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After the Offence:
The Construction of Crime and its Consequences by
Families of Serious Offenders

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of relatives of those accused or convicted of serious offences such as murder, manslaughter, rape and sex offences. Relatives' accounts focus on the discovery of the offence as traumatic and life-changing, comparable in many ways to bereavement. Accounts of life before this point polarised and were either *problem-identifying* or *normalising*. Participants passed through several stages after discovering the offence as they began to feel they were coping and as the criminal justice process progressed. Responsibilities within the family were re-negotiated and new responsibilities emerged which particularly revolved around the offender and his or her needs. Female relatives, and primarily mothers and wives, tended to take on these new tasks.

Relatives experience secondary stigma because of their kin relationship to a serious offender, but this is more than just a stigma by association. Relatives are themselves subject to a 'web of shame' on the basis of contamination and blame. The thesis explores the accounts that relatives construct about the offence and about their own actions. When accounting for the offence, relatives were found to use 'actor adjustments' and 'act adjustments' of various types. Many participants were searching around for reasons and trying to understand why the offence had happened; formulating these accounts was part of that process.

The thesis considers why relatives use self-help and what it offers. It is argued that self-help provides a 'collective narrative' for understanding experience which relatives use as a *resource* along with other sources to understand their circumstances. Most participants in the research were female, as are most participants in self-help services for relatives of offenders, and reasons for this are considered. The thesis is based upon in-depth interviews with 32 relatives of serious offenders and participant observation of a self-help organisation for families of serious offenders over several years.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review

Beryl is a middle-class, white woman in her early seventies who lives in a small, pretty seaside town with her husband. They have two adult sons, one of whom has recently been released from prison and the other who followed his father into the navy. Her husband has quite severe ill-health, having suffered heart problems and strokes and on the day I visit is out having occupational therapy. Beryl is a slight woman who has suffered from some health problems herself. She used to work as a nurse and now describes herself as a housewife. She continues to be involved in charities and voluntary work.

When we arrive (I am with two other people, one of whom is a friend of hers who has introduced us), we are given a friendly greeting and served home-made shortbread and tea from a matching tea service. We are alone for the duration of the interview, although interrupted once or twice by telephone calls. We sit on two big soft chairs, side by side but facing towards each other, in her living room. The flat is full of ornaments and pictures hang on the walls along with many framed photographs of family members. Her voice is quiet and measured and she seems nervous to begin with and not sure whether she has anything interesting to tell me. Her son was convicted of the murder of a pub landlord, as was the landlord's wife with whom he had been having an affair. Beryl lays the blame squarely at the feet of the landlord's wife and believes she would have found another accomplice if she had not found her son. They both received life sentences and he has recently been released. She points out the pub where this occurred which is very close to the flats where Beryl still lives.

Anne is a mother in her late forties who lives with her husband in a middle-class area of a large town. I interviewed her in her comfortable well-cared-for house and we sit in the conservatory. Her son beat up and raped a sixteen year old girl when he was seventeen. After the offence he had apparently told the girl to fetch the police, and sat and waited for them. He was arrested immediately, and Anne found out about the offence the following day from her son's father (from whom she had separated many years before). She says she was in deep shock and could barely function. For 18 months prior to the offence she 'had a lot of trouble' with her son, including alcohol, drug and solvent

abuse, stealing, suicide attempts and abusive behaviour. She had tried to get help for him and he was under the care of a psychiatrist and seeing a drug support worker. She says she was devastated when she found out about the offence; she compares the experience to bereavement, and says it took two years to start to feel better. She had palpitations, panic attacks and describes the impact as 'debilitating'.

Anne's son pleaded guilty to the charge of rape. She did not attend court for the sentencing, but learnt of the sentence he received when she was woken by the news on her clock radio the next morning. She has struggled to understand why her son offended, and worried whether she might be in some way to blame. No other member of her family, including her two adult daughters, has ever been in trouble with the police.

Frances is a white woman in her early forties with short hair and glasses. Frances now no longer works and is registered disabled, but once worked as a cook. I interviewed her sitting at the dining table in the living room of her friend's house. Although she says she is willing to be interviewed she appears quite uncomfortable and nervous, although she relaxes more towards the end of the interview. We are interrupted several times by the telephone, her friend's cat and her friend's adult son coming in from work and getting ready to go out.

Her husband was convicted of the rape of their fifteen-year-old foster-daughter, who became pregnant as a result and was removed from their care by social services. He pleaded guilty, once DNA tests had proved this to be so, and he was sentenced to three years and nine months. She subsequently divorced him and has had no contact with him since his imprisonment. She is staying with her friend because her ex-husband was due to be released from prison the day before the interview and she wants to avoid seeing him. He has joint tenancy on their council flat and she thinks he is bound to go there. Her voice is quiet at times and her accent is Southern working-class. She sometimes struggles to find the right words, but they flow more towards the end of the interview.

Frances supported her husband, believing his claim to be innocent, until DNA tests proved otherwise. She found the experience shattering; she had already received psychiatric care for previous problems, and was admitted to hospital on the day her husband was convicted and received psychiatric help for some time afterwards. In

addition to her marriage breakdown, she lost her foster daughter, who she says she thought of as like her own daughter. She feels guilty for not protecting her foster daughter, and feels that she is also blamed by others.

I interviewed Jane at the offices of an organisation for prisoners' families. She was a small, thin woman who was clearly nervous about talking to me, but had been encouraged to do so by the Director of the organisation whom she described as her main supporter. She was very upset and cried often during the interview. Jane's daughter was in her early twenties and had been recently sentenced to two years imprisonment after being jointly convicted with her partner for inflicting numerous injuries on their 11 month old son. Jane thought the sentence would have been longer, but she says they both pleaded not guilty and the court could therefore not be sure who had inflicted the injuries. Investigations showed that Jane's grandson had many broken bones and must have suffered prolonged abuse.

Jane's grandson was adopted with no further contact with his birth family, and Jane was heartbroken about this. She had been close to him and cared for him often, and was keeping a room with all his things which she considered 'his room'. Jane lives on a council estate and had become a virtual prisoner in her own home as a result of abuse she had received from neighbours following her daughter's conviction. She feels angry towards her daughter, but continues to be her main supporter. She finds the costs of supporting her daughter in prison and visiting difficult to manage because she is on income support. She says she feels very depressed most of the time, but has to keep going because she is a single parent caring for her teenage son.

How do relatives of serious offenders like Beryl, Anne, Frances and Jane construct their experiences? What do they share as relatives of serious offenders and how do their experiences differ? This research considers how relatives of serious offenders are affected by having a serious offender in the family. Having a relative accused or convicted of a serious offence can have an impact on all aspects of a person's life. He or she might find daily life becomes organised around that person, thinking and worrying about him or her; if the relative is in prison, writing letters, providing him or her with money or other items; liaising with legal or other authorities, and so on. The emotional impact can be great and relatives in this study used words such as 'shock', 'grief' and

'trauma' to describe their experiences. Their very identity and self-image can be affected, and they may question whether they might have had a role to play in what happened. Their relationships with others, both within and outside the family, can be affected. They find themselves drawn into the criminal justice process of which they may have had no prior experience, and often find information about their family member and the offence (and in some cases details about his or her family background) in local and national newspapers. Families of serious offenders can therefore find themselves having to cope with often sudden and all-consuming changes, a predicament to which they say those without shared experience are often unsympathetic. These consequences will be explored in the chapters that follow.

Until recently criminology tended to take a narrow view of those involved with and affected by crime, concentrating on perpetrators and primary victims. While the broader reach, impact and repercussions of crime have become popular research topics, the main foci have been the affects on witnesses (e.g. Dent and Flin 1992), the wider community (e.g. Foster 2000; Hope 1995) or the families of victims (e.g. Rock 1998a; Rock 1998b) rather than offenders' families. Some research has considered the effects on prisoners' families, with a much smaller body of work on the families of *serious* offenders.

The relationship between crime and the family has received attention in both academic and public discourse. The family is portrayed as having causal or preventative functions. Political, media and lay discourses on the family point to its power to prevent crime by socialising children into law-abiding adults, and to cause crime if it fails to fulfil this function and breaks down. Alternatively, families are perceived to transmit criminality, either genetically (e.g. Mednick et al. 1987) or socially (e.g. Farrington 2002). The family has also been portrayed as having an important control function, for example in Hirschi's control theory where strong family relationships are an important part of the 'attachment' bond, one of four bonds that tie individuals to society and so prevent them breaking laws (Hirschi 1969). Furthermore, the family can be a location of crime and family members primary victims, such as in the case of domestic violence (e.g. Smith 1989a), sexual offences against children (e.g. Howitt 1995), or intra-familial homicide (e.g. Hendricks et al. 1993). Viewing relatives of offenders (other than primary victims) as affected by crime, rather than as agents causing or preventing it, has received less attention in the academic literature.

A focus on offenders' families also draws our attention to ways in which women are affected by crime. A higher proportion of relatives supporting prisoners are female, whether because of single parenthood, as partners of male prisoners, or for other reasons to do with gender and family responsibilities¹. With a current prison population of over 73,000² a high number of relatives are likely to be affected. Second-wave feminism drew our attention to women as victims, and to women offenders; a focus on offenders' families enables us to see the broader effects of crime on a greater number of women and to see how they are drawn into the criminal justice process through their kin relationships, and nowhere is this more evident than with the families of serious offenders.

Serious Offences

To define the population with which this study is concerned, it is necessary to begin by considering what is meant by 'serious' offences. The 1997 Crime (Sentences) Act section 2 (5) provides a list of serious offences, which in England and Wales are: murder, attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, incitement to murder, manslaughter; rape or attempted rape; possess firearm with intent to injure, use of firearm to resist arrest, carrying firearm with criminal intent; robbery with firearm; unlawful intercourse with a girl under 13; soliciting murder; wounding or GBH with intent (Francis et al. 2001). However, as Francis et al. point out, there are variations between United Kingdom jurisdictions, so for example Scotland has more sexual offences on the list³. Therefore there is not definite agreement about what constitutes serious offences and Francis et al. suggest the list is based on opinion rather than empirical evidence. They say: 'Identifying 'serious' crime should therefore be recognized as a contested boundary relating to the social views of the period and location; the idea that one can encapsulate a notion of evil is illusory' (Francis et al. 2001: 728). There is, however, some constancy: 'In reality, at any point in time the

¹ See chapters three and seven.

² At August 2003. Source: Howard League (<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/howard.league/>)

³ It is interesting that more sex offences against children are not included on the England and Wales list. Media coverage would suggest that public opinion views all offences against children as serious.

'seriousness' rankings of some crimes are being renegotiated while the 'seriousness' of others are being maintained' (Francis et al. 2001: 734).

When we look at lay opinions of offences seriousness, violent offences are generally thought more serious than offences against property. There could be exceptions to this, for example stealing one million pounds could be more serious than a violent offence such as pushing someone in a queue (Ashworth 1999), but it is a generally held view and surveys of public opinion tend to find that people give similar rank-orderings to crimes (Von Hirsch and Jareborg 1991). The concept of proportionality in sentencing depends upon an assessment of offence seriousness, although how this is defined is far from straightforward and has received remarkably little attention: 'the jurisprudence of crime seriousness is a topic that has scarcely been touched' (Von Hirsch and Jareborg 1991: 2).

Von Hirsch and Jareborg suggest that seriousness of crime has two dimensions, *harm* and *culpability*, and that standardised assessments of different offences can be made on this basis. However, what they propose is a general approach rather than a formula and they acknowledge that the categories they propose for assessing harm are far from precise (Von Hirsch and Jareborg 1991). Therefore, it is not possible to simply rank offences by seriousness and attempts to do this remain contested. However, despite these difficulties the concept of seriousness should not be disregarded:

Judgements of relative seriousness are made frequently in all walks of life – not just by legislators when deciding whether to criminalize and what maximum penalty to assign to an offence, but also by judges and magistrates when sentencing, and also by lay people in commenting on whether the official response is proportionate.

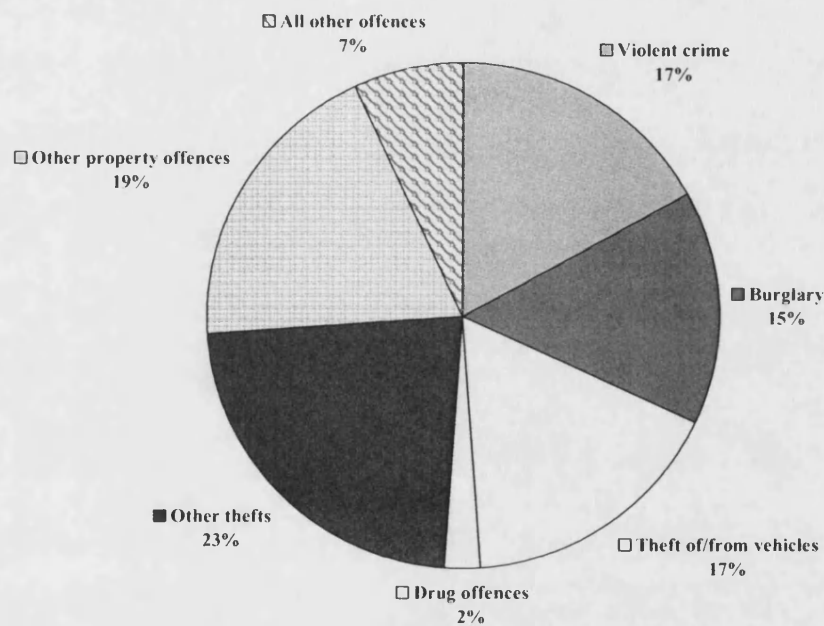
(Ashworth 1999: 41)

As we will see, participants in this study also made judgements of relative seriousness and defined themselves as relatives of *serious* offenders (see below).

Criminal statistics in England and Wales are not broken down by offence seriousness. It is possible, however, to look at the distribution of offending in England and Wales and see that if serious offences are taken to be violent or sexual offences (acknowledging they might also include any other offence that receives a long prison sentence) they are

only a very small proportion of all offending. In 2002/3⁴, violent crimes constituted only 17% of police recorded crime; offences against property were much more common (see chart 1)⁵. Sexual offences are included in the category of violent crime and accounted for only 0.8% of police recorded crime.

Chart 1: Police Recorded Crime 2002/03



However, not all violent offences would be classified as serious. In 2002/3 80% of the category of violent crime was made up of less serious types of violence, which included common assaults (assaults with no injury), crimes of harassment and less serious wounding where only minor injury was involved (see chart 2)⁶.

⁴ This refers to the financial year April 2002 - March 2003.

⁵ Source: (Simmons and Dodd 2003: 115-6)

⁶ Source: (Simmons and Dodd 2003: 75)

Chart 2: Police Recorded Violent Crimes by Offence Type, 2002/03

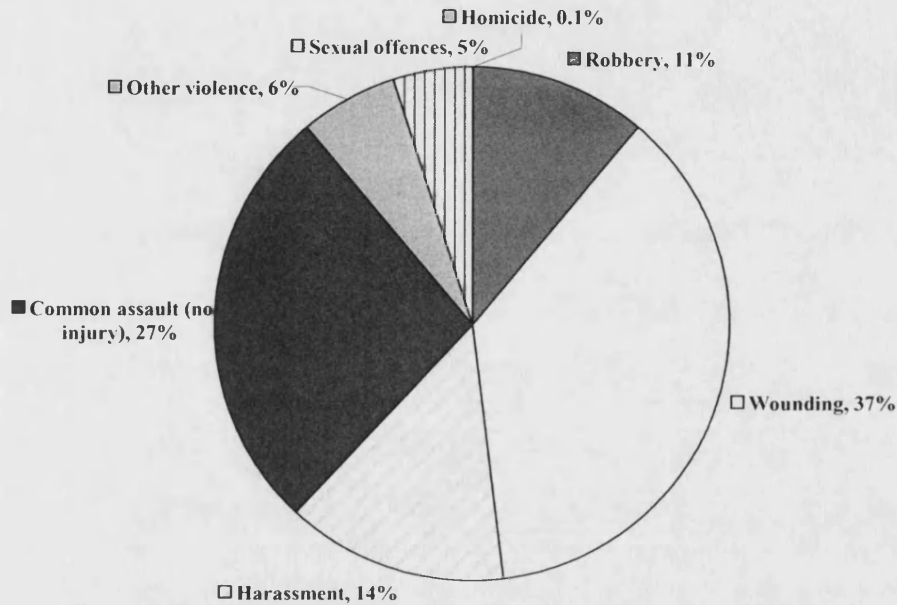


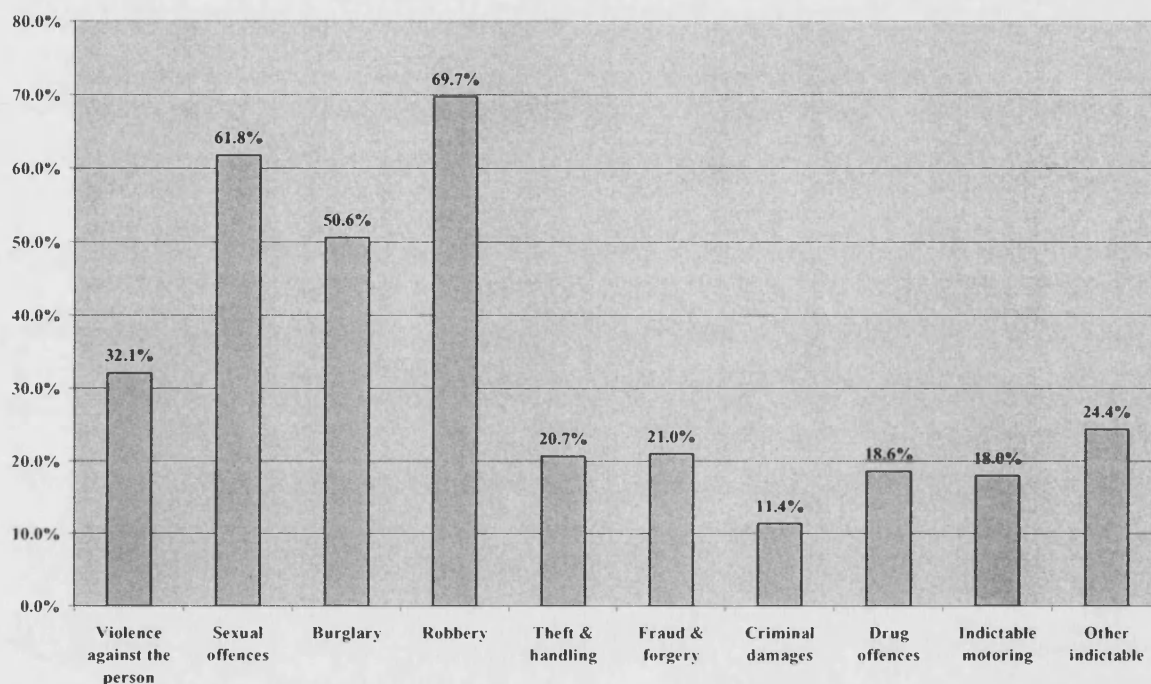
Chart 2 shows that sexual offences were only 5% of all violent crime, and homicide only 0.1%. We can therefore see that serious offences are only a small proportion of all offences. Home Office figures for 2002/3 show that there were 48,654 sexual offences recorded, of which 24,811 were cases of indecent assault on a female and 1,880 were cases of gross indecency with a child. There were 12,293 recorded rapes, and 93% of these were rapes of a female. There were 4,096 recorded cases of indecent assault on a male. 1,048 deaths were initially recorded as homicide, although this included 172 deaths which related to further offences by Harold Shipman (Simmons and Dodd 2003: 81-2).

An indication of offence-seriousness can be taken from those offences which receive a sentence of immediate custody. Chart 3 shows this for selected offences⁷. We can see that violence against the person, sexual offences, burglary and robbery are most likely to receive a sentence of immediate imprisonment (although it should be noted that

⁷ Source: Offending and Criminal Justice Group, Home Office.

violence against the person is a broader category also including less serious offences, as outlined above).

Chart 3: Immediate Custody Rates at All Courts by Offence Group, England and Wales 2001



One of the most enduring characteristics of criminal statistics is gender difference (Heidensohn 1996). In 2000, only 19% of known offenders were women. 16% of those arrested for notifiable offences were women but the proportion was higher for fraud and forgery (27%) and theft and handling (21%) (Home Office 2001: iii). In February 2003 there were 4,349 female prisoners, comprising 6% of the overall prison population. Out of 5,352 life sentence prisoners, only 164 were women (Hollis and Goodman 2003: 1). Within the sentenced female prison population, the main offence groups are drug offences (35% at June 1998), violence against the person (19%) and theft and handling (17%). Women are less likely to be convicted of serious offences. In 1997, for example, 49.6 thousand males were convicted of violence against the person, and 6.4 thousand were convicted of sexual offences. In the same year 8.6 thousand women were convicted of violence against the person and 0.1 thousand were convicted of sexual offences (Home Office 1999).

The literature on prisoners' families

The prisoners' families literature refers to the families of all offenders who are imprisoned, not just those who have committed serious offences. Many of the difficulties faced by prisoners' families generally are magnified for families of serious offenders, first by length of sentence, and secondly by the seriousness of the offence itself. In reviewing a diverse body of literature, there is a danger of neglecting the differences between prisoners' families. It covers a wide time-span (of over thirty years) and looks at the experiences of prisoners' families in the UK, the US, and other countries such as Australia. These countries have different criminal justice systems, and different prison populations, so there are both quantitative and qualitative differences in those affected. However, there are important commonalities and themes that emerge, some of which will be briefly considered here.

Financial difficulties

If the imprisoned family member is a spouse or partner, a main breadwinner might be lost. For all family members, maintaining contact places an extra financial burden. Letters, telephone calls, and the cost of visiting and in many cases transportation to prisons for visits can be major costs (Daniel and Barrett 1981). In addition, prisoners have material needs which families are often expected to meet. There may be particular items families are asked by the prisoner to provide, such as clothing, shoes or radios. Some studies have found that families have to neglect their own material needs in order to meet these requests (Fishman 1990; Koenig 1985). Housing difficulties can be exacerbated or created by imprisonment. Morris found this to be one of the most serious problems facing prisoners' wives in her study (Morris 1965), as did Girshick (1996).

Lack of information

A lack of clear information can compound the difficulties prisoners' families face. However, the focus in the literature is almost completely on lack of information about

prisons and about prison visiting, with little attention paid to the lack of information about the offence itself, or the specifics of the legal case and the criminal justice process. Exceptions come from Jorgensen et al., who point to a lack of understandable information from the point of arrest to parole (Jorgensen et al. 1986: 48) and Fishman, who discusses the difficulties prisoners' wives in her study had dealing with this 'criminalization process' of arrests, lawyers, courts and sentencing. Adequate information is even more critical for those families facing imprisonment for the first time (Hostetter and Jinnah 1993). A lack of even the most basic information can 'change a problematic event into a crisis situation' (Daniel and Barrett 1981). This is also recognised in the policy literature (e.g. NIACRO nd.) and by Action for Prisoners' Families in the UK who, during the period of this research, produced a leaflet aimed at all relatives of someone recently imprisoned in conjunction with the Prison Service and Prison Reform Trust⁸.

Maintaining family ties

Maintaining family ties during imprisonment, and the difficulties associated with this, loom large in the literature. Morgan argues that prisoners 'generally set greatest store by contact with their nearest and dearest' and that family ties should not be treated as a privilege by the Prison Service and should not be included in any incentives scheme (Morgan 1995). Ties are maintained through visits, letters and telephone calls and the problems associated with these are considered by Richards et al. who make various recommendations with regard to each (Richards et al. 1994). It should be noted that improvements have been made to the provision of these in England and Wales, for example increasing the number of visitors' centres at prisons, increasing availability of card telephones for the use of prisoners and less censorship of letters. However, problems associated with maintaining contact still abound in the literature, for example Hostetter and Jinnah say 'maintaining contact with the prisoner is one of the most difficult problems that a family faces' and that visits may be 'marred by humiliation and degradation' due to suspicion, searches and 'seemingly arbitrary rules' (Hostetter and Jinnah 1993: 3).

⁸ 'Guide for Visitors to Prison' (nd.)

Prison visits can be difficult to manage. Visits are an artificial family situation, usually closely monitored and lacking the privacy necessary to resolve family issues (Jorgensen et al. 1986). Fishman suggests that the wives in her study perceived visitation procedures to be a 'source of contamination which leads them to believe they share their husbands' low and discredited status' (Fishman 1990: 139). Sources of this contamination can assume several forms, such as searches, contact with 'undesirable inmates', rules and orders and the public character of visits. Strategies to manage this contamination would comprise either 'disassociation' or 'association' with others in the visits area (Fishman 1990: 139). Another US study of women visiting male prisoners found that they experienced 'restricted rights, diminished resources, social marginalization, and other consequences of penal confinement, even though they are legally innocent and reside outside of the prison's boundaries' (Comfort 2003: abstract). Visitors were disadvantaged by the architecture and design of the building, inconsistent rules, and regulation of dress and belongings.

Imprisonment and its concomitant problems therefore place family relationships under great strain, making them difficult to maintain (Girshick 1996: 47-8). Relationships and the roles within them undergo changes which can be difficult to survive. The problem is more acute for those serving longer prison sentences. One study found that over half of those serving sentences of five years or more had a change of marital status, which for the vast majority would be separation or divorce (NACRO 1994). A further source of strain may also be conflict within families over support for the member imprisoned. Daniel and Barrett found that the wives in their study were not supported in a consistent fashion by their immediate families, some of whom displayed open resentment towards the inmate-husband. The victim of the crime may also be a member of the family, forcing choices of allegiance on relatives.

Preventing re-offending

A recurrent theme in the literature is that maintaining family ties is likely to prevent re-offending. The frequency with which it appears might partly be due to the justification it offers for supporting prisoners' families and for funding organisations and research. Following Light, the claims made in the literature fall into three categories: *prison order*; *successful rehabilitation*; and *preventing offending in prisoners' children* (Light

1993). First, ties with those in the outside world are very important to prisoners (Morgan 1995) and threats to those ties, through disruption of visits, have been the cause of prison disturbances in the past (Light 1993). A review of the literature found marital status to frequently be a predictive factor in prison infraction rates (Ditchfield 1990).

Secondly, earlier research showed that prisoners with strong family ties are less likely to re-offend (Brotsky 1975; Glaser 1964; Holt and Miller 1972; Ohlin 1954), a finding repeated in later research and mentioned in numerous studies (Ditchfield 1994; Girshick 1996; Jorgensen et al. 1986; Light 1993; Lloyd 1990; NACRO 1994). Schafer examines the relationship between parole success and visits, and says that all empirical evidence supports a relationship between the two. This relationship might work due to a continued reminder of the outside world, or due to a promise of continued support. He suggests that further research might find a relationship between parole success and economic status; it might be that those with families who can afford to visit are likely to have greater parole success (Schafer 1994).

A Home Office review of the literature concludes that family relationships and social ties do help to discourage recidivism, but also acknowledges that family support is likely to be associated with other factors:

The results of both detailed social research and large scale statistical studies strongly indicate that family ties and responsibilities may help reduce further offending, partly in themselves (because of the support they offer), and partly because they tend to be associated with other factors which help offenders to desist.

(Ditchfield 1990: 8)

Lastly, supporting family ties might help to prevent offending in future generations. Light quotes the then Home Secretary at the 1992 AGM of the National Association of Prison Visitors: 'Disruption of family life may lead not only to further offences by the parent, but possibly also to future offending by the child as it grows up' (Light 1993: 326). A similar point is made by Hostetter and Jinnah (Hostetter and Jinnah 1993) who say that the disruption to children's values brought by imprisonment can have a like effect.

Emotional impact

Families of prisoners are described in the literature as suffering 'emotional trauma', which might include conflicting feelings towards the imprisoned family member of love and sympathy on the one hand and anger and rejection on the other (Hostetter and Jinnah 1993). A study of prisoners' wives in Kansas characterised imprisonment as similar to death requiring a period of grieving. It found that the wives experienced more grief than wives of prisoners of war and servicemen missing in action. Twelve typical symptoms of grief were listed (depression, jumpiness, fitful sleep, difficulty falling asleep, waking not rested, boredom, rapid mood fluctuations, headaches, feeling life is meaningless, poor digestion, shortness of breath and accident proneness), five or more of which were experienced by 90% of the wives (Daniel and Barrett 1981).

There may be further emotional difficulties associated with living alone after the imprisonment of a relative. Moerings found that the prisoners' wives in his study just badly missed their husbands (Moerings 1992), and other studies highlight the problem of loneliness for those left on the outside (e.g. Fishman 1990; Girshick 1996). The picture presented in many of these studies is sometimes rather rosy, and neglects the difficulties faced by prisoners' families before imprisonment. There are some exceptions to this, for example some earlier studies acknowledged background to be important (Martin and Webster 1971; Morris 1965; Zalba 1964) and in the prisoners' children literature some authors do recognise that for a limited number of families, imprisonment might improve their situation.

Stigma

The stigma faced by prisoners' families often appears in this literature, but the source of the stigma is usually seen to be imprisonment (rather than the offence) and its different dimensions are not considered. It is also a common theme in policy and organisational literature. Some authors draw directly on Goffman (e.g. Fishman 1990; Girshick 1996; Sack et al. 1976) and in particular his concept of 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman 1963: 30) which prisoners' families are said to experience. Stigma is seen to be the key factor differentiating prisoners' wives from the wives of soldiers and sailors who also suffer as a result of separation from their husbands (Moerings 1992).

The prisoners' wives in one study were found not to experience shame or stigma (Daniel and Barrett 1981). The authors suggest that this could be because those suffering shame and stigma are more difficult to reach and had not been participants in this study, or (perhaps rather optimistically) that:

. . . other studies were conducted prior to the resurgence of the feminist movement, which may have enabled these women to feel more confident of their own worth. The movement, which has championed the dignity of women as independent human beings rather than as appendages to their husbands, may have given the women more freedom from association with their husbands' actions.

(Daniel and Barrett 1981: 319)

Several studies point to factors that might mediate stigma or shame. Morris suggests that feelings of shame depend on offence type, and found that it was more likely to be experienced by wives of sex offenders and white-collar criminals (Morris 1965: 109). Fishman suggests that stigma depended on whether the wives were 'neophytes or old-timers' (i.e. new to being a prisoner's wife or experienced), on the type of offence, and on the community in which they lived. A study of families of politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland suggests they do not experience stigma because they share the ideology of political motivation with the prisoner and receive greater community support. This does not insulate them, however, from the practical, emotional and financial consequences of imprisonment (McEvoy et al. 1999).

For those families that are affected, the consequences of stigma can be severe. They might exclude themselves from particular social situations (Morris 1965) or be prevented from seeking help (Light 1993). Other strategies to manage stigma are considered by some authors. Fishman (Fishman 1990) describes the acute feelings of stigmatisation felt by the wives in her study in their interactions with the criminal justice system, and in particular the prison. The wives thought that prison guards categorised them as either "good wives" or "whores" and treated them accordingly. Coping strategies included 'putting on a performance' to attempt to change the guards' perceptions, or 'dissociation' from other wives when visiting.

Prisoners' children

The difficulties faced by prisoners' children receive considerable attention in the prisoners' families literature, reflecting both the extent of the impact, and that they are more likely to engender sympathy and their plight be seen as a 'real problem' than other family members (and possibly attract more research and organisational funding as a result). As with all prisoners' families, children of prisoners are not a homogenous group (Lloyd 1990), but they do share some common difficulties. In 1996, Shaw estimated that half a million children, or 5 per cent of the child population, had been affected at some time by the imprisonment of their father (FPFSG 1996). Within the literature, children of prisoners are said to experience numerous difficulties, including problems at school (Jorgensen et al. 1986), difficulties associated with prison visiting (Richards et al. 1994), social, emotional and cognitive delays, problems with behaviour and social stigmatisation (Hostetter and Jinnah 1993).

Families as victims

Depicting families of prisoners as *victims* has a long history in this literature, for example in 1978 Bakker et al. described the families of prisoners as the 'hidden victims of crime' (Bakker et al. 1978), in 1983 Matthews described families as the 'innocent victims of our penal system' (Matthews 1983) and a Howard League report in 1994 stated that '[prison] visitors are the innocent, and often "forgotten" victims within the criminal justice system'. Light explains thus:

The victims of crime include not only those who have had offences committed against them, but also families and dependents of those convicted of offences, particularly if the offender is sentenced to a period in prison. The more serious the crime the greater all round is the suffering.
(Light 1993: 324-5)

Light suggests the neglect of prisoners' families as victims might lie in a deserving/undeserving view of victims. Prisoners' families are seen to be 'implicated by association in the offender's criminality and thus considered undeserving of support' (Light 1993: 325).

Gender

Most of the prisoners' families literature assumes a male offender and female relative, and usually focuses on wives of prisoners; there is little attention paid to other relatives such as mothers (Paylor and Smith 1994). Relatively few authors consider gender, which is perhaps surprising given the increased attention to gender in criminology since the 1970s. Fishman says that the wives in her study derived great satisfaction from traditional gender roles and continuing to nurture their husbands. She says wives were keen to legitimate their husbands as the head of the household: home visits allowed men to assume conventional husband and father roles and their wives looked forward to this (Fishman 1990: 276). Girshick also found the wives in her study followed traditional gender roles, which she suggests reflects the role of working-class women in wider society. In a study of prison visitors, Schafer (Schafer 1994) found that twice as many mothers than fathers visited. Schafer comments that this may be due to marital status (fathers might accompany their wives on visits but divorced fathers tend to lose touch) but does not expand on this.

Girshick is one author who considers the influence of gender in relation to the partners of prisoners in her study. She says that differences in 'male/female socialization' account for the fact that supporters and visitors of both male and female prisoners tend to be women: 'Men in prison are visited by their wives and mothers and women in prison are visited by their mothers and sisters.' (Girshick 1996: 24). Women are traditionally carers and their 'self-worth and morality is embedded in social relationships' (Girshick 1996: 24). She points out the contradiction inherent in the fact that society devalues the role of prisoner's wife when prisoners' wives are fulfilling a traditional female role of caretaker. She suggests that given their gender, race and class locations, the women's lives would not be much better if they weren't married to their husbands, they would still be working class and low in status. Despite being one of the few authors to consider wider issues of women's position in society, male/female socialisation is rather taken for granted as a full explanation of the gendered relations between prisoners' wives and their husbands and not explored further.

There is further evidence to suggest that imprisonment may intensify traditional gender roles. Moering describes the increased responsibility of wives who are also mothers as a

'heavy mother role' (Moerings 1992). Fourteen of the wives in Fishman's study experienced attempts by their husbands to control their actions through telephone calls from the prison. This included wanting their wives to stay confined to the home and attempting to limit their interactions with other relatives and friends, expecting their wives to report on minute details of their daily lives, and calling as often as possible to check up on them (Fishman 1990: 212-3).

Self-help

There are considerable differences in provision for prisoners' families in the UK and the US. Both tend to have voluntary rather than statutory services, but while in the US provision tends to be scattered and patchy, services are much more developed where they do appear⁹. A further major difference is of course the scale and density of families affected by imprisonment given the drastic difference between the US and UK prison population. In the UK provision is limited to a number of poorly-funded voluntary organisations, usually self-help, which provide advice and support but are limited in what they can offer in the way of practical help.

Action for Prisoners' Families (formerly the Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups (FPFSG)) was established in 1990 in the UK and acts as an 'umbrella' organisation for the various voluntary organisations providing services to prisoners' families. They also liaise with government bodies and appear as a 'public face' in the media. The organisation produces literature relating to self-help, including a guide to setting up self-help groups for prisoners families¹⁰. In a similar vein, Hamilton produced a guide for NIACRO¹¹ entitled 'Mutual Support and Self-Help Groups' for those intending to establish their own group (Hamilton nd.). The role of these groups is presented as a place to share information and to exchange ideas and mutual support.

Examples of academic literature on self-help for prisoners' families include Light (1993) who examines the need for prisoners 'family-tie' groups. He says the fact that they are self-help and hence usually staffed by those in a similar position helps those

⁹In the US, for example, they might include provision of clothing and other essentials, transportation to prisons, or HIV education programmes (Comfort et al. 2000).

¹⁰ 'A Problem Shared – starting your own support group'.

¹¹ Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

families who might otherwise be prevented from seeking help because of shame or stigma. He says there are two main reasons why these groups should be supported, first *liberal humanism*, that families are victims and a caring society should offer support to those who suffer harm, and secondly *crime reduction*, that preserving ties can contribute to this in various ways. The attraction of these groups is that they are ‘non-authoritarian and non-judgmental, independent and confidential’ (Smith 1989b) and may further be the only support available for families who are not supported by statutory agencies; one study, for example, found that only 19% of prisoners’ families were contacted at any stage by probation services (Smith 1989b).

Another study uses kinship and exchange theory to suggest a possible function that self-help groups for partners of prisoners perform. Codd considers the benefits of membership of self-help groups to include ‘the provision of information and practical assistance; empowerment, and the promotion of self-esteem’ (Codd 2002). She suggests that female partners of prisoners are very conscious of needing the support of friends and family and taking this help without being able to give back. Self-help groups enable them to retain self-worth by helping others (see chapter seven).

The literature on families of serious offenders

The prisoners’ families literature raises many issues with which relatives of serious offenders must contend, but only captures part of their experience. Offence type or seriousness of offence are rarely mentioned, and where they are, their implications are not explored in any depth. Difficulties are seen to stem from the moment of imprisonment, ignoring life before and difficulties in dealing with other aspects of the criminal justice system. There is a small literature that looks at the experiences of relatives of serious offenders, including three key sociological articles, one based on a study of Aftermath¹² (Howarth and Rock 2000) and two based on a study of murderers’ relatives (May 1999; May 2000).

¹² Aftermath is a self-help organisation for families of serious offenders which has been the source of many of the interviewees in this study and a site for fieldwork (see below).

Howarth and Rock plot the history of Aftermath since its inception in 1988 until the completion of their research in 1997. They examine Aftermath's foundational ideas, how these developed and the work of the organisation. Although as one would expect, the organisation has developed during the period of this research (1997-2003), many of Aftermath's stated aims and objectives have remained the same. Howarth and Rock describe how learning of a serious offence and the events surrounding this was a 'devastating experience' for Aftermath members. They experienced feelings of loss and grief similar in some ways to that of bereavement. This experience:

. . . can bring about bad dreams, anger, sleeplessness, isolation, alienation, confusion, fears and insecurities. It may lead to breathing difficulties, palpitations and bodily disorders. There may be guilt about what has occurred, prompting people to argue that 'if only' they had been more vigilant or more attentive they might have prevented the offence.

(Howarth and Rock 2000: 66)

They offer further insights into how Aftermath has constructed and developed a collective framework of understanding that contributed to members' understanding of the offence (see chapter seven), particularly constructed around the family members as victims of crime who suffer trauma as a result, and the implications of this construction for Aftermath members and criminological understanding of victimology¹³.

May's research was based on interviews with relatives of eight people convicted of murder (15 interviewees in total). She considers relatives' accounts of the offence, and how they struggled to make sense of what had happened. She argues their accounts formed two 'clusters', those who accept the legal definition of murder and those who did not. She analyses their accounts within these two groups, drawing on some of the offenders' motivational accounts literature (May 1999) (see chapter five). She considers how relatives of murderers' experience and manage stigma, suggesting that is rooted in a notion of 'familial toxicity' and in everyday constructions of murder (May 2000) (see chapter four).

Parents of sons who sexually offend were found in one study to be preoccupied with their situation and with trying to understand the cause, looking for both extra- and intra-

¹³ Some of the issues raised by Howarth and Rock are considered in the chapters that follow.

familial contributors (Smith and Trepper 1992)¹⁴. They had difficulty communicating with their sons about the offence and often became so involved in their son's problems that they ignored others in the family. Parents 'respond to the ongoing crisis' in a similar way to those who experience grief through loss, passing through four stages: 'Some common stages of reactions of the parents included a sense of pervasiveness of the problem, feelings of profound helplessness, an increase in active involvement on their sons' behalf, and finally a refocusing of their lives.' The authors briefly mention that parents used a 'denial of responsibility', although the use of this is not explored in any depth, and no other techniques are suggested. Finally, these parents are referred to as 'victims'¹⁵: 'It is clear from this study that the parents of sons who sexually offend are victims as much as the ones who are assaulted.' (Smith and Trepper 1992: 101).

Macleod, a Canadian professor of psychiatry, followed a single family through the suspicion, charge and finally the conviction of their son for murder (MacLeod 1982). He found their response to be like that to other crises such as serious illness or death. They experienced conflict and strain within family relationships, suffered from the protracted legal process and, similarly to the findings of Smith and Trepper, the preoccupation of the parents with their son's offence led to their other children being neglected. The response of friends and community was generally supportive, and Macleod thought 'reminiscent of the community response to the death of a family member' (MacLeod 1982: 200). Macleod suggests that most families in this situation would benefit from the intervention of mental health services.

Finally, research on relatives of serious offenders has been conducted in contemporary Germany by Bar-On who interviewed 51 children of perpetrators and witnesses of the Nazi Holocaust about the legacy of their parents' involvement (Bar-On 1989). After the War they experienced a total silence about what had happened in the Nazi years, both in their families and at school. Many only found out about their parents' role through the media, trial reports and their own searching in archives (Bar-On 1990). Some of the interviewees struggled to establish their own relationships and families, and expressed concern about passing on 'bad seed'. This research is interesting because it points to the

¹⁴ This study was based on interviews with five parents.

¹⁵ See chapter seven for further exploration of this idea.

denial that can occur within families (see chapter three) and the enduring legacy for relatives that might stretch across generations (see chapter four).

Families of *female* serious offenders

Gender is the most prominent point of variation in the criminal statistics (Heidensohn 1996), with women making up a small proportion of all offenders, to an even greater degree with serious offences than with lesser offences. The literature suggests that the experiences of families of female serious offenders might vary in several respects. On a practical level, families wanting to visit might be disadvantaged because of the relatively low numbers of women in prison. As Heidensohn states '...paradoxically, women's under-achievement in offending does not bring them benefits in the penal system. The very low numbers of women inside pose problems: there are few establishments, they are scattered haphazardly and inmates may be many miles from home' (Heidensohn 1996: 70-1).

Recent research by the Prison Reform Trust found that over 60 per cent of women in prison are mothers and 45 per cent had children living with them prior to imprisonment (Wedderburn 2000). Many of these women will not be serious offenders, but those that are will likely be serving longer sentences and the difficulties they face as mothers will be compounded. Those mothers who are primary carers of children will have particular concerns about who will care for them in their absence. Numerous studies look at the differences between the children of male and female prisoners and conclude that the impact is worse for children of female prisoners (e.g. Caddle and Crisp 1996; Casale 1989; Gibbs 1971; Lloyd 1995a; Player 1994; Wilkinson 1988; Zalba 1964) who are much less likely to be cared for by the prisoners' spouse and more likely to be looked after by other relatives or in local authority care.

All women are subject to a socially constructed 'ideal' of motherhood which dictates when to have children, in what circumstances and how to feel about it (Phoenix et al. 1991). The reality for many women is of course very different but particularly so for women in prison, who may experience additional pressure because they have failed to live up to traditional expectations of caring and nurturing motherhood (Tchaikovsky

1994). Deviation from an 'ideal' of motherhood may actually contribute to women being imprisoned in the first place. Carlen found that when sheriffs in Scotland were faced with a sentencing dilemma with a female offender, they essentially decided on the basis of their evaluation of the woman as a mother (Carlen 1983). This might have numerous negative consequences for the children of women in prison, and present further difficulties for adult relatives who are likely to be left to care for those children.

The particular pains of indeterminate imprisonment for female lifers were found by one study to be organised in large part around the family (Walker and Worrall 2000). If the women were mothers, they were likely to be separated from their children for a long period of time and usually for the remainder of their childhood which was difficult to cope with and brought great anxiety managing visits year upon year; if the women were not mothers, they were likely to be deprived of this possibility, given that they would be released past child-bearing age; and prior to imprisonment the women may have been responsible for the care of other relatives which they could no longer undertake.

Female serious offenders are also likely to have offended against the rigid construction of femininity that exists in our society. Both Carlen (Carlen 1983) and Lloyd (Lloyd 1995b) point to the fact that violent female prisoners, unlike violent male prisoners, are never glamorised. This may have further implications for families, for example they might feel more stigmatised or construct accounts around different themes to the families of male offenders as a result, and might have additional worries about her treatment within the criminal justice system.

This Study

The focus of this study is on families of *serious* offenders, rather than families of all offenders. All participants had a close kin relationship to someone accused or convicted of a serious offence. To gain access to these families I began by approaching Aftermath, a self-help organisation for families of serious offenders. All the relatives of male serious offenders that were interviewed (twenty-four in total) were Aftermath members, though with varying degrees of involvement, ranging from just being on their database

and receiving a newsletter to being a member of the management committee. Two of the relatives of female serious offenders were approached through Aftermath, a third through another prisoners' families organisation, and the remaining five through a visitors' centre at a women's prison¹⁶. Aftermath defines its members as:

. . . the Spouses, Partners, Relatives and Friends of persons accused or convicted of murder, manslaughter, rape, violence to any person, sexual offences, and other serious offences, and those convicted or accused themselves.

(Aftermath 1997)

This definition was followed in this research, although excluding friends of serious offenders and those accused or convicted themselves. 'Any other serious offence' is vague, but in practice I discovered would include something like a serious drug offence or any offence that received a long prison sentence, and in the later stages of fieldwork Aftermath published an annual review which stated this: 'we define as 'serious' any crimes that carry a substantial prison sentence' (Aftermath 2000: 2). When approaching families of female offenders through leaflets at a prison visiting centre or through other organisations I asked for families of *serious* offenders. All participants were therefore self-defining as families of serious offenders, either in response to my request or by membership of a self-help organisation specifically for that group.

I further decided to follow Aftermath's definition of the families of those 'accused or convicted'. My sample could therefore include those remanded in custody but not convicted, those accused for a long period of time, but eventually cleared, and those who had received no criminal conviction but were deemed guilty in other ways¹⁷. Given the long period of time that many criminal cases take to process, restricting my sample of interviewees and fieldwork participants to those convicted would eliminate many of those in the early stages. Almost all my eventual sample of interviewees were relatives of those convicted (two were not), though not all believed their relative to be guilty.

¹⁶ For more detailed discussion see chapter two.

¹⁷ An example of the latter was the son of one participant accused of sex offences against his own children. He was not convicted in a criminal court, but action had been taken against him by social services to prevent him having access to those children and his mother was clearly devastated by the consequences of the allegations.

What is important for the purposes of this study is that participants were self-defining as families of serious offenders, saw themselves as different to the families of less serious offenders because of the seriousness of their relative's offence and thought they shared a similar position to other families of serious offenders. Despite the difficulties with defining offence seriousness, they saw this as clear and 'common sense'. Furthermore, they saw their lives affected to a greater extent and the problems they had to face as worse than those of families of less serious offenders. My sample of families of male and female serious offenders included relatives of those convicted of homicide, child sex offences, rape, attempted murder, armed robbery, and other violent offences such as kidnap and GBH (see appendix one).

The aim of this research was to combine in-depth long interviews with relatives of serious offenders with ethnographic fieldwork over a period of several years. As we have seen, the key studies in this area focus on Aftermath as an organisation (Howarth and Rock 2000) or are solely interview-based with relatively small samples and focus on one offence type (MacLeod 1982; May 1999; May 2000; Smith and Trepper 1992). Clearly those that find Aftermath define themselves as relatives of serious offenders (rather than, or in addition to, relatives of sex offenders, relatives of murderers, and so on) and perceive that they share certain experiences in common with other relatives of serious offenders. Pursuing this definition and looking at relatives of serious offenders as a group was thought to be worth investigating.

This research has explored how relatives of serious offenders construct the crime and its consequences and how they cope with those consequences. Fieldwork has taken place over a period of more than three years, and has included interviews with the relatives of twenty-four male serious offenders, interviews with eight relatives of female serious offenders, interviews with people working with families of serious offenders, observation of a self-help organisation for the families of serious offenders and observation at a visitors' centre at a women's prison (see chapter two).

The study has sought to investigate the consequences of having a serious offender in the family, how families portray life before, during and after the offence and the difficulties they face. It considers how relatives are stigmatised, how they construct accounts about the offence and about their own actions, and how and why they use self-help. The

existing literature on offenders' families has been useful, but in the chapters that follow this study draws on literature from a broader range of sources to understand the experiences of relatives of serious offenders, including literature on the family and family responsibilities; on trauma; on relatives of those with alcohol or mental health problems; on stigma, shame and blame; on motivational accounts; and on self-help.

Chapter Two: Methods and Sources

The primary methods best suited to the aims of this study were broadly ethnographic in order to focus on the perspectives of the families of serious offenders, the meanings they hold, and how they interpret, understand and construct their experiences. The 'broader, more flexible net' of qualitative techniques (McCracken 1988) were best suited to attempting to capture these complexities, so a variety of qualitative methods were employed and continually reviewed to ensure they were best suited to the developing aims of the research.

The study is situated within a broadly symbolic interactionist framework which shapes the focus of the study and the kind of questions it asks:

Symbolic interaction theory focuses on the mechanics and ingredients of decision-making. A central tenet is that people act rationally - if not always wisely - rather than being the unwitting victims of inner personality forces or external social pressures. Symbolic interactionist theory posits that people confront and define the situations within which they find themselves and then, in keeping with these definitions, select, construct, and execute, as best they can, what they believe to be the most appropriate action. This theory is especially effective for understanding motivation in problematic situations.

(Wiseman 1991: 3)

In addition to understanding motivation in problematic situations, it helps us to understand the meaning individuals attach to their actions and how they understand and construct their experiences; how they construct and consume stories about events and account for untoward action; how individuals and groups might be labelled and stigmatised and the consequences that follow; the importance of time and process to understanding experiences; and how individuals come together to collectively manage problems. These are all broader theoretical issues considered in this study.

Although rooted in a broad theoretical framework, the relationship between theory and method in this study has been one of induction. When I began this research in 1997, there were no published sociological studies of relatives of serious offenders. I was able to develop 'sensitising concepts' (Blumer 1954) from reading the broader prisoners'

families literature, but I really knew very little about the area under study and so began with very broad research questions which were progressively focused as the research developed. Participant observation with relatives of serious offenders *had* to take place before the interviews; without it, I would not have known what to ask.

I sought access to interviewees through Aftermath, a national self-help organisation for families of serious offenders. I conducted fieldwork with Aftermath to try to discover what it offered its members, to meet a wider number of relatives who would participate through fieldwork, and to have longer-term contact with some of those that I interviewed. Aftermath is the only organisation of its kind. It has an office based in Sheffield, but has members all over the UK. It is run primarily by volunteers, including a Chairperson and a committee, but has two paid members of staff working from the office.

At time of writing, Aftermath was fifteen years old. During that time it had had several changes of Chairperson and internal debates about its aims and purposes, but it continued to offer broadly the same support to members through a newsletter, a network of telephone supporters, annual seminar weekends (which last three days and have a variety of speakers), various training sessions (such as one I attended offered by PressWise, an organisation that offers advice and support in dealing with the media) and 'lunches'. Lunches are self-help meetings for members held on a Saturday, usually every six weeks, in particular areas. They tend to have around 10-20 members in attendance, take place in a church hall or community centre, and usually follow a tradition of each member bringing some food. They are considered very important to members as one of the few opportunities for meeting in person, but during the period of this research remained stable in only two locations.

Aftermath defines its membership as the families of serious offenders (see chapter one). Table One shows the offences that members' relatives have been accused or convicted of:

Table 1: Breakdown of Aftermath Cases from 1988-2001¹⁸

Murder	Attempted Murder	Rape	Attempted Rape	Sexual Offence (against minor)	Sexual Offence (against adults)	Other¹⁹	Total
510	28	148	13	260	65	261	1285

We can see from this table that Aftermath had 1285 families in its membership between 1988 and 2001, and I was told that they would have 200-300 active members at any one time. As we have seen in chapter one, there were 48,654 sexual offences, 12,293 rapes and 1,048 homicides in 2002/3 alone (Simmons and Dodd 2003); Aftermath is clearly only reaching a small proportion of serious offenders' families. Despite this, it provided a convenient way to reach a relatively hidden population.

The fieldwork could be divided into four broad phases. Phase One was an exploratory phase (October 1997 - October 1998) which involved negotiating access to the families of serious offenders through the self-help organisation Aftermath, attending their annual seminar weekends, attending an Aftermath self-help meeting (a 'lunch'), talking informally with members and looking at Aftermath records. In the second phase (November 1998 - April 2000) I continued to attend Aftermath lunches, attended a further annual seminar weekend, attended meetings, and interviewed twenty-four families of male offenders, all of whom were Aftermath members. In the third phase (April 2000 - December 2000) I sought access to families of female serious offenders, having to go outside Aftermath for most of these families. Fieldwork in this phase took place in the visitors' centre at a women's prison and interviews were conducted with eight relatives of female serious offenders. In the fourth phase (January 2001 - July

¹⁸ Source: Aftermath

¹⁹ Aftermath say: "Other refers to - Drugs, Armed Robbery, Fraud, GBH, Arson, Burglary etc."

2003) I remained in contact with Aftermath, attending some of their functions and receiving their newsletter²⁰.

Gaining Access

I first made contact with Aftermath when I attended their annual seminar weekend in October 1997²¹. At the seminar I had a brief informal discussion with the Chairperson about the possibility of doing research. This began an ultimately successful process of gaining access over the following few months through various letters and telephone calls. Initially I felt some concern at the length of time this took and wondered if this reflected reluctance on their part to help. However, I soon realised that I was simply experiencing delays characteristic of any small organisation staffed almost entirely by volunteers.

Aftermath as an organisation were very open to the idea of my research, though understandably keen to protect the confidentiality of members and to stress that participation in the research would be an individual choice. I was fortunate to gain such open access, others have found more difficulty (May 1999; May 2000). This was partly due to my request coming at a time when Aftermath was undergoing a process of increasing professionalism (see chapter seven). Their constitution, written in April 1997, states as one of their objectives: 'To advance the education of the public in matters connected with the effects of serious crime upon families and upon society in general and in so doing also to rehabilitate "serious offenders" and to prevent recidivism into crime.' Hence my research came at a time when Aftermath was keen for awareness to be raised of the impact of serious offending on families.

I asked Aftermath for permission to visit their offices and talk to the administrator, attend lunches and talk to members who might be willing to be interviewed. In order to gain access to lunches, members attending the preceding lunch (usually around 6 weeks before) would be asked if I could attend the following meeting. If there were no objections (and there never were as far as I was aware), I would be invited to attend and

²⁰ In some respects these phases overlap; I began negotiating access to female serious offenders during phase two, for example, and continued to attend Aftermath meetings in the third stage.

²¹ I was introduced by one of my supervisors, who had been conducting research on the organisation (see Howarth and Rock, 2000)

other members informed via the invitation letter that I would be present. There was understandable concern that Aftermath lunches should be preserved as a 'safe haven' for members who should not feel obliged to take part in research or feel under scrutiny on the rare occasions that they were able to meet.

Prior to attending my first lunch I was asked by the administrator to sign a confidentiality agreement, which stated that 'information heard, read, written in exchanges or communication . . . is deemed and agreed to be, confidential property, belonging to the charity Aftermath'. I was reluctant to sign this, given that I was attending lunches as a researcher and wanted to be able to discuss what I found there. I wrote a letter explaining this and gave assurances of anonymity, and this undertaking was accepted as sufficient.

Access to Aftermath members as interviewees was sought on an individual basis. In the first instance, I talked informally with members I met at seminar weekends, lunches, and Aftermath meetings. I explained the purposes of my research and asked whether they might be prepared to participate. Most of the members I asked were prepared to consider it, and give me contact details; some later declined.²² There were several levels of filtering in this process. First, in using this method I only approached Aftermath members who attended these functions (although I would later write to others). Secondly, given the sensitivity of the research topic, I only asked those with whom I had conversations during fieldwork. I had to behave with consideration and sensitivity, and it would have been unreasonable walk up to each member, introduce myself and ask them if they would be willing to be interviewed, and might have put them under undue pressure to accede. In practice, this meant I asked most members attending lunches, but at other occasions, such as seminar weekends, a smaller proportion of attendees were approached.

Thirdly, I had further telephone discussions with potential interviewees to explain the purposes of the research, and at this stage some declined. Finally, two interviews fell

²² One group of three women sitting together at an annual seminar weekend declined my request immediately. The reason they gave was that they didn't think it was possible to understand what it was like to have a serious offender in the family unless you had experienced this yourself, and there was therefore no point in trying. However, this was not a common response.

through at the arrangement stage, one because I was unable to travel to Scotland at the time, and another because of the unavailability of the potential interviewee whenever I tried to make arrangements. However, distance was not usually a barrier - several of the interviews involved a round trip of more than 300 miles for a single interview, staying overnight in bed and breakfast accommodation.

All interviewees in this phase were Aftermath members. I was introduced to some of my interviewees by other members, which enabled me to reach several people who had been active members many years previously but had since stood back and taken a less prominent role. I further wrote to all London members via the Aftermath office (some 30 members in total) asking if they would be willing to participate. There was no lunch running in London at the time, and I had no other way to try and access members in this area. Despite enclosing a stamped addressed envelope and reply form, the response rate was quite low. I did eventually get four interviews from this method. Three replied using the form, and one rang the Aftermath office some months later asking if I was still interested.

This confirmed what I had already begun to realise, that families of serious offenders are often suspicious of attempts to probe into their lives and tend to shy away from publicity. Many of those who participated in my research were related to people who had committed high-profile offences, sometimes of a particularly horrific nature. If the case itself was not high profile, reluctance to discuss the offence might arise from taboos surrounding it, for example if the offence was child sexual abuse. A substantial number had experienced negative reactions from others in their everyday lives (see chapter four), and many told of difficult experiences with the media. Most interviewees were therefore people I had met before at Aftermath meetings, and often people with whom I had built a relationship and level of trust over some time. One mother, for example, told me in an interview that she would never have agreed to speak to me had she not known me for eighteen months beforehand through attending lunches and other meetings.

Access to relatives of female serious offenders was to prove much more difficult. Firstly, criminal statistics show that there are considerably fewer female serious offenders than male (see chapter one), so the population from which they are drawn is

much smaller. Aftermath only had 49 families of female serious offenders as members (out of 1285 families) between 1988 and 2001. I interviewed two relatives of female serious offenders who were Aftermath members. One was an active member who had been with them for many years, while the other had only had telephone contact on a couple of occasions with one of the supporters, who had introduced us. I wrote to all members supporting female offenders, again through the Aftermath office supplying a stamped addressed envelope and reply form, but received no responses.

I approached several prisoners' families' organisations to see if they had any members who were supporting female relatives of those accused or convicted of serious offences. Two in particular were very helpful, although only one interviewee was reached through this route. I approached a visitors' centre at one women's prison and spoke to the co-ordinator who said she had no problem in principle with me conducting research there, but that I needed to contact the prison directly. I wrote to one of the assistant governors who had responsibility for this area, but my request was turned down, due to what they described as 'a change in circumstances'²³. I also approached Women in Special Hospitals (WISH) and Women in Prison (WIP). WISH was unable to help with access to families. They felt it important to stress that most women in special hospitals are not serious offenders, and that many have difficult family backgrounds and do not have families supporting them.²⁴

WIP were very helpful and their Director suggested I contact an organisation for prisoners' families that runs the visitors' centre at another women's prison. As a result of this I spent five months working as a volunteer in that centre. I found this participant observation very useful for understanding the issues facing the broader group of prisoners' families, and in particular female prisoners' families, and it also yielded six further interviewees. This was achieved by following the co-ordinator of the visitors centre's suggestion that I leave leaflets on the tables explaining my research and requesting participants. She did not want me to approach visitors directly, as again she

²³ The letter stated: "Thank you for your letter of 15th March regarding the work of the Visitors' Centre. Initially, the Governor had approved your research request, but due to a change in circumstances we are unable to offer you the facilities you require. I am sorry I cannot be of further assistance. Good luck with your research."

²⁴ Although they were very helpful in other ways. I spent some time talking to the Director on the telephone and they sent me useful reports.

was concerned that families feel safe within the centre and not feel as if they were being 'researched'. I interviewed nine relatives of female offenders and eight of these interviews have been used for the purposes of this study. One interview with the aunt of a female offender was not used because it transpired that although her niece had spent a great deal of time in prison, this was because she was repeatedly given short sentences; she had not been convicted of a serious offence²⁵.

FIELDWORK: Phase One

The first phase of fieldwork was predominantly an exploratory phase and involved spending two days in the Aftermath office in Sheffield, examining Aftermath files, and talking to members of Aftermath informally at a lunch and at seminar weekends. The aim of this phase was to find out as much as possible about Aftermath and its members before formulating more definite research questions and moving on to a secondary phase of fieldwork and semi-structured interviews, which was necessary given the lack of existing work on the families of serious offenders.

When I visited the Aftermath office, I was able to talk in some depth with Aftermath's administrator and to take copies of 'public' documents, such as minutes of committee meetings, but for reasons of confidentiality access to some areas was limited. I was able, for example, to take copies of several letters requesting help or information from Aftermath, but the administrator had to cover the names and addresses of the senders to ensure anonymity²⁶. Clearly this was consuming the time of an already busy person, so expecting full access to those records would have been unrealistic.

I also attended a 'lunch' for the first time, and during this my role was primarily to observe and to talk informally with members. There were twelve members in attendance and the lunch began with members talking informally, followed by food (which in this

²⁵ This demonstrated the difficulty of addressing the sensitive question of the offence. This aunt had said to me in the prison visitors' centre that her niece had been in prison for 'every birthday since she was seventeen' (she was now in her mid-20s). I assumed this meant she had been serving a long prison sentence, but discovered during the interview that she had been repeatedly convicted of more minor offences, such as shoplifting and non-payment of fines. I therefore had to exclude this interview on the basis that she was not a relative of a *serious* offender.

²⁶ These concerns about anonymity were also data - they conveyed something of the stigma involved in being a relative of a serious offender (see chapter four).

case was provided, but usually is brought by each of the members themselves for all to share) and then a group session where members sat in a circle and talked about different issues. At this particular lunch, much of this was taken up with the problems a new member was having with her partner in prison. I sat in the circle during this time but did not contribute to the discussions. I would later learn that lunches do not follow a definite pattern and tend to vary depending on those in attendance and what they decide to do on the day.

It was particularly valuable to meet members at this lunch and talk to them about their experiences and my research. I found that generally the members in attendance at the lunch were very welcoming and open to this. One in particular was very keen to help and offered to put me in touch with several of her friends who were Aftermath members but no longer attended lunches. I would later stay with this woman at her home for a few days and she introduced me to several of my interviewees. Context was clearly important in shaping people's willingness to talk to me and to participate in the research. In particular, a personal introduction from an Aftermath member was important, whether during a lunch or afterwards.

During the lunches I attended I did not think it was appropriate to take notes. I wanted to minimise my impact on proceedings as much as possible, and to 'blend in' rather than appear to be scribbling down everything that was said. I therefore wrote down what I could remember that evening and would only use my notebook during the lunch for writing down members' contact details.

FIELDWORK: Phase Two

In this second phase I continued to attend lunches, and during the research attended six in total. When I first began my research, lunches were taking place in four areas of England. However, two of these lunches ceased to take place during this time²⁷, so the lunches I attended during the study were in two different areas of the country, some 250 miles apart. I had originally intended to attend more lunches, but decided not to for

²⁷ Both because the hosts were no longer able to offer the facility, although for different reasons. One lunch closed after Aftermath introduced a new rule that lunches should not take place in members' own homes, an issue over which there was some disagreement.

several reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, I felt that my presence probably did affect proceedings to some degree. With a relatively small number of members in attendance it was difficult to 'blend in' and I clearly influenced interaction at the group level. At one lunch I was asked what I wanted people to talk about, and one member did tell her 'story', which was indeed helpful but not, I understood, something that would usually happen. Other than this, much of the interaction at group level involved informal chat and discussion about all aspects of members' lives; rarely were details of their family members' offence and its impact on their lives discussed. Instead, members would often separate from the group and talk confidentially together in pairs, something I would usually not be party to.

Although the lunches are an important part of Aftermath activity, during the time of my research they were only attended by a fairly small proportion of members. There were only two or three running, which would have on average 10-20 members in attendance (although not always the same members), while Aftermath says it has some 200-300 active members at any one time. Most of Aftermath's supporting and counselling takes place over the telephone, and I endeavoured to find out more about this through individual interviews.

Aftermath was very accommodating in many ways, but I understood from the invitation process described above that they did not want a researcher *routinely* attending all of their lunches. When I did attend I was clearly a guest rather than a member. The lunches I attended were very useful in many ways and I learnt a great deal from attending them. This observation was invaluable to understanding the purposes of self-help and what it offers to members. They were also particularly useful for meeting and talking informally with members, many of whom I would later interview. Opportunity to talk with members at greater length was provided by the annual seminar weekends, which were residential and took place over three days. I attended four²⁸ in total. The final three that I attended were in a conference centre and most of those in attendance ate meals together and spent the evening in the bar in addition to attending the seminar sessions. These informal times were when I was most able to interact with members both individually and as a group.

²⁸ The fourth seminar weekend I attended was in April 2002.

During this phase I constructed the interview guide and conducted interviews with 24 Aftermath members, all of whom were relatives of male serious offenders. Interviews lasted between two and five hours, with three hours being the average. An interview of two to three hours would usually take place in one go, while a longer interview might be spread across the day with lunch in between. An interview guide was used (see appendix three) to structure the questions, although this was flexible and interviews were allowed to flow conversationally and to diverge from the guide when interviewees wanted to elaborate points or explain family history to provide context to more recent events.

Interviewing in participant's own homes provided an invaluable insight into their lives. Participants would be more relaxed on their 'territory', we could break where necessary for a cup of tea, and they could explain events that had occurred in the house or local area with much more ease. I would often be shown photographs along with files of newspaper cuttings about the offence and sometimes court or other legal paper; these 'personal props' (Plummer 1995) were important to their telling of their stories. It was also invaluable to be able to talk informally with participants between taping sessions, and in many cases there was a great deal of opportunity to do so as interviews took place over most of a day.

The ethnographic fieldwork complemented the interviews very well. By the end of the fieldwork, I had known many of those interviewees who are regular attendees at Aftermath events for over three years. This provided an opportunity to understand the experiences of families of serious offenders as a process. This has also been illuminated by interviewing families at different stages of this process. Relatives in this study characterised discovery of the offence as the turning point in their lives (see chapter three). I interviewed relatives at a range of distances from this event, from only a matter of months to some fifteen years and met many more at different stages during fieldwork.

During this phase I also interviewed people working with families of serious offenders, including the Chairperson of Aftermath, the Director of Action for Prisoners' Families, a Co-ordinator of a Visitors' Centre at a men's prison and the Co-ordinator of another

prisoners' families organisation, all of whom allowed me to gain insight into how the needs of serious offenders' families are perceived and met.

FIELDWORK: Phase Three

The aim of this phase was to gain access to and interview families of *female* serious offenders. The literature on female offenders suggests that relatives might experience particular difficulties (see chapter one) and I wanted to see whether this was so. By the end of this phase (December 2000) I had managed to interview nine, eight of whom are used in this study. This was a lower number than I had hoped and as a result conclusions must be made tentatively. Of the relatives of female serious offenders, seven were mothers and one was a daughter. There was one case of homicide, six other violent offences and one serious drugs offence that received a long prison sentence (see appendix one). A further difficulty with drawing comparisons between relatives of male and relatives of female serious offenders in this study was the difference in offence type; there were no sex offenders in the female group and only one case of homicide.

A similar interview guide was used with these families to that used for relatives of male offenders, although questions were removed about Aftermath for the six interviewees who were not members and they were asked instead about different kinds of support they had received and whether this had come from any other organisations. Most took place in relatives' own homes; one took place in the prison visitors' centre and one at another organisation for prisoners' families. I also interviewed the co-ordinator of the visitors' centre at the women's prison where I had conducted fieldwork, and the Director of the organisation Women in Prison. As with similar interviews in phase two, my aim with these two interviews was to gain insight into how the needs of female serious offenders' families are perceived and how services for those families are provided.

Fieldwork at the Visitors' Centre at the women's prison took place over a period of five months (July – Nov 2000). Initially I had intended to do this to gain access to families of female offenders. Although this was an important function of this piece of fieldwork, I very quickly discovered that I could learn a great deal about the broader issues facing female prisoners' families from interacting informally with these families, talking about

the difficulties they faced, talking informally with visitors' centre and some prison staff and witnessing first hand the experience of prison visiting.²⁹ The visitors' centre was staffed by a paid co-ordinator and assistant co-ordinator, both of whom work full-time. Visits took place in the afternoons and two unpaid volunteers worked alongside the paid staff. I was appointed as one of these volunteers after an interview and security check. Volunteers are responsible for 'booking in' visitors, checking they have the right documents for identification and that they are aware of prison rules regarding visiting, helping them through the process of handing in property for prisoners, generally providing information and answering questions and running the cafeteria serving drinks and snacks.

During this fieldwork I was interacting with relatives of all categories of female prisoner, not just serious offenders. This had limitations for understanding some of the questions addressed in this study, but did enable me to see a broader range of issues. I observed, for example, that these relatives seemed to be struggling more with the practicalities of visiting and juggling other problems in their lives. Compared to my sample and to Aftermath members generally, many more of these visitors were 'socially excluded',³⁰ struggling with financial problems, often visiting with a number of children, had mental health problems, had English as a second language (or did not speak any English at all), some were homeless, and some had drug or alcohol problems. In many cases the visitors seemed to be struggling with these problems rather than the horror of the offence (although of course I could not have been sure of this without interviewing them).

Again, I would generally jot down notes at home at the end of the day rather than during the session. There were two visits sessions each weekday afternoon (and one each day at the weekends), with 30 prisoners able to receive a visit in each session, so a maximum of 60 visits each weekday in total. However, a large number of those visits are from regular visitors, many of whom are visiting remand prisoners and can therefore visit repeatedly in one week. I was also given access to records of visitors, but found

²⁹ I also learnt a great deal from a tour of the prison organised for volunteers and lasting several hours. We were able to talk with prisoners and look at most of the prison.

³⁰ The Government's Social Exclusion Unit defines social exclusion as "a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty and family breakdown" (in Prison Reform Trust 2000).

this less useful as they only included very basic details. The records did not note the gender of visitors, but from my observations it did not seem that Girshick's claim that women in prison are visited by women (Girshick 1996) was wholly accurate in this case. Although there were a higher number of female visitors, there were also a large number of male visitors. During this phase I continued to have contact with Aftermath, receiving their newsletter, talking by telephone to some members, and attending their AGM, and I began to transcribe interviews. Phase Three of fieldwork was completed in December 2000.

FIELDWORK: Phase Four

From January 2001 - July 2003 I continued to stay in contact with Aftermath, receiving their newsletter and attending some functions including an AGM and an annual seminar weekend. Some interviewees continued to keep in touch by letter. During this phase, the remaining interviews were transcribed and the process of analysing transcripts and field notes began.

Methods of Data Collection

Participant observation

I collected data as a participant observer at Aftermath functions and at the prison visitors' centre at a women's prison. There are of course many aspects of our lives that remain unarticulated, and this fieldwork was useful for accessing some of those aspects and for gaining insights before, during and after the interview period. I was interested to find out what Aftermath offered its members, the nature and scale of Aftermath activity, who the members were, how their needs were perceived, and the extent to which these were addressed by the organisation. I was also interested to understand more about how 'sense-making' work might be collective and how collective activity was organised (see chapter seven). As a worker in the visitors centre I was able to interact with a large number of families of female prisoners and hear first-hand about the difficulties they were encountering, in addition to learning about the perceptions of their needs by organisations and how attempts were made to meet those needs.

What I looked for changed over the course of the study as I learnt more and progressively re-focused and narrowed down my aims. Adler and Adler (Adler and Adler 1998), following Spradley (Spradley 1980) and Jorgenson (Jorgenson 1989) describe these stages of observation from initial observations which are mostly *descriptive* and general to more *focused observations* which generate clearer research questions and typologies which then require *selected observations* where the characteristics of previously selected elements and the relations between them are further defined. These stages form a 'funnel' as the researcher's attention becomes deeper and more focused. It became clear to me during the course of the study, for example, that the consequences of serious offending and attempts to cope with those consequences seemed to depend on gender and kin relationship. My observations regarding this then became more focused, and clearer questions were formulated. Selected observations were then required to understand this with greater clarity. Examples of this included looking at the gendered dynamics of Aftermath occasions, including at one lunch a discussion that arose as a result of a question I'd asked ('Why do you think most Aftermath members are women?') (see chapter seven), and deciding to observe a prison visitors' centre at a women's prison to see whether difficulties faced might vary according to the gender of the offender.

My role varied in each of the observational settings. As Reinharz (Reinharz 1992) states, each setting requires the fieldworker to take a different approach to closeness/distance, which is fine but should be made explicit. Following Adler and Adler my role in Aftermath settings could be described as a 'peripheral membership role' (Adler and Adler 1998: 85), close enough to establish an insider's identity, particularly as the fieldwork progressed, but without full membership. When I attended lunches I was perhaps more of an outsider (although still often known by many there and made to feel welcome), while at other Aftermath occasions where there were larger numbers in attendance I tended to blend in and to a certain extent became an 'insider'. At the visitors' centre, however, my role was more one of 'active membership'. Researchers in this role '...become more involved in the setting's central activities, assuming responsibilities that advance the group, without fully committing themselves to members' values and goals' (Adler and Adler 1998: 85). Although the setting in this case was a visitors' centre and the group all of those involved in its daily functioning, I was certainly much more involved and played a more active role, having been appointed

as a volunteer giving help and advice to visitors (something that was clearly not part of my role in Aftermath). I would suggest that my observations at Aftermath functions provided greater depth of understanding, given that my role was solely as researcher and my concentration focused fully on the intricate details of the setting. My observations at the prison visitors' centre provided more breadth as I was able to understand a smaller amount about the problems faced by a larger number of families and also interact, though much more briefly, with a greater number³¹.

The validity of observational data is sometimes questioned, reliant as it is on the perceptions of the researcher. This is a point that needs considering with this study, particularly as I was the only researcher and hence observational data rely on my perceptions and interpretations. Comparing my data with those produced by other methods (see below) is one way to enhance validity; I have looked for patterns and links within field notes and made comparisons with both interview and documentary data.

Reliability is also more difficult to ensure in observational work, but as Adler and Adler (Adler and Adler 1998: 88) state, this can be improved by observing over time and across place. My observations at Aftermath occasions have taken place over a period of more than three years, and at the visitors' centre over a period of five months. I have also been careful to attend Aftermath lunches in two locations, rather than just one, and have attended numerous other events. I would therefore hope that observational consistency (Adler and Adler 1998) has been improved.

Interviews

Long, semi-structured interviews have been the primary method of this research. McCracken explains the advantages of using this method:

The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.

(McCracken 1988: 9)

³¹ I would estimate that I observed hundreds of visitors during that five months, and had discussions with over fifty about problems they were facing or issues they were dealing with.

This method is the only way to learn about some of the areas under investigation, such as aspects of family life. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to study these through participant observation, and all the more so because many of the interviewees did not live with their offending family member. The 'empathic access' (Kvale 1996) afforded to the researcher by this method is necessary to understand how relatives construct the impact of serious offending on their lives. Furthermore, interviews were essential to study the accounts relatives give of the offender's actions and their own actions.

My aim in these interviews has been to get as much depth as possible with a limited number of interviewees, rather than explore issues at surface level with a greater number. Although the interviews are lengthy, I have felt this has been necessary given the aims of the research³². This duration is important to allow the interviewee to '... tell his or her own story and explore key terms in substantial chunks of unconstrained testimony' (McCracken 1988: 37). Although guided by the interview schedule, I allowed considerable flexibility within each interview. This flexibility did affect the comparability of interviews (Silverman 1985), but comparison was still possible as all areas were covered with each respondent at some time. I aimed to achieve a balance between drawing out responses from interviewees, not imposing my own categories, and still exerting some control during interviews to be sure to cover the important areas. Ten of the interviewees who were Aftermath members and relatives of male offenders also worked through Aftermath as telephone supporters of other relatives. During the interviews they often spoke about this work and about the difficulties these other members had faced, which was helpful for understanding the experiences of a wider number of relatives.

Almost all interviews took place in interviewees' own homes. I was often surprised by how freely interviewees talked and how quickly they opened up about difficult subjects. Some interviews took a while to 'warm up', and with this in mind I asked questions first about Aftermath and other support received before moving on to ask more difficult questions about their family member's offending and its impact. As one would expect, rapport between the interviewee and myself developed more quickly when I had met them before. However, I would say that some kind of rapport developed in all cases and

³² McCracken reports that he has conducted six hour interviews (1988), while others have told of interviews as long as eight hours (Gross and Mason 1953).

each interview produced interesting data. I was welcomed as a guest in people's homes, and shown hospitality, always offered tea or coffee and sometimes lunch. This welcoming attitude is something often neglected in research reports (Finch and Mason 1993; Oakley 1981).

Oakley examines the traditional research textbook portrayal of the interview as a one-way process and the interviewer as uninvolved, detached, and not giving any information and criticises the relevance of this to women interviewing women. She says that:

When a feminist interviews women: (1) use of prescribed interviewing practice is morally indefensible; (2) general and irreconcilable contradictions at the heart of the textbook paradigm are exposed; and (3) it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.

(Oakley 1981: 41)

This was certainly the case in my research. Interviewees responded to me as a person and showed interest in my life. They would often ask questions during an interview (Was I married? Did I have children? Etc.), and to attempt to evade these would have been inappropriate. In most interviews the interviewer-interviewee relationship has a definite asymmetry of power (Kvale 1996: 125), but interviews are also a social interaction between two people that involves, as Oakley says, some investment of personal identity. This could not have been otherwise in my research, particularly with those participants that I knew over time and those with whom the interview was spread over the course of a day.

I also felt there were some advantages to being a relatively young, female researcher looking at this area. Participants knew that this was research for my PhD, and although that removed me far away from some of their lives, it did not offer the same distance that there might have been had I been a more established academic researcher³³. This allowed me to present myself as naïve about particular things in an attempt to get

³³ This was my experience with this particular group. It should be noted that qualifications and titles can also have advantages, for example in gaining access.

interviewees to either be explicit or elaborate. At first, of course, I *was* quite naïve about the area under study and this did not require much effort. As the fieldwork progressed, however, ‘playing dumb’ (Becker 1954) was useful at times.

I would concur with Finch (Finch and Mason 1993) that being a woman interviewing women offers an immediate identification, which was of great benefit. All but one of my interviewees were female, and they were very ready to share intimate details of their lives, some of which I suspect might not have been so forthcoming with a male researcher. Interviewees spoke openly about domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse, and personal details of their family relationships. The interviews tended to have a relaxed atmosphere, despite covering often difficult topics such as these. Many interviewees cried at times, and I soon learnt to pack tissues along with my tape recorder. I would always make the offer of taking a break from the interview if it was needed; however the offer was rarely accepted. I would not want to characterise the interviews as sad occasions. Even those where interviewees were most upset were generally relaxed and calm, and often involved laughter.

The sample

Amassing this number of interviewees took a certain amount of ‘leg work’ and was by no means straightforward. This was a larger number of interviewees and interview hours than any other study I am aware of in this area³⁴. I was not able to select Aftermath members, or prison visitors, to provide a random sample and instead had to rely on what is best described as an opportunity sample. Participation was on the basis of either an introduction being made (at an Aftermath function, by another member, or through a prisoners’ families organisation) or self-referral (in the case of six who were accessed through the prison visitors’ centre) and the relative being willing to participate. Although interviewees sometimes said they found the opportunity to open up and talk about their experiences to be quite therapeutic, I was aware that asking them to do this was asking rather a lot. It usually involved inviting someone they had only recently met into their homes and talking about upsetting, personal subjects for several hours.

³⁴ Other than Bar-On (1989; 1990) who was looking at a particular population, children of the perpetrators of the Nazi Holocaust (see chapter one).

I therefore had to rely on a slowly-built sample of relatives who were prepared to do this. It was not possible to select participants on the basis of, for example, their characteristics (other than all sharing a close kin relationship to a serious offender), their role in Aftermath or other organisations, or their potential helpfulness as informants. I often did not even know the nature of the serious offence until half way through the interview.

Certain factors might affect the degree to which the sample is representative. The families of male serious offenders are members of a self-help organisation which in itself raises questions about who joins self-help groups, and the extent to which membership provides a lens through which to view experience (see chapter seven). All interviewees participated on a voluntary basis and as such are more willing to talk about their experiences, they might be more likely to be 'standing by' and supporting their relative (although some were not, and levels of support for the offender varied), and compared to the general prison population they show greater ethnic homogeneity (thirty classifying themselves as 'white UK', four of whom classified the offender as 'mixed race', and only two classifying themselves as 'black UK' (see appendix one)).

I asked all interviewees for their current or most recent employment with the intention of making some assessment of their class position. However, this was far from straightforward. Many described themselves as 'housewives'; some had not worked for some time due to illness; some were retired; and others were employed in a voluntary capacity. Only ten out of 32 could straightforwardly name an occupation: a teacher, a care worker, a cook, two charity workers, a social worker, a solicitor, a 'stress management therapist', a counsellor and a childminder. This was not enough on its own to assess the class composition of the sample. However, it is likely that participants had a higher socio-economic level than many offenders' families. Aftermath members I met could be described as working or middle class, but most of those members and most of my interviewees (including relatives of female serious offenders) were not what might be described as 'socially excluded', in contrast to both the general prison population and families I observed at prison visitors' centres. It may be possible to make some inference from their housing situation. 20 out of 32 interviewees owned their own homes, 11 were in local authority accommodation and one in a housing association flat.

Those who owned their own homes tended to live in houses with two or three bedrooms³⁵.

Appendix one shows the kin relationships of interviewees to the offender. Only one interviewee was male, a father³⁶. I did attempt to interview male family members, but found this very difficult. Almost all those who attend Aftermath lunches and other occasions are female relatives and most of those male relatives that do attend were reluctant to participate in my research. I did, however, ask at each interview if there was anyone else the interviewee thought I should speak to, and in several cases male members of the family were asked but declined. Furthermore, in many cases there was not a close male family member to ask. Some women had separated from their former partners (either the offender or the father of the offender) and made new connections with men who did not feel involved to the same degree.

In one case I interviewed two people from the same family, a mother and a father, so interviews of relatives of male serious offenders came from 23 families in total, and relatives of female serious offenders from 8 families. Appendix one shows the offences their relatives were accused or convicted of: 11 cases of homicide, 10 sex offences against children, 3 rapes, 7 violent offences, and one serious drugs offence. All but one of the homicide offences and all the child sex offences were in the relative of male serious offenders group, making direct comparisons on the basis of gender of the offender difficult because of this variation in offence type. Geographically, interviewees were spread over much of England, from London to the South Coast, the West, the North East and the North West. There were no interviewees from Scotland, Ireland, or Wales. Interviews took place in interviewees' own homes, with four exceptions.³⁷ The range of ages was from thirties to seventies (I asked participants to choose age bands

³⁵ I could have asked for annual income, but this felt too intrusive. With hindsight, it might have been useful to offer income bands for participants to tick, and to ask for their highest level of education. I contemplated asking which class they thought they belonged to, but when one participant said 'upper class' I decided to abandon this as perceptions of each category clearly varied widely.

³⁶ Further explanations for why this might be so can be found in chapter three, which looks at family responsibilities and gender, and chapter seven, which looks at gender and self-help.

³⁷ Two interviews took place in another interviewee's home, one in the offices of a local voluntary organisation, and one in a university.

rather than specific ages); there were no younger relatives in their twenties or teens (see appendix one).

For most participants this was the first member of their family to go to prison, and many spoke of their offending relative having little prior history of criminal involvement. This may be another factor colouring my sample; it is perhaps more likely that families with no prior offending history would join a self-help group³⁸ and volunteer to take part in research. Additionally, of course, allowance should be made for interviewees possibly not knowing the full extent of their family member's offending history (see chapter three). Furthermore, participants were not relatives of professional or organised criminals, and did not describe the offender in their family as being part of any criminal network. In fact, they were keen to distance the offender and their family from these types of criminals (see chapter six).

Most interviews took place several years after the interviewee had discovered the offence. Only four interviewees had discovered the offence in the year preceding the interview, although many more fieldwork participants were closer. Several interviewees said they would not have been able to speak to me in the early stages because they would have been too upset (see chapter three). Nicola said: "If you'd done this interview when we first met [at a lunch some months previously] it would have been you making tea and me sobbing." A study such as this already relies upon retrospective interpretations of life before the offence and discovery of the offence (see chapter three), but a sample such as this mainly relies on retrospective interpretations of the initial impact and early stages³⁹.

Finally, it may be that homicide offences occurred less frequently within the immediate family with this sample than with the general population of offenders. Six of the homicide victims had been friends or acquaintances, one had been a girlfriend, two had been strangers and one had been the offender's grandmother. With the child sex offences, the (alleged) victims were nieces in three cases, a foster daughter in one case, the offender's young children in one case, now adult children (not related to the relative

³⁸ And in particular a self-help group such as Aftermath which claims that families are traumatised by having a serious offender in the family (see chapter seven).

³⁹ Although I did talk to fieldwork participants in earlier stages.

who participated in this study) in two cases, grandchildren in one case, and unrelated children in two cases. In two rape cases the victims were strangers, and in one case an acquaintance. In the violent offence cases, the victims were acquaintances or friends in three cases, strangers in one case, and in three cases (all of which were female offenders) they were family members: two were the offender's own baby and one was her husband.

Although this sample has particular limitations, it would be wrong to conclude that no generalisation is possible. Kvale develops a distinction made by Stake (Stake 1994) between naturalistic, statistical and analytic generalisation (Kvale 1996: 232-3). With statistical generalisation, the sample is selected randomly from the population and confidence in generalisations can be stated in probability coefficients. That kind of generalisation will not be possible with a sample such as this, which has been necessarily selected by availability. Hence it is not possible to conclude with certainty from my findings that *all* serious offenders' families feel or react a certain way. However, with recognition of the features of this particular sample *analytic* generalisation is possible and is described thus by Kvale:

Analytic generalization involves a reasoned judgement about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation. It is based on an analysis of the similarities and differences of two situations. In contrast to spontaneous naturalistic generalization, the researcher here bases the generalization claims on assertational logic. There are several forms of assertational logic, such as the legal form of argumentation in court and arguments for generalization based on theory. By specifying the supporting evidence and making the arguments explicit, the researcher can allow readers to judge the soundness of the generalization claim.

(Kvale 1996: 233)

Conclusions drawn from a sample such as this must therefore be tentative, and explicit reasoned judgements made about the extent to which particular findings might be generalised to the wider population, taking into account the particular features of this sample and drawing on other studies where possible.

Documentary research

I have collected documentary data from several sources during fieldwork. The most important sources have been media coverage of some interviewees' family members' offending and subsequent cases (provided to me by many interviewees at the time of the interview); letters, documents and other correspondence from interviewees; Aftermath records, reports, minutes from meetings, letters, newsletters, and policy documents; and media coverage of Aftermath as an organisation and of serious offenders' families and prisoners' families. Other sources have included material from the Action for Prisoners' Families⁴⁰ and other prisoners' families organisations, and relevant on-line data, for example from the web site of the Family and Corrections Network in the USA, a much larger organisation working to provide support and information for and about the families of offenders⁴¹;

As Atkinson and Coffey state, documents do not so much report a reality as construct a reality, and each constructs a particular version of it (Atkinson and Coffey 1997: 55). They are 'social facts', not transparent representations or surrogates for other data (Atkinson and Coffey 1997: 47). Documentary data have been regarded as supplementary to interview and observational data; they could only be used to answer some of the questions I asked, and in most cases interviews and observations were the first source of answers. Documentary data have been treated in this study as both topics and resources, as things to explain and as things to explain with. One example would be the Aftermath literature and records mentioned above which have been analysed to ascertain the collective narrative Aftermath provides and how this is conveyed (see chapter seven). This documentary reality is important in its own right, but has also been cross-checked with field notes and interview transcripts.

⁴⁰ Formerly the Federation of Prisoners' Families' Support Groups

⁴¹ I also attended the Family and Corrections Network conference in September 1998 in Maryland, Virginia USA in order to learn more about how the needs of prisoners' families are perceived in the USA and the provision of services there.

This research generated a large amount of unstructured data. All interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed⁴², and field notes and documentary material were organised. As Dey states, analysis is about identifying and linking conceptual categories, which includes processes of describing, classifying and connecting (Dey 1993). Data analysis had begun much earlier in the research process as initial research questions and conceptual categories emerged during fieldwork, but once the collection process was complete, the data collected needed to be understood and interpreted. The process of data analysis had the following stages (which are similar to those outlined in Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, chapter 8):

- 1) Reading through the data several times (interview transcripts, fieldnotes and documentary material) to get a 'feel' for the important issues. I was aware of the 'culture of fragmentation' (Atkinson 1992) which can arise when analysis is based solely on categorisation and coding, and wanted to focus on the 'storied' qualities of the data in the first instance.
- 2) Analysing interview transcripts. I used the computer programme Atlas/ti for this stage, although only as a basic tool to code and retrieve relevant sections of text. Using Atlas/ti I was able to develop a coding scheme which could be continually refined. I went through each interview transcript carefully coding sections of text. Codes came from two sources: pre-designated categories that by this stage I knew were part of the focus of the thesis (e.g. 'reasons' was used to code anything said about the reasons for the offence) and those which emerged from the transcripts (e.g. 'hierarchical comparisons' was a code that emerged from the comparisons interviewees made between themselves and others; this later developed into the technique of comparative adjustment (see chapter five)). These categories were therefore both 'observer-identified' and 'member-identified' (Lofland 1976). Interviewees often spoke at length, and I found I often needed to code large chunks of text. Each file of quotations was retrieved and transferred into a Word file.

⁴² I transcribed most of the interviews myself, but a transcriber was paid to do ten. These ten were selected simply on the basis of recording quality and clarity of sound.

- 3) Within each of these Word files (of which there were fifty), I then worked on developing the categories that seemed most important to the analysis, sifting through data within each file and developing further sub-categories. So, for example, within a file on 'finding out' (about the offence) I developed sub-categories of 'shock' and 'trauma', which was how finding out was characterised by many participants (see chapter three). I also looked within each file to see whether variables such as kin relationship, offence type, and gender of the offender were important.
- 4) I manually coded field notes, looking for anything that related to my coding scheme and anything else that emerged as important. Some bits of documentary data that related to particular topics were coded (e.g. Aftermath newsletters were searched for examples of Aftermath's collective narrative, see chapter seven).
- 5) A final stage involved developing typologies, examples of which include the strategies used by relatives in their accounts (see chapters five and six) or the stages through which relatives progress (see chapter three).

During the phase of writing up the research, I often returned to the data to check particular ideas, and also compared what I found with that found in other studies (e.g. I looked at how my interviewees described traumatic impact and compared this with the literature on this, see chapter three). I would also return to reading through the transcripts on occasions to not lose sight of relatives 'stories'.

Limitations of the data

It is clear that there are certain limitations to the data collected in this study, and possible threats to validity. As we have seen, the sample has relied on availability and opportunity and with a sensitive population such as this it probably could not have been otherwise. However, attempts have been made to sample 'within the case' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995): across *time* (the research was conducted over a period of several years), a variety of *people* (efforts were made to find relatives of female offenders, for example) and across different *contexts* (various Aftermath meetings, lunches in different locations, prison visitors' centre, other organisations, and of course participant's homes).

Another way to help overcome these limitations is through relating different types of data. This research utilises data from different sources, each of which might involved different kinds of threats to validity, and how those data are linked and integrated is important to consider. Technique triangulation involves comparing data from different methods of collection:

To the extent that these techniques involve different kinds of validity threat, they provide a basis for checking interpretations. Ethnography often involves a combination of techniques and thus it may be possible to assess the validity of inferences between indicators and concepts by examining data relating to the same concept from participant observation, interviewing, and documents.

(Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 231)

As Fielding & Fielding say, triangulating methods encourages the researcher to think critically about his or her own material and to want to test that material and identify its weaknesses (Fielding and Fielding 1986). This offers the opportunity to enhance validity, which as Kvale suggests is about playing ‘devil’s advocate’ with one’s own findings (Kvale 1996: 242). Using a range of methods has been beneficial, and the aim has been to achieve integration between findings. It is not a matter of just lumping data together, but rather: ‘. . . attempting to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each’ (Fielding and Fielding 1986: 31). Using data from different sources does not imply: ‘. . . that one simply can take the results from different analyses and stick them together like children’s building blocks in order to create a single edifice’ (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 14).

Combining observation of Aftermath activity and the visitors’ centre with interviews enables me to look at how interviewees’ accounts relate to what they actually do. Observation can also generate accounts when it occurs before an interview and can be followed up with questions about things that have been seen. Other opportunities to check aspects of accounts are provided by media reports, documentary material, or comparing when two interviewees talk about the same events. However, these ‘checks’ are not to see the ‘truth’ or otherwise of statements (unless plainly factual statements), but to check possible threats to validity, as described above.

There have been particular issues arising during this period of research which have required special consideration. This was a sensitive topic for those involved, and as such harbours potential 'threats' (Lee 1993), both to participants who are being asked to divulge private and stressful information and potentially to the researcher who is listening at times to difficult and traumatic stories. Guidelines provided by the British Sociological Association⁴³ and British Society of Criminology⁴⁴ have been followed, and informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality have required particular consideration.

I have tried to be open and honest about the purposes, aims and possible uses of the research at all times. Consent was sought in the first instance from Aftermath, and the purpose of my attendance was explained at most Aftermath events (although less so in the later stages when my attendance was more likely to be taken for granted and most members knew who I was). Individual consent was sought from all those who participated in interviews, with a brief explanation about the purposes of the study. Of course, this explanation was necessarily a summary - it would not be appropriate to talk for an hour about my aims and objectives - and would usually centre on my interest in the impact. However, an opportunity to ask questions was provided, both before and after an interview, and my contact details provided so that participants had the opportunity to return to me at a later stage with any issues or concerns. In practice, discussions about the research often took place on the telephone when potential interviewees were deciding whether to participate. Permission to tape interviews was also sought on an individual basis, with an explanation given of the intended use of those tapes and measures to protect identity. In practice, permission to tape was never refused.

Aftermath and individual interviewees were also made aware of my intention to publish results of the research, and that I intended to take measures to guard the anonymity of participants, and protect confidential information where necessary. However, Aftermath

⁴³ <http://www.britsoc.org.uk/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.britsoccrim.org/ethics.htm>

itself is a unique organisation and as such its identity cannot be concealed. It is the only organisation of its kind for the families of serious offenders (see chapter seven). This raises particular difficult issues with regard to how the organisation and its members are portrayed and possible consequences of this.

I intend to show a draft of anything I plan to publish to anyone who is identified and to the current Aftermath committee, and possibly to other participants with whom I have remained in contact. Their comments will be welcomed, and incorporated wherever possible, although I will retain final editorial control. I choose to do this prior to publication rather than earlier in the research project because it is difficult to predict what an organisation might find objectionable⁴⁵, particularly with a sensitive population, and I did not want to 'close doors' should there be any problem. This is another reason why retaining final editorial control is vital (Punch 1986). Respondent validation is important as another form of triangulation, but has its limitations: 'In short, while people are well-placed informants on their own actions, they are no more than that; and their accounts must be analysed in the same way as any other data, with close consideration being given to possible threats to validity.' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 229).

Several participants have had particular concerns about being identified, one of whom had received threats against her life and was understandably anxious that her participation did not jeopardise her local anonymity, or raise her profile in any way. Caution has been taken with all interview and observational data to change names, dates, and places and to leave out some identifying details without damaging the integrity of the data. Tapes and transcripts from interviews were coded rather than named so those participants could not be identified.

I did not feel that I was at risk as a researcher at Aftermath functions or during interviews. Aftermath functions felt like very 'safe' places and I did not observe aggression at any time. Although interviews took place in interviewees' own homes, which could have been risky for a lone female researcher, almost all interviewees were female and I had met and talked with most of them before. On one occasion the husband

⁴⁵ See Rock (1998a) for an example of an organisation objecting to research findings and interpretation.

of an interviewee who was at home having recently been released from prison was less than pleased to find me talking to his wife, and appeared to be very angry - however, it quickly transpired that he thought I was from social services and when she explained who I was, his tone changed completely. He made me a cup of tea and came back into the room eager to join in with the interview at several points, only for his wife to send him back out.

I felt unsafe on three occasions during the research. When I wrote to all London Aftermath members asking if any would be willing to be interviewed, I received a haphazardly written reply from an offender detailing his rape convictions and asking if I was 'interested'. The tone was quite aggressive so I chose not to reply. When working as a volunteer in the prison visitors' centre, I witnessed visitors getting quite heated on several occasions and heard raised voices and swearing. This was perhaps not surprising given the stress of prison visiting and was considered a normal part of the job. However, on one occasion a visitor who clearly had quite severe mental health problems really lost his temper with a member of visitors' centre staff, and prison staff were called for assistance. On another day I was told of an incident that had happened on the previous day when a female visitor had become very aggressive with a member of staff to the extent that all the staff and visitors (including it was said all the male visitors) were very frightened. We had been warned that she might return that day, and spent our time anticipating that. Fortunately she did not.

Research such as this entails entering into personal and moral relationships with definite obligations. I have been involved with some participants over a period of three years and those participants have shared many intimate and sensitive matters with me. I have been concerned to keep in mind the boundaries of my role as a researcher, show sensitivity, and not exploit participants. Maintaining critical distance when 'knowing' people so well is also a consideration. My immersion in the field has been for relatively short periods over a long stretch of time, rather than one short intensive period, which has made this easier. I have also been out of the field for some time during the stages of analysis and writing.

I was further concerned that I was asking a great deal of interviewees to invite me into their own homes and talk at such length about difficult matters. However, despite often

becoming distressed during the course of the interview, interviewees frequently spoke of the positive benefits of being able to talk to someone neutral, and seemed to have no difficulty in doing so at length.

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the key methods used and the experience of using them in this piece of research. Although the characteristics of my sample place restrictions on conclusions that can be drawn, I have attempted to enhance breadth and depth of data by using long interviews, observation and documentary analysis. Interviews were carried out with 32 relatives of serious offenders, and during fieldwork in-depth conversations and discussions about their circumstances were held with a higher number, and many more were observed. Despite the limitations of a sample selected by availability, this is the only study in this area to gain access to this number of families. I hope that this will provide valuable insights into a population that has, until now, remained relatively hidden.

Chapter Three: Discovering the Offence: 'My world as I knew it gone'

In every single aspect my life has been changed, you know. In effect, I feel I have a new life. That was my old life, this is my new life. It's just made me see everything in a different light, it kind of woke me up . . . life began at 40 for me, March 1996, my world as I knew it gone. . .

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

Relatives of serious offenders in this study talked about discovery of the offence⁴⁶ as the important turning point in their lives. It was life changing and the event around which everything else was constructed⁴⁷. This chapter examines how relatives describe life before the offence, the experience of discovering the offence and events that surround it, life after discovery and the consequences that follow.

Life before discovery

A study of relatives of serious offenders is by definition reliant on retrospective accounts of life before discovery, before participants became aware of their status. It is important to consider how and when they came to know about the offending, and how they describe this process of becoming aware. There are several important factors which make 'knowing' more or less likely for relatives. This study looks at relatives of serious offenders as a group, but the offence type in this case is likely to be important. We know, for example, that sex offences against children are often carried out over a period of time, whereas murder is usually a single act. With some offences, then, there may not have been a history of serious offending to know about, while with others there might have been a history of many years.

However, some offences are by their nature more hidden than others. Perpetrators of child sex offences go to great pains to hide their actions, whereas some violent offences

⁴⁶ For convenience 'the offence' is referred to as a single event, although it is of course recognised that there might have been a series of offences rather than one incident prior to discovery.

⁴⁷ Finding out was the crucial time, and although relatives were often told by the police this was not always the case (see below) so discovery is not necessarily the same as arrest.

are carried out in public spaces; the son of one participant in this study, for example, was seen by several witnesses with the body of his murder victim in a busy town. The location of the offence is important: if it happens within the home or within the family it might be more difficult to hide from relatives, but easier to hide from those outside the home. The kin relationship shared with the offender and his or her place of residence will also make a difference; obviously the closer this relationship the more likely the relative is to know. Time is a further important variable. Three interviewees were not with the offender at the time of the offence: two because they were second wives and the offender had committed sex offences against his now adult children which had only recently come to light and one because she met her partner since his offence which had occurred in his teens⁴⁸. Additionally, the process of becoming aware may be quicker when the offender presents other problems, such as mental health or addiction (see below). Finally, awareness may be gendered: almost all participants in this study were female, and as Howarth and Rock point out, much offending is committed by males in public places and may not be reported to women; women who are in a position of dependence may not be able to afford to know too much; and even if they do ask questions they may not receive a reply (Howarth and Rock 2000: 65).

Given this range of different factors, one would expect a variety of different experiences amongst a sample of thirty-two interviewees. All participants⁴⁹ described discovery of the offence as shocking and traumatic (see below); none said they knew about the serious offending for any length of time prior to the offender's arrest (and in the few cases where they did, the police were informed very quickly, and often by the participants in this study); none said that looking back they must have known before or must have been 'in denial', a narrative that one might expect to hear from relatives of alcoholics in AlAnon, for example⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ This interviewee, Lisa, gave an account of life before the offence rather than life before discovery. This was based on what she understood from secondary sources rather than first-hand experience and was problem-identifying (see table one below).

⁴⁹ Except Lisa - see previous footnote. She was told about the offence some time after meeting her partner.

⁵⁰ Being 'in denial' does not form part of Aftermath's collective narrative (see chapter seven), whereas in AlAnon, the self-help organisation for relatives of alcoholics, it is an important part and as with all 12-step organisations acknowledging the problem is the first step to recovery.

Most relatives were keen to stress that they had little or no experience of serious offending prior to discovery. None admitted to any criminal involvement themselves⁵¹, and they usually spoke about their offending relative as the only serious offender in their family. Lorraine's response was typical:

R: And is this the first member of your family to go to prison?

L: Yeah, yeah, the whole family right the way through. No-one ever in my family has ever gone to prison, from aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmother, even my grandfather, father, none of them have ever, ever gone into prison.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

Many, though not all, of the offenders had no previous offending history (of which their relatives were aware); if they did, it was usually of a more minor nature and discovery of the serious offence was still described as a shock.

It may well be true that relatives in this study genuinely knew nothing, and I had no reason to doubt the shock and trauma they described on discovery. However, we know from the literature on families with other problems such as alcoholism or mental or physical illness that it is possible for families to sustain collective denial in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary and it is worth considering how these processes might operate in this context. As Cohen states:

Without conscious negotiation, family members know what trouble spots to avoid, which facts are better not noticed. These collusions - mutually reinforcing denials that allow no meta-comment - work best when we are unaware of them. The resulting 'vital lie' in the family may become a literal blind spot. But the facts are too brutal to ignore. They have to be reinterpreted, using techniques like minimization, euphemism and joking: 'If the force of the facts is too brutal to ignore, then their meaning can be altered. The vital lie continues unrevealed, sheltered by the family's silence, alibis, stark denial. The collusion is maintained by directing attention away from the fearsome fact, or by repackaging its meaning in an acceptable format' (Goleman 1985).
(Cohen 2001: 64)

⁵¹ Although one interviewee was working in the sex industry as a 'stress management therapist' and was taking calls from clients throughout the interview, but she did not perceive this as criminal - she thought she was offering a very valuable service - and she did not make reference to any other criminal involvement.

Therefore there may be processes occurring within families that keep acknowledgement of offending suppressed, but these processes are difficult to access through research relying on retrospective accounts. Studies of wives with mentally ill husbands (Yarrow et al. 1955a; Yarrow et al. 1955b) and wives of alcoholics (Wiseman 1991) present a picture of the wife trying to interpret her husband's behaviour as normal, using a variety of techniques, until a point where she is no longer able to do so and finds she must seek help. Usually a precipitating event means the wife is no longer able to normalise her husband's behaviour and Wiseman refers to these as 'scale-tipping incidents' followed by 'last straws or clinchers'. According to Johnson, a typical pattern can be discerned from the Yarrow study of mental illness in the family and two others during that period (Rogler and Hollingshead 1965; Sampson et al. 1962), a pattern which has been confirmed by later interview studies (Hambrecht et al. 1994; Lincoln and McGorry 1995):

Family members have a difficult time identifying a clear initiation point, and usually describe either a poor pre-morbid history or a surprisingly good one. At some point in the IM's [ill member's] development, an accumulation of odd or bizarre behavior begins, which is rationalized in different ways by various family members (e.g. as emotional stress, associating with the wrong crowd, drug use). As a result of these observable changes, family members begin to adjust their own behavior and expectations (usually involving increased protection by older female members, and increasing distancing by male and female members of the same age or younger). An alternating progression of normal and abnormal behavior by the IM creates an ambiguous situation, confusing family members, and making their accommodations more difficult to sustain. Finally, a precipitating event occurs that involves clearly unacceptable (and frequently dangerous) behavior; this pushes the family past the threshold point and, as a result, they involve the mental health system. Odd thoughts on the part of the IM are usually accommodated by family members; it usually takes disruptive behavior to initiate involvement of mental health personnel.

(Johnson 2000: 128)

In his own study of the families of 180 people with serious mental illness, Johnson emphasises the cyclical nature of mental illness and the effect of this on recognition, finding significant differences between the families of those who had only one hospitalisation and families of those with a pattern of hospitalisation and re-hospitalisation:

The latter could anticipate a cycle of hospitalization, discharge, readjustment, early warning signs, de-compensation, crisis and rehospitalization. Families with only one hospitalization, however, could not conceive of this as a possibility; they had no desire to join a support network or educate themselves about illness, since they hoped that this would be their last encounter with the mental health system.

(Johnson 2000: 129)

So families of serious offenders might experience what Wiseman refers to as the 'urge to normalize', and as with behaviour indicating mental illness or alcoholism, behaviour indicating offending is rationalised until the family are pushed past the 'threshold point' and can do so no longer (Wiseman 1991). As with Johnson's study, it may be that where offending behaviour is cyclical - the offender has an offending history of which the family are aware and has been processed in the past by the criminal justice system - the potential to rationalise or normalise would be reduced. Nine interviewees in this study spoke of previous offending behaviour, but this was usually of a different kind (see below). Furthermore, even if relatives of serious offenders do have guilty knowledge they might find it difficult to take steps to halt offending. There are cases where mothers know that their children are victims of sexual abuse, for example, but do not act; one study has argued that this is because those mothers are powerless rather than collusive (Russell, 1986 in Cohen 2001: 75).

Johnson states in the quotation above that families with a mentally ill member usually describe either a poor pre-morbid history or a surprisingly good one. A similar finding emerged in this study in the descriptions from relatives of life pre-discovery: there was a tendency for relatives to either offer primarily *problem-identifying* or *normalising* accounts during interviews of their relationship with the offender and the offender's behaviour. This is not the same as dividing relatives into deniers and non-deniers of offending behaviour prior to discovery; relatives of serious offenders who offer either account in interviews might oscillate between partial denial and partial acknowledgement both before and after discovery⁵².

⁵² As Cohen states, denial is not a property of a personality, but rather of a situation. Although some people may use it more than others, people are not either total deniers or total non-deniers: "People give different accounts to themselves and others; elements of partial denial and partial acknowledgement are always present; we oscillate rapidly between states." (Cohen 2001: 54). Although those offering normalising accounts are more likely to be using various denial techniques, this is not necessarily so: their lives with the offender prior to discovery may well have been more 'normal' than those who offer problem-identifying accounts; the 'offender' may

All of the problem-identifying accounts point to a gradual decline in the offender, because of addiction, mental illness or other problems. Often the offence for these families was preceded by many years of trying to get help for their relative and interaction with health and social services and sometimes criminal justice agencies. Anne tried to get help from her teenage son's psychiatrist before the offence, but it was not forthcoming. She had concerns about the worrying behaviour he was exhibiting prior to the offence:

He became abusive to me at home, he's never been abusive to me and he's not now, but during those eighteen months he was awful. He started stealing because he'd got to fund the drugs . . . he was obviously abusing solvents, he used to leave cans of butane gas in his bedroom, dozens and dozens of them. One morning I picked about thirty odd cans and put them in a bag. His behaviour was absolutely horrendous. . . He was just a totally different person, unbelievable . . . in those eighteen months he overdosed about four times. We had a terrible time with him.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Stephanie tried to get help from several sources for her husband before the offence:

S: A lot of people who commit serious offences need help, and they're not getting it, because when Simon committed his offence, I went to everybody: doctors, psychiatrists, probation, everybody and said before the murder, 'do something else he's going to commit something serious', but nobody listened to me. He was cutting his wrists, not just once or twice; it was a number of times.

Her husband was addicted to heroin and was also violent towards her prior to the offence.

S: Yeah, he was charged with ABH, he broke my nose, blacked my eyes, held a knife to me, threatened to throw boiling hot water over me, all sorts of injuries I've had from him.

R: And this went on for a period of time?

well have not been guilty, as some participants claim; and problem-identifiers might be identifying one problem while denying another.

S: From the word go when we got married. From the night we got married he was violent towards me.

(Stephanie, wife, homicide group)

Eventually Stephanie left her husband and sought safety in a refuge. He then killed a young woman who was a stranger to him and whom the police had said looked very much like Stephanie.

Nine of those who offered problem-identifying accounts talked about previous offending behaviour. In five cases, this involved drug use (in particular heroin and crack cocaine) and stealing to support it. In two cases it was other minor offences. Only three reported previous violence from the offender⁵³, an attack against a stranger by one offender and domestic violence from two others. Even in these cases discovery of the serious offence for which they were convicted was described as shocking and upsetting by the relatives (see below).

Those relatives who offer normalising accounts are keen to stress that everything in their lives prior to discover was otherwise normal:

R: What was he like just before this happened, when he was 18, 19, what was he like then?

A: Well we didn't know any different from, he was just normal. You know, he'd been, he'd joined the T.A. and he'd been away at camp and he'd done everything, you know, and we just could not understand it, because he was acting normally at home. . . Because they thought maybe he was schizophrenic at first, but from all the tests they did, he even asked the psychiatrist if he could read his notes! You could tell how normal he was.

R: So would you say his offending was a complete surprise or were there any warning signals?

A: It was, it was a bolt out of the blue. No warning signals at all. Perfectly normal teenager, wouldn't clean his room at all.

(Ada, mother, rape group)

⁵³ This is not to say that none of the other offenders had a history of violent offending; their relatives may not have been aware of other incidents, or may not have been willing to report it to me.

Relatives who offer normalising accounts stress positive aspects of life before the offence and give examples of how their life was just like anyone else's - the jobs they had, the things they did, their preoccupations were all 'normal'. Normalising accounts of life before the offence address both the offender's and their family members' culpability. Parents might be conveying the message that 'we did our best'; all relatives might be conveying the message that 'we did not know'; and in some cases they might be trying to show that the 'offender' could not possibly be guilty of the offence of which he or she has been accused or convicted. Problem-identifying accounts address culpability in a different way. By pointing to problems such as mental illness or substance addiction relatives are able to identify 'reasons' and so minimise their own and the offender's responsibility; this will be explored in chapter five.

Those offering normalising accounts do not describe what Wiseman refers to as 'scale-tipping events' prior to discovery (Wiseman 1991). For some of this group the offence itself was the precipitating event following which they recognised that their relative had a problem; others in this group continued to normalise after discovery of the offence, particularly those who questioned their relative's culpability. For those offering problem-identifying accounts the offence is yet another, more serious event which though perhaps unexpected in its severity confirms their prior concerns.

Of the 32 interviewees in this study, 15 offered problem-identifying accounts and 17 offered normalising accounts. Table Two shows the distribution of these accounts.

Table Two: Accounts of Life Before Discovery

	Number of interviewees offering problem-identifying accounts	Number of interviewees offering normalising accounts
Homicide group (n=11)	8	3
Child sexual abuse (n=10)	1	9
Rape (n=3)	2	1
Violent (n=7)	4	3
Other (n=1)	0	1
Relatives of male offenders (n=24)	12	12
Relatives of female offenders (n=8)	3	5
Non-supporting relatives (n=5)	2	3
Mothers ⁵⁴ (n=17)	8	9
Wives / partners (n=10)	3	7
TOTAL	15	17

We can see from this table that the most significant variable is offence type, and in particular that relatives of homicide perpetrators were more likely to offer problem-identifying accounts and relatives in the child sexual abuse group more likely to offer normalising accounts. Other variables were not significant: relatives of male offenders and female offenders were roughly divided equally between the two groups, as were non-supporting relatives. Mothers were equally likely to offer either account (8:9), but wives were more likely to offer normalising accounts (7:3), although with such low numbers in these categories it is only possible to identify possible patterns and not comment on statistical significance. An initial explanation might be that wives or partners were more likely to be sharing a household with the offender prior to

⁵⁴ Other relatives have not been included in the table as a separate category because there was only one in each category: one father, one grandmother, one daughter and one aunt of a serious offender. Each of these four offered problem-identifying accounts.

discovery, and therefore might have more to gain from offering accounts which stress that everything was normal and they could not have known. However, the seven wives offering normalising accounts were from the child sex offence group, and the three offering problem-identifying accounts were from the homicide group, so the source of this difference is probably found in the offence type rather than the kin relationship.

It is important to consider *why* relatives of child sex offenders are more likely to offer normalising accounts. The first reason is the nature of the offence: sexual offences are generally secretive and offenders might go to great lengths to hide their actions from family members. It may be more difficult to pick up on signs or clues, unlike someone with a history of violent offending, for example, who might present with physical marks or offend more publicly. It is possible, therefore, that in many cases family members really did not know and that in all other ways life appeared normal. Child sexual abuse may be such an affront to relatives' world that they might experience a stronger 'urge to normalise'. One interviewee, for example, described how she had been told by her six year old niece that her husband had 'licked my tottie [vagina]'. She had reported this immediately to the girl's mother (the interviewee's sister) who had said not to worry about it, her daughter had been having bad dreams and that would be why she said it, and that it was best forgotten. When she was confronted with an open disclosure from her niece some time later she says she was haunted by having missed her earlier attempt to tell: "with it being nearly two years since she said that, [finding out] nearly killed me. I could have stopped so much of that . . . If I'd have took it on board I could have stopped it for these last how ever many months."

Normalising accounts could partly be a response to current public opinion, that people who commit sexual offences against children are the lowest of the low, almost sub-human. For child sexual offenders more than any other offenders their offence becomes their master status, something their relatives try to resist; these attempts at resistance will be considered in chapter five. Relatives might also want to convey that they think their family member will not re-offend, and that he has a happy, 'normal' family life to help him with that. Relatives of sex offenders in this study felt they experienced greater blame than relatives of other serious offenders and they might therefore want to convey that they did not know, that they did not collude, that they could not have prevented it and that they are justified in continuing to support (see chapter four).

Finally, it is worth noting that being unsure of the offender's culpability might be at best uncomfortable and at worst extremely stressful for relatives, and some remain unsure after discovery. Wiseman points out that the Yarrow et al. model did not really consider the effect on the wife of struggling with ambivalence in the stages prior to acceptance of mental illness. In her study, she found a 'serious psychological toll taken on the wives of alcoholics as they suspect their own sanity while being bombarded with conflicting evidence during the difficult judgement period' (Wiseman 1991: 34), something which may be similar for relatives of serious offenders who are struggling with ambivalent feelings.

Discovery of the Offence

Most relatives learnt of the offence from the police. This might have been via a telephone call, a visit from the police to ask questions or to ask whether they knew the whereabouts of the offender, or as in Beverly's case suddenly having their house searched:

At about 12 o'clock, half-past 11, 12 o'clock, I was in bed asleep with my boyfriend and my front door came off. And there was seven police standing over us with guns with lights on. My neighbours came out of the door and everybody was out there looking because they took us outside. And we had to stand up outside they handcuffed my boyfriend with plastic cuffs and they're searching all through the place and that. . . and [my boyfriend] couldn't use his, he had no feeling in his thumb for a long time. And then total shock and disbelief you know, just couldn't believe that [my grandson] would get himself involved in anything like that, do you know what I mean?

(Beverly, grandmother, violent offence group)

Other relatives learnt in different ways: two in the child sex offence group learnt from social services, two others notified the authorities themselves - one wife was sent a letter by the victims and took this to social services and one mother recognised her relative's description in a newspaper and notified police⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ And police appeals often rely on someone from an offender's immediate circle coming forward with information.

Gill discovered that her husband had been sexually abusing her nieces when her daughter was playing with her cousins. They had told her daughter that her father had been touching them and she ran to tell her mother:

When she said that it's like somebody had come up and just picked up the biggest mallet and just smacked me here and smacked me there. So I shouted for my sister and she come running up and I knew then, I knew. And I couldn't believe it, see, and she said 'do you believe them?' And I said 'of course'. First I'm going 'no, no' and then she said 'do you believe them?' and I said 'of course I believe them' and I put my arms around them and I saw [my daughter] Dawn and she was crying. Oh and all I remember, I just said to them 'oh you're brave girls for telling me' and Lucy says 'that's why I can't come, you were asking me, because Juliet swore if I go tonight she's going to tell me Dad, she said I daren't go'. And then they told me this, and of course I knew and I just remember Dawn crying behind me and I just thought, I just knew I wanted to take Dawn and go home, and [my sister] Samantha was talking to me and I says 'Samantha I've got to go home' and I went home and confronted [my husband].

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

Some family members hear from other adult relatives, particularly if the offender is not a member of their household. One mother found out from her daughter in law when her son had already been in prison for three months, for example, and another mother found out from her sister who had discovered the details of the offence first. One mother who had lost contact with her son discovered the offence some months after it happened when it appeared on a television documentary she happened to be watching:

R: How did you feel when you found out?

H: I felt sick. It was the biggest shock. I mean I've had some shocks, but I think that was the biggest. But in a way, I felt relief when [my partner] come in, because at least I could tell him as well, you know, let him have some of it.

(Hilda, mother, homicide group)

The shock of discovery

However they found out about the offence, most relatives, like Hilda, described feeling shock, disbelief, unreality, and feeling sick. One wife during a fieldwork conversation

said that when the police arrived to search her house she felt like she was in a television programme, as if it was happening to someone else. One interviewee described shock at both the offence and its anticipated consequences:

. . . but you're in a situation where you've all had this terrific shock, you're having to deal with ultimately the sentences that they get, you're having to deal with actually what they've done, which is significant.

(George, father, homicide group)

For families of serious offenders, difficulties stem from both the offence itself and the sentences that are likely to be given. Even those offering problem-identifying accounts still described shock; despite being more sensitised to dealing with their relative's difficulties, they say the serious offence was unexpected:

R: Was the offence a complete surprise or were there any warning signals?

C: What to me? Well I suppose because I knew he'd been in borstal I knew that he could get into trouble and was likely to end up in prison. Never did I imagine he would kill somebody, no, no.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

The offence was a complete surprise. I always thought that she would kill herself, I never, ever thought that she would turn it on anyone else, let alone a baby. There were warning signs that she was in a bad state, but traditionally that has always led to either a suicide attempt or some other wildly destructive behaviour.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

Relatives describe this shock as manifesting in physical symptoms:

I can actually remember physically what I felt like that day, half dead. It's like when you've got the worst dose of the flu but double-fold, it's like you just, your limbs have got no weight but they feel dead heavy, you know, I can feel how I felt but you couldn't describe how you felt. You weren't floating, they were heavy but there was nothing in them, you were just nothing, you were just hollow.

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

One mother described how her reaction to the shock of the police arresting her son for rape was to immediately clean out all her kitchen cupboards because she felt so defiled.

The immediate consequences are described by relatives as devastating and symptoms of shock persist for some time:

I had sort of ten appalling days of you know, driving to prison and seeing solicitors and going to social services meetings and not being able to get there because I was snowed in, and oh blimey. I went back when I got home, I went home first to see [my husband] and [my son] and then I went over to see my Mum and I took to my bed nineteenth-century style and I went to bed and I couldn't get up, it was the most extraordinary sensation I've ever had, I was lying in bed and I couldn't move my arms and legs, they were so heavy, I stayed in bed for two days, I just couldn't move at all. I think exhaustion and shock and whatever.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

Relatives say that life as they knew it has been shattered and smashed to pieces, and they cannot imagine how they will ever come to terms with the news. One mother at a seminar weekend described feeling numb, and compared the process as like bereavement with a need to move through stages. She said: "It's grief, a form of grieving, but you haven't got the respectability of them being dead". This comparison with the bereavement process has been made by many relatives:

R: How do you think Tommy's offending has affected your life?

P: Horrendous. Through my personality, I'm just dead inside, not there. Have you ever had a bereavement?

(Pauline, mother, homicide group)

What is it that relatives are grieving for? There are a number of losses that they describe. First, relatives might lose the offender and their relationship with the offender, particularly if there is a long prison sentence. Second, their hopes and dreams for the offender, particularly when the relative is a parent and a long prison sentence has been given or is anticipated. One father during fieldwork described how his hopes for his son to have a good job, a house of his own and get married and have children were shattered when his son was given a life sentence for murder.

There might also be the loss of the victim, particularly if they were within their family or immediate circle. An obvious loss in the case of homicide, but also with violent or sexual offences when the victim might be removed from the family, or decide to remove themselves. There may be the loss of other relatives, such as grandchildren. One

interviewee whose daughter was convicted of violent offences against her son, the interviewee's grandchild, was grieving the loss of that grandchild who had been removed to the care of social services and adopted with no further contact with his birth family:

J: Losing my grandson. That hurts, he's out there somewhere and I can't get to him. . . I've got a room in the house, I know it sounds morbid [crying] but it's the only way I can cope with it, it's dedicated to Gareth. He's got clothes hanging in the wardrobe, he's got a cot, highchair, potty and toys on the floor and curtains up.

R: You think of that as his room?

J: That's Gareth's room.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

Relationships with others might also be lost. There are many examples of participants losing friends, and there may be conflict within the family over supporting or not supporting the offender. Two mothers had lost relationships with their other adult children, the siblings of their offending sons, because of their decision to support their sons. There might be consequential practical losses of a job, finances, a home, and of time which is now devoted to the offender and his or her needs. One fieldwork participant said she was unable to work because her son's conviction for murder was so shattering and as a consequence had to resign from her job as a social worker and lost her house.

Anne described her own experience of these losses and the experience of the numerous other families of serious offenders she has counselled. Anne is a bereavement counsellor for Cruse⁵⁶ and draws parallels between this and her role in Aftermath. She grieved for the loss of her son and her relationship with him and for the loss of his future when he was convicted of rape:

R: Are there similarities between bereavement counselling with Cruse and counselling with Aftermath?

⁵⁶ Cruse Bereavement Care is the national UK charity that supports those who have experienced bereavement.

A: Very much so, I think it's, certainly for me it was a grieving process, even to the point that I could see a turning point after two years, which they say is the norm for grieving, you know, it takes two years. It was the same, it was two years before I started to sort of improve, because you've lost, I lost my son as I knew him, I lost my son, this is how I saw it at the time, life was never going to be the same between us again, I'd lost his future, I thought his future had gone, there was going to be no future, so very, very much the same, very much the same. Many, many times I felt that it would have been easier if he had died, because in my own mind he was dead, because everything had gone, and yet there was all the shame and the guilt and everything else that came with it, you know, so I couldn't get over it like I would if he died.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

One Aftermath Chairperson described this as a 'living death': relatives would experience many of the emotions of bereavement, but with constant reminders as they supported the offender through the criminal justice process, prison sentence and beyond.

Loss of the assumptive world

One of the overwhelming losses described by relatives is the loss of security, of what they believed in and life as they knew it, and a consequent loss of identity and their sense of self. Traumatic events involve a disruption of meaning, and of the framework we use to understand the world, which has been described as a 'loss of the assumptive world' (Murray-Parkes 1971; Murray-Parkes 1975). The psychological impact of trauma and its aftermath has been analysed further by Janoff-Bulman who describes this impact as one of 'shattered assumptions', and has found similarities across different victim populations (Janoff-Bulman 1992). She suggests that we hold three core global beliefs about ourselves and the external world which are shattered by traumatic events: the world is benevolent, the world is meaningful, the self is worthy: '. . . in our world bad things happen infrequently, and when they do, they don't happen to us; they happen in accordance with certain principles, and we are personally protected because of who we are or what we do' (Janoff-Bulman 1992: 51). We all have a basic 'cognitive conservatism' and tend to discount anything that challenges how we see the world. This stands us in good stead most of the time and helps us to understand the world and organise our experience. Normal change in our cognitive schema would be slow and gradual and not threaten its stability, but the change wrought by traumatic events is

sudden and shattering: ‘the abrupt disintegration of one’s inner world’ (Janoff-Bulman 1992: 63).

Janoff-Bulman’s analysis is useful for understanding the traumatic impact described by relatives. Again and again interviewees and fieldwork participants described how their world had fallen apart, how life as they knew it had ended and how they felt their previous life experience had not prepared them for coping with something like this. The initial traumatic impact is partly to do with this anomie and loss of security which leaves relatives asking why this has happened to them and what they have done to deserve it, and searching to restore a sense of meaning to their lives. Celia likened the consequences that follow discovery of the offence to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder⁵⁷ and describes the symptoms in those she has supported:

That’s when I got involved with the [counselling] training side of Aftermath, learning about the people that I share with, who never, ever were alcoholics, who previously had never taken drugs, who previously were not anorexic, were not bulimic, who previously were not agoraphobic and I began to realise wow, it isn’t just about the offence and the offender, the effects on the families are devastating, and communication, how families are literally ripped apart because of an offence being committed. . . And then I began to realise the effects on the family. People couldn’t sleep, couldn’t eat, turned to drink, turned to drugs, had no-one to talk to, in isolation, and there have been several times when I’ve been sharing with people on the telephone and I have begun to realise that this is more than trauma, this is now what people are referring to as Post Traumatic Distress that the families suffer. I’m not saying everybody, but my experience tells me that most people, that is the severity. If I could find anything else that could allow you to see the impact, that’s what common, language that we use today, that’s the thing that would come closest to my experience of other families.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

⁵⁷ The description of PTSD in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association (DSM-III-R) would be an appealing one to relatives: “The essential feature of this disorder is the development of characteristic symptoms following a psychologically distressing event that is outside the normal range of human experience. . . . The stressor producing this syndrome would be markedly distressing to almost anyone, and is usually experienced with intense fear, terror and helplessness. The characteristic symptoms involve re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoidance of stimuli associated with the event or numbing of general responsiveness, and increased arousal. The diagnosis is not made if the disturbance lasts less than a month.” (Janoff-Bulman 1992: 49)

A further distinction is made in Janoff-Bulman's study between traumatic events which are 'acts of God', and those for which a perpetrator is responsible. This is a difficult distinction for relatives of serious offenders. While a perpetrator is responsible for the offence, the relative is not the primary victim in the cases in this study (although of course this is not always the case) and apportioning blame for their circumstances is therefore not straightforward and relatives might struggle with ambivalent feelings. On the one hand they want to care for and support the offender, and not heap blame upon him or her, but on the other might feel anger for the position they find themselves in following the offender's actions:

And I feel that if he would have opened up to me, maybe I would have been able to help him. Maybe if there was something I could have got treatment for him. But I don't know, I don't know, I'm left in the dark about this and this is what's annoying me. This is what's making me so angry inside. I'm very angry. I'm very, very angry with him. My anger won't go away. And I think this anger must be what's really eating at me, not doing me any good whatsoever.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Anger towards the offender was expressed by fewer participants than might be expected. It may be an emotion that relatives feel privately but do not feel comfortable expressing publicly. Relatives may find their need to defend their relative conflicting with the anger they feel, as was the case with Anne:

I suppose in a way I was always trying to protect [my son] Neil, because letting people know how I felt, they were always going to blame Neil, and I didn't want that.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

At the time of discovery relatives are in a difficult stage. Life as they know it has been destroyed, thrown into confusion, and they do not yet know what it will be replaced with. All their thoughts and energies are devoted to the predicament of the offender and what will happen to them.

So how does life change following discovery of the offence? The families in this study say life is entirely changed; life after discovery of the offence is completely different to life before. From interviews, observations and fieldwork conversations it has been possible to discern five broad stages through which relatives progress: *initial impact stage*; *early coping stage*; *accommodation*; *helping others*; and *moving on*⁵⁸. This model has been constructed for the purpose of summarising the experience of many relatives, and there will of course be individual variation which is not reflected, but broadly all participants made some progress from the initial shock of discovery to a point where they are beginning to cope, many progressed to the point where they were able to help others and some were able to consider the whole matter to be in the past, though they were in the minority among participants in this study.

Most participants described discovery of the offence as the lowest point, often followed by a further low point when their relative is sentenced:

I suppose that at the end of the day it's not going to be as bad as the day you first hear that it's happened. You know, is anything going to be? And the day that the sentence comes out, what's going to be worse than that? I don't know.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

The time frame for progression through these stages varies from individual to individual and will depend on their particular circumstances. Some relatives mark time according to external events and particularly the criminal justice process. This is predominantly so for those who can see an end to a prison sentence. Gill's husband was sentenced to two years; for her, life began again as they slowly repaired their family life on his release. For others, such as Celia, Hilda and Pauline, their relatives are held indefinitely in special hospitals. They have made progress in an emotional sense even though they cannot plan for their relative's release. An important part of this progress is the gradual

⁵⁸ The traumatic impact and moving on to the point of being able to help others is part of Aftermath's collective narrative (see chapter seven), and these five stages are based upon descriptions given by participants, but the definition of the stages and the labels attached are mine.

re-building of relatives' assumptive worlds and the integration of the traumatic event into their new way of understanding the world.

Not all relatives will pass through all stages. Some may remain feeling traumatised for a considerable time; some may not feel able to offer help to others at any point; others might move on more quickly, for example if they decide not to support the offender. The stages are broadly conceived and may disguise the many smaller stages through which relatives pass and the different emotions relatives experience in each stage. Caution needs to be taken with imposing a rigid framework on relatives' experience. At one Aftermath seminar weekend a speaker who was a community psychiatric nurse showed the audience a 'grief wheel' which she suggested captured relatives' experience, with the stages of *disbelief*, *guilt*, *anger*, *acceptance* and *normal functioning*. This provoked a strong reaction from some audience members who were not happy with the idea of this emotional cycle being imposed on their experience, and two commented: "As a mother of a child who has committed murder you never fully accept it - you never get to the end of that wheel!" and "I'm still in that anger stage and that's after 19 years". The stages suggested here are not intended to capture single emotions, and it would also be inaccurate to portray relatives' progress through these stages as straightforward and linear in all cases. Some participants in this study, for example, had reached a stage of helping others and were 'knocked back' by events which left them needing a higher level of support. However, the stages are useful for understanding changes that occur with the passage of time from discovery of the offence, and the gradual improvement for most relatives following that low point.

Initial impact stage: Life in disarray

Nancy's emotions are characteristic of those in the initial impact stage. Nancy's husband had only recently been imprisoned at the time of the interview:

[My life has] just been turned upside down. I feel as though I'm in a void. I've lost my husband, I can't grieve for him because he's alive. I have contact with him but my life's been put on hold. It's as though you were in a tunnel and there's no light. When this happened all my friends, my personal friends, didn't want to know me.

(Nancy, wife, sex offence group)

For Anne, this first stage was incapacitating and lasted for two or three years:

R: What about when it happened? What was the effect on your life then?

A: Oh God, I wouldn't go, I wouldn't go to the village, I wouldn't go, if I had to do anything out the front I'd just keep my head down, if anybody walked past. It's debilitating, it's the only way I can describe it, just going through the motions. I wished at that time, I'm a coward, if there had been a painless way of committing suicide I'd have done it. You just can't see any way out, can't see how anything can get any better for you, it's just too much to bear. . .

R: How long did that go on for, feeling like that?

A: Probably two or three years. Probably two years before I started to feel a little better. . . I feel such a lot better; you really do put it behind you. . . As I got stronger I suppose, you know.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Anne was one of several interviewees who mentioned contemplating suicide during this stage. A letter to the Aftermath newsletter in March 1998 stated: "I felt like committing suicide several times, but [my Aftermath supporter] was there to help me . . . I'm sure I would be dead right now without her help and support." Others described suffering depression and other mental health problems and needing to seek treatment:

I'd never been to the doctor for years but I did, I was in rather a bad state and she put me on some anti-depressants. And I couldn't seem to stop crying wherever I went. I'd be walking down the street and then I would, people would look at me because I was just so emotional, you know, I just, it was dreadful. It was you know, I'd go to the prison and then I'd leave there and go home and I couldn't even cook a meal because I thought how can I eat, how can I eat this food when he's in there, shut up in isolation?

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Harriet describes how she felt during this stage. Based on her experience of supporting other Aftermath members, she felt this stage lasted even longer:

It was just a nightmare time, I couldn't believe it was happening . . . you actually feel you're going to go mad; the brain cannot take this degree of trauma. It will either explode or I shall go mad . . . They say it takes two years with a bereavement, I would say it takes four [years] before

the family starts to come to terms and pick up their lives a little bit and start to live for themselves, and not just one hundred percent for the person inside [prison].

(Harriet, mother, sex offence group)

There are a number of characteristic responses to a traumatic event: denial, numbing, processes of avoidance, the use of alcohol and drugs and re-experiencing the event through intrusive recollections or distressing dreams (Janoff-Bulman 1992), any of which might be experienced by relatives in this stage. Participants who acted as telephone supporters to relatives in this stage described receiving telephone calls in the early hours of the morning from relatives who were desperate and did not know where else to turn. Relatives in this stage have experienced a shattering of their assumptive world, but have not yet had the chance to assimilate this new knowledge.

Early coping stage: The dust settles

After a period of time, relatives begin to feel they are starting to cope. This is not to suggest their difficulties are over, rather that they begin to realise they are managing better and can see some 'light at the end of the tunnel'. For Monica, this was when the criminal justice process was resolved, which took several months:

I don't think there was a particular turning point, although having said that I think once it was dealt with, once we knew what was going to happen, but it was just slowly, slowly, slowly, things got a bit better.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

As Anne's quotation shows above, it took two or three years to feel that she was coping; Harriet suggested it took four.

An important part of coping is beginning to re-build a viable assumptive world, and Janoff-Bulman outlines three strategies for doing this: *comparison process*; *self-blame*; and *transforming the victimisation by emphasising the benefits for self and others*. She says these processes enable a bridge to be built between the old and the new and help individuals build a new assumptive world, finding benevolence, meaning and self-worth. By using the strategy of making comparisons between ourselves and others we are able to see that it 'could have been worse'. This was one of a number of strategies used by relatives in this study to make sense of events (see chapter five). Janoff-Bulman

suggests that self-blame can have a positive function by minimising the threat to an individual's conceptual system by helping them make sense of their circumstances and answer the question 'why me?' As we shall see in the next chapter, relatives are blamed by others and struggle with self-blame across a number of dimensions. The final strategy is one of transforming the traumatic event to emphasise its positive benefits to the self and others and to view it as serving some purpose: relatives in the *accommodation* stage are most likely to emphasise benefits to the self, and in the *helping others* stage to emphasise benefits to others.

Accommodation

In this stage relatives are successfully continuing to re-build a viable assumptive world. In terms of external events, a prison sentence might end or relatives might settle into a pattern of regular prison visiting and supporting the offender and assimilate this into their lives. Again, this is not to say their difficulties are over, and despite accommodating to their circumstances many still find those circumstances distressing, particularly when faced with painful reminders. Accommodation is not the same as acceptance (in the grief wheel example above); relatives often stressed they could never accept what the offender had done. This is the stage at which benefits to the self of the traumatic experience they have been through are most likely to be stressed. I was surprised at the number of interviewees who when asked whether their experiences had affected their self-image stressed positive changes (see chapter four). Accommodation does not mean a return to life before discovery of the offence; events have been life-changing and relatives describe a new life rather than a return to an old one. As Janoff-Bulman says, when an assumptive world is re-built after a traumatic event it is a new way of understanding rather than a return to the old one: 'Trauma survivors return to a state of health; they do not, however, go back to where they began.' (Janoff-Bulman 1992: 169).

Helping others stage

There is a point at which some relatives feel able to offer help to others, indeed this is an important principle of most self-help groups. This stage is particularly relevant to those who join a self-help group such as Aftermath and therefore have the opportunity

to help others in similar circumstances. As participants have said, it is unlikely they would meet another relative of a serious offender in their daily lives, or certainly one of whom they would be aware; this is not a topic of casual chit-chat. However, some participants were asked to offer support to others in a similar situation outside of the self-help setting, for example one mother was asked to do so by her priest.

During fieldwork I listened to discussions between Aftermath members about the difficulty of placing a fixed time limit on when members would be ready to become supporters. Aftermath as an organisation recognises that a period of time must pass from discovery of the offence before members will be able to offer help to others, but recognises there will be individual variation in how long this should be. This is not a problem specific to families of serious offenders; one interviewee had been involved with Compassionate Friends which asks for a three and a half year gap from the death of a child before its members can support others and another had been involved with the adoption charity NORCAP⁵⁹ which, she explained, specifies that members must be one year post-reunion before they can support other adoptees: “so things have had a chance to settle”.

Helping others can happen more informally within the self-help setting, for example through conversations at groups or informal gatherings, and in the case of Aftermath at ‘lunches’. Gill describes how helping new members makes her realise how far she’s progressed:

R: What do you get from the lunches?

G: First and foremost I feel like they’re part of my family. And when new people come in, it’s so great and so terrible at the same time to see people in the state that you were, back down the line. It gives you such a push to say ‘yes, you were there, look how you’ve come on, you can go further’. And it also, when you get talking to people, you feel sometimes that you’ve helped them by saying to them, ‘yes here was I, two or three years ago’, and I think it helps them, although not in the first stages, because nobody can really help you, you just need to be able to have somebody there.

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

⁵⁹ A national charity which supports adults affected by adoption.

This is the stage where relatives are most likely to use Janoff-Bulman's strategy of transforming their experience to stress the positive benefits to others; if they are able to help others through the initial impact stage they can view their own suffering as having a purpose.

Moving on

Moving on can mean different things to different people. On an emotional level, many of the participants for whom discovery of the offence was some years ago had moved on to a point where they say they were coping, where the offender and his or her needs were not their main preoccupation, and where they felt more 'at peace'. As Anne says in the quotation above 'I feel such a lot better, you really do put it behind you'. Angela describes how she has moved on emotionally:

You know, now I separate, separate, do you know what I mean? Now I can take it out of the box. I can open the door, take it out of the box and look at it and it don't hurt as much as it did. I mean I'm not saying I still don't get emotional about it and don't cry 'cause I do. And I always will. But I can, I've sectioned it off in me brain and I shut the door and I can open the door now when I choose to open the door. And I can open the box and look at the contents and put them back. You know, that's the way that I see it. I can put it back in the cupboard and shut the door and leave it, whereas at one point I couldn't. At the beginning I couldn't.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

However, relatives do not describe moving back to life as it was before the offence. Their life, and they themselves, have been changed forever. Those with relatives serving indeterminate sentences in special hospitals or prisons will not be able to move on in a physical, external sense, particularly if they continue to support the offender and devote time to this. Many relatives say they think these events and their repercussions will always remain part of their lives; as one participant said 'you're never free of it'. Even when they have moved on they will occasionally be reminded and taken back to those feelings.

Sometimes reminders are found in the minutiae of daily life. One fieldwork participant said he couldn't watch violent television programmes or films after his nephew was convicted of a killing. Language can also hold vivid reminders:

Yeah, yeah, I couldn't watch the television or read anything, and I still hate the word 'rape'. I hate it, I find it very difficult to say even when it's rape in a field! You know, I can't call it that, I say 'look at that lovely yellow stuff over there!' I can't bring myself sometimes to say the word.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Very often I hear mothers shouting at the children, 'if you don't come here and do as I tell you I'll bloody well kill you!' And do they really mean it? Do they know what they're saying when they say that?

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

Several interviewees and fieldwork participants talked about significant anniversaries which brought reminders and were times when memories come flooding back, even many years later. Celia described how there were many anniversaries that were still important to her even eight years after the offence, and to those she had supported in Aftermath:

So you have the anniversary of the killing, the anniversary of the first court, you have the anniversary of the Crown Court, you have the anniversary of the sentencing.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

Moving on might happen for some families after a prison sentence has been served. Once families no longer need to deal with any aspect of the criminal justice process, they might feel the worst is over. Others may feel that the repercussions remain long after the prison sentence and continue to need support and/or want to help others. Repercussions are likely to be ongoing for those related to lifers or those related to sex offenders who might be subject to further restrictions on release from prison⁶⁰. There may be new difficulties experienced on release such as re-grouping as a family, re-negotiating family responsibilities, and receiving little support. Families might also be affected by employment problems, particularly likely when a serious offender is released from prison, or other problems because of the seriousness of the offence, such as whether a sex offender can return to the same area. In the long-term, relatives worry what they will tell the children as they grow up, and some interviewees have even mentioned concern over what to tell their grandchildren in the future.

⁶⁰ Several interviewees were preoccupied with the restrictions that would follow the offender being placed on the sex offenders' register and how these would affect their lives.

For some relatives there is a final stage of moving on to the point where being a relative of a serious offender is no longer the main focus of their lives. In Clare's case this was because her relationship with her husband had ended when he was released from a prison sentence for sexual offences. She had begun a new relationship, and although she remained an active member of Aftermath for some years, when I interviewed her she was contemplating leaving the organisation and at time of writing she had done so. She explained her reasons for wanting to leave:

I feel I've come to a point in my life where I want to move on. And I find that still going to Aftermath, still going to the lunches, still being on the management committee, I find that it keeps regurgitating everything. And I think up to a certain point that's helpful as part of the therapeutic process you're going through. But I think I might have got to the stage now where I'm thinking that's not helpful to me anymore. I want to move on, I want to be able to leave some of that behind me now. I don't want to keep regurgitating, and with the best will in the world, just by being involved in it, you can't help but keep doing that.

(Clare, wife, sex offence group)

Ada says that her son's offending and its consequences are behind her and that she and her husband have now moved on. Her son was released from a fifteen year sentence for rape eighteen months ago:

Yes, it's gone, it's gone. It's in the era that's passed. . . We never talk about it now, its gone. We're getting on with what life we have left, we're getting on with it.

(Ada, mother, rape group)

Despite this, Ada described ongoing consequences in her interview, including being estranged from her daughter as a result of conflict over the support given to her son during his sentence and worries about her relationship with her son since his release.

Negotiating family responsibilities

A further consequence of discovery of a serious offender in the family is a change in family responsibilities and obligations. One member of the offender's family, usually

their wife or mother, will primarily be concerned with the offender's needs and welfare and offering support and often additionally offering support to other family members. This process begins at discovery and continues through the criminal justice process and the subsequent imprisonment of the offender. Participants in this study were usually the main supporter of the offender, offering emotional support to him or her and taking a role throughout the criminal justice process. This might include liaising with solicitors, dealing with the police during the investigation, attending court, fending off the media, and supporting the offender during imprisonment.

As Janet Finch explains in her book *Family Obligations and Social Change* (Finch 1989), kin responsibilities are continually negotiated. Kin relationships are distinctive from other relationships because of a sense of obligation; however, this does not operate on the basis of 'rules' but rather 'normative guidelines' which help a relative to work out what to do, rather than tell them what to do. Relationships have their own history and character which come in to play when people negotiate responsibilities. Although assistance cannot be predicted, there are patterns to be found, one example of which is that women have greater involvement than most men in kinship exchanges of assistance. At times of disruption kin responsibilities are re-negotiated; discovery and imprisonment are examples of such times.

Behind negotiations about family responsibilities is the principal of reciprocity, an expectation that assistance should flow in two directions and that family members should not be in the position of receiving without giving back in return. This giving back, however, can occur over a long period of time or even to other family members; in this way a pattern of commitments are created over a period of time and Finch uses a 'balance sheet' metaphor in this respect. This may depend, however, on genealogical distance: 'with husband-wife and parent-child relationships being those most likely to be able to tolerate a one-way flow for quite long periods' (Finch 1989: 165-6). Geographical distance does not necessarily weaken the giving of support, a point that is made by Finch in a discussion of geographical mobility, but is important to understanding support given to prisoners by their relatives. There is clearly some effect on the kind of support that can be given and on opportunities for interaction, but '... what counts as 'near enough' or 'too far away' for a particular obligation to be honoured is some mixture of practical constraints and a sense of how compelling is that

particular responsibility. In principle, geographical distance may simply lead to finding different ways of fulfilling a particular obligation . . . rather than abandoning it.' (Finch 1989: 95). Practical, financial and emotional support can flow between kin across long distances, as they do when relatives support prisoners.

Gender is important to an understanding of kin responsibilities and obligations and 'most research studies suggest sharing practical support is more characteristic of women', which is not surprising considering that it is mostly women responsible for caring for dependent family members and running households; women play a much more active role in family life than men (Finch 1989: 32). There tends to be a pattern in division of responsibilities by gender where men are primarily responsible for the financial sphere and women for the care of family members. Finch suggests this can be explained by three factors: women have different access to resources, particularly financial ones; in the domestic division of labour men and women are given different responsibilities; and men and women's lives are often organised differently so that women are more likely to be able to offer the time and domestic labour involved in caring for others. We know, for example, that women are much more likely to work part-time. This leads to a 'built-in tendency for caring responsibilities to fall on women' (Finch 1989: 53). In this study the primary supporters of offenders were all women, and although it is difficult to assess the role of men in families without directly interviewing them, from the descriptions given by participants most men were not involved to anything like the same extent.

I would suggest that a broader definition of informal care is needed to understand the primary support given to serious offenders by their relatives. Informal care by kin is often defined quite narrowly in terms of physical care given within the home. Relatives of serious offenders provide considerable emotional and practical support after discovery when caring for the offender⁶¹. A distinction is made in the literature on informal caring between 'caring for' and 'caring about'. The distinction is used often,

⁶¹ It is interesting to draw comparisons to other types of caring offered by kin. There have been many studies evaluating the 'burden' or impact of caring for a mentally ill family member which have drawn attention to the various spheres of life which are affected. Perring et al. review this literature and also call for a broader definition of informal care to encompass that given by relatives of those with mental illness (Perring et al. 1990)

but as Morgan says, it is often easier to make in theory than in practice. He emphasises the interaction between the two:

In the context of caring the interplay between caring for and caring about could readily be redescribed as emotional labour. What the woman gives in this work is emotion as much as any kind of physical labour, while she is also supposed to be able to handle the emotions and tensions on the part of the cared for both individually and in relation to other members of the family.

(Morgan 1996: 105)

Emotional labour would be a good description of what the women in this study were providing. As we shall see, their lives were often organised around the offender throughout the criminal justice process, while at the same time continuing with other caring responsibilities and putting the needs of others first. Organising one's life around an offender will vary according to kin relationship. For mothers supporting adult children this might mean reverting to an earlier state of affairs. One interviewee, for example, organised her life around her son who was in his fifties and serving a prison sentence for sex offences, visiting him every two weeks, shopping for items he needed sending in and also sending him money, writing regularly and generally being his first point of contact for any difficulties. She also cared for his son, her grandson, who was a young adult and lived with her. Wives described organising their life around the needs of the offender, again visiting, shopping and sending in money, but also writing regularly and waiting in the home for phone calls. One interviewee described how she would send a letter every day, which she would start writing before she went to bed and finish when she got up. This helped her to feel as if her partner was with her throughout the day.

In addition, women often described being the emotional lynch-pin in the family. Angela, for example, described how she never cried in front of her children and felt she needed to be strong to support them and support her husband when he was accused of child sex offences:

I had to sort of keep going, I had to keep the family together because one of the things that I felt was that's why this was done was to break my family up and that wasn't going to happen. They was no way they were going to split my family, because that's what they wanted to achieve and they didn't.

So it was important that I kept going. If I hadn't kept going then everybody else wouldn't. And everybody looks to mum, 'mum'll do it. Me mum's alright, me mum's alright so we'll be alright because me mum's alright'. And I think that's in any situation, any sort of, you know, any sort of stress the family goes under, if your mother can cope then you know, then you're alright.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

Arber and Gilbert make a distinction between two ideal types of caring trajectories. One of these comes from 'lifelong' co-residence where a relationship changes to one of dependency, such as taking care of one's elderly spouse. Caring here is 'largely by default' and is just as likely to be done by men as women. The second trajectory involves decisions and an element of choice about caring, and the examples given are when an elderly person joins a carer's household or when care for someone in another household is undertaken and: 'where decisions about caring are made, the role of kinship obligations, which in our society are profoundly gendered, become paramount (Finch 1989; Qureshi and Walker 1989)' (Arber and Gilbert 1989: 323); this is the type of caring that women are more likely to take on and it is this trajectory that is interesting for the purposes of this study, if we take a broader definition of care to encompass the support offered to serious offenders by relatives. Decisions are made after discovery of the offence about whether to support the offender, what support should be offered, and by whom; given the circumstances, it is less likely to happen by default and there are examples from participants in this study of decisions not to support, and conflict between family members over decisions to support.

There is also some evidence to suggest that women in middle generations might be in a position of giving assistance to those in generations above and below. The phrase 'women in the middle' has been used to describe them (Brody 1981). Brody is referring to families with three adult generations where women in the second generation are supporting both elderly relatives and adult children in the early stages of childrearing and would therefore be giving more assistance than they are receiving. Finch points to this study and says she is not suggesting that this happens in all cases, but rather that it is a further possibility, particularly given contemporary demographic conditions (Finch and Mason 1993). Certainly the women in this study often had considerable caring responsibilities. There were only four interviewees who did not describe any other caring responsibilities, three of these lived alone and one lived with her husband (not

the father of her offending son) who she described very much as her supporter. Another seven had other adult children, but from their descriptions had relationships with these children that did not require a high level of support. The remaining twenty-one interviewees all described considerable responsibilities that occupied much of their time in addition to caring for the offender. Sixteen of these had adult children and described the support they gave them; ten had children under the age of sixteen, of which six were single parents. Fourteen had grandchildren, and in some cases were their primary carers. In addition, supportive relationships were described with nieces and nephews, and with elderly parents.

Supporting through the criminal justice process

Relatives usually have to deal with the various stages of the criminal justice process: police investigation, legal process, court and sentencing and the prison sentence, and possibly probation services afterwards⁶². Although the focus of the prisoners' families literature is primarily on imprisonment, it is important to look at the whole process; relatives are often very involved with each stage of the investigation and some cases can take years to process from discovery to sentencing. Relatives reported mixed experiences with the police. Some of these experiences were very negative, but even relatives who reported these often spoke of particular officers who had treated them well. Angela's husband was eventually cleared of alleged sex offences against his (now adult) nieces at Crown Court. Angela had experience with the police as the mother of a victim of sexual abuse, but when she had to interact with them as the wife of the accused she felt that her treatment was strikingly different:

R: Tell me about your experiences with [the police] during the investigation.

A: With the police? They were very hostile, the top one in particular, was very hostile . . . they interviewed me at my solicitor's. I told them I won't be interviewed anywhere else. And the policewoman they sent to interview me was quite arrogant. She had the attitude that it had to come out. But it didn't happen, so how could it come out? The policeman in

⁶² Although relatives in this study reported minimal contact with probation services. Some relatives sought contact, but found probation services were limited in the extent to which they were prepared to work with families.

charge of the case, the way he conducted himself at the trial was horrendous. He just stood laughing and joking with the witnesses. I was actually attacked in the court foyer on the Monday by one of the [alleged victims], and he stood there laughing. He stood there grinning with his arms folded, didn't go to my assistance or anything. My barrister reported him for his conduct in the court buildings. He said that the appalling way he'd carried out, carried himself in the courts that week, was noticed.

R: How do you think the police saw you?

A: As a sex abuser's wife. That's how they saw me. . . I always said to them, but he's innocent. And they just laughed at me. You know, it weren't things they said, it was their attitude and the way they looked at me and you know, everything.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

Another example of police insensitivity came from Ada. When her son was arrested for three rapes he was living at home with his parents. The police took away items of his clothing, but when they were returned to her she found an envelope amongst his clothing containing the nail clippings of one of the rape victims. Many relatives had their houses searched. Most were sympathetic to the role of the police investigating a crime, but some felt they were over-zealous in their searching and all those who had their houses searched commented on the mess that was left afterwards for the relatives to clean up. Lorraine was of the opinion that the police were just carrying out their job:

R: And how do you think the police saw you? How did they treat you?

L: I can't say they treated me bad, but there again I've never seen, how do the police treat you bad? Or how do the police treat you good? That is something I've never experienced, so I can't say. I mean they never come in and battered me up! You know, but they also never came in and let me sit down and make a nice cup of tea, you know, and find out what's going on. You know, it was just something like, you know when you see them go in, look around or whatever and do their searching, and they're all there going through all your personal things, you know, and you don't know what's going on.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

Some relatives, such as Monica, experienced very good treatment and understanding from the police. Overall, a lack of consistency in how the relatives were treated was reported; it seemed to very much depend upon the personalities and inclinations of

individual officers⁶³. Relatives of serious offenders are often subject to blame (see chapter four) and some felt this was evident in their treatment from the police.

The court experience and sentencing are usually the second most significant events after discovery of the offence for relatives. Frances, for example, described how she managed to cope between discovery of the offence and the court case, but was admitted to a psychiatric hospital when her husband was imprisoned for a child sex offence. Aftermath offers court support to families where possible because this can be such a difficult and sometimes frightening time. Other Aftermath members who have been through the experience accompany the relatives to give them emotional support and to provide information about what is likely to happen, the rituals involved and how to avoid the press:

On an emotional level, families can very often experience the trauma of facing the horrific gravity of the crime, alongside the complexities of the judicial system. Many families have never been inside a courtroom and find they are experiencing a system that is totally alien to them. Having an Aftermath supporter by their side means that many practical issues can be dealt with for them. This, along with the emotional support offered has proven to be invaluable.

(Aftermath 2000: 4)

Not all relatives attend court; some choose not to, others are asked not to by the offender⁶⁴. Some relatives have to attend in a different capacity, as witnesses, which can mean they are not able to observe all of the case.

For many relatives one of the hardest things was the vulnerability of the offender sitting in the dock and their concerns for their welfare:

R: How did you feel when you attended court?

⁶³ It is very difficult to judge exactly how relatives were treated by the police. This study relies on the accounts and perceptions of relatives; more information about the offence, the investigation and their encounters with the police would be needed in order to make a proper judgement.

⁶⁴ This might be because the offender does not want them to know details of what has happened or because they are concerned about possible repercussions from the victims or the victim's family or associates.

I was very, at the beginning I was upset, because of Caroline being remanded in custody, because I was fearful for her, fearful for her physical survival. And I, it was horrible not being able to visit with her or touch her, because they have these glass screens up, and she looked so little, and you can't see in that picture but she's taller than me and she's awfully skinny, you know, and she looked so tiny and so frail, and she just looked awfully vulnerable and you didn't really feel you could look after her properly. And there were loads and loads of gutter press who were pestering me and pestering [her friends] and I got identified as her mother . . . people were looking at me simply because attention had been drawn to me, and I think I felt judged a bit, you know, because there's always this feeling that parents have done badly by children who go wrong, so I felt judged. But mainly I was just worried to death about Caroline I think.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

We went down [to see my son after he was sentenced] and oh God it was awful, and that picture stuck with me for ages because he, you do absolutely silly things when I think back on it. He'd only got trainers, you know, he was seventeen, hadn't got any proper shoes so he'd wanted proper shoes to wear to court and we'd bought him new clothes which is absolutely ridiculous, as though it makes any difference, so he'd borrowed a pair of [my husband's] shoes and I mean can you imagine? A seventeen year old wearing a fifty year old's shoes and I just picture, I sat next to him in the cell, and we clung to each other, and that picture, that looking down and seeing these stupid shoes on his feet as though they were going to make any difference. And I kept picturing him putting them on in his cell that morning getting dressed and putting on these ridiculous shoes because he thought that that's what he should do, wear shoes, and that picture of those shoes stuck with me for ages. I threw them out, I couldn't bear to look at them, because I could see, you know, us clinging on to each other. Those shoes.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Some participants found themselves interacting with associates of the victim in court, and two interviewees described how they were verbally abused. Most participants described feeling in shock at hearing their relative's sentence; several said they collapsed in court:

After the judge said his piece and he went into his room, he came out, all I heard him turn around and say was 'four years'. I don't know what happened after that, I just was out of it, I collapsed. The next minute I think all I knew after that was them telling me 'come on', and they'd got smelling salts, and they wouldn't let me see her, by this time she's already down in the dungeon, them days, that day, I don't want to live no more of those days. I don't want to see no more of those days.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

It should be noted that occasionally a prison sentence is an improvement⁶⁵. Some relatives, such as Stephanie in this study, are also primary victims of the offender or may suffer other difficulties due to the offender's poor mental health or drug addiction for which prison can bring some relief. After sentencing relatives are likely to have to adjust to a lengthy prison sentence, new knowledge about the offender and what happened from the court, and either the offender's admission of guilt or the belief of others in his or her guilt.

Supporting a prisoner

Speak kindly stranger when you pass the prison
On your busy journey past its gates
For did you know
And then again how would you?
There are those who live their lives
And those who wait.

(Poem by a member in Aftermath newsletter March 1998)

Supporting a relative in prison or a special hospital makes particular demands and relatives described many of the difficulties that appear in the prisoners' families literature associated with prison visiting: demands on finances, time, and maintaining ties (see chapter one). Participants often described devoting time to letter writing, visiting, waiting for telephone calls and shopping for the prisoner and just generally organising their lives around the needs of the prisoner:

My own life had to be shelved, we had to a) try and make [my son] realise there was a reason for living and b) just try and see him through this nasty mess and everything else had to just go by the board.

(Penny, mother, rape group)

Visiting a prisoner can be expensive, particularly if they are a long way from home. Although close relatives can claim transport costs from the Assisted Prison Visits Unit, the money must be paid upfront which some find difficult. For those on a low income, meeting the needs of a relative in prison can be particularly difficult:

⁶⁵ This is perhaps more often the case than is reflected in the sample in this study. Relatives for whom the prison sentence is an improvement are less likely to support and less likely to seek help from organisations such as Aftermath, and therefore are more difficult to access.

R: And how has all of this affected your life?

J: I have to focus more on her. She keeps asking me to send things in. She doesn't realise I'm on income support, it's not a lot. When she does write, which is not very often any more, she asks for different stuff like slippers or knickers or bras or whatever. Stamps, writing paper, envelopes. And a visit to go and see her every fortnight, or whenever she sends me a VO . . . It takes three buses. It takes about three, three and a half hours.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

Prisoners generally earn very low wages and depend on those outside to supplement these in order to make purchases from the prison 'canteen' and to purchase items which they are allowed to have sent in. Participants on low incomes described going without in order to meet these needs - one fieldwork participant said she went without eating herself on visit days so she could spend the money she had on crisps and chocolate for her son. Some families particularly suffer financially if the main breadwinner is imprisoned which was the case for five wives in this study who described having to juggle finances and in two cases cope with considerable debts when their husbands were imprisoned.

Many participants worried a great deal about the prisoner, and mentioned concerns about their mental and physical health, and in some cases concerns that they might attempt suicide. Monica felt that the regime at the prison holding her daughter was far from meeting her needs:

Caroline of course was in a terrible state because by that time she was in prison and, this never ceased to astonish me, they did not have a breast pump in a women's prison and when she said she was in pain they said 'tough'. And I mean if you, when you breast feed a baby, if the baby is an hour late for a feed you're uncomfortable, she didn't have access to a breast pump for two days. And we bought one, we took it, and they would not let us in with it, they said, you know 'you've made your bed you lie in it', they were appalling. I was absolutely horrified by that prison, it was just disgusting. . . God, there's so many young women there, so many of them; I mean this must be something that comes up from time to time. . . And on her admission to the hospital wing she saw a prison doctor, who in my view ought to be struck off, who asked her if she thought she was possessed by the devil. And she sort of looked at him, and that was the sum total of her psychiatric assessment, she was never seen again by anybody.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

Some difficulties are worse for relatives of *serious* offenders and those described by participants in this study stemmed from the seriousness of the offence, their lack of prior experience of the criminal justice system, and the length of the prison sentence. Because of the seriousness of the offence, relatives had specific worries about the safety of the prisoner and some experienced difficulties when visiting. Both Monica and Jane's daughters had committed violent offences against their children. They were aware of the potential for their daughters to be victimised in prison should this be known. Monica said her daughter was moved onto main location in the prison despite her protests that she was worried for her safety, and as a result her daughter wouldn't leave her cell and she says she did not eat any food for a week because taking food into the cell was against prison regulations. Monica's daughter was eventually released and given psychiatric treatment, but Jane's daughter was still in prison when I met her and she continued to be concerned for her safety:

You get more grief in prison if you've done an offence against a child, especially a baby, than you do for any other crime. If you go to prison and you're there because you've knifed somebody, if it's an adult it's bad, but they don't think, but if you go in and it slips out that you're there because you've hurt a child, a baby, then they'll all go for you, they'll all beat you up.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

Relatives of sex offenders also expressed particular concerns for the safety of the prisoner. Even though these prisoners had been deemed vulnerable because of their offence and separated from other prisoners their status might be revealed when relatives visited, and relatives experienced particular consequences as a result:

L: But I do feel, I mean like me when I go to prison, I have to sit in the section, they're in the same room but they sit in a different section.

R: Is he on Rule 43?

L: Well, yes, cause he'll be attacked and they, you might get talking to somebody, you can't help talking to people that have got children, you might talk to the child. And then when you go in, if they say to their husband 'oh, I've been talking to that woman over there' you know, 'she's a nice lady'. And then he could turn around and say 'well don't want to talk to her, the person she's visiting is a sex offender'. And then you feel the next time you go this person won't even acknowledge you.

R: Is that something that's happened to you.

L: Oh yes, yeah.

R: Has anyone ever said anything to you?

L: No, no, no. They never said anything. But they've said aloud about it to other prisoners. Oh you know, 'those people over there, oh they're sex offenders, they're always kept separate from the other prisoners'. And this, sometimes this is very hard to cope with you know.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

R: And how do you feel when you visit? How does it make you feel?

N: Um, I think it's degrading the way you go through to the prison. With him onto the protection, on the protection side, I feel sometimes that the prison officers don't care whether the person you're visiting has come out yet. I don't know whether it's because he's probably waiting for 2, 3, 4 people because they've got to go out and fetch them separately. I don't know if that's the reason why, but sometimes I get the impression that they treat you no different to the prisoners.

R: Have you ever experienced any negative experiences towards you as somebody visiting a convicted sex offender?

N: Yes. I can actually go into the visiting centre, sit at a table, chat to the people. Nobody ever says who they're visiting, what the offence is. I can go in, and as soon as they see me go over to the R section and they go over to the other section, they know I'm on protection wing. When I come out, they avoid me like the plague.

(Nancy, wife, sex offence group)

This lady that I'm supporting, her son was in for a suspected sex offence and the mother who's an elderly lady was visiting her son and she was getting abuse from another visitor and the staff were siding with this visitor and not giving this mother any protection at all.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

Particular difficulties arise for relatives of serious offenders that have no prior experience of the criminal justice system, as Alice explains:

We are like children being taught how to handle this and to cope with it, because we, we've never done it before, have we? So you know, you teach a child how to do something, you have to teach them as parents, you know, or brothers or sisters of the criminal, what to do, because we have no experience, I had no experience of prison, of you know, a little experience of the police, just everyday, you know, phone them up for the burglar alarm

across the road, but no experience of what to do and how to deal with it. So we, somebody has to teach us, but nobody's teaching us properly are they? Because when you ring up it's as though you're expected to know how to book a visit!

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

Almost all participants had not visited a prison before. They needed to go through a process of socialisation, of learning how to do it and how to do it properly. In some instances they had been lucky enough to find Aftermath or another prisoners' families' organisation that were able to provide both formal and informal information. However, there are quite wide variations between prisons in visiting policies, so providing blanket information is difficult:

I know [another Aftermath member] and I have spoken about this because he said you can't say 'in prison this' and 'in prison that' because each prison is an island and it depends on the governor and when the governors change then things change completely as well.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

Some prisons have visitors' centres which offer a bridge between the prison and the families, helping them to navigate the complex rules and regulations. Some were just left to find out by trial and error, and participants gave numerous examples of when things went wrong. Having no prior experience of prisons and prison visiting and no informal social network to tell them how to do it, relatives did not know what they could wear, what ID would be needed, the process of visiting, where they check in, how long this will take, what they can take into the prison, what the prisoner might need them to bring such as clothing or other items, how they can get money to the prisoner, that they will be searched and what this might entail, where they will sit, what they and the prisoner will be allowed to do, how they should talk to the officers, how the officers will talk to them, and so on. Experienced prison visitors have learnt how to navigate these stages, although the pains of prison visiting remain. Novice visitors find they are constantly getting things wrong, which makes an already difficult situation much worse. Some of these mistakes can have seemingly devastating consequences such as a visit not taking place or the prisoner being left without money or other items.

Problems with prison visiting are particularly pertinent to families of serious offenders because they are likely to spend a great deal of time visiting prisons over the course of a

long sentence; some will even be prison visitors for the remainder of their lives. Prison visitors become like quasi-prisoners when visiting and are brought within the reach of the discipline of the prison with rules, regulations, searches and the submission to authority required of them (Comfort 2003). Although attempts have been made to improve the experience of prison visitors, for many it is harrowing and terrifying.

One woman described how during a visit her daughter was picked out by a drugs dog. She says her daughter had never used drugs or had any criminal involvement. The police were called and the daughter agreed to a strip search. She wanted to convince the prison officers and the police that she didn't have any drugs, because she was desperate not to have future visits jeopardised; she was six months pregnant at the time. The strip search was carried out and nothing was found, but she was told by the dog handler that the dogs never got it wrong and issued with a written warning from the prison that should it happen again she would be subject to closed visits (i.e. behind glass with no physical contact). A written complaint from her mother to the prison governor had received no reply at time of interview (one month later).

Visitors often feel that the punishment meted out to the prisoner is extended to them. Prisons have a difficult job balancing control and security issues on the one hand with rehabilitation and humanity on the other, and this balance is played out dramatically in the visits room. Visitors are often sympathetic to security issues and many interviewees mentioned this, but also do want to be treated with respect and dignity. Some prisons and prison officers achieve this more effectively than others. One mother asked in an interview why prisoners couldn't be treated like families for the duration of the visit rather than families treated like prisoners. This would be an admirable aim if security needs could also be met. Suggestions have been made during discussions with those that work in the prisoners' families arena and families themselves of how security might be improved without further infringing on visitors, such as searching prisoners thoroughly as they leave visits and searching everyone who enters the prison, including all staff.

Relatives visiting special hospitals often find the experience easier on a practical level because they are not subject to the same level of rules and constraints and more is done to facilitate contact with families. Five interviewees were in this position. However, having a relative in a special hospital brings its own set of problems, and interviewees

mentioned the indeterminate sentence length, visits being affected by the behaviour of the patient or medication side effects and their own fear of other patients:

It's very emotional having to go to Broadmoor anyway, it's not a nice place. [My son]'s got a nice habit of when you're sitting there he'll say 'don't look now, that bloke behind you, he got done for murdering two people'. He thinks it's funny, but it turns my stomach over.

(Hilda, mother, homicide group)

Furthermore there are considerably fewer special hospitals than prisons and relatives may have further to travel. For one elderly mother in this study, her poor health combined with the distance of the hospital meant she was no longer able to visit and thought it was unlikely she would ever see her son again. A difficulty reported by those visiting prisons and special hospitals was knowing what to talk about in visits. Visitors found themselves treading a difficult line between not talking about problems on the outside and worrying the prisoner, and emphasising all the positive things on the outside and reminding the prisoner of what they had lost. As a result, they ended up treading a middle line talking about mostly 'safe' subjects; one fieldwork participant drew parallels between this and hospital visiting. This brings particular problems for those trying to maintain relationships over long periods of time - and sometimes indefinitely - relying on visits, occasional telephone calls and letters as their only means of communication.

Sources of support

Most interviewees described difficulties in finding the right kind of support to help them through the difficult stages after discovery. The first source of support for relatives might be other family members, and there were many examples of participants receiving help such as lifts to the prison and money. However, participants usually felt they were givers rather than receivers of support, and where they did receive support felt they could not lean too heavily. Although they share the status of being related to the same serious offender, family members are likely to experience this differently depending on kin relationship and participants felt other family members often did not appreciate their point of view. Relatives might not want to express their feelings openly

to other family members. A study of cancer patients had a similar finding: a high proportion of sufferers did not want to confide in family members because they were worried about upsetting them (Dunkel-Schetter 1984).

Furthermore, in some cases the impact of discovery of the offence on the family was to drive members apart and cause conflict rather than bond them together in support. One mother talked at length about the conflict that arose because she and her husband decided to support her son against the wishes of her other two adult children, and how she felt resentful towards them for not standing by him. Some relatives turn to friends for support, but must deal with the problem of if, when and how to tell them, and risk rejection when they do (see chapter four). Some participants described support from their religious faith; one mother thought the support from her priest had been the most important she received. However, this support was not always forthcoming: one fieldwork participant talked in some detail about how he felt rejected by his religion when his brother was convicted of murder and an interviewee felt that people in church were staring at her when her husband was convicted of murder.

Some relatives use self-help. When they find groups such as Aftermath is an issue; many did not find Aftermath until some years after discovery of the offence, while others were lucky enough to find it earlier in the initial impact stage, and might even have had Aftermath members as court supporters. Some participants also used other prisoners' families' organisations. Relatives might need Aftermath at different times for different things and move in and out of involvement. The key point made by all participants was that Aftermath offered an opportunity to meet or communicate with others in a similar situation, something they were not able to do in their everyday lives (see chapter seven).

This chapter has looked at discovery of the offence as a life-changing, traumatic event for relatives and their progression through the stages that follow as they begin to assimilate and adjust to their new status. It has examined how relatives construct life before, during and after discovery and at the events which relatives must manage. The focus has been on how relatives construct events and it is worth considering that their accounts of discovery as traumatic also serve a purpose of negating blame, of making a point about themselves as moral actors and morally distancing themselves from the

offender. Why this should be necessary is the subject of the next chapter which considers how relatives of serious offenders experience secondary stigma.

Chapter Four: Secondary Stigma, Shame and Blame

The concept of stigma is helpful to understanding how families of serious offenders' identities are perceived as spoiled and the consequences that follow from this. The source of this stigma is their kin relationship to the offender. Goffman has described a stigma that stems from a relationship with another as *courtesy stigma*, which he says is attached to '... the individual who is related through the social structure to a stigmatized individual - a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one' (Goffman 1963: 43). Applying this to offenders' families is not new. As we have seen in chapter one, it is a common theme in the prisoners' families literature (although the emphasis is on stigma following imprisonment rather than the offence) and in Goffman's original formulation a 12 year old daughter of an ex-convict is cited as an example of someone so afflicted (Goffman 1963: 43). In this chapter I will refer to *secondary stigma* rather than *courtesy stigma*. The stigma experienced by relatives of serious offenders is more than just a stigma by association; it has its own particular qualities based upon notions of familial shame and blame which will be explored in this chapter.

The concept of stigma has entered into the language of relatives of serious offenders and was used by several participants to describe their circumstances:

L: Rebecca, who's one of the members, describes [meeting other relatives of serious offenders] as seeing that people don't have horns, which is what it's like. You feel very lonely, and, and very, what's the right word? You, you feel as though you're stigmatised.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

L: I think it's a stigma. I think that. I think people don't want to know where there's somebody in prison for a sex offence. I think that they shy away from you. They don't want to know you. They don't want to be involved. They don't want to ask you anything or be involved in any way. And it's like when someone dies and you don't know how to approach them, when you meet them, 'oh, I'm so sorry to hear' but you're always nervous meeting them, approaching them, to tell them how sorry you are, you know. I think it's that sort of a situation.

R: People don't know what to say?

L: They don't know what to say you know, and there's not much then can say anyway.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Lillian's description of her experience of stigma centres on the embarrassment of others, which as she says is comparable to reactions experienced by the bereaved. There is a key difference, however: the embarrassment of those interacting with relatives of serious offenders is coupled with shame, the basis of their stigma. This chapter examines the dimensions of relatives' secondary stigma, the consequences that follow, and their strategies for stigma management. First, issues of disclosure and secrecy are considered which confront relatives immediately after discovery.

Disclosure and Secrecy

Following discovery of the offence, participants have a new status: they are a relative of a serious offender. Their experience of secondary stigma and their strategies for managing it will depend on whether this status is known. The notion of 'awareness contexts' (Glaser and Strauss 1964) is used by May in her article about the stigma experienced by murderers' relatives because it 'offers the opportunity to understand how an individual's social status can shift between open awareness contexts, in which toxic relationships are publicly known, and closed awareness contexts, where others are incognizant of this toxicity' (May 2000: 207). However, Goffman's original study provides a useful distinction between the *discredited* and the *discreditable* which also offers this possibility. Goffman is sensitive to context in his distinction; these are not absolute qualities of a person but rather qualities of interactions and he recognises that 'a stigmatized individual is likely to have experience with both situations' (Goffman 1963: 14).

This is even so with examples of much more visible and less concealable stigma such as physical disabilities; there will be occasions when even people with these stigma 'pass' and so are discreditable rather than discredited and clearly much more so when a stigma is not readily visible. These terms are perhaps even more appropriate and relevant to this particular stigma than they are to stigma based on physical disability because of the important dimension of 'controllability' (Heatherton et al. 2000), and hence blame and

responsibility for the origin of the stigma. As we will see below, relatives of serious offenders are deemed responsible for their secondary stigma in several ways. In everyday use these terms have connotations of personal responsibility or blame in the eyes of others. Indeed, a dictionary definition of 'discredit' makes reference to causality: '1. harm to reputation (*brought discredit on the enterprise*). 2. a person or thing causing this (*he is a discredit to his family*)' (Thompson 1995). When a person's kin relationship to a serious offender is known they are discredited; when it is not known they are constantly aware of their potential to be discredited should it be known and therefore always aware of their status as discreditable.

Some relatives of serious offenders are, for a period of time, discredited in most contexts. This is usually when they live in a small community where anonymity is impossible and information is passed through informal networks and/or where they have been exposed by media coverage. The discredited have little control over information about their circumstances once it is known, and must resort instead to various strategies to manage their stigma. There was some media coverage of the offence and sentencing for most participants in this study, though it ranged from a short article in a local paper to radio, television and newspaper coverage and nation-wide saturation. This exposure exacerbated many families' difficulties:

A: I think the media coverage was bad. I mean it weren't blown all over the papers but the headlines were you know, 'sex beast', and that's hard to handle when you look at the man that you love sat there and it's him they're talking about.

R: Was it just in the local papers?

A: Yeah. The repercussions on the kids were bad. I mean it got so bad that [my husband] Dan was worried about letting them out you know, 'don't let them go to shop, make sure you know where they are all the time' because he was scared, we were both scared that they were being picked on and they were getting abuse thrown at them in the street. The youngest one had to move schools from one side of [the city] to the next, to the other side because it got, they put in the paper that Dan had been charged for rape. And Alex went to school and came home and sort of broke down, in tears, and said that this lad had said to him 'your Dad's a rapist'.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

The discreditable, however, have not suffered this exposure and therefore do have a degree of control over what is known, and as Goffman says, they need to manage information: 'To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where' (Goffman 1963: 57). So, for example, an individual might choose to exert this control and change his status from discreditable to discredited through voluntary disclosures (Goffman 1963).

A useful distinction has been made by May (2000) between the different purposes for which relatives of murderers' might disclose. Within closed awareness contexts, she says relatives have greater control over managing information. Her interviewees used four 'non-exclusive methods' to do this: *representation* where information is partially concealed, such as not disclosing the exact nature of the offence, *selective disclosure* (Herman 1993) where relatives decided in each context whether to conceal or reveal, *therapeutic disclosure* where the need for support or catharsis is paramount, and *preventative disclosure* which attempts to see off gossip or questions. Relatives' decisions about whether to conceal or reveal 'emerged within ongoing interactions' (May 2000: 213).

Relatives in this study who were discreditable would decide in different contexts whether to disclose and would use techniques similar to those described by May. The first of these interviewees describes what she calls preventative disclosure, the second describes representation:

As far as my friends and associates and people like that, I've always, the jobs that I've had, I've always told the bosses and whatever else what's gone on, so that they wouldn't pick up a newspaper and read it and not know what's going on. I haven't done this at university because I don't need to do it any more, but I would do it if I needed to do it. I did it with the principal on my access course and with the managers that I've dealt with ever since. But I can't honestly say that anybody's ducked me because of Justin, not that I know of.

(George, father, homicide group)

Oh they know he's in prison, yes but they don't know what he's in prison for. I just said it was matrimonial things that had happened you know. I didn't tell them why. I just hadn't got the courage to tell them. I can't explain. I thought well I'm living amongst these people and they're quite sort of middle-class people that I just couldn't bring myself to say

exactly why he was in prison you know? It's very hard, especially when they've got children of their own and grandchildren, you know? And on top of it all, at the particular time, there was so much in the papers and on television. Every time I put the television on, there was sex offenders. Every time I picked up the paper, it was about sex offenders.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

The main motivation for relatives to disclose to outsiders is the stress, strain and loss of intimacy associated with secrecy; the main drive to keep it secret is risk of rejection and the consequences associated with being discredited which will be outlined later in this chapter. The difficulties of keeping a stigma secret have been considered by several authors (Crocker et al. 1998; Goffman 1963; Smart and Wegner 2000). These difficulties can be either interpersonal, affecting relationships because '... every relationship obliges the related persons to exchange an appropriate amount of intimate facts about self, as evidence of trust and mutual commitment' (Goffman 1963: 108), or intrapersonal, an internal struggle with stress, strain and anxiety (Smart and Wegner 2000):

Well yes because you can't let everybody know everything. If you've got a really good friend, one of my friends knows but the others don't, it's as though I'm deceiving them all, I'm living a different life, because they say 'oh what about your ex-husband?' and I'd say 'oh he's in prison' and I can't bring myself to tell them, because I'm worried what they'll think of me.

(Stephanie, wife, homicide group)

When making decisions about disclosure, relatives must balance the difficulties of secrecy with the difficulties that might follow a change in status from discreditable to discredited, and as May (2000) has suggested, decide within each separate context.

For some relatives the strategy of secrecy is very successful; they would prefer the consequences of secrecy to what they perceive to be the possible consequences of exposure. This is particularly so when the relative lives in another area to the offender and has a different name, which was the case for some mothers of offenders who had re-married, such as Alice:

A: Yes, yes . . . I don't tell anybody, this is perhaps why I don't get support, because people don't know, very few people, no-one in my estate here knows,

R: Really?

A: No, no. My next door neighbour doesn't know, the people across, the girl who looks after my dog doesn't know . . . it isn't talked about, it just isn't discussed. . .

R: What do you say if somebody asks you?

A: Oh he's lives away, he works, he works in the government. I tell lies. Nobody really asks me, you know, somebody said, this niece said, just say he's in the prison service. Which isn't a lie.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

However, even those most successful at disguising their status will become discredited in certain contexts, and in particular during involvement with the criminal justice process and prison visiting described in the previous chapter when their secondary stigma is revealed. This was the experience of one elderly mother whose circumstances are not known in her local community:

L: They treat you, when you go to the prison, they treat you like dirt.

R: Do they?

L: Really like dirt, you know, and you've only got to say something that you don't like and 'oh well, that's just too bad, if you don't like it, write to the governor'. You know, it's, we're not the, we're not the people that have done wrong. We're innocent of these crimes but they treat us, we're like lepers in a way. You feel ashamed when you go in and you feel ashamed when you come out . . . you feel as much the criminal, you can't help it. You feel bad, you feel dirty, you feel unclean, you feel, you know, you just don't feel the person that you are for that time that you're there. And it's every week that you get this stress, so you're never really free of it. As fast as you try and get over it, you've got the night before you go thinking about it. And then when you get back, you've got the whole evening and night to go through to try and stop thinking about it. And then going back over everything all the time, you can't stop going back, thinking well how did it happen? Why did it happen? You know.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Both the discredited and the discreditable can strategically maintain various types of physical distance, though for different reasons; the former might move house or stay indoors to avoid tension or disgrace while the latter might avoid intimacy with others that could lead to an 'obligation to divulge information' (Goffman 1963: 122). Alice is

describing this second type of avoidance; her circumstances remain secret but she keeps her distance from new people she meets to avoid having to reveal more:

I tend to be, although I don't sound it, more withdrawn. Because I'm afraid of, of getting in conversation, for instance, I started to go, just last year or so, line dancing before, when I was on my own when [my husband] Clive was retired, there was a friend who was going and I went, and then she stopped going and I thought I'm going to carry on going by myself, because it was that sort of atmosphere whereby you could go by yourself because you don't have to have a partner and people are very friendly. And I did strike up an acquaintance with quite a few people actually, and who would say 'I'll call and see you' and I'd say 'oh well', but I feel as though I've held back on these overtures . . . people constantly talk about their families and their children, and I found that difficult . . . they say you know 'Our Margaret' or 'Our Tracy', or 'I've been having a day out with our. .' just in general . . . and I not only don't offer, I try to hedge around it, because I don't want anybody new in my life to ask me questions. You know, I just don't want to.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

The Dimensions of Secondary Stigma

Once relatives' status becomes known, they are likely to be stigmatised. Some of the insights from the broader literature on stigma are helpful for understanding their predicament. The literature typically focuses on types and dimensions of stigma, the consequences of stigma, and strategies for stigma management. Goffman's classic study, to which all later works refer, identifies three types of stigma: physical deformities, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigma (Goffman 1963: 14). Later authors have identified a range of dimensions of stigma, including 'concealability', 'course of the mark' (i.e. how it changes over time), 'disruptiveness', 'aesthetics', 'origin', and 'peril' (Jones et al. 1984), 'visibility' and 'controllability' (Crocker et al. 1998). Empirical studies have shown peril, i.e. the perceived danger of the stigma to others, the concealability and the origin of the mark to be particularly important dimensions (Heatherton et al. 2000).

Two of the most detailed analyses of the stigma experienced by offender's families are to be found in Fishman's study of the wives of prisoners (Fishman 1990) and May's study of murderers' relatives (May 2000). Fishman found that the extent to which wives

felt shame as a result of perceived stigmatisation depended first upon whether they were 'neophytes' (i.e. had newly become prisoners' wives) or 'old timers' (i.e. experienced prisoners' wives) and secondly upon the type of offence for which their husbands were arrested. Feelings of shame and concerns about 'encountering stigmatizing situations' were more likely for neophytes than old timers, and more likely for the wives of sex offenders. However, Fishman fails to unpick the difference between *being shamed* and *feeling ashamed* and instead describes 'feelings of shame' and 'stigmatization' without exploring what these actually mean. She says that many wives felt 'somehow guilty', but she does not consider this guilt further. She does mention that stigmatisation might follow the offence or imprisonment, rather than just imprisonment, but devotes most of her discussion to stigmatisation from imprisonment and the experience of visiting. Wives of sex offenders in her study were especially likely to describe feelings of shame and were most worried about neighbourhood gossip, but again this point is left without further exploration. Ultimately, she says wives in her study were more concerned with being separated from their husbands than they were with the stigma associated with imprisonment.

May (2000) provides a much more sophisticated analysis of the stigma experienced by relatives of murderers in her study. The source of this stigma is seen to be notions of 'familial toxicity' and 'everyday constructions of murder'. She suggests three 'meta-tactics' that were used by relatives to manage their stigma: *managing space*, where relatives would selectively avoid 'socially threatening' contexts, *managing information*, which included the various methods outlined at the start of this chapter (re-presentation, selective disclosure, therapeutic disclosure and preventative disclosure) and *self-presentation*, the attempt to influence others' impression.

Within the third strategy of self-presentation, relatives in May's study attempted to resist the stigmatising identity of 'murderer's relative' through either *dissension*, arguing that their relative should have been found guilty of manslaughter rather than murder and consequently deliberately acting contrary to expectations to express shame and penance, or *collective support*, accepting the murder verdict but managing their stigma through joining Aftermath. Dissension is close in some respects to what I have called *resistance* (see strategies for stigma management below). However, dissension in May's study was restricted to those who believed that their relatives should have been

found guilty of manslaughter rather than murder, and although they ‘felt powerful enough to act contrary to expectations to express shame and penance’, this was because they dissented in relation to the offender’s culpability; relatives in this study who used the strategy of resistance also resisted the overall apportioning of blame and shame to them as family members. As we will see, my findings about why people joined Aftermath also differed.

Family blame

The concepts of responsibility and blame are important to an analysis of secondary stigma applied through kin relationships. Those closest to the offender are likely to be most affected: ‘The problems faced by stigmatized persons spread out in waves, but of diminishing intensity.’ (Goffman 1963: 43). The power of secondary stigma is embedded in judgements of relatives’ responsibility and culpability for the offender’s actions. This is understood by May who uses the concept of ‘familial toxicity’ (Lefley 1987), ‘a moral stigma of the ‘failed family’’ (May 2000: 199) to show how relatives are themselves causally implicated. May points to the powerful message of family culpability in public discourse which influences relatives’ self-blame and perceived blame from others, and a ‘symbolic toxic relationship’, that someone from the same family must be in some sense the same whether through background or biology. This chapter examines exactly why this blame is important and how it might operate.

We know from the broader literature that the source of stigma and its ‘controllability’ are important dimensions:

The controllability of stigma directly involves the person’s responsibility for having the stigmatizing mark in the first place, as well as for maintaining or eliminating the mark. Controllability is important because people with stigmas that are perceived to be controllable are less liked and more rejected than those whose stigmas are perceived to be uncontrollable.

(Heatherton et al. 2000: 7)

Families of serious offenders are deemed responsible in particular ways for the origin of their stigma (their offending relative’s actions) and the maintenance of the stigma (their

continued association with the offender). In addition to affecting how blame is apportioned by others, each of these types also influences their own perceptions and whether they blame themselves:

The perceived controllability of stigma is also an important dimension from the perspective of stigmatized persons. The perceived controllability of the stigma, for example, affects how stigmatized people construe others' reactions to them, as well as the impact of stigma on self-esteem.

(Heatherton et al. 2000: 7)

Relatives of serious offenders are potentially made morally accountable by all those who are aware of their circumstances and therefore in a position to judge them for their relationship with the offender. Often this is those with whom they interact in their daily lives, but in high profile cases might also be those they have never met.

Powerful discourses on family responsibilities permeate all areas of family life. A description of these responsibilities can be found on the back cover of a book entitled *Building Good Families in a Changing World*:

A good family fosters the well-being of its members. They, in turn, contribute positively to the greater 'family' – the community, our society. Without good families, our lives are less than they could be. Private and social morality breaks down. Today, an uncertain and confused community must deal with the resulting greed, anger, violence, sickness and sadness. A good family is at once a port in a storm and a safe point of departure. It provides role models and sustains individuals. It nurtures and encourages personal strength and confidence. It contributes to the well-being of humanity by creating people who care about their participation as citizens. Moral initiative develops in good family life, and good families encourage positive community ethics.

(Porter 1995)

According to this, the family is the guardian of morality and responsible for its members' failings; if they deviate, the family must have failed in its functions. This message has many sources. Historically, a white, middle-class nuclear family has been presented as the normative ideal in both American and UK academic discourse (Chambers 2001). Politicians make morally crusading speeches about 'family values' and the media draw attention to failing families; teenage pregnancies, lone mothers, and

truanting children are just some examples of failure from 'bad families' to which our attention is drawn.

Motherhood and mothering have been subject to particular regulation, often targeted at working-class mothers. In the early and middle decades of the twentieth century 'mothercraft' was taught in schools, informed by scientific discourse shaped by physicians. Experts such as health visitors and midwives were trained in similar methods, undermining informal networks as a source of knowledge. In the modern era, there are numerous experts, often in disagreement, vying for the right to define 'good mothering'. Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation was very influential from the 1940s and 1950s onwards, pointing to adverse consequences if the bond between mother and child and the constant presence of the mother were in any way threatened (Chambers 2001: 52-3). Neo-Freudian thought was also prominent in the 1940s and 1950s, with the emphasis on looking at the family of origin in order to understand the individual (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998). The legacy of these perspectives continues today: good mothers create emotionally secure children and adults, and either explicitly or implicitly, bad mothers create a catalogue of different problems.

There is a long history of mother-blaming. Until relatively recently psychiatric discourse blamed autism on mothers rejecting their children; schizophrenia was blamed on maternal rejection; and anorexia on troubled mother-daughter relationships. Homosexuality was blamed on over-protective or independent-minded mothers from the 1890s to the 1950s; juvenile delinquency on working mothers; welfare dependency on black mothers (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998). In the mental illness literature before the 1960s families were seen as causal agents; poor socialisation and communication with parents were blamed, though again mothers in particular were seen to be at fault (Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale 1985; Cohler et al. 1991; Cook 1988; Cook et al. 1997). A subsequent generation of research has questioned whether poor communication and the other symptoms observed in these families might have been caused by the offspring's mental illness rather than the other way around (Cook et al. 1997). One study looks at the portrayal of serial killers in popular film and academic analyses, and concludes that in both, mothers are blamed for their son's deeds:

Academic case studies of actual serial killers read like only slightly subdued versions of the Hollywood screenplays. Here, too, mothers create sons who kill. As in the films, fathers, boyfriends, stepfathers, and lovers appear only as shadowy figures, if at all . . . Clearly, academics and film producers are reading from the same cultural script when they seek to explain serial killers' behavior . . . Whatever goes right in the child's development reflects the ability of good *parents*; whatever goes wrong reverts solely to the mother.

(Epstein 1998: 259-261)

Though marriage and other intimate relationships have undergone significant changes in recent years (e.g. see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992), discourses based upon traditional models of marriage and intimacy remain powerful. For example, Cheale suggests that the promotion of new family forms is about the growth of individual freedoms and erodes the sense of duty that binds families together in caring for each other (Cheale 1999), but as Chambers points out, the undercurrent here is that it is *women* who are deemed disruptive for demanding freedoms which for men are taken for granted, and female emancipation continues to be blamed for the breakdown in modern family values (Chambers 2001: 129). Women as wives therefore have particular 'duties' and like women as mothers are imbued with particular responsibilities for maintaining family values and promoting 'good families', and blamed for not fulfilling them when things go wrong.

Notions of familial responsibility are reflected in the relationship between the state and the family. There is a long history of the British government being concerned with family life and making assumptions about the role of the family in legislation. Since the 1970s there has been a greater stress on 'supporting the family' and families have been encouraged to look after their members, one theme being 'strong moral disapproval of people who apparently do not acknowledge that they have certain responsibilities to their relatives' (Finch 1989: 3). One particularly strong recent example is the government's promotion of parental responsibility for the deviant behaviour of children, resulting in the prosecution of those that do not prevent their children from truanting. Relatives are judged and blamed by the statutory and criminal justice agencies with whom they interact. This raises the important dimension of power: the consequences of blame levelled by these agencies can be much more serious, for example when social services judge whether a child may remain living at home when her father is released

from prison, or when probation decide after home visits whether a man can be released from prison to his partner's home, both examples from taken from this research.

Furthermore, expert and therapeutic analyses repeatedly locate explanations for offending behaviour within the family. Studies show family factors to be important predictors of offending. Reviewing these studies, Farrington suggests that the important factors are: criminal and antisocial parents; large family size; child-rearing methods (poor supervision, poor discipline, coldness and rejection, low parental involvement with the child); abuse (sexual and physical) or neglect; and parental conflict and disrupted families (Farrington 2002: 670). Studies of sex offenders often point to factors in family background such as poor parental relationships in the case of incest male-object perpetrators (Gebhard et al. 1965) or problems with mothers in the case of incest offenders (though apparently not other paedophiles) (Paitich and Langevin 1976), even though 'evidence on this matter is very spotty and inconclusive' (Finkelhor et al. 1986). Dobash et al. found that just over a third of men currently serving prison terms for homicide offences came from broken homes, and a quarter had a father who was violent to their mother (Dobash et al. 2001) though as Levi and Maguire point out, these statistics show that a 'surprisingly large percentage do not appear to come from a severely dysfunctional family or personal background' (Levi and Maguire 2002: 815).

Expert knowledge that locates explanations for offending within the family filters through and informs the everyday understandings of lay people; most people in society would be aware of seeking explanations for offending behaviour within childhood experiences and family background. Relatives are also confronted with it as they, or the offender, interact with experts. Offenders might interact with psychiatrists, doctors, probation officers, social workers, and take part in anger management or sex offender treatment programmes, all of which might have underlying messages about the source of offending behaviour. It is not the aim of this study to judge the accuracy of these expert analyses, but rather to look at how relatives construct their experience. It may well be that explanations for offending can be found within the family to a greater

extent than participants in this study described. However, relatives felt they were constantly faced with the belief that serious offenders are 'made' by their families.⁶⁶

May's notion of familial toxicity is useful for understanding how relatives are blamed, but the dimensions of culpability around which this secondary stigma is constructed and attached to relatives of serious offenders can be further analysed. Relatives are subject to shame because of their kin relationship to a serious offender. Relatives in this study mostly experienced what Braithwaite calls 'disintegrative' or stigmatising shaming; their kin relationship to a serious offender was deemed their master status and they were often outcast or excluded as a result. Braithwaite explains how shaming occurs in relation to offenders. These are the ways that offenders' relatives are also shamed, and during fieldwork and interviews I heard many similar examples, some of which follow in this chapter (and included one fieldwork participant who had slogans painted on her house):

Of what, then, does shaming consist? It can be subtle: a frown, a tut-tut, a snide comment, a turning of the back, a slight shaking of the head, a laugh; it can be direct verbal confrontation in which the offender is admonished about how guilty she should feel or how shocked her relatives and friends are about her conduct; it can be indirect confrontation by gossip which gets back to the offender; it can be broadcast via the mass media or by a private medium (as when the feminist paints a slogan on the front fence of a rapist); it can be officially pronounced by a judge from a bench or by a chamber of the legislature; it can be popularized in mass culture by a film which moralizes about a certain act of wrongdoing.

(Braithwaite 1989: 57-8)

It is understandable that serious offenders should be subject to shame for their actions, but why should their relatives? The web of shame outlined below refers to the grounds on which relatives of serious offenders are shamed in our society and is structured around five types of familial contamination and culpability: *association*; *genetic*; *omission*; *commission*; and *continuation*. These types are intended to show the different

⁶⁶ A recent television documentary *My Son the Killer* followed the attempts of Roger Aston, father of Andrew Aston who is currently serving the longest prison sentence in the UK for attacks on pensioners, to find out why his son offended. The explanation was placed firmly within his family background, the inadequacies of his parenting, and in particular emotional and physical abuse suffered at the hands of his father. The programme stated that his childhood mirrored that of most violent criminals, and a forensic clinical psychologist stated that 98% of violent offenders have experienced some kind of childhood abuse. (BBC 1, 3rd July 2003)

ways relatives might potentially be judged and deemed culpable. *Association* and *genetic* are about contamination; *omission*, *commission* and *continuation* are about direct causality, for which relatives are blamed. How these dimensions play out in individual circumstances will depend upon a myriad of other factors, including the type of serious offence, their kin relationship, and the relationship between the parties in any interaction. Relatives are not always blamed, and as we will see some relatives found support and understanding from friends and acquaintances. However, the potential to be judged is always there and is something that relatives are always aware of.

The web of shame

Association

On a basic level, this is simply that relatives are the same as the offender by virtue of their kin relationship, that they come from the same 'stock' as the offender and are therefore tainted or contaminated by sharing a background or household:

But it's, it's when one member of a family has committed a serious offence I think neighbours, the media, friends, often find it difficult to cope with this and therefore the family are treated as though they've done something wrong as well.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

R: How does it make a difference to the family member? Is it people knowing, or?

S: Its people knowing, it's the harassment you get, it's the, because you're a wife of a murderer or rapist of whatever you're classed in the same category as them. If you're a son or a daughter of a murderer they will paint you the same.

R: So you think people see family members as the same?

S: Yeah.

(Stephanie, wife, homicide group)

The expression ‘tarred with the same brush’ was used by several fieldwork participants and interviewees:

We come up against the prejudice and stupidity of other people, and you do get tarred with the same brush.

(Nicola, partner, sex offence group)

Angela recounts the experience of someone she was supporting in this respect:

I had a lady who went to visit in prison and she was strip searched for drugs, because they’d had a tip-off that she was taking drugs into her husband. And she said she felt like a piece of meat on a slab. She said she felt like being herded like cattle. And she said, well actually one of the prison officers, one the officers was arrogant, enjoyed his job, and he actually said ‘you’re all alike’. And that’s it. If you’ve got somebody in your family that’s committed a crime, you’ll be judged for that crime as well as your family member because you’re related to him. Sad, but that’s what happens cause everybody thinks, people who it’s never touched, people who’s had perfect lives or near perfect lives and have never been touched by anything like it, they can sit down and say ‘you’re all the same’. . . they judge the whole family for it, not just the offender.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

Relatives of serious offenders can therefore be ‘treated as though they’ve done something wrong as well’, ‘classed in the same category’ and ‘painted the same’ as the offender, ‘tarred with the same brush’ and judged as ‘all alike. . . all the same’, simply by virtue of their association, in this case their kin relationship, with the offender. This contamination can be experienced by any member of the offender’s kinship network, although the closer the kin relationship the stronger it is likely to be.

Genetic / biological

Relatives who mentioned genetics questioned whether this might provide an explanation for the offender’s actions. Perhaps not surprisingly they were more likely to comment on this when the genetic heritage was from someone else, as in the case of two interviewees who were adoptive parents and questioned whether there might be a genetic basis to their offspring’s offending, or George who identified his son’s mother as the source:

[My son] Justin was seriously depressed when he committed his crime, really badly depressed, which is part of the gene from [his mother]. Because her father was really, suffered badly from a depressive illness, but Justin was really in a bad state, I'd taken him to the hospital a couple of times to sort of see if they could do anything for him, but I couldn't deal with a depressive illness then as I could now, because I know a lot more about it.

(George, father, homicide group)

One interviewee said her son was concerned that he might inherit a propensity to sexually offend from his father and another said her grandson had expressed the same concerns. New conceptions of an individual who is genetically 'at risk' of offending are developing as a new biology of control emerges based on genetics and neurobiology (Rose 2000); seeking explanations in biology must have implications for those who are genetically related to offenders. These relatives may be judged and deemed 'all the same' because of this shared biology; it may be inferred that if they share those genes they are also 'at risk'; and in the case of parents or grandparents they might be blamed for passing on that heritage. As we will see in chapter five, genetic explanations can potentially mitigate the offender's responsibility, but the finality of these explanations and the extent to which they taint relatives means they are often resisted.

Mothers particularly felt blamed for their biological connection to the offender, and often spoke of their horror that someone born of their body had done something so awful. As Pauline states, mothers have a particularly strong connection to their children: "You've carried him for nine months, he's part of you, isn't he? Okay dads might have a bond but there's always that special bond between a mother and a baby, well should be. There is in my kids anyway." Motherhood is central to how women are defined by others and to their self-perceptions (Phoenix et al. 1991: 13), and in being defined through motherhood these mothers feel they are defined through their offending sons and deemed responsible, having brought them into the world, for their very existence.

Omission

At this level relatives are deemed blameworthy because of inaction: they either knew, or should have known, about the offending or likelihood of an offence and therefore could have stopped it. This is particularly likely to be so where a household was shared, i.e. parents with children still living at home or spouses of offenders, and even more so when the offence was child sexual abuse. Accounts offered by problem-identifiers might partly seek to address this dimension ('we tried to get help and it wasn't forthcoming'), as might normalising accounts ('we couldn't have known - everything before the offence was fine').

Blame on this dimension is less likely to be experienced by relatives of those who commit violent offences or homicide outside the family, although if the offender had a history of offending or mental health problems for which help was not sought, relatives might find they are blamed. Relatives of those who offend within the family are often seen as in a better position to know about or to prevent offending. Particularly pertinent in this respect is the case of wives of men who sexually offend against children. These women are often blamed as 'collusive mothers' (Russell 1986). The victim of Frances's husband's crime was their teenage foster daughter. She says she did not know of the offence until her husband was charged:

My CPN [Community Psychiatric Nurse] had arranged to come round and see me, well the day, the day that [my husband] went down to the police station he was charged, she came to see me a couple of hours after he was due at the police station and she got in touch with one of the doctors at the hospital who came out to see me the next day, and his first words to me were 'Did you know it was going on and did you condone it?' And I thought if somebody of a professional nature has said that, how many other people were saying that? And whether some people thought that I knew it was going on I don't know, but I have lost a hell of a lot of friends.

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

Frances draws attention to the power of professionals to define and their importance as sources of accounts (see chapters five and six). Her quotation illustrates blame for omission, but the suggestion of 'condoning' sexual offending also suggests possible blame for commission or collusion (see below). Blame constructed around omission is

based upon two issues: first, whether or not relatives did know (and as we have seen in chapter four, this is by no means straightforward) and second, if they did know why they did not act. The blame levelled here is that relatives were bystanders, and is similar to that levelled at bystanders in other circumstances outside the family, such as when homelessness, crimes or other kinds of misery are witnessed without action. The ‘classic bystander’ image is one of indifference, but as Cohen explains, the reasons can be more complex: ‘Observers will not act if they do not know what to do, feel powerless and helpless themselves, don’t see any reward, or fear punishment if they help.’ (Cohen 2001: 16).

Ada’s adult son lived at home when he was convicted of three rapes against strangers. She felt she and her husband might be blamed by people outside the family for not preventing their son’s offending:

R: What did you think people might be thinking about you?

A: I don’t know, I don’t know whether they thought well they could have kept a closer eye on him or you know, know what he was doing

R: But you felt they might be judging you for what he’d done?

A: Yeah, yeah

(Ada, mother, rape group)

Relatives might also blame themselves for not preventing the offending. As we saw in the previous chapter, one interviewee had not acted upon an earlier disclosure of sexual abuse from her young niece; when a later disclosure followed she said she was horrified that she could have stopped the abuse earlier. Jane’s daughter and her daughter’s partner were both convicted of inflicting serious physical injuries over a period of time on Jane’s 11 month old grandson. Jane says had she known he was in danger she would have done anything to protect him, but despite this still blames herself for missing what she now thinks was an earlier warning sign:

I had [my grandson] Gareth ready to go, and as I passed him to his step-Dad he turned in to me, and held on to me like that, and screamed, and I said ‘no Gareth, you’ve got to go now because Nanny’s going to bed’, and he screamed and he clung even tighter and his little fist, I’m sure that was a sign that something was happening, because he was always scared of [his

step-father]. Always scared of him. I won't forgive myself for that, that's the only warning sign I had and I ignored it, I won't forgive myself ever for that. I feel like I've let him down [crying]. I love him dearly, but I've let him down. I should have been there to protect him, not put him back into danger.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

Commission

Long-term past

Relatives might be blamed for having created the offender, having responsibility for the person he or she became. This is obviously particularly the case for parents:

They always, well they do say don't they, 'oh it's the way he's been brought up. It must be something in the family. It must be his parents' fault, it must be', you know, they do. They never seem to think that these people [the offenders] have got a life of their own and what they do is nothing to do with it, their parents or their family.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Monica, whose daughter committed a violent offence, described her feelings of responsibility as a mother:

Of course there's this sort of feeling of guilt and responsibility. Not responsibility for the offence, but responsibility for her being as she is, and feeling that, you know, if you had been a better mother, if you had done things differently, if, if, if, then maybe she would be less mentally unstable or less self-destructive, just an easier person. Maybe that's true, I don't know.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

As we have seen, explanations for offending behaviour are often located within the family, and may be seen as the consequence of 'bad parenting' or 'bad mothering'. Relatives are aware of these explanations, and parents who participated in this study frequently asked 'where did we go wrong?'

Immediate past

Relatives might be seen as absolutely culpable because of their own actions, either by directly colluding or covering up, or actually being involved in the offending. Again, this is particularly likely to be so where a household was shared at the time of the offence and particularly likely that wives of sexual offenders will be blamed in this way. The role of 'wife' is partly constructed around responsibility for fulfilling the sexual side of a marriage, and wives might therefore feel responsible or be blamed for their husband's sexual activity elsewhere. A study of the excuses of 'child molesters' found 'my wife wouldn't sleep with me' to be one of those excuses (Pollock and Hashmall 1991: 57). Furthermore, if an offence happens within the family, the wife of an offender might be blamed for not protecting the victim. Frances questioned whether she was to blame for her husband's sexual offending:

It's very strange actually because nobody knew it was happening to me, and I didn't know it was happening then, but yeah, I felt guilty that I didn't know it was going on, and I felt to blame. Because the way I looked at it is because it was a sexual offence, there was, there must have been something wrong with me, to make him want to go with her, if you can understand it. I don't know, I was no different to what I was when we first got married. Disability-wise, yes, I was probably worse than what we were when we first got married, but apart from that there was no difference.

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

Some family members are accused of being directly involved in the offending. One grandmother in this study was accused in court of supplying the weapon used in an attempted murder, but no criminal proceedings were taken against her. It should be remembered, of course, that some relatives do collude and offend together, and one participant did have several members of her family convicted of the same serious crime. However, participants in this study described feeling blamed for collusion when they were not involved in any way.

Continuation

By continuing their relationship with the offender and offering the offender their support relatives are further stigmatised and deemed responsible for the maintenance of their stigma. However, there are few paths out of secondary stigma for relatives of serious offenders. Although they could eliminate this dimension of blame by breaking contact and not supporting (and some do take this path), the other dimensions which refer to the past and their kin relationship would remain. Relatives therefore offer accounts of their decision to support - or not support - the offender:

I mean I try to explain that, to people that would feel against you, that it's your own child. If you can't stand by them, who can? It comes with the job of having a child. You don't have a child and just abandon it somewhere in life, no matter how old they are, there's always got to be, there will always be a bit of support if you're a decent enough parent. And I feel that no matter what he'd done, I'd still support him and if it was my last penny, I'd still send it to him.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Braithwaite shows how the model of reintegrative shaming at a societal level is based on shaming practiced in loving families (Braithwaite 1989), and interestingly this model is akin to how relatives of serious offenders continue to support the offender while not condoning the offence. Paradoxically it is precisely this separation between the act and the actor that many outsiders cannot comprehend and hence relatives experience blame for continuing their relationship with the offender (see chapters five and six).

The types of shame experienced by relatives and the degree of secondary stigma will depend on kin relationship. This study has focused on adult relatives of serious offenders, but the stigma of children of serious offenders illustrates this point well. Children of serious offenders do suffer secondary stigma, and as we have seen in chapter one the literature on prisoners' families pays considerable attention to their plight. However, they are not likely to be given responsibility for the actions of adults, and hence their stigma is constructed only around contamination: they subject to shame

by association or for sharing a genetic heritage⁶⁷. However, this contamination might be serious in its consequences and long-lasting. Some participants expressed concerns about how having a serious offender as a parent (or grandparent) might affect children in the family in years to come. Evidence from relatives of perpetrators of offences in the Second World War suggests that stigma can be passed down the generations. There have been media reports of the children and grandchildren of Quisling party members in Norway suffering exclusion, and the descendants of Nazi collaborators in Holland have organised self-help groups for around 800 members because Dutch society has discriminated against them because of their parents' past (Bar-On 1990: 241).

The consequences of secondary stigma

Many participants in this study directly experienced negative consequences following their stigmatisation. One of the most common consequences was the loss of friends:

And then there was another one who I had been friendly with for many years and I thought oh rather, in case it's in the papers I'll ring her and I'll tell her about it, and she'd always been a very sympathetic person, but I hadn't seen her for quite a long time, but I thought in case she sees anything in the paper I'll tell her. And I rang her and I told her and she said 'Oh dear' and that was it and I never heard from her again. Now if that were me, I would have been saying 'can I help?' So obviously I didn't have a good choice of friends.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

N: When this happened all my friends, my personal friends, didn't want to know me.

R: Really?

N: Truly. So now I've got no friends, all I've got now is colleagues and I'm just so, I am literally on my own. . . they just kept away. . . They'd make excuses at first and they, you got to the stage where you thought oh this is a waste of time, so you just left it. I thought they might have come round before now but they haven't.

(Nancy, wife, sex offence group)

⁶⁷ We might also speculate that their plight attracts more funding for supporting prisoners' families and research precisely because they do not experience blame for direct causality as adult relatives do.

Mixed reactions were found from other people outside the family, from acquaintances and neighbours met in the street. Some relatives found support, others were ignored:

Not friends as I would call friends, people that I've known over the pub and that sort of thing have walked over to the other side of the road.

(George, father, homicide group)

Some people have crossed roads so they didn't have to speak to me and some people have crossed the road suddenly and said, 'it's not your fault, don't worry about it, I'll still talk to you'. But I suppose some people, it's like a bereavement, you don't know what to say but if you don't know what to say, you're going to keep your mouth shut and keep on going, aren't you? But I certainly found out who my true friends were.

(Pauline, mother, homicide group)

They've all looked at me, even kids across the other side of the road. If I've actually walked anywhere, the kids have seen me, they've walked on the other side of the road, and to me, I think that was quite comical, I mean I hadn't done anything. The person that's been accused is in prison so he couldn't do anything to them. So why cross the road from me? And now if I see any neighbours and I know what the attitude's going to be, I wave to them. It's my way of coping.

(Nancy, wife, sex offence group)

Some relatives experienced more serious consequences. One interviewee had her house attacked and her windows smashed by a relative of the victim, another interviewee has been told her life is in danger if associates of the victim discover where she lives, a risk she takes very seriously and hence was anxious that her anonymity should be totally protected in this study. One mother described receiving abusive telephone calls, although she had no idea who they were from or why they were directed at her and her husband. During fieldwork I had conversations with relatives who had suffered attacks on their houses. In some instances relatives have had to go into hiding, one example being the families of the boys who killed James Bulger⁶⁸. Soothill and Walby describe a newspaper report where the wife of a convicted rapist tells of public revenge on her and her three children aged 4, 5 and 10, which included 'men urinating through the letter box, the children being roughed up at school, her washing being slashed and receiving obscene phone calls night and day: "from the public reaction you'd think I

⁶⁸ These families have had to go into hiding and take on new identities. One set of parents were supported by Aftermath at the time of the court case and appeared in a BBC documentary about Aftermath *Why Blame the Mothers?* (BBC 2, 40 Minutes, February 1994)

was alongside helping him”, she said’ (Soothill and Walby 1991: 128). The following quotations show examples of other serious consequences reported by participants in this study:

S: It was only when I went into the village where my Mum lived that people started taunting me, ‘you murderer’s wife’

R: Just walking down the road? People you knew or people that just knew who you were?

S: People I’d grown up with. My friends that I thought were friends, school friends, didn’t even speak to me.

R: Really? Right. So did you still go to the village?

S: Yeah, I never stopped because my Mum was there and that was my main priority. But as time went on people forgot, or they just didn’t say anything to me, but even now I go to the village and I can see, they look at you, you know, as if to say ‘oh, we know who you are’. Yeah, they do know who I am.

R: And how does that make you feel now?

S: Why am I still being punished? It’s as though I’ve done a life sentence as well, which I honestly think I’ve done more of a life sentence than he has. Because he’s in prison he’s doing the sentence, but it’s me what gets the flack out here.

(Stephanie, wife, homicide group)

R: Have you had any negative reactions towards you when you’ve been out in the community?

L: Oh yeah, I’ve got the looks, and even round here people I mean, I don’t mix with neighbours as such, but I do say ‘morning’, ‘hello, how are you?’ You know and if you’re walking out or walking in and you see them in their front garden or at their door you have a stop to chat. I don’t get that no more, you know. I feel the vibes, you know.

R: You haven’t had any abuse or anything like that? Just people not speaking to you?

L: No, I haven’t had no, at first, I did have at first when it all first happened, I came out of the corner shop up the road a couple of times in the evening and I’ve been gobbled [spat] at, you know.

R: Really? Who by?

L: Just people in the street, I don't know who they are, I don't know who they are. And I've even mentioned it to [my daughter] Grace and she said 'I don't know who they are Mum', you know, 'describe them'. . . it wasn't like little yobbos, or little girls, say people about say Grace's age, say about twenty-one or twenty-two, you know.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

R: And [children have] been throwing eggs at the windows?

J: They've done it downstairs and they've done it to the door, and now they've moved on to [my grandson's] room. And I don't like it because I can't get up there to clean it up.

R: And that's children in the local area?

J: Yes, the ones that live on the block. They've done it for months and they're still doing it

R: And have you had other negative reactions from people? What about your neighbours?

J: they just totally ignore me. They won't speak to me. You know, 'she's not worth bothering about'. It's like they're blaming me for what she's done.

R: That's terrible. Why do you think they see you as in any way to blame?

J: I don't know, I don't know. And sometimes I get people shouting abuse at me. Telling me to f-off or go and live somewhere else, but not in them words, with swear words in between.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

Secondary stigma is therefore very real in its consequences for some relatives. While all relatives are aware of a web of shame and discourses of family responsibility, some will be brought face to face with the judgement and blame of others on occasions such as those described above which brings this into sharp relief. They may also be brought face to face with judgement in the media. Soothill and Walby found this to be the case for wives of rapists: 'There is little doubt that the offenders' wives often have a difficult time from the press: they are portrayed either as crazy to stay married to their husbands or as disloyal to break away. Indeed, it is by no means unknown for wives of rapists to be implicitly blamed for their husbands' crimes' (Soothill and Walby 1991: 128).

So how do relatives cope with being stigmatised and manage a secondary stigma that is constructed around so many levels of blame and can have such devastating consequences? Relatives might react in a number of different ways or use a number of different management strategies: *internalising blame*; *avoidance*; *resistance*; *stressing the positives*; *accounts*; and *collective management*. These strategies have been separated for analytical purposes, but are not mutually exclusive and in reality are often linked. For example, one of the purposes of collective management is helping to construct accounts, and these accounts might accept or resist blame. Importantly, the strategies used may change over time. Avoidance and internalising blame are more likely during the initial impact stage, for example, and resistance and stressing the positives are more likely to develop in the later stages after discovery.

Internalising blame

Shame and guilt are not the same thing. Shame is a social emotion; it is possible to be subject to shaming and to be aware of being shame-worthy in the eyes of others without feeling guilt, and in some cases relatives will resist. However, guilt often accompanies being shamed and many relatives internalised the blame levelled at them. At discovery of the offence relatives often feel they have lost their security, what they know and believe, and this can leave them feeling uprooted and at sea. In this anomic state they question whether they have had any role to play in the offender's actions. As we have seen, they will be aware on a more general level of political, media and lay discourses of family responsibility and may also experience specific instances where they feel they are being blamed.

Relatives might blame themselves along the different dimensions that have been outlined: just because they are from the same family; share the same genetic heritage; for not knowing about or not preventing the offence; or for bringing the offender into the world or not protecting the victim. None expressed guilt about continuing to support the offender: accounts referring to this dimension all resisted blame (see chapter six). Relatives may feel negatively about themselves because of the contamination of shared

association or genetics which may manifest in feelings of low self-esteem. Sarah said she was left feeling this way after her mother committed a violent offence against her father which left him blind. Most participants who reported this said, like Sarah, that it improved with time:

R: Has what's happened affected your own self-image in any way, how you feel about yourself?

S: Yeah, I think it has. I did, I felt incredibly vulnerable and fairly low self-esteem and it was also, you know, why is all this happening to me when other people seem to glide through life, nothing touches them? I almost felt alienated from people because they didn't know what was going on my life, they didn't know what was going on in my head and I couldn't socialise because you know, that was, it was in my mind all the time. And I couldn't just engage in trivial chit-chat. So yeah, I did feel a breed apart and I still do to a certain extent. . . I still feel a little alienated but I'm gradually getting some enthusiasm for life back and some self-esteem. I mean I've never really been, been one for sort of dressing up and putting loads of make-up on and stuff but there was a point where I just didn't care what I looked like, what I put on, it didn't matter. But that's beginning to go.

(Sarah, daughter, violent offence group)

Relatives might question their role in what has happened and might ask themselves 'where did I go wrong?' Lorraine asked herself this question even though she said she believed her daughter was 'set up' and not guilty of the serious drugs offence for which she was convicted:

I think well did I go wrong somewhere along the line? I mean I talked to [my daughter] Grace like I talked to all of them, all about the do's and the don'ts and the wrongs and the rights, so it's not as if they can say 'oh well I didn't know about this', or 'I didn't know about that', you know, they wasn't exposed to things like some people are exposed or it's all in the home. You know, I tried to teach them the best way I could, and even now I still say 'where did I go wrong? Where did I go wrong?' And it was beginning to, at first, I kept on, I was beginning to really hate myself. And I kept thinking what else could I have done? You know, but we can't be there with our children all the time, we don't know what they're doing or who they're speaking to or whatever behind our backs, you know, we don't know what their conversation is on the phone with their friends. But oh yes, I hated myself, and I still feel I didn't do something right, I still feel there must have been something else I could have done to try and prevent this, you know? But I don't know what, I just don't know, really.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

Relatives are most likely to blame themselves in the initial impact stage. Penny describes feeling like this when her son was arrested for rape, and Pauline says that she now believes her son's mental illness was to blame for his offence, but in the early days she blamed herself:

P: Emotionally it just broke my heart really. I felt guilty, I felt as guilty as [my son]

R: Why did you feel guilty?

P: Because I'd given birth to him. And, I know a person is responsible for his own actions . . . but it was like I was partly responsible for what happened.

(Penny, mother, rape group)

Yeah, originally I hated myself for letting it happen and then I thought, you didn't let it happen. You didn't tell him to go out and do that. You didn't make him poorly. You didn't do this, that, and the other and then you go, 'well maybe if I'd have done that'. But you can't.

(Pauline, mother, homicide group)

Although George blamed himself in the early stages, he now points to his lack of influence in his son's adult life:

R: And has all of this affected your own self-image?

G: I think it did in the early part of it, but I came to terms with it fairly well and I, I think there's always this suggestion that the parents are to blame. From that point of view, you feel guilt, without a doubt. That's it, because this, again maybe at the initial time you think is it my fault? Is it my fault, I brought him up this way? And that kind of thing. But I think you come to terms with that, and logic tells you at the end of the day his mother and I aren't influencing him any more, once he became a teenager then he went off and did his own thing.

(George, father, homicide group)

Self-blaming and feeling guilt are not the same as accepting that it is right to be blamed by others and accepting the fairness of being stigmatised. Janoff-Bulman suggests that self-blame is a coping strategy used by survivors of trauma, motivated by the need to integrate the traumatic experience and re-build a viable assumptive world. Self-blaming helps to answer the question 'why me?' and restore a sense of meaning. However:

Survivors are motivated by recovery, not accuracy in attributions. . . The reactions of observers do not reflect this same motivation for recovery. If survivors blame themselves, this in no way gives others the right to blame them. It is important to differentiate between survivors' reactions and observers' reactions, for their motivations and implications are very different. Thus, if I belittle myself, this does not give another person the right to belittle me. Consider the different implications of an individual's own statement, "I can't believe how stupid I am!" and the reaction of another person, "I can't believe how stupid you are!" The self-statement might reflect a desire to motivate oneself to do better; the other statement is likely to be an outright condemnation. Most assuredly, the meaning of the two is unlikely to be the same. What we say about ourselves means something very different from what it would when said by another.

(Janoff-Bulman 1992: 123-4)

Janoff-Bulman is referring to victims of many different kinds of trauma, and as we have seen relatives of serious offenders might have more reason to self-blame than, for example, victims of natural disasters or rape victims. However, their motivation for using this strategy might be the same and internalising blame does not mean accepting that it is right to be spat at or abused in the street. Participants reported feelings of guilt and self-blame diminishing as time progressed. Whether self-blame continues, and to what degree, will depend on a variety of factors including the personal characteristics and resources of relatives, the history of their relationship with the offender and the circumstances of the offence, and the support they receive afterwards. As chapter seven will show, reducing self-blame is part of the project of Aftermath.

Avoidance

We have seen at the start of the chapter that avoidance of people or places is a strategy used by relatives to avoid having to disclose their status. It is also used to manage stigma when the stigma is known, and particularly in the initial impact stage. Celia is describing this type of management as she avoided contact with her neighbours in the early stages because her circumstances were known:

Then I found that if I wanted to go and hang the washing out on the line I would check to see if there was anybody out there, I've just realised as I'm talking to you, because I didn't want to talk to anybody about it at all, and so for a while although I'd go out, as soon as I heard voices either side I'd

either you know, immediately come back in or go in the shed and wait or whatever, so yeah, I'd forgotten about that.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

Several participants in this study moved to avoid living in a community where their status was known. Ada experienced negative reactions from neighbours after her son's conviction and as a result moved away:

A: The girl next door, she was very sympathetic and helpful, and the people on the other side were absolutely the opposite, you know. One of the reasons that we left that house.

R: What did they do or say?

A: They didn't say a thing, they just you know, cut us dead. They'd been very friendly, but as soon as that happened it was finito. We still see them, they come up every Friday morning to the market here and they walk straight past us.

(Ada, mother, rape group)

The strategy of 'managing space' was found by May to be used by murderers' relatives, though only where the stigma was known ('open awareness contexts'). Her participants would avoid particular people and places, something that she recognises might vary and become more selective over time (May 2000). One technique used by the wives in Fishman's study, though the least often employed, involved the management of physical distance. Fishman calls this technique 'jailing', where wives cut themselves off from the outside world and constructed their lives around the prison (Fishman 1990). Jane's daughter was convicted of violent offences against her own child. In fear of consequences from her neighbours, Jane's avoidance has made her a virtual prisoner in her own home:

R: And you say [your neighbours have] been trying to get you evicted, what have they actually done?

J: I don't know what they've done because I daren't open my curtains, because if I open my curtains in the front room it leads on to the courtyard which means I can see all the other houses.

R: So do you think they've been taking measures to go to the council or anything like that?

J: I don't know, I don't know.

R: you must feel quite trapped if you're experiencing these negative reactions when you go out?

J: Well I've got all my curtains in the front room, in fact most of the house, are closed so they can't accuse me of spying on them. . . I look at the world go by and I can't, I can't have any daylight in the front room.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

Resistance

Resistance is a strategy that can be employed at several levels by relatives managing their secondary stigma. First, it is clearly easier for those who question or deny the offender's culpability to resist. Nancy is one such example:

It went to the papers and the headline was 'sex beast sexually assaults two girls', not his daughter, two girls. And it made out that he was a serial sex beast, that was it, it said a serial sex beast over a period of years. And people were, they looked at me. I thought well I'm not putting my head down, I've not done nothing wrong. [My husband] Bill's not done anything wrong but he can't prove he's not done anything wrong. And it was them eventually that put their head down because I looked them straight in the face but it hurt. I didn't let them know how much it hurt me.

(Nancy, wife, sex offence group)

Nancy describes resisting because she says her husband had done nothing wrong - but also because she says she had done nothing wrong. This is the second level of resistance; relatives would offer accounts resisting the blame levelled at them, even when they accepted their relatives' culpability (see chapter six).

Resistance also operates at another level. At the discovery of the offence, relatives lose their own and their family identity as they had seen it, but are reluctant to replace it with the alternative identity of 'mother of murderer' or 'wife of sex offender'. This is the identity that they feel others want to force upon them but that they do not want to adopt, though it may become their master status in the early stages. They are fighting a totalising conception of the offender's identity (see chapter five) and consequently of their own identity: their relative is more than a sex offender, for example, and they are more than a sex offender's wife. A documentary was made during the period of

fieldwork which had the title 'A Killer in the Family'. Aftermath was unhappy about the label 'killer' and wanted the title changed to 'A *Killing* in the Family' and had some success, although it was too late for many of the TV listings magazines which printed the original title.

Resistance is likely to get stronger as relatives move through the stages outlined in chapter three. Anne describes this as she became more confident in her decision to support her son:

[The media coverage] made it far worse for me than people knew. I wouldn't go to the local shops, sort of like the reaction and the belief that if somebody walked past me in a local supermarket and they probably hadn't seen me, but I thought they were ignoring me, and that upset me. But that feeling goes in time too . . . As I got stronger I suppose, you know, [my son] is the one that matters and if people choose to punish me for supporting my son that is their choice, I can't do anything about that. I have to do what I feel is right.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

A further type of resistance is choosing to ignore the reaction of others, and this was Lorraine's response to being spat at on the street:

And I just took no notice, I thought well let them carry on because they'll have to stop soon, they can't just go around keep doing that, you know.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

Lorraine's response was unusual amongst participants in this study. This might be a factor of a sample selected either through self-help group participation or self-selection responding to a leaflet: these relatives might be more affected by what has happened and less willing to ignore and the strategy might therefore be more commonly employed than reflected here. Stronger resistance might also be employed - it is not beyond the realms of possibility to imagine relatives 'hitting back' when confronted with some of the consequences of their secondary stigma - yet this was not reported. This may again be a factor of the sample; it may reflect unwillingness to report that sort of thing; or it may be that relatives felt disempowered by self-doubt or blame.

Stressing the positive benefits

Interestingly, and unexpectedly, when questioned about their self-image many participants who were in the later stages described the long-term consequences as positive. In the accommodation stage they are most likely to stress the benefits to themselves; in the helping others stage, to stress the benefits to self and others. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this is also a strategy used to cope with trauma by giving events a sense of purpose (Janoff-Bulman 1992). Beatrice and Anne are both at the helping others stage, and talked about the support they offered in their interviews. In response to questions about whether they had changed, they both stressed positive aspects:

R: Have you changed over the past ten years?

B: I don't know, I suppose I've probably got stronger. I've certainly had no more depression. No, I think I am stronger, and I think you have to change. I've tried to become less angry and I've tried to become less confrontational, I've tried to understand the dynamics of the family . . . I've tried to understand, if I possibly can, the dynamics of the whole thing and how, you know, I've tried to become more, a little bit more standing back and looking at it, I don't know.

(Beatrice, mother, homicide group)

I feel a stronger person, I feel as though I've changed, I've, I don't think there's anything life could throw at me now that I couldn't cope with. You know, things would have been the end of the world, and it just puts life into perspective. It hasn't affected me in any practical way, its made me look at life and I feel as though I'm doing something with it, instead of just getting up, going to work, coming home and sitting watching Coronation Street, and going to bed, and getting up, and actually my life is fuller because of it.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Penny also stresses positive changes. She has been campaigning on behalf of her son who she believes was wrongly convicted of rape:

I used to find it hard to be vocal, kept myself to myself, but now it's like 'you will know how I feel.' I feel I've had to make a statement about who I am, even though it's been hard on my family.

(Penny, mother, rape group)

We know from Braithwaite's work on shaming that some familial shame can have positive benefits, providing it is of the right kind. For shame to be useful it needs to be *reintegrative*, that is 'expressions of community disapproval . . . are followed by gestures of reacceptance into the community of law-abiding citizens' (Braithwaite 1989: 55). Shame experienced by family members can serve a purpose within this context by shaming the offender in turn. However, if we lived in a society that practiced reintegrative shaming, the plight of relatives of offenders would not be the same; if offenders were not stigmatised relatives would not experience secondary stigma in the same way. Most relatives of serious offenders in this study experienced what Braithwaite calls *disintegrative* shaming – stigmatisation – which was often accompanied by open criticism and lacked the important element of reacceptance into the community.

Accounts: Verbal management strategies

Goffman says the discredited have tension to manage (Goffman 1963); one of the ways relatives of serious offenders do this is through verbal techniques, either literal denial of the offence or accounts that try to adjust the impression of the offender or what he or she has done. For relatives who believe the 'offender' to be innocent, there is nothing to explain other than injustice: the offence simply did not happen, or an offence did happen but their relative had no role to play in it whatsoever. However, participants who used literal denial were in the minority in this study. Most were confronted with 'tension' that needed to be managed through accounts. Relatives are called upon to offer these accounts in a variety of situations and to a variety of people. Accounts must deal with the offender's culpability and with the shame and blame levelled at the family; these accounts are the subject of chapters five and six.

Collective management

A self-help group such as Aftermath helps members to manage stigma by bringing together those in similar situations for support and offering a collective narrative about their shared circumstances which also attempts to deal with the different dimensions of

shame outlined above. May suggests Aftermath helped the relatives of murderers to manage their stigma in two ways: first, by offering a narrative which ‘challenged the notion of evil murderer because it located explanations of the individual offenders’ crimes within their life and familial experiences’ and secondly, by offering ‘a community where their trauma was normalized and where they gained support, acceptance, and a new chorus to support their construction of events’ (May 2000: 215-6) and ‘consequently, joiners were empowered to develop a critique of the way in which society understood and excluded them as murderers’ relatives’ (May 2000: 216). As we will see in chapter seven, the role of self-help groups and what they offer their members is complex, as is the collective understanding of shared circumstances that they offer. Certainly during the period of my research Aftermath offered a community where relatives’ trauma was normalised, but it did not focus on explanations of the offenders’ crimes as suggested by May. However, this is likely to be due to changes in the organisation since her research following the departure of the founder. Aftermath’s collective narrative since then has focused on addressing the shame and blame apportioned to relatives rather than questions of aetiology (see chapter seven).

May also found in her research that relatives of murderers only turn to Aftermath within open awareness contexts and go to Aftermath when they fully accept the offender’s culpability. In contrast to this, Aftermath during the period of this research had members with a variety of views about their relative’s culpability⁶⁹ (see chapter five). Whether they agree with the offender’s guilt or not they will have experienced being both discredited and discreditable and Aftermath offers a form of collective management for both statuses. Of course, it is very difficult to know what relatives believe privately about the offender’s guilt, and it may be that some had different private views to those they were prepared to state in interviews or during fieldwork. However, the primary focus of this sociological study is on public accounts.

⁶⁹ Again, this might be due to changes in the organisation since the period of May’s research, and in particular the departure of Aftermath’s founder, or a factor of the difficulties she found in accessing this population, difficulties she recognises compromise the extent to which her conclusions can be generalised. Her sample only included relatives from eight families, three of whom were Aftermath members and she was not able to gain access to Aftermath meetings to conduct fieldwork.

This study has also included some participants from Aftermath with relatives who are accused and not convicted. They were not excluded because of the range of views members of Aftermath were found to hold about their relatives' culpability. What is important to those participants is what others think of their relative's guilt and how others judge them, and that they are subject to the same shaming processes following 'discovery' as other relatives, though may feel in a stronger position to resist. Although our legal system is premised upon the principle of innocent until proven guilty, relatives felt the 'offender' was presumed guilty until proven innocent; one fieldwork participant said people assumed there was 'no smoke without fire'. This was particularly the case for those accused of sexual offences against children which is to do with the construction of perpetrators and the crime as something involving secrecy, denial, collusion, and that allegations should always be believed. So these relatives experience difficulties from 'discovery'⁷⁰, before there is a conviction, and still consider that they have suffered even if a conviction is never reached. During the period of investigation, which can take some time, they are stigmatised and even if their relative is cleared they might continue to experience residual consequences.

Differences between relatives of serious offenders

Although there are commonalities to how relatives of serious offenders experience stigma, they do not all experience it in the same way. A first and important difference to how stigma is experienced is the type of serious offence; what families are seen as related to makes a difference. All relatives of serious offenders might potentially experience blame on all of the dimensions described, but relatives of those who have committed sexual offences against children say they are subject to greater blame and believed their secondary stigma was greater:

R: Is it different for families of sex offenders for example, than it is for families of murderers? Are there differences according to the type of crime as well?

A: I think so, yeah. Sex offences, there's a stigma. There's the definite stigma of it being a sex offence. You know, I found that myself that it was

⁷⁰ Although that would be discovery of allegations rather than of an offence in the eyes of those who disputed their relative's guilt.

you know, like I used to get, 'that's his wife', you know, because it was a sex offence. They wouldn't have said it if he'd robbed a shop or they wouldn't have whispered behind my back, you know, if he'd, if he'd done something like a burglary or even killed somebody, you know. They wouldn't have, I wouldn't have got that attitude and that, you know, the whispering behind me back and the crossing the road when they saw me coming and you know, people that'd usually only just nod at me, stopped nodding at me you know, they knew nothing. . . But you know, it was a case of it's, sex offences definitely. They bring about a more gut reaction I think from the general public because that is the worst, in my opinion, I think murders are bad, whatever. I can't say sex offence is the worst but to me, you know, that a man or whoever can perpetrate these things on a child you know, he's lower than low. He's below contempt . . .

R: So there are differences for the family members according to?

A: Stigma, stigma that surrounds all offences but more so a stigma that surrounds sex offenders is you know, it evokes more of a public, you know, reaction.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

I mean sure if people I knew, I'd have trouble at my door. And it always did worry me a bit that they'd come knocking on my door. And I really do think that's why [my daughter in law] moved away and got married again, to get away from the flat. Because I think she thought maybe someone would attack her one day. . . So it is there, and then there's the time when they come out of prison, when they could go round and attack you. So it's, it is, it's always, they never really leave you alone in that respect. You're blacklisted as much as they are I think.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

G: I think always when it's a sex offence, the feeling of, I won't say shame because I think that applies to everybody that gets into, you know, a criminal situation, I think the shame's there for everybody but it could be a lot deeper I would say for a sex offence.

R: In what way?

G: Just the way people view it, you know, I think people, if somebody murdered somebody and it wasn't through a sexually motivated crime, people can accept people, but anybody who's done any kind of a sexual crime, you see it's never, to me what happened, yeah horrible, put his hands up straight away, but it went from indecent assault to all round it was rape and everything, people use their own minds. Whereas a murder is a murder. People that don't know any details build them up in their mind, somebody says 'oh it was this', they go and tell another person, and it builds up and up and up, and from being at the bottom end of a crime it ends up you know, he damned near finished them off, he's raped, beaten, you know done everything. They don't differentiate.

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

The community in which relatives live is another important variable, something that is recognised by Fishman (Fishman 1990). In working-class communities, she says, arrests are not uncommon and therefore were more likely to be considered ‘crisis-provoking’ than stigmatising. In middle-class communities, friends were likely to be supportive but neighbours more likely to withdraw. Nine wives in her study lived in the same town as the prison, and they all reported hostile reactions from members of the local community.

Most participants in this study described living in communities that were not tolerant of criminality, and said that their friends, neighbours and other associates had little experience of offending, of which they were aware. Community is important in three ways: first, a community might be close-knit or may alternatively be more anonymous; second, some communities might be more tolerant of criminality, though often not of some types of serious offence; third a community may or may not be communitarian, its members linked through extensive interdependencies (Braithwaite 1989). In the latter case, reintegrative shaming is more likely. This might be the explanation for one participant who came from a close-knit small community which could not be described as having tolerance for the murder her son committed. Despite this, she did not experience stigma, though she did have significant interdependencies:

I’ve always been fortunate that we live in [name of town] and some places, some people have had to move, haven’t they? Because of backlash and everything, but I’ve had none of that. I can honestly say I’ve had none of that at all. I’m involved in the Lifeboat ladies on the committee and on the cancer committee, I collect for the Leprosy Mission, and I do a day at the hospice, which was yesterday. Now I started doing that not long after Jamie got sentenced, probably June, and then I started there in September and I’ve been doing it ever since. Obviously they must know [my surname] is not a common name, but nobody’s said anything.

(Beryl, mother, homicide group)

Stigma is something we would expect to be worse for relatives of female serious offenders; women who offend are considered doubly deviant (Lloyd 1995a). There were not enough relatives of women in this study to be able to draw firm conclusions, although one mother of a female serious offender did think the consequences were worse for relatives of female serious offenders for this reason:

If it's a female that's done it, it's worse for the people they've left on the outside. If they keep in quiet in prison, they're okay; it's just the family on the outside.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

This is also an area where the type of serious offence makes a considerable difference; as we have seen, secondary stigma may be worse for relatives of sex offenders. None of the eight relatives of female serious offenders who were interviewed were related to child sex offenders and in only one case was the offence murder. The rest belonged to the violent offence group and there was one serious drugs offence conviction. These relatives are still dealing with problems because of the seriousness of offence, but it is difficult to draw direct comparisons because of this variation in types of offence. Looking at relatives of female serious offenders has been useful; this study has found some gender-specific difficulties, but direct comparisons in experience of stigma are skewed by offence type. We could hypothesise that if we took relatives of male and female pairs convicted of same offence the secondary stigma would be worse for relatives of women, but this would require further research to test. Certainly high profile cases indicate that public reaction is likely to be worse towards women accused or convicted of serious offences, see for example the highly publicised cases of Myra Hindley, Mary Bell, Rose West, and more recently Maxine Carr.

Stigma and society

Stigma is more than a phenomenon of individual interaction; it tells us much about the social context within which those who stigmatise and the stigmatised are enmeshed. Though stigmatised, relatives of serious offenders are not a normatively separate group, but rather share prevailing norms with other members of society; this is precisely why they feel shame for the actions of the offenders which have breached some of those which are most widely held and basic. This is also why they offer accounts for their own actions; as Sykes and Matza argue, accounts serve the purpose of realigning the account-giver with his or her social group whose norms have been breached, and are necessary precisely because these norms are shared (Sykes and Matza 1957). Indeed, in an effort to place themselves and their loved ones within a moral order, relatives are also involved (as we all are) in stigmatising those who are 'other':

The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives. These are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of the unrealized norms that are likely to play upon the encounter . . . since interaction roles are involved, not concrete individuals, it should come as no surprise that in many cases he who is stigmatized in one regard nicely exhibits all the normal prejudices held towards those who are stigmatized in another regard.

(Goffman 1963: 164)

Relatives of serious offenders in this study were keen to separate themselves and their loved ones from 'criminal families', professional criminals and petty, recidivist criminals who were viewed in some cases as more deserving of blame and stigma (see chapter six).

Finally it is important to return to one of the dimensions of stigma raised in the broader literature: 'peril', or the perceived danger of the stigma to others: 'stigma has its basis first in threat, be it symbolic or tangible' (Stangor and Crandall 2000: 80). It is perhaps an obvious point that serious offenders present a tangible threat on which their stigma is based. How, though, is the secondary stigma of relatives of serious offenders threatening to outsiders? Their threat is more symbolic and can be distinguished on three levels. First and most basically the stigma has the potential to be passed on in weaker form to those who associate with relatives of serious offenders: '. . . persons who acquire a degree of [courtesy] stigma in this way can themselves have connexions who acquire a little of the disease twice-removed' (Goffman 1963: 43). Secondly, relatives of serious offenders offer a threat to a 'belief in a just world' (Lerner 1980), a belief that someone's fate must be in some way deserved, and our 'cognitive conservatism' that tells us that the world is benevolent and the world is meaningful: 'Victims are threatening to non-victims, for they are manifestations of a malevolent universe rather than a benevolent one.' (Janoff-Bulman 1992: 148). Thirdly, they offer a symbolic threat to outsiders' moral world view by suggesting that their relatives are not inherently evil and that it is possible to offer them support without condoning the offence. In this way they present a kind of blurred morality which is uncomfortable and threatens the clarity of people's moral schema and our urge to categorise into good or evil.

Chapters five and six explore the motivational accounts given by relatives of serious offenders. Motivational accounts are verbal management strategies used in interaction with others to give reasons for untoward action. Relatives of serious offenders will be called to account for the actions of the offender and for their own actions in many different contexts, because the offender has clearly transgressed norms by offending and because this transgression ‘contaminates’ the offenders’ relatives; they are often seen as deviant because of their kin relationship to the offender and subject to the web of shame outlined in chapter four.

The focus of motivational accounts theory is on how offenders account for their own actions; there is little attention paid to accounting for the actions of others. However, this literature is useful to understand how, why and under what circumstances people attempt to explain why they acted as they did, and can be extended, though with limitations⁷¹, to an understanding of what people might say about why someone else acted as they did.

The earliest and most comprehensive theory of ‘vocabularies of motive’ was offered by C. Wright Mills (Mills 1940) who was keen to stress the inherently sociological character of motive. Statements of motives are social because they serve the purpose of realigning an actor with the groups whose norms he or she has broken and because different vocabularies will be appropriate to different groups. We learn which motives are acceptable for which actions through processes of socialisation. As the term ‘vocabulary’ suggests, there are only a limited number of available and acceptable motives in given situations and ‘institutionally different situations have different *vocabularies of motive* appropriate to their respective behaviors’ (Mills 1940: 906).

71 For example, there is considerable debate amongst theorists about when accounts are formulated. Although elements of a relative’s account will be present before the offence takes place, by definition an account of the offence cannot be constructed until the relative is aware of the offence, often some time after it has occurred. For offenders, the accounting process begins before the act; for relatives accounting for the offence can clearly only begin as they become cognisant of the offence(s) at discovery, although elements of their accounts will have been formed before this time through their interaction with and view of the offender and his or her actions prior to the offence and reference might be made to this history.

Vocabularies of motive are historically and culturally specific, so certain motives will be acceptable and influential in particular societies at particular times. Motives are not just formulated retrospectively, but may be given before, during or after acts and anticipating reactions to motives can operate as an effective control on behaviour. This and the following chapter will attempt to address some of Mills's sociological concerns: what kinds of accounts are offered by relatives and are likely to be honoured; the purposes accounts serve; what all of this tells us about the social context within which account-givers and account-receivers are situated, and what it tells us about the power to define.

Sykes and Matza (Sykes and Matza 1957) also focus on the functions of accounts. In their study of the 'techniques of neutralization' of juvenile delinquents they show how these techniques serve to realign the actor with his social group. Delinquents do not live in a separate normative world but rather share the values of conventional society, hence the need for accounts, or techniques, to neutralise the act in question. They emphasise that accounts are not just formulated after the act, but are also formulated before the act and make that act possible by weakening social control. After the act, these techniques provide the function of protecting the actor from self-blame and from blame by others by neutralising social disapproval. Sykes and Matza identify five techniques used by offenders to counter blame: *denial of responsibility*, *denial of injury*, *denial of the victim*, *condemnation of the condemners* and an *appeal to higher loyalties*.

Scott and Lyman call motivational statements 'accounts'. An account is 'a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior - whether that behavior is his own or *that of others*, and whether the proximate cause for the statement arises from the actor himself or *from someone else*' (Scott and Lyman 1968: 46, emphasis added). Although Scott and Lyman introduce the idea of accounting for the behaviour of others in the statement above, they do not develop this further. They make a basic distinction between excuses and justifications - excuses attempt to diminish the actor's responsibility, justifications attempt to normalise the act. This is the distinction that is most used in subsequent studies of the accounts of offenders, for example looking at the accounts of rapists (Scully and Marolla 1984), murderers (Ray and Simmons 1987) and paedophiles (DeYoung 1988; Hanson and Slater 1993; McCaghy 1968; Pollock and Hashmall 1991; Taylor 1972; Thomson et al. 1998).

How is a theory that has been developed to explain the accounts of offenders applicable to understanding the accounts of their relatives? Why examine accounts about action from anyone other than the primary actor? At the broadest level, if the theory makes any sense at all accounts must have currency; they are produced and consumed in a social context and need to be honoured. They are not about internal processes known only to offenders: accounts are traded in the social market-place and require audiences and this trading - producing and consuming - is worthy of study. Relatives' accounts matter because they are in a unique position of closeness to the offender: they care what people think and are motivated to account for his or her actions and have particular 'insider' knowledge. The offender is also likely to care what his or her relatives think. Relatives are important audiences for offenders' accounts, and because of their closeness are well placed to judge their plausibility. Finally, relatives of serious offenders are particularly vulnerable to the process of giving accounts, and perhaps even more so than offenders. Most of those serious offenders that are caught receive prison sentences, and although they may become used to giving accounts to, for example, lawyers, the courts, psychiatrists, and probation officers, these will be called for on particular occasions, are less likely to be part of their daily life, and the frequency with which they are called to account may well diminish as a prison sentence progresses. Their relatives continue on the outside, mixing in society and subject to the shame outlined in the previous chapter. They chat with neighbours, talk to teachers at their children's schools, hear gossip in the post office and may even be subject to direct abuse: they are the people in the market-place for consuming and producing accounts and may continue to be so for years after discovery.

Relatives are drawn into a pool of people who listen to the accounts of offenders and are validators - or otherwise - of these accounts. They therefore have an important role as *audiences*. However, they do not just absorb and straightforwardly reflect offenders' accounts. They may be called upon to comment on them and to give their own account of why the offence happened - and the accounts they construct may also be based on several secondary sources: relatives are therefore *commentators*. Relatives may be called to account themselves. As we have seen in the previous chapter, they may experience secondary stigma constructed around several types of shame; in this respect they are producers of accounts because they are contaminated or *implicated* and

therefore construct causal narratives about their own roles. This chapter looks at relatives as audiences and commentators as they account for the offender's actions. Chapter six looks at the accounts offered by relatives to counter the fact that they are implicated, and how these accounts address family shame.

Relatives as audiences

As audiences, relatives listen to the primary accounts of offenders and absorb information about events and motives from numerous secondary sources, including other family, friends, criminal justice professionals, the media and so on. No offenders were interviewed as part of this study, but the kinds of excuses and justifications that are found in the literature on serious offenders were not straightforwardly reflected in the accounts of relatives, suggesting that relatives do not just accept what they are told by offenders. Of course, the literature does not tell us what offenders tell their families, and this might be quite different to what they tell legal or other authorities, researchers or even each other. One study of the publications of paedophile organisations, for example, found strong justifications used by participants in the form of *denial of injury*, *denial of the victim*, *condemnation of the condemners* and *appeal to higher loyalties*, all techniques of neutralization from Sykes and Matza (DeYoung 1988). Relatives in this study did not use these justifications.

Some relatives never have the opportunity to speak to the offender about the offence; others may have the opportunity but under very restricted conditions, for example during prison visits, while others might receive detailed explanations from the offender. Beryl's son had been released from prison when I met her, but she still had not had an explanation from him:

B: We can't think how he got involved in it. And no matter how you go round and round and round with it, you can't get an answer. It's whether he, I mean, I still don't know whether he was drunk or not, really. I just think, well one of these days we shall find out.

R: Have you ever talked to him about it?

B: Only to say what a stupid thing, look what a stupid thing it's all turned out to be. He doesn't really want to talk about it. Whether he will open up now, I don't know.

R: How long has he been out of prison?

B: Six months

R: Right, so it's not very long. How much time have you spent with him in that time?

B: Um, three days.

(Beryl, mother, homicide group)

Even those relatives that do receive an account from the offender are likely to use secondary sources to supplement it. Families must therefore piece together *what* happened and *why* it happened, the latter usually being a long-term process, dependent upon the level of knowledge about the offence, their knowledge of and relationship with the offender, and their own life and experiences. Accounts given by families about the offender and the offence are therefore second-order accounts, as are accounts given by anyone other than the actor whose actions are being explained, such as when a psychiatrist, for example, discusses the motivations of a patient, or when a church accounts for the action of a priest accused of child sex offences (Thomson et al. 1998). However, the crucial distinction between relatives as account-receivers and other account-receivers such as psychiatrists or criminal justice agencies⁷² is that relatives have a relationship and a history with the offender; their lives are interwoven and they themselves might be implicated.

Relatives as commentators

As commentators on the offence, relatives struggle to make sense of whatever information they have and to formulate a coherent story, something which is difficult in some cases to do:

⁷² This distinction is less clear in the example of the church accounting for the action of a priest. The church will obviously have had involvement in the life of the priest and may be causally implicated, e.g. that they should have known, or that they did know but did nothing about it (Thomson et al. 1998).

C: The question that I heard so many times [from other Aftermath members]: ‘Why? Why? How can this have happened?’ And I didn’t know the answer to that.

R: Is that mostly people at the beginning?

C: Yes. But it still follows through. ‘Why was it?’ ‘Why did this happen?’ And people at various stages do that, still go back there, why? How?

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

Relatives struggle to piece together information about the offence and to formulate motivational accounts about the offender’s actions. This process of establishing ‘what happened’ from information from numerous sources has some parallels with the processes used by jurors in criminal trials (though clearly jurors do not share a kin relationship with the offender and are not themselves implicated). Jurors have to piece together information, making inferences about motive and culpability based upon normative understandings of what constitutes excusable or inexcusable behaviour in particular situations, which they do using a ‘story framework’ to understand the evidence (Bennett 1997). Furthermore, relatives are part of society and as such aware of accounts that have currency for explaining offending, including those that point to family background.

Attempts have been made to apply motivational accounts theory to the accounts given by relatives of offenders about the offence and these have generally based their analyses on Scott and Lyman’s distinction between excuses and justifications. Fishman examines themes in the accounts the wives of prisoners in her study gave of their husbands’ offending. She says that the women convinced themselves that their husband’s offending did not matter through the device of a ‘sad tale’ (Goffman 1961) which she attributes to Scott and Lyman⁷³ and describes as:

. . . a selective and often distorted arrangement of facts that highlights an extremely dismal past and, presumably, explains an individual’s present state.

⁷³ Scott and Lyman use Goffman’s ‘sad tale’ as a form of justification - not to explain the individual’s present state, but rather the reasons why the act in this case was reasonable. Goffman’s own formulation is broader, however, and could also be used to *excuse* actions, for example as a denial of responsibility, e.g. a chain of events led to the individual’s poor state of mental health or the individual not being in control of his or her actions. Despite wrongly attributing the concept of a ‘sad tale’, Fishman’s use is really closer to Goffman’s.

The teller of the sad tale attempts to rationalize, rather than condone or excuse, unacceptable (i.e. deviant or criminal) behavior.

(Fishman 1990: 29)

She says that themes ran through the wives' accounts of the men never having had a chance to make good, being victims of problematic families, having fallen in with the wrong crowd, or been drawn into the criminal activities of other family members, all of which are excuses rather than justifications, and that the women held on to the belief that "love can save my man".

May considers how the relatives of murderers in her study struggled to find explanations for the offences committed (May 1999). She says that relatives' accounts formed two 'clusters', those that accept the legal definition of murder and those that did not. Four of the eight families who participated in her research thought that the offender should have been found guilty of manslaughter and three families accepted the murder verdict (and were involved with Aftermath); members of the eighth family held conflicting views about what the offender had been found guilty of, but all thought he was innocent. May looks at the differences between the 'murder accounts' (offered by three families) and the 'manslaughter accounts' (offered by four). Within the 'manslaughter' accounts, 'explanations of excuse', appealing to cultural scripts of accident and illness, and 'explanations of justification', establishing some degree of offender victimisation, were used. Interviewees in this cluster explained the legal verdict of 'murder' by characterising justice as unpredictable and blaming the jury, the judge and legal advice.

Interviewees in the murder 'cluster' retained a notion of absolute culpability and absolute victimisation. They sought help from a range of organisations to try and find explanations, and all three families were involved with Aftermath. These families referred to making a separation between the person and their actions ('loving the sinner, but not the sin') and identified factors in the offenders' lives which could help explain the killings. Aftermath at the time of May's research had a strong narrative about the causes of offending: 'that only people with low self-esteem will have so little respect for others that they can act violently and that such low self-esteem is rooted in intra-familial relationships' (May 1999: 502). Members of these three families 'took some responsibility for generating these familial conditions but also marked a clear

delineation between this and offenders' responsibilities for the killings' (May 1999: 502).

May's analysis of her interviewees' 'vocabularies of motive' provides some of the same themes that emerged in the accounts of interviewees in this study, but I have found accounts about the offence to be offered by all relatives, other than three who retained an absolute notion of the offender's innocence rather than culpability (see Table Three below); for these relatives the crime did not happen and there was nothing to explain. An analytical framework is needed to capture the range of accounts used by relatives, and one which allows for the tension between wanting the offender to take responsibility for his or her actions and wanting to mitigate that responsibility in particular ways. All relatives of serious offenders are aware of discourses of familial responsibility for offending, and these have sources other than Aftermath. In addition, Aftermath's collective narrative had changed during the period of my research since the departure of its founding Director and is used in different ways by Aftermath members (see chapter seven).

To whom are accounts given?

Accounts are given on many levels, both formally (e.g. to legal or other authorities), and informally (e.g. to family, friends and associates). The audience is of course important in any account interaction; it does not need to agree with the account-giver, but the account must be honoured. Clearly the extent to which relatives feel the need to give accounts depends upon the extent to which the offence is known (see chapter four). Angela felt the need to account to people she met in her local community:

What was difficult? People judging you when they don't know the full story. And feeling that you had to explain to people. Why should I have to explain to anybody? But I felt I had to justify to everybody what was going on. Why? Do you know what I mean? They'd come in and I'd say well this is happening and this is what happened and I'd explain the lot. Why should I? Because my husband had done nothing wrong, so why should I? And even when he was protesting [his innocence], why should you? Why should *you* justify to all the people what's happening in your life? But I thought I had to do that. So that was bad, really.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

There is also an important distinction to be made between accounts that are formulated privately and those that are given publicly; Antaki has made a distinction between accounts that are *performable* and told to others and those that are *unperformable* and remain private (Antaki 1987). Private accounts are of course very difficult to study and less likely to be divulged in research interviews. A good example of this distinction, however, can be seen in the willingness or otherwise of relatives to express anger towards the offender (see previous chapter).

As commentators, family members digest and construct accounts of the offence, and this can be a joint enterprise. It is therefore interesting to consider how accounts might be constructed *within* the family⁷⁴. Family members may collude in denial of particular problems, and use techniques to repackage them (Cohen 2001; Goleman 1985) and these repackaging techniques can include the kinds of accounts described here. One case study of a family attributing competence to a 'severely retarded' child attempts to show how family members can construct an extreme version of reality and sustain it in the face of strong information to the contrary (Pollner and McDonald-Wikler 1985). It is important not to present the family as always sharing a consensus of understanding, however; there are many cases of conflict within the family following discovery of the offence, and this can centre on disagreements about what happened and culpability.

What are the purposes/functions of accounts - what do they do?

The primary purpose of accounting is to re-align the account-giver with his or her social group following a perceived breach of norms. Some authors focus on this interaction with the account-receiver as the primary function, referring to accounts as a device to repair 'fractured social interaction' (Semin and Manstead 1983) or with the purpose of maintaining social interaction and identities (McLaughlin et al. 1992). Accounts can be powerful tools for changing the opinions of others, and studies have found that individuals are willing to assign character traits and form impressions of others based

⁷⁴ To study this systematically would require researching several members of the same family. Access to another relative within the same family was only possible in one case in this study (see chapter two).

upon accounts presented (Orbuch 1997; Orbuch et al. 1992). In addition, accounts are a form of stigma management, reducing the exclusion and ostracism of the account-giver.

Telling the story can have a therapeutic purpose, helping the teller to recover from a traumatic experience. In South Africa, banners carrying the slogan 'Revealing is Healing' were hung around the public halls housing most of the victims' hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. People came to the hearings to '... tell their stories. They had come to mourn. To be heard. To put their truths on record.' (Slovo 2003: 19). Accounts perform further important functions for protecting the self of the account-giver and his or her self-esteem. Many authors in the wider study of narrative in sociology have focused on the production of identity through the process of storytelling (Orbuch 1997) and how narratives can mend damaged identities (Lindemann Nelson 2001). Other authors focus on the positive functions of confiding accounts to others in coping with major life events, (e.g. Harvey et al. 1991). Williams, for example, looks at the process of the 'narrative reconstruction' of self-identity (Williams 1984) which is necessary when 'biographical disruption' due to major life-altering events occurs (in his study chronic illness). A key difference, however, between the broader study of narrative and motivational accounts is that the study of narrative assumes the production of a consistent 'story' while motivational accounts theory assumes fragmentation; the 'story' will be told in different ways to different audiences.

However, accounts do have an important role in enabling account-givers to create and organise meaning and to understand their circumstances. Maruna has demonstrated this function for ex-convicts who he says need to make sense of their lives in order to abstain from crime:

. . . to desist from crime, ex-offenders need to develop a coherent, prosocial identity for themselves. As such, they need to account for and understand their criminal pasts (why they did what they did), and they also need to understand why they are now "not like that anymore". Ex-offenders need a coherent and credible self-story to explain (to themselves and others) how their checkered pasts could have led to their new, reformed identities.

(Maruna 2001: 7-8)

All of the above functions have relevance to the accounts of relatives of serious offenders: accounts are given in an attempt to repair fractured social interaction and

manage stigma following discovery of the offence. Making sense of their circumstances is part of the progression from the initial impact stage described in chapter three and can help relatives to regain their self-esteem and repair their sense of identity. Ultimately, accounts are about making experiences and circumstances meaningful and conveying this in a way that will be honoured; studying this process of constructing meaning can help us to understand much about the relationship between the individual and society and the wider societal context within which the account-giver is placed.

Accounting for the offender's actions

When they discover the offence, families are confronted with unusually shocking information of which they must make sense. They try to understand *why* their relative did what they did, the *reasons* for the offending and will formulate accounts for these motivations. These accounts are given on several levels: to themselves through an internal dialogue; to those within the family and their close circle; to those outside the family with whom they have informal contact; sometimes to those they meet formally, for example social workers, psychiatrists and those in the criminal justice professions; and for some eventually to self-help groups such as Aftermath; each forum has its own nuanced expectancies. Furthermore, families have given accounts of their own and the offender's actions to me during the interviews for this research, and on occasions during the fieldwork.

It is important to consider the motivation of relatives of serious offenders giving accounts of the offenders' actions to different people and in different contexts. This motivation will not be the same as offenders who are trying to mitigate personal responsibility, who have much more invested in doing this and may do it in a calculated way to achieve personal ends. Relatives are often struggling with trying to work out what happened, piecing together information and searching around for alternative ways to view the offender and his or her actions. There may be circumstances where their accounts are deliberately calculated to achieve specific means, but they certainly have less to gain from this than offenders. In addition, of course, they sometimes genuinely

do not know the details of the offence and in some cases do not even know whether it took place; the same cannot of course be said for the offender⁷⁵.

I have found Scott and Lyman's distinction between excuses and justifications less useful for analysing the accounts of the interviewees in this study because so few of the interviewees used justifications in the pure sense of the term. The concept of justifications might be stretched to include some of their techniques - there were examples of relatives using *denial of injury* and *denial of the victim*, both of which are techniques of neutralization appropriated by Scott and Lyman in their explanation of justifications. However, Scott and Lyman tell us that '. . . to justify an act is to assert its *positive* value in the face of a claim to the contrary' (Scott and Lyman 1968: 51, emphasis added), and the relatives in this study did not do this. It is possible to imagine circumstances where relatives might offer justifications, and numerous examples come from relatives of those committing 'political' or 'ideological' crimes, such as parents of Palestinian suicide bombers who say they believe in the rightness of what their son has done and talk in media reports about how proud they are of him. Examples can also be found of Israeli soldiers committing atrocities against Palestinian youths and receiving support from their families who offer denials and justifications (Cohen 2001: 157-9).

When offenders offer excuses and justifications they tend to be stronger and more forceful appeals to limit or eliminate culpability: 'it wasn't my fault', 'I'm not to blame', 'I did the right thing', and so on. What relatives in this study offered were less clear and more limited and partial. Many of the relatives talked about how they wanted the offender to take some responsibility for his or her actions, how they expected the offender to address their offending behaviour, how they could not condone what the offender had done, and so on, but simultaneously used techniques to try to neutralise some of the blame attached by others. Excuses and justifications cannot accommodate this dual wish, and do not adequately capture the range of techniques used by relatives with a variety of views about the offender's culpability, and as we have seen, May was only able to apply this distinction to the 'manslaughter accounts' offered by four families (May 1999). The blame levelled at offenders, given the seriousness of the offences, was often all-encompassing and might even take the form of the offender

⁷⁵ Unless they are innocent of the crime, in which case their account would be one of literal denial.

being labelled evil, sub-human and below contempt; this is what relatives wanted to adjust. A mother during a fieldwork conversation told me she hated the fact that people thought badly of her son, she wanted them to see the good things about him. A letter in the *Aftermath* newsletter in June 1998 stated: "I too am a mother who dearly loves her son . . . we love our sons and we know the good in them that no one else sees. And the bad in them breaks our hearts." It seemed that often this most basic wish - that others would not think badly of a son, daughter, husband or other close relative - was behind attempts to adjust the impressions held by others.

The most useful distinction for the purposes of this study within the literature on accounts is between *act adjustment* and *actor adjustment* (Cohen 2001; Ditton 1977). These techniques are used by offenders to evade moral blameworthiness, and I have found them to be the techniques used by relatives in their (often partial) attempts to do this on behalf of the offender. In his study of the motivational accounts of bread salesmen who are 'part-time' criminals fiddling and stealing Ditton says:

Adjustment may be achieved in one of two ways. Firstly, by adjustment of the *actor*, which amounts to a denial of full responsibility by psychologically excusing the self on the grounds of the denial of imputability. Secondly, through the application of various definitions, it is possible to adjust the fault component of the *act* in question as a form of circumstantial excuse.

(Ditton 1977: 165)

An act adjustment is therefore a response that focuses on the *act* - in this case the serious offence - and attempts to minimise or downplay the harm caused, or to normalise it. An actor adjustment focuses on the *actor* and attempts to adjust the impression the audience might have of that actor. Both accounts tend to be apologetic, like Goffman's 'sad tales', rather than asserting the positive value of an act - they are not active justifications. This is therefore a more effective distinction to capture relatives' attempts to account for the offender's actions, firstly because adjustment is a less total and less forceful plea and secondly because it does not attempt to portray the act as positive. Table Three shows the distribution of these strategies in the accounts of relatives.

Table Three: Use of Actor and Act Adjustments⁷⁶

	Number of interviewees offering actor adjustments	Number of interviewees offering act adjustments	Number of interviewees offering both	Number of interviewees offering neither
Relatives of male offenders (n=24)	18	7	4	3
Relatives of female offenders (n=8)	8	1	1	0
Homicide group (n=11)	11	3	3	0
Child sexual abuse (n=10)	6	3	1	2
Rape (n=3)	1	1	0	1
Violent (n=7)	7	1	1	0
Non-supporting relatives (n=5)	4	1	0	0
Believes 'offender' is innocent (n=7)	3	3	2	3
Mothers⁷⁷ (n=17)	14	4	3	2
Wives / partners (n=10)	7	2	0	1
TOTAL (out of 32)	26	8	5	3

We can see from this table that actor adjustments predominate in the accounts of interviewees; act adjustments are much rarer and where they are used tend to be used in conjunction with actor adjustments. This is likely to be because of the seriousness of the offences - it is clearly more difficult, for example, to adjust an act of child sexual abuse than it would be to adjust an act of vandalism. With serious offences, therefore, actor adjustments from relatives are more readily available and more likely to be honoured.

⁷⁶ It should be noted that no statistical inferences can be drawn these figures, they are just included to illustrate the distribution of act and actor adjustments in relatives' accounts.

⁷⁷ Other relatives have not been included as a separate kinship group in the table because there was only one in each category: one father, one sister, one grandmother, one daughter and one aunt of a serious offender.

Claims for mitigated responsibility because of some of these factors (under the influence of alcohol or drugs, emotional problems, etc.) often appear in excuse accounts offered by serious offenders (e.g. see Ray and Simmons 1987; Scully and Marolla 1984).

Relatives from the violent offence or homicide groups were more likely to offer actor adjustments, as were those from the child sex offence group. For the child sex offence group, however, these were of a more limited range (see below). All relatives of female offenders offered actor adjustments; only one offered an act adjustment, and this was used in conjunction with an actor adjustment. It should be noted that neither of these strategies are exclusive; although it is useful to analyse them separately, in reality many relatives use them simultaneously.

Seven out of thirty-two interviewees believed the 'offender' to be innocent, and three of these did not use any form of adjustment. In one case, the 'offender' was accused of child sex offences and prosecuted, but eventually, after a lengthy and traumatic wait, cleared in a Crown Court trial. In another case, the mother believed her son had been 'set up' and falsely accused of rape; he was convicted on one of two charges, but she believed this to be a miscarriage of justice and was campaigning on his behalf. In a third case, a mother described how allegations of sexual abuse had been made against her son, which were taken very seriously by social services and resulted in him losing the right to have contact with his children. When these allegations were first made, she said she believed they were true, but seven years later is now convinced he did not do it.

Four others said they believed the offender was innocent, but were less categorical and still offered adjustments. In one case a wife believed her husband was falsely accused of sex offences by his (now adult) children, but told me she accepted he had taken pictures which were 'a bit naughty' of one of his daughters; he was convicted of indecent assault charges and charges relating to the photographs. A grandmother believed her grandson had not committed the crime of attempted murder, although he had been there when his co-accused fired the gun. One mother believed her daughter to be wrongly convicted of murder; she had been at the scene, but had not committed the act. In another case, a mother believed her daughter had been wrongly convicted of serious drugs offences; she too had been 'set up' and found with a very large quantity of drugs which were not hers,

but was unable to reveal this to the police because threats had been made against her daughter's life, and her daughter consequently served a long prison sentence.

There were three further relatives who stated that they did not know whether or not their family member was guilty, and continued to state this even when questioned further⁷⁸; each of these used adjustments. One mother did not know whether or not her son had committed murder; one wife did not know whether her husband had committed sexual offences against his grandchildren (although she said she knew he was 'not a paedophile'); and one mother did know that injuries had been inflicted on her grandson by either her daughter or her daughter's partner, but did not know the extent of her daughters involvement. In each of these three cases the convicted offenders continued to protest their innocence.

In one rather unusual case, a mother did not know the offence for which her daughter was convicted. She thought it must have been something violent and must have been serious for her daughter to receive a twelve year prison sentence. She defined herself as a relative of a serious offender and had sought help from Aftermath on that basis. She said she knew some details, the offence had taken place at a party at her daughter's house and she had gone to her daughter's house to clear up after this party. However, she says, she avoided newspapers, did not attend court and did not discuss details with anyone at her daughter's request. She felt she would rather not know what her daughter had done as this would make it easier for her to support her on her release, and she said she had managed to avoid finding out over the several years since the offence happened. This was an interesting strategy of self-protection. By avoiding knowledge she could avoid some of the consequences following discovery, though she could not avoid them all - she still knew her daughter had committed a serious offence and received a long prison sentence, and still continued to visit her regularly in prison and was her daughter's main supporter.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that this is what these interviewees stated to me, and I had no reason to disbelieve it. It must be very difficult, however, for some relatives of those who persist in declaring their innocence to take a stand against this and say they believe in their guilt. It is possible, therefore, that some relatives maintain a public stance of 'not knowing' out of loyalty to the offender that is different to what they privately believe.

In the remaining cases, relatives recognised some wrongdoing while attempting to adjust the impression the listener⁷⁹ might have about their offender. So what exactly are the forms that actor and act adjustments of relatives of serious offenders take? Table Four summarises these forms.

Table Four: Act and Actor Adjustments in the Accounts of Relatives

ACTOR ADJUSTMENT	ACT ADJUSTMENT
<p>1. Denial of Responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental illness • Drugs or alcohol • Hereditary/genetic • Sad tale as denial of responsibility • Led astray • Accident/no intention • Child or child-like • Anger/emotions out of control 	<p>1. Denial of the victim</p>
<p>2. Resisting totalising identity</p>	<p>2. Denial of injury</p>
<p>3. Balance (a) backwards (b) sideways</p>	<p>3. Normalising the act</p>
<p>4. Separate act from actor</p>	<p>4. Comparative adjustment</p>

⁷⁹ In the case of the interviews the listener was obviously me, but relatives also knew about the possibility of some of their comments appearing in later publications, and therefore reaching wider audiences (though they would be anonymous). The point about motivational accounts is that relatives might be called upon to give them in a variety of circumstances, but many of these circumstances will not be amenable to direct observation.

ACTOR ADJUSTMENT (He or she is not the kind of person that does things like this)

As has been shown in Table Three, actor adjustments predominate in relatives' accounts. These adjustments take four main forms: *denial of responsibility* (Sykes and Matza 1957), *resisting totalising identity*, *balance* and *separating the act from the actor*, each of which will now be considered in turn.

Denial of responsibility

This is the 'master theme' in relatives' accounts and, as can be seen in the above table, it takes eight broad forms. Again, these forms are not exclusive - in reality many relatives use more than one form and some relatives use several simultaneously. As we have seen in chapter three, relatives of sex offenders were more likely to offer normalising accounts of life before the offence, and as such they use a more limited range of these denials. Relatives of homicide perpetrators and violent offenders were likely to point to mental illness, drugs or alcohol as reasons for the offence; relatives of sex offenders do not use these in the same way. McCaghy found that sex offenders used being under the influence of alcohol as an effective method of 'deviance disavowal' (McCaghy 1968), substituting drinking as a more acceptable form of deviance. However, relatives of sex offenders in this study did not describe an addiction to alcohol or drugs or long-term problem which might contradict their attempts to normalise and did not describe their relatives as mentally ill. The one exception to this was Lillian, who pointed to her son's alcohol use and previous drug addiction, along with other actor adjustments (and in chapter three is the one relative of a sex offender who offers a problem-identifying account). However, even she stressed her son's difficulties with drinking were a recent occurrence and did not describe him as an alcoholic, although she saw his drinking as responsible for the offence (see below).

Mental illness

This is a broad category which includes all references to poor mental health such as depression, post-natal depression and schizophrenia. For some relatives this was the key explanation for why the offence took place. Had the offender not been mentally ill it would not have happened; hence personal responsibility was mitigated to a degree because illness was the cause:

I think that [my daughter] did it because she was mentally unwell in some sense or other and that that mental unwell-ness stemmed from a complex mixture of her history, and post-natal depression and possible psychosis, although I don't know enough about that, and something in her personality that causes her to have periodic, I don't even know how to describe them, almost like, yeah, she goes, it's like she goes mad. She has these patches where she just loses it completely and something has to give. And whereas before it's always been turned inwards, on that occasion, tragically, it was directed at her baby.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

Drugs or Alcohol

Some relatives cited drug or alcohol use to mitigate responsibility, because without this drug or alcohol use the offence would not have happened. Lillian categorically states that the drink led her son to offend:

He's never had a problem with drink, this only happened about a year before he went in prison. . . I found all the empty bottles . . . and now he's really worried that when he comes out that he mustn't never go near drink again because that's what led him into all this.

(Lillian, mother, child sex offence group)

For Monica, alcohol was a driving force but not the cause of her daughter's offence:

All of these crises are fuelled by drink. I mean she doesn't drink all the time and she can sometimes drink and nothing will happen, but always, whenever there's a crisis it's not caused by, but linked to heavy drinking.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

Several interviewees pointed to heroin or crack cocaine addiction as the cause. Debbie describes her husband's crack addiction as a major reason, but also talks about his mental illness, and his upbringing:

D: He murdered his grandmother . . . he was on drugs and you know, and I think he had a bit of a mental illness . . . he had a really, not a nice upbringing and I think that's, I think part of it, you know? I don't know, I just think it was all to do with childhood and growing up and getting involved in drugs and mental illness

R: What sort of drugs was he involved in?

D: Crack, you know, and I didn't learn that he was on crack until like it all came out . . . I knew that he smoked cannabis and that but I didn't know about crack, you know . . . I've known him for quite a long time. He was still a nice person you know.

(Debbie, wife, homicide group)

Hereditary/genetic

One way to adjust the impression held of the actor is to point to a genetic or biological cause. If an offender is a victim of their genes, they might be seen as somehow less responsible for their actions. In their search for a reason or cause some relatives wondered whether there might be a genetic explanation. Lillian, an elderly mother of a sex offender, pointed to a history of sexual offending in her family:

L: Although it's not my fault, I feel, I feel somehow responsible. It's silly really, for me to be carrying that around with me because it's not my fault what my son's done but I do feel bad about it.

R: Why do you think you feel responsible?

L: I don't know. Well the thing is when I was young, when I was 17, not quite, the War was on. And my mother's boyfriend, who was an American, my mother used to bring him and his friend to the flat . . . They were in the medical corps. Well one night one of them gave me something to drink which I found afterwards that it was pure alcohol from the hospital where they were stationed in Victoria. And one of these men raped me and so consequently I didn't know it at the time until I was over three months pregnant, I was pregnant. So that was my son. And when I was young, I was also sexually abused by two of my uncles. And so somehow I told my son when he was old enough to know, that, about his father but I never ever told

him that I was sexually assaulted. But I did tell him that as time went by and somehow in my mind I thought, I wonder if this has triggered off anything in him or whether anything of his father's come out in him . . . You know, is it something in our family? Is it something on my mother's side with my, her brothers that were? Is it something that's hereditary? I don't know.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Lillian went on to explain how her eldest grandson was most affected by his father's offences and worried about a genetic link: "he was worried that he might turn out like that. He said to his mother 'do you think when I'm older, I might have these feelings, whatever Dad's done?'" Harriet also points to genetics as a possible explanation; if the cause is nature rather than nurture relatives, and particularly parents, may be less implicated:

H: A lot of people will say 'well I blame the parents', you know, 'if you'd brought him up properly this wouldn't have happened'.

R: What do you think about that?

H: I think there are many, many factors. It may be one of the factors. I believe in our genetic make-up and there's not an awful lot one can do about it.

(Harriet, mother, sex offence group)

Dorothy's grandson had also been convicted of a serious offence and she questioned whether the cause was genetic:

D: But serious crime, sometimes it may be something in the genes, something's born in them that you're not aware of. In my young grandson's case, I would think maybe something, I don't know, I will never really know but maybe just something came out from the father, you know, I mean the tragedy that occurred with his father when he was the eldest of the three little children, and developing a taste even alcohol or maybe a sudden temper within, who knows, to make him do something like he did.

R: Did the father leave when they were very young?

D: He burned the house down, he was an alcoholic.

(Dorothy, mother, homicide group)

However, this was not a frequently offered account, which may be for two reasons. First:

. . . mitigating evidence such as genetic predisposition is. . . a two-edged sword, which may diminish blameworthiness for the crime at the same time as it indicates the probability that the criminal may be dangerous in the future and is beyond redemption.

(Rose 2000: 14)

Secondly, as we have seen in chapter three, it is an explanation which contaminates those relatives who share a genetic heritage.

Sad tale as denial of responsibility

Scott and Lyman use Goffman's 'sad tale'(Goffman 1961) as a justification, but that is not the sense in which it is offered here. Instead, a series of events are described that lead to the individual being less responsible for his or her offence because so many awful things happened to him or her - not that a series of events led to an offence being committed and that to do so was somehow right or reasonable under those circumstances. Goffman says: 'if the facts of a person's past and present are extremely dismal, then the best he can do is show that he is not responsible for what has become of him' (Goffman 1961: 140). So it is an actor adjustment, and an attempt to mitigate responsibility. Relatives described the offender's family background, abuse that might have been suffered and various other traumatic events, losses and hardships in the life of the offender.

Celia describes how her nephew's family background and experiences in the care system and borstal led to the offence, but states her surprise that it led to this particular offence:

I think he felt somehow responsible for taking care of his mother, because the family had stepped back from his mother because we didn't know how to be with her, how to respond to her [mental health problems] and we were growing up and we moved away. And my mother and father really were the ones who tried to be supportive of her and I think that [my nephew] witnessed a lot as a child that a child should not see or hear, and he did, he took his responsibility to his brother and sister very seriously, and then I think getting into trouble, then going to borstal, he says like many people I've heard say, he learned more about how to commit more offences inside than he did before he went in and also the different professional standards, moral standards, of the people who, in inverted

commas, question marks, exclamation marks, were there to treat him with humanity, to help him to become rehabilitated back into society, and he's told me that he has had beatings, that he was, when he was in care, he was abused by somebody who has subsequently been convicted, so I'm not surprised at one level, and at another level I am, because I don't think that most people would ever imagine somebody they love could kill somebody.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

Gill points to abuse her husband suffered as a child, but unequivocally states however that she is not offering this as an excuse for the abuse perpetrated by him:

R: There are many ideas about why people commit serious offences, what are your own views about that?

G: I think there are reasons. Not excuses, there are reasons and mitigating factors, definitely. A lot's to do with what happens to you, especially men, I've found, don't get a chance, some through their upbringing don't get a chance to talk out things. I can only give like Austin as an example. He was ten years older than his brother and sister, he had a Dad who in his own way is lovely but is an out and out bully, really an out and out bully, and also I mean I'd been married, when this happened I'd been married for 23 years, and I'd talked about abuse because I'd got a daughter and I was aware you know not just what was going on in my own house but I was aware that things happened, you think you're aware, you think oh that will never happen to me, but anyway that's another part of the story. But 23 years, and it wasn't until all this came out, it wasn't straight away, a couple of days later, and I finally got to find out what had happened to him as a ten year old [sexually abused by a family friend]. And the first thing I said, it made me so mad, why the bloody hell if it happened to you, you must have known what they were going through! Why?

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

A 'sad tale' was also offered by Sarah who talked about her mother's gradual decline in health and depression and her physically abusive relationship with Sarah's father which resulted in a serious assault that left her father blind. A denial of responsibility in the form of a 'sad tale' was a common account form; relatives were keen for the offence and the offender to be understood in the broader context of events. Again, it should be stressed that attempts to do this were usually partial and questioning and reflected a search for reasons rather than a claim that the offence was somehow right or reasonable.

Led astray

With this denial of responsibility technique relatives say that the offender's co-accused or someone else was responsible for the offence, that the offender was dragged into it or forced to commit the crime by another and that this should therefore mitigate or lessen their responsibility. Beryl's son was convicted of murder. She blamed his co-accused, a woman with whom he was having an affair, though this was not an explanation accepted by the court:

R: And do you now understand why Jamie committed that crime?

B: No. Only that she'd got him round her little finger really . . . he hadn't any friends here. And so he used to go in [the local pub], you see, and then he started working in the bar. And that's why I think really, it was companionship I suppose, and it was somebody of his age group, and er she sort of got him woven into her web, really. I've tried and tried, but I can't work it out why. And how she sort of, I mean, his solicitor said did she give you any drugs? He said no. But the sort of person she was . . . Could have been sex, I don't know. In her own way she was attractive, there's no two ways about it. Why she had to pick on my son, I don't know.

(Beryl, mother, homicide group)

Jane felt her daughter was somehow involved in the physical abuse of her son, but pointed to the influence of her partner:

My daughter didn't offend like that when it was just her; it was just when she got married.

(Jane, mother, violent offence group)

For Christine, her daughter's offences of serious and violent armed robberies were explained by the influence of her violent partner upon whom her daughter was dependent for her heroin supply. Without his influence, she says, the offences would never have happened:

C: She was given four years prison sentence, but they did take into consideration the person she was with when she done these robberies. He used to beat her to make her do them, because he used to wait until she was withdrawing and then tell her what she's got to do because otherwise he wouldn't supply her with what she needed.

R: So she was pretty desperate when that happened?

C: Oh yeah. She told the probation officer that right up to the very last minute when she was actually in the shop she was thinking of ways of getting out of it, but knew that if she came out with nothing she would get a good hiding.

(Christine, mother, violent offence group)

Accident / no intention

This actor adjustment was offered less frequently by relatives: that the offence was an accident or that the offender did not know what he or she was doing. Accident is the 'pure' form of lack of intention - some relatives pointed to a lack of intention without going as far as to say the offence was an accident. Lisa thought the murder committed by her partner had been an accident. As a young boy he had lashed out at another young boy after an altercation which involved comments about his sexuality:

R: So what's your understanding now of why he committed the crime that he did?

L: (Pause) As far as I'm aware (pause) well, as far as I'm concerned I ought to say, I don't think it was a crime. To me it was an accident um it was the mores of the time that meant that if he'd said what he was talking about the finger would have been pointed, they would have presumed that he was gay anyway, um I think like so many young men of that age he probably had an ambivalence about his sexuality and I think the main reason there was this problem was because he didn't have a, um a steady emotional master figure in his life, he had nobody to whom he could refer. He'd lost his mother, he was estranged from his father and there was nobody at the children's home to whom he could relate sufficiently. He's a very private person anyway and I think that the system failed him dreadfully because there was no-one there that he felt it was safe or appropriate to talk to . . . I mean to me if he said 'I had a pet cat and I set it alight' then that would mean far more to me because it was something he'd done deliberately and cruelly and this was just a horrible accident.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

Child, or child-like

One way to attempt to adjust the impression held of the actor is to point to his or her young age or immaturity as mitigation. When Anne's son was fifteen, she says he was falsely accused of rape by a local girl, and that the allegations were dismissed by the police. She suggests the effect of this on him at such a young age might partly have contributed to him committing rape two years later:

But then again I think, and [my son] said, he has said, and I feel too, if it had happened to him when he was older he could have coped with it, but at fifteen being accused of something like that, he wasn't able to handle it.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Dorothy's daughter was an adult at the time of the offence for which she was convicted, but Dorothy says she was less responsible for her actions because she was child-like:

There's a difference in someone who's academically very bright, which my daughter is, but there is the other part of the brain just like a child. You've got to understand, you've got to know her, you've got to see her, everybody loves her. . . She's unique in a way that even in here [in prison], she's accepted, she can cut off, but she's accepted. . . She wanted to be a child with the others. She wanted to be one of the teenagers with them. Instead of growing up, they weren't her sons and daughter's friends only, they were her friends.

(Dorothy, mother, homicide group)

Anger/emotions out of control

Pauline was struggling to understand the causes of her son's offence. He is detained indefinitely in a special hospital, and she says the staff there have not been forthcoming with answers. The only explanation she has is that 'it was just pure out and out anger':

R: So the main difficulties or problems that you've had to cope with over the past years since it happened are with the hospital not telling you anything?

P: They never tell you a word. They never even say your son was progressing or regressing, digressing or whatever -gressing. They just don't

tell you nothing. In all the years I've had one visit from a social worker from [the special hospital] who's now left. There's absolutely nothing. No feedback from a doctor saying well he's suffering from this, that or other or he's suffering from nothing. He hasn't even got a label. He's not schizophrenic, he's not on no medication. It were just pure out and out anger. That's all.

(Pauline, mother, homicide group)

Anger here is represented as an alien thing, not part of the core self of the offender, and as an explanation in its own right.

Resisting totalising identity

Relatives are fighting for the offender to be viewed as more than a serious offender, as more than a killer or sex offender. There are two levels at which this resistance operates. First, there are those relatives who question the full culpability of the offender and therefore straightforwardly resist defining him or her in these terms:

R: That programme is on tonight, 'A Killer in the Family'. Aftermath are not very happy about the title.

B: No, yeah. You see this is what used to get to me with [a member of Aftermath in its early years]. She used to say 'well, you're a mother, yes, but you're the mother of a murderer', and I used to cringe. I used to think that's um, I don't class myself as that really, at all, because he was involved, yes, but he wasn't the one that er committed the er, he was involved and then he stood back and she did the rest.

(Beryl, mother, homicide group)

R: What I'm thinking of with regard to your own self-image, you've told me that people have thrown at you the expression that you're a mother of a killer before, have you ever seen yourself as that, and has that had any consequences if you have?

B: I don't see Justin as a killer. Um, I always perhaps euphemistically use the term Justin and Sarah came to blows, and as a result of which the girl died. Or I've sometimes sort of said, you know, 'Justin unfortunately took his girlfriend's life'. I find it difficult to say 'Justin killed his girlfriend', I would never say 'my son is a killer'. I mean Pauline and I will say 'oh of course, we're killer's mothers, aren't we?' But we're making a joke of it, if you can make a joke of it, but we're joking at ourselves, you know. But no, I don't see Justin as a killer.

(Beatrice, mother, homicide group)

Secondly, there are those who accept the offender's culpability, but still do not want to define them solely in those terms. These relatives resist the application of the label 'sex offender' or 'murderer' to their particular family member. Gill repeats an account offered by her husband. He felt that staff running the sex offender treatment programme in which he participated in prison wanted to impose the totalising identity of 'sex offender' which he wanted to resist:

He couldn't see the point of the exercise. I really feel that in some fields like that [sex offender treatment programmes] there are people getting some gratification, I firmly believe that. I wanted to know what happened to the tapes, because they were taping them, and he challenged what they were saying to him, because they were like brainwashing them as well, to say that they were sex offenders, and he said to me then after a while, he said 'they're undoing everything I've done by reading and going into myself', he said 'I'm not a sex offender', he said 'I'm somebody that has committed sexual offences', he says 'but I'm not a sex offender'. He said they were telling him that he'd got to say [exact details of the offences] all the time, they weren't allowed to refer to 'it' as 'it', they'd got to say.

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

Finally, separating the act from the actor, our fourth actor adjustment, is also an attempt to resist a totalising identity, though one deserving of separate consideration (see below).

Balance - backwards and sideways

A common actor adjustment technique used by relatives was the attempt to introduce balance in the impression held of the offender. Good qualities, acts or events are held up to show that the offender is 'not all bad'. Klockars described this 'metaphoric ledger' as a technique used by professional fences in his study (Klockars 1974) and Ditton shows how recalling occasions when they chose not to fiddle their customers allowed bread salesmen in his study to do the same (Ditton 1977). Some of the balancing accounts of relatives in this study were backwards in direction, showing the good side of the offender prior to the offence, while others were sideways in direction, showing the offender's current positive qualities. Lorraine's account is an example of the former:

She was a very soft, she's always been a soft, quiet natured person, she took on her Dad's side like that. . . As a child she was very forward, educationally she was very forward . . . I've still got reports from Grace from nursery, how she's, as little as she was all those years ago, she's a star pupil, she was always helping all the children when they fell down, she's helped to feed the other little ones, you know, very loving towards all the children and caring towards everybody, very mannerable, very polite. . . Very clean, even when she was little, she was very, very clean and as she got older she was growing up into a nice young girl. All those school reports from primary to secondary school, she was always in all the activities that was going, whether it was games, school plays, Christmas activities, she was involved in everything like that, she was always in and out of libraries, she was kept occupied.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

Sideways balance accounts focus on current good qualities that should be taken into consideration. Beverly and Christine both draw attention to similar qualities:

When I went to the prison [my grandson] asked the officer if he could show me his room which he did. And I said 'my goodness', I said 'I can't get over how nice and clean this place is'. And the man said to me, the officer said 'it's down to you' he said, 'because he cleans the room'. He said 'he's a very tidy boy isn't he?' I said 'he is. He's very fussy. He's always been like that'. Yeah, he's always been like that. But they said, you know, they said 'you've taught him well because he can cook and what have you' . . . because he ain't a bad boy, really on his own. He's as nice as pie, because I never had no trouble with him, as I said.

(Beverly, mother, violent offence group)

And if you hear [my daughter] talking now, she's always been polite, always been, always respected her elders, you know, she talks to somebody who's older than her, she knows how to talk to them. She's always been like that.

(Christine, mother, violent offence group)

Most interviewees and fieldwork participants pointed to some good qualities in the offender they were supporting. Some, like Beverly and Christine, pointed to specific qualities. Others, like Debbie, just wanted me to know that the offender was not a bad person:

But I know that [my husband's] not a bad person, I just know he's a very sad, hurting, sick person and . . . he's just not a nasty person, there's nothing, just that horrible thing [the offence] but when you look beyond that you see that he just wasn't well, you know, it was just not, and I feel sorry

for him because I think that he got a really raw deal in life. You know, and I really believe that.

(Debbie, wife, homicide group)

In fact, much of the time spent with interviewees would be taken up with their descriptions of the offender and his or her life before and after the offence, often offering positive descriptions and personal anecdotes to balance the stark fact of the serious offence. Before, after and in between interviews relatives would talk about the offender and most interviewees took the time to show me photographs of the offender, and if they were parents to talk about the offender's childhood and show me photographs from that time. Balancing accounts were therefore an important part of time spent informally with interviewees, in addition to being given during interviews. Balancing accounts were also given by many fieldwork participants with whom I had more informal conversations⁸⁰ at Aftermath meetings and seminar weekends.

Separate the actor from the act

This technique deals with both the act and the actor, but is technically an actor adjustment: these accounts ask the audience to look at the actor in isolation from the act. Relatives say that they can still love and support the offender without condoning what he or she has done: it is possible to 'hate the sin but love the sinner':

R: I've heard people in Aftermath talk about hating the sin but loving the sinner, making a distinction between the two. Is that something that's relevant to you?

H: Well, how can I put this? As I said to you, I don't condone what he's done, but then on the other hand I have to forget about it, because he's still my son.

(Hilda, mother, homicide group)

This technique is necessary precisely because all the other act and actor adjustments are so partial. If relatives were offering more total excuses or justifications they would be less likely to need this technique. Relatives say it is possible to make a separation

⁸⁰ I was also shown photographs on some occasions by fieldwork participants at Aftermath events. I would often be given a description of the offender's good qualities and told 'If you met him, you would like him'.

between the behaviour/actions of the offender and their character/person. Because this technique is such a significant part of how relatives account for continuing to support the offender it will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter.

ACT ADJUSTMENT (He or she did it, but it's not as bad as you might think)

This less common form of adjustment took four main forms: *denial of injury*, *denial of the victim* (both of which are techniques of neutralization from Sykes and Matza (Sykes and Matza 1957)), *normalising the act*, and *comparative adjustment*.

Denial of injury

Relatives using this technique seek to minimise the injury caused. Two attempts to do so came from Ada and Nancy. Ada accepted her son's claim that he did not commit 'rape':

R: And was he convicted for three offences of rape?

A: Yes, yeah. He said he never raped them, it was attempted rape, but because it was three [offences] he got five years for each . . .

R: Has it ever affected how you felt about your son, the fact that he's been convicted of the three rapes?

A: No, no. Because he said he never raped, he never got, you know, he just attacked. But er, no, I've never thought about it like that.

(Ada, mother, rape group)

Nancy's husband was convicted of sex offences against his now adult children. She showed me photographs during her interview which formed part of the court papers. She accepted her husband had taken these photographs but sought to minimise their seriousness:

N: Now when Bill took these photographs of his daughter Donna, she wanted to be a model and he didn't want-

R: [Looking through court papers Nancy has given me] Why are these in here, these pictures?

N: Well he was giving them, they are, some of them are rude, I mean but when he took these photographs his wife was in the room at the same time.

R: Really?

N: I mean they are, some of them, but he said he felt as though he was going to take the photographs the way [his daughter] wanted them taken. You see some of them are, they said at the time that he took these for his own personal pleasure.

R: Right, and she wants to be a model does she?

N: Yeah. . . Because I mean the girls did model for them, it was the photography club. He's got his degree in photography, my husband. But some of them are what you call a little bit naughty but I mean if you were taking them for a portfolio but you know, there is one or two which I thought were a bit naughtier, something like that [shows me photograph of child posed seductively wearing little clothing].

R: Yeah. How old was she at the time?

N: I think she was 13 at the time. Yeah. But I'd never seen these photographs in the house because when we moved, I moved my flat, I moved Bill's flat and I actually saw, looked at every photograph Bill had because to be truthful, I tossed a few out of his ex-wives.

R: So what, was he actually, was there a charge relating to these photographs?

N: Yes, he was found guilty on them. Yes.

(Nancy, wife, sex offence group)

It is difficult to minimise the injury caused by serious offences, especially those which are sexual or violent, which may explain why this technique was rarely used by participants in this study.

Denial of the victim

This was another technique that rarely appeared in relatives' accounts, again likely to be due to the seriousness of the offences and the harm caused. Both Alice and Celia are

related to offenders who killed criminals known to the police for drug offences and were offered denial of the victim accounts by police officers:

A man was killed [by my nephew], he was a drug dealer, and when I was giving my statement the WPC said 'if it's any consolation he's done society a favour', and for a very brief moment I thought yeah, yeah of course he has! And I was so disgusted with myself; I said to myself how can you say that? Somebody is dead. This man who we were told has got two children and a wife, he's got a mother and a father.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

And so the police even said at the time 'Don't quote me, but, he's done society a favour'.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

Interestingly, neither was willing to accept these accounts at face value. As Celia explains, she was initially tempted but realised it was not acceptable; Alice was unsure of her son's guilt and although she spent some time describing what the police had told her about the victim of the crime, was not prepared to justify the offence in this way.

Frances attributed some of the blame for her husband's sexual offending to his victim, their foster daughter, despite the fact she was only fifteen. Frances discovered the offences because the girl became pregnant and DNA tests proved her husband to be the father. She also partly attributes her husband's actions to his wish to have children which she says she could not fulfil. However, the mitigation offered by this act adjustment was not strong enough for her; she left her husband when he was sentenced because she could not live with what he had done:

R: What's your understanding now of why he did what he did?

F: Um, 'she offered it to me I couldn't say no'. You know, and quite honestly, as everybody says, how many men would say no? But, you know, he shouldn't have done it, she was under age.

R: How did you come to that understanding?

F: What, that he shouldn't have done it?

R: No, the understanding of *why* he did it, is it something you've had to think through a lot, or?

F: He always wanted children. Always wanted children. And er, I was not in a position to, because I'd had a hysterectomy, you know, so there was no way I could have children, um. I'm not saying that's *the* reason, but I do believe that that is some of the reason.

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

Beatrice's son was convicted of manslaughter after he killed his girlfriend in an altercation. She says she blames the victim and in fact sees her son as a victim:

B: I see Justin as a victim.

R: You do? A victim of?

B: Of the victim

R: A victim of?

B: A victim of the victim. [A psychiatrist] from the early days of Aftermath, he said 'very often, Shirley, we find that the offender is the victim's victim', and he said 'I think this is true in [your son] Justin's case'⁸¹.

(Beatrice, mother, homicide group)

Betty was unusual among the interviewees in this study because her view was that her brother, who was in his fifties, was totally devoid of any blame despite his victim being, she thought, around fifteen, and as she says in the quotation below they had been having a relationship for several years. Her account was more total, and the only one that came close to being a full justification. For Betty the blame lay clearly with the victim who she felt was not a victim at all:

B: He was convicted of indecent assault

R: Do you feel comfortable telling me a bit about what happened?

B: I don't really know that much about that. I do know that it was a boyfriend who had cost him in the region of about £30,000. He took him on trips on Concorde, he travelled all over the world, bought him cars, bought him motorbikes and for several years he was perfectly happy with that situation and then when he asked to borrow some more money from my brother my brother refused, he suddenly decided that he'd been indecently

⁸¹ This is interesting because it invokes the idea of victim precipitation, e.g. see (e.g. see Amir 1971; Wolfgang 1958) There has been much debate about this in criminology, e.g. see (e.g. see Fattah 1991; Walklate 1989)

assaulted. That's why I say, they don't go in to the whole case, they don't go into the whole story. I mean as far as I'm concerned that's a rent boy, he's a pimp, and he should never have been entitled to bring the case in the first place. And he's been had for drugs; he's been kicked out of his job for moneys lost, he's a thoroughbred criminal.

(Betty, sister, sex offence group)

Normalising the act

This was another strategy that was rarely used by participants in this study, which is again likely to be due to the seriousness of the offences; it is much more difficult to normalise such serious acts. George suggests that anyone could kill given the right situation:

Well I've always said that anybody could commit a serious offence, could kill, if the situation was right. I think, I've certainly been placed in a position where I could have killed somebody, you know, [when I was] quite young, so I think it's the time and the place.

(George, father, homicide group)

Ada was one interviewee who had accepted a normalising account offered to her by her G.P. The acceptability of this account does seem somewhat surprising - her son had been convicted of three separate rapes of strangers - but this demonstrates how difficult it is to construct acceptable normalising accounts about such serious offences:

I went to the doctor myself one day when we were down here in [local city], and the doctor asked me how my son was and I said 'how do you know about my son?' And he said 'the police came and I had to give details', he said 'don't worry', he says 'a lot of young boys do that, make that offence', he said 'it's quite common'. I said 'oh I didn't know', he says 'no', he says, 'it's part of growing up'. He says 'some are caught and some aren't' . . . the doctor thought that it was a common thing; quite a few teenage boys go through it, part of growing up.

(Ada, mother, rape group)

Comparative adjustment

Drawing comparisons between ourselves and our circumstances and others is a characteristic of social life. Relatives in this study were trying to absorb and understand the fact of the serious offence, and their accounts often revealed their own ranking of offence seriousness, placing the act hierarchically in relation to others; the status of a particular act was therefore defined in its relationship to other acts, on both a broad level (murder is worse than sex offences) and a specific level (the crime committed by her son was worse than the crime committed by mine). Social psychologists have pointed to this tendency to make comparisons to others. Festinger has suggested that comparisons are usually made to those who have performed better (Festinger 1954), while Wills suggests that 'downward comparisons' to those in worse circumstances are usually made when we ourselves are experiencing negative emotions and feeling vulnerable (Wills 1981); Janoff-Bulman highlights the important emotionally palliative effect of 'comparing ourselves with people whose outcomes are not as good as our own' (Janoff-Bulman 1992: 119).

Comparisons were made by relatives on other levels, such financial circumstances or family situation, but comparative adjustment in terms of the offence was particularly common. Interestingly, a single shared understanding of levels of offence seriousness amongst relatives did not exist. So, for example, Mary thought drugs offences would be worse than the violent offence her daughter was convicted of:

M: It must be difficult though if you have had a son who, alright if he wants to take drugs that's his lookout, but I don't think I could tolerate any sons or daughters who sold the drugs, supplied them, no.

R: You couldn't?

M: No. Well think how that spreads out, no. We'd have too many Leah Betts⁸² on our hands, wouldn't we? No, I'd find that difficult to forget because you've damaged so many people's lives.

(Mary, mother, other group)

⁸² Leah Betts died in November 1995 after taking ecstasy at her 18th birthday party. The case received a great deal of media attention.

Hilda thought sexual offences against children were worse than the murder her son was convicted of:

H: When I got the first newsletter from Aftermath I read it and I read it again and I said to Victor 'no, this isn't me', so he said 'let me read it', he said 'oh'. That was concerning children and I thought oh no, and then after a while you start thinking literally about what he's done and you think well, there but for the grace of God go I. That could be my son here instead of being in there for murder.

R: So you were thinking it must be different for people whose relatives committed sexual offences against children? You felt that was quite different?

H: Yes, yeah

R: Does it feel worse to you?

H: Yes, absolutely. It's ridiculous because my son took that young boy's life, but to me, anything interfering with children, to me it's sickening. . . That is just my personal feeling.

R: So you think if your son had done something like that it would have been much harder to understand for you?

A: I think I would have killed him myself.

(Hilda, mother, homicide group)

However, comparisons were not always downwards. Lillian and Harriet's sons were both accused of sexual offences against children and they both thought sexual offences were worse:

I mean I think murder's bad but I think sexual things like that, rape and stuff like that, I think are far worse than even murder myself, you know.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

Even now I think sexual abuse, and I mean real sexual abuse, is in some way more horrible than rape or murder. That people can do these things to little children. . . I find it quite horrendous, quite sickening. And although I feel like that, I couldn't feel that my son was a monster, even if he had done it.

(Harriet, mother, sex offence group)

Celia thought taking someone's life was the most serious crime, and this was what her nephew had been convicted of:

I believe that to take somebody's life is the ultimate crime, although again my experience tells me, when I have spoken to people who've been on the receiving end of sexual offences, that they would say that their lives have been taken and destroyed.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

This hierarchical ranking therefore often operated as a straightforward *placement* rather than adjustment of an act, part of the struggle to absorb and make sense of what has happened, but was also used to adjust the impressions of others when the acts to which comparison was made were worse:

There are worse crimes than the one that my son was found guilty of, then there are, aren't there? The killing of children, of defenceless old age pensioners, there's killing people slowly . . . I mean if my son was, had been accused of killing a child, I really don't think I would have gone to visit him.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

Maruna found similar techniques in the accounts of ex-offenders in his study. The ex-offenders compared themselves to 'real criminals' who were worse than they were in terms of the crimes they were prepared to commit, and also in terms of other factors, such as drug use or mental health, thereby differentiating themselves as not 'true' criminals (Maruna 2001).

Opportunities to draw comparisons occurred in the context of self-help groups and prison visiting when relatives came into contact with other relatives of offenders, or when high-profile cases were reported in the media. George and Ada both talked about drawing comparisons in the self-help context. George is aware that this might be an adjustment technique on his part:

I think sometimes that you, even though people are talking to you about the crimes that their relatives have committed, I felt that I was being sympathetic to them, rather than them being sympathetic to me. I heard things that they said and I thought well I'm not like that, it's not just a question of say killing somebody or whatever else, there were horrible side effects some of them had. A particular chap had robbed an old man and

actually bugged him at the same time, and that to me is totally offensive. .
.but when somebody tells you that sort of thing you sort of recoil from it,
but then I think well you need my sympathy; I don't need yours so much. I
don't know whether I minimise Justin's crime to a level, and maximise
theirs, I don't know whether that's a way of expressing it, because in a way
that's the way I felt about it.

(George, father, homicide group)

I think with going to [Aftermath meetings] you got used to talking about it,
you know, and hearing other people's stories, which were more horrendous
than yours. Because there was, I think there was, three or four had murdered
and one had been a child offender. And then I've got friends, I've got two
friends in [Northern city], their sons have murdered, you know, so mine's
fairly mundane to what theirs was.

(Ada, mother, rape group)

Sometimes these comparative accounts were a response to attempts by outsiders to impose uniform definitions on offence categories. This was particularly the case with relatives of sex offenders who felt that all sex offenders were subject to the same narrow construction which allowed for no gradation of seriousness. Attempts to adjust the acts were often met with strenuous resistance - to say that one sex offence against a child was not as bad as another was to say it was somehow 'better'. Relatives of sex offenders faced rigid constructions of what it meant to be a sex offender on many occasions, but some of these constructions mattered more than others, particularly where they as family members were implicated.

Act and actor adjustments are therefore used by relatives to account for the offence and to attempt to alter the impression held of the offender. As relatives of serious offenders they care what people think of the offender and what he or she has done, but they are balancing this, in most cases, with recognition of the harm caused by the serious offence and a wish for the offender to take responsibility for his or her actions. As we have seen, relatives are players in offenders' and others' accounts of the offence, and may be causally implicated; the following chapter looks at how relatives account for their own actions and how they address this implication.

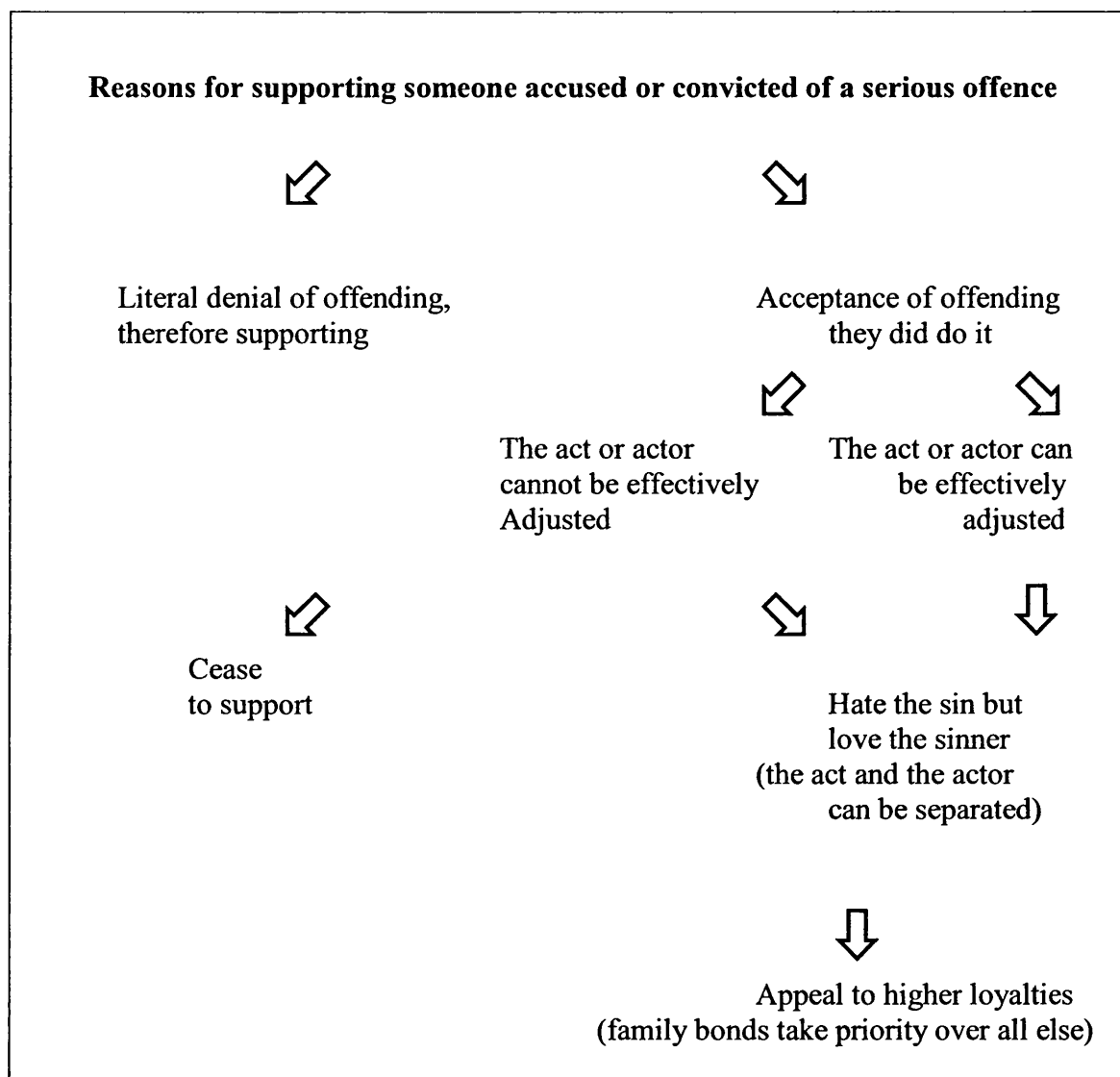
Chapter Six: Relatives Account for their own Actions and Address Family Shame

An account is only necessary when actions have deviated from norms in some respect, and it is not immediately self-evident that families should need to account for a decision to support or stand by the offender as families that stay together are not usually considered deviant. However, relatives felt the need to account or were called upon to do so for several reasons: because the offence itself is serious and hard to support; because by supporting the offender, they might be seen as condoning the offence; and because they themselves may be seen as in some way culpable in the course of events. As we have seen in chapter four, relatives can be subject to shame constructed around several dimensions: *association*; *genetic*; *omission*; *commission*; and *continuation*. The techniques used by relatives to account for the offence are part of the process of accounting for continuing to support the offender (the last source of shame on our list), and this chapter begins with that dimension.

Continuation of secondary stigma

The process of accounting for continuing to support the offender can be seen to have a logical order (see Table Five below). It starts with a division between those relatives (few in number in this study) who say they support the 'offender' because he or she simply did not commit the offence and is literally not guilty, and those who acknowledge that the offender did commit a crime. There is then a further division between those relatives who can offer acceptable mitigation in the form of act or actor adjustments as described in the previous chapter, and those who cannot. Those who cannot (because they cannot find act or actor adjustments that they themselves can honour or that others will honour) will either cease to support, or will use further techniques. If these adjustments are effective, relatives are able to offer an account for their ongoing support that is likely to be honoured. However, we saw in the previous chapter that these adjustments are necessarily partial pleas that do not usually attempt to excuse the offender totally or justify the act as right or reasonable, and the offender will therefore retain some degree of responsibility for his or her actions and some degree of blame.

Table Five: Accounting for Supporting (Continuation of Secondary Stigma)



For those relatives who can offer acceptable act or actor adjustments, and for those who cannot but are continuing to support, two further techniques are available to account for continuing a relationship with someone who has committed a serious offence, and therefore the maintenance of their secondary stigma. First, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the act and the actor can be separated - it is possible to 'hate the sin but love the sinner' - and doing this enables them to support the offender despite what he or she has done. This is an actor adjustment because relatives ask the audience to look at the actor in isolation from his or her acts, but the technique has a dual purpose:

in addition to wanting to improve the impression held by others of the offender, another major purpose of the technique is accounting for the ability to support a serious offender while not condoning his or her actions. Secondly, relatives of serious offenders offer a *justification* for their actions - an 'appeal to higher loyalties' (Sykes and Matza 1957) - that strong family bonds take priority over all else. "She's my daughter and I'd support her no matter what she'd done", "he's still my son", and similar refrains were heard numerous times during fieldwork and interviews.

Using these techniques, relatives account for their actions after discovery of the offence. They must also account for their actions before discovery, and as we saw in chapter four, two sources of shame refer to life pre-discovery (*omission* and *commission*). Relatives' attempts to account for different sources of shame will be examined in the later part of this chapter. The family might be blamed in offenders' accounts or in the interpretations of others within and outside the family. This in turn is connected to their decision to support and how they account for it: if they are predominantly blamed by the offender this is one reason that they would be less likely to support him or her.

Ceasing to support the offender

From the sample of thirty-two interviewees, only five had ceased to support the offender⁸³, all of whom were wives or partners of male offenders: Frances, Nicola and Clare from the sex offender group and Debbie and Stephanie from the homicide group. Four left their husbands during the prison sentence and one after his release. It is interesting that these women felt the need to account for their decision to leave the offender, and perhaps demonstrates the strength in our society of the alternative account of family loyalties and marriage vows. Additionally in Aftermath the majority of members are supporting the offender which is likely to have contributed to the need of non-supporting members to account for their actions within that context. All five offered accounts explaining their decision not to support. Frances expressed feelings of

⁸³ One took the decision to leave her husband just before the main offence, three took this decision when their husband or partner was imprisoned, and one took the decision when he was released. Three no longer had any contact with their former partner, one had contact in relation to the care of their child, and one said she continued to support the offender, and maintained contact, but considered her relationship to be over and no longer visited him in prison.

guilt for not supporting her husband when he was found guilty of sexual offences against their foster daughter:

F: I think I feel guilty when I meet up with other Aftermath members because not many of them, they're all supporting their particular [family] member that's committed [an offence]. No, I've not met any, I've not met up with any that have you know, divorced them and things like that. The only ones that I've met are sticking with their family, and that's why I feel guilty.

R: Right, right. And have you had any reaction from Aftermath members to that effect?

F: No, no.

Frances felt the need to account for her decision not to support her husband:

F: I didn't fall out of love with him. I divorced him because of what had occurred, I couldn't live with him knowing that he'd done that, I'd never have been able to have trusted him again, every time, you know if he'd come back, every time he'd left the house I would have thought oh my God, what's he doing?

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

Clare explained why she decided to leave her husband when he was released from prison. She explains very clearly that she could not provide a justification or excuse because her husband's sexual offences against his (now adult) children had gone on for so many years:

I think again the separation of the prison sentence gives you time to reflect . . . I began to change and had my doubts at around May. . . [the abuse] was over a period of some years, actually. I think it was the final straw for me in a sense of trying to come to terms with what he'd done and that's the bit I suppose that finally I found I couldn't live with it, if truth be known. I think it happened, we think at least, when now again I went through it with him, we worked out that it happened over about a period of seven years, if not longer. . . I think that's really what got to me in the end. I think [if it happens] once, it's easier to make a justification or excuse, isn't it? One could almost accept perhaps a one-off, one shouldn't I know but one, it's easier for the brain to get your head around isn't it? But somebody said 'oh well, I came home drunk' or 'I don't know it just happened' - but it did go on for as long as it did. However much I tried to justify that to myself, at the end of the day that's what I think I found hard.

(Clare, wife, sex offence group)

All five of those who did not support were Aftermath members, and talked at length in interviews about the traumatic experience they had undergone. Despite the decision not to support, they still identified themselves as relatives of serious offenders, and thought they had been profoundly affected by the experience. We can now return to the two techniques used by relatives who do support the offender to account for their actions: *hate the sin but love the sinner* and *appeal to higher loyalties*.

Hate the sin but love the sinner

Prior to conducting interviews, I had heard the expression ‘hating the sin but loving the sinner’ used by fieldwork participants at Aftermath meetings. All interviewees were asked directly whether it was a distinction that was relevant to them⁸⁴, and for most of those who believed in the offender’s culpability it was. One participant disliked the expression because of its religious connotations, but most identified with it in some way, both Aftermath members and non-Aftermath members. For some participants, this reflected the way they would deal with errant behaviour from any family member, and particularly with children:

It always reminds me of when my daughter was little and did all sorts of vile things and she used to say as I deprived her of her pocket money or her television, ‘Oh you’re a nasty mummy, you hate me’ and I used to say ‘I don’t hate you, I hate what you do’, and to me there’s a very clear dividing line there because I’m sure it becomes very difficult in some cases, if for example you have a woman whose husband has sexually abused their granddaughter, that must be really difficult to take, but you can still continue to love them as a person even though you hate what they did.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

Going back to my social work training and how you, you always try and say to parents who have problems with children, you know, ‘it’s not the child that’s bad, it’s the behaviour’. And if you like I used that analogy with [my son] when I was trying to explain to him what was wrong with what his father had done⁸⁵ and I would say to him, again, separate the behaviour

⁸⁴The question was: “I’ve heard people in Aftermath [or ‘other relatives of serious offenders’ if the interviewee was not an Aftermath member] talk about ‘hating the sin but loving the sinner’, making a distinction between the two. Is that something that is relevant to you?”

⁸⁵ Clare’s description of using this adjustment with her son also shows that family members might construct accounts for each other, something that may be gendered. Other studies have

from the person, doesn't mean that the person who's done something wrong is all bad. I suppose that's what I was trying to say. But the behaviour was obviously wrong and very damaging. But it doesn't mean that the person's all bad.

(Clare, wife, sex offence group)

Making this separation between the act and the actor allows relatives to continue to see the offender as a good person while disapproving of their actions. This is akin to Braithwaite's model of reintegrative shaming where 'expressions of community disapproval. . . are followed by gestures of reacceptance into the community of law-abiding citizens' (Braithwaite 1989: 55); the act is disapproved of, but the actor is not outcast. Braithwaite's description of reintegrative shaming depends upon this separation:

It is shaming which labels the act as evil while striving to preserve the identity of the offender as essentially good. It is directed at signifying evil deeds rather than evil persons in the Christian tradition of 'hate the sin and love the sinner'.

(Braithwaite 1989: 101)

It is precisely this that relatives attempt to do. As Braithwaite states, his theory is based in part upon shaming in families:

The best place to see reintegrative shaming at work is in loving families. Griffiths has described a 'family model' of the criminal process as one which, instead of punishment being administered within the traditional framework of disharmony and fundamentally irreconcilable interests, it is imposed within a framework of reconcilable, even mutually supportive interests:

Offences, in a family, are normal, expected occurrences. Punishment is not something a child receives in isolation from the rest of his relationship to the family; nor is it something which presupposes or carries with it a change of status from 'child' to 'criminal child'. When a parent punishes his child, both parent and child know that afterward they will go on living together as before. The child gets his punishment, as before, within a continuum of love, after his dinner and during his toilet training and before bed-time story and in

found, for example, that women are more likely than men to take on the role of 'relationship historian' and observe, document and analyse major events in relationships, [Orbuch, 1997 #278 469]; it may be that women are more likely to take on the role of accounting for untoward events.

the middle of general family play, and he is punished in his own unchanged capacity as a child with failings (like all other children) rather than as some kind of distinct and dangerous outsider. (Griffiths, 1970, p376)

(Braithwaite 1989: 56)

Participants in this study were relatives of adult offenders, and though not administering punishment of this kind, they argued that they expressed disapproval while continuing to love and support the offender.

A study of Catholic priests accused of paedophilia found that the Church offered accounts which involved making a separation between the character and behaviour of the priest (Thomson et al. 1998). This is important because 'stigma for both [the priest and the church] is reduced if conduct rather than moral essence is at issue. The Church is less culpable for failing to detect behavioral disorders than for failing to recognize low moral character, and priests can be treated for specific disorders but not for flawed moral essence' (Thomson et al. 1998: 185)⁸⁶. The stigma for relatives in this study may be reduced if conduct rather than moral essence is at issue, and it is easier to defend continuing to support someone with a behavioural disorder that might be treated than someone who is inherently bad or evil.

Attempts to make this separation between the actor and the act do not always receive wide acceptance from those with whom relatives come into contact, who assume instead that supporting the actor must reflect support for the act. Celia and Harriet explain:

I do not condone in any way, shape or form what [my nephew] Owen did, then again I know Owen, I know there is another part to Owen that other people could not be aware of, so in that sense it is separating out the deed from the person and the way the person's behaved, and I think that's where you start taking into account their history, life experiences, getting involved in drugs with Owen, whatever. So yes, I don't condone what he did at all, and I think that that is one of the things that people, some people seem to believe that because you can still visit, that because you're doing that you must agree with what he's done, that he or she has done, that you are condoning it, they find it hard to appreciate, because most people would say

⁸⁶ This study is also interesting because it provides one of the few examples in the literature of an attempt to account for another's actions (although in this case an organisation accounting for one of its members).

'lock them up and throw away the key, they deserve everything they get', and they think that families should also take that stance, and some families do, and for their own reasons, but that hasn't been the way for many, many people that I know, that's not the case.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

Certainly I think people feel that the relatives, if they haven't turned on the wrongdoer, are condoning what they have done. . . I certainly am very reticent who I tell about Aftermath or where I'm going because I don't think people would understand.

(Harriet, mother, sex offence group)

Paradoxically, as we have seen in chapter four, relatives experience blame because of the unacceptability, in many circles, of this account and are blamed for continuation; maintaining their secondary stigma by continuing to support the offender is construed as implicit support for his or her actions. Additionally, another study suggests that religious beliefs such as 'hate the sin but love the sinner' might have negative consequences for those that hold them, engendering a tolerance for domestic abuse and a resistance to seek help (Burriss and Jackson 1999). However, it was a widely-used and popular strategy with relatives of serious offenders in this study, and part of Aftermath's collective narrative (see chapter seven).

Appeal to higher loyalties

A final account offered by supporting relatives is an *appeal to higher loyalties* (Sykes and Matza 1957), holding up family bonds to counter real or perceived criticism of their support. This account might be offered in conjunction with successful actor or act adjustments or as a final account when all others have failed. In the case of a wife, the marriage vows and their sacredness might be held up. Eileen, a wife in the child sex offence group, felt pressure to separate from her husband and offered an account expressing the strength of her belief in marriage to counter this:

I don't believe in divorce. I'm not Catholic, I just don't believe you should get married in the first place unless you're absolutely certain and that you're strong enough to bear whatever it brings. You know, everything, married life is sacred to me and I spent hours talking to my children [before they married], that this was a sacred vow, that if they didn't think they could maintain, then they should get married in a

registry office. . . . And so I can't, now social workers thought I was a quack you see. And in fact I called my vicar who happens to be one of the most down to earth people, and I said 'look, they're driving me mad to divorce him and I can't. I don't want to and I can't'. And he said 'no, stick to your guns, tell 'em' and I did. I said [in court] 'I know you all think it's ridiculous, but I love my husband as much as I did the day I married him, I want to be married to him and I've made a sacred oath and I'm not going to break it. It's as sacred as the oath I took when I walked in this box, I don't make sacred oaths everyday of my life. . . . You have no right', and the judge, he was wonderful, he said 'no one's got the right to try to force you to divorce'; I said 'well I have had pressure from social services and even my own solicitor'. And so as I said, it's been difficult for me.

(Eileen, wife, sex offence group)

In a fieldwork conversation, a mother used the expression 'blood is thicker than water' and said that she could not walk away from a child born of her body. Lorraine refers to the bond between mother and child:

I will help my daughter; she'll always need my help until I'm taken off this earth, no matter how old she is. Same as like my other two, they'll still need my help and support until I'm taken off this earth. I will still try to do my best to fight for them, like a mother should. . . . I mean even if she was involved or did do it, you know, I'd still love her, I couldn't hate her. I couldn't hate her and I could never turn my back on her, because I'm her mother. . . . A mother can't stop loving her children, because that bond is there from the day she conceived. Oh fathers come and go, fathers, they plant the seed and they go anyway, you see, but the mother can't. She can't go and leave it, no, no, no. So you see, I feel personally even if she was involved, if she was doing it or she did do it, I'd still be there for her, I would stand by her, no matter what. I'm not going to say I will agree with what she done, but I will not throw her away, I will not turn my back on her, no way; I will still be there. . . . You've got to, because if you don't, who is? Who is? You know. I stand by my kids, each and every one of them.

(Lorraine, mother, other group)

So a competing account is offered, and as Sykes and Matza state, an *appeal to higher loyalties* does not offer an account of new oppositional values, but rather one that attempts to re-align the family with conventional society. The competing account of unbreakable family bonds is a powerful one in conventional society. Returning to the book *Building Good Families in a Changing World*, we find a description of the importance of family loyalty:

Those family members disposed to be faithful take seriously the importance of being devoted to other family members. This commitment instils a sense of loyalty, that you protect those to whom you are devoted, you keep coming back to them, and you show your attachment to family members by being dependable.

(Porter 1995: 38)

However, despite the power of this account, it is not enough to simply support unconditionally when someone has committed a serious offence, and hence this account was usually offered by relatives in this study in conjunction with the separation of act and actor to show that they were not condoning that offence.

Addressing shame

Most relatives in this study oscillated between shame-resisting and shame-acknowledging accounts. Relatives of serious offenders are exposed to the same discourses of family responsibility outlined in chapter four as other members of society and many therefore struggled with an ongoing tension between internalising and resisting shame. The most strongly resisted dimensions were the first, that relatives are the same as offenders (association), and the fifth, that relatives are to blame for continuing to support the offender (continuation).

Association

Relatives were at pains to separate themselves from the criminal actions of the offender by stressing two points: that they did not condone the act (part of 'hating the sin but loving the sinner') and they were not criminal families. A frequently expressed view was that there was another type of offender - a 'hardened criminal', professional criminal, or recidivist petty criminal - with a family that might also be criminal, or at least condoning crime. This was what relatives in this study wanted to be distinguished from - and resisted shame for being 'all the same'.

As relatives of *serious* offenders, they saw themselves in a different category, first because they thought serious offences were more likely to be single offences rather than repeat recidivist offences:

I've always thought it's not a way of life, serious offending isn't a way of life, whereas inverted commas 'petty criminals', it is a way of life and it's almost an occupational hazard going to prison and yeah, whereas serious offences are usually 'one-offs' in the family

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Secondly, this was because they were not 'criminal families' - an offender in the family was a new experience for them and was devastating in a way it was not for relatives who were used to this:

R: What were your impressions of the other families prison visiting?

B: Well I remember one because this is what my friend said about career criminals and career criminal families and second and third generation, and some of them are. I was waiting to see Justin, I was in one prison years ago, this was in the early days, and there was this little Scots bloke, cocky little bloke, and he greeted the prison officers and he was walking up and down and he said 'alright?', he said 'if its not me in here it my lad'. And another woman who I knew well was f'ing this and f'ing that and she said 'it's fucking thirty years I've been coming here to see my father and now him, and if it's not him it's our Anthony and if it's not our Anthony it's,' you know, she was a career prison visitor. She'd been doing it for thirty years.

(Beatrice, mother, homicide group)

R: How much do you think you have in common with the families of people who commit less serious offences like theft?

A: Not a lot. No, I do feel different, and it's stupid because it's awful what [my son's] done, but I don't think of us as a criminal-type family. And I hear that such a lot when I talk to people on the phone too [as an Aftermath supporter], so I'm not, I know I'm not the only one.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

Thirdly, relatives sought to distance themselves from the families of professional criminals:

A: The thing is like you don't get somebody like Ronnie Biggs⁸⁷ [coming to Aftermath for help], his family, or you know,

⁸⁷ One of the members of the gang responsible for the notorious Great Train Robbery in 1963, who subsequently spent 35 years on the run, returning to the UK in 2001.

R: You don't get professional criminals' families coming to you?

A: Coming to you for help because they've got the support within their criminal network. I know that's being judgmental, but they have. I've never had anybody ring up who has you know, the likes of people who are in and out of prison all the time.

R: Really?

A: Never. Because it's more often than not, 99% of the cases that I have had, it's something that's happened once. It's just happened, that's it. And it's hit the family like a brick wall falling down on them. You know, I've not had people that are in and out of prison all the time because it's a way of life for them. And it's a sad thing to say but it's a way of life. You know, they know the system, they know it inside out; they know how to work it.

R: And where, so where would they get support do you think? Where would the families, people like that get support?

A: I think it becomes a way of life. And they, like I said, they know the system, and they know how to work the system. You know, they know about prisons inside out, they know about visiting. They don't need any advice. You know, they know how to do it. Not like the Aftermath families that come and they're devastated about what's going on. They've never been to a prison in their life before. They don't even know what to expect and that's the difference.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

It is interesting to note that this marking of certain types of offenders and their families as 'other' and as morally inferior is an inverted form of that which occurs in prisons. Many prisoners do not want to mix with certain categories of offenders, in particular sex offenders, and many relatives of professional criminals would not want to mix with relatives of sex offenders⁸⁸. At the same time, relatives of serious offenders are seeking to separate themselves from relatives of 'real' criminals, despite the fact that these 'real' criminals might have committed less serious offences.

Genetic

As we have seen in chapter five, relatives resisted genetic explanations for offending, which may be because these explanations point to the very essence of an offender,

⁸⁸ This point was made to me by a former professional criminal.

suggest the offender may not be treatable, and further contaminate those who share a genetic heritage. Clare's husband was convicted of sex offences, and although he was someone to whom she was clearly not genetically related, they had a son who might be considered 'at risk' of offending if a genetic explanation was accepted:

I would hate to think that sexual offending is genetic, that you're born if you like, to be an offender. I still think the environment and what you learn as you grow up, what is done to you in a sense and what happens to you within society will have a bearing on how you turn out and obviously the choices you make.

(Clare, wife, sex offence group)

Although some relatives questioned whether genetics or biology might have a role to play, this was unusual. However, most relatives in this study said they had no family history of serious offending; it is possible that less resistance to these explanations might be found amongst those who do.

Omission

Many relatives questioned whether they could or should have done something to prevent the offence. This is well illustrated by Frances's comments which show her struggle with self-blame for not protecting her foster-daughter. Despite this, she also resisted taking responsibility and terminated her marriage when her husband was sent to prison:

F: I think people were horrified, the fact that the victim was also a foster child, really, because she was placed into our care for safekeeping, and that's, I think that's how I found it so hard, she was placed in my care for safekeeping and I didn't keep her safe. . .

R: OK, so if you could summarise it, how do you think the police saw you?

F: Probably the same way as I thought of myself. Because I felt very gullible. Very stupid. Very guilty.

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

The police had said to Stephanie that the young woman her husband killed looked very similar to her. This had happened after Stephanie had left him after enduring

many years of domestic violence and moved into a refuge. She felt she was in some way to blame because she had refused to go out and meet him on the night he had committed the offence:

R: Did you have anything to do with the victim's family? Were they in the newspapers or anything like that?

S: They did a big write up. I would have loved to have seen them. I would want to say to them you know, how sorry I am, I do feel guilty, it was my fault, I'll always blame myself, if I'd have gone out that night and met him it might have never happened, but then it could have been me [that he killed].

(Stephanie, wife, homicide group)

Commission

Long-term past

This was the most common level of blame that parents struggled with, and as we have seen in chapter four discourses of family responsibility often focus powerfully on the parental role. Many relatives, such as Anne and Alice, were aware that they were implicated in accounts that stressed family background and struggled with this:

R: There are lots of ideas about why people commit serious offences, what are your own views about that?

A: That's a hard one, I don't know. Textbook, I know all about why people commit offences, and that's hard for me now I'm doing this diploma [in counselling], because everything I read about child abuse and psychological disturbance and I think oh God, I've convinced myself I'm not to blame and here I am reading that I possibly am. I really, really don't know. I've heard on one hand that it might have affected him because he'd got a strict stepfather, and I read on the other hand, I've just been doing another assignment, and I've read that I could have been too lenient with him, giving him everything he wanted. Now, my daughters say that's more than likely to be the one, he was never, he was always the apple of my eye, always, he was special, I always told him he was special, and when he was a baby he was brought up to think he was special. I never punished him for anything because he made life difficult if I did, so it was easier to let him have what he wanted, so therefore I think he's grown up thinking he can have whatever he wants. I know I'm talking about it from our position, for other people I don't know. I don't know, I don't know.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

I'm a bit mixed up, really. Part of [my son's] defence [in court], which I find offensive, was his, you know, his background . . . I mean I've read some of it, and it is, but I think it's the, I hope it's just the solicitors or the lawyers going and picking up the background. Because he didn't have a worse background than me, and I didn't go out and do anything like this.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

Many parents, like Beryl, questioned whether something they had done had contributed to the offender's actions:

You wonder where you've gone wrong. And it goes over and over and you think why did it happen? Is it something I've done or something, um, you think very deeply about things.

(Beryl, mother, homicide group)

Although many parents questioned whether they had been in some way to blame, perhaps not surprisingly they were less likely than wives or partners to lay the blame squarely at the feet of the family. Monica's account shows how blame can be levelled at the family by the offender, something she resisted:

M: I mean [my daughter's] view is that it was my fault which is always a bit hard to deal with. Well she says two things, first of all she reckons that I was such a terrible mother it was impossible for her to be a good mother in her turn because she hadn't had good mothering herself, and second of all she was very, very angry with me for not going back to [her home] that night [of the offence] and her interpretation of that is that I didn't want to be with her, I wanted to be with this man and I was rejecting her, which of course you know is nonsense, but that's how she sees it and er it makes it, I find it very hard to deal with, you know because I feel as if I spent many years of my life doing everything I can to help her and support her and she clearly doesn't feel that I have, or that I haven't done it well enough or often enough or what have you. . . certainly one of the reports that went before the court referred to my daughter's conviction that I was to blame for what happened

R: Was that quite a surprise to you?

M: No. Not really, no. I think she sometimes has quite a lot of difficulty taking responsibility for her own actions.

(Monica, mother, violent offence group)

Accounts that blame the family can also be part of a 'sad tale', an actor adjustment which might be offered by the offender as well as their relatives. This form of actor

adjustment was clearly more available to wives and partners who had not been part of the offender's early life:

R: Some people say the roots of offending lie in the family, the peer group or the environment; do you have any views on that?

S: I think in their case it was the family, he'd been brought up, his Dad was an alcoholic, his brothers were all in and out of prison, so I think that had an effect, and then when he moved in with me and my Mum and Dad he sort of had a stable life, but then when we had to go out on our own, the responsibility, it all changed, so yeah, I think his family life had a lot to do with it.

R: And he was in the care system as well?

S: Yeah, yeah.

(Stephanie, wife, homicide group)

This is similar to Fishman's finding in her study of wives of prisoners, that those wives often used 'sad tales' of their husband's family life to explain his offending (Fishman 1990: 29).

Immediate past

Some relatives questioned whether something they did immediately prior to the offence had contributed to its occurrence. Beryl says she blames herself because her son had come to stay with her to help her care for her sick husband prior to committing a murder in her local area. She gives the actor adjustment, outlined in the previous chapter, of denial of responsibility because her son was led astray and her account shows how relatives' self-blaming can be another form of this act adjustment - if others are to blame (including relatives) the offender can take less responsibility:

B: He knew what I had to do for his father [who needs constant home care], and this is why I, well, I do blame myself really. If we hadn't been in that situation he wouldn't have been here.

R: If you hadn't been in which situation?

B: Well he came to help me with his father really. He came back down here, I think his divorce had gone through, I don't know. And so he decided he'd

come back here, so he came home really. And if his Dad had never had a stroke and all these things go through your mind, you see. He wouldn't have been here. She'd have involved somebody else.

R: She would have involved somebody else?

B: Mmm. And the people in the town agree, people knew what was going on, but we didn't, that they were having an affair.

(Beryl, mother, homicide group)

Beverly was one of the few relatives who had been directly accused of being part of the offence, although according to her description, this accusation was only made during the court hearing and no proceedings were taken against her:

B: When we was in court, [my grandson's co-defendant's] QC said that I supplied two sawn-off shotguns to [my grandson and his co-defendant]. And the judge's summing up was, to the jury, 'don't let's forget that it was the grandmother that supplied two sawn-off shotguns' and I was gobsmacked. 'What are you trying to say? That I, it was me and him that went and done it?' Do you know what I mean?

R: And the judge said that in his summing up as well?

B: Yeah. And when I said to the police about it about it they said there is nothing you can do about it.

(Beverly, grandmother, violent offence group)

As Lillian and Eileen's comments show, relatives of sex offenders might be assumed to be directly involved in the offending:

R: Do you think people see the families of sex offenders in a particular way?

L: Well I think maybe they do. Maybe they do think that they're involved, you see.

(Lillian, mother, sex offence group)

R: How do you think the police saw you, as the wife of somebody who was accused of sex offences?

E: Well, me? As far as one particular officer was concerned, I was involved.

(Eileen, wife, sex offence group)

Most relatives resisted the idea that they had actively done something prior to the offence to cause it. The above quotations provide an interesting contrast with the

findings of studies of the motivational accounts of offenders which show strong resistance, in the form of justifications or excuses, to the blame that is levelled at them. Relatives in this study, in contrast, offered accounts that questioned their own role while at the same time resisting taking responsibility for the actions of another. This resistance is summarised by Celia:

It's so important to hang on to the dignity, because I did not commit this offence, and I don't believe that my family and myself should be judged, and that is very often what happens.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

Celia makes a further important point that the degree to which relatives self-blame can change over time:

R: And how did you feel seeing all of this newspaper coverage at the time [of the offence]?

C: I felt guilty, I felt as if I was part of it. And that's when I say to you, I now realise that I'm not responsible.

(Celia, aunt, homicide group)

This change is part of the progression that relatives make through various stages following discovery of the offence (see chapter three). Part of the collective narrative of *Aftermath*, that relatives are the 'other victims of crime', also constructs relatives as not responsible and not to blame for their predicament (see chapter seven).

The power to define

Some accounts have more currency than others, some account-givers are better positioned to have their accounts honoured, and the consequences of accounts from some quarters can be more serious. We have already seen how the power to define can be important when accounts of the offence are constructed, and some sources of accounts may be more powerful than others. Those labelled mentally ill, for example, can benefit from reconstructing their past to give an account acceptable to psychiatrists (Scott and Lyman 1968) and if offenders are consistently offered psychiatric and legal accounts with currency they are likely to adopt them to explain their behaviour (Cressey

1962). Relatives in this study were subject to powerful definitions that located explanations within the family from criminal justice agencies, mental health professionals and, in the case of those with children in the family, social services.

Relatives had limited contact with probation services; they do not have any statutory duty towards relatives of offenders. However, where they did have contact, accounts were sometimes offered, as in the case of Anne who was offered an account focusing on responsibility within the family:

I hated my husband when this happened, I hated him, I wanted him to die, because he was strict, because he tried to control [my son] because he said he could see how he was going, I hated him for it because he used to hit him and I put all the blame on him, I really wanted him to die. And then blaming myself, even the probation officer had told me that if [his step-father] used to hit him, [my son's] offence was caused because he was blaming me for letting him do that. That's lovely to hear that, a probation officer telling you that. I blamed myself for leaving his father, if I hadn't had left his father this wouldn't have happened, he'd have grown up with both of us. And I suppose that's where counselling helped me, although those feelings are still there, I still think 'well yeah, I can't say that things wouldn't be different', but that's the past and I can't do anything about that, I can only try and change the future. . . . But the conclusion I've come to in my own mind is okay [my husband] might have to own up to something because of the way he treated him, but I can't take responsibility for that. He never hit him when I was here, apparently it was only if I was at work, so [my husband] has got to cope with those feelings, those aren't mine, you know. His Dad didn't see him very often, wasn't a very good father, so that's his responsibility, I can only be responsible for what I did or didn't do. . . . then I think good grief, look at all the families in the country that are one-parent families or broken homes, my father used to hit me more than Alan hit Neil, far more, you know, and I didn't offend!

(Anne, mother, rape group)

As Anne's quotation shows, despite questioning the role of the family, the account offered by the probation officer was not one she fully accepted. She also describes how counselling helped her to make sense of her circumstances. For most participants this was sought through Aftermath, and chapter seven examines self-help as a source of understanding the problem it is organised around.

Social services became involved in the lives of several families with children following discovery of the offence, and most reported negative experiences. Those from the sex

offence group had particular difficulties which centred on disputes about whether those children were 'at risk'. Alleged victims of the offenders in this study were nieces, grandchildren, a foster-daughter, now adult children from previous marriages and in two cases children from outside the family. However, in several cases wives or partners of offenders in the sex offence group described disputes with social services about their children or about other children, such as grandchildren, who were not alleged victims visiting the house following discovery of the offence.

Relatives thought that social workers had a rigid conception of a sex offender: that he would always re-offend, that he would do so at any opportunity, that if guilty of a more minor sexual offence he would always progress to more serious ones, and that he would be indiscriminate in choosing victims. In addition, all sexual offences against children were treated as belonging to the same category; relatives thought there ought to be a better understanding of different levels of offence seriousness. This construction of the offender did not fit with the beliefs of relatives who did not think their own children were at risk, did not think it likely the offender would re-offend and in two particular cases thought that, although serious, offences against children involving masturbation and watching pornographic videos did not belong to the same category as the rape of a child.

Clare was a social worker when her husband's now adult children from his former marriage told her they had been sexually abused by their father as children, something she subsequently reported. She was aware of the professional construction of sex offenders and their relatives and found it difficult to be on the receiving end:

And being a social worker in child protection, of course, I'd been trained to believe that once a perpetrator, always a perpetrator. And I had a ten year old son. So my initial thought was obviously for my own son, to make sure that he was okay. . .

. . . I was a social worker with children and families and dealing with families, dealing with sexual abuse, and yes, I would say that professionally as far as Social Services are concerned, and I'm not sure about the other services like Health and Education, particularly with Social Services I think yes, they saw a stereotype of some families. Again, perhaps because of the historical stuff that they may have been dealing with over a period of years. I don't like a lot of the terminology that is used and I know it's professional terminology, but I suppose because I know what the connotation actually

means, you know, when you actually see it written in a document it has such awful connotations. And although you understand that therefore you are an innocent party, somehow it just, just the terminology that's used, that you are a 'non-protecting parent'. You know, all these labels that are put on you. Although I could argue very strongly about the reasons why I did what I did, they can actually wipe that to one side because professionally they know and whatever you say doesn't seem to bend their view. There's no balance and that's what I found frustrating about the system . . . I definitely felt I wasn't listened to because again I was either colluding or I was being a non-protecting parent. And it can make you feel very demoralised, literally because yeah, assumptions are made about you because you are actually standing by a sexual offender basically. They're not interested in what you're saying your reasons are, they're only interested because research tells them this and therefore you're colluding with the abuse. . . And I suppose I was shocked at that, especially, I suppose I thought that people would believe what I said because I thought I was, I had integrity as a social worker, I'd built up integrity over a number of years. And I suppose naively I thought they would believe me. But then you suddenly realise that nobody believes anything you say.

(Clare, wife, sex offence group)

Gill's husband had committed sexual offences against her nieces, and Gill says she is certain he did not abuse their daughter. When he was released from prison, she says she was threatened with her daughter being taken into local authority care if her husband returned to live with them. He did return to live with them, and her daughter was removed from the 'at risk' register, but only after a considerable battle:

G: In the end [social services] wanted to come into my house, to our house, and watch us as a family going about our everyday business, like having our tea to see how we reacted as a family, and they really thought they were coming in to do that. Because all along I'd gone along with everything they said, everything they told me that [my husband] was saying and doing, I was believing them, more fool me. And I just woke up one day and I thought they want to come in and watch us? What do they think we are, bloody chimps? I said 'for what purpose?' And they said 'to watch you, you know, going about your tea normally'. I said 'how can we do that if there's somebody sat watching us?' She said 'you won't know I'm there', I said, you know, 'you can't do that', I said 'I'm not a bloody moron', I said 'no'. And they got really, really stroppy with me then, and plus they also said, matter-of-factly, 'and we shall be coming to talk to you, sitting down and discussing yours and your husband's sex life, your marriage, but mainly your sex life'. I said 'you will, will you? No!' And they were really annoyed about that.

R: How do you think they saw you as a family?

G: I think they'd got it down like as [my husband], I'd be sat in one room, [my daughter] could be there and I could turn my head and he'd jump on her, assault her, and I'd look back and he's done it. That's how stupid they are.

R: So they really thought he'd abused her?

G: Oh yeah, or that he was going to if he hadn't. That he was going to. Or any child walking past, he would grab them, fumble and then stop.

R: And they didn't think you'd been part of it, but they thought it had been going on right under your nose?

G: Oh yes, it was actually said to me, actually said. I said 'I'm here to look after Dawn'. 'But you didn't stop anything happening before.' You see I was so shell-shocked, I wasn't aware before. If I'd have been aware it wouldn't have, as soon as I'm aware it stops, right? As soon as I'm properly aware. But no, I couldn't understand that mentality. Alright, they must deal with a lot of subnormal people, but I felt that's how I was being labelled, as somebody, I was actively, openly told that I was under [my husband's] spell.

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

Nicola had planned for her partner to live with her and her son after his release from a five year prison sentence for child sex offences. She says social services made it clear that this would not be possible. She had to go through complicated procedures to get clearance for her ten year old son to visit her partner in prison with her. Eventually she did get this clearance. Social services sent a letter telling her that she should not take him to visit and inviting her to a meeting where this was repeated. She says she decided to end the relationship with her partner because of this:

Let's just say social services made me feel the most inadequate thing in the world . . . they made a very thinly veiled threat which was 'we would advise that you don't take your son to [name of prison]', so I thought 'alright'.

(Nicola, partner, sex offence group)

There are, therefore, particular agencies that make it their professional business to define the causes of offending and the circumstances of relatives of offenders, and have particular power to impose these definitions. It is important, however, not to view relatives of offenders as passive recipients of accounts; they do not simply absorb and repeat the accounts they are offered, but rather digest these accounts and use them as resources in the formulation of their own accounts. Even where these accounts are

offered by those with the power to impose they are often resisted: neither Alice nor Celia were prepared to accept the justifications offered to them by police officers, Anne resisted the account offered by a probation officer, and Gill and Clare both battled against the accounts offered by social workers.

Relatives therefore offer accounts that resist family blame and shame, but many continue to struggle with ambivalent and conflicting feelings about their personal responsibility. This struggle is played out collectively in the self-help context, and *Aftermath* offers a narrative which constructs relatives as victims to whom this 'happened'. The following chapter examines self-help for relatives of serious offenders and what it offers in this context.

Chapter Seven: Self-Help for Families of Serious Offenders

This chapter examines the use of self-help by relatives of serious offenders, considers what it offers to members and suggests some possible explanations for why it is predominantly used by female relatives. I take the following as my broad definition of self-help, although all aspects might not apply to all groups:

Self-help groups are voluntary, small group structures for mutual aid and the accomplishment of a special purpose. They are usually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and/or personal change. The initiators and members of such groups perceive that their needs are not, or cannot be, met by or through existing social institutions. Self-help groups emphasize face-to-face social interactions and the assumption of personal responsibility by members. They often provide material assistance, as well as emotional support; they are frequently “cause”-oriented, and promulgate an ideology or values through which members may attain an enhanced sense of personal identity.

(Katz and Bender 1976: 9)

As we have seen in chapter one, there are numerous self-help groups for prisoners’ families across the UK operating under the ‘umbrella’ organisation Action for Prisoners Families⁸⁹. However, there were only three organisations operating during the period of this research that specifically catered for relatives of *serious* offenders⁹⁰: Aftermath; Serious Offenders Families Association (SOFA); and Consequences. Of these, Aftermath is the only national organisation and the largest and best known. SOFA is a regional group that offers a higher level of face-to-face support to a much smaller membership. It has close links with Aftermath; its founder and director has served on Aftermath’s committee and been an active member for some time⁹¹. Consequences is a smaller organisation set up by the founder of Aftermath who left in February 1996 after

⁸⁹ Formerly the Federation of Prisoners’ Families Support Groups (FPFSG)

⁹⁰ Organisations for prisoners’ families do not exclude relatives of serious offenders, and usually help some. I interviewed the directors of two of these organisations and also approached some of them to attempt to access relatives of female serious offenders, which was only successful in one case.

⁹¹ As part of this research I interviewed the founder of SOFA about her role in both organisations.

disagreements about the purpose of the organisation and aims to work with both offenders and their family members.

The focus of this chapter is on the help relatives receive from Aftermath as it was the source of twenty-six interviewees and the main site of fieldwork. Six interviewees in this study were not Aftermath members, but most of these still used other forms of self-help. Three used other prisoners' families organisations (two of whom received a great deal of support and attended self-help meetings), one used Families Anonymous, an organisation for relatives of drug users, and one used an organisation that supports ex-offenders. Only one had not used any self-help organisation, and she received considerable support from the psychiatric unit she attended.

Aftermath: The story of a self-help group

Aftermath was set up in 1988 when its founder became aware of the need to support relatives of serious offenders through her volunteer work supporting victims of crime. The founding of Aftermath and its evolution until 1997 has been well documented by Howarth and Rock (Howarth and Rock 2000) and a short summary will suffice here. Aftermath was founded on the idea that crimes have many victims, including the family of the offender, and that addressing the problem of serious crime could only be achieved by helping offenders to better understand themselves and their family and helping the family to understand the offender. Aftermath was described as 'a loving family network' and members were linked by telephone and through 'lunches' held originally in Sheffield and later in other areas. A programme of individual counselling was offered to offenders and their relatives and ex-offenders would offer support and information to members through the 'therapy team' or 'offenders team' by talking to families about their experiences and their offences.

Aftermath continued in this form until the founding Director's departure in February 1996. Under the management of a new Chairperson from 1996-2000 Aftermath moved to more formal, written procedures: a policy manual that outlined what it did as an organisation; accreditation from the British Association of Counselling; and a formal training programme for counsellors, distinguishing between telephone supporters, who

were at an earlier stage, and counsellors who had received more training. As Howarth and Rock state, charismatic authority had given way to rational-legal authority (Howarth and Rock 2000: 68). This is the form that Aftermath took during most of the period of my research; I arrived in October 1997 at Aftermath's annual seminar weekend. During this period stronger links were forged with the Federation of Prisoners' Families Support Groups⁹², which in turn had an important liaising role with government. Stronger links were also forged with statutory agencies, and Aftermath began to receive more referrals from probation and police officers.

There had been a long-standing tension within the organisation about its role and purpose, and during the period of my research there was much debate about the desirability of increasing professionalisation, including ongoing discussions about whether support should come from a familial network offering 'tea and sympathy' or a more formalised network of counsellors. There was a great deal of discussion, for example, over whether Aftermath counsellors or supporters had to be relatives of serious offenders, or whether this support could be offered by others and whether 'lunches' should be held in members' homes or in more neutral locations such as church halls.

A non-Aftermath member took the role of Chairperson from 2000-2002, coming to the position from his work with other charities and voluntary organisations. The organisation's administrator since its inception came to take on a more senior role in the management of the organisation as the Service Development Manager and another administrator was employed. In 2002 the role of Chair was taken over by a female Aftermath member who was a long-standing committee member and a former social worker. In 2003, Aftermath continues under the management of this Chairperson, a committee and two paid members of staff. Lunches run regularly in two areas, a newsletter continues to be produced and there is a network of telephone supporters helping members.

I attended a seminar weekend in 2002 and learnt that Aftermath was experiencing a financial crisis. Aftermath has always had difficulty attracting funding, as do most

⁹² Now called Action for Prisoners' Families

voluntary organisations, and been brought to the brink of closure as a result on several occasions. This time they were closer to the brink than ever; both paid members of staff had had to be given notice of termination of their employment. They were later to be rescued by foundations that had given them past funding, but only at the final moment. This difficulty in finding adequate funding might partly reflect the secondary stigma experienced by its members⁹³. The efforts of one member to raise money for the organisation suggest they are not seen as a worthy cause:

Well its very salutary for me because when I ran a playgroup I used to do market stalls, charity market stalls, and we'd put up a couple of homemade cakes and a couple of old second hand books, and oh we'd coin it, a hundred quid easily, so I said to [Aftermath's administrator], 'oh I'll do a market stall, wonderful, hundred pound no problem', and I made about forty pound, and I was distraught, and it's because your charity has to have a banner that says what you are and what you do and when people realised what it was for, when they could see it wasn't for little children or cuddly animals, they didn't want to know, they just walked away, and I found that very hurtful.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

The financial difficulties experienced by Aftermath mean that it is limited in the work it can do. As a national, but small, organisation Aftermath must contend with inequalities in distribution and an uneven geographical spread, problems that have similarly been found in other self-help groups (Gay 1989; Richardson and Goodman 1983). This is particularly the case with face-to-face support which can often only be offered through lunches; these have taken place in a handful of areas with only one location remaining stable throughout the period of my research.

Aftermath also faces the dilemma of how far to publicise the group. In its current form, it would find it difficult to meet the needs of the large number of families that might come forward if its existence were widely known. Groups must decide how far to expand given limited resources. One group for parents of allergic children made a conscious effort to stay small and local in order to continue giving the same breadth of support and information to its members (Raven 1985). However, in order to reach

⁹³ It might also reflect a general reluctance to donate money to those associated with crime in any capacity. Rock found that self-help groups for relatives of homicide victims also struggled to find funding because of this reluctance on the part of potential donors: 'It is as if the pariah identity of the victim wards them off.' (Rock 1998a: 167).

relatives of serious offenders, some publicity is necessary. Gay states that publicity in the voluntary sector is usually by word of mouth (Gay 1989). However, for drug users' families in her study it was less likely to be so because of their reluctance to talk openly about the problem, something that clearly can also be said for relatives of serious offenders. Groups must therefore rely on other forms of publicity, the most common for these groups being posters, leaflets and advertisements in local papers. Aftermath has relied upon posters and leaflets and spreading the word through more receptive channels, for example prison visitors centres and probation services.

The fact that some relatives of serious offenders seek support from a self-help group can be placed in the wider context of the growth of the self-help movement in contemporary society. The exact number of participants in self-help cannot be known because many groups and organisations do not keep membership records so estimates must be relied upon, but the scale and diversity of provision is vast. One such estimate is that 40 per cent of the US population participate in self-help (Wuthnow 1994), although the proportion is likely to be lower in the UK. Within the broader self-help movement there are numerous groups for families coping with the problems of one of their members, such as relatives of the mentally ill, alcoholics, and drug addicts, who like offenders families might also be described as stigmatised or families with spoiled identities.

In the 1930s Alcoholics Anonymous, the 'granddaddy of self-help organizations' (Katz 1993) was formed in the US and a multitude of others have followed. There was an enormous proliferation of self-help groups in the second half of the twentieth century in both the US and the UK and some authors have examined why this might be so. The most detailed analysis is provided by Borkman who says that the breakdown of the family and other support networks might explain the rise of alternative support such as self-help, but does not explain the specificity of the numerous groups that have arisen for each chronic disease or social issue (Borkman 1999: 51-71). For this is it is necessary to understand the 'broad societal changes' that have 'modified the way and means by which people learn how to handle illness, death, birth, divorce, disease, and other life experiences' (Borkman 1999: 51-2). She draws on Giddens's concept of 'radicalized modernity' (Giddens 1990) and his contention that with the reflexivity of the modern world individuals create their own identity and new forms of identity and community evolve as our relationship to time and place changes. Borkman says that

'self-help and mutual aid are prime examples of these new forms of identity and community' (Borkman 1999: 62):

The activity and advocacy, self-definition, empowerment, and creation of meaning perspectives that occur in self-help / mutual aid organizations resonate with Giddens's radicalized modernity: individuals can reflexively reconstitute their selves within an experiential-peer community. Groups and their members appropriate professional knowledge of their predicament and interpret it to fit their day to day lives.

(Borkman 1999: 62)

Typologies of self-help groups have been constructed along various dimensions. Groups have been classified according to their primary focus (Katz 1993; Katz and Bender 1976), dividing them into therapeutic groups that focus on self-fulfilment or personal growth, groups that are primarily focused on social advocacy, groups focusing on creating alternative patterns for living and finally what they call "outcast haven" or "rock bottom" groups which demand total commitment in a living arrangement. In addition, however, there are "mixed groups" which do not fit any of these categories and have been organised to meet a specific and personalised set of problems that their members confront. These groups typically do not have a well-resolved ideology and codified procedures as 12-step groups do, and usually concentrate on the objective of helping members cope with the stressful situation they share (Katz and Bender 1976); it is this type with which Aftermath fits best.

Groups can also be divided into those which are inner-focused (on members' welfare) or outer-focused (on changing legislation or social policy), (Katz and Bender 1976: 39-40), and again Aftermath would fit with the former rather than the latter. A further interesting typology is based on:

. . . the self-help / mutual aid organization's "meaning perspective": (1) What does the meaning perspective say about the type and extensiveness of personal, identity, and lifestyle change (transformation) members should make in order to resolve their problem? And (2) what is the expected duration of participation in the group? Each attribute is dichotomized in terms of little or extensive transformation and short or long expected duration of membership.

(Borkman 1999: 8)

Cross-classification results in four group types: 'Short-term coping', 'Long-term coping', 'Short-term transformative' and 'Long-term transformative'. Short-term is defined as less than two years; long-term is two years to a lifetime⁹⁴. Aftermath is not transformative - it does not seek to promote extensive change on the part of its members - but rather focuses on coping.

Aftermath would fit with the classification of both short-term and long-term. Most of my interviewees were long-term members, and for them the group would therefore be described as long-term coping. The same would be true of almost all the members I met at lunches and at annual seminar weekends: these members would expect to be involved with Aftermath for more than two years. An Aftermath publication states: "Some of our members may only require short term, practical advice; however, many of our members require longer term, emotional support that can often be for more than five years." (Aftermath 2000: 2).

So Aftermath is not transformative, and does not promote the 'recovery' of its members as many other self-help organisations do. It also does not campaign for political change, as for example rape survivors or gay rights organisations do (Plummer 1995). Aftermath has made sporadic attempts to educate the public, for example by giving talks to church groups and to criminal justice agencies such as prison officers and the police, but has not developed a campaigning agenda. This may partly be explained by relatives' desire to remain anonymous and by the dimensions of their secondary stigma: 'shame may prevent a story being told, pride may lead to it being shouted.' (Plummer 1995: 28).

What does self-help offer?

Participation in self-help groups can involve numerous activities. Aftermath members all receive a newsletter and are likely to receive telephone support or counselling at

⁹⁴ Issues such as divorce or breastfeeding might require short-term coping, physical disability or addiction might require long-term transformative groups, people who stutter might require short-term transformative groups, while long-term coping groups might be those such as Weight Watchers or groups for parents of children with a chronic disease or mental illness that persists a long time 'but the problem requires coping more than extensive change on the parent's part' (Borkman 1999: 10).

some point. Some also attend 'lunches' and the annual seminar weekend, and there are additional meetings such as the AGM and information days examining issues such as dealing with the press. Activities in self-help organisations do depend upon the type of group. Katz (Katz 1993) believes the distinction between 12-step and non-12-step groups to be the 'most fundamental and important' one. 12-step organisations began with A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous) on which an enormous literature exists. Twelve-step principles have been extended to numerous other problems so that in 1992 there were 130 national 12-step organisations in the US (Katz 1993: 11) and there now even exists a 12-step programme for people who are addicted to 12-step programmes. Participation in these groups involves working through the 12-steps, which may take several years, and attending meetings which follow an organised and prescribed structure.

Non-12-step organisations, like Aftermath, are more diverse in the activities they undertake. As well as the conventional support group meeting, self-help organisations link members by newsletters or annual conferences, computer bulletin boards and online support groups, and telephone support (Borkman 1999). A study of 42 groups for families of drug users in the UK found that the activities most often reported were telephone help lines, arranging seminars, giving talks to teachers or magistrates, offering home visits and one-to-one counselling (Gay 1989), a list that is remarkably close to that offered by Aftermath.

So why do people join self-help organisations and why do they stay? The benefits offered by self-help groups are numerous and this section considers those mentioned by Aftermath members interviewed in this study. An important part of a self-help group is the understanding of the problem it has been organised around and this will be the subject of the following section. First, and overwhelmingly, Aftermath members talked about the opportunity to meet others in a similar situation. This was an opportunity that did not present itself in every day life: relatives said they were not likely to knowingly meet other relatives of serious offenders, and their circumstances were not likely to be a topic of casual conversation or something they would wish to publicise:

I went and attended the first lunch that I went to and I couldn't believe that, you know, that there was like all these different people that were in a

similar role you know, situations to what we were. And then, and that they all met and you know, I felt brilliant. Well I felt 100% better when I came away from there than I did when I went. And it was sort of, the fact that knowing, you know, I mean there were other people that were suffering the same as we were but you don't know where they are, you don't know who they are, you know, it's not something that you can shout from the rooftops, that it's happening to you.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

In *Aftermath*, they find others prepared to talk about their shared experiences - a community of story tellers describing their experiences in similar ways (Plummer 1995). Interviewees thought that other relatives of serious offenders understood how they felt and could empathise in a way that non-relatives could not:

Because there's people [in *Aftermath*] in the same boat. They know exactly what's hitting your heart, what you're thinking, what you're feeling, how you feel and it's just amazing to have somebody there that knows exactly.

(Pauline, mother, homicide group)

R: So what kind of support did *Aftermath* give you over that time?

B: Well I think it was sort of, it was knowing that there was other people besides you, you weren't out on a limb on your own, and it boosted you a bit really. There was nobody here [at home] that I could talk to, like you can talk to somebody who knows what you're going through really. I mean my friends know, but you don't keep on about it.

(Beryl, mother, homicide group)

Relatives of homicide victims who join self-help groups also point to the need to be with others who share similar circumstances and understand how they feel (Rock 1998a). Many members talked about the importance of knowing that they were not the only person in this situation:

It makes a difference to me to know someone else is going through what I'm going through. I'm not selfish or anything, but I do at times think what am I going through all this for? Why me? Then I think well why not? . . . *Aftermath* have given me more confidence because I know there are other people going through what I'm still going through and which I will do, surely, because things don't change. He's there, he's never going to come out, and you've still got to carry on. It hurts and it's hard.

(Hilda, mother, homicide group)

Furthermore, they were helped by discovering that there were people who shared their circumstances who were 'normal':

Looking back now [to when I first joined Aftermath], it was a sort of belonging I suppose, and when I went to the lunches it was the realisation that there are other normal families that it had happened to, you know.

(Anne, mother, rape group)

I felt everybody could look at me and see we've got a prisoner in the family, and yeah you do, you just feel awful, you think nobody else has got one. It's only when I went, and that is the good thing about it, when I went to Aftermath and you find there are perfectly normal respectable people out there.

(Mary, mother, violent offence group)

Relatives spoke about Aftermath as a non-judgemental and safe place, something which was an important contrast to their everyday lives (see chapter four):

R: Does it help that [Aftermath members] have also got a serious offender in the family?

L: Yes, it does, it does help. It does help because you know when you're talking to them, you're not an outcast, you know. It's like when I was on the [hospital-based] therapy group, I couldn't bring myself to tell people in that group why I was at the group. I told them I was at the group because my son was in prison, but I never told them what he was in prison for because they were local people from around where I live. Whereas Aftermath, you could tell them, you could talk to them, they didn't look down on you, they didn't think you were some monster. And they also didn't consider your son a monster which to me was such a great relief, you know, that you could talk to somebody about it.

(Lillian, mother, homicide group)

I found it a comfort to know that I wasn't alone, that there were places [within Aftermath] where I was safe to talk. You're not safe and you've got this terrible secret and you can't talk to anyone, but if you can't talk you just sort of think you're going to explode, but you daren't talk.

(Harriet, mother, sex offence group)

Harriet had seen a counsellor through her GP's surgery who had told her that if she talked about her son's alleged sexual offences against his children, anything she said would have to be passed on to social services. She therefore did not feel safe to express her uncertainty about whether or not he had done it, but within Aftermath felt she was able to do so.

A place to talk in safety about their experiences was something relatives valued. Just as in South Africa when the slogan 'Revealing is Healing' was used by victims in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Slovo 2003), being able to talk in a safe place has important consequences for mending identities and reducing stigma and shame:

R: What's the most useful service that Aftermath provides?

G: A haven, safe talking, you know. I did, I felt safe. There was so much, from walking down the street I felt people were looking at me and talking about me and I was even afraid, yeah, that a brick might come at me or something like that. I thought, you know, on the phone to Aftermath you felt you could say anything to them without them thinking oh you shouldn't be saying that or shouldn't be thinking that way, and the same when you went in to meet them, you just felt like a proper person again, not like somebody dirty, somebody that had gone into a life, you know, it's such a shock to go into that prison life, it's just so totally foreign.

(Gill, wife, sex offence group)

Within Aftermath there was an ethic mirroring that in prisons⁹⁵ that you did not ask another member what offence their relative had committed, something that further added to members' feeling of safety:

You don't have to, you do not have to tell what their crime is, that's one of the things I liked about Aftermath. If you want to, you can but you don't have to. So I may not know, there may be more people who have the same sort of thing.

(Eileen, wife, sex offence group)

I was also instructed before attending Aftermath lunches not to ask for this information; members might offer it, but this was only to be on a voluntary basis. Aftermath members are self-defining as relatives of serious offenders; there is no formalised gate-keeping procedure to ensure the offence is serious enough. The first point of contact for members approaching Aftermath is their office, staffed by two people. When enquiring about this I was told that relatives would usually telephone the office in distress because of the devastation of the offence - and this was less likely with a minor offence. Aftermath advertises as an organisation for relatives of *serious* offenders and in practice

⁹⁵ Where supposedly prisoners do not ask each other what they are in for.

often receives referrals⁹⁶ because of the seriousness of the offence. Some Aftermath members, and one Chairperson, have told me that an offence is serious if it is defined as such by the family member - but in practice, I only met those coping with clearly serious offences in Aftermath. One document from Aftermath states: 'we define as 'serious' crimes that carry a substantial prison sentence' (Aftermath 2000), but there is no apparent formal process for ensuring this is the case. Some relatives approach Aftermath asking for practical advice and this group could be more likely to include those with less serious offences. In some cases, I was told, Aftermath might refer to a local prisoners' families organisation or another voluntary organisation that could help with a specific problem. I was also told, however, that a relative approaching Aftermath would not be turned away if they needed help.

Members joined Aftermath to find emotional support and to manage stigma, which could be described as the main purposes of the organisation; relatives describe the experience of discovery of the offence as traumatic (see chapter three) and sought help to cope with this. This help is primarily given by telephone and described as support or counselling depending on the training the supporter has undertaken. Alice found this particularly helpful:

R: What's the most useful service do you think that Aftermath provides?

A: Listening I think, absolutely listening. Yeah, I think that's the most important thing. But that's only my point of view, because I, other problems I can resolve, I have the means, I can read and write, you know that's the very basic thing isn't it? I can read and write, I can use a telephone, I can afford to use a telephone, I can afford to make my journeys anywhere, so really emotional support for me is, is absolutely the main thing.

(Alice, mother, homicide group)

For some members telephone support can be a lifeline. It was described to me as such by several interviewees who said they did not know what they would have done without it. Some, like Frances, doubted they could have survived without this support:

They have been, well if it wasn't for Aftermath and the help that I've received I don't think I'd be here today.

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

⁹⁶ For example from the police, probation services or other prisoners' families organisations.

Ten interviewees were also telephone counsellors or supporters and when they talked about their work described how desperate the members they were supporting could sometimes be:

I've got one lady that rings at half past one in the morning screaming, just screaming, she just screams until the frustration's gone. She's got to scream at somebody, I'd rather she scream at me than slice her wrists or take a load of pills. But she's at the stage where she's angry and she's, you know, so then she cries and says she's 'sorry Angela, I don't mean to scream at you.' I say 'it's alright love,' I just hold the phone away from me ear cause I know it's there and I know she's going to go off ballistic and swearing and going off. But it's her way of venting the anger and I'd rather she'd vent the anger on me than one of the kids and I know it's not personal. I know when she's screaming and ranting and raving, it's nothing to do with me as a person; I'm just a sounding board for her to sound off on. And then she'll calm down and then we talk and you know, you rationalise things and I sort of said to her, you know, 'let's think rational about this.' And then she'll say to me and I'll say 'but how do you feel about that?' And I turn everything back on her and she don't even realise you're doing it and you know, she'll say 'well yeah.' 'And how do you feel about that?' You know. 'What do you think you should have done?' And it's 'well I know I should do this,' 'well there you have it then, there's your answer, what you talking about?' You know.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

Angela's description of the counselling she offers also illustrates the non-directive approach advocated within Aftermath during the period of this research.

Self-help groups also offer their members coping strategies. These might be the outcome of counselling processes, as described by Angela above, or conveyed between members who have 'been there'. Borkman describes this as 'experiential knowledge', a term which refers to knowledge based on personal experience, rather than professional or folk knowledge, and is conveyed through self-help organisations (Borkman 1990). Angela felt she learnt from other members telling her how they had coped:

Yeah, the lunches. Being there, having somebody that actually, that understood. You know, they'd not actually gone through the same experience but knowing that they understood exactly what I was feeling, you know, like they didn't say to me 'I know how you feel' because that's really patronising, because nobody knows how we feel, nobody does because no two people feel the same anyway. But like they'd say you

know, 'when this happened to us, this is how I handled it', or 'this is how I felt'. And knowing that you could relate to that person you know, the empathy that was there was really important.

(Angela, wife, sex offence group)

New members to Aftermath benefit not only from learning *how* other relatives got through the earlier traumatic stages (see chapter three), but also that they *did*. Because Aftermath can be classified as a long-term coping group (Borkman 1990) for most of its members, this is something that can be passed on at mutual gatherings such as lunches or annual seminar weekends where members at different stages meet and through one-to-one supporting. A letter to the Aftermath newsletter shows this progression and the help offered to others by those in the later stages:

It's [date] once more and the anniversary of my brother's offence. I am amazed to realise that it is now ten years since I first needed Aftermath. I was depressed, panic-stricken, ashamed and very lonely. How lucky I was to find such a wonderful group of people, all able to empathise with me in my plight and offer the support I so desperately needed at that time, and sometimes still do need. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Aftermath members, both past and present, who have 'been there' for me over the years. To our 'older' members I say "Thank you for walking my road with me," and to our 'younger' members I say "Take heart, you too will get through." Thanks a million everyone.

(Aftermath newsletter, February 2002)

Aftermath also has an important role offering practical support which might take the form of advice regarding prison visiting, for example, or support through court hearings. For Betty this practical information was the most important benefit of Aftermath membership:

Well the most important thing was to go on that seminar [weekend] and just to meet people, networking, ask them the specific questions: 'how do I get the parole looked at again?', 'how can I get him on the course [Sex Offenders Treatment Programme]?' and to find out about his legal rights.

(Betty, sister, sex offence group)

As outlined in chapter three, relatives in this study said they had no past experience of the criminal justice system, and therefore had to go through a process of socialisation; the 'experiential' and professional knowledge gleaned through Aftermath was invaluable to this.

As we have seen in chapter four, relatives of serious offenders suffer a particular kind of secondary stigma which is structured around dimensions of shame. Self-help groups have an important role to play in collective stigma management; indeed, some have argued that this is a key role shared by all groups:

. . . all self-help / mutual aid is formed in part in reaction against the stigma projected by others - friends, co-workers, strangers, professionals providing services, and so on - onto the shared problem that is the focus of the group.

(Borkman 1999: 8)

This collective management can operate on several levels. Practical information and 'experiential knowledge' might be offered to help with the management of some of the consequences of interpersonal stigma outlined in chapter four. Intrapersonal stigma, how relatives feel about themselves, is managed through both the ways of understanding the problem offered by Aftermath, which as we will see constructs relatives as victims rather than blameworthy (see below), and the boost to self and identity that comes from the confidence and sense of belonging engendered by membership. Eileen outlines this latter point:

The initial shock, horror, I wanted to lock myself away, it would have been very nice to have had, to have known there was someone there that I could talk to without feeling tainted. See that's the thing that Aftermath does for me. It makes me feel like a person. I'm not something dirty that should be under a stone or crawled out from under a stone. That's how Aftermath made me, it gave me my self-confidence and I felt part of something, belonging. And that is very important because as the wife of a serious offender, you don't belong anywhere. You're vulnerable. Everyone can throw what they like at you and you're nothing, you know. They did that for me and they've been great because there's a lot of us here and we're all in this together and you're part of us. And that is something to cling to.

(Eileen, wife, sex offence group)

One of the primary benefits from membership of Aftermath is that of friendship and a social network, and as we have seen in chapter four, loss of friends is often one of the consequences of relatives' secondary stigma. It is difficult to accurately capture the atmosphere at most Aftermath functions I attended. Lunches were usually fairly quiet occasions with people talking most of the time in pairs or smaller groups. The larger group would come together to discuss any current important Aftermath issues and

anything anyone else wanted to raise. Sometimes this would involve personal or distressing problems people were contending with, but only if volunteered. Members did not give testimonies at lunches as they do, for example, in 12-step group meetings. There would often be joking and laughter in addition to the tears, and a feeling of warmth, support and friendship. Members either knew each other very well or were welcoming to newcomers.

Annual seminar weekends took place over three days. At times they felt like conferences, with the focus on practical information; sometimes more like a support group with particular members feeling upset - emotions ran particularly high on the few occasions that invited members stood before the audience and told their 'story' - and in the evenings they often felt like any other gathering taking place around a bar. Newsletters afterwards would contain letters such as this one thanking Aftermath for the weekend:

The family members that courageously spoke were just amazing, to relive often painful memories; we could understand their pain, learn from their experiences, and gain hope for the future. . . The most outstanding part of the weekend was meeting such lovely people, being able to talk honestly, and finding total understanding of our experiences and gaining hope that we can live through our forthcoming trial. Sadly, our time together was too short but the brave and strong family members we met have touched our lives forever. We both feel honoured to be part of our 'new family' and grateful to have made some wonderful new friends.

(Excerpt from letter from parents in Aftermath newsletter, June 2001)

Meetings such as AGMs tended to be more about addressing the business of the organisation and less about emotional support, although at any of these occasions between meetings pairs or small groups of members might be huddled together discussing more personal matters. I got a strong sense from fieldwork of close ties between members and the importance of these bonds of friendship to coping with the difficulties relatives faced.

Interviewees often characterised Aftermath and the bonds between members as being 'like a family'; perhaps ironic given the difficulties many members have encountered within their own families, but important nonetheless as their interpretation of the

support they found. This is also part of Aftermath's collective narrative (see below) and a common way that members speak about the organisation:

How do I feel a part of it? Well, it's as if we're one, it's a family, I suppose, and I feel one of the family, and we all help each other and we're there to help others as well.

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

R: Has Aftermath made a difference to your life?

S: Yeah it has, yeah. If I'm down in the dumps I can always phone one of the volunteers, any of them really. It's like one big happy family really. They do give you a lot of support.

(Stephanie, wife, homicide group)

Interesting parallels can be drawn with self-help groups for families of those with addiction or mental health problems. Kurtz (Kurtz 1994) suggests a number of 'helping features' offered by these groups. First, members are able to open up feelings. Important to this is a perception of similarity which comes through the 'self-disclosure of similar experiences' and a redefinition of the problem, for example defining embarrassing behaviour as symptoms of the disease of mental illness. As outlined above, sharing experiences is important to Aftermath members, although something which is promoted as voluntary. How and whether the problem is re-defined within Aftermath will be considered below. Secondly, Kurtz says members can gain intellectual understanding which includes acquiring professional knowledge and 'experiential knowledge' (Borkman 1990), and as we have seen this is certainly the case with Aftermath.

Thirdly, members are able to explore coping mechanisms, which includes what Kurtz refers to as 'disengaging' and Al-Anon (for families of alcoholics) calls 'detachment', that is 'letting go' of the relative and trying not to control their behaviour. 'De-escalation of intensity' is a further coping mechanism where the supporting relative modifies her behaviour to reduce tension and intensity of communication. A final learnt coping mechanism is clarification of boundaries where the supporting relative learns to set limits and take care of their own well-being. It is only this latter coping mechanism that would be characteristic of Aftermath; the others would be characteristic of what Borkman (1990) describes as transformative groups, and Aftermath does not seek to transform the behaviour of its members. Fourthly, Kurtz says that members of self-help

groups experience an expansion of their social world. Their social network is enlarged, their self-confidence may be increased and some members might experience spiritual growth (Kurtz 1994: 299-306). As we have seen, this expansion of the social world is an important part of Aftermath membership, but Aftermath steers away from all matters spiritual or religious which are deemed personal rather than the business of the organisation.

Another study of families of the mentally ill found two distinct types of benefits gained from being a member of a support group. The first, *information benefit*, included ‘. . . knowing how to advocate more effectively for the relative with mental illness, increased ability to cope emotionally with the relative, and having more knowledge about mental illness, as well as more information about services and the latest interventions’. The second, *relationship benefit*, referred to ‘. . . an improved ability to cope with the social stigma of having a relative with mental illness, less anger toward the relative, and better relationships with the relative and other family members’ (Heller et al. 1997: 193). As we have seen, ‘information benefit’ is an important part of Aftermath and might include help with dealing with the criminal justice system, for example. ‘Relationship benefit’ is also important, improving the ability to cope with secondary stigma and although non-directive in approach, the support from Aftermath given to relatives supporting serious offenders⁹⁷ must affirm their belief in what they are doing and may serve to strengthen that and possibly other family relationships⁹⁸.

A collective narrative?

Self-help groups provide meaning and a way of understanding the particular problem that they have been organised around. This collectively constructed meaning has variously been called ‘community-level narrative’ (Rappaport 1993), ‘meaning perspective’ (Borkman 1999), ‘worldview transformation’ (Kennedy and Humphreys 1994), ‘narrative map’ and ‘template’ (Pollner and Stein 1996), ‘collective story’ (Richardson 1990) and ‘cognitive restructuring’ (Katz 1993). As we have seen in chapter five, relatives go through a process of trying to make sense of the offence and

⁹⁷ Although it should be noted, again, that Aftermath also supports non-supporting relatives.

⁹⁸ And those decisions over whether to support can be a source of conflict within some families.

offer accounts to others, and self-help groups are an important source of these accounts. They are a site for the production and consumption of stories (Plummer 1995), and how members talk about their experiences both shapes and is shaped by a shared, collective narrative.

Clearly the strength of interpretation offered by a group will depend on the type of group, and as we have seen there are important differences between different types of self-help groups. For some, a way of seeing a problem is their primary function; 12-step groups might be the best example of this. For others, such as Aftermath, ways of seeing are more diffuse and less structured. There is, however, a discernible collective narrative through which Aftermath understands the experience of being a relative of a serious offender. What this narrative does not do - and this is a key difference to the organisation during my period of fieldwork compared to its early stages under the management of its founder - is pronounce on questions of aetiology. The only (and important) exception to this is the belief that families are not (necessarily) to blame for the sins of their members, although alternative theories about why people offend are not propounded. This points to the importance of the type of leadership to the strength of a narrative. If a leader with influence in an organisation propounds a particular view it may form the basis of a collective narrative, as was the case in the early years of Aftermath under the leadership of its charismatic founder. As rational-legal authority came to dominate, the views of the organisation were enshrined in policies and the emphasis moved towards non-directive counselling methods and a focus on relatives rather than offenders.

The key elements of Aftermath's collective narrative during the period of my research can be briefly summarised as follows⁹⁹. There are many victims of an offence, and families of offenders are the unrecognised victims of crime. The experience of discovering the offence is devastating to relatives and comparable to bereavement and events which follow are difficult to cope with. Family members are traumatised and are often blamed, unfairly, for the actions of the offender. Only those who have been through it can really understand this impact. Family members support the offender but

⁹⁹ For a more detailed summary of this narrative see Howarth and Rock (2000). The main change during the period of my research was the move away from questions of aetiology and further emphasis on professional practice.

are very clear about not condoning the offence - they 'hate the sin but love the sinner'. Aftermath provides a caring and compassionate network to help relatives to cope with the traumatic impact and the difficulties they face. Members all share the same problem - having a serious offender in their immediate circle - and this brings a close bond comparable in some ways to a family.

This collective narrative is conveyed through Aftermath literature and newsletters, by supporters or counsellors, and at meetings and lunches both by speakers and through informal conversations. In 2000, Aftermath produced a six page 'Annual Review' and which included the following statement about its beliefs:

We define as 'serious' crimes that carry a substantial prison sentence. Many of the serious crimes carry a stigma, offences such as murder, rape and sexual abuse. Aftermath believes that the family of a serious offender can very often experience the backlash of their relative's wrong doing, and are very often treated with contempt. The mother and father who find their son has committed a serious sexual offence can immediately lose their own self worth. Learning to accept the gravity of a social wrong committed by a close relative is a process of extreme torment and Aftermath offers a safe, non-judgemental support system where families can begin to regain their self-esteem and dignity.

(Aftermath 2000: 2)

However, although Aftermath has a definite way of understanding the experiences of families of serious offenders, the narrative is much more diffuse than in many other organisations. There is no 'Big Book', for example, as there is in Alcoholics Anonymous and members do not routinely give testimonies or tell their stories at lunches. At annual seminar weekends, a small number of members might be invited to 'tell their stories', but this is the only occasion when oral testimonies are publicly given. These stories give rise to great emotion amongst those present, and the teller is often tearful. The stories I have observed have focused on the events surrounding discovery, the traumatic impact of this, help received from Aftermath and that the teller has now reached a point where he or she is better able to cope. At one weekend an ex-offender told his story, which focused on the importance of the support he received from his family and how he had reformed. One of the most important sources of the Aftermath narrative is face-to-face interaction and informal conversations where elements of the

narrative can be observed, and I took part in and observed numerous examples during fieldwork.

An interesting contrast can be drawn between Aftermath and Alcoholics Anonymous where meetings revolve around the personal stories of members (Cain 1991). Through these testimonies more experienced members offer 'narrative maps' which might shape the decisions, actions and discourse of new members (Pollner and Stein 1996). These narrative maps have particular characteristics and shape experience in particular ways and coupled with the 12-steps provide a powerful guide for how newcomers should interpret their experience. Aftermath does not offer a framework of this strength. In part, this may be because it is a relatively new and relatively small organisation. As we have seen, organisations such as AA are much older and more extensive and the 'narrative maps' almost exists *sui generis* and could be found in any meeting, transcending place and time. Secondly, organisations organised around a 12-step programme are likely to offer a stronger framework by their very nature. Thirdly, Aftermath is not transformative, and as such does not have the same focus on the self as 12-step groups. Relatives of alcoholics in AlAnon, for example, follow a 12-step programme which focuses on changes in their attitude and behaviour and modifying their thinking to improve conditions in their lives (Ablon 1974) and must practice 'detachment' and 'tough love' to allow the alcoholic to experience the consequences of alcoholism which it is thought will aid their recovery (Reddy and McElfresh 1978); a similar focus on changing beliefs about the self and behaviour exists in Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACoA) (Kennedy and Humphreys 1994). Aftermath does not seek to change the behaviour of its members in this way and instead focuses on helping them to cope.

The collective narrative offered by Aftermath is better viewed as a *resource* rather than a template or rigid lens through which they understand their experience. Members might tend to accept and agree with the key elements and define their experience in what appears on the surface to be a similar way, but when probed further different interpretations of what these elements mean are discovered. The elements of the collective narrative outlined above are therefore *flexible categories* which members interpret to suit. As Richardson says, 'people make sense of their lives through the stories that are available to them, and they attempt to fit their lives into the available

stories' (Richardson 1990: 26); people also attempt to fit available stories into their lives.

All interviewees described the events surrounding discovery as very upsetting and traumatic, emphasising the need for recognition of what they have been through. However, it is not clear whether the source of this is Aftermath, or whether those feelings are what brought them to Aftermath in the first place. It is likely that relatives of serious offenders who find events less traumatic are less likely to seek support, although most relatives of serious offenders will not find Aftermath and will have to seek support elsewhere¹⁰⁰. The few non-Aftermath members interviewed for this study also talked about discovery of the offence being traumatic and shocking, although they did not explicitly compare their experiences to bereavement¹⁰¹.

The Aftermath narrative emphasises that relatives do not condone the offence, but are still able to support the offender (they 'hate the sin but love the sinner'). No-one within Aftermath openly condones the offence, although feelings about the offence and its gravity vary. A lunch participant told me "If a parent turned up not bitterly ashamed but almost bragging about it, we would find that very difficult" and other members in the room agreed. Aftermath does not provide an environment where condoning the offence is acceptable, although as we have seen in chapter five views of the offence differ and some relatives do make attempts to adjust the act. In addition, not all relatives 'love the sinner', some take the decision not to support the offender and are still accepted and supported within Aftermath.

An important element of the Aftermath collective narrative is that families of serious offenders are the 'other victims' of crime. An Aftermath leaflet states:

THE FORGOTTEN VICTIMS

Whilst we support the offender and his family, we never condone the offence. We do, however, sympathise with the unique and difficult

¹⁰⁰ Relatives might also use other sources of support to cope, such as family, friends, the Church, and so on.

¹⁰¹ Further research interviewing relatives before and after Aftermath membership would be necessary to be able to state with some certainty the source of elements of their accounts; as we have seen there are many possible sources.

circumstances in which these families find themselves. These are the Forgotten Victims. Our aim is to offer them support, love and understanding.

(Aftermath leaflet, n.d.)

Most of the Aftermath interviewees agreed with this element of the narrative in some way; however when probed further this assertion meant different things to different interviewees and some examples of this follow. Lisa, a partner from the homicide group, did not see herself as a victim, but explained her belief that families of serious offenders are victims because of the nature of the offence and the fact of imprisonment:

It must be so difficult for. . . a wife whose husband's gone inside and she has to explain to the children, she has to try and stop them being bullied and tormented in the school playground, she's confronted with media pressure, she's confronted with conversations in shops that suddenly stop as she goes in, I mean all those must be dreadful pressures and I think this is something that people don't understand, one conversation I had with a girl in the Dartmoor waiting room, was 'Well, its alright for him, isn't it, he's not sitting waiting for the light to go out, he's not wondering where the gas is coming from to cook the children's tea, he's in the warm, he's in the dry, he's got no bills and he's got three fucking meals a day' and she was surrounded by three little ones, so I mean they're getting all sorts of pressures that most of us don't understand, and that most of society is unwilling to accept. We'll read *The Sun* and we'll take on board all these ridiculous stories about yes they're living on lobster and caviar and Whitemoor is a hotel, what they won't take on board is how a little girl goes back to wetting the bed and cries herself asleep at night because she's lost her daddy and she doesn't understand why, and because of what people are saying to her about it.

(Lisa, partner, homicide group)

For Frances, families are victims because of the lack of provision available and lack of recognition of their needs. This is what attracted her to Aftermath in the first place:

R: And why Aftermath? Why were you interested in them?

F: Um, well it was you know, what it said, you know 'for the other victims', um, because there was no help for me, everybody else seemed to get help but me, you know I did take it quite badly.

(Frances, wife, sex offence group)

George, a father from the homicide group, says that families are victims because they are 'brought down' to the level of the prisoner. However, although he sees himself as a

victim because of what he feels people are thinking, he doesn't think that his life is otherwise affected¹⁰²:

G: Yeah, I think they are [victims], I think that's true. I think that's what we are. You're brought down to a level, like we were talking before about visits, and you are, you might just as well be a prisoner. In fact you are a prisoner, for that time that [my son] was in [prison] anyway because you can't get out [of the situation].

R: Do you see yourself as a victim of what happened?

G: I do up to a point, but not, it doesn't, not to the point where it's affected my life. I'm only affected as I said before by that smear that comes along from time to time and 'well he's the father of somebody that's killed', or 'he's the father he must be to blame', or that kind of suggestion, from that point of view, yes, I feel a victim

R: Where do those suggestions come from?

G: I don't know, I think they're probably in my thoughts just as much as from outside. I mean you tend to get these concepts of people thinking that you're one thing, but maybe it's not happening at all.

(George, father, homicide group)

Harriet was an active Aftermath member when I met her, attending lunches and acting as a supporter. She did not agree with describing relatives as victims because she thought it would be seen as a claim for suffering to the same degree as primary victims:

H: I've always taken issue with Aftermath that we are victims. I think that must be dreadfully annoying to the people who have had someone murdered or raped. You know, how dare they say they are victims? You know. We've suffered greatly as a result, but I think the word victim is the wrong word. And I think it must lose us a lot of public sympathy. I can't think of another word other than victim, but it is the wrong word.

R: And you don't feel like a victim yourself?

H: Possibly, but I think it's worse for the actual people whose brother has been murdered . . . we're a victim once removed, aren't we? There are many different types of victim - the immediate victim, the relatives of that

102 There may be a gender difference here. It is possible that male relatives are less willing to admit to being victims (although with only one male interviewee this cannot be concluded with any certainty); may be less likely to organise their lives around caring for the offender (see chapter three); and less likely to be financially dependent on the offender.

victim, and then another tier on the other side, the relatives of those that have done it.

(Harriet, mother, sex offence group)

We can therefore see how key components of Aftermath's collective narrative are flexible categories which are used as resources by relatives. Different aspects of victimisation are emphasised by each relative, and the application of the status 'victim' to themselves varies widely and is dependent upon their circumstances and other resources they use to understand those circumstances¹⁰³. So despite not seeing herself as a victim, Lisa strongly believes that families generally are victims and that they are victimised by both the nature of the offence and the separation of imprisonment. For Frances, families are victims because their needs are not recognised or provided for, and she herself is a victim, while for George families are 'brought down' to the level of the prisoner, but in his own case he does not think his life is affected. He does point, however, to thinking that others seeing him as 'the father of somebody that's killed' or in some way to blame. Although Harriet says she is possibly a victim of what has happened, she resists the use of the term because she says it does not differentiate between different types of victims. The degree to which relatives self-blame varies (see chapter six), so acceptance and interpretation of this element of the collective narrative will vary too. In addition, it is important to recognise the distinction between public and private accounts – relatives might publicly say that they define themselves as victims to reduce blame from others, but privately feel a greater degree of self-blame than they are willing to express.

Six of the relatives of serious offenders were not Aftermath members, although one became an Aftermath member after our interview¹⁰⁴. Responses from these participants were mixed. Sarah thought that families are victims because they have to deal with problems not of their own making. Like Lisa, she points to problems faced while the family member is imprisoned, however unlike Lisa she does see herself as a victim:

¹⁰³ Some relatives will of course also be primary victims of the offender, although they were few in number in this study.

¹⁰⁴ This was unrelated - it had taken some time to organise the interview, and in that time she had made contact with Aftermath at the suggestion of another prisoners' families organisation. At the time of interview she had only had brief telephone contact, but became an active member afterwards.

S: Oh yes, yes because they're [families of serious offenders] unwittingly caught up in it all aren't they? They're having to face the music of that family member. If that family member is in prison, they're out the way but the rest of the family has to face the hostility that might come from neighbours towards the family you know, like your brother did so and so. 'He's a complete waste of time, your, the whole family's a waste of time', that sort of thing.

R: And do you see yourself like that, as a victim of what your Mum did?

S: Yeah. Yes. Yes I do.

Sarah's mother committed a violent attack against her father. Sarah identified herself as a victim because of her relationship to both her mother and her father:

S: I've actually identified with both. Yes, I identified, saw myself very much as a victim because of I think, if I'm honest, what I was having to deal with and what was being put on my shoulders and the emotional trauma that I was having to deal with. So I did see myself as a victim. Victim Support verified that. You know, they said 'well you are, you are a victim' and initially yes, I did identify very strongly with what Dad was going through. Then it switched and I was identifying with Mum and what Mum was or wasn't doing to me. You know, the fact that she wasn't talking to me plus the fact I felt so incredibly guilty about her not staying here [while on bail], although I couldn't have done it, the guilt was unbearable. And until, I couldn't cope with it you know, I had to have her forgiveness almost, you know, she had to absolve me and say 'it's alright. It's not your fault.'

(Sarah, daughter, violent offence group)

Christine was prepared to consider describing families as victims, but said she did not see herself like this:

R: I've also heard the families of offenders described as the other victims of crime. What do you think about that?

C: [long pause] Um, well yeah, I suppose we are in a way, you know, because we're still living with it, living with her being in prison. She's our daughter and she's been took away from us, although be it her own fault, sort of thing. So we are living with that.

R: So do you see yourself like that, as a victim of what's happened?

C: I don't know if victim is the right word to use, because that's like I feel sorry for myself, and I don't feel sorry for myself. I feel sorry for her, that

she got that low, no I don't, I don't feel like a victim. I feel we're suffering from the fact that we haven't got her here, that she's not with us.

(Christine, mother, violent offence group)

Why does Aftermath place such an emphasis on families as victims? The status of victim encompasses both recognition of suffering and blamelessness – that the individual is not to blame for their suffering which comes from sources beyond their control. As we have seen, these are important parts of Aftermath's collective narrative, and the claim for victim status is offered to counter the blame that relatives experience in their everyday lives (see chapter four). Holstein and Miller have argued for an interactional approach to victimology which focuses on the processes through which victim status is assigned:

We can conceive of "victimization" as *descriptive practice* – the interpretive and representational processes for assigning victim status to ourselves and others. "Victimization" then becomes interactional activity that underpins victims' reality status. Describing someone as a victim is more than merely reporting *about* a feature of the social world; it *constitutes* that world.

(Holstein and Miller 1990: 105)

From this perspective, the important question is not whether or not Aftermath members are victims, but the processes through which they might or might not come to be defined as such. Holstein and Miller give the example of a caregiver at an Alzheimer's disease caregiver support group talking about the disease having "two victims" and say that 'the label implicitly underscores the caregiver's injury, free from fault for her troubles, and renders her worthy of others' concern' (Holstein and Miller 1990: 106). Clearly claims for the status of victim are even more pertinent to relatives of serious offenders who are much more likely than caregivers in this context to be causally implicated in some way and not seen as free from fault for their troubles.

So there is much to be gained from the status of victim: to be seen as deserving of help and support, sympathy and possible funding (important to self-help groups like Aftermath), and importantly absolving the individual of responsibility. As we have seen in chapter four, the secondary stigma of relatives of serious offenders is constructed around responsibility and several dimensions of family shame and blame, and claims for victim status aim to deflect this. A claim for the status of victim often encompasses

assigning victimiser status to another, although it is possible for victims to be ‘depicted as objects of harm by *amorphous, impersonal* forces. The well known “victim of circumstances” is exemplary in this regard’ (Holstein and Miller 1990: 107). Who do Aftermath members claim to be victims of? Although they talk about crimes having many victims, they are not usually asking for more blame to be heaped upon the offender – in fact, often quite the contrary as we have seen in chapter five with relatives’ attempts at act and actor adjustment. Their claim is a broader one: they are victims of the stigma, shock and repercussions of serious offending and of events surrounding and following discovery. Sometimes blame is levelled at others, but this is more likely to be those within the criminal justice system or people within their local community from whom they receive negative responses.

Aftermath receives a mixed response to their claim to victimhood, and it is a claim that is often not honoured:

If “victim” is regarded as a claim about the world, then belief in the factual status of the description depends on such things as credibility, influence, and warrant for honouring one set of claims over another.

(Holstein and Miller 1990: 114)

Aftermath face a constant struggle for this credibility and influence. Finally, it is worth noting the negative connotations of passivity and weakness associated with the status of victim. This has led some groups, such as those in the rape crisis movement, to shun the term, preferring to claim the status of ‘survivor’. However, the web of shame is so significant for relatives of serious offenders (see chapter four) that countering this takes precedent over such concerns.

Gender and self-help

One of the most striking things about Aftermath is that the members who are actively involved (i.e. attend lunches, are telephone counsellors, etc.) are almost all women. Given the greater number of male serious offenders, it is perhaps not surprising that there are more wives and female partners, but there are a large number of mothers and few fathers and a greater number of other female relatives such as grandmothers and

sisters. Around 90% of Aftermath members attending functions are women. Men attending would either be ex-offenders or would be 'accompanied' men, usually with their wives or sometimes other female family members. During more than three years of fieldwork I only met two men who had come alone to Aftermath gatherings. On several occasions, men would be attending reluctantly or just to support their wives. At a seminar weekend, one man came with his wife but did not attend the formal provided sessions while she attended them all¹⁰⁵; at a lunch another man sat in the car reading his paper throughout while his wife attended.

So why are Aftermath members predominantly female? It is perhaps helpful to begin with the views of some of the members. I put this question to a small group of relatives¹⁰⁶ at an Aftermath lunch in 1999, and the following discussion developed¹⁰⁷:

Celia: There's a stereotypical image of men, isn't there? Macho, not open, puts people down. The world is male-dominated. Many women have been oppressed by men and find it hard to let them in. Women have a different kind of bonding; it might be hard for men to be accepted in Aftermath. Many women in Aftermath have had horrendous problems living with men.

Don: From talking to people in the counselling role, one lady said to me 'women are more sympathetic than men'. I think it's probably because the majority of families lose the male partner - the male commits the crime. And the British bit - 'I don't need support, I'm a man'

Lisa: Those present at school parents' evenings are mostly women

Louise: I've worked for [a voluntary organisation] and 95% of the staff are women.

Lisa: It's assumed rightly or wrongly that women are more verbally able

Louise: It's assumed women gossip! Women show feelings, boys don't from early childhood.

¹⁰⁵ When I asked his wife about this, she said it wasn't his sort of thing and he'd only come for her sake.

¹⁰⁶ I asked 'Why do you think most Aftermath members are women?'. The members' kin relationships to serious offenders were: Celia, aunt; Don, Uncle; Lisa, partner; Nicola, partner; Harriet, Sister. Unusually there were no mothers of serious offenders present at this lunch; if there had been, a different perspective might have been offered.

¹⁰⁷ This was one of the few fieldwork occasions where I was able to take contemporaneous notes.

Celia: Mothers bring them up that way - 'you're behaving like a cissy'

Nicola: Admitting you've got a sensitive man - eyebrows go up!

Celia: Yes, a 'new man'!

Harriet: Peer group pressure is important

Celia: And there are other sources - TV, radio

Lisa: It's also to do with expectations of kids; tenderness in boys is quashed or ignored.

Nicola: How we're socially conditioned. I'm trying not to follow the stereotype with my son and encourage feelings, but it's very difficult. There's a social stigma - boys are supposed to be tough.

There are some important themes that emerge from this discussion. First, Aftermath is an organisation people approach when they need help and emotional support, and doing so is an admission that this help is needed. In the view of the members in this group, this goes against the narrow social construction of masculinity that is prominent in our society and passed on through socialisation. Men are more likely to keep their feelings hidden and do not ask for help and are therefore less likely to choose to be in an environment focused on emotional support. It is helpful to look for explanations at a macro-level because this gender imbalance is not unique to Aftermath. Studies have shown that members of self-help groups are characteristically drawn from similar populations: female, white, middle class and with a higher level of education (Gidron et al. 1990; Heller et al. 1997; Lieberman and Snowdon 1994; Norton et al. 1993; Videka-Sherman 1982). A gender imbalance has also been found in readers of self-help literature who are predominantly women (Simonds 1992). A study of self-help groups for families of drug users in the UK found that those groups were predominantly used by women and offered the following explanations:

All groups reported parents as members and these were mostly women in the ratio of 5 women to 1 man. This imbalance towards female involvement is very much in line with society's expectations of women's caring role and masculine discomfiture at the exposing of personal feelings in public. Some leaders mentioned that men were more likely to feel shame and stigma, and when they were persuaded to come to the group it was 'with their wives and with their arm twisted behind their back'. Perhaps more perceptively, women were aware that the misunderstandings which the presence of a drugs problem within the

family might create in the world outside could be more difficult for men who were fearful that this would have adverse repercussions on career prospects or at work generally. While the same considerations might apply equally to women, nobody mentioned it.

(Gay 1989: 20)

It may be that men suffer stigma more than women when there is a drug problem in the family because they are more likely to be in the public domain. However, this possible finding cannot be easily translated to relatives of serious offenders. A serious offence committed by a family member is likely to be stigmatising to any relative and it may even be experienced to a greater degree by women who are more strongly defined through their kin relationships (see chapter four). Female relatives in this study did not report that male family members felt more stigmatised. This is an area that would have been interesting to explore had more interviews with male family members been possible.

Celia raises a further interesting point in the discussion above, that the predominantly female environment in *Aftermath* provides a safe place for women who might have encountered difficulties with men in the past, including being primary victims of crime, and certainly during interviews in this study there were several cases of domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse disclosed. This may well be so, but is probably an incidental point rather than an explanation for the gender imbalance. There was no women-only policy and efforts were made to make men who did attend very welcome. In addition, ex-offenders were also made welcome at most occasions and female members would often find themselves sitting with known perpetrators of offences such as child sexual abuse. In an interview that took place after the lunch, Harriet also suggested the bond between mother and child as a reason:

Never for one minute did I think 'well if he's done it I don't want anything to do with him'. He came from my body; I couldn't turn on him whatever he'd done. And I think this is why, when you say 'why are there more women in *Aftermath*?', because they carried the child, they gave birth to the child, they knew the child from nine months before the father did, and I think many fathers . . . haven't bonded in the way that the mother has.

(Harriet, mother, sex offence group)

It may be that women seek out self-help because they are shouldering greater caring responsibilities following discovery of the offence (see chapter three) and need support

in doing this. One study of self-help groups for prisoners' partners suggests the opposite: that women caring for imprisoned family members are in a position of dependency on other relatives and hence are able to maintain positive identities by 'giving back' through self-help (Codd 2002). This study suggests that self-help groups provide, among other benefits, pseudo-kinship relationships which provide support and either supplement or replace kinship relationships; one of the interviewees (who may well have been from Aftermath - this is not made clear in the article) also commented that her self-help group was 'like a family'. Codd explores the importance of reciprocity to the dynamics of kin relationships, and the argument from Finch and Mason (Finch and Mason 1993) that kin members try to achieve a satisfactory balance between giving and receiving assistance and support (see chapter three). Codd argues that female partners supporting prisoners find they are in deficit:

Financial and personal difficulties arising from imprisonment can create a state of dependency, which can lead to individuals feeling that they are continuously the recipients and beneficiaries of unreciprocated informal support . . . thus prisoners' partners face conflicts when their circumstances mean that they simultaneously need help and support from their kin but feel unable to reciprocate.

(Codd 2002: 339)

Codd draws on Finch and Mason's (1993) concept of 'generalised reciprocity' and argues that through membership of self-help groups these female partners are able to 'give back' in other ways and hence maintain positive identities:

Within the context of social expectations that women should be caregivers, membership of a self-help group can allow women to maintain a positive female self-identity. In addition, in self-help groups, women care not only for their own imprisoned family members, but also for other carers and their incarcerated family members. Shared experience and a willingness to provide emotional support can constitute a currency for exchanges, which would not be of value outside the self-help group. Thus membership of, and participation in, such groups allows women to maintain positive self-identities not only as moral individuals, but specifically as moral *women*. When exchanges between kin are unbalanced, the net recipient may feel a negative gendered moral identity. Self-help groups operate so as to enable those involved to maintain their positive female self-identities whilst allowing for mutual support between individuals in need.

(Codd 2002: 340)

The support given to other self-help group members might involve listening or 'being there for somebody else' or more formalised support structures; two of her interviewees were training as counsellors with one organisation. The logic of this argument is based on some assumptions which do not concur with the findings of this study. First, it is not at all clear that women supporting imprisoned partners are in a state of dependency on other kin and 'net recipients'. Of course, some women might be, but as we have seen in chapter three, many women are already juggling numerous responsibilities and with the negotiation of responsibilities following discovery of the offence women in this study were primarily net *givers*. Caring for an imprisoned relative exaggerates gendered responsibilities, and women in this study often had to cope with this along with their other everyday responsibilities towards children and other kin.

This difference in findings might stem from several factors. Codd's study only looks at female partners of prisoners, while members of self-help groups for prisoners' families might have other kin relationships to the prisoner. Only six of the eleven interviewees in her study used these groups; it is not possible to know with such a small sample whether these women were unusual in having few kin responsibilities and being 'net receivers'. These women were all 'older' female partners of prisoners, aged from 38 years to over 60; age and their stage of life might also reflect upon their everyday kin responsibilities¹⁰⁸. It is difficult, therefore, to extrapolate from this small group of older female partners to all female partners participating in self-help for prisoners' families; and certainly problematic to extend this to all female members of these groups, regardless of kin relationship.

Secondly, it is not clear that female partners of prisoners need considerable kin support in order to care for their imprisoned partner. Codd gives examples of women in her study receiving financial help or being driven to prison visits, but caring for an imprisoned partner is not analysed any further. The lives of many women in my sample revolved around the needs of their imprisoned relative and although caring involved financial support and frequent visiting, it also involved frequent telephone calls, letters, liaising with legal authorities, shopping for the prisoner, and generally offering emotional support. Much of this was done single-handedly by these women, and there

¹⁰⁸ Although the youngest interviewees in this study were in their 30s and most of my sample still had considerable other responsibilities.

were examples of women travelling all day for prison visits or going without things themselves in order to buy items for the prisoner (see chapter three). There were examples of women receiving support from kin and from friends, but not to the extent that they were likely to feel like net receivers.

The logic of Codd's argument also assumes an equality of exchange within these self-help groups which is not the case. Self-help membership means different things to different people and there are varying levels of involvement. More importantly, there are varying levels of support given by members: some within Aftermath are not able to give any support to others; some are only able to offer informal support through listening and friendship; others offer formal telephone support, but even within this latter group I found examples of members who supported only a few other members, and one who had supported around eighty¹⁰⁹. The extent to which members are able to offer support depends upon their personal circumstances and ability to cope with their own difficulties, but also upon the time that has passed since discovery. There is an understanding within most self-help organisations that a certain amount of time should pass before a member can become a supporter and almost all of those who join organisations such as Aftermath join as receivers of support. Therefore those who have been net receivers *within Aftermath* often become net givers *within Aftermath*, but this usually happens over a considerable period of time when relatives progress to the 'helping others' stage outlined in chapter three.

There may be some people that arrive at self-help organisations ready to help others - I met two people who had sought counselling and other help elsewhere and arrived at Aftermath somewhat further down the process - but the vast majority do not. Thus, it cannot be an explanation in this context for why people join self-help groups, but may be part of the explanation for why *some* members *stay*. The balancing through 'generalised reciprocity' could be stretched across the years it takes for a member to be primarily a support-giver, but it seems likely that the debt to be paid is one incurred within Aftermath. Membership of a self-help group such as Aftermath can help women to maintain a positive female self-identity, and in the later stages of membership this

¹⁰⁹ And if Codd's argument was stretched to its logical conclusion, it would suggest that those women doing the most supporting within Aftermath have the greater debt to pay to kin and others outside Aftermath. This was certainly not the case.

might be aided by helping others. However, women in this study already had identities constructed around their kinship roles and caring for others, and when their identities were damaged by discovery of the offence Aftermath's key role in helping them repair these identities was through emotional support, helping them through the earlier traumatic stages and helping them to manage stigma which enabled them to progress to a stage where they could better cope and in some cases go on to help others. Women's identities were therefore repaired through receiving rather than giving support, in most cases a necessary prerequisite to being able to help others¹¹⁰.

It would seem, therefore, that the explanation for why Aftermath is predominantly female might be found in several important contributory factors. First, and shared with all self-help, it is likely that women feel more comfortable asking for emotional support and discussing these issues. Second, it may be that women's identities are more closely constructed through their kin relationships (see chapter four), they may be more subject to blame and shame for the deviation of a family member, and they may feel a greater need to seek help when something goes wrong. Third, part of the impact of discovery is a re-negotiation of family responsibilities where female family members, and particularly wives and mothers, take on the greater load both in emotional and practical terms (see chapter three); support might be sought from Aftermath to help in managing this load. Finally, there is a sense in which the family, kinship and related problems are seen as women's domain and women's responsibility, and therefore up to women to sort out.

To conclude, what Aftermath offers its members is best understood in the wider context of the self-help movement and the growth of that movement in recent times. It is a relatively young organisation and has experienced changes in the fifteen years since its inception prompted by changing views about its aims and how its service should be delivered. The support which Aftermath offers relatives of serious offenders is unique; there is no other national organisation that does this. Members join to meet others in a similar situation, find emotional support and manage their secondary stigma. Aftermath

¹¹⁰ One of the main problems with Codd's study is the lack of a sense of time or process because it is limited to 'snapshot' interviews with these six women and no ethnographic fieldwork; it is difficult to pronounce on the role of self-help for members without observing this across time.

offers both a safe place where relatives can be heard and a collective narrative that helps them to understand their experience; this narrative is used as a resource. Most Aftermath members are female, and it is suggested that several factors might explain this; the picture is complex and cannot be explained by any single factor alone.

Conclusion

This thesis has focused upon how relatives of serious offenders construct the offence and its consequences. Qualitative methods have been used to try to capture relatives' interpretations of events and to discover how having a serious offender in the family has an impact on relatives' lives, whether they are stigmatised and subject to blame and shame, how they make sense of and account for the offence and for their own actions, and how they make use of self-help.

The study has primarily relied on retrospective accounts given by relatives in long interviews, and on a sample necessarily selected by availability and opportunity. As discussed in chapter two, this places limitations on the extent to which conclusions can be generalised. Many of these relatives were reached through Aftermath which was also a site for fieldwork. This enabled particular questions about relatives' experiences to be addressed (see chapter two), but this is not primarily a study of Aftermath. This is the first study to use long interviews and fieldwork over a period of several years with this particular population, the first to gain access to this number of relatives, and as such has made some interesting findings about a relatively hidden population.

The Findings

Participants in this study constructed the discovery of the offence as traumatic and life-changing, comparable in many ways to bereavement, and interviewees described in detail how shattered and devastated they had been. Relatives experienced particular losses which had to be grieved for, and some of their reactions were indeed comparable to those of the bereaved. Parallels were found between relatives' descriptions of this traumatic impact and other kinds of trauma. In particular, participants described how their worlds had been turned upside down and how life as they knew it had ended; part of this was a disruption to the way they understood and made sense of their lives, a 'loss of the assumptive world' (Murray-Parkes 1971; Murray-Parkes 1975).

Furthermore, discovery of the offence was a shock: most participants said they were ill-prepared and knew nothing of the offending before this point. Although we know from studies of families managing problems such as alcoholism and mental illness that denial and cover-up can operate effectively within families despite strong evidence to the contrary, relatives clearly portrayed 'discovery' as a single, shocking moment. Accounts of life before discovery tended to polarise and were either problem-identifying or normalising, both of which might be attempts to negate blame by themselves or others, either because relatives should have known or because they should have acted.

Participants passed through several stages after discovering the offence (*initial impact stage; early coping stage; accommodation; helping others; and moving on*). Interviewees and fieldwork participants talked about progressively coping and feeling as if they moved forward in stages, although the labels for the stages are mine. The stages are broadly conceived and are intended to convey progression rather than impose a rigid prescriptive framework on relatives' experience. They encompass both external events, such as the unfolding of the criminal justice process, and relatives' emotional development, as they gradually feel they are coping. Viewing being a relative of a serious offender as a career also has parallels with the bereavement literature where several studies suggest stages of progression to a point where an individual has recovered (e.g. Bowlby 1981; Murray-Parkes 1972). Participants in this study resisted the idea of reaching a stage of recovery, however, and similar resistance has been found amongst those who are traumatically bereaved (Rock 1998a: 57-60).

After discovery, responsibilities within the family are re-negotiated and new responsibilities emerge which particularly revolve around the offender and his or her needs. Female relatives, and primarily mothers and wives, tend to take on these new tasks. Usually one member of the family is the offenders' primary carer, meeting his or her needs and giving emotional support, and almost all the participants in this study had adopted that role. It is suggested that meeting the offender's needs is best conceived as informal caring within the family, particularly after imprisonment but also during the criminal justice process which families often felt they were drawn into and pulled through along with the offender. Participants' lives revolved around the offender as they spent much of their time worrying about him or her, speaking to legal and other authorities, shopping and providing for material needs after imprisonment, prison

visiting, and generally offering support to both the offender and other members of the family. Morgan describes this ‘. . . interplay between caring for and caring about’ as *emotional labour* (Morgan 1996) a description which fits these tasks well. For many participants their new responsibilities were in addition to other caring responsibilities they already carried.

Relatives experience secondary stigma because of their kin relationship to a serious offender, but this is more than just a stigma by association. I have shown that relatives are themselves subject to a ‘web of shame’, on the basis of contamination (*association* and *genetics*) and on the basis of blame (*omission*, *commission*, and *continuation*). Political, lay, media and expert discourses often locate explanations for offending within the family: serious offenders are seen to be ‘made’ and family background is the key factor. There is a long history of mother-blaming, and mothers in this study talked about how they felt particularly blamed (and blamed themselves) for having given birth to a rapist or a murderer. Relatives’ secondary stigma can have serious consequences, and participants reported loss of friends, being ignored or verbally abused, threats and physical attacks. Relatives’ experiences will depend upon whether their circumstances are known, by whom, and in what circumstances. Participants in this study were constantly negotiating issues of disclosure and secrecy. Recall Alice, for example, who avoided making new friends because this might lead to her having to disclose the whereabouts of her son, serving a life sentence for murder.

This study found that relatives used various strategies to manage their secondary stigma (*internalising blame*; *avoidance*; *resistance*; *stressing the positives*; *accounts*; and *collective management*) which were separated for analytical purposes, but in reality are often used simultaneously. One strategy, internalising blame, was found to be common. Relatives are aware of the discourses of familial responsibility that permeate our society and often spoke of feeling responsible for what the offender had done. However, it was suggested that internalising blame was not the same as accepting the right of others to blame, or accepting that the abuse some relatives experienced was justified. Strong resistance was not found among participants in this study to stigma experienced in the local community; relatives did not describe ‘fighting back’. This may be a factor of the sample or reflect unwillingness to report. It may also be that relatives are paralysed by shame and do not feel empowered to resist.

Why do relatives of serious offenders provoke such a strong reaction from outsiders? One reason might be the threat that their secondary stigma presents. We know from the literature on stigma that this threat or 'peril' is an important dimension and while serious offenders themselves pose a more tangible threat, the threat posed by their relatives is more symbolic. It is suggested that they threaten outsiders' assumptive worlds and the 'cognitive conservatism' (Janoff-Bulman 1992) that we all share, which tells us that the world is benevolent and meaningful: why would this be happening to relatives of serious offenders if they were really blameless? They also present a blurred morality that challenges a black and white world view and presents grey areas: they claim that offenders are not inherently evil and that it is possible to support them while not condoning what they have done.

Making sense of the offence is part of the process of moving forward from discovery, and relatives were found to be *audiences* to the offenders' accounts, to be *commentators* on these accounts, and to have a role accounting for their own actions because they are themselves subject to shame and *implicated*. When accounting for the offence, relatives were found to use 'actor adjustments' and 'act adjustments' (Cohen 2001; Ditton 1977). This was the best distinction to capture the tension between recognising, in most cases, the harm caused by the offender and wanting him or her to take responsibility for their actions on the one hand, and wanting to mitigate blame or improve the impression held of the offender on the other. Scott and Lyman's (1968) distinction between excuses and justifications is the most commonly used in all analyses of motivational accounts (of both offenders and offenders' relatives), but it was found to be less useful for understanding participants' accounts in this study. First, relatives did not use justifications - they did not assert the positive value of the offence. Secondly, Scott and Lyman's distinction between excuses and justifications did not accommodate the tension between wanting the offender to take responsibility and wanting to mitigate blame.

A typology of act and actor adjustments was constructed based on accounts given by participants. Actor adjustments (*denial of responsibility* (Sykes and Matza 1957), *resisting totalising identity*, *balance* and *separating the act from the actor*) predominated in relatives' accounts, which is likely to be because of the seriousness of

the offences: it is very difficult to adjust acts such as homicide and child sexual abuse and much easier to adjust more minor offences such as vandalism or shoplifting. Denial of responsibility was the 'master theme' and took eight different forms; this is also a theme that dominates in offenders' excuse accounts in the literature. Though less common, four forms of act adjustment were used: *denial of injury*, *denial of the victim* (both from Sykes and Matza, 1957), *normalising the act*, and *comparative adjustment*. Relatives were keen to alter the impression of the offender and used these various techniques in their accounts to do this. It is important to recognise that relatives have less invested than offenders in trying to mitigate responsibility, and often it seemed that their main motivation was to try to improve the impression held of their loved one. Many participants were searching around for reasons and trying to understand why the offence had happened; formulating these accounts was part of that process.

Participants offered accounts for their decision to support, or not support, the offender. Two techniques might be used to account for supporting the offender, whether or not the act or actor could be effectively adjusted: *hate the sin but love the sinner*, and *appeal to higher loyalties* (Sykes and Matza 1957). The first technique involves making a separation between the act and the actor, and is akin to Braithwaite's model of reintegrative shaming which points to evil deeds rather than evil persons (Braithwaite 1989). A similar technique was also found to be used by the Catholic Church in accounting for paedophile priests (Thomson et al. 1998). Participants said that this account was not always accepted and that they felt blamed for continuing to support the offender because this was interpreted as support for the offender's actions. An appeal to higher loyalties pointed to family bonds - as Anne said: "at the end of the day, I'm his Mum and I'll be there no matter what he's done". An appeal to family bonds is a powerful account in our society - good families stick together and family members support each other - and harks back to ideas in public discourse about family responsibility and caring.

Accounts which addressed other aspects of family shame (*association; genetic; omission; commission*) tended to oscillate between being shame-resisting and shame-acknowledging. As we have seen, internalising blame and resistance are both strategies used to manage stigma, and relatives struggled with feeling shamed by the actions of the offender and questioning whether they had a role to play on the one hand, and wanting

to resist contamination and blame on the other. Strong resistance was found to the idea that relatives were 'all the same' and that offenders came from criminal families. Participants sought to separate themselves from families whom they perceived to be tolerant or supportive of criminality and from families of professional criminals.

Some participants encountered dimensions of shame from those with more power to define: criminal justice agencies, mental health professionals and, in the case of those with children in the family, social services. A probation officer, for example, told Anne that her son committed rape because his step-father used to hit him and he was blaming his mother for letting him do so. Relatives of sex offenders with children in the family felt strongly about difficulties they had experienced with social services. They thought social workers held rigid conceptions of sex offenders with which they did not fit 'their' offender. Clare had worked as a social worker in child protection before her husband's sex offences against his now adult children came to light. She was aware of how social services constructed sex offenders and their families and found it difficult to be on the other side and suspected of colluding with the abuse or labelled a 'non-protecting parent'. Despite this power to define, relatives did not unquestioningly accept, absorb and repeat these accounts and often resisted or questioned them instead.

Self-help organisations provide a form of collective management of stigma and its consequences and parallels were found between self-help for relatives of serious offenders and self-help for other relatives with stigmatised or spoiled identities, such as relatives of drug addicts, alcoholics or the mentally ill. Participants pointed to particular benefits offered by Aftermath: meeting others in similar circumstances who would understand how they felt, meeting other 'normal' relatives of serious offenders, a non-judgemental and safe environment where they felt able to talk, emotional support and help in managing stigma, practical support and information, and finding out how others coped - and that they did cope. Aftermath was often described as 'like a family', something which is part of its collective narrative. Aftermath members are primarily women. Several factors might explain this, including that the majority of serious offenders are men, and that disproportionate responsibilities are shouldered by women in the family; self-help may be a gendered source of support to help women cope with this.

All self-help groups are organised around a problem and provide a way of understanding that particular problem. Aftermath constructs relatives of serious offenders and their experiences in particular ways, and I have called this Aftermath's 'collective narrative'. How this shapes relatives' own accounts and experiences is an important question and it was suggested that this narrative is a *resource* which members draw on and interpret to suit. Elements of this narrative are flexible categories. So, for example, most members agreed that relatives of offenders were the 'other victims', but when probed further had different understandings of why this was so and what it meant. Some categories are more flexible than others, however: Aftermath members do not condone the offence, for example, and attempts to do so would be frowned upon.

Collective narratives are created, re-created and sustained on several levels. Aftermath's claim for victimhood for offenders' families can be traced back to the broader literature on prisoners' families where it has a long history (see chapter one). Aftermath is part of a wider network of prisoners' families groups, most of which come under the umbrella organisation Action for Prisoners' Families, and therefore part of a community that constructs offenders' relatives in particular ways. Though other prisoners' families groups also claim victim status as recognition of suffering and blamelessness, Aftermath's narrative does differ in key ways, in particular the focus on how relatives deal with the horror of the offence and its seriousness. Narratives are created, re-created, and sustained at the level of the organisation - and as we have seen in chapter seven, Aftermath's literature and functions promote certain aspects. They are also created, re-created and sustained at the level of individual interaction - which for Aftermath members is usually through telephone supporting and meeting and functions.

Three variables have been particularly important to this study: offence type, kin relationship to the offender, and gender of the offender. These variables have been considered during each stage of analysis and commented upon where they seemed to make a difference. So, for example, mothers often talked about how they felt a strong bond to the offender, and would support him or her no matter what the offence, whereas only wives and partners (in five cases) felt able to cease supporting the offender.

The type of offence has an impact on the experiences of relatives of serious offenders. Most notably, relatives of sex offenders constructed the stigma and shame to which they

were subjected as being particularly strong. They were more likely to feel contaminated by association or genetics, to feel blamed for commission or omission, and to be blamed for continuation by supporting the offender. Participants reported particularly feeling blamed for condoning the offence because they supported the offender: in the case of sex offences, it seemed as if 'hating the sin but loving the sinner' was a separation that was difficult for others to accept; the status of sex offender was a master status that defined an offender's very being. Moral panics about child sexual abuse have been flourishing since the 1980s (Cohen 2003: Introduction), with public opinion vehemently against offenders and their associates. This is well illustrated by the *News of the World's* naming and shaming of paedophiles campaign, following the abduction and murder of Sarah Payne in 2000, and the subsequent vigilante attacks which occurred. Relatives of sex offenders were often genuinely fearful that they might encounter similar public fury if their circumstances were known.

The gender of the offender was found to be significant in several ways. Relatives of female offenders were more likely to portray the offenders as victims and to use strong denials of responsibility. Christine's daughter, for example, was addicted to heroin and according to Christine she was made to commit armed robberies by an abusive boyfriend who controlled her supply; Louise's daughter's violent offence followed a traumatic bereavement which devastated her and which she sought to avenge in her bereaved state; and Monica's daughter suffered psychiatric problems, mental instability and then post-natal depression which culminated in an attack on her baby.

The victims of three of the female offenders had been within the immediate family and closely related to the participating relative: Monica and Jane's daughters committed violent offences against their babies, and Sarah's mother against her husband. The victims were therefore grandchildren of the interviewee in two cases, and a father in the second; these relatives had to struggle with conflicting feelings as close relatives of both the offender and the victim. This was also the case for some of the relatives of male offenders, though only in those in the child sex offence group where the victims had been nieces, a foster daughter and grandchildren of the participating relative (see chapter two).

I had expected relatives of female serious offenders to describe experiencing greater stigma because the offender had also offended against the rigid constructions of femininity that exist in our society, but they did not. This may be because of the offence type, however: only one female offender was convicted of a homicide offence, and none were convicted of sex offences. In order to determine whether relatives of female offenders suffer more in this way it would be necessary to pair male and female offenders more closely by offence type.

Two relatives of female offenders pointed to the concerns raised by Walker and Worrall about what is missed when a female offender is imprisoned for a long time (Walker and Worrall 2000). Mary's daughter received a twelve year sentence and Mary expressed concern that she would be past child-bearing age on her release; Dorothy expressed concern about her daughter missing out on the final years of raising her teenage children. All the other female offenders were serving sentences of five years or less.

Two concerns were commonly expressed by relatives of female offenders: first, the unexpected nature of the offence, and second, concerns about the offender in prison. Several relatives said they just did not expect their female relative to offend in this way and to find themselves visiting her in prison. Christine, for example, said that as she brought her daughter up it was never one of her concerns that she would see her convicted of a serious offence, in this case armed robbery. Three relatives were worried that their daughters might attempt suicide in prison, and one that her daughter would be given adequate help in withdrawing from drugs (though she was very pleased to 'have her [daughter] back' when she did manage this). As we have seen, Monica was concerned that her daughter did not receive psychiatric care and was not provided with a breast pump when first in prison, and both Monica and Jane were concerned for their daughters' safety should their offences against their children become known¹¹¹. Relatives of male offenders did express concerns about the offender in prison, but again

¹¹¹ The concerns of relatives of female offenders in this study fit with what we know about the female prison population. A recent report found that two-third of female prisoners showed symptoms of at least one neurotic disorder and more than half were suffering from a personality disorder. 40% of all women sent to prison say they have attempted suicide at some time in their lives, and 54% of remand prisoners and 41% of sentenced prisoners report some degree of drug dependency in the year before prison (Prison Reform Trust 2003).

this was often relatives of sex offenders who were concerned for their safety should the offence be known, or more general concerns about health and well-being.

This study therefore found some issues specific to relatives of female offenders: the accounts offered by these relatives were primarily actor adjustments and strong denials of responsibility; three relatives were struggling with conflicting feelings as they were closely related to both the victim and the offender; the two relatives of those serving longer sentences were concerned that they were missing out on motherhood; the offence itself was more unexpected for six of the eight relatives because the offender was female; and there were specific concerns about treatment in prison. However, direct comparison with male serious offenders on other dimensions, such as the experience of stigma and shame, has been difficult because of the variation between the groups in offence type.

Policy Implications

This thesis is a sociological study of relatives' interpretations and understanding of their experience and did not seek to directly address questions of policy. However, these findings do raise particular policy implications and questions to consider. First, the research indicates that early intervention and referrals by criminal justice agencies might be important for relatives of serious offenders. Participants in this study often discovered the offence when the offender was arrested, and in some cases had their houses searched. There is no provision made for helping offenders' relatives at this stage by any agency, and unless they are lucky enough to find Aftermath (and as we have seen a low proportion of all relatives of serious offenders find Aftermath anyway) they are very much on their own. As we saw, participants described feeling shock which manifested in many symptoms, was comparable in some ways to bereavement, and in some cases required psychiatric treatment. Some participants said they had even contemplated suicide.

It may be that mental health services have a greater role to play with those relatives that need help at this early stage, and as we saw in chapter one, a psychiatrist who studied a single family through the suspicion, charge and finally the conviction of their son for

murder suggested that most families in their situation would benefit from the intervention of these services (McLeod 1982). Some relatives did seek this help, usually through their GP, but accessing this help was by no means automatic.

As the first agency to encounter the offenders' family, the police might have a role to play in referring relatives to appropriate agencies for help. Clearly the first priority of the police is the crime investigation, and some family members might even be suspects, but this would not preclude guidelines for dealing with offenders' families. According to participants in this study, the treatment they received from the police was somewhat haphazard and depended very much on the personalities of individual officers. Further research is needed to determine the role of the police in dealing with offenders' relatives. Does police training (formal or informal) include any mention of offenders' families? Is there any scope for broadening the role of officers to include these relatives? Some police authorities are more open than others to the idea of working with relatives of offenders. In one area the police family liaison officer, who works on homicide cases, has close contact with Aftermath and refers families to them and one police authority had Aftermath speakers included as part of their training. Another force was approached by Aftermath to see if their family liaison officers would be interested in attending a seminar weekend and replied that they worked with the families of victims, not the families of offenders.

This research shows the importance of considering the dynamics in the courtroom and the role played by offenders' families. Participants in this study spoke of this as a particularly traumatic time. Most had to rely on the support of friends and family in the court and only a few had Aftermath members as supporters. In some cases relatives were in fear of, or subject to, attacks from the victim's associates. Some relatives described collapsing in the court at hearing the verdict or sentence given. Participants who had been court supporters spoke of the importance of recognition of the needs of offenders' families: the need for information about the court process, being able to sit away from the victim's friends and family, being given protection should it be needed and being shielded from the press to whatever extent is practical. How might these needs be met in the absence of supporters from Aftermath? Might witness supporters provided by Victim Support also support offenders' families?

Serious offenders' families often become prison visitors for many years. Recognition of the needs of prisoners' families has developed considerably in recent times. Action for Prisoners' Families has an important liaising role with government and the Home Office has a Family Ties Unit which considers these needs. A recent Prison Reform Trust report states that there are now 80 visitors' centres at prisons across the UK (Loucks 2002). It suggests that these centres have an important role in helping to maintain family ties and therefore rehabilitating offenders. They help families make sense of the difficult visiting process and aid interaction between the prison and the family on issues such as the welfare of the prisoner. The report found a low priority accorded to these centres and to visits generally in some prisons, and stressed the importance of good funding, which in some cases is not forthcoming. It recommends the development of fully-staffed centres across the prison estate (Loucks 2002). These issues are even more important to relatives of serious offenders who may be trying to maintain family ties across longer periods of separation, might have concerns about the prisoner linked to sentence length or possible repercussions from the type of offence and as we have seen, for participants in this study, often lack basic information and needed to undergo a process of socialisation to become competent prison visitors. Furthermore, prisons need to consider the dynamics in the visits room, and if vulnerable prisoners are segregated, recognise that this will also identify their visitors.

How far can probation services accommodate relatives of offenders? Participants in this study had little contact with probation services, other than on occasions speaking to probation officers within the prison and sometimes receiving home visits before release. In some cases relatives had contacted probation, but they had not been particularly helpful. One probation officer I spoke to said that their role used to be broader and might have included looking at the family as a unit, but that as resources had become tighter and more restricted their role had followed suit. The role of probation services in relation to families needs to be made explicit so relatives are clear about the degree to which they can expect to be included.

In general, this study shows that the criminal justice process, and particularly imprisonment, has a broader reach than is officially recognised. This and other studies have found that the main supporters of prisoners are primarily women, so it is likely to also be the case that many more women are affected by crime and its consequences than

is officially recognised. With the expansion of imprisonment (the prison population has risen from 42,000 in 1993 to over 73,000 in August 2003)¹¹² more and more relatives are being affected. Some participants used the metaphor of a pebble being thrown into a pond and a 'ripple effect' to illustrate the people affected when a serious offence is committed. Relatives of serious offenders need to be recognised as some of those affected, and not just as prison visitors: these effects reach into every corner of their lives.

It is important to unpick the different dimensions of shame to which relatives are subject, as this study has done, in order to be able to see where it is occurring and what the consequences might be. In particular it is important to make family blaming by experts and others with the power to define explicit, examining how it informs social work or probation practice. How explicit are the criteria used by social workers in the definition of a parent as 'non-protecting' or colluding? How do social workers construct sex offenders and their families? What are the theories that inform practice and what are the consequences of these for relatives of offenders?

This study also has implications for the recent growth industry of restorative justice within the criminal justice system. One of the assumptions upon which restorative justice has been built - that those within the offender's immediate circle will be carriers of shame - has not been questioned in the enormous literature which has proliferated in recent years. It is necessary to explore both reintegrative shaming (which as Braithwaite says, does not seem to form the basis of shaming in our wider society) and disintegrative shaming (which does). If it is the case that relatives are subject to shame because of more than mere association, that they are also seen as contaminated and blamed and suffer very real consequences as a result, then this needs to be recognised when they are asked to participate in reintegrative processes such as restorative justice conferences; it cannot be assumed that restorative justice processes are totally free from stigma and reintegrative. How do reintegrative processes such as restorative justice operate within disintegrative societies? What are the consequences of this for offenders' families? If it is also the case that these processes are gendered, and that women in the family shoulder most of the burden of shaming and of re-negotiated responsibilities,

¹¹² Source: Howard League (<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/howard.league/>)

then this too should be explored. It may be that women have a valuable role to play in restorative processes, but this a role that must be unpicked.

The findings about responsibilities within the families of serious offenders have further important consequences. As we have seen in chapter four, notions of familial responsibility are reflected in the relationship between the state and the family and the British government has long been concerned with family life and making assumptions about the role of the family in legislation. Families have been encouraged to look after their members, with 'strong moral disapproval' (Finch 1989: 3) of those who do not acknowledge their responsibilities. The prisoners' families literature consistently points to a strong association between family ties and reducing further offending (see chapter one), suggesting that those offenders who have relatives who are willing to take on these responsibilities have a better chance of rehabilitation. In most cases, participants in this study wanted to take on these responsibilities and to support the offender, and further wanted to encourage the offender to address his or her offending behaviour. Indeed, the act and actor adjustments they used allowed for this, as they did not attempt to fully absolve the offender of blame.

This raises particular issues that need to be addressed. First, it is important to recognise that these responsibilities may fall disproportionately on women along with other caring responsibilities within the family. Second, it raises the question of how much we can reasonably expect relatives of offenders to do. For example, is it reasonable to expect a mother on income support to send her son money and buy items to send to him, forgoing some of her own needs, or should prison wages be increased to a point where prisoners can afford to buy these items themselves? Relatives who support might help to reduce recidivism, but this can sometimes lead to them being given a policing function within the family. Clare, for example, said she felt she was expected to police her family when her husband was released from a prison sentence for child sex offences. She did not believe that her son had been abused, nor that he was at risk, but felt she was being expected to 'police' her husband at home and constantly watch his relationship with his son, something she was not prepared to do, and one of the reasons she says she decided to end her marriage on his release.

Furthermore, if relatives do take on these responsibilities and have an important role reducing recidivism as the literature suggests, it is important that they are supported in doing so. As we have seen, no statutory agencies offer support after discovery. If Aftermath is the only source of available support, how it is funded needs consideration. As we have seen in chapter seven, it has suffered financial crises to the point of almost closing and relies on grants from charitable trusts. It would benefit from a more regular source of income. The Home Office gave two small grants shortly after the departure of Aftermath's founding Director, but since that time Aftermath has had to struggle on alone, relying on the skills and availability of members to fill out numerous funding applications and never knowing whether these will be successful. One of the reasons that Light says we should support prisoners' families groups is *liberal humanism*, that a caring society should offer support to those who suffer harm (Light 1993). This is even more relevant to relatives of *serious* offenders who as we have seen are likely to suffer considerably in the early stages. There is an inherent contradiction between the readiness of the state to point out when families do not fulfil responsibilities and to sanction them, and the lack of available help for offenders' relatives who want to take these tasks.

Concluding reflections

It is important to structurally locate participants in any study, and as we have seen the relatives in this sample are more ethnically homogeneous and likely to be of higher socio-economic status than the general prison population. Many participants were members of a self-help organisation and the degree to which that organisation's collective narrative shaped what I found needs to be considered, although without a larger sample of non-Aftermath members this can only be determined to a limited extent. However, one of the findings of this study was that relatives use Aftermath's collective narrative as a resource, and that they are more creative than to just accept a template to interpret their experience. What I have tried to unpick is the exact meaning of the different elements of this narrative for relatives, something that was only possible to do through in-depth long interviews, asking for example, what it means to be a victim and whether participants defined themselves in that way, trying to determine the meaning relatives attach to the different elements of the narrative.

I have aimed to treat participants' stories or accounts as sociological phenomena. Stories are an important tool for understanding lives, but 'not *the* life, which is in principle unknown and unknowable' (Plummer 1995: 168) - my concern has been with how relatives talk about their lives and their experiences, my focus is on how they understand, interpret and construct - judging how close their accounts come to life as experienced is difficult to do, but I do accept that their stories reflect their experience as they understood it at the time. Stories about experiences can be formulaic and rehearsed, but how we understand and talk about our experiences informs how we live our lives - the two are intertwined - and therefore our stories have more worth as objects of study than solely as constructions. I would argue, therefore, that Aftermath membership has an important role in contributing to how relatives construct their experiences, but that what I have attempted to document is more than just an Aftermath story.

Stories are 'social actions embedded in social worlds' (Plummer 1995: 17) and relatives' social worlds include more than just self-help membership. They are part of a wider society, and subject to discourses about criminal responsibility, types of offences, family responsibilities and caring, motherhood, marriage, and so on, and exposed to media, fiction, conversation with other relatives and friends, gossip, etc. all of which structure their experience and contribute to the construction of their accounts about their experiences.

So how far can the findings of this study be generalised? We cannot conclude that *all* relatives of serious offenders find discovery shocking and traumatic, that they are *all* subject to secondary stigma constructed around shame and its consequences, that they *all* use act and actor adjustments, or that they would *all* benefit from self-help. The findings of this study, however, show that this is the case for *some* relatives of serious offenders, and for a significant number to warrant attention. Certainly it is likely that a proportion of all relatives of serious offenders (and we cannot be certain of the size of this proportion) share similar experiences. The manager of one prison visitors' centre, for example, talked about how relatives of serious offenders she encountered were traumatised when they arrived at the prison for their first visit, which suggests that the early stages may experienced in this way by more relatives than those who join

Aftermath. Additionally, there are parallels with the findings of the limited number of other studies on relatives of serious offenders outlined in chapter one.

This study has given a detailed insight into the experiences of relatives of serious offenders, and aimed to understand those experiences in the context of their broader lives. It has managed to do this with people who are often initially reluctant to talk, and to build research relationships that have led to participants opening up about some of the most intimate aspects of their lives.

I hope that this thesis will make a contribution to theoretical debates, including those on traumatic impact, family responsibilities, stigma and shame and their dimensions, motivational accounts, and self-help and collective narratives. What has been found here can be added to other studies to make a more comprehensive theoretical picture. Taking the example of motivational accounts, if this analysis of the motivational accounts of relatives of serious offenders is read alongside analyses of the motivational accounts of murderers (Ray and Simmons 1987), rapists (Scully and Marolla 1984), paedophiles (DeYoung 1988), fiddling bread salesman (Ditton 1977), relatives of murderers (May 1999), paedophile priests and the Catholic Church (Thomson et al. 1998) and perpetrators of political atrocities (Cohen 2001) then a better understanding of how and why accounts are constructed in different contexts emerges, and we can begin to understand more about their purposes and answer some of C. Wright Mills' sociological concerns (Mills 1940): what are the purposes served by motivational accounts? Which are available and acceptable in different situations? What is their relationship to different forms of society? And how are they imposed by those with the power to define?

This thesis has been an attempt to tell the story of a group of relatives of serious offenders as I found it, between 1997 and 2003. I encountered a great deal of upset and hurt during fieldwork and interviews, and was often asked by different participants how I could stand to be around so much sadness and listen to unhappy stories and why I would choose to do so. However, I would not want this thesis to only reflect these aspects. I was always struck by the resilience of relatives I met and encouraged by the progress I saw and by how they managed to cope with experiences which had turned their worlds upside down. As Celia said: "Aftermath allowed me to realise that people

can come through terrible situations, and that had a big impact upon me". What I encountered was also a positive story of moving forward, of salvaging dignity, humour, friendship and strength from difficult times and of relatives (primarily women) coming together to create new networks and re-build their lives and pass these coping skills onto others. In addition to contributing to theoretical and policy debates, I hope this thesis reflects this positive side to the stories told by the relatives who gave their time to participate.

Appendices

Appendix One: Interviewee data

	Kin Relationship to offender	Offence	How accessed	Age	Active Aftermath member? ¹¹³	Ethnicity	Offender's ethnicity
Relatives of male offenders:							
Lisa	Partner	Homicide	Aftermath lunch	50s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Frances	Wife	CSA ¹¹⁴	Aftermath lunch	40s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Angela	Wife	CSA	Aftermath lunch	40s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Beryl	Mother	Homicide	Introduction from Aftermath member	70s	Not any more	White UK	White UK
George	Father	Homicide	Introduction from Aftermath member	60s	Not any more	White UK	White UK
Beatrice	Mother	Homicide	Aftermath lunch	60s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Pauline	Mother	Homicide	Introduction from Aftermath member	40s	Yes	White UK	White UK
Ada	Mother	Rape	Introduction from Aftermath member	60s	Not any more	White UK	White UK
Nancy	Wife	CSA	Aftermath lunch	50s	Yes	White UK	White UK
Alice	Mother	Homicide	Seminar weekend	60s	Yes	White UK	White UK

¹¹³ Do they do any more than appear on the database and just receive the newsletter, e.g. attend functions, support other members, sit on committee, etc.?

¹¹⁴ Child sex offence

Penny	Mother	Rape	Introduction from Aftermath member	60s	No	White UK	Mixed race ¹¹⁵
Anne	Mother	Rape	Aftermath lunch	40s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Beverly	Grandmother	Attempted murder	Letter via Aftermath office ¹¹⁶	50s	No	White UK	Mixed race
Stephanie	Wife	Homicide	Introduction from Aftermath member	40s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Lillian	Mother	CSA	Letter via Aftermath office	70s	No	White UK	White UK
Hilda	Mother	Homicide	Letter via Aftermath office	70s	No	White UK	White UK
Harriet	Mother	CSA	Aftermath lunch	60s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Gill	Wife	CSA	Aftermath lunch	40s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Debbie	Wife	Homicide	Letter via Aftermath office	30s	No	Black UK	Mixed race
Nicola	Partner	CSA	Aftermath lunch	30s	Yes	White UK	White UK
Clare	Wife	CSA	Seminar weekend	40s	Yes	White UK	White UK
Betty	Sister	CSA	Seminar weekend	60s	Yes	Black UK	Black UK
Eileen	Wife	CSA	Introduction from Aftermath member	60s	Yes	White UK	White UK
Celia	Aunt	Homicide	Aftermath lunch	40s	Yes - supporter	White UK	White UK
Relatives of female offenders:							
Mary	Mother	Violent offence ¹¹⁷	Aftermath lunch	70s	Yes	White UK	White UK

¹¹⁵ In each case where the offender is described as mixed race, their father was described by the interviewee as 'black' and their mother as 'white'.

¹¹⁶ A letter which I sent out asking if members might be willing to be interviewed (see chapter two).

Dorothy	Mother	Homicide	Prison visitors' centre	60s	N/A - not accessed through Aftermath	White UK	White UK
Christine	Mother	Armed robbery	Prison visitors' centre	40s	N/A- not accessed through Aftermath	White UK	White UK
Monica	Mother	Attempted murder ¹¹⁸	Introduction from Aftermath member	50s	No	White UK	White UK
Louise	Mother	Kidnap and GBH	Prison visitors' centre	60s	N/A- not accessed through Aftermath	White UK	White UK
Lorraine	Mother	Possession with intent to supply class A drugs	Prison visitors' centre	40s	N/A- not accessed through Aftermath	White UK	Mixed race
Sarah	Daughter	Violent offence	Prison visitors' centre	30s	N/A- not accessed through Aftermath	White UK	White UK
Jane	Mother	Violent offence	Another prisoners' families organisation	40s	N/A- not accessed through Aftermath	White UK	White UK

¹¹⁷ Where violent offence is listed, the participants did not know the exact charge. Mary did not know the details of her daughter's conviction (see chapter five).

¹¹⁸ Later reduced to ABH

Appendix Two: Interviewee cases

Participants have been divided below into groups according to offence type. The homicide group includes murder and manslaughter. The sexual offence group refers to sexual offences against minors and the rape group refers to rapes against adults. Some identifying details have been left out.

Homicide group

Beatrice

Beatrice's son Justin was in his early 20s when he killed his girlfriend during a violent argument around 10 years before the interview. Beatrice says the cause was his depressive illness, for which they had tried to get treatment prior to the offence. He was convicted of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility and given psychiatric treatment. Beatrice had a job in the voluntary sector which she says she lost due to her son's conviction, later winning compensation at an industrial tribunal. She was a particularly helpful participant, introducing me to several of her friends and her husband (George) who I interviewed.

George

George and Beatrice no longer lived together, but he came over to her house so I could interview him. An unassuming man in his 60s, he was doing a psychology degree at the local university and had taken an access course previously. He had an interest in the research and asked lots of questions. He talked in detail about Justin's conviction, and shared his wife's view that Justin's depressive illness was primarily to blame.

Beryl

Beryl was an elderly lady who I interviewed in her flat where she lived with her husband. Her son was 29 at the time of the offence, and served 14 years of a life sentence. He had been released six months before our interview. He was convicted of the murder of a local pub landlord; his co-accused was the landlord's wife with whom he was having an affair. Beryl was an active Aftermath member in its early days, but no longer attends any functions. I was introduced to her by another Aftermath member.

Stephanie

Stephanie's first husband was convicted of killing a young woman whom the police said looked very much like Stephanie. This was after Stephanie had gone to live in a refuge with her three young children to escape domestic violence. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, and she does not know when he will be released. She has since re-married and had a daughter - her daughter was fifteen at the time of the interview and did not know of the existence of her ex-husband. Stephanie said she was waiting for the right time to tell her. She works as a volunteer for Victim Support, and I interviewed her in their offices in the town in which she lives. She is also a supporter for Aftermath. She is worried about the day he is released, and his hoping she will be notified in advance.

Hilda

Hilda's son was convicted of killing a care worker in the mental health community care home in which he lived. She said her son was addicted to drugs and also had 'paranoid schizophrenia'. The case attracted a great deal of publicity and Hilda said it would often appear on the television. He is now detained indefinitely in a special hospital. Hilda was quite elderly and in very poor health when I interviewed her, and had to lie on the sofa for the duration of the interview which took place in her flat. Her partner, Victor, was there for part of the interview and joined in at times.

Celia

When I interviewed Celia she had been an Aftermath member for six years, having joined two years after her nephew committed his offence. He shot and killed a man who was a drug dealer; she assumes her nephew had met him when he was in borstal. She says she had a very close bond to her nephew, and that he lived with her family for a while. He was convicted of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility and is detained indefinitely in a special hospital. Celia was a very active Aftermath member at the time of interview, and telephone supporter to a large number of members.

Lisa

Lisa was unusual amongst participants in this study because she had met her partner since his imprisonment. He had been convicted of killing another boy when he was

fourteen, which Lisa says was an accident and not intentional. He was detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure, and was still in prison when I interviewed Lisa despite being in his 30s. Lisa is a primary school teacher and lives with her young adult son. She had been with her partner for several years at the time of interview, but only ever had contact with him through prison visiting and letter writing. She was an active Aftermath member and telephone supporter to a number of other members.

Pauline

Pauline is a woman in her forties. She lives in a house on a council estate, which she shares with her seventeen year old son. Pauline's son was convicted of the murder of a man he met in a bar. Pauline says he was convicted of murder and sentenced to serve at Her Majesty's Pleasure as he was only seventeen at the time. The murder was particularly brutal and he was then seen with the body by many witnesses which made the murder particularly notorious in the city in which it occurred. Pauline tells me he then ran off and went home and raped his girlfriend. He is held in a secure special hospital and likely to remain there for some considerable time. I interviewed Pauline eight years after this happened. She was an active Aftermath member in its early days, but no longer attended lunches or functions.

Alice

Alice is in her early sixties and lives in a large semi-detached house with her husband on the outskirts of a city. Her son was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a recommendation that he serve at least twenty-five years. He had a disagreement with someone which resulted in a shooting, although Alice is very clear that he was not a professional criminal, had never been in trouble with the law before and that this was a culmination of a series of events which had included the loss of his home and the loss of his relationship. He claims to be innocent of the crime, Alice is not sure. Alice does not attend Aftermath lunches as there is not one within travelling distance for her, but she has received telephone support. I met her at an annual seminar weekend.

Debbie

Debbie is a single parent. I interviewed her in the house that she shares with her four children. Two years before the interview her husband had killed his grandmother. She

had been pregnant with her youngest child at the time. She says her husband was convicted of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility, and that he had mental health problems and addiction to drugs, specifically crack cocaine. He received a life sentence, but with a recommendation that he serve a shorter term. She had received some telephone support from Aftermath, but was no longer doing so at the time of the interview. She received Aftermath's newsletter, but did not attend any functions. She considers her marriage to her husband to have ended, and does not visit him in prison, but continues to stay in contact with him and support him and says she will always do so.

Dorothy

I interviewed Dorothy at a visitors' centre at the prison that held her daughter. Her daughter was convicted of murder and given a life sentence. Dorothy thought this was very unfair. Her daughter had been present at a murder committed by someone else, and did not participate in the killing, but was judged to have an equal role and given the same sentence. Dorothy had received a great deal of support from this prisoners' families organisation, and had just found Aftermath at the time of our interview. She later became a very active member. Dorothy was her daughter's main supporter.

Violent offence group

Louise

Louise's daughter had recently separated from her partner, and following this separation her partner's teenage son had died of a heroin overdose. She had felt this young man was like her son, and went after the person she saw as responsible for selling the drugs. Details are a bit sketchy, but she did this in conjunction with a male friend, and charges related to the alleged drug dealer being kidnapped and assaulted, and a gun was thought to be involved. Her mother thought it likely that the man was primarily responsible for the violence as her daughter had no history of offences like this, but he escaped prosecution by leaving the country. Her daughter received a prison sentence of several years; I met Louise, who was her main supporter, at the prison visiting centre when she was visiting.

Mary

Mary's daughter was convicted of a violent offence when she was in her 30s. She knows very little about the offence - she thinks it took place at a party at her daughter's house, and that it must have been serious because her daughter was sentenced to twelve years. This happened about four years before the interview. She has avoided TV and newspaper coverage at her daughter's request and did not attend court. Mary was widowed 11 years previously and lives alone with several cats. She has had recent health problems, including suffering a stroke. She has another daughter with whom she has fallen out over her decision to support her daughter in prison. She has had a great deal of support from her Rector and from the Salvation Army as well as Aftermath.

Christine

I interviewed Christine at her house where she lives with her husband. Her daughter was convicted of three armed robberies which she describes as quite violent, involving knives and a gun in one case. She had committed these offences alone, but Christine says she was made to do it by an abusive boyfriend. She was a heroin addict, and this boyfriend also controlled her supply. The robberies had happened several months before the interview, and she had been convicted that week. She was sentenced to four years, which Christine says was relatively lenient and took into account the pressures she was under when she committed the offences. Christine has another daughter and a son, both in their 20s, neither of whom have ever been in trouble with the police.

Jane

I interviewed Jane at the offices of an organisation for prisoners' families. She was attending one of their group meetings, and had been receiving considerable support from them. Her daughter was convicted along with her daughter's husband of inflicting injuries on her 11 month old son. Her daughter was nineteen at the time and this had all happened in the year prior to the interview. Her daughter received a two year sentence, which Jane says was fairly lenient because both parties denied the offence and the court could not be sure who had inflicted the injuries. Hospital investigations showed that Jane's grandson had received many previous injuries. He was taken into foster care straight from the hospital, and adopted with no further contact with his birth family; Jane is devastated about this.

Monica

I interviewed Monica in her flat sitting at the kitchen table. Monica lived alone in the flat after separating from her partner. Monica's daughter from her first marriage, who is in her mid-20s, was arrested for attempted murder after assaulting her baby (Monica's grandson), but later this charge was reduced to assault (ABH) and she was released having served a prison sentence. This happened a year and a half before the interview. Monica says her daughter had a history of mental health problems prior to the offence, and was suffering from postnatal depression at the time.

Beverly

I interviewed Beverly in the council flat she shares with her partner and her teenage granddaughter. Beverly's grandson was convicted of attempted murder at the age of seventeen. She had been the primary carer of him and his sister while their mother served a prison sentence of several years and they had continued to live with her afterwards. She believes he was unfairly convicted, although he was present when his friend had shot another young man. He was convicted two years before the interview, and given a sentence of fifteen years. She remains his main supporter and is hoping his sentence might be reduced on appeal. She is an Aftermath member, but does not attend any functions.

Sarah

I interviewed Sarah in her flat which she shares with her husband and three children. Her mother was convicted of a violent offence against her father which left him blind, for which she received a three year prison sentence. The offence happened eight months before the interview. Her mother and father were both heavy drinkers, and had a history of violence in their relationship, although her father was usually the victim of the assaults. Both were in poor health, and her mother was suffering from depression. At the time of the offence her mother was in her mid-sixties and her father was in his mid-seventies. She had no previous convictions. Sarah thinks her mother's sentence was quite harsh, but says that was because of the severity of the injuries caused.

Sex offence group

Gill

Gill's husband Austin was convicted of indecent assault against two of her nieces, her sister's children. The offences had happened when the nieces were staying at their house. Her husband was sentenced to two years, and served 12 months. This was four years before the time of interview, and her husband was in his 40s. They had been married for more than twenty years when this happened, and had a daughter who was eleven at the time; Gill is certain she was not a victim. Her decision to support Austin has caused a rift within the family. She has had a great deal of support from Aftermath, is a very active member, and supports other members. She says her husband will be on the sex offenders' register for seven years.

Betty

Betty's brother was convicted of indecent assault and sentenced to two and a half years when he was 55. This happened around a year before I interviewed her. She says the victim was his boyfriend, and that he had encouraged the relationship, although he was under the age of sixteen when it began. She says she is very close to her brother, and considers what he's been through to be a 'great injustice'. She had been an Aftermath member for around 18 months, originally contacting them to get information about how she might be able to help her brother. He had been released by the time of our interview. She works as a 'stress management therapist' and a masseuse in the sex industry and took calls from clients all through our interview. She was 60, but looked much younger.

Frances

Frances was staying with her friend when I interviewed her, but usually lives alone in her council flat. Her husband was convicted of the rape of their fifteen-year-old foster-daughter, who became pregnant as a result and was removed by social services. He pleaded guilty, although DNA tests had already proved this to be so, and he was sentenced to three years and nine months. She subsequently divorced him and has had no contact with him since his imprisonment. She is an active Aftermath member, attending lunches and other functions, and providing telephone support to others.

Angela

I interviewed Angela in the living room of the Victorian terraced house which she shares with her husband, Dan, and two of their three adult sons. Dan was accused of sexual abuse by his adult nieces but later cleared at a Crown Court trial, several years before our interview. Angela says they had in fact been sexually abused by Dan's brother, and Angela and Dan's own children had also been victims. The experience inspired Angela to help others, and she has supported many other relatives of serious offenders through Aftermath and another support group. She was an active Aftermath member when I interviewed her and attended many of their functions.

Nancy

I met Nancy at an Aftermath lunch and later interviewed her in the living room of the house she had shared with her husband prior to his imprisonment. Her husband, to whom she had been married less than two years, was convicted four months before our interview of twelve offences including the rape and sexual assault of two of his daughters, who were now adults. One of the charges related to pornographic photographs of one of his daughters when she was thirteen years old. This is the only charge Nancy believes to be true and during the interview she showed me the pictures which form part of the court papers from the trial. Nancy has an adult daughter who was present for some of the interview.

Lillian

Lillian is an elderly lady who I interviewed in a room at a university because she did not want to be interviewed at home. Her son had been convicted four years prior to the interview of sexual offences against children. Lillian is unsure of the exact charges, but they related to watching pornographic films with children and taking indecent photographs. He was sentenced to ten years. Lillian says her son was in his fifties, and had not been in trouble with the police before. Lillian thinks his offending was caused by alcohol and the influence of his brother in law. Her grandson now lives with her following his father's imprisonment, and she is estranged from her daughter-in-law to whom she was very close prior to this.

Harriet

Harriet's son was accused of sexual offences against his young children after his marriage ended. The police eventually decided not to pursue charges, but social services were involved and believed the allegations. He was denied access to his children as a result. Harriet was widowed some years before this happened, and lives alone. I interviewed her in her house, having met her before at several Aftermath functions. Harriet believed the allegations when they first came to light, seven years before our interview, but is now convinced that he did not do it.

Nicola

Nicola is a single parent and I interviewed her in the flat where she lives with her son. Her partner was convicted of sexual offences against his young niece, which Nicola says included two counts of rape and three of indecent assault. He was sentenced almost a year before our interview, and received five years. The offences were said to have happened nine years previously, when he was twenty-one; Nicola did not know him at this time. Social services made it very clear to Nicola that he would not be able to live with her and her son on his release, or at any point until her son was over sixteen. As a result she decided to end their relationship, although she says they are still friends and she is still supporting him. I met Nicola at an Aftermath lunch, and she was receiving telephone support.

Clare

Clare's husband was 60 when allegations of sexual abuse were made by his adult children from his first marriage. He was convicted of sexual assault and indecency. This happened several years before I interviewed Clare; she was his second wife and they had a ten year old son whom Clare is certain was not a victim. Clare works as a social worker. She found out about the abuse when her husband's children wrote to her and immediately reported it to the authorities. She supported her husband through the prison sentence, and then decided to end their marriage. Her son was thirteen, and chose to live with his father. She now lives with a new partner, and I interviewed her at their home. She had been an active Aftermath member for some years, but at the time of interview was contemplating leaving and later did so.

Eileen

Eileen's husband was convicted of sexual offences against his young grandchildren. He was sentenced to four years and served two and a half. Eileen is not sure of the truth or otherwise of the allegations, but says she knows he is 'not a paedophile'. I interviewed Eileen in the living room of her house. Her husband had been released from prison at the time I interviewed her, and was present in the house, joining in with the interview at several points. I had met Eileen at an Aftermath lunch, and she was an active member.

Rape group

Ada

Ada's son was convicted of three rapes of strangers when he was nineteen. He claimed these attacks were attempted rapes, but was convicted on three counts of rape. He was sentenced to fifteen years, and had been released around 18 months before our interview. I interviewed her sitting in the conservatory of her house where she lives with her husband. She has another daughter from whom she is estranged; she says this is because of the offences committed by her son and their decision to support him. She was very involved in Aftermath in its early days, but does not attend lunches or other functions now.

Anne

Anne's son raped and beat up 'quite badly' a young girl of sixteen that he had met on the bus. He was sentenced to five years, and released after three and a half years. She never had any doubt that he did it and he never denied it - he apparently waited for the police to arrive and arrest him after the offence. Eighteen months before the attack, he had been falsely accused of rape by a girl in the local village. Anne says he went 'down hill' from then, with numerous problems including drug and solvent abuse and suicide attempts. Anne's mother and daughter are both Aftermath members and attend lunches with her, and Anne is a telephone supporter to a number of Aftermath members. Anne says she has had a good relationship with her son since his release.

Penny

I interviewed Penny in the flat where she lives alone. Her son had recently been convicted of rape and indecent assault. The alleged victims were both adult women, one was a friend and one was a woman he had met in a nightclub. He was sentenced to six years imprisonment. Penny believes there has been a miscarriage of justice and is campaigning on his behalf. She thinks the women were motivated to make these allegations by money and their plans to claim compensation. She was not an active Aftermath member, but did receive support from one member.

‘Other’ group

Lorraine

I interviewed Lorraine at her house. Her teenage son and a young child she was looking after were also there for part of the interview. Her daughter Grace was arrested a year before the interview for possession with intent to supply a large amount of cocaine and heroin. These drugs were found in her bedroom, but Lorraine says they belonged to a boyfriend of a friend and Grace did not know what she was being asked to look after. She says neither she nor Grace could tell the truth about the source of the drugs because threats were made against Grace’s life. As a result, she had to take the blame and was given a prison sentence of four years. Grace discovered she was pregnant shortly after going to prison, and is planning to keep the baby with her in prison until her release (she expects to serve two years, some of which had passed at time of interview). Lorraine thinks this has given her a new focus and will help her through the sentence.

Interview number ΓΓΓ

Interview guide for Aftermath members

Thank you statement
Explain research and aims
Stress anonymity and confidentiality

AFTERMATH

1. (a) Can you tell me *when* you came to be involved with Aftermath?
 - (b) *How* did you come to be involved with Aftermath?
 - (c) *Why* did you come to be involved with Aftermath?
2. What kind of support has Aftermath given you?
 - telephone counselling
 - 'lunches'
 - meeting others in similar position
 - face-to-face counselling
 - letters, newsletter, etc.
3. Has Aftermath made a difference? [If so, how? If not, why not?]
4. Have you had any other support?
 - Friends, family, etc.
 - other voluntary organisations
 - statutory agencies
5. Are there any additional services you would have liked Aftermath to offer?
 - or something you would have liked more of?
6. Has Aftermath has changed during the time that you've been involved? [If so, how?]
 - increased formal procedures
 - departure of SM
 - has your role in it changed?
7. Do you feel part of Aftermath?

8. Are there particular members you feel closer to or identify with? [Why?]
9. Are there members you feel are less fortunate or more fortunate than you are?
10. 'Serious offending' covers a wide range of offences. Do you think that the experience of Aftermath members depends on the *type* of offence their family member has committed, or are there more similarities than differences?
11. How much do you think you have in common with the families of people who commit less serious offences like theft?
12. [If the victim was someone with whom the interviewee had a link] Some people in your situation might identify themselves first as a victim rather than with the offender – does that apply to you?
 - Have you sought any help on this basis (e.g. from Victim Support) and what was the result?
13. Do you now understand why _____ committed that crime?
 [IF YES – GO TO Q14 & Q15]
 [IF NO – GO TO Q16]
14. How did you come to that understanding?
15. How has that understanding affected your own situation?
16. There are lots of ideas about why people commit serious offences – what are your own views?
 - Has being in Aftermath affected this?
 - Has your own experience affected this?
17. Some people say that the roots of offending lie in the family, the environment or the peer group – what do you think about that?
18. Have you ever been involved with any other support groups or support organisations for any other reason? [If so, how does Aftermath compare?]

RELATIONSHIP WITH OFFENDER

Check facts: Which family member?
 Offence?
 Victim? Known to interviewee?
 Date of offence?
 Age of offender?
 Length of relationship, are there children? [If appropriate].

19. Has your relationship with _____ changed over the years? [If so, how?]
- If parent, what was he/she like as a child?
- If child or sibling, what was he/she like when you were a child?
- Significant times, e.g. when arrested, court, etc.
20. Were there any warning signals of the offending?

21. What has been the effect on other members of your family?

- siblings, parents, children, grandparents, other extended family
- Are other members of your family involved with Aftermath?
- Do other members of your family get support from anywhere else?

22. Who has been most affected?

23. Has it affected your relationship with other members of your family?

24. How has _____'s offending / being involved with _____ affected your life?

- Time it takes up (visiting, letters, etc.)
- Emotional effects
- Health - under any medical treatment?

25. Has it affected your own self-image?

- identity, how feel about self

26. What are the main difficulties or problems you have had to cope with?

- Are there specific difficulties arising from the kind of offence committed, or would it be the same with any offence?
- Have these difficulties changed over time?

RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

27. How did other people in your life react when they found out?

- When did they find out? Did that make a difference?

- Other family
- Friends
- Colleagues
- Neighbours
- Wider community
- Children's school

- Reactions: Supportive? Verbal abuse? Physical violence? Ostracism? Gossip?

28. Has your relationship with these people changed?

29. What is your relationship with them now?

30. Have you changed over this time?

- feelings about the offending
- relationship with offender
- more able to talk about it
- feelings about self

31. Has Aftermath contributed to these changes?

[I'M NOW GOING TO GO BACK TO THE TIME OF THE OFFENDING]

32. When did you first learn of the offence?

- Who told you?
- What were you told?

33. Did you have any contact with the police? Tell me about your experiences with them.

- Investigation?
- Arrest / searching house?
- How do you think they saw you?

34. [If attended court appearances] How did you feel when you attended court?

35. What were the reactions of the people there towards you?

- family member / offender
- judge
- court ushers
- barristers / solicitors
- jury
- victim and / or victim's family
- members of the public
- police
- witnesses

[How did that make you feel?]

36. What were the reactions of other people in your life at this time?

37. Did you have any support?

- From Aftermath?
- From friends / family?
- Other source?

38. Is _____ in a prison or special hospital? [If so, which one?]

39. Do you visit (or have you in the past)?

[IF YES, GO TO Q38]

[IF NO, GO TO Q37]

40. Why not?

41. Can you describe a typical visit to see _____ in prison / special hospital?

- Travelling, timing, frequency, other practicalities
- Conditions for visiting – facilities, privacy, etc.
- Relations with staff
- Relations with prisoner
- Relations with other families
- How did you feel?

- 42. You've described a typical visit for me – do you have any examples of much better or worse visits?**
- What could prisons do to make improvements?
- 43. How do you think prison staff regard you?**
44. Have you had any contact with the probation service? [If so] Can you tell me a bit about that?
- **Helpful or not?**
 - **Keen to involve families?**
 - **Attitude towards family?**
 - **How do you think probation officers regard you?**
- 45. Have you had to deal with the media at any time?**
- Newspapers
 - TV / radio shows
 - As Aftermath member / representative
 - Was it volunteered or sought?
- 46. Was there specific coverage of _____'s offending / court case?**
- What were the effects of this?
 - Did you keep any examples - if so, can I see them?
- 47. I've heard people in Aftermath talk about hating the sin but loving the sinner - making a separation between the two. Is that something that is relevant to you?**
- 48. What do you think about Aftermath's description of the families of offenders as the 'other victims'?**
- Do you see yourself like that?
 - Do other people see you like that?
- 49. What does the public think about the families of serious offenders?**
50. How do you see your future?
- Over the next year?
 - And in the long term?
 - What might be the biggest difficulties?
51. When might you leave Aftermath?
- Why would you do so then?
- 52. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important?**
- 53. Is there anyone else you think I should talk to?**
- 54. Is there anything you've written or had written about you that you think might be useful for me to see?**

Thank you very much
Stress confidentiality and anonymity

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