

## ABUSE IN SEX OFFENDERS EARLY LIVES :EXPLORING EARLY NARRATIVES

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LIFE WRITING & HUMAN RIGHTS: GENRES OF TESTIMONY,  
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## Presentation Focus

1. Social context: Folk devils and media representation
2. Human rights: Policy & legislation
3. Methodology – life history accounts & qualitative exploration
4. Sex offender narratives – early life experience

# Media Representations

- 1972 Stan Cohen- folk devils and moral panics
- Media representation & moral panic - mods & rockers gangs during the 60s
- Each wave of panic has 'folkdevils'
- Focused around 'newsworthy' stories



Sun Newspaper , 10/11/07

Sex offenders are  
The '*folk devils*' of our  
time  
'*Candidates for monster  
status*'

Cohen, (p XV1, 2002)



## Policy & Legislation: Key Political Issue

- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Sexual Offences Prevention Order (Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and later under the Sexual Offences Act 2003)
- Risk of Sexual Harm Order introduced under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- All newly-convicted sex offenders register under the Sex Offenders Act 1997 (strengthened by Part Two of the Sexual Offences Act 2003). Min of 5 years.

## Criminal Justice Policy

- CJ policy developed following successful media campaigns on high profile cases eg News of the World 'Naming & Shaming' 2000
- Disclosure of risk of harm – (all police forces in Eng & Wales). Partial notification 'Sarah's Law'. Parents right to know.
- Govt may not introduce legislation (7/2011) but may still retain partial disclosure
- Dealing effectively (or being seen to) with sex offenders is a key political issue



## US Notification: Megans Law

- Community leaflet drop
- County sheriffs' websites
- Information can be sent to individuals on provision of their address when a sex offender moves within a certain radius of their home. EG Ohio County police  
<http://ohio.esorn.net/index.php?AgencyID=53922>
- Community notification meetings
- Information displayed in a public area, such as a library.

*This violent predator lives in your community*



NAME	Bill Grant
AGE	57
SEX	W
HAIR	BR
HEIGHT	5 06
WEIGHT	188

This Level III sex offender abducted two children, sexually assaulted them and threatened to kill them if they did not consent.

He has admitted to assaulting countless other children over the course of more than twenty years.

Representative Bill Grant refused to impose life sentences for violent sex predators. Call Bill Grant at 360.785.7828 and tell him to *protect children and not violent sex offenders.*



## Offender Treatment

- Attempts to alter behaviour through CBT
- Chemical castration ((hormone suppressing drugs)
- Human rights infringement? (American Civil Liberties Union- strong opposition to indeterminate sentences in the US) – most offenders at less serious end of the scale
- Justified in terms of arguments regarding the need to protect children
- Effective? Attempts at reintegration into community hampered by disclosure?

# Polygraph testing

Introduced in the UK for sex offenders

Lacks scientific reliability- 'how to pass' courses



## Narratives: What do we really know?

- Research has focused on effectiveness of CJ programmes and reconviction rates
- Little qualitative research
- Little attempt to explore offender life narratives and to give offenders a voice.

## Offender Research(Davidson, 2006)

### Aims:

1. Evaluate cognitive behavioural treatment programme for men convicted of sexual offences against children and subject to probation (community treatment group)
2. Explore early life history of respondent group
3. Funded by National Probation Service

*Davidson, J(2006) 'Victim's Speak: Comparing Child Sexual Abusers And Child Victims Accounts, Perceptions and Interpretations Of Sexual Abuse ' Intl Jnl of Victims and Offenders, Vol 1.*

## Methods: Exploring Narratives

- Depth one to one interviewing using topic guide to explore narratives
- 98 interviews were undertaken with convicted male offenders(180 hours of interview).
- Documentary analysis of their victim statements was also undertaken - compared to offender accounts of offence circumstance.
- Offender survey- demographic data N =119
- The first part of the interview explored offenders early lives and relationship experience.
- Thematic analysis and qualitative counts
- Detailed accounts of childhood experience given during the research over 4 year period.
- Few inconsistencies over time in the accounts provided by offenders.
- Ethical issues- fully informed consent, right to withdraw at any point, BSC guidelines

## Impact of Conviction & Isolation

*'I like old cars and motor bikes, --- lots of spare time now, I live in my workshop-- just work really. I've got no real friends, I go over the pub for my dinner and the landlord speaks to me, but I just avoid people really. I get lonely ---- Q. How long have you felt this way? A long time, I was with my family before but not really with them Q. what do you mean? It was like I was separate because of my problem(G1.12)*

## Research: Physical Childhood Abuse

- Reported at high rates in the histories of sexual offenders in some studies (e.g., Ryan & Lane, 1991).
- This abuse is most often carried out by biological fathers (44%) and stepfathers (20%) (Kahn & Chambers, 1991).
- Beech et al (2004)- Vast majority of participants reported having been physically abused in childhood (rapists: 82%, sexual murderers: 68%). The most frequent form of this was being hit with an object, for example, a belt or a stick.

## Davidson (2005) Key Interview Findings: Family Relationships & Violence

*· Mother said I was her favourite but I was always the one who got hit. Me Father wasn't around much but he remembers me being hit. It was only ever one slap, but she was very strong and athletic, so there was quite a lot of force. But you know just bang and finished with. I use to be puzzled why I got it, I think because I was too slow doing things. Q you weren't fast enough for her?. No. You know doing household chores. Q How often did she hit you? It's difficult to say really--- probably most days. It was always round the face, that still rankles with me, I feel really angry when I see that'(Respondent G2.1)*

## Family Relationships

How did you feel as a child?

*' I don't know (long pause), unhappy I suppose. Q. What made you unhappy? If anyone walked into a classroom I knew that they would blame me, I knew that they would blame me for something. If anyone spoke to me I would blush. I was shy, my mother said that if a smaller kid shit on me I would stand there and take it'. Q. Do you think that's true? ' yes, that's the kind of kid I was.'(G1.1)*

*'She's my mother and I love her. Q. But how would you describe your relationship? Well I certainly didn't take it to heart because she's heavy handed. You know as a child I'd get a slap around the ear hole. Q. Was she violent? no--- just a hard slap around the face or head, it was quite regular but dad never touched us'(G1.3)*

## Family Relationships: Fathers

*'My father was a waiter on an ocean liner, I didn't see much of him he was away most of the time. He didn't take me out, when he wasn't away he'd come in and get drunk and go to sleep in the chair. I had a lot of contact with him when my mother died last year, we had a relationship in the end, but it was too late'(G1.6)*

*'I hated him(father) as a child. Q. Why? Because of the life my mother had. She had a hard time, she got up at 4am to do a cleaning job to keep us and he never sent money home. She died at 55 when she was just starting to enjoy life, she separated from him three years before'(G1.10)*

## Bullying & Peer Relationships

- 60% of sample had experienced bullying and isolation at school
- Tingle et al(1986) 86% of adult rapists and 74% of child molesters in their sample had few or no friends when young.

## Bullying

Q Why were you truanting?

*'Well, the usual thing, bullying. There was a gang of around six, they would wait for me after school, they would pick on me if I was in the way. They would often beat me up, I used to have cuts and bruises. Q. Did you tell your parents? They knew, but they didn't pay much attention, Dad said I should just get on with it and stand up to them'(G1.7)*

Q. How did you feel about the bullying? *' I didn't want to go to school, no one cared so I didn't go, I got behind with things and I couldn't catch up. I just felt stupid. Now I feel like I really missed out'(G1.7).*

## Peer Relationships

Q. *Did you have many friends? I knew lots of children Q. Did you make friends easily? long pause) No, no not really the other children didn't speak to me or play with me'(G1.14)*

Q. *How would you describe your schooldays? Hated every bit of it, don't know why, I just didn't want to be there. I found it difficult to talk in large groups. Q. did you have friends? No, I was always playing on my own and when I went home I used to play in the garden on my own (G1.2)*

## Summary

- Media representations – depiction of high profile cases and sex offenders
- Raft of legislative measures and prevention- political issue in the wake of cases
- Little attempt to research narratives, evidence of :
  - Social isolation
  - Severe child victimisation (often familial)
  - Relationship problems from early age
- \* More measured approach to CJ policy needed that balances offender *need* and *rights* against the need to protect children

*'The spectres of Ian Huntley and Roy Whiting are the nightmare of every parent. How far nightmares should be not just the starting point of, but the very basis for criminal justice and public policy is questionable'*

(Downes & Rock, 2007. In Davidson, 2008, Foreword, px)



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