volunteering**

Volunteering has been identified as one of the most common ways of participating in active citizenship (Edgar et al., 2011), with the potential to mitigate the exclusion of marginalised groups (Institute for Volunteering Research and Volunteering England, 2007). Given the marginalisation of incarcerated people, physically and symbolically, volunteering has been argued to be particularly significant for those in prison as it can constitute purposeful use of time, and provide an opportunity to exercise responsibility, allowing men to make the move from being a “passive recipient to a contributor to society” (Edgar et al., 2011: 21). By making a positive contribution to wider society, without remuneration, it has been argued volunteering can create “a sense of citizenship” for prisoners by strengthening their bonds with society (PRT, 2002: 1), and encourage desistance (Maruna, 2007). Recently, the former England & Wales Justice Secretary, Michael Gove (2016), emphasised the need to prioritise “purposeful” activity so prisoners might be “assets contributing to society rather than liabilities who bring only costs”, while the Irish Prison Service (IPS) strategy for 2016-2018 also demonstrated a commitment to maximise engagement with “constructive activities” (IPS, 2016c: 6). As such, the rhetoric in both jurisdictions appears to prioritise

meaningful activity enabling positive contributions, elements that seem intrinsic to volunteering.

Demonstrating the prevalence of its recognition as a meaningful citizenship activity in both jurisdictions, the Listener Scheme was most frequently referenced by participants as providing examples of individuals who were contributing to the prison community by helping others on their wing. The Listener Scheme trains participants to act as a listening-ear for individuals who are struggling emotionally in prison, at risk of suicide or self-harm, or wish to talk to someone in confidence in an environment which largely inhibits such open discussions and leads prisoners to regulate their emotions for self-protection (Laws & Crewe, 2016). The Listener Scheme is supported by members of the Samaritans, who train prisoners to participate and provide support to those working as Listeners. Operating in 89% of prisons across England & Wales (Edgar et al., 2011), and having been introduced to the IPS in 2002, the Listener Scheme was highlighted by participants in both jurisdictions as an example of men contributing to the prison community. In fact, this was often the first activity referenced when providing examples of opportunities to contribute to the community, prisoners helping each other, or indications of the existence of communities within prison. Several participants interviewed also had experience of working as Listeners: three in Ireland (Oisin, Ciaran and Max), and six in England (Andrew, Oliver, Noah, George, Owen and Blake), while another two participants in England (Logan and Rhys), and one in Ireland (Eoin), had applied to become Listeners and were awaiting training. The significance Listeners' work held, and the potentially deadly consequences of leaving men exposed to the pains of incarceration without this support, was prevalent in discussions with participants in both jurisdictions, regardless of their involvement or lack thereof. Harry (Ireland), who was involved in various volunteering schemes at Mountjoy Prison, believed the work of volunteers was vital to saving men's lives in prison. During a focus group, he explained:

*I think we've got a good community with the Samaritans and the Red Cross. We've stopped guys from choosing the rope, we have! If we hadn't done that stuff people would have been hanging themselves.*

The importance of the Listener Scheme for the wellbeing of men in prison enabled those involved to appreciate that they were performing a pro-social role, and doing

something sufficiently meaningful to constitute a genuine positive contribution to the lives of others. McCold and Wachtel (2003: 299) discuss the way in which ‘micro-communities’ – communities of interest, characterised by “deeply interpersonal” relations – can demonstrate different needs and responsibilities, which should not be confused with those of the broader geographical community or “abstract notions” of community. The significance attached to the Listener Scheme seemed to demonstrate the heightened need for such support in the context of the prison, where levels of mental illness are disproportionately high (Bebbington et al., 2017; Kennedy et al., 2005) and the pains of incarceration can cause substantial emotional distress. Drawing further on McCold and Wachtel’s (2003) work, attribution of a meaningful sense of community to the existence of activities such as the Listener Scheme and the Red Cross suggest that just as ‘micro-communities’ or ‘communities of care’ can be established through involvement in the process of restorative justice, so too can they be established through engagement in voluntary activities within the prison context. Key to the relationships developed, and frequently referred to in discussions with Listeners, was the requirement of absolute confidentiality that was vital to their role, and the ability this gave them to withhold information from staff. Oliver (England), who volunteered as a Listener, explained the significance of being able to legitimately oppose staff efforts to gain information:

*...sometimes staff think that they can overrule everything. That's our little bit of power. It's like if I come out of this cell and I've been talking to somebody, sometimes staff might say "Oh what did they say? What's up with him?" and I'll say "I can't tell you."...They might be genuinely concerned their selves, but I can't tell you...That's our thing isn't it.*

By providing a legitimate means through which individuals could reject staff requests for information, in an otherwise authoritarian environment where disobedience invariably results in punishment, being a Listener allowed individuals to subtly resist the institution in a manner which would not attract negative consequences. Being privy to information prison staff were not provided a sense of control the prison could not subsume, and spoke to the idea that information is power. As such, participants valued this ability to know something the prison officers, to whom men would not speak openly, did not. Such reference to the rules by which staff should be abiding could be interpreted as an act of censoriousness, as described by Mathiesen (1965), as Oliver



appeals to shared values in his assertion of control over an element of life in prison. While fervently asserting their independence from staff in this way, participants who volunteered for the Listener Scheme in England situated their contributions within the broader context of austerity, and noted the benefits of their work to staff who were over-stretched and under-resourced, as Andrew explained:

*Without the PID [Prisoner Information Desk] workers, and the Listeners, they'd be lost! They would. They'd be totally lost, because...I've got to say that the officers, because they're so short staffed, they can't deal with everybody's needs.*

AS: *Yeah. So do you think that there's a benefit for the staff then in what you're...in the work you're doing?*

*Yeah, definitely. Though it's not always appreciated.*

Within this context of scarce resources and under-staffing at HMP Leeds, Oliver also perceived his role as a Listener to be instrumental in the management of staff workloads by limiting paperwork and physical and emotional labour, through reducing self-harm incidents:

*It definitely helps the staff...Well in a way sometimes I think aww they're just chucking them in with us, just to save them [the work]. Cause if someone does something stupid on their watch...I don't mean stupid, but say they cut theirselves or, then they've got to write that up. That's paperwork, so every time someone does [something] they have to write it up. So if they can get them in with us to stop them doing that then that's less work for them. They can get home easy.*

This demonstrates the need for further consideration of the potential roles of incarcerated individuals as a resource used to fill gaps left by under-staffing, or to undertake work prison staff wish to avoid. While this occurs under the widely-accepted guise of encouraging engagement in constructive activity to support rehabilitation, this appears to have the effect of further responsabilisation of those in prison – experienced as a burden. In addition, the sense of a connection between the burden experienced and the covering of officer roles seemed to contribute to a sense of resentment towards prison staff, furthering the oppositional ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide despite sharing roles (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961).

Other volunteering roles identified as significant for realising a sense of citizenship by enabling community contributions, were those involving provision of information, support, or events for others in prison or individuals with disabilities, older people and children outside. The Irish Red Cross programme at Mountjoy prison, which at the time of fieldwork had recently closed down<sup>49</sup>, was highlighted by a number of participants as a meaningful and enjoyable programme through which they felt able to make contributions to both the prison community, and the wider community outside. With the Red Cross, participants described involvement in various health-related projects including HIV awareness and testing events, provision of covers for dinner plates on the landings, a weapons amnesty, and organising entertainment within the prison for children with disabilities and older people from the local community – an exception to the general rule that contributions involved little or no direct contact with members of the wider ‘community’. Additionally, Oisín explained how, through these activities, the programme improved interactions between men at Mountjoy Prison:

*...it's built good morale within the prison as well, because you get landings that don't mix. Say A and B wing don't mix as such, but you'll get them mixing doing certain things then, and there'll be that kind of animosity...not animosity...an amnesty kind of thing, you know.*

Those volunteering across these schemes emphasised the importance this held for their sense of purpose and responsibility, and their relationships with staff and other men held at the prison. A few participants explained how, through their voluntary work, they had taken on the responsibility of representing the programme and thus the scope of their contributions was extended beyond the ‘community’ of the establishment at which they were serving their sentence. When asked about whether he was able to take responsibility with the Red Cross, Oisín said:

*Oh yeah. Definitely, yeah...cause I was the chair person for the Red Cross here...you know, and when you have that role you have to do all the MCs [Master of Ceremonies]for events that's happened and whatever you're doing. If something's happening in different prisons, you're brought to a different prison to represent Mountjoy then, you know...or whatever prison you're in like. It gives a few opportunities the Red Cross...the Red Cross are brilliant.*

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<sup>49</sup> The official reason for this discontinuation of the Irish Red Cross programme at Mountjoy Prison is unknown, however participants discussed in detail their assumptions that this was related to staff dissatisfaction (discussed in detail later in the chapter) and informal discussions with prison teachers and staff also suggested this to be the case.

This praise was echoed by Ryan, who explained how his involvement in these activities and opportunities to represent the scheme increased his confidence:

*I went up and down to Wheatfield to give speeches to delegates from all over the world to encourage the programme in other prisons. Prison has made me a totally different person really – I wouldn't have been doing any speeches!*

Ryan's comments illustrated how, for some, involvement in contributions to the prison community – such as the Red Cross programme – provided opportunities for individuals to develop skills, confidence, or a sense of self which they had not had before their incarceration, or were unable to develop outside of prison, due to the overwhelming influence of addiction, crime or – in the case of Ryan – gang involvement in shaping their lives while at liberty. As such, in spite of the harmful and potentially criminogenic nature of imprisonment, these experiences demonstrate how, when its deprivations are considered alongside the deprivations of life outside, the experience of imprisonment can have “reinventive” effects (Crewe & Ievins, 2019: 5), enabling reconstruction of oneself through activities which would not have been possible in their “blighted” communities outside (2019: 3); Ryan was able to develop confidence and skills that he saw as part of a new self, which may not have been possible in the context of his life before prison.

Despite the positive experiences of Red Cross volunteers, this opportunity was only available to a small group of men and as such opportunities to contribute, or the associated benefits for self-development, were not experienced by all participants. While Kyle perceived this as being the remit of life sentenced prisoners, saying “It's mostly the lifers. The lifers have it set up”, Joshua explained how there had been a long waiting list making it “hard to get involved”. This perception that there were more opportunities for lifers was evident in the narratives of other participants, demonstrating how those who were serving shorter sentences felt opportunities for meaningful contributions were more limited for them. Ben and Ryan echoed this feeling about the Red Cross programme, while Ross (Ireland) also explained how he felt the role of a Listener was only for those serving long sentences. When discussing the fact he would like to take on this role but had not done so, Ross explained how he did not think it was appropriate, saying “I don't have a right to be there listening to someone. I'm on a small

sentence.” This suggested that those serving short sentences were dissuaded from participation in volunteering activities due to a sense that these were not for them and thus, even where opportunities for community contributions did exist, these were not equally accessible for all.

Opportunities for participation became even more limited when the Red Cross programme was discontinued at Mountjoy Prison. Despite being organised by an external agency, and an emphasis on partnership working in the IPS strategy (IPS, 2016b), there was a perception that staff disaffection had inhibited the continuation of the scheme. Ryan explained how industrial action by the Prison Officers’ Association (POA) and a loss of staff good-will had left the programme without the officers needed to facilitate its continuation:

*...because of all the industrial action they won't allow the Red Cross to run...the good will is gone now, the officers won't do anything more than they have to. It's a shame though – it was a great initiative.*

This view was echoed by other volunteers, such as Oisín and Cian. Discussing the scheme’s closure, Cian explained the impact of union action on participants’ lives in prison:

*...we weren't sure if we were getting our family day like. We got our family day in here like, but we weren't 100% because the union was still going on and...it's just sad the way they pass on the effect. I can understand if it's about wages and all this carry on, but...at the same time like d'ya know it shouldn't be passed on in the jail like...but, it does.*

While recognising staff concerns as legitimate, Cian highlighted the detrimental impact union action had on those in prison, further restricting opportunities to make positive contributions to their communities and heightening uncertainty surrounding contact with those outside. The significance of uncertainty around family contact was made clear as Cian explained the importance of family days for creating a sense of normality:

*...and then at the end of it all we got to see your family for...for nearly 3 hours. You know sitting down normally, eating cakes and that...so it was great like d'ya know! You know like you could sit with your kids, you got a few photographs taken with your kids so...it was good in that way like.*

Given the significance attached to living a 'normal' life as part of the meaning citizenship held for participants in this study (see Chapter Eight), Cian's comments demonstrate that not only did volunteering itself hold significance for realising a sense of citizenship, but so did the rewards for participation.

While volunteering in prison held great significance for some, there were challenges participation posed for the volunteers which either undermined the meaningfulness of the work, or created additional pains to those inherent in imprisonment. Taking on the role of a Listener was highlighted as particularly emotional, draining and difficult work, by Owen (England):

*Like if a kid tells me he's gonna commit suicide, I won't go tell that officer 'cause we're not supposed to. You know what I mean? That's confidential what he says to us...It's a big responsibility...In a way it's good, but in a way I think at times it's bad 'cause that kid could come in my pad and say to me "I'm gonna kill myself when I get outta this pad". Now that's on my conscience all night, so if that did happen the next day I'm gonna feel guilty about that, 'cause I didn't bring that to anybody's attention.*

Given the intensely emotional nature of this type of volunteering, and the high risk of vicarious trauma, it is vital volunteers have the necessary support from staff or co-ordinators to prevent negative impacts on their own wellbeing. Findings suggested Listeners did not always receive this support. Despite reports from HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2018:27, para 1.51) that Listeners at HMP Leeds spoke positively about support from Samaritans, Andrew explained how support was restricted due to risk-averse decisions to limit contact with Samaritans to public spaces on the wing:

*The Samaritans come every Monday...but because everybody's out on association, you can't really have a conversation like we're having now, you know?...So basically it's...a job off where "Yeah, everything's OK. Everything's fine. Blah blah", but you would like to turn around and say "Can I have a one-to-one with you, because I need to discuss this"...it never happens, because everyone's out. I've asked many a time can we see the Samaritans, say in room like this? But because of their safety, safeguarding and something...it's like...it's like us now, basically we shouldn't be in a room. I know the doors open and the locks there, but...it's weird...This is how we're treated...I'm supposed to be a trusted prisoner, but the officer who come in my pad, he'll turn the lock and you'll think surely you know me now?*

Many participants across both jurisdictions considered themselves unable to take on this emotional burden of volunteering. For some this was due to their existing struggles with the pains of incarceration, often in concert with emotional struggle resulting from personal circumstances beyond the prison. As Jack (Ireland) said:

*If you're having a bad day yourself like, you don't really want to be listening to other people's problems like you know...Like if I came off a phone call now...had a bad phone call, things weren't going right at home...or if I had some bad news or anything like that like, and then another fella comes up to you and says "Ahh we go into your cell for a cuppa tea?" No...Fuck off. You know what I mean? You know it's just... it's that balance between having a right head on your shoulders...Like, if there was somebody...there was somebody having a bad day and you were like, you were having a good day...know what I mean? And you'd be thinking like well this happened last week so...and you put me into (inaudible) [a bad mood] from listening to them so no. Fuck off. [sighs]*

Previous research found low levels of involvement in volunteering by those in prison, with less than one in five imprisoned individuals volunteering in a single scheme in England & Wales (Levenson & Farrant, 2002). When participants were asked about lack of engagement, the inability to manage this emotional burden alongside personal struggles was frequently described. This feeling of being incapable of participating in formal volunteering activities, despite a willingness to support others in prison emotionally, demonstrates the substantial hurdles men face to making positive community contributions within the deeply painful prison environment. Although volunteering can provide an opportunity for people in prison to contribute to others' wellbeing, these findings demonstrate how it can also constitute a burden which compounds the pains of imprisonment. This clearly indicates the importance of acknowledging the negative impacts 'responsibilisation' agendas can have on the individual, with the potential for such activities and responsibilities to be experienced not as empowering, but as the weight of another thing for which individuals will be held responsible. Behan and O'Donnell (2008) have discussed the role of responsibility in enfranchisement of those in prison. They posit that, when viewed through the responsibilisation agenda, granting opportunities for civic engagement can constitute additional ways of shifting the responsibility for rehabilitation from the system to the individual, in a way which "individualizes the experience, overemphasizes agency and fails to locate the prison and prisoner in a larger social, cultural and political context"

(Behan & O'Donnell, 2008: 333). The findings of this study demonstrate that efforts to encourage 'responsibility' through volunteering also fail to take account of the *emotional* context of prison, and the constraints this places on many incarcerated individuals, meaning even where opportunities to contribute to communities exist, they are inaccessible for many. This is particularly problematic within incentivised regimes where individuals are expected to demonstrate responsibility to receive any 'privileges' to mitigate the dull, painful experience of incarceration, or to secure early release.

## 7.5 Prison Work

The employment of men within prison is a practice common to all institutions across England & Wales, and Ireland, with an emphasis on 'constructive activity' in current prison policy for both jurisdictions. Many prison jobs take place in workshops, and constitute menial manual labour, however some paid jobs held by participants were identified as enabling a meaningful contribution to the prison community. The type of jobs held varied substantially between the two institutions, particularly given the difference in which roles are paid or voluntary in each jurisdiction.

In both jurisdictions, men employed as cleaners or laundry workers explained how these roles enabled them to make a contribution to the prison community. When asked why he wanted the job of laundry worker on his wing, Jayden (England) explained the opportunity it provided to ensure people's clothes were looked after:

*I've got OCD [Obsessive Compulsive Disorder], so I'm funny with my clothes getting washed, and at least by me...I know what I'm doing myself, looking after it, cleaning...so everything's done right. Just me in general, that's what I'm like, so that's what made me want to be on the job. If everyone else does it, it doesn't get done right...It gets done properly then. People's stuff don't get ruined.*

Eoin, serving a life sentence at Mountjoy West<sup>50</sup>, also explained how his prison work – cleaning, doing laundry, and distributing meals – was an important contribution that benefitted the prison community, while he also appreciated the positive impact of others' work:

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<sup>50</sup> At the time of the research Mountjoy West was used to hold working prisoners, in a building on the same campus but separate from the main jail. Since the time of the research, Mountjoy West has been re-allocated for those coming up to release.

*...the way I look at it is...it benefits the prison community...without the tracksuits and that...or they wouldn't be fed...and even the fellas that you know...bleedin' do the library, I was actually impressed with it, because when I ordered a book the fella that works in the library, he actually brings it to my cell. The name and number and all that, and he delivers it to you. I was very impressed!...I says "without the likes of yous we wouldn't have this". It's important. Everything like that in here's important.*

Similarly, Edward recognised his work in the library as making an important contribution to the lives of others at HMP Leeds. Not only did he see his formal duties as benefitting others, but also his assistance with men's queries as he helped them to navigate the opaque prison system:

*...well this is kind of sort of helping some guys, 'cause it's obviously the guys are reading what they want and, kinda last week...now and again people are asking me things that I'm not really connected with but I've been able to tell 'em who to go to, or where to go, or what form to fill in which, it's part of the IAG [Information, Advice and Guidance] course that you're taught how to be...how to work on the PID desk.*

While some viewed this assistance in navigating the system as a meaningful contribution, others were reluctant to participate, seeing this as a way for staff to shirk their responsibilities. Tyler (England), discussed the benefits to staff of the PID worker role taken on by a number of participants:

*They [the staff] don't have to do nowt!...you know instead of you get people going up to the officer saying "can you get me an application form for a job?", and then they don't get it, you've got inmates – they will get it, you know what I mean?*

This frustration was felt even more strongly by Alan (Ireland) who explained how he refused to have a job in prison because he viewed this as supporting the system, doing jobs that should be done by prison staff without any meaningful impact on release:

*I wouldn't want to clean for them. I don't like them telling me what to do. I've never cleaned in a prison and I've never had a job...I just don't like working for them...I'd rather the officers did the cleaning than the prisoners! They don't do anything all day...they just sit there, drinking, and like think they can tell prisoners what to do! There needs to be something in it...but they still don't let people out. There's*



*a guy in there [gestures to the classroom across the hallway], and he's got no P.19s,<sup>51</sup> he's got a job, he's enhanced and he's not getting out still.*

These frustrations echoed those identified by Bullock and Bunce (2018) that work, often presented as constructive activity justified through responsabilisation, was in fact a means by which the prison could benefit economically – in Alan and Tyler's view this was done by giving those in prison tasks which would otherwise have been done by prison officers. While Alan identified prison work as providing little benefit for workers themselves, a number of PID workers at HMP Leeds also highlighted how work deemed staff's responsibility could present challenges in terms of relationships with others on the wing. Failures or delays in the system would sometimes be attributed to them as the point of contact. Andrew described the role as a "big responsibility" saying about other men on the wing "If they don't get what they want then obviously it's your fault!" This misunderstanding over the power PID workers held to influence decisions, or impact the speed of decision-making, was also described as problematic by Rhys, causing tensions between PID workers and other men: "PID workers get it all the time. It's our fault. We didn't put it [the application] in on time or...they don't understand what we do."

This frustration at the consequences of not being able to complete prison work to the satisfaction of others on the wing, was also expressed by Jayden (England) who noted that he would often receive the blame from others on the wing if told by staff to close the laundry before all of the washing was done:

*They told me to bang up and I said "Boss, I've got one more bag to do" – They're not here to listen. And I'm gonna have him in my head saying "Jay, where's my washing mate?!" I'm not to blame pal! They're banging me up kid. But then I look the bad person, don't I?*

Previous research into active citizenship in English prisons found individuals were more inclined to participate in activities contributing to the community outside than work for the prison service, due to a sense that such work supported the prison system

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<sup>51</sup> A P.19 is a report, filed by a prison officer, which alleges a breach of the Prison Rules. The full list of acts constituting a breach of discipline is included in Schedule 1 of the Prison Rules 2007. This is submitted to the Governor, via the digital Prisoner Information Management System (PIMS) who then decides whether an inquiry is necessary before serving the P.19 on the prisoner.

rather than constituting a positive community contribution (Levenson & Farrant, 2000). This view was echoed in the sentiments of participants, like Tyler, Alan, Andrew and Rhys, who felt they were being used as resources to offset pressures on staffing, and thus contributing to sustaining the prison regime, rather than making a meaningful contribution to their communities. As such, while prison work in England might have provided responsibility, with this came additional burdens. Ultimately this meant that the responsibilised job roles that participants were given served to strengthen resentment of both staff and those around them whose complaints and grumbles would be directed their way.

Despite substantial opposition to prison work from some participants, the data illustrates that some perceived the roles described as contributing to the prison community, and therefore holding significance for a meaningful sense of citizenship. In contrast, many participants explained that employment in prison workshops held little meaning as a community contribution, and was instead experience as punishment, for two reasons – its menial, low-skilled nature, and the limited choice involved in participation. Rory, who had recently taken on the role of PID worker at HMP Leeds, described his previous job in the tea packs workshop,<sup>52</sup> illustrating both of these reasons for the lack of meaning such work held:

*We're sat there for three hours just putting two tea-bags there, two sugars there, two sachets...It's just boring! It's just not good at all...it's like doing their donkey work. Obviously it's...it's like slave labour innit, but I suppose it's a punishment innit.*

Rory's comments demonstrated how employment which was enforced, and lacked any opportunity for individuals to demonstrate skill or autonomy, was experienced very negatively. Rather than seeing these jobs as engaging in 'constructive activity', or contributing to a community within prison, this was seen as exploitative punishment. This demonstrated that, in order for work within the prison to be experienced as a meaningful community contribution – and viewed as engagement rather than compliance – it needed to involve an element of choice, and a sense that individuals

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<sup>52</sup> The tea packs workshop at HMP Leeds involved men preparing bags containing portions of tea and sugar to be handed out to each cell.

were doing something positive through their work. The menial labour carried out in the prison workshops did not satisfy either of these criteria.

In contrast, contributing to their communities appeared particularly relevant for participants engaged in jobs which involved helping or supporting others in prison. This included PID workers, Equality and Diversity representatives, and various types of educational mentors, as well as those working in the prison chaplaincy, all of which were paid roles at HMP Leeds. For these participants, when asked about their motivations for doing this work, they identified the opportunity to help others. As Noah said: “I decided to put in for PID desk to help people, stuff like that.” Whether or not involvement in *paid* employment could be deemed to constitute meaningful pro-social activity, or ‘active citizenship’<sup>53</sup>, it was evident the impact holding these roles had on individuals’ experience of incarceration was significant for their perceptions of themselves, and ability to exercise autonomy during their incarceration.

## 7.6 Contributing Views and Having a Voice

Another aspect of engagement which was identified by participants as a fundamental condition for citizenship, was the ability to have a voice in order to share views and contribute to decision making on day-to-day issues. This position was shared by individuals who noted the significance of having a voice to citizenship, such as Owen (England) who argued this was the very meaning of citizenship, upon which he could not live out citizenship while in prison:

*AS: ...if you say you don't feel like you're a citizen, what does being a citizen mean for you? What is being a citizen in your...in your eyes?*

*It means having an opinion and a voice, dunnit? You know, having your say, and like I said in here we don't have a say.*

Owen’s perception that individuals did not have a say during their time in prison, despite this being what he viewed citizenship to be about, was echoed by Ethan who explained that the right to have an opinion or say on issues was removed along with liberty when an individual goes to prison:

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<sup>53</sup> Much of the academic literature has problematised the connection of paid work and citizenship, with the voluntary nature of work being key to its pro-social or civic nature (Jaffe, 2012a).

*No. I mean it's sorta like that's one of the liberties that are taken away from us, isn't it, having that right to speak out...to voice an opinion really. We've had our liberty taken away from us, and we've had us voice taken away as well.*

While Ethan's comments on the denial of a voice in prison alluded to rights, describing the 'liberties' that are lost on incarceration, some participants were more explicit in their reference to their right, or lack thereof, to have a say through the democratic process. Andrew (England) referred specifically to the denial of the right to vote when describing his perceived exclusion from citizenship:

*We don't even have the right to vote...I think it's...dictatorship! It puts it across that everybody in prison is a monster. We take away their rights. The lock 'em up and throw away the key attitude, and that's from the media.*

Andrew's explanation of how the loss of the right to vote made him feel, demonstrates the impact on his perception of his relationship with both society and the state now that he is serving a prison sentence. Andrew's reference to dictatorship suggests a perception of government as illegitimate given his denial of a voice on public issues. Andrew's comments resonate strongly with the argument of Schall (2006) that the legitimacy of one's governance is called into question where the vote is denied and, as such, consent is removed from the social contract. This reduces the individual to a subject being ruled over without consent, rather than a citizen who is party to a mutual agreement with the state.

For Ciaran, a life-sentenced prisoner in Ireland, the centrality of having a voice to citizenship incorporated both the ability to have a say on issues through democratic processes, but also in day-to-day life by having the opportunity to take control. In contrast to Andrew (England), who found the denial of the right to vote indicative of an exclusionary public view of those in prison as monsters, Ciaran (Ireland) highlighted the right to vote as something which enabled him to feel engaged in the community, in a 'normal' way, through having a say:

*The vote did help a bit, but I don't know...I don't think I could feel like a full citizen until I had freedom. When that door locks on your cell at night, you realise you're locked away from society. Having the vote...I know this sounds strange, but it makes you feel a bit normal. I don't know if that's the right word, but like when everyone goes to*

*the polling station to vote, you're voting with them as well. You might be voting a few days before or whatever but you feel involved in the community, in the real world.*

Ciaran's reflections on how voting made him feel 'normal' suggested that there was significance for him, not just in the legal enfranchisement provided, but also in the ritual of going to the ballot. Maruna (2011: 5) has described how stigma could "conceivably be broken with rituals of reintegration", drawing upon literature which theorises the role of ritual in creating social cohesion, solidarity and shared reality (Durkheim, 1912; Collins, 2004). The way Ciaran describes his experience of voting as voting with 'them' or 'everyone' seems to suggest that the act of casting his vote held ritualistic significance in this way, with the fact this made him feel "a bit normal" and "involved in the community" challenging the stigma and isolation of his incarceration. Nevertheless, describing himself as "less than a citizen", Ciaran explained how regardless of his ability to engage with the community through voting, this condition of citizenship – having a say – was not fulfilled in his own experience due to the limitations on his ability to have a say in how he lives his own life:

*You don't have the same voice. The vote helps a bit, but I'm on a life sentence – even after release I won't have the same freedom. When I got a life sentence I told myself 'that's it – I'm never going to have control over any of my life again'.*

Through demonstrating the limits on his own voice, Ciaran demonstrated clearly this was a fundamental feature of the meaning citizenship held for him, and a condition which must be realised in daily life to feel like a 'full citizen'. This was also heightened by the fact that, serving a life sentence, Ciaran did not think that he would ever regain this voice or control over his own life. The denial of voice placing an individual in the position of "less than a citizen" is echoed in the work of Bird and Albertson (2011: 94), who argue citizenship is necessarily contingent on voice, and ask the question "if a prisoner does not feel able to voice their opinions and views...how far can the rhetoric of citizenship, responsibility and, indeed, the reducing re-offending agenda go?"

While participants shared feelings that they lacked a voice in wider society, when considering the multiplicity of community identification discussed in Chapter Six, it is also necessary to consider whether participants felt they had a meaningful voice within the prison setting. The following discussion considers the opportunities for individuals

at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds to have a voice within the prisons, and the experiences of those involved in forums intended to provide such a voice.

### 7.6.1 Having a Voice in Prison

Pitts posits that having an “effective voice” in the institutions governing one’s day-to-day life is central to citizenship (2000: 26) and, in concert with this understanding, some participants discussed their contributions as a ‘voice’ for men in prison during their incarceration. Participants communicated their views, and those of others on their wing, to the institutions and staff through organised forums, and more informally through interactions with staff or their behaviour on the wings.

Acknowledging the significance of such a voice to citizenship, Behan (2014a) has noted the limited avenues of participation in the governance and administration of prison institutions, to influence this ‘community’, while imprisoned. This sentiment was echoed in responses from participants in England and Ireland. Nevertheless, some participants had *sought* to contribute to improving the prison community through making representations to Governors in prisoner forums or prisoner council meetings. Despite increasing recognition of prisoner councils as providing a voice and an opportunity to exercise responsibility by representing the views of others (Solomon & Edgar, 2004), the extent of facilitation in prisons, and the level of influence on decision-making, varies substantially between institutions with a lack of continuity in their “nature, scale, quality and success” (User Voice, 2010: 17). This was reflected in participants’ experiences of voicing their opinions to Governors in both jurisdictions.

At HMP Leeds, a number of participants shared their experiences of attending governors’ meetings, which provided opportunities for prisoners to hear governors respond to questions submitted by those on wings in advance. Despite no such arrangement in Ireland at the time of fieldwork, a number of participants referred to a prisoner council which had been running shortly beforehand<sup>54</sup>. Three participants,

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<sup>54</sup> No official reason was uncovered for the closure of the prison council at Mountjoy Prison and men involved felt the reasoning for this decision had not been explained to them. Participants speculated on the reasons behind discontinuation of the council, as discussed later in the chapter.

Ryan, Thomas and Cian, had been elected as members of this council. Ryan described how discussions with Governors in this forum had enabled improvements to aspects of the prison regime and seemed, at the time, to provide a meaningful voice in prison management:

*AS: Would you say during the time on that council you...*

*Had a voice? Yeah a million percent. Like they did give productive answers – they didn't just roll their eyes. They'd tell you how it was and that. I can only speak for myself like but yeah I think so.*

Despite positive experiences of the council at Mountjoy Prison, no further meetings had taken place and council members felt abandoned, with no explanation given for what appeared to be the termination of the council. Nevertheless, there was a strong suspicion amongst representatives that the council ended due to staff disapproval of the men's views being taken into consideration, and the resulting response of the POA:

*I don't think the POA were very happy with it, because they weren't necessarily getting what they want and they weren't happy that prisoners were being listened to and getting what they wanted. Not that we always did get what we wanted.*

These suspicions that POA disapproval of the council was what resulted in its closure speak to the opposition between captives and captors as groups in the prison setting, illustrative of the split between the two groups characteristic of total institutions and the resentment between staff and inmates (Goffman, 1961). This feeling was evident even where individual narratives demonstrated that prisoner-staff relationships were not always oppositional, with the perception being that the *collective* views of each group were incompatible, or competing for influence, within the prison setting.

Other participants saw the discontinuation of council meetings as resulting from negative press attention the council had received. Ryan explained how he saw genuine progress being halted by negative, sensationalist headlines:

*We were getting places with it, but then it came out in the papers that there was a "killer councillor" when the press realised there were lifers, some in for murder, on the council. It started off as an IPS pilot you see, and as soon as that happened it got nipped in the bud.*

This perception was echoed by Eoghan who, recalling sharing his concerns with council members, said “That fell apart as well, when they put them in the paper. Pictures and all that”. The media’s role in undermining opportunities for positive contributions was not unique to the council, with reference to media also being made in relation to parts of the Irish Red Cross programme. For some, this unwanted media attention put participants off taking part in such activities. As Cian, a prisoner council member involved in the Red Cross programme, said: “If I’d known I was going to be wrote about in the paper, I wouldn’t have gone anything near it like”. This reluctance was explained by Cian’s earlier expression of fear that his children would be caused upset upon seeing mention of him in the newspapers:

*If I got something like that [temporary release], I could see an officer ringing up saying "Cian got out today and there's pictures of him", and then it'd be an article in the newspaper...I've got kids as well like, and I'm sure other people have got kids like, the kids don't wanna be reading about...on a family day out like.*

The ability of media coverage to undermine constructive opportunities for engagement with communities has been highlighted by Burnett and Maruna (2006) in relation to an initiative at HMP Spring Hill allowing individuals to work outside of prison with the Citizens’ Advice Bureau. Perceptions of Irish participants that media coverage led to the prisoner council’s closure, and the impact of media coverage in deterring men’s participation in volunteering schemes, provides further support for the conclusion that the tone of media representations has significant consequences for the success of such initiatives, as with the use of Temporary Release (O’Donnell & Jewkes, 2011). Despite a tendency towards hyper-punitive, populist press representations of prison in England & Wales (Mason, 2006), this issue was not raised by participants at HMP Leeds. Such a difference may be due to the size of Ireland, and its relatively small prison population, meaning those convicted of serious offences may be household names for the Irish public, making details of their lives in prison more likely to attract attention.

Despite this negative media attention, some of those involved in the Mountjoy prisoner council felt their contributions were listened to, and had a meaningful impact on the running of the prison. However, this enthusiasm was not shared by all. When asked if he thought prisoners had any influence on decision-making in the prison, Thomas



rejected this view of the council, viewing it purely as a forum to air views, without any expectation of influencing governors' decisions:

*No, no. There was never any kind of...us having any kind of thing with the decision-making in the prison. Erm...we were just voicing concerns of prisoners like.*

This perception was also prevalent outside of the small group elected as representatives for the council. For others in the prison, there was a belief that the influence of council meetings was minimal, if not non-existent. Darren (Ireland), a foreign national prisoner (FNP), explained the lack of material impact the council had on life in prison:

*When I came newly, I used to see some poster on the wall saying 'prisoner committee, prisoner committee' but...[sigh] to be honest with you I haven't seen anything positive that come out of it.*

This feeling that no material benefit had been seen from the discussions of the council was echoed by other participants who had not been elected to the council. Matthew was one participant adamant that during imprisonment it was impossible to have an influence within the prison. He distinguished the lack of opportunity for men's voices to be heard, that he perceived at Mountjoy Prison, from the practices at a high-security prison in Ireland – Portlaoise – where dissident Republicans and members of paramilitary organisations are usually imprisoned:

*No influence at all [laughs]. No, absolutely not. I'm not part of that who makes the decisions, and "there's noone to speak for us like!". In Portlaoise you'd have the OC [Officer Commanding] on the landing...I'm not sure what that stands for, maybe chief officer or something...and so you'd go to him if you wanted to speak to the Governor and then one person would get sent to the Governor to pass on the issues. That's only in Portlaoise that though, it doesn't happen in any other prison, and I think that's because it's a lot like paramilitaries there, so that's how they work.*

This comparison drawn by Matthew, between the idea of having a voice at Mountjoy Prison and representation of those imprisoned for political reasons at Portlaoise, reflects historical trends in the denial of representation, or overshadowing, of groups campaigning for the interests of 'ordinary' prisoners in penal reform. Matthew's comments suggest that there was still a perception by some, that a voice on issues of penal change was reserved for politically aligned prisoners (Behan, 2017),

demonstrating a significant way in which the historical, political context of Ireland had shaped Matthew's understanding and experience of citizenship during incarceration.

Despite the existence – for a short period – of a prisoner council at Mountjoy Prison, the general consensus was that prisoners were unable to influence decisions about prison governance, or have an “effective voice” (Pitts, 2000: 26). Niall explained how he felt any opportunities to have a voice in prison were ineffective, with comments ignored by staff or governors:

*They make their own decisions, and whatever decision they make they stick by it. They just look at us as prisoners – you have no rights! We could put stuff up to them and say we'd like this or that, but it would just go in one ear and out the other. They wouldn't listen.*

This view was echoed in England, with participants' experiences of governor meetings being that of limited influence over daily life in prison. Previous research has discussed the “restrictive tone” of the Prison Service Order (PSO) 4480 on prisoner representative organisations (Solomon & Edgar, 2004:5; HMPS, 2002), which governs such meetings. The lived experiences of participants, as having little if any meaningful voice, reflect this. When asked about influence within the prison during his time in England, Matthew explained how influence was restricted in England even more than in Ireland:

*Aw less so than here – no influence at all. There are a lot more prisoners there, and a lot less staff... Oh you don't have a voice. It's as simple as that!*

For Matthew, there was no meaningful voice afforded by attendance at governor meetings. However, his comments allude not just to the denial of influence by the institution, but also to the challenge of getting a perspective across when competing against the voices of so many others in attendance. This seems to offer further support for the individualisation and atomisation of the prisoner community, discussed in Chapter Six, with the perception being that each person wishes for their own individual views and concerns to be dealt with, rather than this always being in the collective interests. In this respect individuals are competing for influence against each other, rather than the more clear-cut relationship of opposition to staff identified in some of the classic prison texts (Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958).

### 7.6.2 Representing the Views of Men in Prison: Benefits and Challenges

While perceptions of forums for having a voice on issues within the prison settings were predominantly that these had little influence on prison life, for those involved in these forums the role of representative had significant implications for their time in prison – positive and negative. In both jurisdictions, participants involved in representing others in the prisoner council or governor meetings communicated how this had a positive impact on their time in prison. Charlie (England) explained how being chosen to take part in governors' meetings sent a message about him being viewed as responsible, making him feel good about himself:

*They ask you. You have to put your name down for it, or you get picked if you're known as a responsible adult, you know...a responsible inmate. Yeah. I got picked 'cause I didn't put my name down...You feel good. You feel like well at least they've noticed that you're...not daft. They know like you're not...I wouldn't quote something that wasn't all for inmates or staff. I'd do it for both, you know. I'm not gonna say I want more chips for the lads and that...do something sensible.*

Similarly, Oisín (Ireland) explained how his role on the prisoner council, and the fact that he felt listened to through this forum, demonstrated that he had built up trust with staff through his volunteering work at the prison:

*Like again, going back to the Listeners thing...if you make recommendations they will listen to you, and they'll help you and help change something that you need to change. They will do that for you, you know. It would be through those things, and through the trust that I've built up maybe you know?...They wouldn't listen to anybody type thing you know...they'd listen to people who were kind of trusted, and who do a bit in the prison.*

Oisín's comments reflected the fact that, for the most-part, it was those who were actively involved as representatives within these forums who felt most positive about their impact. Additionally, both Charlie and Oisín's experiences of having a representative voice in the prison illustrate the significance of treatment by staff which demonstrates a sense of trust. Within an environment where officers are expected to be cynical and suspicious of those they hold within the prisons (Crawley, 2004; Arnold, 2008) this was interpreted as a clear indication that they were viewed as different to

other men in the prison; as individuals with strengths (See Chapter Eight for further discussion of individuality).

Conversely, for others it was precisely the responsibility that the role of representative required which put them off involvement in opportunities to voice the views of others around them. When asked if he would ever join a prisoner council, Matthew (Ireland) said:

*I wouldn't like the responsibility...like taking the rap for everything. You'd get the grief for it all if there was something the Governor didn't like...and you'd get trouble on both sides.*

AS: *What from the staff/governor and the prisoners?*

*Yeah. It'd need to be someone older doing it, someone who is respected by everyone...Otherwise it'd be an awful life [laughs].*

This suggested that the role of a representative within the prison would create a tension between staff and prisoners which would be difficult to manage, and potentially result in conflict with both groups. Even some of those involved in representative roles raised concerns about the challenges accompanying this responsibility. Andrew, a representative for the VP wing at HMP Leeds, explained how the role could lead to tensions with others on the wing if prompt changes were not observed, in a similar way to the tensions described in relation to some types of prison work:

*It's a big responsibility, because if they don't get what they want then obviously it's your fault. "Well did you bring it up?" "Yes, I brought it up" "Why haven't we got it then?" "Because I'm still waiting to hear" and if I do get an answer through from the Governor "oh, it's because of budget reasons blah blah" they're not satisfied with that...it's us to blame then.*

In addition to the tensions created with other men on the wings, a number of Irish participants explained how taking the role of a representative within the prison setting could attract unwanted attention from staff. When asked if he would ever get involved with representing others at a prisoner council, Kyle (Ireland) explained how taking on the role of representative could be perceived as disruptive, rather than a pro-social community contribution: "No. Because someone would act as a representative is like if they're leading a group so, you know what I mean, they'd be punished!" These concerns

were also held by Oisin, who shared his own experience of how the ‘responsible’ role of a representative can be interpreted as trouble-causing in the prisons setting:

*There's no such thing as a representative in here. If you're seen as a representative in here, you're putting your hand out to be slapped you know. If anything went wrong then they'd be...you're targeted by the establishment then. It was him that incited this or started this, or whatever you know. Well there's a prime example – when I was first convicted there was a stand out protest out in the yard at the prison and all the lads refused to go back into bang up...because I told youngsters to shut up when somebody was talking, I got done on incitement of protest and the whole lot and I got a month in the block. If you open your mouth in anything like that you know? They will clamp down on the spokesperson as such.*

While the opportunity to sit on a prisoner council, or contribute to a governors’ meeting, demonstrated instances where individuals were afforded great responsibility, this brought with it great tensions and burdens. In England the perception was predominantly that these tensions were between the incarcerated men themselves when frustrations at the system were taken out on those who acted as representatives. In contrast, in Ireland this tension seemed to be between the incarcerated men and prison staff. Here there was a perception that voicing the interests of the incarcerated population was in conflict with staff interests, and as such the role of representative could serve as a dangerous position to take on. These findings suggest that the opposition between those in prison, and their captors, had not been eroded to quite the same extent in Ireland as was the case in England, perhaps due to the infancy of Ireland’s incentivised regime, when compared to the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) scheme, which had not yet fully shaped the prison experience.

## **7.7 Informal Peer-Support**

Despite existing studies of active citizenship within prisons focusing on engagement in programmes facilitated by prison staff or external organisations, a theme evident across both jurisdictions was the high level of claimed involvement in informal contributions towards members of the prison community, undertaken through the individual and collective initiatives of the men themselves. Participants told stories of how they would share possessions with other prisoners, provide emotional support, mediate conflicts on

the wing, or help those nearing their release with preparations for resettlement, as discussed below.

### 7.7.1 Emotional Support

Despite the feeling shared by many men that people wear a ‘mask’ in prison to hide their true emotions, one of the most common ways participants claimed to have made informal community contributions was through emotional support. A number of participants identified how, despite not holding a formal role in the Listener Scheme, they provided a listening ear and encouragement for men on their wing at difficult times. This was a theme consistent across both jurisdictions, and Jayden (England) who had been in and out of prison since childhood explained how he would be there for men struggling due to a sense of shared experience, despite perceiving the role of a listener as out of reach for someone with his record:

*...getting to be a listener or ‘owt’<sup>55</sup> like that, I wouldn't be able to get that job...because of the person what I was before, you know? I can only have certain jobs, but...if I'm on the wing and a man's upset and he comes to me like "Jay, blah blah blah" and he talks to me, my ears are open and my arms are open for the man, because we're all here together...and we're all the same type of people. We're all men, and at the end of the day we're not showing each other up. If a man wants to cry on my shoulder, so be it! I mean I'm here, I'm gonna comfort him, cause he's got noone else to...you can't go to the officers for comfort, cause they're not here for that.*

In Ireland, a number of participants also explained how they would support others despite not ‘wearing the t-shirt’ of Listener, as Jack (Ireland) put it. Eoin explained how, due to his efforts to stay out of trouble, men would approach him for support when struggling, enabling him to contribute by helping to prevent the potentially deadly outcomes of these struggles:

*I was never one for confrontation or any trouble...so they just say to me "look you're always up for a chat, you're always the go-to guy just for a bit of advice..." things like that, and I mean...I had a fella there... and he actually tried to take his own life... Your man actually came to me, he was going through a bit of a bad time and he attempted to take his own life by cutting his throat...He was in bits he was. He's only a young fella - younger than me! ...He said "what am*

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<sup>55</sup> Colloquial term for “anything” in Northern English dialect.

*I going to do? I don't know what to do and my head is absolutely fried!". So I sat him down and said... "Look, I was in a similar situation myself." ...and I said "look, it's alright now" and I was talking him through it, and this and that. Now he's doing grand!...So I just, basically I love listening to people's stories....and seeing how I can sort of get them out that bit of a hole they're in, in their head. You know what I mean?... If I can stop someone doing something like that to themselves, I get a good feeling off it you know what I mean?*

Moreover, Jack – one of the youngest men interviewed in Ireland – explained how he thought most men would provide this support should they notice someone on their wing feeling down:

*If someone was having a bad day on the landing you would... most of the fellas would try and point it out or like... you know what I mean...if they seen you with a face on you, they'd... 'y'alright' ....and 'come into the cell and have a cuppa tea... and y'know... have a chin wag [chat] you know what I mean.*

These explanations of men supporting each other emotionally within the prison setting, contrast starkly with the expectations of hegemonic prison masculinity as gaining respect from others in prison through demonstration of stoicism, toughness, and careful management of emotions (Messerschmidt, 2001; Sykes & Cullen, 1992), and findings of other researchers that demonstrate resistance to social support from others in prison (Laws & Crewe, 2016). As such, this suggests that the erosion of a solidary prison community, based on the inmate culture described by Clemmer (1940) and Sykes (1958), may well have been accompanied by an increasing acceptance of alternative presentations of self by men. Nevertheless, as Chapter Eight demonstrates, this did not completely alleviate participants' concerns about showing their true emotional selves to others in prison.

As well as challenging expectations of masculine behavior in the prison setting, Jayden, Eoin and Jack's comments also reflect the position of most participants who said they would provide support to other imprisoned men, maintaining a clear distinction between prisoners and staff. However, occasionally participants demonstrated contributions which contravened this separation, such as Charlie (England) who would also support prison staff:

*And a lot of people will come to me, even though I'm not a Listener, people will ask me for advice... You never stop being a Listener. Even outside I didn't... I've been approached by staff before now who've had problems... Yeah! Flippin' heck! Officer said "we have problems, you know?" and started telling us.*

*AS: Yeah. So would you say even though you're not officially a Listener, you're a Listener for prisoners and staff...*

*Yeah, I would. I'm there to talk to.*

While the help-seeking of prison staff has received little academic attention, this finding suggests a need for further consideration of the informal help-seeking practices of those working in prisons, and the potential roles of incarcerated individuals not only as a resource to fill gaps left by under-staffing, but also as providers of emotional support to staff. This practice was not, however, prevalent amongst the sample, and it seemed Charlie's previous experience of exceptional support from a prison officer influenced his behaviour in taking on this role:

*The question is what kept me out of jail...for seventeen years! When I was released, after a five year prison sentence, I was able to phone a member of staff in the prison...whenever I felt like getting in trouble, or felt down, and he'd give me support...Just him doing that thing...and it were a big help.*

Having developed a meaningful, sustained, supportive relationship with a staff member during a long period outside of prison, Charlie's perception of the distinction between prison officers and their captives had been softened, and as such he identified staff as part of the community he considered himself as contributing to.

### **7.7.2 Sharing and Material Contributions**

Another practice commonly identified as a community contribution by participants was the sharing of material goods, such as toiletries, essential clothing and food. As Lucas (England) explained, "People'll lend you a teabag, or give you a bit of milk", while Cian (Ireland) highlighted how men had to help each other in this way due to failure of the prison to provide certain necessities:



*We would help one another like....there's no doubt...if they needed a bit of dust<sup>56</sup> like, we'd sort out a bit of dust d'ya know?...you know I've often given away a couple of pairs of unders like d'ya know...At the end of the day like, we are here like and...it's a big circus like...just different clowns that's in it like but....we just have to help each other.*

In addition to necessities, Cian highlights one of the most significant and frequently cited ways individuals talked about being able to help others and contribute to the prison community during their time inside – through the lending or gifting of tobacco. Tobacco is an integral part of prison culture<sup>57</sup>, with smoking serving to pass time, and manage stress levels in a tense environment, while also constituting currency for trade (Richmond et al., 2009). As such, the sharing of tobacco was problematised by Sam (England), who explained the difficulty in determining whether contributions were genuine:

*Well cause prison officers don't necessarily see the things you're doing are good. Like when people borrow tobacco in here, and they end up owing double...Then if I lend out tobacco the prison officers don't see that I'm not doing the same as the other guys. I'm actually doing it to try and stop the lads doing it cause they can't afford to buy it and are always in debt, but it's assumed that I'm doing the same...There's always a motive behind it when people do help. If there's nothing in it for them then it's hard to get any help. It's like with tobacco – people will say “oh I'll lend you half an ounce of baccy” and it seems like they're helping, but then they'll want an ounce back in return – it's called “double bubble”. I've got a mate who I helped out of borrowing by saying to him “if you borrow it from me instead and you just have to give me back half an ounce”. It's a situation where people make you think they're helping you out, but in the long run they're not.*

For Sam, his informal contribution to the prison community – sharing tobacco – attracted suspicion from staff and was not perceived as a positive act of sharing, but as leading men into debt. This misinterpretation could present a barrier to such good-natured acts. In both prisons the practice of sharing or donating items to others was often spoken about in relation to two key points in the prison experience – committal and release – with these being the stages where participants highlighted the greatest need, and greatest willingness, to contribute to others' material wellbeing in this way.

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<sup>56</sup> 'Dust' is a slang term which was used by some prisoners at Mountjoy Prison to describe rolling tobacco.

<sup>57</sup> In the time since fieldwork, a smoking ban has been implemented in prisons across England & Wales.

In England, Louis explained how he had gone out of his way to help a man who had just arrived at HMP Leeds find the necessary essentials to help him in the early days of imprisonment:

*I seen a Chinese guy the other day - he only came in a week ago. He was walking about all on his own like, you know what I mean? He didn't have anybody to talk to and whatnot so, you know, I pulled him to the side. I found out what his name was and I shouted him over and said "Come here". I shouted him over and said "You alright?", got to know him a little bit like. Now when he comes on the servery, you know what I mean, he's always smiling and joking instead of, you know, a sad guy that I used to see walking around. If he needs anything then he'll come to the PID desk, you know. "I need towel. I need this." and I'll say "Right, go there". I'll shout my lad on the laundry and say "Listen, give him a towel" you know? Just little things like that. That makes me happy, innit.*

Louis' actions in this scenario demonstrate an awareness of the struggle that the first few days of incarceration could be for those who were not familiar with the prison's systems, making this a focal point for the provision of help and support. Similarly, Eoin (Ireland) highlighted the significance of help for those who were about to be released, where this was not provided by the prison and individuals were being released without an external support network. Eoin described how, alongside other men in the prison, he would make material contributions to ease this transition to life outside of prison:

*I had a fella then come in, just the other week, into reception...I asked him... "what are you doing out there with yourself? Floating round the hostels or what?" I've been in that situation myself before, so I said we're gonna do a bit of a bag [for him] to go out with...a few hoodies and stuff like that, a few tracksuits, a few tubes of toothpaste...a bag of stuff that we'd pass him on the outside. Helping out, like...helping out. I wanna be honest with you, I was never one to give to the likes of charity and things like that. Yeah, they're disadvantaged people...it's not like I've anything against them, but I'd sooner help out people that were more close to home.*

Participants' narratives demonstrated that while there were official programmes in place through which they could make contributions to the community, many of the meaningful contributions within the prison setting were those which took place informally, of men's own volition.

## 7.8 Education and Training

For a number of participants who did not perceive any opportunities to contribute directly to their communities during time in prison, the only way to contribute was through self-improvement via education or gaining skills for employment on release. These responses suggested opportunities to contribute to communities, as a citizen, were suspended during imprisonment, but that individuals must go through a transformative process during incarceration to become citizens once more. This speaks to the idea of people in prison as “sleeping citizens”, with the need for change during incarceration before contributions to their communities continue upon release (McNeill & Velasquez, 2017). McNeill and Velasquez (2017) coined this notion of “sleeping citizens”, and note this expectation of change, describing disenfranchisement during incarceration as “civil anesthesia”:

*Whereas medieval punishment imposed civil death on some prisoners (rendering them non-persons), disenfranchisement (only) during imprisonment might be better described as a kind of civil anesthesia; the errant citizen is ‘put to sleep’ while some ‘correction’ takes place that might allow the rehabilitation of citizenship. At the end of this process, released prisoners are expected to have somehow readied themselves for civic revivification.*

For those participants who only identified opportunities to prepare oneself for future contributions, education – in the broadest sense – was perceived as the ‘correction’ individuals undertook before they could awake from their slumber, upon release, as citizens. However, the extent to which participants held this view of education preparing them for future contributions, or constituting part of meaningful citizenship during incarceration, varied greatly between jurisdictions, and depending on the courses available and/or completed.

Education was identified as a way individuals could ‘better’ themselves, and therefore work towards stopping the harm they considered themselves to be causing to outside communities, while preparing them for positive future contributions to those same communities on release. For several participants, this started as seeking to reduce or eradicate their negative impact on external communities, rather than actively engaging through positive contributions. A number of participants drew a connection between

education and the potential for a better society, by encouraging individuals to desist. Fionn, an Irish prisoner nearing release from prison and about to start university, explained the benefits he saw in education:

*Like if people get a little bit of education at the start then point them in that direction. To me, education is the way forward. If you get the kids in and educate them to the level that they should be, you know what I mean, you'll get a better society, you'll get a better team. If you give them nothing, and they have nothing, they're gonna go out robbing to get something.*

Similarly, Jake (Ireland), who had been engaged in computer education before his incarceration, emphasised the importance of education, arguing the need to have more opportunities for engagement with education in prison:

*Education, like. That's what every prisoner needs, is education! More activities! You Know?...To get the prisoners out and working, to better themselves...Education is the key to everything. It helps people. It gives them something... a sense of achievement. The gratitude towards themselves when they do it, you know.*

Jake's words demonstrate not only the significance that education held as a perceived contribution to communities, but also suggest a view of education as an idealised and overarching solution to the vast range of problems faced by those inside. While this huge potential of education was identified by some participants, the extent to which participation in educational activities was seen to be meaningful, and constitute a contribution to their communities, differed across the sample. In particular the level of choice and autonomy involved in participation, and the perceived relevance of learning for life beyond prison, influenced the subjective meaning that education held for participants during incarceration. These factors are now considered in turn.

### **7.8.1. Autonomy & Choice in Participation**

Behan (2014) has discussed how education *can* be a place to assert autonomy, but one of the key differences between experiences and perceptions of education as a potential community contribution for participants, in England and Ireland, was the level of choice and autonomy involved in participation. This characterised participants' narratives around education, and had implications for the extent to which education was

considered a meaningful part of realising citizenship in the men's lives. In England, some participants felt they had no control over the type of education they could participate in, with the allocation process and rationale being unclear. Alfie highlighted this when explaining his reasons for participating in a cookery course:

*I didn't have a choice...I just, they put me on it one morning. You wake up one week and you could be on a different course. You never know what you're gonna get put on, Miss. Activities<sup>58</sup> put you on anything they want.*

This lack of autonomy over involvement in education was also highlighted in relation to the mandatory status of basic education courses, such as Level One Maths and English. A number of participants in England explained how men were repeatedly required to attend these courses, despite having already completed them previously. Mason explained his frustration at having to repeat introductory courses when records of his qualifications were lost:

*I was forced to do the education – I had no choice. I just had to get on with it – it's one of those things...When I was here last time I completed Level One English, and it should have been documented, but when I got here this time it hadn't been recorded properly and they said I had to do it again... I'd already done it! Level One is mandatory, but if they would have just spoken to the induction staff – they'd know my face well enough to know I already done it.*

In their responses, English participants linked the mandatory nature of education to the procurement arrangements, with the repeated requirement of attendance being perceived as the result of education providers' targets. The value of education provision was also questioned by participants, regarding profit-driven targets, when discussing those with legitimate reasons for non-attendance. For example, policies requiring attendance resulted in individuals who were ill being sent to the education building to get their mark, before being sent back to their cell, so their attendance could be counted.

Scholars of prison education have discussed the impact of managerialist, target-driven culture on experiences of incarcerated students (Rogers et al., 2010; Costelloe & Warner, 2014), with entrants for examination being chosen on their ability to pass with

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<sup>58</sup> Term used by men in prison, and staff, to refer to the team responsible for allocating individuals to particular activities or educational programmes at HMP Leeds.

little teaching (Bayliss, 2003). The experiences of participants in this study suggest these priorities continue to influence education provision, and this culture undermines the contribution education could make to any meaningful sense of citizenship during incarceration, prioritising statistics over informal benefits of education for social inclusion. Given the move towards marketisation in prison education in England & Wales, this emphasis on aggregate-based, target-driven practice is unsurprising. Responsibility for prison education provision lies with private and third sector organisations, rather than local authorities as previously was the case, and thus providers are under increasing pressure to prioritise reaching targets at the lowest cost possible. This focus on targets for constructive activity, rather than ensuring individuals access courses that are helpful and meaningful for their development and rehabilitation, was also alluded to in participants' discussions of education. Ethan (England) considered the prison to prioritise being *seen to* provide constructive activity, rather than *actually* delivering opportunities for engagement deemed constructive and meaningful by those participating:

*...the prison service are making people busy, and they're not sat in their cells 23 hours...you're giving them activities that they don't necessarily want to do. No, you might not want to go to education but they'll put you on courses anyway, and you'll get multiple courses too, and it might be of absolutely no benefit whatsoever to your sentence at all, but as long as you've been seen to be out of the cell and doing an activity then that's what they want.*

Alex explained how choice was also restricted by one's sentence plan, with this dictating courses individuals could attend rather than providing a choice between the activities available:

*So...you haven't got no...you can't like contribute to...you can't say "Can I do this? or do this?". They'll say "You've got to do this" ...No, there's no suggestion of "oh I'd like to do this". It's not what would you like to do, it's what they want you to do. You might want to do a course, but if that's not in your Offender Manager plan, for your sentence, you can't do that course.*

By making attendance at educational courses mandatory on the basis of sentence plans, the provision of prison education described by participants appears to fall into the realm of treating particular *needs*, rather than providing opportunities for *transformation*. By

taking this approach the system champions a view of education as something *done to* the individual to *impose* a change, rather than something that allows autonomous engagement and empowers individuals to develop and discover their strengths for developing a pro-social, non-criminal identity. Such practices shape the lived experience of those in prison in a way which pulls in two contradictory and competing directions – enforced compliance sitting in contrast to notions of rehabilitation and, ultimately, participants’ own conceptions of citizenship.

In England, the most positive discussion of education as enabling community contributions was from individuals who had participated in the Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) course in preparation for taking mentoring roles. Logan, a Novus<sup>59</sup> mentor for his wing, explained how he was able to make contributions to the prison community through the training he received which emphasised individuality and autonomy in mentoring others:

*Well in the IAG course everyone’s got their own ways to speak to people, but I do get approached for advice yeah. I didn’t think people would approach me, but they do...there’s no set guidelines about how to do this role – I have my way of doing it.*

Responses from others on the IAG course, like Logan, suggested participants viewed their participation as allowing them to be themselves, identified as key to meaningful realisation of citizenship (see Chapter Nine), and exercise control or autonomy over their contributions based on their own strengths and individual approach.

In contrast to the English participants, for whom education was largely perceived as a requirement rather than an opportunity for development or community contributions, participants in Ireland tended to discuss their involvement in education in a much more positive light, referencing the autonomy involved. Cian explained how engagement with education was a choice he had made, and had allowed him to participate in courses that he wanted to be involved in:

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<sup>59</sup> Novus was the organisation that held the contract for provision of education whilst I was conducting fieldwork at HMP Leeds.

*...all the courses that I done, if I didn't wanna do these myself I wouldn't have done them. Noone said to me "you have to do this, you have to do this" like.*

This sense of control and autonomy through participating in education was echoed by Ryan, who was completing an Open University (OU) degree during his life sentence:

*Well the fact I go to school – that's a choice. I could go to the yard, or out to the gym instead...or the block shop...But I had control over my OU stuff – it was my decision to do that.*

This distinction between the two jurisdictions' approaches to prison education was exemplified in the comments of Ciaran, who had spent time imprisoned in England before his incarceration in Ireland:

*I can make the decision of whether I want to go to work or go to school – now that's different to in English prison. There you have to or you'll be banged up for 22 hours a day. Here even if you don't go to school or work, you're still allowed out of your cell at the same times and you can just go to the gym, the yard or whatever. It's all very set in England if you know what I mean.*

Ciaran's comments summed up a stark distinction in the perceptions of prison education between participants in Ireland and England. When identifying education as a way that they could make meaningful contributions, or prepare for future contributions, participants in Ireland constantly alluded to the importance of their autonomy in participation. While such voluntary opportunities for education do exist within the England & Wales prison system, this was not the perception of education for those imprisoned at HMP Leeds where the emphasis on mandatory courses diminished the meaningfulness of such activities for participants.

### **7.8.2 Education for Life, or for Life in Prison?**

Despite differing education provision and arrangements of delivery, participants in both jurisdictions, with a few exceptions, identified a central limitation of prison education as preparation for community contributions – its perceived lack of relevance to the external job market. In England, Sam used an example of a 'model prisoner' who,



despite participation in courses and employment during sentences, was caught in the revolving door of the prison:

*They'd be better doing more life skills and stuff – things like decorating skills or teaching them a building trade...Like that guy Jonathan, sat on the PID desk, he's done every course but he doesn't use 'em when he's out. All he needs them for is for when he comes back to jail...and to get more pay! They're just not transferable to outside in my eyes.*

Despite later identifying his work through mentoring, when initially asked about opportunities to contribute to communities during incarceration, Logan argued there were none, due to the irrelevance of prison training to the external job market:

*In this prison I don't think there are any to be honest. The courses you have here are so limited. It's awful to be honest – education is awful! I got my maths and English on the out, and so for me there's really not much to offer. Let me think...there's the barista course which I've done, there's the customer service course – done, there's the IT course but all you do there is learn how to use Microsoft Word 2002! What the hell is that gonna teach you?! What edition we on now?...Noone will employ you with that – Jesus Christ!... When I've done my IAG, I wanna better myself but what is there for me? Cause I've done all the others they'll get me tea packing or sewing boxers – who even does this on the outside? I guess tea packing is like working in a factory, but who sews clothes in workshops these days?! And the tea packing is like working in a factory, but then factories aren't bothered about experience or anything anyway – they'll take people with really limited education.*

By identifying a lack of responsiveness to changes in the external job market, but also provision of courses based on out-of-date technology, Logan illustrates how – from the perception of participants at HMP Leeds – opportunities for engagement were not preparing men for employment or future community contributions, and thus failed to foster a sense of being able to fulfill participants' own views of citizenship on release. Similarly, participants in Ireland spoke of the lack of skills-based training for employment. Cian explained how he felt the opportunity to learn a trade would be beneficial and was, given the expertise of staff, a missed opportunity:

*But you're getting thrown out of here like...there's fellas in here doing 12 year, that's the same again like...you'd have 2 trades done like. There's nothing like that available...and most officers in here are*

*tradesmen like. There's carpenters, there's bricklayers, there's this, there's that...They have the staff there that have these qualifications, but it's not err...they don't care like.*

Despite many participants in Ireland expressing the need for skills-based training for future employment, there was one area of education accepted by most participants involved as a legitimate form of preparation for a career beyond prison, and future community contributions – Personal Trainer education. When asked if he would contribute to his community once released, Ryan responded with enthusiasm, sharing his aspirations for success in an industry he perceived to have contemporary relevance:

*Of course! I want to open a gym. I know I could walk straight into a gym – my mate has one – but I'd like to be high up in one, like the sports director, or a tutor or something. Like what Rachel (teacher) does. I mean I'd fit right into a gym you know, and the gym business isn't going to go away I don't think.*

Whether such a career would be feasible for participants on release, given the many structural impediments to employment after conviction, there was a sense that personal training was a way individuals could work towards building a relevant business, that was consistent with the external job market while also providing a potential opportunity for self-employment which would avoid some of the barriers to employment ex-prisoners face. The perceptions of participants appeared to be that those educational activities and training that held relevance for meaningful contributions post-release were those which would prepare the men for careers where they could be self-employed or set up their own business, likely due to the barrier to employment that a conviction poses (discussed further at section 8.6.3). The concentration of participants' positivity and optimism about training in areas such as personal training, suggested that it was those activities which acknowledged the barriers to employment, and provided skills which might enable individuals to by-pass some of these hurdles, which were seen as the most realistic, and therefore meaningful, preparation for future contributions to their communities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate education has the potential to contribute to a meaningful sense of citizenship by providing a way that individuals can prepare themselves for future contributions to their communities. However, such activities are only meaningful for participants where they satisfy two criteria. Firstly, participation

in educational or training programmes needs to facilitate the exercise of autonomy, and secondly there needs to be a clear relevance to real opportunities within the external job market which are accessible to those with convictions. In both jurisdictions, there were frustrations communicated by participants about these criteria not being satisfied, however a key difference between England and Ireland was evident in the autonomy involved in education – voluntary participation in education by participants in Ireland was spoken of far more positively, and considered to have far more relevance to citizenship and community contributions, than mandatory participation in education at HMP Leeds.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

Through exploring participants' perceptions and experiences of opportunities to contribute to their communities during incarceration, a number of themes have arisen. These demonstrate the significance of carceral space and punitive regimes in limiting the extent to which such opportunities, where they exist, are meaningful for individuals' sense of citizenship. Firstly, these findings demonstrate that the activities perceived by individuals as having the potential to constitute community contributions, and thus hold relevance to citizenship as defined by participants, cover a broader range of activity and engagement than the formal instances of volunteering, education or democratic participation often focused on in discussions of 'active citizenship'. Whilst these examples of community contributions were evident, with some participants involved in contributions and activities they had not previously engaged in outside of prison, so too were informal contributions to others in prison, and sometimes prison staff.

Whilst such additions to the range of citizenship activities were raised in participants' responses, the data also illustrates how the value of those activities traditionally associated with citizenship, such as volunteering, education and democratic participation, is shaped significantly by the extent to which participation is autonomous and voluntary. This is tied into whether participation serves or supports 'the system'. As such the potential of these activities for cultivating a sense of citizenship can be undermined by the particular context of imprisonment.

Being able to exercise autonomy and control in decisions to engage, or not, with particular courses or activities was fundamental to participants' understandings of their abilities to make meaningful contributions to their community/ies during their incarceration. While the deprivation of autonomy is widely understood as a pain of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958), and was evident in the narratives of prisoners in England and Ireland, this pain was felt to differing extents in each jurisdiction due to the particular activities available, the arrangements for delivery of and participation in activities, and the pressures facing prison staff in each national context. In Ireland the ability to make autonomous decisions about whether to participate in educational activities was key to the meaning this activity held for participants, while many engaging in education at HMP Leeds did not identify this as meaningful because it was something they were required to do by the prison. As such, while not explicitly defined as key to participants' understandings of citizenship, it is clear in participants' discussions that autonomy was central to whether activities fostered a meaningful sense of citizenship for those in prison. As such, it appears any 'citizenship' activity which exists within the prison environment, and denies such autonomy, cannot be experienced as citizenship in a way that is meaningful to participants. Rather, it is experienced as enforced citizenship – a notion which is profoundly contradictory. This calls into question the extent to which 'active citizenship' within the prison setting is in fact a qualified form of prison citizenship, shaped by an environment where compliance with an individualised system shapes contributions above all else.

Despite much of the data demonstrating the problematic nature of relationships between imprisoned men and prison staff, and the resentment and tension which impacts on participants' experiences, the findings also demonstrate how opportunities for community contributions during incarceration can be seen to challenge principles of prisoner group loyalty, and opposition to prison staff, which Clemmer (1940) posited as fundamental to the 'inmate code'. Whilst the impact of incentivised regimes has been discussed elsewhere as individualising the experience of incarceration and thus softening the 'us v them' distinction between prisoners and staff (Crewe, 2011a), the findings in this study suggest that activities perceived as opportunities to make contributions to the prison community, are sometimes used to assist the running of prisons and maintenance of order where staff are overstretched. Where there was a more pronounced sense of the distinction between officers and those held in prison, in line

with Clemmer's (1940) understanding of prison culture, opportunities to make contributions were fragile due to a lack of staff support.

Finally, it is evident participants in both jurisdictions faced substantial barriers to engagement with activities which could be considered the necessary community contributions for realising meaningful citizenship, and that the experience of the highly engaged prisoner volunteer and representative is not reflective of the experiences of all imprisoned men. Many participants viewed making community contributions during incarceration as impossible due to lack of opportunities, restrictions on participation or the problematic consequences of making such contributions, which for some compounded the sense of disenfranchisement they had already felt within their external communities. As such, there were substantial barriers, faced by those imprisoned in both jurisdictions, to making meaningful contributions and consequently achieving a sense of citizenship that was meaningful in line with their own understandings.



# Chapter Eight

## Maintaining an Identity Beyond ‘Prisoner’

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### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data from interviews, relating to the significance of individuals’ ability to maintain an identity that extends beyond the status of ‘prisoner’ or ‘inmate’ during their incarceration. Despite these not being topics directly addressed in interview questions, several factors central to participants’ understandings of citizenship were the significance of identity, humanity or personhood, and sense of self. The data speaks to the importance of non-prisoner identities to maintaining a meaningful sense of citizenship, in part due to the debasement of personhood inherent in the stigmatised identity of ‘prisoner’. Recognition of individuals’ humanity, individuality and value as a ‘normal’ person, both from their own perspective and that of others around them, was highlighted by a large number of participants as significant to the meaning citizenship held for them. This chapter will consider these perceived features of ‘citizen’ identities, before exploring the ways individuals sought to construct and/or maintain their imported identities during incarceration. Consideration is then given to the factors impacting upon the feasibility of constructing positive, non-prisoner identities in the prison setting, and the extent to which the maintenance of a ‘citizen’ identity was possible for those interviewed.

Alluding to the significance of identity and sense of self to understandings of citizenship, participants referred to the importance of being seen, and treated as human, an individual, or a ‘normal’ person by those around them. Many suggested these were opposed to the view and treatment of people in prison; the identity of ‘prisoner’ or ‘criminal’ was regularly viewed as incompatible with that of ‘citizen’. The impact of imprisonment on identity, sense of self, and individuality is clear throughout much of the seminal prisons literature. In contemporary prisons, processes of reward for compliance with penal regimes, and punishment for disobedient behaviour, further contribute to the shaping of individuals’ identities during time in prison (Crewe, 2007b). Developments in prison sociology have explored identity work as meaningful for individuals in the negotiation of prison life (Rowe, 2011; Ugelvik, 2011), as well as

considering the significance of programmes in shaping the extent to which identity work, and the development of positive identities, can take place in carceral spaces (Feldman, 2018; Smoyer, 2014). However, studies of subjective understandings of self-identity for those in prison are largely absent from the literature (Bosworth, 2003; Rowe, 2011). In particular, subjective self-identity is yet to be considered in relation to citizenship for those incarcerated in modern prisons, despite a connection being drawn between citizenship and identity in the broader social sciences literature (Isin & Wood, 1999; Purvis & Hunt, 1999; Frosh, 2001). The data presented in this chapter demonstrates that identity and self-concept have significance for a meaningful sense of citizenship for men in prison, and the context of imprisonment can challenge some of the fundamental elements of identity which may be taken for granted in wider society.

## **8.2 The Prison as an Assault on Identity**

It is widely accepted that modern punishment, and in particular the prison, is fundamentally concerned with the self in its emphasis on seeking to change and reform the ‘offender’. This is evidenced by the move towards treatment-focused models of punishment as described by Foucault (1977), and contemporary discourse around rehabilitation (Rowe, 2011). At the centre of efforts to rehabilitate an individual is the intention of changing them as a person by eradicating undesirable elements of their behaviour in favour of those deemed acceptable or desirable by society. As such, narratives around the experience of imprisonment frequently refer to ‘change’ in, ‘damage’ to, or realisation of one’s sense of self, as reflected in responses of participants in this study. Whilst the self and identity differ (Jewkes, 2005), they are interrelated in the way interactions based on the presumed identity of an individual can shape, challenge or reinforce their own subjective sense of self. It was clear from participants’ comments that, for many, being in prison had an impact on their understanding of both their identity from the perspectives of others, and their sense of self, which were often experienced as mutually reinforcing/dependent in men’s explanations. Aaron (Ireland) drew a clear distinction between his identity outside and while in prison. When asked if he considered himself to be a citizen, he explained how this depended on whether he was incarcerated, saying “No. On the outside...[but] I’m a prisoner on the inside.” For Aaron, and many other participants, their imprisonment had implications for their understanding of their identity in relation to wider society.



The data presented in this chapter demonstrates a number of factors shaped this subjective distinction between inside and outside identities, and the ways prison regimes, and staff behaviour, served to create and sustain this division; for most participants, the status of ‘citizen’ was considered to be in direct opposition to ‘prisoner’ identity.

There was a sense amongst participants that during incarceration the label of ‘prisoner’ reified individuals’ identities to a sum of the actions which led to their incarceration. Where individuals usually possess multiple identities based around their various roles and relationships, during incarceration there was a sense that these other identities – often pro-social and legitimate – were swamped by the master status of ‘prisoner’. As such, any sense of self based on factors beyond the prison was eroded substantially. Previous research has demonstrated how the experience of imprisonment serves to destruct the individuality of confined people through the institutional regimes and structures it imposes. Sykes (1958) outlines how the deprivations inherent in imprisonment reduce opportunities for assertion of individuality through autonomous acts, whilst Goffman (1961: 35) theorises how the regime inmates are subject to in the ‘total institution’ forces out any sense of individuality through “mortification of the self”. In addition to these processes of mortification and dehumanisation, the prison environment can also cause some to consciously change their presented identity for practical reasons of survival. Jewkes (2012: 46) has argued “in order to acculturate to their new environment, prisoners suspend their pre-institution identities and temporarily construct an inauthentic identity that masks the true self”. This was one theme evident in discussions about time in prison, with many participants explaining how they, or others, put up a front or mask in order to hide signs of vulnerability, and avoid becoming a target of bullying or violence within the prison setting. When asked to explain what he meant when he talked about needing to ‘wear a mask’ in prison, Cathal (Ireland) explained how presenting oneself in this way was necessary, but also problematic in terms of the impact it had on future sense of self:

*Image...you know you're looked at as weak and you're preyed on, you know what I mean? Preyed on, people will prey on you, you know what I mean? ...Preyed on in ways where they'd take stuff off you, they'd take drugs off you, they'd take clothes off you...things like that, you know what I mean? Cause you're weak...I wouldn't be a victim now, but what I'm saying is that's...this is what happens. Your brain*

*gets trained to being like that...and you feel like you have to be like that everywhere you go, d'ya know what I mean? And you think...you think, Abi, ahh it'll be alright when I get out, but really...you're still stuck with that! You know what I mean? You're still stuck in that fucked up frame of mind.*

In his explanation of why he felt it was necessary to wear a 'mask', and sustain a presentation of self different to his 'real' identity, Cathal highlights how the presentation of a particular self or identity can be instrumental. In this instance, it served the function of shielding individuals from the threats posed by other men alongside whom they were incarcerated. As such, only narratives of self that held this utility were viewed as feasible within the prison environment. Despite serving a purpose for Cathal, the presentation of self through the mask he describes had a fundamental impact on what he anticipated his identity would be following release. Having taken on the mask of a prison identity, and behaved in ways to support and maintain it, Cathal demonstrated anxiety about his ability to develop a healthier, more genuine identity to replace this in the future. Later in the discussion, Cathal referred to this in terms of a sense of loss explaining how he needed and hoped to find his true self, which had been 'lost' during his many years in prison:

*I just wanna get my life together, you know what I mean? Help my family, you know? ...I wanna go to treatment I do, you know what I mean? ...I wanna be in an environment where I know people have my best interests and where I don't have to put a mask on, where I can take the mask off and reveal myself. I don't have to show an image, you know what I mean? I can be myself, you know? I can be myself. I can be myself more and more, and I can learn to...be myself again and find that person that...that I lost through being in prison. Do you get me? Like I'd love to find that, you know what I mean, and get that back...cause when I find that, that's...the main thing Abi, you know what I mean?*

The sense of loss communicated by Cathal, and concern about his ability to rediscover a healthier, genuine identity following release, demonstrates how damaging the impact of prison can be on identity and sense of self, supporting seminal literature (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961). This also demonstrates how the construction of identity within a prison setting is fundamentally different than outside, by encouraging behaviour which does not allow for a genuine presentation of self and, as the following data and discussion demonstrate, present substantial barriers to a meaningful sense of citizenship for those in prison. This sense of anxiety surrounding the ability to find or develop an

identity of the ‘real me’ was most prevalent in the narratives of those who had been in prison from a very young age, spending time in Young Offender Institutions in England, or Children Detention Schools in Ireland, throughout their formative years.

In contrast, a number of older prisoners expressed a higher level of confidence in their sense of self being genuine, and therefore one which had carried on from their life before prison. Nevertheless, these were still accompanied with some doubt. For example, Oisín’s (Ireland) comments illustrated the struggle men found with knowing whether they had changed, or were taking on an identity reflective of their true self whilst in the thick of the prison regime:

*You would hope you could go back to some sort of normality when you get out you know? It's...it's actually impossible to say...because in here I feel my head is right, I feel everything is right, but you don't know how it's going to be being released after eleven and a half years. You don't know how you're gonna be able to help, how you're gonna be able to get on with life you know. You would hope so. You would hope so, and mentally I think yeah I'm OK yeah. I'm over half way through now or something, and mentally I don't think I've changed at all...I hope not anyway.*

Such concern and doubt over the extent to which individuals would be able to ‘find’ their true self following release from prison is, in many respects, unsurprising given that the rehabilitative aims of both prison services rely upon the ability to change people (HMPPS, 2018; IPS, 2017); rehabilitation and reform are notions which rely primarily on seeking a self for the imprisoned individual that is different to that they arrived with, and thus instills ontological insecurity for those who are subject to this rhetoric and its implementation.

A fundamental difference between the two jurisdictions was the extent to which individuals had space and time during which they felt able to truly be themselves. All of the men interviewed at Mountjoy Prison, as well as a few Listeners at HMP Leeds, were held in single occupancy cells meaning lock-up offered some privacy from the forced conviviality of the wings. Oisín (Ireland) described how this made evening lock-up the best part of the day, because he was able to finally let down the guard of his performed prison identity:

*Having your own time as well...I think everybody, if you ask...I'd say most people you'd ask... once half 7 comes, it's great. Everybody loves*

*half 7. It's the time of the day you know! The door is banged out, that's it you know. Eastenders starts, or Coronation Street starts or whatever it is you know. That's your little relaxation time then, you know... That's my time to read my paper and relax, because I give the paper to the lads all day. They can read it all day and I just want it back for half 7 then you know...and then I can read it in peace! Yeah, that's my own relaxation then.*

However, for the vast majority of prisoners at HMP Leeds, this privacy at the end of the day was not guaranteed. All but two of those interviewed were held in cells with one or two other men. While some developed very positive, open relationships with their cell-mates, this was not universal and for others removed the possibility of being one's true self from all aspects of life in prison.

This thesis illustrates how individuals' identities and sense of self can be damaged or marginalised through the processes, interactions and experiences inherent to imprisonment. However, scholars have argued people in prison do not just lose their existing identity, but may replace it with an alternative identity as part of their adaptation to the prison environment (Rowe, 2011; Ievins & Crewe, 2015) or through the taking on of particular roles or activities within the course of their sentence (Feldman, 2018; Duguid, 1980). In the definitions of citizenship men provided, it became clear this process of identity maintenance, construction or adaptation was linked to a meaningful sense of citizenship; participants highlighted several factors they considered relevant to maintaining the identity of human being, individual, and 'normal' person, as so many considered fundamental to citizenship. These included moral characteristics centered around being a 'good' person, as well as holding socially acceptable roles built around the social identities of partner, parent or worker. In addition to the stripping of individual identity traits through the 'mortification' described by Goffman (1961), the prison setting presents a number of barriers to maintaining, or constructing, these positive, socially accepted identities which participants felt were necessarily part of a meaningful experience of citizenship. The particular types of identity noted as necessary were often opposed to the status of 'prisoner', and illustrated the significance of maintaining an identity beyond the 'prisoner' label if individuals were to feel like, or subjectively identify themselves as citizens in any meaningful way.

### **8.3 Prisoners' Perceptions of Themselves as Citizens: Common Humanity and Equality.**

Despite an increasing scholarly appreciation that imprisonment is accompanied by various collateral consequences, which diminish the rights and privileges associated with citizenship (Travis, 2002), the majority of participants initially responded strongly with the assertion that they were indeed citizens. In so doing, many of these participants appeared to use the question of their citizenship status as an opportunity to assert their shared characteristics with non-prisoners, and to minimise perceptions of difference by appealing to notions of sameness, equality, integrity and universality as central to the meaning of citizenship.

Multiple participants asserted their own citizenship by appealing to a universal notion inalienable from their existence as human beings. This universalist conception of citizenship, in asserting one's own citizenship status, was evident in responses from participants in England and Ireland. When asked if he would describe himself as a citizen, Jack (Ireland) responded saying "A citizen? Yeah...Like just cause we're not outside, doesn't mean we're not human beings". This position was echoed by Ethan (England) who felt citizenship was a status of personhood everyone holds by nature of living as a human being, and that could not be removed by imprisonment: "Even though I am incarcerated, and I live behind a big wall, I'm still a member of this human race. I'm still a person." Underpinning these responses appeared to be a desire to emphasise similarity, and to reduce perceptions of distance between prisoners and others in wider society. Re-iterating the importance of *being* to citizenship, Jack commented further: "We're still human beings in here. Just cause we've no freedom doesn't mean we're any different". This served to emphasise the lack of any fundamental difference between prisoners, as humans, and any other human being. In doing so, participants shifted focus to the institution's impact *on* incarcerated people, rather than what their imprisonment said about them compared to law-abiding members of society.

Where participants argued they were able to realise their citizenship status during time in prison, this was often underpinned by universalist understandings of citizenship as constituting *any* lifestyle, whatever activity this might entail. For these individuals, what they were doing with their time, who they interacted with, or the morality of their actions had little bearing on their ability to realise a sense of citizenship behind bars.

These individuals felt they were simply living out citizenship in a different way, and through a different lifestyle to citizens in the community. Emphasising the fact these participants did not consider the universal status of citizenship to be altered or denied by imprisonment, multiple individuals noted how many different behaviours and lifestyles existed within the citizenry. What this behaviour or lifestyle looked like, however, was inconsequential for the denial or retention of citizenship status. Sam (England) illustrated this point by describing how one of the fundamental features of citizenship was the diversity of the lives that citizens lead:

*We're all citizens at the end of the day, but I think there's different types of citizens. There's them who are stuck in their mundane life, there are those who live for drugs, and there are people who try and make a difference. That's what citizenship's about really.*

By demonstrating an understanding of citizenship as enhanced by diversity and difference, Sam minimised the moral distinction between those in prison and law-abiding members of society. Suggesting both ways of experiencing life are wholly compatible with citizenship, this view contradicts arguments that citizenship is dependent on civic virtue or observing the social contract, which often frame the debate of prisoners' inclusion or exclusion from citizenship.

Going beyond inclusion of offending lifestyles within understandings of citizenship, to claiming their value for the citizenry, Ethan (England) argued criminal lifestyles were an important part of citizenship. These lifestyles would 'balance out' the law-abiding, communitarian individuals to ensure the laws and rules imposed on the citizenry are challenged, and wider issues in society highlighted through this behaviour:

*So yeah, it is a lifestyle.*

*AS: So you think the lifestyle of prison itself is...a way of acting out citizenship, just in a different way?*

*Yeah. Yeah definitely, yeah. You know...we have to have us<sup>60</sup> good-doers, but we also have to have us wrong-doers as a balance do you know? ...I mean...everything has to be challenged. I think every rule and decision has to be challenged. Just to even, sort of like...yeah to validate it or to...to challenge it I suppose...Breaking the law might*

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<sup>60</sup> "Us" in this context is local dialect, normally used in place of "our". As such, Ethan is stating that we need to have our good-doers and our wrong-doers in society.

*be a way of challenging something that's happened, you know, to yourself. It's a way of pointing out, right this has been done to me...I don't know. You know you've been released out of jail and you haven't got any money at all, which is an all too often thing that happens...*

Such a construction of offending lifestyles as having a social function of political activism, or raising awareness of issues in wider society, demonstrates that whilst based on an underlying premise of citizenship as a universal status which *should* be attributed to all, Ethan's explanation is ultimately influenced by an understanding that some form of contribution, or public good, is intrinsic to citizenship. Ethan sought to justify the inclusion of himself, and other individuals with offending histories, as citizens by arguing their unlawful actions served a wider social purpose. In doing so, he minimised the distance between himself as a prisoner and the law-abiding population, by advocating a conception of citizenship which includes all.

While the majority of participants drew upon this understanding of an inalienable status of citizenship, unaffected by their offending behaviour, not all participants were convinced of how this broad, inclusive notion of citizenship played out in practice. As Reiner (2010) discusses, 'citizenship' as a term in political discussion and debate has largely been focused on exclusivity, whether in terms of nationality, or the testing of deservingness of attached rights on the basis of moral standing or economic productivity. Opposition to such an approach was evident in the language of universalism in participants' responses, with some specifically denying the validity of any exclusionary definition on the basis of socio-economic status. Shane (Ireland) said, for him, the meaning of citizenship was "Having a life, I suppose". He did not think citizenship rested on any conditions but was fundamentally about inclusion and equality:

*I believe everyone is a citizen whether they're giving to the community or taking from it. Everyone deserves to be a citizen, and people shouldn't be excluded because they're poor or whatever.*

Although Shane believed that all people are citizens, his following assertion that everyone "deserves to be a citizen" demonstrates how his belief, and self-perception, did not necessarily reflect the perceptions of others, or the lived reality of citizenship. His self-perception as a citizen may be an expression of what *should be*, rather than

*what is* in day-to-day life, with his view being that his socio-economic background has excluded him from citizenship, even before considering his incarceration. A difference between this universal conception of citizenship, and its realisation in practice, was also evident in discussion with George (England) who also appealed to humanity and universality in his assessment of his own citizenship status, saying:

*Everyone's still a person, whether they've made a bad choice or not, they are still a person and deserve a right of life, you know...everybody is exactly the same, whether we're in here, whether we're out there, whether we're rich, whether we're poor. Everybody is the same.*

In both jurisdictions, the prison population are disproportionately drawn from backgrounds of deprivation and financial instability, with many of those incarcerated coming from the same locales and economic backgrounds (O'Mahony, 1997; IPRT, 2017; PRT, 2017). As such, this reference to exclusionary citizenship definitions, on the basis of socio-economic status, is not surprising, but highlight an important element of intersectionality in the way citizenship is understood and experienced for marginalised individuals. Shane and George's comments illustrate how some participants considered themselves to be excluded from citizenship by nature of their socio-economic position, which thus influenced their experience of 'lived citizenship' not only during incarceration but also in their lives outside of prison. Nevertheless, this exclusion was furthered by imprisonment and, despite affirming his own citizenship status, when asked about whether it was possible to live as a citizen in prison, George went on to discuss how this principle of universality was challenged by the impact imprisonment has on individuals' rights and opportunity to have their views heard:

*You are still a citizen. You are still a member of the area, the population. You are... but no. Some of your rights are taken away. All things like voting, you know? Obviously we were just on about the government - you're not allowed to vote. Well, why not?! D'ya know? At the end of the day, to me, people that are in prison have rebelled against the system, whatever system that may be. They've rebelled against the system for a reason. If you're not gonna let 'em vote, that reason will never come to light...so you're basically just masking all the problems. That's all you're doing, you know?*

In addition to demonstrating one of the problems perceived by participants in relation to the denial of specific rights for individuals in prison, George makes clear that



situating himself within the universal understanding of citizenship he initially shared is problematic. The realities of imprisonment, and its accompanying restrictions, make it difficult for any universal citizenship status to be lived out in practice. The frequent attribution of citizenship status to ‘everyone’ by participants, suggests an idealistic conceptualisation, centred on inclusion on equal terms, through recognising individuals’ common humanity – a principle identified as key to commonism, and a truly inclusive notion of citizenship, by Bell and Scott (2016). Such an inclusive notion of citizenship has also been highlighted as key to addressing the problem of social exclusion by Easton (2008). However, such a view of citizenship is considered utopian, precisely because it goes beyond what actually exists. In their proposal of a utopian “citizenship of the common”, Bell and Scott (2016: 61) note this ideal of citizenship can only exist as “lived experience”. As such, it is necessary to acknowledge that even for those who initially identified themselves as holding such a universal status, whether this status is realised in lived experience is likely to be more complex. Whilst some participants initially appeared to hold a basic self-concept as citizens, participants’ comments highlighted that self-perception alone was insufficient for a lived experience of citizenship. Given the inherent connotations of citizenship as relating the individual to a wider collective, participants were also concerned with how they were perceived, accepted, and treated by others, when considering their own standing as citizens, not only in relation to their incarceration but also their circumstances outside of prison.

#### **8.4 Maintaining a Human Identity**

Participants in this study identified being human as the main criteria for holding citizenship status. One’s sense of self is not only achieved through self-identification, but is also constructed and reinforced through the behaviour of others towards the individual, and their interactions with them. As such, whilst participants in this study explained all humans should be considered citizens, this does not mean this was reflected in the views others, particularly prison staff and members of the public, held of them as incarcerated individuals. Despite a growing body of law and policy which suggests a “fundamental commitment in Europe towards recognising that prisoners should not be degraded but treated with dignity and mercy” (Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009: 383), this was not always reflected in the experiences shared by participants in this research. Liebling (2011) has highlighted how it can be hard to understand what

notions of ‘inhuman and degrading treatment’ mean in practice, or as experienced by the prisoner, however the findings from this study demonstrate that a range of day-to-day experiences in prisons, in England and Ireland, are experienced as minimising the human identity of the individual.

#### **8.4.1 Acknowledging the Existence of Lives Behind Bars**

The utopian nature of participants’ conceptions of citizenship was supported by those who vehemently maintained they were *not* citizens due to their treatment and experiences during imprisonment. One way this was illustrated was in participants’ explanations of how their treatment did not reach the standards expected for human beings of equal or universal status. Andrew (England) described the experience of incarceration as “totally degrading” and highlighted that “you’re totally separated from [the] reality” human beings on the outside of prison are living. Going even further than referring to separation from the external reality of life, several participants described how being in prison was in some respects equivalent to having died, highlighting the perceived incompatibility of humanity-based citizenship and incarceration. Aiden (England) described how, for him, being in prison was not a life, but a mere existence:

*I’m dead to the community at the moment...You just exist here, don’t you? You just exist...That’s literally, that’s all you’re doing. You’re existing. You’re dead to the world, aren’t ya?...You’re not dead but you might as well be...you know, you spend most days wishing your life away. I want the third to come, I want the third to come, I want the third to come.*

For Aiden, his assumption was that to the community outside he was as good as dead while in prison. This suggests not only a sense of physical removal from the collective living of a community, but also removal from their thoughts and concerns upon imprisonment. Other participants spoke in a similar vein, describing how they felt forgotten by their communities outside, for whom life continued, as Louis (England) explained:

*When you're in prison it's like...it's a different, to me yeah, it's a totally different world innit, prison? Prison's like...forgotten about people, prisoners are...It's like you're non-existent once you're in here. You know? People are living their own lives outside, you know what I mean? It's a totally different world you're living in.*

Despite many having contact with members of family through phone calls and visits, there was a sense amongst participants that they had been ‘forgotten’, whether in the day-to-day of their loved ones’ lives or by their communities more broadly. These comments reflected the notion of exile and echoed earlier findings on the significance of being remembered by members of external communities to participants’ understandings of citizenship (see section 6.3.4). While numerous crossings of the ‘border’ between inside and outside took place, the fact these only went in one direction meant participants were unable to see or imagine their existence being acknowledged in their communities beyond the prison.

#### **8.4.2 Being Afforded the Rights of Humans**

Despite the prevalent discussion of rights as central to prisoners’ citizenship status (Easton, 2008; van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009), few participants adopted rights-based language in their own understandings of citizenship. However, this did provide an interesting difference between jurisdictions. In Ireland, an assumption that citizenship was linked to rights was slightly more prevalent, with a few participants referencing their rights as indicative of citizenship. When asked what citizenship meant to him, Ross said “I can get certain things off the government”, while Eoin listed some of these rights in the meaning citizenship held for him: “medical card – things like that...When you have citizenship here you do have a medical card, things like that for health and housing”.

Oisin (Ireland), felt strongly he was “definitely” a citizen and that the meaning citizenship held for him revolved around the rights he had, in particular the right to vote:

*Again, the right to vote. You know? The right to have proper healthcare like you would out there, you know, just liberties like that, you know...Healthcare and the right to vote and stuff like that, you know, and to be treated with a bit of dignity in here, you know, which I think we are treated with a bit of dignity in here you know. It’s not like years ago.*

As this quote from Oisin illustrates, some participants drew upon their awareness of their rights during incarceration as evidence of their sustained human status. These participants interpreted continuation of such rights as indicative of a commitment to treat those in prison with dignity, and as human beings. For Oisin, retaining some of

the same rights as those in wider society was an indication of his dignity being recognised. Oisín demonstrated a high level of confidence in his ability to enforce his own rights, with strong awareness of his own entitlements and the ways to ensure he would receive these:

*AS: And do you feel that...obviously you talk about how rights are important to that [citizenship], do you feel that you're able to enforce those rights? That you can make sure that you get those things in prison?*

*Sometimes you might have to threaten them with the High Court, for the health things you know...I have a lot of health problems myself...but I wanted to see the doctor one time, and I was told there was no doctor available. So I said "that's no problem, I'll get onto my solicitor about it. I'll be taking this to the High Court" I says. Because I'm the same as any other citizen, I'm entitled to healthcare. And...within 20 minutes an ACO [Assistant Chief Officer] came upto the fabric shop and said "Oisín, the doctor will see you now", so I said "no problem"...so with a little bit of a threat of the High Court...*

As such, Oisín demonstrated both the significance of his ability to invoke his rights, and his knowledge of the entitlements of an Irish citizen, as crucial to his understanding of himself as holding a meaningful citizen identity. This was echoed by Ryan (Ireland) who, having already explained his own success in a legal challenge of prison conditions, was confident he could ensure his rights were enforced by making use of the law:

*If they don't listen then I would say that I'm going onto the legal side. There's this guy that comes in once a week to help with legal stuff, and he's really pro-prisoner, and if you have something he'll tell you all about how to take it forward and he'll get you in the High Court...he'd say I'll have you in there on Monday!*

Overall, participants in Ireland demonstrated a higher level of confidence in, and awareness of, their ability to enforce the rights they viewed as integral to citizenship status during incarceration, with a number saying any action taken would be through legal challenge, rather than prison complaints procedures or the democratic process. Contrastingly, where rights were raised as a feature of citizenship status by prisoners in England, this was often raised in the context of negative comments about the lack of rights available, or even enforceable, for imprisoned individuals. Offering his understanding of what it meant to be a citizen, Logan (England) drew a very clear

distinction between prisoners and the general public on the basis of rights, saying a citizen is “Just a member of the public with rights. You just don’t feel like you have rights here – none at all”. Similarly, Isaac (England) argued that during incarceration citizenship was insignificant, because individuals were not able to enforce any of the rights attached to it:

*What is the point of being...having a feeling of being a citizen whilst you're in here if you can't...if you're not empowered to exercise any of those citizenship rights? I would say 99.9% of people in here wouldn't give a shit about it. They're being incarcerated by the body of which they believed they were a citizen! They've been incarcerated for a reason but there's a conflict, and they're certainly not going to be supporting the authority that put them in here, are they?*

For some, despite holding rights which afforded equal human status in law, their subjective lived experience was one of having no rights and instead possessing a subjugated status that did not respect their intrinsic human worth. Niall (Ireland) explained how his perception was that individuals were denied rights in prison by nature of their identity being perceived as just that of ‘prisoner’:

*They just look at us as prisoners – you have no rights! We could put stuff up to them and say we'd like this or that, but it would just go in one ear and out the other.*

For Niall, this perceived lack of rights (despite the objective existence of many rights in law) and accompanying human status was illustrated in the fact men in prison were not listened to. Andrew (England), who was in his 60s and held on the Vulnerable Prisoner Unit (VPU), also communicated a subjective denial of the rights legally maintained during imprisonment: “I’ve no rights here, and when I get out of prison I won’t have any rights at all because...the way my health is, prison’s done for me.” For him, not only was his subjective perception that he lacked the legal rights attributed to human beings outside of prison during his time inside, but also that in fact the prison itself would be responsible for taking away his very existence as a human being – his life. Andrew’s comment suggests, in addition to degrading one’s symbolic identity and status as a human being, the experience of incarceration is also perceived as damaging the physical chances of sustained existence and being through its negative impact on individuals’ health. While Andrew is speculating about the future, his concerns are not unwarranted when there were such high levels of deaths in custody at the time of

fieldwork (MOJ, 2018c), which have continued to rise since (MOJ, 2019a), suggesting incarceration not only presents an existential threat to maintained social existence as a human being, but also a very real threat to future living existence. Andrew's comments provide empirical support for Scott's (2018: 164) argument that the prison is "haunted by the "spirit of death," speaking to the presence of all three types of death in the experience of incarceration (*civil, social and corporeal*). Having initially identified the presence of *civil death* through the lack of rights available to him, Andrew notes how this will continue upon release. Having been convicted of a sexual offence, Andrew referred throughout his interview to the limits that would be placed upon him socially, on release, through being unable (or unwelcome) to be involved in the community as a result of the stigma attached to his offence. Andrew explained this sense of social exclusion by saying "my community will be my house." This demonstrates that the *social death* Andrew sees himself as experiencing is so stigmatising that it will continue upon release. Finally, Andrew's reference to his health illustrates how the prison environment has not only negatively impacted his health physically, but also made him more acutely aware of his mortality. This further supports the existence of an "intensified death consciousness" in the prison environment, with imprisonment removing the positive stimuli which enable individuals to deny the presence of *corporeal* death as a future inevitability (JanMohamed, 2005 cited in Scott, 2018: 264). In this respect, Andrew's discussion of rights demonstrates strongly the significance of rights as an indication of acknowledged common humanity in participants' understandings of citizenship, with the prison even threatening realisation of the broadest conceptualisations based purely upon existence as a human being.

In the few cases where rights were highlighted as fundamental to the meaning citizenship held for participants, the tone with which these rights were discussed differed between the two jurisdictions. In short, participants in Ireland who discussed rights did so with a confidence in their ability to enforce them and seek legal recourse, while mention of rights by participants in England was often to illustrate their perceived lack of presence for people in prison. This suggested that the status of *Rechtsburgerschaft* (Kelk, 2000 cited in Van Zyl Smit & Snacken, 2009) was more likely to be experienced in Ireland. Here, participants seemed to have a greater awareness of their rights and, as such, were closer to the position of an unprejudiced legal standing as human beings. This raises an interesting difference between rights in

law, and rights in lived experience – whilst in practice those imprisoned in England also retain certain rights during incarceration, the perception of their ability to enforce these is substantially impaired, with individuals lacking the awareness, means, or resources to enforce their rights consistently while behind bars.

### **8.4.3 Humans, Not Animals: Being Treated with Humanity & Dignity**

Relating to participants' discussions of universal citizenship, the concept of dignity and humanity repeatedly arose in men's answers. Participants in both jurisdictions explained how they felt their humanity was minimised in their treatment, and the views others held of them, as prisoners. In particular, animalistic language was used to illustrate the lack of human worth or value these individuals felt they were afforded in prison. The lack of humanity attached to the 'prisoner' identity as perceived by participants was evident in the likening of imprisonment experiences to those of animals, both in relation to their confinement in cage-like spaces, and in some of the specific dehumanising practices which took place during imprisonment. Explaining how his understanding of citizenship did not apply to people in prison, Isaac referred to the situation of prisoners in HMP Leeds as being "cooped up like an animal in a cage", while several other participants referred to particular aspects of prison life which conveyed their subjugated position, and treatment without dignity or humanity, in a manner which likened them to animals. Aiden (England) was one of several participants who used animalistic language in support of their views that the experience of imprisonment was degrading and damaging. He described how they were locked up in conditions inconsistent with the needs of human beings, or of those citizens outside of prison. Moreover, his description of how prisoners are 'caged' might be likened to wild animals being held in cages outside of their natural habitat, in the unhealthy situation it creates:

*So I'm behind my door. I'm caged in, and it's irritating sometimes. You know we're human beings. We're not designed to be put behind a door, full stop... But if I paint you a picture, Abi. If I stuck you in your bedroom and left you there with a toilet for twenty four hours, you'd go off your head!*

This metaphor of caged animals was also clear in the perspectives of Cian (Ireland) in describing how his circumstances in prison were different to that of those deserving of citizenship status. However, as with a number of older prisoners and those serving

longer sentences, this was somewhat tempered by the fact conditions in Irish prisons had recently improved substantially through the introduction of in-cell sanitation and single cells (IPS, 2017):

*If you catch a wild bird and you put it in a cage, he will tame to the cage. You'll break down to the size of, like the bird, to the size of your cage... or the size of the bird and the size of you, the cells are about the same. They're only twelve by six maybe? D'ya know? It's a lot better conditions since 2011. In 2011 there was two of us in a cell errr, we had no wash hand basin, no toilet d'ya know ...so in the cell now you've got your sink, you've got your toilet in the cell, so it's a lot better like...cause I'm a non-smoker as well so it's handier...it's handy in that way like.*

While acknowledging the improvements to conditions since his previous sentence, Cian also illustrates how notions of citizenship based on humanity may not be realised in the context of imprisonment if individuals do not feel their conditions are such that their humanity is acknowledged. In fact, in describing how the bird is broken down “to the size of your cage”, Cian alludes to the damaging effect on an individual’s status as an autonomous individual that such conditions can have. For other participants, it was not only the physical conditions of incarceration which created a tension between universal understandings of citizenship by virtue of living, and realisation of this status for prisoners themselves. While the reality of being caged or locked up was central to many of these narratives, Rory (England) described how the treatment of men by staff could sometimes be likened to that of animals, rather than human beings, with these being the times when he felt least like a citizen:

*Well sometimes we do get treat a bit like shit, you know when you're not...when you're banged up for no reason...or someone'll have an argument on the wing, or a fight on the wing, and they'll shut the full wing down and then you're banged up for like two hours, when it's not even down to you...They're just seeing you as...a fight's gone on on the wing, and they'll forget about that you're that person. You just get treat like a dog, if you must say.*

Rory’s description of his treatment during a lock-down on the wing as “like a dog” illustrates the significance that being treated as an individual person held. Seeing and acknowledging ‘that person’, as Rory states, is fundamental to any citizenship status based on common humanity; the treatment of men in prison as a homogenous collective, rather than individuals, is what leads to a perception of their treatment as



like animals. Tyler (England) explained how this feeling of being contained, and treated, like an animal was heightened for those who were serving their sentence on a Basic regime:

*If you're on Standard they'll talk to you a bit different, treat you a bit different. When you're on Basic they just treat you like a dog! They'll block the stairs off so that you can't go nowhere.*

*AS: Yeah. When you say they treat you like a dog, what is it that makes you feel like that? Blocking the stairs and things like that?*

*Yeah, they just block the stairs and won't like...talk to you, or look at you, you know what I mean? You can't get no answers out of 'em.*

Tyler's comments demonstrated how this feeling of being treated like an animal, rather than a human being, was often connected to the feeling that an *individual* is forgotten within the prison environment. Tyler's description of how officers would concurrently block entry as if controlling an animal, while avoiding eye contact and interaction, suggested that failure to see the person themselves, or perhaps avoidance of this, was what strengthened the feeling of being treated like an animal. Not only had the individual been forgotten, but their humanity too.

Treatment described by other participants further illustrated a lack of respect and dignity that might go along with a 'normal' person's identity, in their interactions and relationships with staff. For example, the closure of the prisoner council, with little explanation to those who had participated, was interpreted by Cian (Ireland) as a way in which the council members were treated with the level of respect expected for animals, rather than human beings:

*...there was twelve of us elected there for the job like, and we would've...we would've took whatever complaints off any errr prisoner...and we would've brung it to them and said "look, this is how it works like" but as soon as it got wrote about, we got dropped like dogs like.*

This feeling of being treated without humanity was also illustrated in participants' comments about how aspects of the prison regime challenged their understanding of dignity. When asked about when he felt most like a citizen during his time inside, Aiden (England) responded with an example of a scenario where he felt his personal dignity was invaded to the extent he couldn't see himself as a citizen:

*Least like a citizen is when they strip-search you. Don't like that. It just feels like...you know, you're in front of blokes and you have to spread your bum cheeks. You know? It's not a nice thing. I've got a girlfriend, you know! She wouldn't be happy, you know what I mean? So...very invasive if you ask me. I don't like that. I can't think of me being a citizen.*

This sense of being treated like an animal, described by multiple participants, demonstrated the way in which the status of those in prison is viewed as inherently reduced to the subjugated 'prisoner' identity, with little requirement for the dignity and humanity generally expected to be afforded to human beings. Some participants cited exceptions to this, noting how interactions with staff could be powerful in challenging the dehumanising experience of incarceration, and demonstrating to the men that they were still seen by others as human. Fionn (Ireland) discussed this when asked if there was a time in prison when he felt most like a citizen:

*Just the way that like, some officers...they treat you with respect, because they want respect. They know like it goes both ways. So that makes you feel like "he's not that bad" you know what I mean and then I'd give him respect...so it's things like that there that make you feel like yeah, I'm still part of the community, you know what I mean. So it's good...They expect the most... like we expect it too. We're still human beings in here. Just cause we've no freedom doesn't mean we're any different.*

The responses from participants, both positive and negative, provide further support for the significance of staff-prisoner relationships, which are widely acknowledged to be important to the perceived safety, fairness and legitimacy of the prison from the perspectives of those held within it, as well as for the maintenance of order and security (Liebling & Arnold, 2004; Crewe, 2011b; Crewe et al., 2015; Sparks et al., 1996). This data further demonstrates the significance of treatment with dignity and respect, by prison staff, for individuals' sense of identity beyond the 'prisoner' label and, consequently, their sense of citizenship. Liebling (2011: 538), using the words of Charlesworth (2000), has identified how the individuals who became their students in prison, through sharing reading with them, had demonstrably experienced a "lack of humanity" in their experiences before incarceration, due to the impact of class on their lives. Given many participants at HMP Leeds and Mountjoy Prison may well have experienced this same inhumanity in their pre-prison lives, with the prison populations of both jurisdictions reflecting various dimensions of social exclusion (Centre for

Social Justice, 2010; PRT, 2017; IPRT 2017), the significance of experiencing treatment with humanity in prison is likely to have even greater significance. While treatment with humanity may help to alleviate the impact of these previous experiences, dehumanising treatment may also compound other dimensions of exclusion, further limiting a meaningful sense of citizenship. Where a lack of humanity is experienced in the prison setting, and thus a sense of citizenship experienced as unattainable, this is not necessarily unique to individuals' experiences within prison, but may be building upon prior experiences of inhumanity and disenfranchisement.

## 8.5 Recognition of Individuality

For many participants, being treated collectively in a humane way was not alone conducive to a meaningful sense of citizenship; for many being treated as a human, and thus – in their own terms – a citizen, was contingent on treatment as distinct individuals, with unique identities, rather than a homogenous collective. For some participants, this was based on a view of citizenship as about being one's true self. Conor (Ireland) explained in his own understanding of citizenship: "I think just...just be yourself. I think that's probably it – that's being a citizen."

For some participants, identifying as a citizen was more about self-concept than identity; they considered that it only mattered how an individual felt about themselves, rather than what the views of others were. When asked about what determined his own identification as a citizen, Oisín (Ireland) explained how, alongside nationality, his view of himself was vital:

*Me own view of myself like, I'm a citizen of Ireland...am I proud to be Irish? I dunno. D'ya know? Not from what I've seen of the governments back here and what they've done with the Irish people. But there you go! It's only my view. There might be different views. And that's the bottom line for me like. You can only think of what you think of yourself - I do think I'm a good enough guy and everything else but maybe somebody might have a different view of me [laughs] d'ya know? But that's their opinion at the end of the day.*

However, for many participants one's self-perception as an individual was not sufficient alone for a meaningful sense of citizenship. Rather, they needed to feel treated as individuals, by others, in their day-to-day lives in prison. Jayden (England) explained how it was vital that staff members acknowledged people as individuals if

they were to meet the diverse range of needs, and build upon the varied strengths of those held in the institution:

*And communicating!... 'Cause every prisoner's different, you can't...every prisoner's different, you can't...what you can do with me, you might not be able to do with that guy, another prisoner, you know what I mean, 'cause everyone's got different abilities and different disabilities.*

As such, key to understandings of citizenship was an expectation that people would be seen as individuals, rather than part of a collective aggregate (Goffman, 1961). Consideration is now given to the treatment of participants during their time at HMP Leeds and Mountjoy Prison, and the extent to which this reflected an acknowledgement of them as individuals.

### **8.5.1 Treatment as a Homogenous, Collective Risk Instead of Individuals**

Having highlighted the importance of prison staff behaviour to one's sense of citizenship, Jayden (England) explained the significance of being treated both as humans and individuals through behaviour that recognises the commonalities between prisoners and non-prisoners, as well as the differences between those people held in prison:

*What makes a good officer? What makes a good officer is that we're all human, and we're no different from each other, and a good officer is that...he understands you, even though we look like bad people 'cause we're in jail, he takes time to listen and makes his own decision on that person individually.*

Jayden's comments indicate how, by minimising the distance between the identities of prisoners and staff – and acknowledging the shared identity and value of human status, as discussed in section 8.3 – staff members should also acknowledge the individuality of men in prison, rather than treating them as a homogenous collective of others; both commonality and difference needed acknowledgement for a meaningful sense of a citizenship to be realised. While Jayden's comments refer to the practice of 'good' prison officers, from his perspective, the responses of many of the men interviewed suggest this was not reflective of the overall experience of those incarcerated in either England or Ireland. A number of participants explained that the way men were viewed and treated in prison ignored their individuality by viewing them in actuarial terms as

merely one of the abstract prison population. Five participants in England, and three in Ireland described themselves as being defined by their number, being just one of many prisoners. Owen (England) argued that he could not be a citizen, “Cos we’re just a number in here”, taking on the ‘prisoner’ identity that minimises individuality and considers people as aggregates of risk to be treated or managed. Jake (Ireland) also explained how by nature of imprisonment and ‘prisoner’ status, the system, and those within it, viewed him and others only as numbers, rather than individuals with valuable insight on their own situation:

*You're a prisoner - that's it! You're stuck here. That's it! They should just...that's it! You're just a number. That's all. It's...you're just a number...To the IPS [Irish Prison Service] you're just a number. You're just another prisoner - you have no business whatsoever telling them how to do their job, or giving them advice...which explains why most people gets cut to bits in jail, cause if you don't...if you have something for prisoners to do, they won't get rowdy. They won't go wanna cut people and that.*

For Jake, the treatment of those in prison as numbers making up a collective was particularly problematic in the way it minimised the significance of their strengths and abilities to contribute to decision-making about the way their time in prison was spent. As such, it was in the denial of autonomy over the day-to-day life of prison – and consequently in agency over the steps to progress in future – that Jake saw the ignorance of individuality as most pertinent. His perception was that, in order for individuals to be able to make positive decisions and improve their behaviour both inside and outside of prison, interactions and opinions formed about people in prison must be individualised to take account of the strengths they each have, and the ways these strengths might be harnessed to improve the experience and outcomes of serving a prison sentence.

While treatment and acknowledgement of men in prison as individuals, by staff, was identified as a clear theme impacting upon the extent to which participants self-identified as holding an identity compatible with citizenship, the perceived identities they held outside of prison was also noted as important. This held pertinence in relation not only to their subjective feelings about their current identity amongst those outside, but also to the future identities they would expect to hold upon release. While some individuals sought to demonstrate and perform the identities that, as individuals, they

subjectively identified with outside of prison, there was a feeling amongst several participants that their external perceived identity was out of their control. These participants considered external identities to be superseded by the collective image of prisoners as a faceless, homogenous group that is presented in the popular media. Andrew (England) explained how this led to a view not only of individuals as something other than human, but also as a group who are all the same:

*You know, the sensationalism...In the papers, Yeah! I think what it needs is a programme like Panorama or something like that, to go in-depth in prisons and "hang on. This isn't right. That isn't right." There is a lot of monsters, or bad people in prison, but there's thousands that...have probably made one mistake or whatever. Been in that place in the wrong time. You will have heard it before, Abi! And they're all lumped in one category - stereotyped as monsters!*

Andrew's comments echoed those of prisoners in Ireland during their discussions of media representations of their involvement with the prisoner council, highlighting the assumptions of individuals' identities that are perpetuated by public and media discourse, and the lack of control that participants felt over the presentation of their identity.

### **8.5.3 Differentiation from the 'Normal Prisoner'**

There is a significant body of research which illustrates the informal hierarchies that develop amongst prisoners (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958) and can serve as part of the "ethical self-work" prisoners may undertake to construct a culturally acceptable moral self and narrative (Ugelvik, 2015: 9). There was substantial evidence in participants' narratives of attempts to distance themselves from the collective 'prisoner' label, differentiating themselves from others who they considered to constitute the 'normal prisoner'. This was reflected not only in participants' own attempts to distance themselves from behaviour they deemed to be expected of this 'normal prisoner', but also in their responses to staff treatment. This further demonstrated the significance of staff treatment, which acknowledged their difference from others, in supporting self-work to construct a narrative compatible with citizenship. This also illustrated the fact that what is considered 'normal' for the purposes of maintaining a sense of citizenship, and citizen self-identity, is distinctly different to being 'normal' in terms of the prison.

For Rory, the experience of being treated as something other than a ‘prisoner’ – in this case as a friend – was significant in helping him to self-identity as ‘normal’ in an otherwise highly abnormal environment. Given the significance attached to normality in the meaning citizenship held for participants, this demonstrates that the micro-interactions between individual staff members and those in prison have the potential to shape individuals’ own understandings of themselves as citizens. Rory himself recognised establishing positive relationships with staff members as vital if individuals were to be treated in a way which mitigated rather than reinforced the ‘prisoner’, as opposed to citizen, identity:

*Say like some of 'em will leave your doors open, some of 'em won't, and then it's just...it's catch 22. One officer'll leave your door open, and then one officer'll lock it, and then it ends up a pain in the arse tryin'a get your door open. It's just...you say to officers "Just leave it open. They leave it open". "No. I aren't leaving it open" 'cause it'll be another officer from a different wing...what doesn't know you, so then you're like pfff. So that's when you get treat[ed] like a normal prisoner again. They don't know who you are...Yeah, that's when it just goes like...you forget...you're forgotten again... 'cause obviously I've built a relationship on J wing. Every single officer on that wing, probably hasn't got a bad word to say about me...but then there's...if I get moved off a wing, it's like I'm back to nothing again. Nothing! Nothing. Banged up! Nothing. 'Cause they don't know me. So you've gotta build that relationship and it takes ages. They've got to trust you as a prisoner. They've got to like you, to get you a little stay out and...you know, you get your little treats like that. You get to like...our SO [Senior Officer] the other day, do you know they've got a coffee shop here haven't they? He come on the wing and give me a caramel coffee. He says "Hey, do you want one of these here?" and he gave me a caramel coffee. Well that were nice. So obviously you've got that trust, you've got that building a relationship.*

Part of the significance these small acts of trust held for the construction of a ‘normal’ identity, for Rory, was the fact it enabled him to distinguish himself from others on the wing. Rather than being treated like a ‘normal prisoner’ he felt he was treated like a normal person:

*You've got to join [the system], 'cause you can't beat it. You've got to listen. Then eventually they won't ask you to bang up anymore. Like if someone goes on they'll just leave you. They'll just leave you to do what you do. They know a lot of things going on with people, and they'll just leave 'em. They're not bothered 'cause they're nice people. So they're just not...they're not gonna care. Like they'll let you cook. Sometimes they'll give us toast, or they give us a George Foreman*

*and say "You can cook". So then they'll let us take it in our cell and we'll make some food. They'll say "just take it back when you're finished with it", and there's 207 people on our wing. He's only give it to me...to cook and take it back. Out of 207 prisoners...so then it makes you feel good then...So them little luxuries are what you look forward to. A little frying machine, like that [makes a big difference] 'cause obviously it's eating this food everyday, so if you get that you can cook some different food so you're just in a good mood.*

Seeking to distinguish oneself from the 'criminal' majority, Rory's comments echoed the findings of previous studies that posit that prisoners assert identities which differ from each other as a way of managing the subjugation of status inherent in the punishment of incarceration (Opsal, 2011; Feldman, 2018; Rowe, 2011; Toyoki & Brown, 2014). The need to be differentiated from the rest of the prison population in order to establish or maintain an identity beyond the prisoner label, would seem to encourage the atomised, individualised experience of incarceration described as resulting from incentivised regimes (Crewe, 2005b), which breaks down the creation of a collective sense of solidarity that might be needed in order to consider oneself part of a prison community. Toyoki and Brown (2014) identified this practice of situating oneself as an 'unusual' prisoner as a way imprisoned individuals appropriated the 'prisoner' label in order to manage the stigma associated with incarceration and prevent the negative associations of this from being attached to them. This practice was evident across several interviews in this study, with individuals drawing on their background, status outside of prison, behaviour, or exclamations of their morals and values, as a means of differentiating themselves from the normal 'prisoner' to whom they deemed the negative associations of the label to apply. Isaac was one individual who distinguished himself from other prisoners in his narrative, highlighting how other staff could tell he was a different kind of prisoner:

*Yeah I think after a period of time they've gone "alright, OK. We've got a different character on our hands here." They're easier for you and then things work out for themselves really. I don't necessarily go trying to help staff out, but I think it comes across being around a person for a while you think well he's not smoking spice, he's not doing that, he's just...naturally engaged.*

Despite noting that he had grown up in similar areas to most of the other men he had met at HMP Leeds, as a well-off, high-powered person outside of prison, there are many demographic reasons why prison staff may have treated Isaac differently, or thought



they were dealing with a ‘different’ character as he describes. However, Isaac chose to distinguish himself from the other men at the prison on the basis of moral standards, referring both to his offence type and his standards of behaviour within the prison throughout our discussion. In doing so, Isaac appeared to be asserting his individuality and resisting the connotations of the ‘prisoner’ label that come with the homogenised treatment of prisoners many other participants described. Where he recognised staff making a distinction between him and other prisoners, marking him out as exceptional in their interaction and/or treatment of him, he embraced this as evidence of his ‘real’ identity as an individual being seen.

Not all participants, however, found this recognition of themselves as different by staff to be an entirely positive thing. For Ryan (Ireland) this perception of his difference from others in the prison had led to tension where he felt pulled in different directions between staff or governors and the rest of the prison population:

*Let me think...I mean they would look at me as if I have a lot more influence over other prisoners...so if something happened they'd (the officers) come to me and ask me If I can try and find out if anything is going to go off. But I asked them to stop doing that, like being called in to mediate in fights and all. I'd say I have a voice in some respect...I mean most governors are alright – I get on with all of them and I'm sure they'd listen to my opinion, unless it's something over their heads. I suppose I'd have a small influence depending on the issue.*

Ryan’s comments illustrated how an assumption that one is different to the ‘normal prisoner’ could lead to a situation where individuals were asked to tread the middle ground between the ‘us’ and ‘them’ of staff and the other imprisoned men, in a similar way as was described by those taking on certain volunteering, representative or work roles. Nevertheless, Ryan’s situation was indicative of how his involvement in a variety of activities within the prison had led to his adoption of an identity which differed from that expected of those in prison. This was further illustrated when Eoin (Ireland) discussed his reasons for participating in the Listener scheme, framing this involvement as an opportunity to demonstrate his real self, as opposed to the identity expected of him in the prison environment:

*It's like...I dunno, I think it's something in the...deep down in my nature. You know, it's just liking to help people, you know what I mean...and... trying to see past all the gangster bullshit that goes on*

*in here. You know...you can still be a man and do nice things at the same time.*

This desire to demonstrate one's individuality, as different from the 'normal' prisoner, was the motivation for engagement that a number of participants shared. When asked about his reasons for participating in a range of voluntary and paid activities within the prison, Oliver (England) highlighted how the results of engaging in such programmes can change the way staff view and treat individuals in light of this new, trusted identity:

*... it helped myself because you get more trust off the staff and...you're in a better role than what you was just a normal prisoner...Well you get along with people a lot better, and the staff trust who you are. Your door might be open a bit longer...Just [participated] really to help myself and help the prison.*

This was echoed in the experience of Oisín, who was actively involved in prison work and volunteering at Mountjoy Prison:

*Well I can see that [it's appreciated] by the treatment I get off staff in here myself, you know. You have a bit of respect off the staff here, you know. If I say to them "Look, let us through that gate", I'm not asked why I wanna go through the gate. If I say "I wanna go up to that landing", I'm not asked why I wanna go up to that landing. I'm just...given the freedom to roam, type of thing. Yeah, trusted that way you know. And they know I don't act like an eejit, you know. So there is a bit of trust there on both sides, you know. Definitely.*

As a result of Oisín's work in prison, his experience of staff was one which went against the general experience of individuals as not being trusted. Along with the trust Oisín gained, he was also able to gain some freedom within the confines of the prison – a very physical manifestation of the different identity he considered himself to hold compared to others in prison. In this way, Oisín and other 'trusted prisoners' were able to escape the homogenising experience of batch living (Goffman, 1961) not only in staff's perceptions and treatment of them, but also in their ability to physically remove themselves from the collective.

Despite these examples of staff treating participants as individuals, and 'different' to the homogenous prison population – highlighting this as important to retaining a sense of identity as a citizen – the underlying assumption communicated by participants was that great barriers existed to being perceived as a 'normal person'. Even where

individuals could develop an identity as an individual within the prison environment, this was limited in its influence providing individuals with a sense of being a good prison-citizen rather than cultivating a sense of citizenship which transcended the prison walls. The chasm between being identified as an unusual prisoner, or as a 'normal' person was still substantial, with the comments of participants suggesting the stigma attached to their incarceration made achieving the status of 'normal' citizenship difficult if not impossible.

## **8.6 Being a 'Normal' Person in an Abnormal Place**

It is widely accepted within academic and policy discussions on imprisonment, that relationships and interactions between prisoners and prison staff have great significance in shaping the lived experience of individuals during time in prison (Liebling & Arnold, 2004). This was echoed in responses from participants in their discussions of staff, but relationships and interactions with staff also emerged as holding great significance in enabling or preventing individuals from being able to conceptualise themselves as a 'citizen'. The formal power that prison staff hold to define prisoners has been highlighted by Carlen (1983) who links this positioning of prisoners to the broader systemic power of the prison regime, with the way prisoners are defined by staff having significant implications for the way their time in prison is experienced. This power of staff to influence the identity of those in prison was reinforced in responses from participants in this study, who highlighted how their treatment by individual staff members shaped their own self-identity. Rory (England) explained how actions of individual staff members had helped him to feel like a 'normal' person:

*Like talking to the SOs on a level, like you know like they treat you like you're a friend. Like they'll come in't office and give me a packet of biscuits or summit. D'ya know, just like me - out of everyone they'll pull me in the office and say "Oh here, Rory, I wanna talk to you about PID desk [Prisoner Information Desk]"...and then they'll throw me a pack of biscuits and say "go on then, on your way". So...you feel like aww that's nice. It's like they're giving you something back...and then they have a laugh with you. They chat to you... an officer'll come up to you and just start talking to you about "Aww how's your weekend been". They know obviously you're in prison but they're "You have a good weekend? Has everything been running alright?" so it's friendly. It's as if they've come for a chat, which is nice, so it makes you feel normal...They do [that] on our wing, but I've heard some officers on other wings aren't really that nice.*

Just as staff held the power to contribute to the construction, or maintenance, of identities beyond that of the prisoner, they were also just as able to diminish and damage ‘normal’ identities through their interactions with, and actions towards, prisoners in both jurisdictions. However, beyond staff treatment, there were a range of other factors which impacted individuals’ ability to identify themselves as ‘normal’ despite their abnormal circumstances. These included their moral expectations of a ‘normal’ person, the extent to which they were able to sustain a ‘normal’ external identity, and whether they could imagine a ‘normal’ future beyond their prison sentence. Each of these issues is now discussed in turn.

### **8.6.1 The Morality of ‘Normal’**

In the broader context of neoliberalism and debates around welfare rights, there has been an increasing emphasis on citizenship as conditional upon behaviour and individuals’ ability to take personal responsibility (Dwyer, 1998). Despite its separation from wider society, the prison and those held within it have not been exempt from this behaviour-based conditionality of citizenship, and participants’ experiences illustrate the significance of such conditionality, making a meaningful sense of citizenship largely unachievable in their day-to-day lives. For some participants, the notion of citizenship was inherently steeped in expectations of maintaining specific moral standards, many of which were contingent on following the laws of the land – a requirement participants viewed themselves as having failed to satisfy. When asked about the meaning of citizenship, Aaron (Ireland) suggested “normal people on the outside”, while Matthew (Ireland) described it as living a “normal life” and “not like the life I’ve been in”, instantly situating themselves and those within prison as outside of normality, or somehow *other* when compared to the rest of the population. Similarly, Conor (Ireland) described citizenship as being crime-free and thus excluded himself by virtue of his offending history:

*Just my idea of citizenship? Yeah. Yeah, probably just someone that doesn't break the law or cause trouble in the area, be anti-social and that. That's probably my idea of being a citizen, you know.*

When asked if they considered themselves to be a citizen, many participants questioned their position as a ‘good citizen’ or a ‘proper citizen’, qualifying any self-identification as a citizen in their own terms. As Cian (Ireland) said, when asked if he identified

himself as a citizen: “Maybe not a very good one, you know?” Several participants highlighted the difference between citizenship as an abstract, empty label which anyone could achieve, and being a ‘good citizen’ which was held up as the more important position to aspire to. Declan (Ireland) illustrated this distinction saying “I’ll always be a citizen, but it’s whether I’m a good citizen or not”.

For these participants, their understandings of what it meant to be a citizen were steeped in the rhetoric of the social contract, which is widely discussed in scholarship on imprisonment, particularly in relation to the right to vote (Easton, 2009; 2011; Behan, 2012; 2014). Conceptualisations of citizenship focused on the absence of law-breaking, rather than the presence of a pro-social characteristic, suggesting participants perceived themselves as unable to even *become* citizens, with their deviation from morally acceptable behaviour marking them as ineligible for this status. However, this definition of citizenship as the absence of law-breaking suggests a status that cannot be regained, and from which exclusion is certain from the point of offending behaviour onwards - a position of permanent civil death. While a few participants believed that their perceived status as non-citizens would continue, for many their citizenship was fluid and could change along with their circumstances, should they begin to act in a morally defensible manner, being more about a feeling or sense of self than a fixed status. One way this change could be demonstrated was by engaging with their community, or making contributions to it as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Sykes (1958: 66) argues prisoners are not only physically excluded from society through their incarceration, but also suffer the deprivation of moral status, never being “allowed to forget that, by committing a crime, he has forgone his claim to the status of a fully-fledged, *trusted* member of society”. This deprivation of moral status can be heightened, or multi-layered, for groups of prisoners who are deemed to have committed particularly heinous or stigmatised offences (for example, Ievins & Crewe, 2015). Some participants sought to challenge this moral requirement by providing extreme examples of those who might present themselves as upstanding citizens, but were in fact committing heinous crimes when compared to those of themselves as ‘ordinary decent criminals’. Cian (Ireland) provided such an example:

AS: *Yeah. I mean what do you think determines whether or not someone's a good citizen?*

*Whatever he probably believes in himself is it? I'm a good citizen like – but there's good citizens out there who have done...Jesus [sighs]...horrific things you know and they'll think they're a good citizen like. Like a couple of year ago there was a judge there that was caught with porn or child porn on his computer, and he thought he was an outstanding citizen of the community I think.*

However, for some participants, the standards of behaviour they thought necessary to be considered a 'normal' person were close to infallible, based on those demonstrating no evidence of transgressions in their lives. When asked about whether he identified as a citizen, Aiden (England) explained how he viewed his own life to be opposed to this understanding of citizenship:

*[laughs] No...'Cause I live at the other side of the spectrum...I've been a citizen. Like to me a citizen is someone who is hardworking and never put a step out of line. Are you wi' me? And I'm not from that world... You know, I'm on about straight pegs. That's what I call the civilians, you know what I mean? Like...Like you, Abi! No disrespect, you know. You're a civilian. You're a...a citizen, you know. A good woman, hard-working, wants to get somewhere in life...you know, trying to do her thing. Never put a step outta line, and wouldn't be here for any other circumstances than the circumstances you're here for now, d'ya know what I mean? Instead of...I can't see you in New Hall<sup>61</sup>, ever! Do you know what I mean? So...*

These expectations of citizens as those who “never put a step outta line” suggested that despite universal ideals of what a citizen *should* be, some participants saw a meaningful sense of citizenship as something they would never be able to achieve, with their expectations of 'normal' being completely law-abiding. While this prevented participants from viewing themselves as 'normal' in this way, others considered meaningful citizenship to be contingent on maintaining identities that they had previously held outside of prison.

### **8.6.2 Maintaining the Identity of a Family Man**

One of the key themes central to participants' understandings of their own identity as citizen, or non-citizen, was the extent to which they were able to sustain the 'normal', non-prisoner identities which had defined their roles in society outside of the prison. Several participants spoke of citizenship as being about 'normal life' – particularly in

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<sup>61</sup> HMP New Hall is a closed category, local female prison in West Yorkshire. As such it is one of the closest female prisons to HMP Leeds.

relation to having a family. For many this was linked to who they considered themselves to be, with their role as a husband, partner or father, being central to their understanding of who they were before entering prison. For some men there was a feeling they could no longer hold these identities, while many took efforts to try and sustain them despite facing significant hurdles in doing so – overall, it was clear the context of imprisonment was not conducive to maintaining pre-prison identities as partner or father. The barriers to sustaining these identities, and the restricting context in which men sought to do so, meant that for many these identities were seen as being overridden by the identity of prisoner – a master status through which every other identity was seen to be shaped, or viewed by others. There were a variety of factors which limited the men’s ability to sustain their sense of identity as a father, or partner, which ranged from emotional responses to the prison environment, through to institutional arrangements that failed to consider the practical barriers to communication with families through institutionally sanctioned means. A large body of literature exists on the impact incarceration has on family ties, both for incarcerated individuals and those left behind outside of or, as Codd (2008: 1) says, “in the shadow of prison”.

Many of the barriers to sustaining family identities noted by participants reflected those discussed in the existing literature. For some participants, the restrictions on their contact and relationships with family members had served to erode this non-prisoner identity due to the limits these place on their ability to fulfil the familial roles considered fundamental to individuals’ non-prisoner identities. Aiden (England) explained how, by nature of his incarceration, he was no longer able to take the role of emotional support to his partner, instead needing her to provide this support for him. This called into question elements of his identity as a family man:

*You’re leaving your family exposed when you’re in a place like this. They’re exposed...you’re not there, Abi. The dynamics of things get flipped. I’ll be my Mrs’ support network when I’m out there...and when I’m in here you find yourself leaning on your family. You need that support.*

In both jurisdictions there were examples of individuals who expressed a reluctance to see family members during their time in prison due to the particular arrangements of prison visits and the impact they thought this experience may have on their loved ones.

For some, their concerns around the negativity of the prison environment were such that they did not allow family members to visit, choosing instead to miss out on these much-desired interactions. While the distancing of family relationships was, for some, about protecting their family members from having to experience the prison environment, for others this was about maintaining a presentation of self inconsistent with their imprisonment, particularly with children. Isaac (England) explained how he would not see his children in person, but would maintain contact only by telephone or letter, so that he could maintain the pretense of being somewhere other than the prison, and as such not taint his 'normal' father identity for his daughters. Isaac shared his concerns about how markers of the prison might reach his family on the letters he sent, risking the erosion of the narrative he had developed around his situation:

*I've asked every officer on that landing, I send a letter to my wife, to my daughters, and I want to know does that letter have a stamp that says from HMP Leeds. I've asked all the officers in here - genuine question, does this letter get stamped. Nobody knows. Nobody will find out for you, cause it's insignificant, but it isn't to you!*

For Isaac, this was about being remembered as the person he was before incarceration, highlighting the fear and concern that came from the mortifying processes of imprisonment, and the potential for external identities to be subsumed by that of 'prisoner' not only within the prison, but also outside should his presence in prison be made known.

In contrast, acknowledgement by staff of individuals as being a 'good' father, and successfully fulfilling the roles that accompany this identity, was significant for participants. Darren, a foreign national prisoner (FNP) who was coming towards the end of his sentence at Mountjoy Prison, explained how complimentary comments from staff, who witnessed him helping his children with their homework during visits, reinforced this pro-social identity he held, alongside his status as a prisoner:

*One of the officers down in the visits said to my wife...He says he has been working here for many years and he has never seen one of the parents sitting in the visiting room doing homework with his child!...I still have the authority then you know...like call them and say it's important to do your homework.*

This acknowledgement, by staff, that he was still managing to influence his children's lives in this way was important for Darren, who used this observation as a way of



distinguishing himself from the rest of the prison population who had not been seen to do this. As such, even where normal or pro-social identities from outside prison were sustained, participants sought to differentiate these identities from those they were surrounded by, further demonstrating the strength of the ‘prisoner’ label and the need to distance oneself from this.

While the data presented demonstrates that some participants struggled to sustain or establish a ‘normal’ identity within the abnormal environment of the prison, other participants drew connections between their understandings of citizenship and their ability to imagine a future ‘normal’ self beyond the boundaries of their prison sentence.

### **8.6.3 Imagining a Future ‘Normal’ Self**

For one participant, a new-found sense of citizenship – stemming partly from his involvement in charity activity during incarceration, but also through legal changes to immigration status – held meaning in the way it gave a visible identity that had been lacking. When asked about the meaning citizenship held for him, Max – a FNP incarcerated at Mountjoy Prison – explained this connection:

*It give me back identity, because I never had identity. I have used my life hiding identity, for example, even hiding my name. When I say that how, for example, when I come first to England...I were hide my identity by giving a different name by tell lies to come to Europe, because if you don't do that they'll send you back. Like the same thing I said when I was here was from Kosovo, because Kosovo was at war, because if I say [Former Soviet Country] they wouldn't let you in the country. They send you back. So when I say identity, it's my identity compared to where I come from, from my past. And I'm not afraid anymore to hide my identity. And I feel very confident to talk about myself. My identity – my new identity. I feel like it's a new me now to be honest. That's me – I done this. I hold my hands up. I can do nothing about that. Now have to heal myself, to heal the scars of the past because I have suffered loss in my life, you know. But now I have the skills and tools how to manage myself and how to heal myself, and I'll continue like that. And if I can have that...I think I have energy for someone else too. That's what I think... Finding myself and continue to find myself.*

Max's comments echo the distinction made by desisters in Maruna's findings, between the ‘old me’ who offended and the ‘new’ or ‘real me’, in order to reinvent one's self-concept for reentry to the community (Maruna, 2001). This suggests that having a sense

of citizenship based upon identity could have implications for individuals' desistance from crime following release from prison. Max's comments also demonstrated how citizenship enabled him to draw a line between his offending history and his 'new self', facilitating the "knifing off" of the offence that is reminiscent of desisters' narratives in Maruna's work (Maruna & Roy, 2007: 105; Maruna, 2001). With citizenship being interpreted as holding meaning for identity in this way, rather than in the legal or normative terms it is often discussed, this data highlights the potential significance of the connection between citizenship and desistance explored by Farrall et al. (2014). Additionally, Max's reflections on the change in his identity further support earlier discussions of the potential for time in prison to be "reinventive" in spite of the deprivations and harms it involves (Crewe & Ievins, 2019: 5), allowing the time and space for reflection and identity work which may be impossible when the circumstances of individuals' lives outside are overwhelming. While Crewe & Ievins (2019: 3) have identified this as a kind of "respite" for those whose lives are "blighted by addiction, abuse and related degradations", in this instance the circumstances surrounding Max's immigration status had overwhelmed this possibility of such reflection before his incarceration.

For some participants the change they described, as part of the meaning citizenship held for them, was a real transformation in sense of self, but for others this was more about the presentation of a new identity for others to see, as was the case for Ronan (Ireland):

*Just because you're in prison doesn't mean you're not part of society – everyone does something wrong. I know some people do things more wrong than others but everyone does something wrong. Even when you get out of prison and go for a job or something it's a turn off straight away! It's like look at who I am now, not who I was... Well I've no shame. Not like I've got no shame, but I've no shame about being in prison. I'm not bothered what people think when I get out, I know I'm gonna change. But then people still should be judging you on your past. That should be a quote that, what I said?*

AS: *"Look at who I am now, not who I was?"*

*Yeah. If it was written a bit better that'd be a powerful quote that would.*

Such comments from participants highlighted the finality and permanence seen to be attached to the stigmatised label of 'prisoner', with many feeling they were not given

the chance to develop and present a new pro-social identity which would be supported by the community. Jake, a young Irish prisoner who had been imprisoned for a driving-offence, explained how his past good deeds, preventing harm of others through his use of technology, were forgotten and overshadowed following his incarceration, making imagination of a future ‘normal’ self more difficult:

*Like, likes of me, like I contribute. I stopped...I took down a load of websites from ISIS<sup>62</sup>, I helped people with their bank cards that got robbed...you know? Telling them to cancel it and get a new one and all, so...I even were good on the outside like if I see dirt on the street I'll pick it up, put it in the bin like. You know? Once you're in jail, you're looked at as a scumbag. And prisoners need to be given the chance to prove to the people on the outside, and prove to them that they're not. That what they done, they're sorry...but you can't [laughs]...you don't get that over here anyway!*

This pessimism about the ability to shed the stigmatised identity they held as a result of their conviction and imprisonment was prevalent amongst participants in this study. This was often accompanied by concerns that attempts to establish a non-criminal identity, and a life beyond crime, would be stunted by a lack of acceptance upon release from prison, particularly when seeking employment. Research from Unlock (2018) has demonstrated these concerns are valid, with the vast majority of UK employers asking about criminal convictions at the earliest stages of application, a practice that has been argued to constitute social death of the individual through exclusion from important remits of social life (Henley, 2017). This reluctance of employers to take on those with convictions was illustrated in the comments of a participant who himself acted as an employer outside of prison. Isaac (England) – who had run a successful business before his conviction – explained that despite his own incarceration he would not employ those who had spent time in prison, in part due to his perception that meaningful preparation for employment was lacking in the prison context:

*I wouldn't employ any of these to work for me, OK? So it's the old "yeah there's no jobs". Well, there's no jobs because you can't do anything! You have pissed up your life since you were twelve year, you've not followed through, you've not got anything to offer me. You're just telling me, and your talk is cheap, that you're gonna turn up to work every morning. Oh and by the way, what can you do?*

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<sup>62</sup> Jake is referring to web content posted by members or followers of the jihadist militant organisation ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), otherwise known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), IS (Islamic State) or Daesh.

*Sweep the floors, this, that and the other? I want somebody who has actually put some effort in and got themselves a qualification...and if they're not going to do it of their own free will, instead of throwing them into blooming prison...throw them into something that's going to bring them out of it with a piece of paper, some kind of...pride in themselves, because most of them don't.*

While this impediment to the development of future, normal identities through legitimate employment was felt strongly by participants in both jurisdictions, the different approaches to legal rehabilitation and spent convictions in England and Ireland mean that the reality of seeking employment, at the time of the research, would have been particularly difficult for participants in Ireland. Prior to the introduction of the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016, there was no spent conviction legislation for adult offenders<sup>63</sup> in the Republic of Ireland meaning individuals lacked any opportunity to “wipe the slate clean” (McIntyre & O’Donnell, 2017: 27), while in England & Wales the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 allows convictions resulting in a sentence of less than four years in custody to become spent, removing the requirement to disclose these convictions in most circumstances. This difference in approach to criminal records was reflected in Cillian’s experience of seeking employment with a conviction in both countries, which he referred to when explaining his plans on release:

*I wanna go back over [to England] and get a job like, you know what I mean...Cause if I stay here, I get out...I'm not gonna get a job. I'm gonna be back selling drugs to make money, yeah?...It's the only way I know of making money [here] is selling drugs or doing robberies, you know what I mean? At least when I go to England they actually give me a fucking job!*

In line with the more restrictive legal approach to criminal records in Ireland, Cillian perceived his chances of obtaining employment in Ireland as being far more restricted by his conviction, than in England. For some participants, the inability to escape from the legal record of their offending, in their pursuit of employment, shaped the way they imagined their future ‘normal’ lives – a number of individuals discussed the need to live life, and approach work, in a different way in order to navigate these hurdles to meaningful citizenship. For these participants, including Darren (Ireland), this involved

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<sup>63</sup> In 2001 s.258 of the Children Act 2001 introduced a rehabilitation period of three years for offences committed by children under the age of 18.

changes to future career plans which would remove the need to navigate the complex web of criminal records and background checks, for example through self-employment:

*I used to work as a care assistant...and due to the fact that a higher sentence...err having a criminal record...so now going back to work in care is a problem. To apply for jobs now they need your background check, and you can't escape it!...The best thing I can do, whatever for my children, my family...I can start my own business without the need for a background check when I'm starting.*

This suggested that even where men were able to imagine a future 'normal' self, this 'normal' self was substantially different to their real hopes by nature of the restrictions their conviction, and incarceration, places on the realistic opportunities available to them. The way that participants' imagined future selves were shaped by these structural barriers to employment further highlights the importance of activities in prison being perceived as relevant to these realistic future careers, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Other participants explained the centrality of family connections to their imagined future 'normal', or working, self, highlighting the family community as important social capital through which individuals may be able to bypass some of the challenges of criminal records and secure the employment they perceived necessary for a 'normal' life, and consequently citizenship. When asked about his hopes for the future, Conor (Ireland) explained how his sister might help him secure employment:

*I don't know...My sister, she works in a drug rehabilitation team...They help addicts and that there, and she was saying "you should come, you should try and get work for us – you'd be great for the young lads" because I've been through all the drugs and that, and prison, so...I don't know. If I probably got a chance when I get out then I would, you know.*

Despite the introduction of legislation for the expungement of criminal records in Ireland (Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016), the Irish approach to legal rehabilitation remains a narrow one. While there is now provision for legal rehabilitation, expungement is restricted to one conviction (s.5(3)) and thus, while the situation for participants in Ireland seeking employment on release may have improved somewhat since this research, the reality is that the vast majority of those imprisoned at Mountjoy Prison, and other prisons around the country, would be excluded from the benefits of this legislation (McIntyre & O'Donnell, 2017).

While this legal difference in approaches to criminal records between the two jurisdictions is substantial, participants in both jurisdictions clearly expressed the significance of barriers to employment in limiting their opportunities to realise, or even imagine, a future working or ‘normal’ self. Regardless of the wider application of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 when compared to the Irish legislation, similar approaches to imagining a future ‘normal’ self were also taken by participants in England with a perception that avoiding the usual employment process was a way to secure a future ‘normal’ life, despite the barrier of employers’ suspicion:

*Nobody even wants to employ you, you know, an ex-armed robber or someone of that nature. You know, no one wants to worry about that, so you could set up your own little thing.*

(Tyler, England)

This perception of a reluctance to employ people with convictions, amongst participants in England too, demonstrates that despite the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, the hurdles to employment are substantial. Henley (2017) has noted that even where no legal basis for discrimination exists, people with convictions are subject to *de facto* discrimination, being regarded as dangerous, a greater risk, and ‘less-eligible’ than other candidates for employment. As such, individuals leaving prison in both jurisdictions are likely to experience substantial difficulty in gaining employment, notwithstanding the legislative barriers. The experiences and perceptions of participants in this study suggest that, while it is broadly accepted such practices present a barrier to desistance from crime, the very anticipation of such exclusionary treatment upon release can itself terminate hopes and aspirations, or the beginnings of attempts to develop pro-social identities. Given the centrality of normality and holding self-perceived ‘normal’ or pro-social identities, often oriented around family and work, to participants’ understandings of citizenship, these barriers faced in both jurisdictions served to substantially limit participants’ hopes of realising a meaningful sense of citizenship in their lives post-release.

## **8.7 Outside Citizen and Inside Prisoner, or Prison Citizen?**

Despite calls for, or aims to move towards the ‘normalisation’ of prison standards – and thus the replication of an environment as similar as possible to life outside – in both

jurisdictions (Woolf & Tumim, 1991; IPS, 2016c), many participants' understandings of citizenship were altered substantially by the context of imprisonment. For many, the notion of citizenship was inherently linked to the outside community, or applied equally to whatever community they perceived themselves to have membership of. However, others adapted this notion specifically for the prison environment considering 'prison citizenship', or citizenship of the prison, to be fundamentally different from any other citizen status.

A number of participants identified a difference between their position as citizens, or non-citizens, between wider society, and the confines of the prison itself. Cillian (Ireland) described himself as "a citizen...of the prison", saying: "I'm a citizen inside these grounds. I'm not a citizen outside". Similarly, Sam's (England) initial response to the question of his citizenship status was to describe himself as "A prison citizen", however he went on to highlight how this is impacted by the perceptions of others, rather than being guaranteed by nature of incarceration. Suggesting a 'them' v 'us' distinction between staff and prisoners, Sam said "I believe I am a citizen to certain prisoners, yeah...to prisoners, yes, to officers, no." For Conor (Ireland) his definition of himself as a prison citizen was also based on the perceptions of others, and the impact this had on his sense of belonging:

*Erm...[I'm] a prison citizen, yeah [laughs]. Well you know, I think I belong in prison more than I do...not belong but...I'm more accepted in here than I would be outside maybe.*

Conor (Ireland) further noted how citizenship in prison was also based on being part of, or belonging to, something bigger than oneself in day-to-day life, saying "Erm, citizenship – in here it just means belong... have friends and just part of the daily life in here I suppose". Similar conditions of citizenship were also illustrated in Ryan's (Ireland) description of what citizenship meant for him in his daily life at Mountjoy Prison:

*In here it means three things: abiding by the rules of the prison; being the best I can; and doing good for others.*

While for Ryan, the meaning of citizenship, and the conditions of its realisation in prison, replicated those prevalent in participants' understandings of citizenship more broadly, for others 'prison citizenship' constituted something very different, which in

some respects required the abandonment of the conditionality described above. Adam (England) felt that, while he was not an ordinary citizen during his time in prison, he was able to live as a citizen under a different type of citizenship, which held meaning unique to the prison environment:

*Citizen, erm...what's that? Erm...would I?...No, I'd say no... 'cos you're excluded from being a citizen innit, like. You're not doing the daily routines as a normal citizen, you know? Like for instance pay a bill, go pay a bill like, or pay your council tax, d'ya know what I mean? You're not...we're shut off, innit. We're not part of it. We're not part of it as yet...Yeah...but a different citizenship. Jail Citizenship...That means things like basically being under that...being under that thumb innit, in a sense, like it's jail innit. Like you're back in that environment - you automatically adapt to that environment. So it's like...in jail...It's just living on the wings, living on the wings, waking up doing the same routine - that robotic routine over and over again.*

Ultimately, for many of the participants who did not identify themselves as being citizens, the status or identity of *prisoner* seemed to overrule, or contradict, that of *citizen*; multiple participants provided the label of 'prisoner' as an alternative when asked about their perceptions of their own citizenship status. Participants in both jurisdictions noted that while outside they might be considered a citizen, this was not the case while in prison, with the status of 'prisoner' overriding. Alfie (England) said outside he would identify as a citizen, but then described how this wasn't the case during time inside, as "In jail you're a prisoner".

This distinction between identification with citizenship status outside of, and within prison, despite the crossover some participants identified between communities, suggests something fundamental about the experience of incarceration and its role in disrupting, or preventing, the conditions participants perceived as necessary for a meaningful sense of citizenship and, for some participants, compounding the hurdles to a meaningful sense of citizenship which had already characterised their lives outside of prison. Stern (2002) has argued much prison policy prioritises and strengthens an identity of 'criminal' over that of 'citizen, giving the example of prioritising offender behaviour programmes and basic level education over any other development opportunities individuals may want to partake in. Such features of the prison environment demonstrate the significance this context holds for understandings of citizenship, and the need to consider the potential of differentiated, contextually-



specific notions of citizenship, where this is reflected in subjective experiences of citizenship behind bars.

## **8.8 Conclusion**

Through the presentation of data from interviews with participants, this chapter has demonstrated the significance of identity to prisoners' understandings of citizenship, and the particular identities participants considered to go hand in hand with the notion of citizenship. With each of these identities, it has been considered whether prisoners are able to construct, or maintain, such an identity during their time in prison. Overall, it is clear from participants' comments in both jurisdictions that there are various barriers preventing those in prison from maintaining identities beyond the status of 'prisoner' or 'criminal', which could be subsume any other identities during periods of incarceration, or imagining a future 'normal' self. These barriers range from the structural constraints of restricted contact with family, and awareness of the barriers to employment on release, through to social interactions with others which reinforce the label of 'prisoner'. Even where participants did express an explicit self-identification as a citizen, this identity was often described as 'prisoner-citizen', demonstrating how pro-social identities during incarceration come with a caveat. When considered alongside existing literature on desistance and strengths-based models of reintegration (Burnett & Maruna, 2006), this caveat of 'prisoner' and the accompanying prejudice may well undermine the possibility of developing a non-prisoner or 'citizen' identity whilst within the confines of the prison; the very fact of individuals' incarceration, and daily exposure to the dehumanising features of the prison regime, instead serve to constantly re-label individuals with the stigmatised identity of 'prisoner'.



# Part Four

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Part four forms the final part of the thesis, which is made up of one chapter. This final chapter will summarise the findings of this study and relate these to the existing literature on citizenship and community during imprisonment, as considered in part one of the thesis.



# Chapter Nine

## Discussion & Conclusions

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### 9.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore ‘lived citizenship’ from the perspectives of men incarcerated in Ireland and England. The qualitative empirical research on which this thesis is based, involving interviews and focus groups with men incarcerated at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds, was undertaken with a view to understanding participants’ conceptions of citizenship, the issues they identified as important or necessary to experience a meaningful sense of citizenship, and the way that this was influenced by the context of imprisonment. In doing so it uncovers the previously neglected subjective meaning and experience of citizenship in day-to-day life during incarceration. As outlined in Chapter Four, giving those in prison the opportunity to speak about citizenship in their own terms was of great importance to understanding how and whether their subjective understandings of citizenship were realised during incarceration. Moreover, this approach has furthered understanding of whether individuals in prison view themselves as citizens within their own definitions.

In addition to furthering understanding of the subjective meaning and lived experiences of citizenship for those in prison, by comparing the experiences of men in England and Ireland, the thesis also challenges the notion of the right to vote as symbolic of citizenship (Stern, 2002; Easton, 2018). This advances understanding of citizenship during incarceration beyond analyses of rights and legal status, or engagement in pre-defined citizenship activity, to consider individuals’ lived experiences and subjective understandings of their own social positioning. Despite an increasing emphasis on encouraging ‘good citizenship’ amongst individuals in prison it is clear, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, that the experience of individuals during incarceration is not always one of meaningful citizenship; based on their own understandings of citizenship as contingent on belonging, community contributions and identity, many felt it impossible to be a citizen inside of prison.

This chapter presents an overview of the thesis, reviewing the issues raised in each chapter and bringing together the core findings of the research. Secondly, the chapter provides a reflection on the aims and research questions of this study and discuss how these have been addressed. The contribution of this thesis to the academic literature on imprisonment and citizenship is outlined, before presenting the idea of *prison citizenship* as a way to understand the distinctive experience of ‘lived citizenship’ during incarceration. Thirdly, the chapter discusses the potential implications of the thesis for imprisonment and considers whether meaningful citizenship is possible in the prison setting. The chapter then considers the limitations of this study, and future potential avenues for research, before summarising the overall original contribution of the thesis and offering my final concluding thoughts on the research.

## **9.2 Overview of Thesis & Key Findings**

Part One of the thesis gave an overview of existing academic literature relevant to understanding the citizenship status and experience of those sentenced to a period of incarceration as a result of criminal conviction. Chapter Two discussed the contested nature of the notion of ‘citizenship’ and considered the way that various definitions of citizenship, legal and normative, have been used to understand the position of imprisoned persons within society more broadly. The chapter introduced the notion of ‘lived citizenship’ as proposed by Hall and Williamson (1999) as a valuable approach for exploring the meaning of citizenship for those in prison, due to its emphasis on subjective understanding, agency, and a sensitivity to context vital for exploring the experiences of those confined in the prison setting. Chapter Three evaluated academic debates around the existence of a ‘community’ within the context of the prison, with a view to understanding whether such a ‘community’ might be of significance to those serving a prison sentence. The chapter considered whether the notion of community – so often closely associated with citizenship – holds any relevance for those subject to regimes of incarceration, and whether the collective of individuals within a prison setting can be considered to be a meaningful community according to the seminal prisons literature, in addition to considering alternative perspectives in the emerging global literature on incarceration.

Overall, part one of the thesis highlighted a need for further research to understand

‘lived citizenship’ for those in prison. Many assessments of prisoners’ citizenship status, as discussed in Chapter Two, focus purely on the legal rights held by or removed from those in prison, or on a specific selection of activities which have been pre-defined as constituting ‘active citizenship’. As such, while assessments are made of prisoners’ legal or normative position in relation to these pre-defined standards of ‘citizenship’, there is little understanding of what individuals in prison themselves understand ‘citizenship’ to be, and the elements of the prison experience which do, or do not, facilitate a meaningful sense of citizenship during imprisonment. In addition, the limited body of comparative study in the literature on citizenship during incarceration highlighted the need for new research to contribute to an understanding of how the particular local and national arrangements of imprisonment impact upon understandings and experiences of citizenship during incarceration.

Part Two of the thesis outlined how the empirical research for this study was undertaken and provided details of the particular contexts and samples that formed the basis of this research. Chapter Four presented the methodological approach towards the empirical study, outlining the rationale behind decisions made from initial research design, through to data collection and analysis. It further explained the suitability of an adaptive theory approach, using qualitative methods, for exploring men’s understandings and experiences of citizenship during incarceration, and reflected on the challenges posed by undertaking research both in prison environments and in two jurisdictions.

Chapter Five was separated into four parts. Firstly, the chapter explained the rationale behind comparing the subjective perceptions and experiences of men imprisoned in the two chosen jurisdictions – Ireland and England & Wales. The chapter demonstrated that despite these jurisdictions and their prison systems having many shared characteristics, the legal difference in positions on prisoner enfranchisement provided an interesting opportunity to assess whether this reflected something broader about individuals’ lived experiences during incarceration. Secondly, the chapter provided a brief overview of the policy context relevant to participants’ experiences of imprisonment in Ireland and England at the time of the research. The chapter then went on to introduce the prisons which were chosen as fieldwork sites for this study – Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds. The reasoning behind the selection of these two specific sites was explained, and a brief overview of the prisons themselves was given,

considering their history, facilities, regimes and the characteristics of individuals held therein. Finally, Chapter Five provided an overview of the sample characteristics of the men interviewed at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds. The purpose of this discussion was to provide an overview of the various experiences reflected in the study.

Part Three of the thesis presented data from periods of fieldwork at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds, involving interviews with 64 men across the two jurisdictions and one focus group at each prison. Chapters Six to Eight presented research findings relating to the key themes identified through the thematic analysis of interview transcripts following fieldwork. The findings were organised around three topics identified as key facets of meaningful citizenship in participants' own understandings of this term: belonging to a community, making contributions to one's community, and holding an identity beyond the 'prisoner' label.

Chapter Six focused on the centrality of belonging and community to participants' understandings of citizenship. The chapter demonstrated that while a sense of belonging to something bigger than oneself was necessary for individuals to have a lived experience of citizenship, there was a wide range of different 'communities' identified as relevant based on participants' own definitions and experiences. While membership of 'society' in broad terms, or of national communities, was highlighted by some as one way in which they could conceptualise themselves as citizens on a surface level, the research demonstrated that for the most-part individuals found a meaningful sense of belonging in small, tight-knit communities. Usually these were constituted of those they lived close by to outside of prison, or, on an even smaller scale, those in their immediate families. Findings suggested a greater strength of belonging to local communities, outside of prison, in the experiences of participants in Ireland. The narratives of participants at Mountjoy Prison more often featured discussion of sustained connections to local areas, with a sense that they would always belong to these communities, because they had grown up there. Conversely, participants in England were more likely to profess a lack of connection to local areas outside of the prison, describing experiences of moving home or living in 'bad' areas without a sense of community. Instead, interviewees in England more often described their immediate family as the community to which they experienced a meaningful sense of belonging. These findings demonstrated the complexity and multiplicity of community



identification for participants, with membership of community being a highly personal notion meaning different things to different people. As such, these findings suggest that discussions about reintegration into ‘the community’ on release fail to acknowledge the diversity of understandings and realities of community for those in prison.

Chapter Six then considered the existence of a ‘prison community’ – an alternative community that some participants, in both jurisdictions, identified themselves as being part of during their time inside. While some participants identified acts of solidarity and generosity between those inside, which they viewed as cultivating a community within prison, for many this ‘community’ was not meaningful in a way they considered necessary for lived citizenship. Data illustrated how communities within the prison setting, while showing glimpses of solidarity, were predominantly seen as institutionally structured or forced communities. Often participants discussed how becoming part of these communities was instrumental and necessary to survival of the pains of incarceration, and therefore brittle (Mathiesen, 1965). During interviews, participants identified some exceptions to this, noting how particular spaces in the prison settings enabled the cultivation of community with other imprisoned men. These pockets of community were usually spaces where individuals were able to exercise a level of autonomy greater than what was characteristic of the wider prison regime. They were places where individuals could interact with those outside of the ‘administered groups’ of their wings (Goffman, 1961), and where they were – within the constraints of the regime – making a choice to be in that setting. Examples included the school at Mountjoy Prison, and the gym at HMP Leeds. Nevertheless, both within these settings and the prisons more broadly, there was a sense that meaningful community was inhibited by the prison regime itself. This was due to staff perceptions of interactions between those in prison as troublesome, and the increased individualisation of the prison experience as a result of incentivised regimes (Crewe, 2009). In both jurisdictions this had served to erode any meaningful sense of community or solidarity that was previously felt by those who had spent long periods within the prisons.

Having considered the multiplicity of understandings of community, both inside and outside of the prisons, Chapter Six finally considered the connection between these two worlds and the consequences of this for individuals’ experiences of lived citizenship during incarceration. While there was a blurring of the lines between external and

prison communities for some participants, with many of those from their local communities also being present alongside them in prison and characteristics of prison communities sometimes mirrored in those outside, much of the data presented demonstrates a tension for those in prison, between belonging to internal and external communities which hold fundamentally different meanings for the individual. It was demonstrated that this tension, represented as a tug of war, further prevented individuals from being able to cultivate a meaningful sense of belonging to either inside or external communities.

Chapter Seven explored participants' experiences and perceptions of opportunities to contribute to their self-defined communities during incarceration. Despite some examples of individuals engaging in pro-social activity and identity work that they had not before, or felt unable to do outside of prison, the findings discussed support previous studies which have found the context of imprisonment to limit opportunities for meaningful contributions to external communities (Behan, 2014a; Levenson & Farrant, 2002). The opportunities to contribute that did exist tended to be from within the confines of the prison, involving sending work or money out to external communities. Despite limited opportunities for contributions to external communities, participants identified a wide range of ways that individuals could contribute to the 'prison community' during their time inside but these differed in the extent to which they fostered a sense of meaningful citizenship. Participants in both jurisdictions commented that the main way individuals felt able to contribute to their communities beyond the prison was by developing themselves, through education or training, to prepare them for community contributions upon release. However, the lived experiences of these education and training opportunities differed significantly depending on the particular arrangements and focus of the programmes themselves. Three key themes emerged in participants' discussions of their involvement in various programmes within the prison setting which determined the extent to which these activities were perceived as positive, or meaningful to one's sense of citizenship. Firstly, participants highlighted the perceived relevance of participation in activities as important to their lives beyond prison as a factor impacting the meaning that such activities, or community contributions, held for them. Participants highlighted the relevance of activities to external labour markets, particularly those which were perceived as accessible to people with convictions, or their ability to continue such activities on release as influencing

whether contributions were considered part of meaningful citizenship beyond the prison setting. For many, concerns that their participation would be restricted to the prison, due to structural restrictions on their participation on release, meant that such activities were seen to hold significance *within* the prison setting but not beyond this. This was predominantly the case despite the fact that, for some participants, these activities seemed to present opportunities for self-reflection and identity work that had not been possible prior to their incarceration. Secondly, the level of autonomy involved was identified as key to the meaning that these community contributions held for participants, with mandatory activities being viewed in terms of pure compliance rather than something meaningful for developing a sense of citizenship. Recent research has highlighted the problematic nature of rehabilitation as an aim of imprisonment, with the structural context of the prison working in opposition to voluntary, empowered engagement with opportunities for reform, demonstrating that rehabilitation is viewed differently by those who are themselves imprisoned (Bullock & Bunce, 2018). This same problem was evident in participants' discussions of community contributions within the prison setting, and as such the same caution should be taken in labelling such activities as 'citizenship' where they do not afford autonomy to those involved. Those activities which did afford such autonomy, or control over an aspect of prison life, were spoken of most positively as enabling meaningful contributions. Finally, there were a number of problems highlighted with participation in community contributions where these activities were perceived to be filling in a role which would otherwise be done by staff. This, along with the closure of schemes due to staff tensions and shortages, demonstrated the extent to which meaningful citizenship was further frustrated by the resource shortages at both prisons.

Chapter Eight examined the ways in which participants felt able to maintain an identity beyond their 'prisoner' status during their time in prison – a theme which became evident as one of the key factors impacting whether individuals identified themselves as citizens. This chapter drew together data demonstrating the importance of identity to a sense of citizenship by considering the importance participants attributed to being acknowledged and treated as human beings, having their individuality recognised by those outside and within the prison, and being able to maintain a sense of oneself as 'normal'. With the exception of a few participants for whom their self-work during incarceration had been somewhat "reinventive" (Crewe & Ievins, 2019: 5), the findings

discussed in this chapter demonstrated the many ways in which imprisonment frustrated this sense of identity beyond the stigmatised ‘prisoner’ label – participants expressed feelings that their humanity was minimised in their treatment within prison, and their ability to maintain ‘normal’ identities, or present their ‘real’ self, being disrupted by the prison regime, while awareness of the structural barriers to employment on release inhibited participants’ ability to envisage a future ‘normal’ self. Some participants provided examples of ways that treatment by staff, or adoption of particular roles, could provide respite from the weight of this pervasive ‘prisoner’ identity, but also highlighted the speed with which this sense of being viewed as a human or individual, rather than a prisoner, could be undone. As such, positive identities – associated with participants’ understandings of citizenship – were seen as fragile and easily damaged or overwhelmed by the prison.

At the outset of the research process, this exploration was guided by a number of key research questions, which the findings discussed across these three chapters have shed light upon. The first issue that I sought to uncover was how the notion of citizenship was understood, and the meaning that was attributed to citizenship, by men in prison. Despite having debated the compatibility of imprisonment with maintained citizenship status, and the experience of citizenship from a variety of perspectives, previous academic literature has not considered the subjective meaning that citizenship holds for the very people whose status or feeling of citizenship is being discussed. Using the lens of ‘lived citizenship’, this thesis establishes that the meaning of ‘citizenship’ for men in prison is varied and complex. The findings of this research demonstrate that citizenship was understood in a variety of ways by participants, meaning different things to different people. In addition, the thesis demonstrates that understandings of citizenship are sometimes multi-layered with some conceptions holding deeper significance for a meaningful sense of citizenship than others. As such, this study goes some way in progressing discussion of citizenship beyond pre-defined categories of which membership or satisfaction can be judged in definitive terms. In doing so, the research responds to the concerns of citizenship theorists that, to understand lived experience, there is “a need to get away from the construction of substantive citizenship as an absolute – the idea that someone is either a citizen or she is not” (Lister, 2007: 717). Secondly, this thesis sought to explore whether men in prison considered themselves to be citizens. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that understandings

of one's own citizenship status were often multi-layered, with participants sometimes identifying themselves as being 'citizens' by nature of their humanity or nationality, but that they did not identify their lived experience during incarceration as one of citizenship. The third research question guiding this research asked how, if at all, the experience of imprisonment affects individuals' subjective sense of citizenship. Discussion of findings have demonstrated that individuals' sense of citizenship was influenced significantly by the interactions, physical constraints and separation from external communities, and lack of autonomy within the prison environment. Additionally, and most significantly, findings demonstrated that the stigmatised label of 'prisoner' – often described in opposition to a citizen identity – was so pervasive that it presented a significant barrier to meaningful participation, or self-conceptualisation, as a citizen.

Finally, this study explored whether 'lived citizenship' differed for men imprisoned in Ireland and England, in order to further understanding of whether the legal differences in the right to vote reflected something deeper about the relationship between imprisonment and citizenship in these jurisdictions. This study is the first *empirical* comparative study of citizenship for men imprisoned in Ireland and England. The selection of Ireland and England as jurisdictions for comparison was based on the stark difference in their granting and restricting of the right to vote for people in prison, which has been argued to be symbolic of citizenship – the findings of this research challenge this assumption. What is quite striking about the findings of this research is the consistency with which a subjective sense of citizenship was lacking in the narratives of participants in both jurisdictions. While there were important yet subtle differences in whether and how each of the key facets of lived citizenship was experienced, the features identified as relevant to meaningful citizenship by participants at Mountjoy Prison were mirrored in the responses of men at HMP Leeds.

The national contexts of individuals' experiences were important to how these three key elements of citizenship – belonging, community contributions and identity – were understood and experienced. Firstly, the definition of community varied between the two jurisdictions, with those in Ireland demonstrating a stronger sense of belonging to local areas where they had grown up, than participants in England. Rather, those in England were much more likely to refer to their family as the only meaningful

community they had. Additionally, there were differences in the opportunities for community contributions when comparing Mountjoy Prison to HMP Leeds. While opportunities to contribute beyond the prison were limited in both jurisdictions, the voluntary nature of prison education in Ireland resulted in the ability of engagement with education to foster a sense of meaningful contribution in a way that was not present in England where education was perceived as mandatory. This further highlights the importance of autonomy to a meaningful sense of citizenship, and demonstrates how models of procurement and delivery of activities in the prison setting can influence the lived experience of citizenship during incarceration. Finally, another key difference between the two was that those in Ireland were far more likely to assert an identity as Irish, or human, with reference being made to the rights afforded them. This strength of identification with a broader non-prisoner identity was not so prevalent in the narratives of those imprisoned in England. The granting of the right to vote, and recent improvements to the conditions within the prison, were referred to by participants as indications of the system acknowledging individuals' humanity and dignity, and it appeared that there was a greater awareness of one's rights, and confidence that these could be asserted, in Ireland.

While 'lived citizenship' for participants was influenced by national context – the key point of comparison for this study - findings across Chapters Six to Eight demonstrated that the elements identified as key to citizenship were also shaped by other contextual factors including the stability of the prisons' populations and the length of time spent in custody. The frequent turnover or 'churn' which characterised Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds caused significant disruption in the prison population, inhibiting the development of meaningful relationships or groupings, and thus preventing the establishment of a key criteria of citizenship identified by participants themselves – community. At HMP Leeds this was inhibited further by the combination of substantial overcrowding and low staffing levels, reducing the availability and consistency of staff interaction, thus causing further disruption and limiting opportunities to cultivate 'community' on the wings. The constant movement in and out of the prisons served to further disrupt collective solidarity by facilitating the 'community of drugs' at each institution, creating conflict and tension which resulted in a social world divergent from the "single normative framework" and "common purpose" which Sykes (1958) observed amongst prisoners in his work (Crewe, 2007a:135). The constant change of

individuals entering and leaving the prisons also appeared to strengthen the feeling of tension between participants' communities, being a constant reminder of the world outside and communities left behind on incarceration, in a way which may not be so prominent at institutions with a more settled and stable population. As such, participants' understandings and lived experiences of community belonging, both inside and outside of prison, were influenced by the primary committal function of the institutions at which they were held.

Relatedly, the length of time participants spent in prison also impacted how these key elements of citizenship were experienced. A sense of being 'between' communities, and a fluidity across internal and external communities, was most prevalent for individuals stuck in the 'revolving door' of short-term imprisonment, while those serving longer sentences demonstrated a greater sense of belonging to a 'community' within the prison setting, with the necessity of instrumental community being more pronounced. Additionally, contributions to the prison 'community' were more prevalent amongst those serving longer sentences, in keeping with findings that such individuals will engage in activities to 'kill time', or to give meaning to the period of incarceration (O'Donnell, 2014; Crewe et al., 2017), while those serving short sentences felt unable to contribute to either their external or prison 'community', with many of the activities identified as meaningful being perceived as reserved for lifers or those serving long sentences. Despite the seemingly stronger sense of investment in, and belonging to a prison 'community' evident amongst participants serving longer sentences, their gradual adaptation to the prison environment left long-term prisoners demonstrating the greatest levels of apprehension about their ability to recover, or rebuild, a 'normal' future self after long periods of potential institutionalisation, demonstrating how both current experiences, and future hopes of realising meaningful citizenship were also shaped subtly by the length of time in custody.

These findings of differentiated experiences illustrate the need for a "more variegated" understanding of life in prison (O'Donnell, 2019: 242), and 'lived citizenship' during incarceration, and the need to consider not just national context but also the specific functions of the institution, and the sentence lengths of those held within. While the classic studies of long-term imprisonment in the USA (Sykes, 1958; Clemmer, 1940; Irwin & Cressey, 1962) have been widely influential throughout much of the prison

sociology and hold relevance to a number of the issues raised in this study, these findings of differentiated experience based on national and institutional context, and sentence length, provide further support to the calls of emerging international prisons literature (as discussed in Chapter Three) to avoid uncritical acceptance of the assertion that prisons share “basic similarities which...override the variations of time, place, and purpose” (Sykes, 1958: xiii), and consequent assumptions of the equal applicability of seminal works to all imprisonment experiences.

The findings discussed across Chapters Six to Eight have demonstrated that, when explored through individuals’ subjective understandings, citizenship is far from absolute. Interviews demonstrated how citizenship was experienced, felt and understood in different ways, in different contexts, both individually and nationally. While there were subtle national differences evident in the findings, and some variations of experience on the basis of sentence length, the most prominent contrast was not between jurisdictions. Rather, the most striking difference was between how meaningful citizenship was *understood* by participants and their *lived experience* during incarceration; for the most-part the lived experience of imprisonment was not one of meaningful citizenship on the basis of participants’ own understandings. As such, consideration will now be given to a key contribution of this thesis, which furthers understanding of citizenship for those in prison by proposing that the lived experience of the key features of citizenship, as identified by participants, is shaped by imprisonment to such an extent it results in a different kind of citizenship – prison citizenship.

### **9.3 ‘Prison Citizenship’ & Theoretical Implications**

Key to the theoretical contribution of this thesis is the importance of context not just to *experiences* of citizenship, but also *understandings* of citizenship and what is needed for a meaningful sense of citizenship in day-to-day life. It is clear from the findings of this thesis that understandings of citizenship are inevitably shaped by context, whether that context is national or institutional. Theories of citizenship in existing research have predominantly been developed with consideration of the relationship between the individual and either the state, or a political community, when individuals are in free society. While understandings of citizenship as a legal status, activity, or normative



aspiration are a useful starting point from which to consider the position of imprisoned people in relation to their wider communities, they do not enable consideration of lived experience on the basis of the contextually-contingent understandings of citizenship that are held by those in prison. While interviewees in this study did refer to features of mainstream notions of citizenship in their own understandings, an overwhelming theme in participants' understandings of citizenship was the importance of being treated in a way that acknowledged basic humanity, dignity and individuality. Findings demonstrate that within an environment where personhood and sense of self is challenged (Goffman, 1981), autonomy and meaningful relationships are denied (Sykes, 1958), individuals feel the need to establish their personhood, before they can have a meaningful sense of citizenship based on traditional definitions. The basic acknowledgement of humanity was key to citizenship for those in prison, for whom findings demonstrate this was often denied. In fact, it appeared that acknowledgement of humanity and autonomy constituted a pre-citizenship requirement or foundation, without which alternative features of citizenship held little meaning. In contrast to these understandings of meaningful citizenship as based on, or preceded by, a fundamental acceptance of individuals' humanity and personhood, within the prison setting the experiences of key features of citizenship – community belonging and community contributions – are experienced differently by nature of the fact this pre-citizenship requirement is lacking.

This research has uncovered the factors which united participants' understandings of a meaningful sense of citizenship for men in prison: belonging to a community, having opportunities to contribute to that community, and being able to maintain an identity beyond the stigmatising label of 'prisoner'. What this research has also demonstrated is the extent to which these characteristics of 'lived citizenship' are experienced differently within the prison environment. Feelings of belonging, opportunities to contribute to communities, and individuals' sense of identity are shaped by the institutional context within which imprisoned men are held. This thesis does not seek to argue that no positive realisation of these factors can occur within the prison environment, indeed some participants discussed perceived opportunities to contribute or cultivate a sense of community within the prison with enthusiasm. Rather, this thesis demonstrates that while each of these factors may be experienced during incarceration, the way 'lived citizenship' is experienced by most of the men interviewed is vastly

different from their own subjective understandings of meaningful citizenship in wider society. As such it is proposed that the lived experience of citizenship during incarceration is one of *prison citizenship*, or as Adam (England) called it ‘jail citizenship’, rather than a sense of citizenship that has relevance and significance for life beyond the prison setting. Participants at once described themselves as excluded from citizenship, but also described experiences of the key elements they themselves considered important in their subjective understanding of ‘citizenship’. While this initially seemed contradictory, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that where such features of ‘citizenship’ – community belonging, community contributions, and non-prisoner identities - are experienced, the experience is shaped and, in some cases limited, substantially by the prison environment. In particular, experiences are often prefaced – or in some cases subsumed – by the status of ‘prisoner’. Each of the key elements of citizenship, as identified and discussed by participants themselves, will now be considered in turn to demonstrate how the data illustrates that the experience of citizenship inside differs substantially from that deemed meaningful beyond the prison.

Firstly, participants in this study identified belonging to something bigger than oneself – a community – as fundamental to understanding themselves as a citizen. Findings demonstrated that understandings of community identification varied substantially, and in many cases there was multiplicitous identification with a range of different communities. Described in Chapter Six as a tug-of-war, participants’ responses demonstrated a tension between the need to become part of an instrumental community within prison and the desire to maintain connections to meaningful communities on the outside. In order to make time inside easier, maintain some sense of order, or to protect against the potentially deadly consequences of the pains of incarceration, many participants explained how having a community in prison was a necessity. Despite this instrumental value of communities within prison, many explained how they perceived connections to these as superficial compared to their external communities, with the need to keep one’s head down or ‘do their own thing’ being vital to getting through their sentence with the least trouble possible and maintaining a sense of attachment and aspiration to return to the communities they identified as most meaningful – often their families – on the outside. The thesis demonstrates that given these tensions, and the commonality with which demonstrations of community or solidarity were framed as instrumental survival techniques, the existence of a ‘community’ should not be taken

at face-value as a positive reflection of the prison environment. Indeed, these findings problematise the idea of community as inherently positive, with the experiences of some participants explicitly highlighting the negatives of what they described as ‘community’ at the two prisons.

Secondly, while belonging was integral to self-identification as a citizen, participants also identified meaningful opportunities to contribute to their communities as fundamental to a lived experience that realised a sense of citizenship. It was evident from many participants that there was a paucity of opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their self-identified communities beyond the prison. Opportunities for external contributions that did exist were predominantly limited to sending out money, or gifts, to loved ones, and had to be made from within the prison walls. However, participants shared their experiences of opportunities to contribute within the prison, to improve the lives of others incarcerated alongside them. Participants identified prison work, volunteering and informal peer support as ways that they could make contributions within the prison setting. These opportunities reflect activities widely consistent with understandings of active citizenship referred to by academics, politicians and practitioners. However, there were various factors that limited the extent to which these contributions were seen to cultivate a meaningful sense of citizenship that held relevance beyond the prison.

Given the limited opportunities to contribute to communities outside of prison, the way in which opportunities to contribute were shaped by the institutional culture of the prison in its denial of autonomy, and the emphasis on individualised responsabilisation inherent in incentivised regimes, participants in both jurisdictions explained how many of these contributions held little meaning external to the prison. This sense of disconnect between contributions within prison and meaningful citizenship was also demonstrated in the concerns of participants that such activities held little relevance beyond the prison, due to their lack of value in external job markets and the structural impediments they would face in undertaking similar activities in the community, as a result of their convictions. As such, for some participants, participation in these contributions served a function within the prison setting and requirements of the prison regime, but held little meaning for a broader sense of meaningful citizenship beyond prison.

Finally, and most significantly, the data from this study highlights the significance of maintaining a non-prisoner identity to self-identification as a citizen. Participants' responses during interviews highlighted the significance of being seen, and treated, as something more than their conviction or incarceration. As such, for the men interviewed, citizenship was intrinsically linked to humanity, dignity and individuality – all features which were widely understood to be lacking or frustrated in the lived experience of imprisonment. The pervasiveness of this 'prisoner' label was such that even where individuals have experience of belonging to a community, or contributions to these communities, these all occurred within the overarching identity of prisoner, limiting their significance in cultivating a sense of citizenship which held meaning beyond the prison. As such, rather than simply experiencing 'qualified citizenship' while incarcerated, any features of citizenship experienced were framed within the context of prison and the status of those within as prisoners. This resulted in identification with a citizenship that was seen as fundamentally different to understandings of meaningful citizenship outside, despite the fact that some also identified barriers to citizenship based on factors beyond their incarceration. There was a wealth of evidence in interviews with participants that their understandings of citizenship were universal and unqualified, based on their intrinsic value as human beings, seeming to echo elements of the 'citizenship of the common' discussed by Bell and Scott (2016). On this basis, participants spoke negatively of being perceived, or treated, as 'just a prisoner' despite a perception that this should not qualify acknowledgement of their humanity and, consequently, citizenship. While it is widely appreciated that the walls of the prison as an institution have become more porous (Turner, 2013; 2016; Moran, 2013), and as such the barriers between those within prison and the community outside are less 'total', there is much about the experience of imprisonment which remains totalising. The findings of this study suggest that the impact of the 'prisoner' label on one's identity and sense of self is such that for many it swamps, or prefaces, identification with identities perceived as normal and therefore compatible with a sense of citizenship, by participants. Additionally, this label serves to compound any pre-existing barriers to meaningful citizenship in individuals' lives outside of prison. Stern (2002: 137) notes that prison policy often perpetuates or strengthens 'criminal' as an identity for those in prison, rather than the identity of "an incarcerated 'citizen'". The findings of this study support this assertion, while

demonstrating that the minutiae of the prison regime, and interactions within it, also serve to reinforce this ‘prisoner’ identity as the dominant label through which individuals’ experiences are mediated during incarceration.

Previous research has often referred to the position of those in prison as being that of qualified, suspended, dormant or conditional citizens (Easton, 2018; Ramsay, 2013; McNeill & Velasquez, 2017; Vaughan, 2000). The findings of this research support the contention of Behan (2014: 25) that any limited notions of citizenship contradict the idea of citizenship itself: “One cannot be a half citizen, a conditional citizen, a second-class citizen. Each one is a contradiction, the adjective rendering the noun meaningless.” However, while Behan makes this assertion in relation to the denial of the right to vote for those in prison, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that such comment is also pertinent even where such a right is granted, with legally enfranchised people in prison still feeling less than citizens within their own understandings of citizenship as universal and based upon common humanity.

Having problematised these notions of citizenship as something which can be *partially* experienced, based on the fact they do not match up with participants’ own subjective understandings of citizenship as universal, it is posited that the ‘citizenship’ which is experienced by those in prison is vastly different – determined, shaped and defined by the context of imprisonment. While Mauer (2011: 554) argues that the disenfranchisement of those in prison is based on assumptions that they are “qualitatively distinct from citizens in the outside world”, this sense of experiences being qualitatively distinct from citizenship outside of prison was prevalent both in England and Ireland, regardless of differences in disenfranchisement laws, albeit to differing extents. The relevance of this notion to the experience of imprisonment in both jurisdictions was evident in the responses of participants; narratives of citizenship having a different meaning in prison (Ryan), individuals identifying as “prison citizens” (Connor), or experiences constituting “jail citizenship” (Adam), were evident in interviews with participants at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds.

## 9.4 Meaningful Citizenship as a Possibility in the Prison Setting?

The findings discussed thus far demonstrate the barriers to cultivating a meaningful sense of citizenship for people in prison. Consideration will now be given to the question of whether cultivating meaningful citizenship, based on participants' own understandings, is something which is possible within a modern, individualised prison setting. The appeal of the notion of citizenship, and the idea of cultivating citizenship in the prison setting, is clear in the rhetoric of politicians and the aims of both the Irish Prison Service (IPS) and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), focused on rehabilitation; circumstances where individuals who have been convicted are encouraged and motivated to undertake pro-social work to the benefit of a wider 'community', and become engaged, responsible 'citizens', is no doubt appealing when linked to potential reduction in crime. When beginning this research one of my key justifications for exploring citizenship in the context of the prison was the link that had been identified in previous research between 'citizenship' and desistance from crime (Farrall et al., 2014). My argument when setting out on this research was that understanding what citizenship means to those in prison *must* be important if it is somehow influential in, or connected to, their path away from offending. Having now completed interviews with men imprisoned at Mountjoy Prison and HMP Leeds, however, I would argue that understanding citizenship from the perspective of those in prison is vital independent of this benefit of potential links to desistance. This thesis demonstrates that the meaning of citizenship for those in prison is inextricably linked to understandings of their own value or worth as human beings. Faulkner (2002: 1) has noted the lack of "a clear or convenient statement of what treating prisoners as citizens should actually involve as a matter of theory or practice". I would contend, on the basis of these findings, that much of what is involved relates to treating those in prison as human beings and individuals with their own personalities and strengths, rather than the tendency of prison systems to respond to the incarcerated as a homogenous group. The findings discussed suggest that this is fundamental to maintaining an identity beyond the 'prisoner' label during incarceration, which along with sustaining a sense of belonging to one's community, and making meaningful contributions, is fundamental to instilling a sense of meaningful citizenship that those in prison can carry with them on release.

One way that prisons might move towards cultivating a subjectively meaningful sense of citizenship for those inside is through prioritising each of these features in the design and delivery of activities within the prison setting. At present, identification of particular activities within the prison setting as ‘citizenship activity’ is largely premised on assumptions about the connections between citizenship and the particular act being done. The findings of this research have demonstrated that the unique environment of the prison shapes the experience of such activities, and can limit the extent to which they are experienced as contributing to meaningful citizenship for those in prison. If we do not assess such activities on the subjective understandings of citizenship held by those in prison, then we will not gain an understanding as to whether these activities truly bear any meaningful connection to citizenship for those who are involved in them.

This research demonstrates that many activities, which have been defined as ‘citizenship activities’, are not experienced as such due to the lack of connection to external communities and denial of autonomy in participation. This was most clearly demonstrated in experiences of education as one of the only ways perceived as enabling the men to contribute to their communities outside of prison. As such, greater use of Temporary Release and Release on Temporary License (ROTL), in Ireland and England respectively, to facilitate contributions to individuals’ home communities and family lives, could help to move towards cultivating a more meaningful sense of citizenship for those in prison, particularly for those serving longer sentences and thus experiencing extended removal from their external communities. In addition to facilitating these contributions, research has also demonstrated substantial benefits of temporary release schemes for supporting rehabilitation and desistance. In a study of Temporary Release from Irish prisons Baumer et al. (2009) found that those permitted leave to spend time with family or engage in vocational activities demonstrated lower levels of reimprisonment than those who were not given this opportunity, while an international review of research on temporary release concluded that this positive impact on reoffending levels is also accompanied by high levels of compliance (Cheliotis, 2009). This suggests that Temporary Release has substantial rehabilitative benefits, in addition to displaying potential to facilitate meaningful citizenship for people in prison, and thus the value of reversing trends to reduce its use could be two-fold. In relation to Ireland, the Community Return Scheme has also seen substantial reductions (Gallagher, 2019) despite its benefits for communities and those leaving

prison (IPS & Probation Service, 2014). In addition to the potential positive impact on rehabilitation, extension of this programme would be one way to foster meaningful citizenship amongst those approaching the end of custodial sentences in Ireland. The references made to this scheme by participants, as a potential future way to make meaningful contributions to one's own community, demonstrates the valuable opportunity it provides to encourage both rehabilitation and meaningful citizenship. While it has been noted (see Section 7.3) that England and Ireland demonstrate substantial differences in their approaches to providing people in prison with a "taste of freedom", shaped by differences in their penal climates (O'Donnell & Jewkes, 2011: 76), both jurisdictions would benefit from increasing use of temporary release schemes – during, and at the end of, sentences – where currently these schemes are shrinking (PRT, 2017; IPS, 2018; Gallagher, 2019). In this respect, the recent decision to offer governors more autonomy to grant ROTL in England & Wales (MOJ, 2019b) is a welcome one, which has the potential results to increase opportunities for individuals to make meaningful contributions to their communities during incarceration should it manage to evade the influence of the populist punitiveness (Bottoms, 1995) which tends to characterise politics and media in the UK (O'Donnell & Jewkes, 2011).

While education was praised by participants, and the school identified as a space where individuals could escape the pervasiveness of the 'prisoner' label for a short period in Ireland, the lack of autonomy involved in educational participation in England was highly problematic in limiting the meaning that participation held for men at HMP Leeds in relation to citizenship. These findings support Lister's (2007) claims that autonomy and agency are important to determining the significance of citizenship activity as meaningful for individuals, suggesting the need for the maximisation of autonomy and agency in participation, as far as possible within the inherent constraints of the prison environment. For prisons in England & Wales, the mandatory nature of education – and the perceptions of the link between this requirement and the model of procurement for prison education – works against this.

Another factor significant to cultivating a sense of citizenship for those in prison was the tone and nature of relationships between staff members and the imprisoned men. Findings demonstrated that individuals were more likely to identify themselves as more than a 'prisoner', compatible with their subjective understandings of citizenship, where



their interactions with staff demonstrated that they were truly known and respected as individuals and human beings. These findings are consistent with much of the literature on the importance of staff-prisoner relationships to shaping the experience of imprisonment (Liebling & Price, 1999; Liebling & Arnold, 2004; Crewe et al., 2015; Drake, 2008). Improving the relationships between staff and those held in prison to maximise humanity, dignity and acknowledgement of people as individuals, should be an ongoing priority if individuals are to experience a meaningful sense of citizenship. In practice, such relationships are unlikely to be helped by the resource cuts, understaffing and resulting staff dissatisfaction described by participants in both jurisdictions. While lower numbers of staff mean less time for officers to have meaningful interaction with individuals, and get to know them as ‘more than a number’, it also results in less consistency of staff interaction, as demonstrated by participants’ descriptions of ‘guesting’ at HMP Leeds, which was also observed during fieldwork. The data from this study suggests that with overstretched and under-familiar staff, the experience of incarceration is less likely to be defined by the humanity and individual treatment which is so central to establishing, and maintaining, an identity beyond ‘prisoner’ and compatible with citizenship.

The pervasiveness of the ‘prisoner’ label was overwhelming in the data collected during this research, and highlighted how problematic the normalised use of this term to describe and/or define individuals can be in limiting their ability to construct non-prisoner identities, and identify oneself as a citizen, during incarceration. As such, I would argue that the terminology used when describing people in prison is crucial and that frequent reference to imprisoned individuals as ‘prisoners’ undermines their humanity and reinforces the idea that their conviction, and the fact of their imprisonment, subsumes all other characteristics of their identity – even their humanity. The removal of everyday references to people in prison as ‘prisoners’, in the running of prisons and interactions with staff, could help to weaken this oppositional distinction between ‘prisoners’ and ‘citizens’ that was evident in the narratives of participants. For this reason, the decision was made to try and avoid use of the term ‘prisoner’ in my own discussions of participants throughout this thesis, as far as possible. The narratives and reflections are first and foremost those of *people* and should be acknowledged as such.

However important terminology may be, changes in this alone will not result in a meaningful sense of citizenship for people in prison. Indeed, the labelling of prison regimes or activities as involving or facilitating ‘citizenship’ should be treated with caution where such labels are not informed by the subjective understandings of those in prison. Based on the findings of this research, I would agree with Behan’s (2014: 198) assertion that “if prisons are to allow for citizenship, they must be re-imagined”. If prisons are to allow for a sense of citizenship which holds meaning for participants themselves, they must be reimagined in such a way that maximises autonomy and enables the continuation of meaningful connections to external communities, but most importantly in a way that acknowledges and treats individuals as humans first, rather than prisoners. Whether such a re-imagination is possible is beyond the scope of discussion in this thesis, but the findings suggest that – even in Ireland where those in prison are legally enfranchised – there is still a long way to go.

## **9.5 Limitations of the Thesis & Future Research**

Given the dearth of literature exploring subjective understandings and experiences of citizenship during incarceration, this study makes an important contribution to understanding these experiences. Nevertheless, as with any research project, this study has a number of limitations relating to the particular samples studied, the restrictions inherent in undertaking prison-based research, and the time limitations of the PhD process.

The current research is relatively small-scale, focusing narrowly on the experiences of individuals imprisoned at only one prison institution in each jurisdiction, out of a total of 3,929 imprisoned people in Ireland (IPS, 2019) and 82,321 in England & Wales (HMPPS, 2019). As such, the research involved only a very small proportion of the total population of individuals in prison across England and Ireland. Consequently, it is uncertain how generalisable the findings of this study would be to those held in other prison institutions across the two jurisdictions. The two prisons used in this study reflect the closed conditions of a committal prison that most individuals will experience at some point during their incarceration, albeit possibly only for a brief period before being moved on to another establishment. Prisons vary greatly from one institution to

the next, and therefore it would be useful to explore the understandings and experiences of citizenship for those held in other prisons, particularly those of differing security levels, sizes, or those operating substantially different regimes.

In addition to the specifics of the institutions studied, the vast majority of participants interviewed were either from the inner city of Dublin and surrounding areas, or West Yorkshire. As such, their experiences will to an extent be shaped by their distinct locality – both during and outside of their sentences – and may well differ from the experiences of men incarcerated in other parts of either jurisdiction. In particular, the inner-city location of both prisons studied mitigated for many the challenges faced by families and friends in visiting their loved ones that have been described in much of the prisons literature (Codd, 2008). As such, differences in men's experiences of community connections and contributions would be expected at more remote and isolated prisons. To establish whether the findings of this research reflect those of the prison populations more broadly, throughout these jurisdictions, further research would be needed to explore the perceptions and experiences of men within other prisons across the two countries. Whilst this limitation was an inevitable consequence of the time and financial restrictions of PhD study, an ideal scenario would be to study a broader range of experiences incorporating the perspectives of individuals held at a variety of different institutions across both jurisdictions.

The findings of this research demonstrate that, despite the prison environment no longer constituting a 'total institution' in the way Goffman (1961) used this term, the label of 'prisoner' attributed to those who are incarcerated is totalising in its qualifying effect on any identities, contributions and attachments sustained or developed during a prison sentence. As such, it would be particularly useful to further this research by exploring the experiences of those incarcerated in open and semi-open institutions which are less physically restrictive, and where the boundaries between the inside and outside 'communities' are more fluid, in order to explore any similarities in understandings and experiences of citizenship and the relevance of 'prison citizenship' to lived experiences in these institutions.

Scholarship has demonstrated the significance of both gender and age to the 'experience' of lived citizenship. In particular, connections have been identified

between citizenship and the transition to adulthood for young people (Lister, 2007; Hall et al., 2006; Lister et al., 2005), while the public/private divide has been identified as impacting upon the meaning and experience of citizenship for women (Lister, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 1997). As such further research is needed to understand the lived experience, and meaning of citizenship for women in prison and those held in young offenders' institutions.

There are also other areas relating to the notion of citizenship in the prison context that warrant academic attention. Whilst this study prioritised subjective experience of individuals who were themselves imprisoned, it did not involve interviews with prison officers or other staff members who might be involved in the delivery or implementation of programmes aimed at cultivating or fostering 'citizenship' for those in prison. Given the findings of this research that demonstrate substantial barriers to realising a meaningful sense of citizenship – at least beyond that of 'prison citizenship' – during incarceration, it would be useful to gain understanding of how prison staff members, and those involved in the delivery of programmes or regimes framed around citizenship, understand citizenship and perceive it to be fostered within the prison setting. It was evident in the findings of this research that many participants' understandings and experiences related to their subjective interpretations of how they were treated and perceived by those working in the prison environment. As such, staff members' understandings of whether those in prison are citizens, and what is necessary to achieve a meaningful sense of citizenship while inside, also merit attention in future research.

## **9.6 Concluding Thoughts**

Despite the limitations of this research, this project has provided an in-depth exploration of prisoners' understandings and experiences of citizenship during incarceration which makes a valid contribution to the academic field. This thesis has furthered understanding and made an original contribution to the areas of prison research, and citizenship research in two important ways. Firstly, while there has been substantial academic interest in the citizenship status and experience of those in prison, this has been largely focused on the legal position of imprisoned people – in terms of

rights and responsibilities, formal engagement with the democratic process during incarceration, or participation in pre-defined 'citizenship' activities from the prison setting. This thesis approaches the study of prisoners as potential citizens differently, focusing on their subjective understandings of citizenship and the way in which their material circumstances within prison impact upon their experience of citizenship, as defined in their own terms. As such, the thesis furthers understanding of the contextually-contingent meaning citizenship holds for individuals within the prison environment, and the features that they themselves consider necessary to identify as, or experience, citizenship. By taking influence from the work of Hall and Williamson (1999) to consider 'lived citizenship' from the perspectives of men in prison, this research privileges the voices and understandings of incarcerated men in a way that existing research on citizenship and imprisonment does not.

When first contemplating doctoral research in this area, I began with a focus on the positive consequences that had been highlighted in relation to active citizenship activities for individuals in prison, working on the assumption that something branded as 'citizenship' was an inherently good thing not only for supporting the rehabilitation and resettlement of individuals on release, but also for their wellbeing and sense of citizenship during the custodial part of their sentence. During the early stages of PhD study, I realised that this position did not sit well with the understanding I had gleaned from deeper engagement with the literature on imprisonment, and these concerns were later strengthened by the insight that spending time in the prison environment and speaking to men about their experiences of incarceration gave me, causing me to question whether this focus on participation in citizenship activity was too narrowly, and optimistically, conceived. As such, the thesis itself has shifted away from the initial anticipated focus on understanding ways that levels of participation in these activities could be increased based on my assumptions about their inherent goodness. Rather, the lens of lived citizenship enabled the focus of the research to be centred on exploring the lived experiences of participation, prioritising the issues important to those in prison and, in some instances, challenging the labelling of these activities as 'citizenship' when assessed against participants' own understandings of what is important to citizenship.

England and Ireland were chosen as countries for comparison to determine the significance of the right to vote as a ‘symbol’ of citizenship in the lived experiences of individuals in prison. Increasingly, as the research has moved on through the various stages of PhD study, this hook of the vote has become less and less central to the discussion; it has become clear that the right to vote is far from symbolic of lived citizenship, with any meaningful sense of citizenship being based upon much more than the maintenance of a legal right which, while important, facilitates only one formal route through which to assert belonging to a society, contribute one’s views, or act out one’s identity as a citizen. Despite this overall finding, the responses of some participants when discussing the right to vote illustrate that this right can be significant in individuals’ own understandings of their position in society, and their sense of inclusion within it. When taken alongside the other various arguments posed for granting those in prison the right to vote (Behan, 2015; Easton; 2008), it would seem that a positive move towards facilitating a sense of meaningful citizenship for individuals in prison would be for the government in England & Wales to comply with the ruling of *Hirst v UK* in a way that is more than minimal, and grant all sentenced prisoners the right to vote. However, as demonstrated by the fact that many participants in Ireland did not identify themselves as citizens despite their legal enfranchisement, this alone is insufficient to enable those in prison to identify as citizens and experience a meaningful sense of citizenship that transcends their imprisonment. What is needed is a fundamental acknowledgement that those in prison are not an abnormal, homogenous group, but individual human beings who are not solely defined by their criminal convictions.

During the process of this research I have been struck by the extent to which participants felt that their voices were absent, or not listened to, in relation to the many facets of citizenship they identified as meaningful. Echoing the experience Uggen (2014) described in relation to his work on prisoner disenfranchisement in the USA, in the run-up to my own fieldwork I was faced with concern from many, including prison staff and researchers, that ‘citizenship’ was a topic those in prison would have little to say about and that would need to be strictly defined or spelt out for participants if I was to sustain relevant discussions or collect data of interest. These concerns were not borne out in my experience. Participants were willing and eager to share their thoughts on the meaning citizenship held in their lives, with several thanking me for the opportunity to

talk about these issues which they were so rarely asked about. Given the lack of a voice that many felt, utilising the 'lived citizenship' lens and focusing on subjective perceptions and experience provided one small way for participants to have a voice of issues which they often feel disenfranchised and excluded from while in prison. It is hoped that this approach will be a step in the direction of considering the lived citizenship reality of many more who are incarcerated, so that they too might have a voice on these issues.





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## **Appendices**

1. Interview Schedule
2. Focus Group Schedule
3. Full Information Sheet – Interviews
4. Full Information Sheet – Focus Groups
5. Summary Information Sheet (Ireland)
6. Poster (Ireland)
7. Interview Consent Form (Ireland)
8. Recorded Interview Consent Form (Ireland)
9. Focus Group Consent Form (Ireland)
10. Summary Information Sheet (England)
11. Poster (England)
12. Recorded Interview Consent Form (England)
13. Interview Consent Form (England)
14. Focus Group Consent Form (England)



## APPENDIX ONE

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### **Semi-Structured Interview Schedule**

#### *Introduction*

*Explanation of the project, topics for discussion and confidentiality/data storage issues (with presentation of the summary information sheet).*

*Explanation of emphasis on participants' thoughts: e.g. I would like to ask you some questions about your thoughts on, and experiences of, citizenship. I am particularly interested in your experiences during your time in prison. It is your thoughts and experiences I am interested in, and there is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions. You are welcome to refuse to answer any of the questions I ask, and you are free to stop the interview and withdraw from the research at any time, without any need for explanation.*

#### *Permission for Recording*

#### *Signing of consent form*

*Clarification of understanding: e.g. If there is anything that is unclear then please let me know, so I can try to explain myself more clearly. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

### **Understandings of Citizenship**

- What does the term 'citizenship' mean to you?
- What do you think determines whether or not an individual is a citizen?
- What does it mean to be a citizen?
- How do people act as citizens?

### **Reflections on own 'citizenship' status –**

- Are you a citizen?
- Do you belong to a community?
- Which community? (prison/local community/national/European)
- Is there anything that makes you, or prevents you from being, a citizen/member of the community?

### **'Citizenship' Activity –**

- Are there any activities in this prison that allow you to contribute to the community?
- Do you participate in any of these activities?

*If 'Yes':*

- Could you explain what you do as part of the activity?
- What is it that made you want to take part?
- Are there advantages to taking part for you?
- Are there benefits for others? (prisoners/staff/wider community)  
Explain.
- Would you like to take part in a similar activity when you are released?

*If 'No':*

- Are there any particular reasons you decided not to participate in these activities?
- Are there any activities that you would like to participate in?
- If 'yes', what is it that has stopped you from participating?
- Is there anything that could be changed to make it easier for you to participate, or that would make you want to participate?
- Did you ever participate in similar activities, before going to prison?
- Could you have stayed involved in these once you went to prison?

### **Democratic Participation –**

- Do you have an influence on decisions made about the prison?
- Do you want to be involved in decision making processes in the prison?
- Do you know about any opportunities for you to share your opinions with prison staff?
- Have you ever acted as a representative for other prisoners in these forums?

*Depending on whether answer 'Yes' or 'No, see Questions above re motivation/barriers to participation.*

- Are your concerns communicated to the prison, by representatives?
- How else do you communicate your views about the prison?
- Do you have a say in how things work in wider society? E.g. Do you think you can influence Government decisions?
- How do you communicate your views about issues in wider society?
- How did you communicate your views about these issues before going to prison?
- Have you voted while in prison? (IRELAND ONLY)
- Did you ever vote before coming to prison?

### **Closing Comments**

- Is there anything else that you would like to add, before we finish the interview?

### **Background**

- How long have you been in prison?
- Is this your first sentence?
- How long do you have left to serve on your current sentence?
- Have you spent the whole sentence at this prison?

*Following the first few interviews/pilot, ask for feedback on the interview itself.*

E.g. Is there anything that I could do to improve the interviews in future?



### Focus Group Schedule

#### *Introduction*

*Explanation of the project, topics for discussion and confidentiality/data storage issues*

*Explanation of emphasis on participants' thoughts and opinions e.g.: I would like to ask you some questions about your thoughts on, and experiences of, citizenship. I am particularly interested in your experiences during your time in prison. It is your thoughts and experiences I am interested in, and there is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions. If there is a question you do not want to answer then that is fine.*

#### *Permission for Recording*

#### *Signing of consent forms*

*Explanation of how the focus group will work and clarification of understanding*

*Go around the group doing quick introductions.*

#### **Use Farrall et al (2014) operationalization of 'Lived Citizenship' to prompt reaction from the group:**

*Statements to be written on board/flip chart as visual aid for discussion.*

1. People should not rely on the government, they should take responsibility for themselves.
2. It does not really matter if you lie when dealing with state officials.
3. Being a citizen is about becoming involved in your community.
4. The government does not listen to people like me.
5. People should obey the law.
6. People should accept that others have a right to be different.
7. Local government officials don't really care about what happens to people like me.

*Where appropriate/possible bring in following questions:*

### **Citizenship**

- I am interested in what citizenship means to you, and what you understand by the term. If we go around the group, please would each of you state one thing that you think is important to the term citizenship?
- What does it mean to be a citizen?
- Is there anything that individuals have to do, or have or be, to be citizens in your view?

### **Community**

- What does community mean to you?
- What does it mean to be part of a community?
- What would you describe as your community?  
(prison/local/national/European)

### **‘Citizenship’ Activity in Prison**

- What does it mean to act as a citizen?
- In what ways do you think individuals can act as citizens?
- Are there any opportunities to do any of these things, at this prison?  
What are they?  
*(Opportunities to participate, contribute to community, have influence on decisions etc)*
- OR, tell me about the activities in the prison. Do any of these allow you to act as citizens? Why?

*Thank all participants for taking the time to be involved and discuss these issues. Ask if there are any final comments before ending the focus group.*



## APPENDIX THREE

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### **Explanation by Researcher: Interviews**

#### **What is this research about?**

This research is about prisoners' experiences of citizenship in England and the Republic of Ireland. The research will explore prisoners' experiences with particular emphasis on involvement in activities, decision-making processes, and why they do or do not participate in such activities in the prison. The results of the research will help people to understand prisoners' experiences better, and will help to identify examples of how individuals participate in citizenship activities in prison, and how activities might be improved to encourage more prisoners to participate.

#### **Who is funding the research?**

The research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

#### **What will the interview involve?**

In this interview I would like to ask you about your thoughts on and experiences of activities in the prison, decision-making and community involvement. You do not have to have been involved in these activities to do the interview- I would like to hear about what you think about these activities. The interview will last for approximately one hour.

#### **Will my personal information be kept safe and confidential?**

This interview will be recorded if you are happy with this, otherwise I will take notes during the interview. All information provided will be kept strictly confidential. It will not be shown to anyone apart from the research supervisors, will be wiped from the recording device at the end of the day, and will be stored safely in a password-protected computer folder. The interviews will then be written down and given a code, so that your name is not linked to the data. This data will then be stored safely at the University of Sheffield. Some of the things you have said in the interview may be used in a research report or academic publication. However, only quotes or examples that cannot be linked back to you will be used. When the original recording is no longer needed for analysis or to use for a future publication, it will be permanently deleted.

The only time that confidentiality will be broken is if you tell me about a risk of harm to you or another person, a possible security risk at the prison, (or if you tell me about illegal acts or breaches of prison rules which have not yet been

disclosed to prison staff)<sup>64</sup>. If you tell me about any of these things then I will have to tell a prison officer about this.

### **What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?**

It is hoped that the interview will be an enjoyable experience, and should not cause any discomfort or upset. However, if any issues arise during the discussion, which you think you may require further support for, then please let me know.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

While there are no immediate benefits to those participating, it is hoped that the work will help further understanding of prisoners' citizenship experiences, and to identify ways that this experience could be improved.

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

The information collected during the research will be written up in a PhD thesis, as well as in reports for the prison services. The results may also be published in academic books or journals. It is hoped that a feedback session will also take place at the prison, to inform participants of the research findings. Any information from participants, used in the publications or presentations, will be anonymous.

### **Do I have to take part in the research?**

Your participation in this research is voluntary and if you decide, at any time during the interview, that you do not want to answer a question or wish to withdraw from the interview then you can do this. If you decide that you do not want to participate in the research then any material recorded so far will be destroyed. If you no longer wish your contribution to be used in the research then you must inform me by [insert date for final day of fieldwork]. After this date it will not be possible to remove your contribution from the study.

Whether or not you choose to be part of this research, or if you choose to withdraw participation, this will not have any influence on your parole, sentence or life in prison.

### **Who should I contact if I have any questions?**

You can ask me any questions you have about the interview now, before taking part, or you can contact me with any questions you have later. You can contact

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<sup>64</sup> Added in for research in England at request of the National Offender Management Service.

me directly [insert details of where I can be contacted] or by speaking to [insert name of staff contact] at this prison.

**Who should I contact if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints about the way this research has been handled, you can speak to me about this. If you do not feel this has been handled satisfactorily then you can contact Dr Cormac Behan, the supervisor of this project, by speaking to [insert name of staff contact] at this prison.



### **Explanation by Researcher: Focus Groups**

#### **What is this research about?**

This research is about prisoners' experiences of citizenship in England and the Republic of Ireland. The research will explore prisoners' experiences with particular emphasis on involvement in activities, decision-making processes, and why they do or do not participate in such activities in the prison. The results of the research will help people to understand prisoners' experiences better, and will help to identify examples of how individuals participate in citizenship activities in prison, and how activities might be improved to encourage more prisoners to participate.

#### **Who is funding the research?**

The research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

#### **What will the focus group involve?**

The focus group will involve a group discussion with other prisoners who have volunteered to take part. The researcher will lead the session by asking some questions to begin the group discussion. The discussion will be focused on issues relating to citizenship and participation. The focus group will be recorded and notes will be taken by the researcher. A member of prison staff will also be present while the focus group is taking place. The focus group will last for approximately one hour.

#### **Will my personal information be kept safe and confidential?**

This focus group will be recorded and kept confidential. It will not be shown to anyone apart from the research supervisors, will be wiped from the recording device at the end of the day, and will be stored safely in a password-protected computer folder. The focus group discussion will then be written down and the contributions of each participant will not be linked to their name. This data will then be stored safely at the University of Sheffield. Some of the things you have said in the focus group may be used in a research report or academic publication. However, only quotes or examples which cannot be linked back to you will be used. When the original recording is no longer needed for analysis or to use for a future publication, it will be permanently deleted.

The only time that confidentiality will be broken is if you tell me about a risk of harm to you or another person, a possible security risk at the prison, (or if you tell me about illegal acts or breaches of prison rules which have not yet been

disclosed to prison staff)<sup>65</sup>. If you tell me about any of these things then I will have to tell a prison officer about this.

During the focus group, it is requested that all participants please respect the confidentiality of others taking part, and that comments made during the focus group are not discussed with others once the session is over. While I will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, and all participants involved in the focus group will be asked to respect the confidentiality of the group, this cannot be guaranteed in a group discussion and this is why it is very important that all participants follow this guidance.

### **Do I have to take part in the research?**

Your participation in this research is voluntary and if you decide, at any time, that you do not want to answer a question or wish to withdraw from the focus group then you can do this. You are able to withdraw from the research until [DD/MM/YY - insert last day of fieldwork]. Due to the group recording of the focus group, any contributions made to the group may be difficult to attribute to one individual, however efforts will be made to identify comments of the participant and remove these from the research.

Whether or not you choose to be part of this research, or if you choose to withdraw participation, this will not have any influence on your parole, sentence or life in prison.

### **What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?**

There are no particular risks to taking part in the research, and it is hoped that the focus group will be an enjoyable experience. However, if any issues arise during the discussion, which you think you may require further support for, then please let me know.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

While there are no immediate benefits to those participating, it is hoped that the work will help further understanding of prisoners' citizenship experiences, and to identify ways that this experience could be improved.

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

The information collected during the research will be written up in a PhD thesis, as well as in reports for the prison services. The results may also be published in academic books or journals. It is hoped that a feedback session will also take

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<sup>65</sup> Added in for research in England at the request of the National Offender Management Service.

place at the prison, to inform participants of the research findings. Any information from participants, used in the publications or presentations, will be anonymous.

**Who should I contact if I have any questions?**

You can ask me any questions you have about the focus group now, before taking part, or you can contact me with any questions you have later. You can contact me directly [insert details of location in prison], or by speaking to [insert name of staff contact] at this prison.

**Who should I contact if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints about the way this research has been handled, you can speak to me about this. If you do not feel this has been handled satisfactorily then you can contact Dr Cormac Behan, the supervisor of this project, by speaking to [insert name of staff contact] at this prison.





## **Experiences of Imprisonment and Citizenship – Research Project**

### **What is this research about?**

This research is about prisoners' experiences of citizenship in England and the Republic of Ireland. The research will explore how prisoners view citizenship, and why they do or do not participate in active citizenship activities in the prison. The results of the research will help people to understand prisoners' experiences better, and will help to identify examples of how individuals participate in citizenship activities in prison, and how activities might be improved to encourage more prisoners to participate.

### **What does the research involve?**

I am inviting you to participate in the research by completing a questionnaire, and/or taking part in an interview or focus group. You will be asked about your thoughts on citizenship, what it means to be a citizen, and the citizenship activities available to you in prison.

### **What will happen to the information I provide?**

All information will be kept strictly confidential, within prison guidelines, and will be stored securely. Names will be removed from all the information and only anonymous information, which cannot be linked back to you, will be used in reports or publications.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No. Your participation in the research is voluntary and you can decide at any time that you do not want to answer a question, or that you want to withdraw from the research.

**Thank you very much for your time. If you have any questions then please contact me directly at [insert details of location in prison], or speak to [insert name of staff contact] to contact me or Dr Cormac Behan (Supervisor).**



**Would you like to  
talk about your  
time in prison?**

**If you would like to be  
involved in a study, **Abi Stark** from  
the University of Sheffield would  
like to talk to you.**

**Please speak to **Abi Stark**, or  
\_\_\_\_\_ at the school,  
to arrange a meeting.**



**The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.**



**Interview Consent Form - Ireland**

I consent to take part in this interview about citizenship with Abi Stark, from the University of Sheffield, as part of her PhD research. I have had the research explained to me, I understand what is involved, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I understand that I do not have to take part in the research unless I want to, and that I can withdraw at any time without giving any reasons. I also understand that either participating or withdrawing will have no consequences for my time in prison.

I consent to the taking of notes during this interview, and understand that anything I say will be kept strictly confidential, within the guidelines of the prison. I understand that the information will be used for a PhD and publications, and that only anonymous information that cannot be linked back to me will be used.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Recorded Interview Consent Form - Ireland**

I consent to take part in this interview about citizenship with Abi Stark, from the University of Sheffield, as part of her PhD research. I have had the research explained to me, I understand what is involved, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I understand that I do not have to take part in the research unless I want to, and that I can withdraw at any time without giving any reasons. I also understand that either participating or withdrawing will have no consequences for my time in prison.

I consent to the recording of this interview, and understand that anything I say will be kept strictly confidential, within the guidelines of the prison. I understand that the information will be used for a PhD and publications, and that only anonymous information that cannot be linked back to me will be used.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_





**Focus Group Consent Form - Ireland**

I consent to take part in this focus group about citizenship with Abi Stark, from the University of Sheffield, as part of her PhD research. I have had the research explained to me, I understand what is involved, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I understand that I do not have to take part in the research unless I want to, and that I can withdraw at any time without giving any reasons. I also understand that either participating or withdrawing will have no consequences for my time in prison.

I consent to the recording of this focus group and note-taking, and understand that anything I say will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher, within the guidelines of the prison. I understand that the information will be used for a PhD and publications, and that only anonymous information that cannot be linked back to me will be used.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## **Experiences of Imprisonment & Citizenship - Research Project**

**My name is Abi Stark and I am doing research at the University of Sheffield, funded by the Economic & Social Research Council.**

### **What is this research about?**

This research is about prisoners' experiences in England and the Republic of Ireland. The research will look at how prisoners experience activities in the prison, from their own perspectives, and why they do or do not participate in these activities. The results of the research will help people to understand prisoners' experiences better, and will help to identify examples of how individuals participate in citizenship activities in prison and how activities might be improved to encourage more prisoners to participate.

### **What does the research involve?**

I am inviting you to participate in the research by taking part in an interview or focus group. You will be asked about your experiences of activities available to you in prison, participation in decision making, and community involvement.

### **What will happen to the information I provide?**

All information will be kept strictly confidential. The only time that information will not be kept confidential is if you disclose a risk of harm to you or another person, a breach of the prison rules or an undisclosed illegal act, or a security risk. Disclosures of this kind must be passed on to prison staff, however all other information is strictly confidential. Names will be removed from all the information and only anonymous information, which cannot be linked back to you, will be used in reports or publications.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No. Your participation in the research is voluntary and you can decide at any time during the interview that you do not want to answer a question, or that you want to withdraw from the research.

**Thank you very much for your time. If you have any questions then please contact me directly at [insert details of location in prison], or speak to [insert name of staff contact] to contact me or Dr Cormac Behan (Supervisor).**



**Would you like to  
talk about your  
time in prison?**

**If you would like to be involved in  
a study, **Abi Stark** from the  
University of Sheffield would like  
to talk to you.**

**Please speak to **Abi Stark** or  
\_\_\_\_\_ to arrange a  
meeting. Abi will be on \_\_\_ Wing  
on \_\_\_\_\_.**



**The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.**



**Recorded Interview Consent Form - England**

I consent to take part in this interview about my time in prison with Abi Stark, from the University of Sheffield, as part of her PhD research. I have had the research explained to me, I understand what is involved, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I understand that I do not have to take part in the research unless I want to, and that I can withdraw at any time until DD/MM/YY without giving any reasons. I also understand that either participating or withdrawing will have no consequences for my time in prison.

I consent to the recording of this interview, and understand that anything I say will be kept strictly confidential, except for any disclosure of:

- a risk of harm to myself or another
- a breach of the prison rules
- previously undisclosed illegal acts
- a security risk

I understand that this information must be passed on to prison staff.

I understand that the information will be used for a PhD and publications, and that only anonymous information that cannot be linked back to me will be used.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_





**Interview Consent Form - England**

I consent to take part in this interview about my time in prison with Abi Stark, from the University of Sheffield, as part of her PhD research. I have had the research explained to me, I understand what is involved, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I understand that I do not have to take part in the research unless I want to, and that I can withdraw at any time until DD/MM/YY without giving any reasons. I also understand that either participating or withdrawing will have no consequences for my time in prison.

I consent to the taking of notes during this interview, and understand that anything I say will be kept strictly confidential, except for any disclosure of:

- a risk of harm to myself or another
- a breach of the prison rules
- previously undisclosed illegal acts
- a security risk

I understand that this information must be passed on to prison staff.

I understand that the information will be used for a PhD and publications, and that only anonymous information that cannot be linked back to me will be used.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Focus Group Consent Form - England**

I consent to take part in this focus group about citizenship with Abi Stark, from the University of Sheffield, as part of her PhD research. I have had the research explained to me, I understand what is involved, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I understand that I do not have to take part in the research unless I want to, and that I can withdraw at any time until DD/MM/YY without giving any reasons. I also understand that participating or withdrawing will have no consequences for my time in prison.

I consent to the recording of this focus group and note-taking, and understand that anything I say will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher, except for any disclosure of:

- a risk of harm to myself or another
- a breach of the prison rules
- previously undisclosed illegal acts
- a security risk

I understand that this information must be passed on to prison staff.

I understand that I should also treat this discussion as confidential, and that I should not talk about it with others outside of the group.

I understand, however, that the researcher cannot guarantee all participants treat my responses as confidential.

I understand that the information will be used for a PhD and publications, and that only anonymous information that cannot be linked back to me will be used.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_