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**Negotiating Research  
Relationships:  
undertaking fieldwork  
with sex offenders and  
probation staff**

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# The Study

- 2 year ethnographic study of the lived experiences of sex offenders residing in a Probation Approved Premises (hostel)
  - Observation of life in the hostel
  - Observation of MARAC (MAPPP)
  - Informal interviews with residents (24) and staff (17)
- 
- These were vital to the fieldwork

# Interviewees -> active participants in research

- Residents:
  - 23 male, 1 female
  - 21 sex offenders
- Staff:
  - 15 male, 2 female
  - 8 RSO, 3 relief RSO, 5 PSO and 1 SPO

# Gatekeepers to fieldwork

- Help or hinder access to:
  - Research site
  - Research population
  - Individuals
  - Other forms of data such as files
  - The quality of data
- Formal and Informal gatekeepers

# Formal Gatekeepers

Researcher



Formal gatekeepers  
Grant access to  
Fieldwork site,  
population,  
other forms of data

Formal approach  
required and  
formal access  
agreed

Hostel staff

Hostel  
Residents

Resident  
files

Hostel  
Operation

MARACs

# Primary Gatekeeper

## ■ Hostel Manager

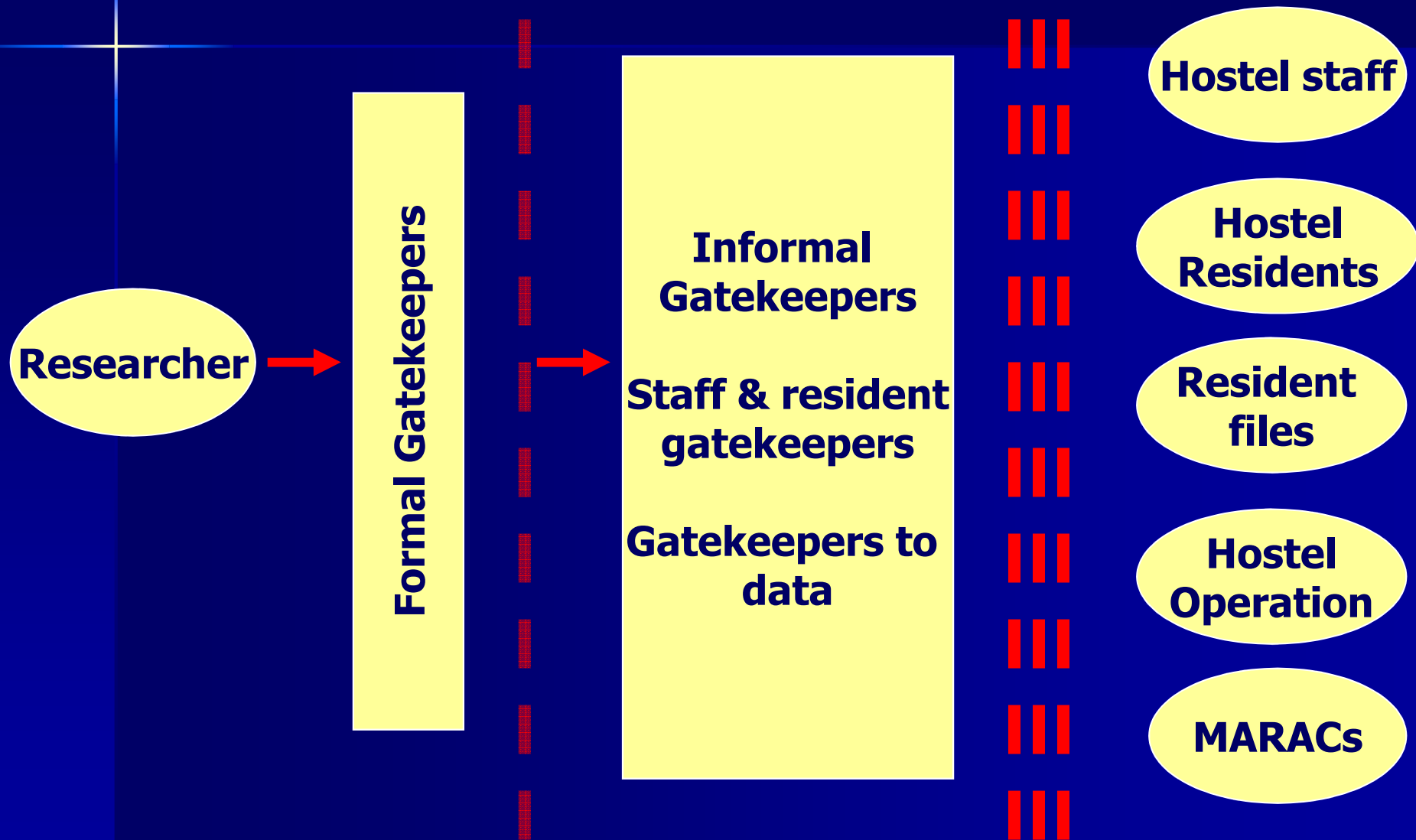
Positives	Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Ensured initial access granted</li><li>*Facilitated later informal staff access</li><li>*Remained supportive</li><li>*gave info. re: operation of hostel</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Retained control</li><li>*Limited access to line managers</li><li>*controlled transmission of info. from above &amp; below</li><li>*requested breaches of confidence</li></ul>

# Negotiating formal access = managing relationships

- Mainly with primary gatekeeper
- Relationship characterised by power
- Did I relinquish some of my own control over the fieldwork to him to secure his support?
- Maybe a little...



# Informal Gatekeepers



# Managing informal gatekeeper relationships

- 1. Staff gatekeepers
- Essential to establish rapport
  - Manager support both helpful & unhelpful
  - Most imp. = work as a staff member
  - Who was I?
- Staff were gatekeepers to residents
- (often gave false impressions)

# Managing informal gatekeeper relationships

- 2. Resident gatekeepers
- Essential to establish 'non-staff' status
  - Problems of changing population – informed consent possible?
  - Most imp. = spending time in the hostel
  - Who was I?
  - What purpose could I serve them?

# Rapport: the foundation of productive relationships?

- Yes - need to be able to identify with people
  - Be empathic & understanding
  - Put them at ease
  - Establish trust in confidentiality
- No – ‘Trust No One’
  - Different organisational & personal agenda’s
  - Lulls researcher into false sense of security?

# Summary

- Undertaking fieldwork is primarily about managing relationships
- A close working relationship with gatekeepers can have negatives as well as positives
- Managing these relationships requires constant re-negotiation of the researcher role, position and status