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The role of Probation Approved Premises in supporting the formation of pro-offending social networks amongst sex offenders

Dr Carla Reeves

University of Huddersfield

With thanks to Bangor University

Today...

- Aim =
 - Explore the structure of offender groups in Probation Approved Premises and how these may support pro-offending identities
 - Consider the structures of the PAP and how this may support the formation of pro-offending offender groups
- Sex offender =
 - Anyone convicted of a sexual offence under the SOA 1997 or 2003
 - Residing in the hostel in the fieldwork period

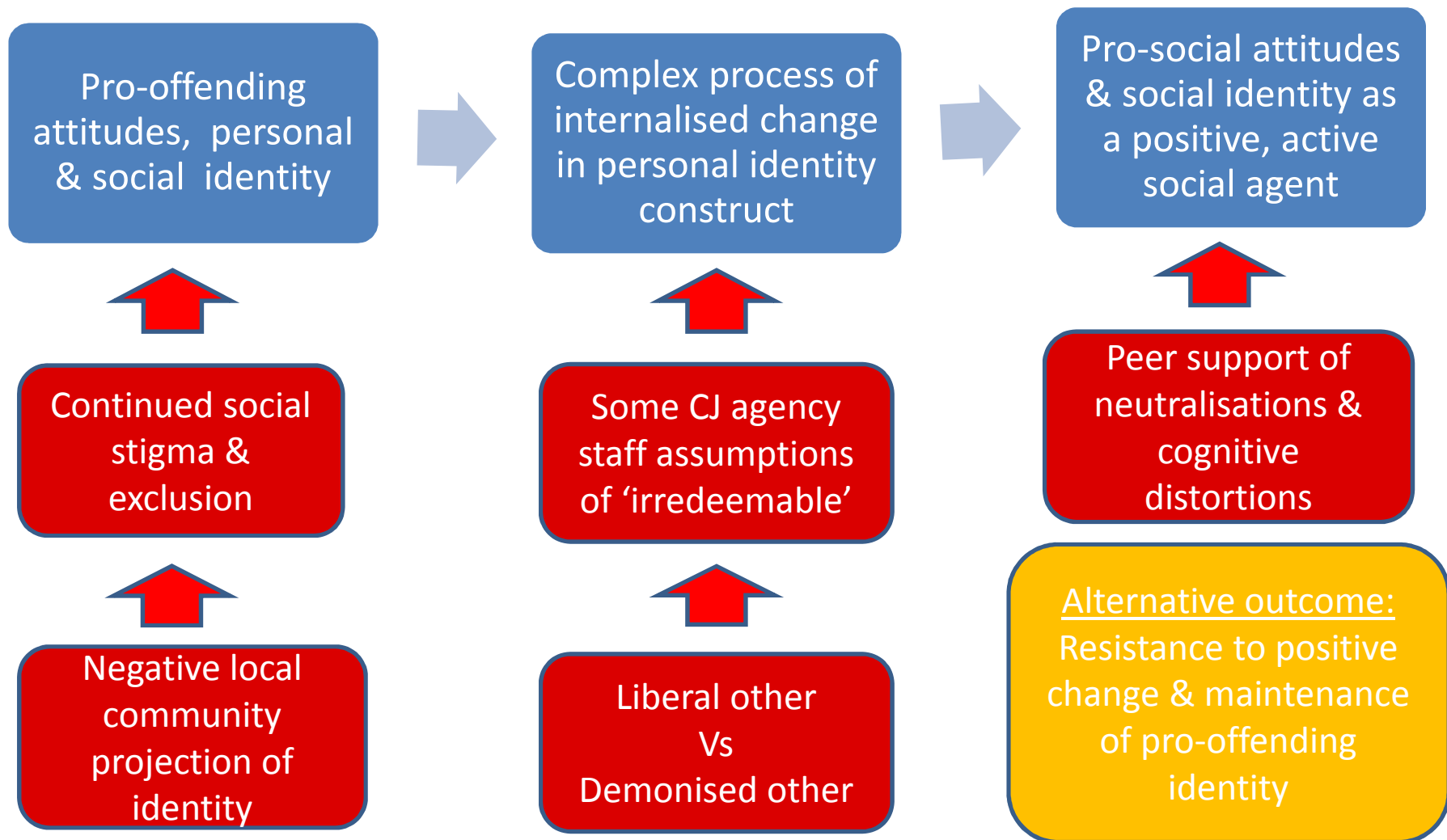
The Study

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

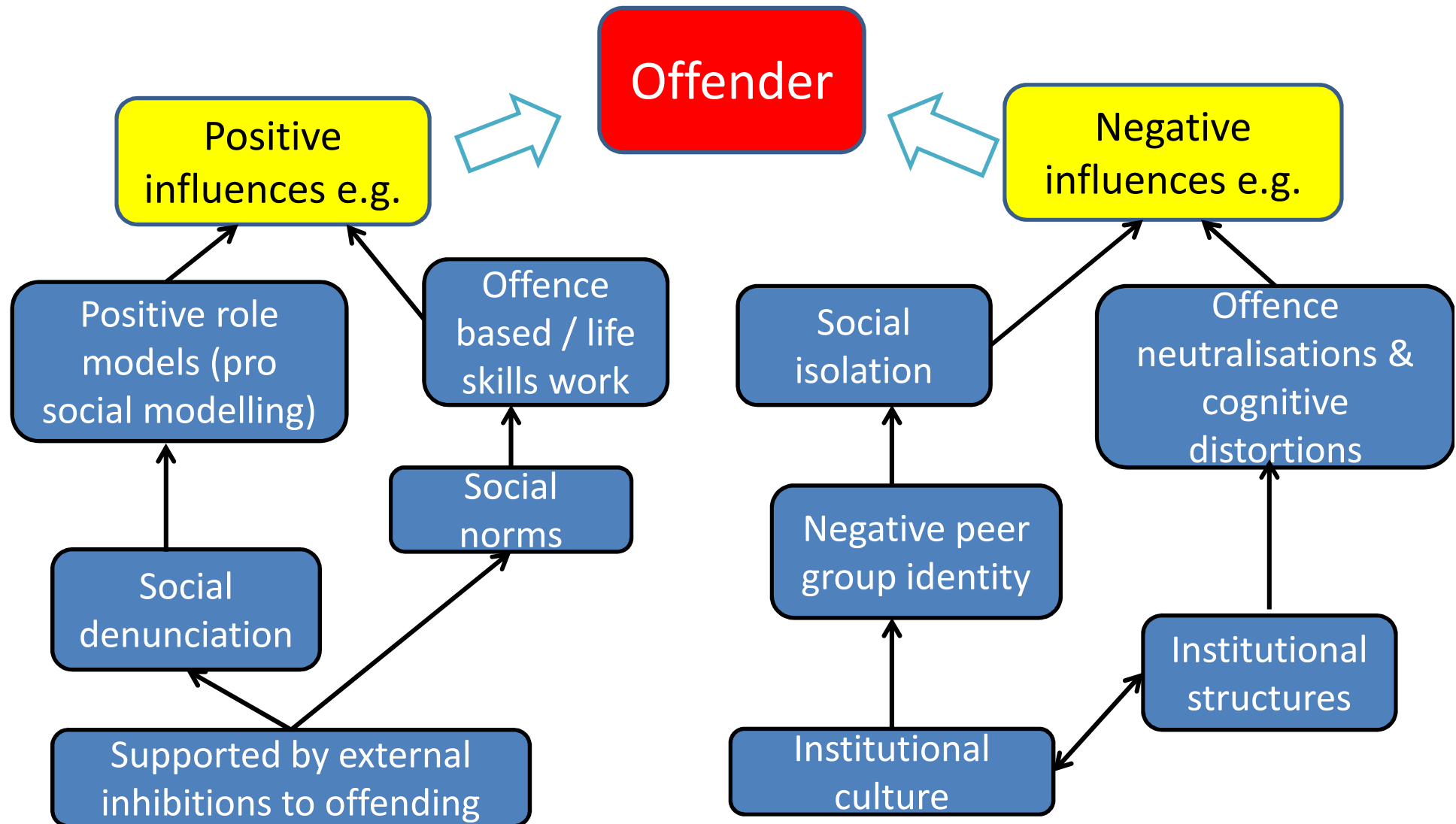
Type of data collected	Number of data collection points
Observation in hostel (including informal interviews)	57
Interviews with residents	24
Interviews with Staff	17

- Mixed hostel setting for high risk offenders:
 - insular, secretive, isolated

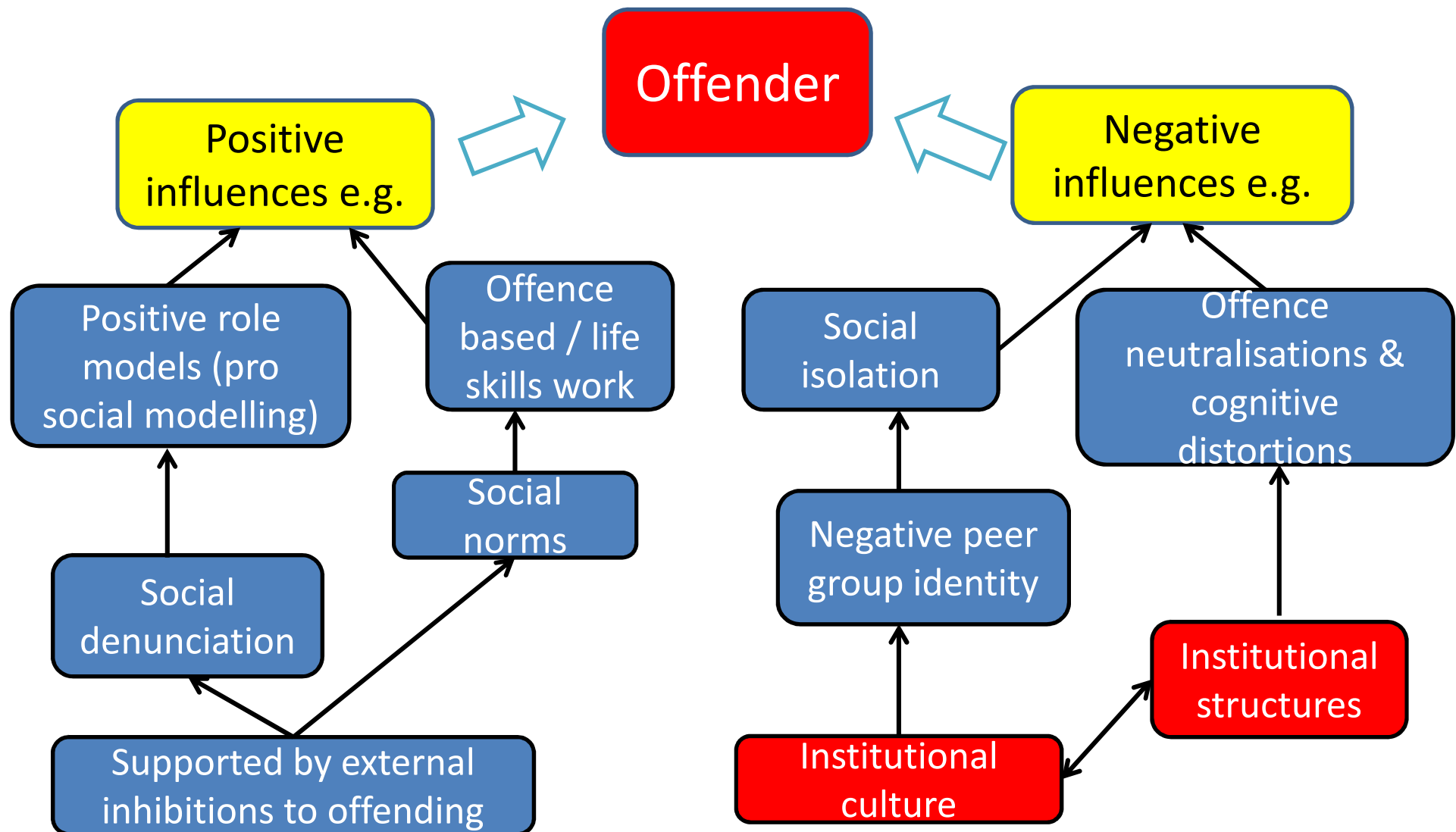
Research on sex offenders & reintegration:



Findings: Messy, non-linear process of identity change

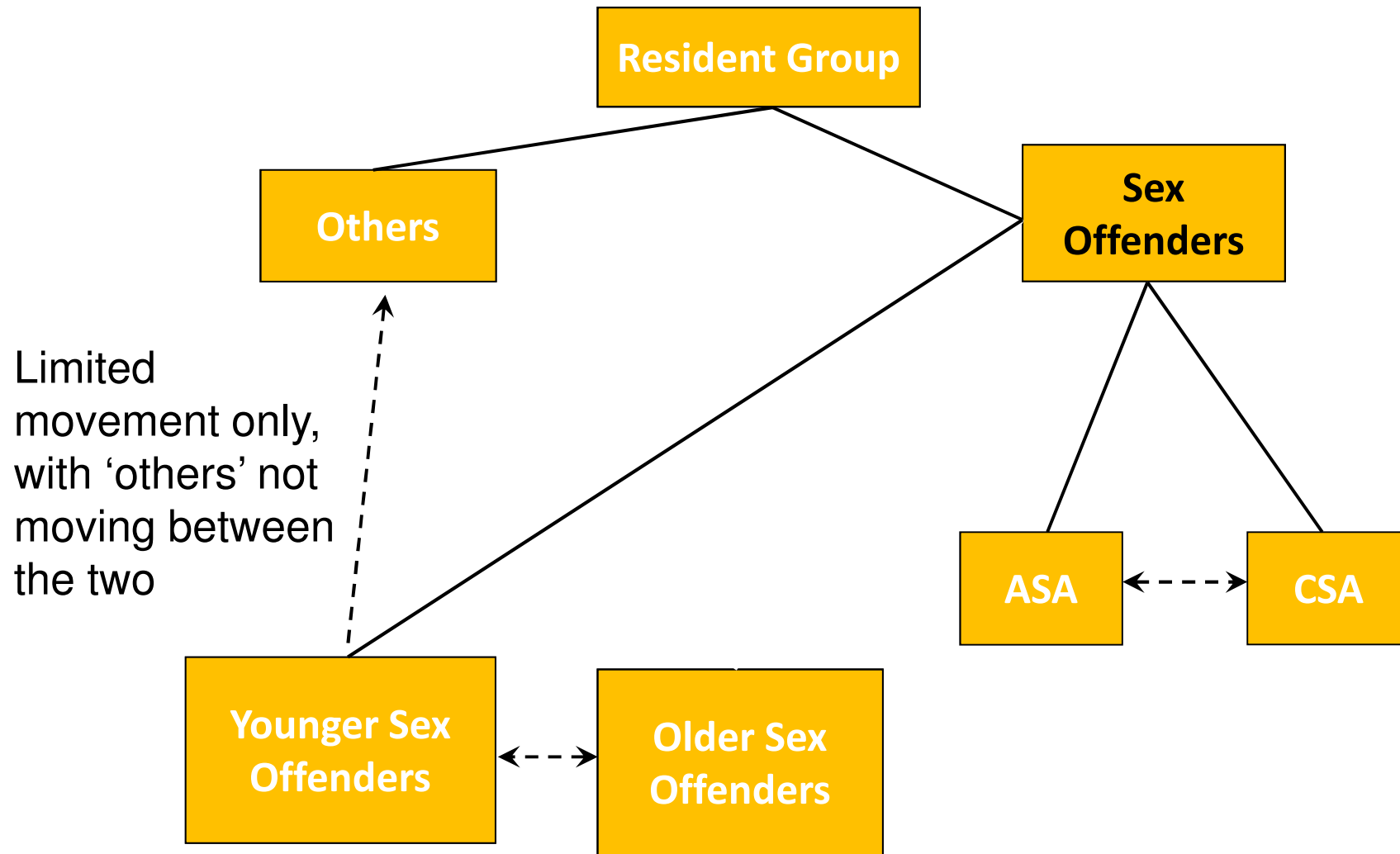


Findings: Messy, non-linear process of identity change



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)



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.

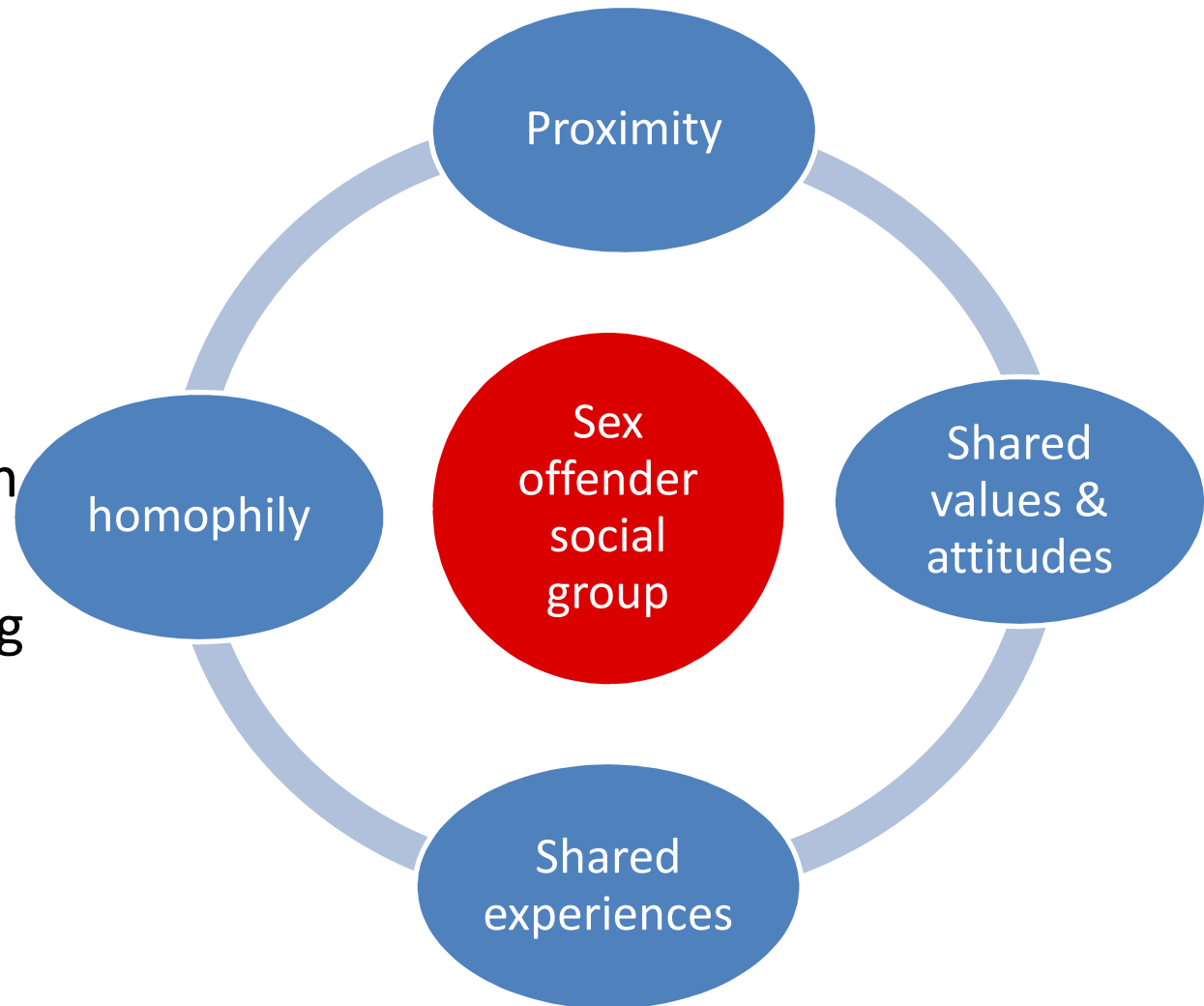
Significance of grouping

- 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

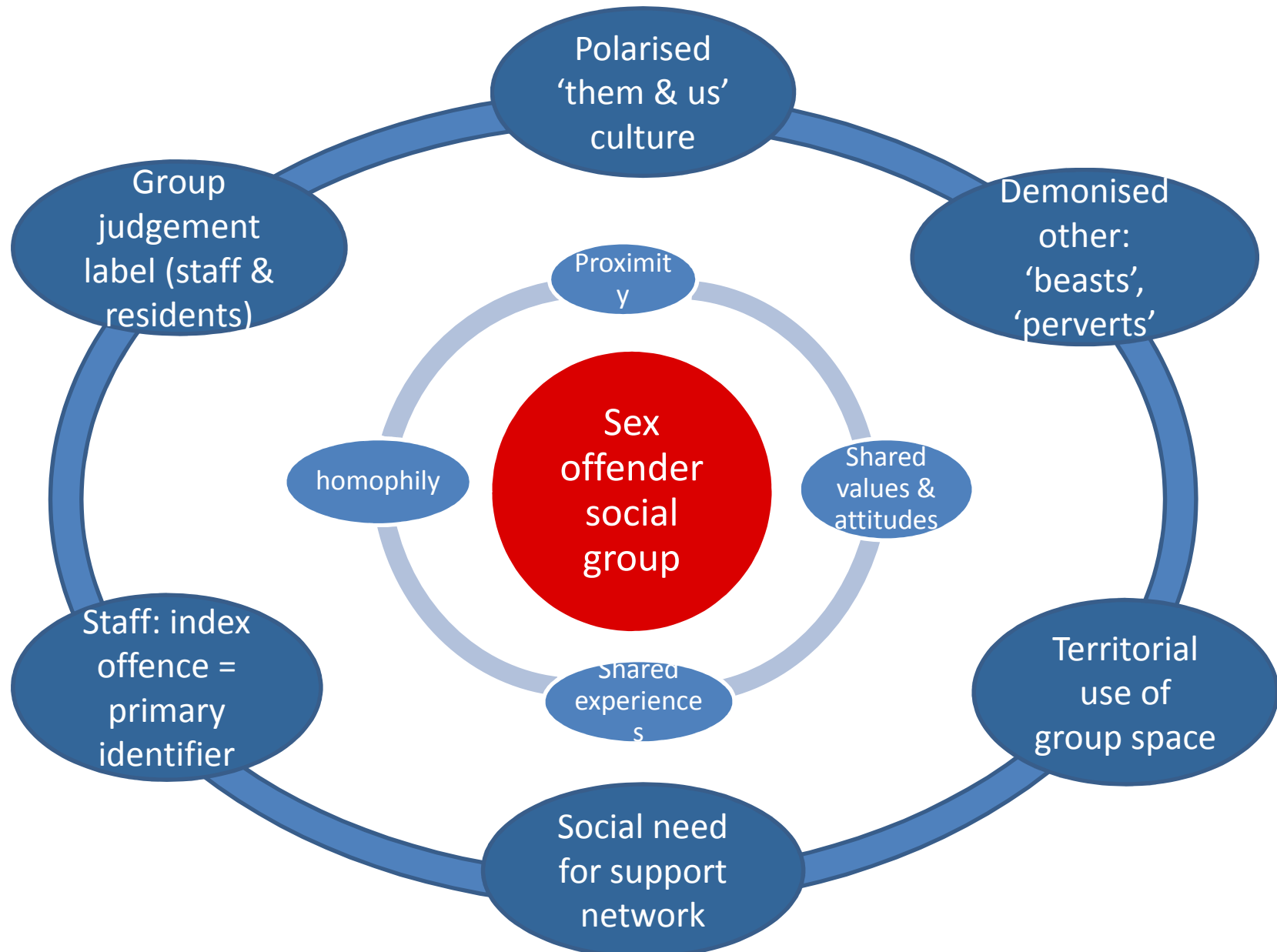
Structural impact on grouping:

- Structural constraints of mandated:

- Accommodation
- SOGP
- Communal living space
- Admissions policy



Cultural impact on grouping:



Conclusions:

- Probation hostels work to encourage grouping amongst sex offenders
- 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
- 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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