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‘THE OTHERS’:

Sex Offenders’ Social Experiences of Hostel Accommodation

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With thanks to Bangor University
Today:

- **Aim =**
  - Explore the ways in which sex offenders’ experience life in Probation Approved Premises (hostels) when preparing for release from prison to the community
  - Particular focus on informal social structures and relationships

- **Sex offender =**
  - Anyone convicted of a sexual offence under the SOA 1997 or 2003
  - Residing in the hostel in the fieldwork period
The Study:

- Ethnographic study of the experiences of sex offenders living in a PAP over 21 months:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data collected</th>
<th>Number of data collection points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation in hostel (including informal interviews)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with residents</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with Staff</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Mixed hostel setting for high risk offenders:
  - insular, secretive, isolated
Research on sex offenders & reintegration:

- Pro-offending attitudes, personal & social identity
- Complex process of internalised change in personal identity construct
- Pro-social attitudes & social identity as a positive, active social agent

- Continued social stigma & exclusion
- Some CJ agency staff assumptions of ‘irredeemable’
- Peer support of neutralisations & cognitive distortions

- Negative local community projection of identity
- Liberal other Vs Demonised other
- Alternative outcome: Resistance to positive change & maintenance of pro-offending identity
Findings: social grouping

• Foundation of social identities
  • Shared cultural values and group identity

• “you still get the same groups forming [as in prison]. Those on drugs and the others. You know what I mean. (Jim, csa)

• “those paedo’s” (Paul, staff)
  • Drug addict / other = non sex offender
  • Other / sex offender = sex offender
  • Younger v older residents

• “I say I’m here for violence and they believe me, it helps that I do have a temper on me. Then they leave me alone […] (Jack csa)
Limited movement only, with ‘others’ not moving between the two.

A solid line denotes additional membership of other groups. A dotted line denotes potential movement between groups. Arrows denote the direction of movement on dotted lines.
Significance of grouping

- Immersive group identity supported:
  - resistance to offence-based work
  - Neutralisations & cognitive distortions
  - Construction of themselves as a sex offender
  - Construction of sex offenders as not ‘criminal’

- “you listen to these men […] justifying it to themselves over all this time.[…] they sound more convincing. And they are there all the time. Not just once a week or whatever. (Jim, csa)

- Emotionally & practically supportive network
  - Potentially pro-social
Structural impact on grouping:

- Structural constraints of mandated:
  - Accommodation
  - SOGP
  - Communal living space
  - Admissions policy
Cultural impact on grouping:

- Polarised ‘them & us’ culture
- Demonised other: ‘beasts’, ‘perverts’
- Staff: index offence = primary identifier
- Shared experiences
- Shared values & attitudes
- Territorial use of group space
- Social need for support network
- Group judgement label (staff & residents)
- Proximity
- homophily
- Sex offender social group
Conclusions:

- Sex offender informal group is the most influential factor in determining individual’s response to hostel work & their self-concept
  - Negative effect in this study
  - The demonised other

- Grouping by sex offenders tends to be seen as a risk-indicative active choice, but…
  - Like anyone else, feel the need to have a socially support network around them
  - Structurally & culturally constrained in their social networks
  - Staff & hostel work also contribute to grouping pressures
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References:


• Scottish Executive (2003), Criminal Justice Accommodation Services: a review and consultation paper. Scottish Executive.
