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# Power, shame and social relations in prisons for men convicted of sex offences

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**Since 2016, the Comparative Penology (COMPEN) project, led by Ben Crewe, has been conducting a large-scale comparison of penal policymaking and the prisoner experience in England and Wales and Norway.<sup>1</sup> At its core, the project is an attempt to determine whether the Nordic Exceptionalism thesis — the idea that Nordic penal systems have a liberal-humanitarian culture and have resisted the punitive turn to which all other Western countries have succumbed — stands up to detailed empirical analysis.<sup>2</sup> The COMPEN project is particularly interested in the experience of two groups who are often overlooked in the literature on imprisonment: women, and men convicted of sex offences. It is the second of these groups which is the focus of this article.**

The COMPEN project is ambitious in its scale, and the comparative focus has brought a number of theoretical, methodological and linguistic challenges. One of these became clear in 2017, as my colleagues Kristian Mjåland and Julie Laursen and I tried to develop an interview schedule for our forthcoming sub-study of the experiences of prisoners convicted of sex offences. One of our main interests in this project was what different penal systems morally communicate to those they hold.<sup>3</sup> If you go to prison for a sex offence in England and Wales, what is the state saying to you about what you've done? What does being in prison, and what happens to you when you're there, do to your sense of who you are? How is this different in Norway, a country often described as liberal and inclusionary? In earlier projects, I had researched the experience of shame in English prisons for men convicted of sex offences, and so I suggested questions

like 'How does being described as a "sex offender" make you feel about who you are?' This is a question I feel comfortable asking in England and Wales, where prisoners convicted of sex offences often talk with vigour about the impact of the label on their life. Julie and Kristian insisted that this question wouldn't work in Norway. The Norwegian word for 'sex offender', 'seksualforbryder', is rarely used by prison practitioners or by prisoners, and so they worried that the question might not mean very much, but also that it might be quite offensive.

This linguistic difference posed a methodological challenge — how can you ask about shame and stigma if mentioning the source of shame deepens it? — but it was also a significant finding, and one that led to further questions. If the 'sex offender' label has less currency in Norway, does that mean that being convicted of a sex offence has a smaller effect on your identity there? Is it a sign that people with sex offence convictions experience less shame, or is it a sign of a different type of shame, one linked less to the label and the associated stigmatised identity? Why is it that different penal systems generate these different forms of shame? And what can they do to help people convicted of sex offences be seen, and see themselves, as ex-offenders or, better, as citizens?

This paper, which is based on the findings of research conducted in five prisons, answers some of these questions. In England and Wales, we conducted ethnographies at two large Category C prisons which only held men convicted of sex offences, and at one Vulnerable Prisoners' Unit (VPU) in a Category B local prison.<sup>4</sup> In total, we conducted 102 interviews, and spent around a year engaging in participant

1. For more details on the project, see [www.compen.crim.cam.ac.uk](http://www.compen.crim.cam.ac.uk).

2. For a discussion of the Nordic Exceptionalism thesis, see Pratt, J. (2008) 'Scandinavian exceptionalism in an era of penal excess: Part I: The nature and roots of Scandinavian exceptionalism'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 48(2), pp. 119-137; Pratt, J. (2008) 'Scandinavian exceptionalism in an era of penal excess: Part II: Does Scandinavian exceptionalism have a future?'. *British Journal of Criminology*, 48(3), pp. 275-292.

3. See Duff, R.A. (2001) *Punishment, Communication, and Community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

4. The fieldwork for one of the Category C ethnographies was conducted for my PhD, entitled 'Adaptation, moral community and power in a prison for men convicted of sex offences'. The other ethnographies described here were all conducted as part of the Comparative Penology project at Cambridge University, led by Ben Crewe, and with Kristian Mjåland, Julie Laursen and Anna Schliehe. I am grateful to them for carrying out some of the fieldwork on which this paper is based, and for their ongoing thoughts and comments. Thanks also to Rose Ricciardelli and Edward Smyth, and also to the former interviewees who offered their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

observation. In Norway, we conducted research in one treatment wing for men convicted of sex offences, and one open prison that held a lot of men convicted of sex offences. We also interviewed men convicted of sex offences who were held on 'mainstream' wings in Norwegian prisons, because, as this paper will go on to discuss, people convicted of sex offences in Norway are rarely held in separate institutions. We conducted 30 Norwegian interviews, and spent about six months doing participant observation.

### Safety, separation and 'the sex offender'

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two jurisdictions was how they tried to ensure the safety of these men. Cross-jurisdictionally, when prisoners convicted of sex offences are held on wings with 'mainstream' prisoners, they can experience extreme forms of violence.<sup>5</sup> In England and Wales, prison officials aim to keep these prisoners safe through a logic of separation. From their first entrance into prison, they are normally allocated to units on the basis of their offence. Most are held on VPUs and, ideally, the regime is organised in such a way that they never meet 'mainstream' prisoners. Those who receive a long enough sentence are then transferred to a prison that only holds prisoners with similar convictions.

In keeping prisoners apart, prison authorities divide them into two categories: 'sex offenders', often conflated with Vulnerable Prisoners (VPs), and 'mainstream prisoners'.<sup>6</sup> When prisoners convicted of sex offences are held on separate wings in the same prison, separating them ensures safety at the most basic level but it also communicates to prisoners that they are different. This communication can be quite direct, as this man made clear when he recounted his time on a VPU in a local prison:

*'You hear them saying things on the radio like "Oh we can't move the VPs because the*

*Normals are moving". It's like, I'm normal, do you know what I mean?'* (John, Category C prison)<sup>7</sup>

Separating VPs from 'mainstream' prisoners might keep them safe, but it also institutionalises the idea that these are two categories of people and enables a ritualised form of bullying. In the local prison, for instance, I took fieldnotes when accompanying prisoners from the VPU as they walked through the prison:

*'We go through door and walk towards the garden. Someone says loudly from a mains wing window — loud enough for us to hear but not yelled, no banging, doesn't sound angry, it sounds more habitual — 'Walk by wrong-uns'.'* (Fieldnotes, Category B prison)

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When prisoners convicted of sex offences were more completely separated from 'mainstream' prisoners and held in discrete establishments, they described feeling safer. Robin, held in a Category C prison, said that he felt secure as he knew 'no one is really dangerous and everyone is a sex offender, so I haven't got to look over my shoulder'.

However, this safety came with a cost, and it was common for prisoners in establishments which only held men convicted of sex offences to say that staff looked down on them because of their convictions. Officers and managers insisted that this was not the case and maintained that they did not judge people based on what they were in prison for. However, they often talked about how different these prisoners, and the prisons which held them, were from their mainstream equivalents, in ways that were clearly informed by stereotypical images of the 'sex offender' as a weak but sinister groomer. Prisons holding men convicted of sex offences were described as quieter because the prisoners themselves were more compliant and less physically challenging, but staff often said that

5. See Crewe, B. (2009) *The Prisoner Society: Power, Adaptation and Social Life in an English Prison*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Ugelvik, T. (2014) *Power and Resistance in Prison: Doing Time, Doing Freedom*. Translated by S.G. Evans. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
6. VPs are held separately from 'mainstream' prisoners under Rule 45. While many have been convicted of a sex offence, people can be held under Rule 45 for a variety of reasons, including debt and 'grassing'. However, prison staff and prisoners often use the two terms as though they mean the same thing.
7. All names are pseudonyms, and any potentially identifying information has been changed.

these men were harder to work with psychologically. They described them as 'clingy', 'needy', 'manipulative' and 'devious', and complained that 'they get in your head' and create a form of 'psychological pressure' (prison officers, Category C prison). Staff regularly insisted that prisoners were likely to 'groom' them, and even the most innocuous conversations could be distorted by assumptions about the character and motivation of 'the sex offender':

*'It starts with "Have a nice weekend", then it's "Have a nice Christmas", and then it's "Have a nice new year", and then it's "Happy Valentine's Day!" and you're like, "You what?" They're always seeking some gratification.'*  
(Prison officer, Category C prison)

Prisoners were highly conscious of the category in which they had been placed. Carlton said that while he was physically safer in a prison for men convicted of sex offences than he had been in a mixed prison, 'from an ego perspective', being held there was demoralising: 'I feel like I'm regarded as less of a person in this environment than I was in that environment' (Category C prison). One man put it starkly: 'in here you're not a prisoner or a person, you're a sex offender' (Jake, Category C prison). In all of the English prisons we visited, 'it's because we're sex offenders' was a catch-all explanation for everything that was unpleasant about their experiences, including things that were definitely not caused by their stigmatised identities — the food being poor quality, for example. This consciousness of a debased status was very painful to prisoners, who often assumed that they were being 'judged' even when staff treated them respectfully:

*'It's like [officers think] "No, you're just the scum of the earth." And that makes you feel like, well, I'm not human then. [...] I can honestly say that's what they think really, even though they don't show it, or [they] treat you with respect because they have to. Or sometimes*

*they don't, but most of the time they do. It doesn't mean they're not thinking about what we really are: dirty scum of the earth. "You committed a serious offence that doesn't make you a human."'*(Jake, Category C prison)

The key phrase here is 'what we really are': this man internalised how he believed he was seen.

### Integration, isolation and anxiety

The Norwegian prison system, on the other hand, accommodates men convicted of sex offences according to a very different logic. Mostly, they are held on normal wings which also hold 'mainstream' prisoners. This principle of inclusion is possible in

Norwegian prisons because they are much smaller, generally more ordered, and with much smaller staff-to-prisoner ratios (the standard ratio is one to eight). Staff are concerned about the dangers faced by prisoners convicted of sex offences, but they try to manage it in a way which addresses the fact that these men are being threatened as the problem to be solved, and not their very presence. When 'mainstream' prisoners try to find out what other prisoners in their unit have been convicted of, it is those who are asking questions who are moved elsewhere, and

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not the person with the sex offence conviction. This strategy has clearly impacted the way prisoners with these convictions are seen within the Norwegian prison system. There is no official approach that 'sex offenders' are a different type of prisoner, and staff do not describe them as though they behave differently.<sup>8</sup>

However, the absence of a rigid but secure categorical divide between 'sex offenders' and 'mainstream' prisoners does not mean that there is no distinction between the two groups in Norway. Rather, it means that the distinction that exists is more fluid, generated by prisoners rather than by the institution. Thomas Ugelvik has written about this phenomenon, arguing that sex offenders mark a moral 'boundary' in the Norwegian prison, beyond which 'exists the unethical and the unthinkable, but also the unmanly'.<sup>9</sup>

8. The Norwegian approach to keeping men convicted of sex offences safe doesn't always work and there are real risks associated with it. In 2017, a man convicted of a high-profile sex offence was killed by another prisoner in Ringerike prison. This was the Norwegian prison system's first murder in many decades, and as a result of it, the Norwegian prison service is seriously considering whether they should abandon their current strategy and start to accommodate people convicted of sex offences in separate units, as is increasingly the international norm.
9. Ugelvik (2014), p.218.

As in England and Wales, 'mainstream' Norwegian prisoners expressed quite profound and violent forms of hatred towards sex offenders, and it was they who policed this boundary and decided who was and wasn't acceptable. Prisoners who were known to be convicted of sex offences, particularly those who had offended against children, were often isolated:

*'I don't speak to the paedophiles.*

*Interviewer: No. No, and you know who they are?*

*Yes. You get to know these things. And you notice it too. They're a little... frozen out.'*  
*(Egil, open prison)*

Offences were not always widely known, and prisoners tried to fill this information vacuum by asking what people were in for and demanding to see paperwork. Even for prisoners who were not identified, this experience could be quite frightening:

*'One time, someone came up to me and said "Are you in for a sex crime?" And I thought "Oh God" but I said "No, why do you say that?" And he said "Oh, somebody told me." "That's completely wrong", I said, and he didn't ask again. I was terrified that day, I was afraid for the situation. My cover story was enough but I didn't like the situation.'* (Anderson, treatment wing)

Men convicted of sex offences may have been held alongside 'mainstream' prisoners, but they still experienced a form of bottom-up exclusion which could be very isolating.

It is worth noting that many of the men who ended up on the specialist wing alongside other prisoners convicted of sex offences described being relieved to be held there. Bernt, for example, said that he experienced 'a totally different level of safety' on his specialist unit (treatment wing). While the Norwegian principle of policed inclusion therefore had clear impacts on the way the Norwegian prison system as a whole thought about this group of prisoners, it nevertheless struggled to keep the lid on a more bottom-up prisoner-led form of moral evaluation which generated significant anxiety.

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Prisons in both countries, of course, are not solely required to hold these men safely, but also to change or discipline them. The different ways in which they do this rest on a particular idea of who these prisoners are, and in some cases affect how prisoners see themselves. In England and Wales, the prison system operates on a 'risk management' basis. It uses formalised systems of risk assessment to identify people's risk levels and then demands that they change in quite specific ways, for instance through treatment programmes. At the same time, the system does not always provide prisoners with the opportunities to change, nor does it notice when they have done so. Furthermore, whether prisoners change or not, they will remain on the Sex Offenders' Register for years, perhaps indefinitely, meaning that they will remain permanently labelled irrespective of what they do. The Norwegian system, on the other hand, has resisted the introduction of formalised actuarial risk assessments and instead makes decisions about progression, treatment provision and licence conditions on the basis of individualised decisions. The system also makes fewer specific demands about how prisoners should demonstrate change, and at best instead creates space in which prisoners can 'work on' themselves. For some, though, this lack of structure can be

frustrating. Many men in Norwegian prisons complain about their lack of access to interventions, and maintain that rather than giving them space, this lack of access means that their sentences feel empty. However, the lack of legal restrictions which face them on release means that they at least have hope for an un-stigmatised future once they leave the prison.

In England and Wales, prisoners identified psychologists, programmes workers, probation officers and, to some extent, Offender Supervisors as the people with power over their sentence. None of these people were located on the wings, and prisoners therefore described feeling alienated and that significant decisions (those which concerned transfer, progression, early release and access to children) were made on the basis of formalised risk assessments conducted by professionals whom prisoners believed did not know them well. Many prisoners felt estranged from risk discourse, and found it hard to align risk language with how they saw themselves. Many, for

instance, described the pain of being misrecognised and seen as a bundle of risk factors:

*'To me it seems like I'm just a caseload number. [...] You're still putting me in a negative light and you're lying about me and it hurts me, you understand, it hurts me, it hurts me a lot. People lie and they can just write whatever they want to write about you on paper, "risk to the public", "risk to females", "risk in relationships". I've never been arrested for domestic violence once, there's never been any allegations of me in any domestic violence! "Risk to children". Risk to children where? Never! Risk to children that they may see something that they shouldn't have seen. You just guessed that, where's anybody ever been arrested for that?'* (Category C prison)

Other prisoners complained that the prison system's reliance on formalised risk assessment meant that they were treated like 'a statistic' on 'a graph' (Lesley, local prison), rather than as a moral agent.

The 'power holders' in the English and Welsh system, the programme and case managers, had a specific and often 'psychologised' idea of what change is supposed to look like. Their idea of change had its own specific discourse: it was about changing your thoughts and managing your risk. Some prisoners absorbed this and described journeys of change which seemed genuine but were also clearly influenced by institutional and cognitive-behavioural discourses. One prisoner, for example, answered a question about how he'd changed over his sentence by talking at length about his greater awareness of his 'schemas'. Prisoners who had been through treatment programmes would quite casually say in interviews, or while chatting on the wing, that they would always be a risk, they just needed to learn how to manage it. I even met one prisoner who always wore a wristband he had been given in another prison which said 'Managing my risk'. These people were not cynically living up to what they thought was wanted from them. Rather, their self-perception seemed to have been infiltrated by system-sanctioned risk and psychological discourses.

More often, though, prisoners either shallowly performed or deliberately rejected what the prison wanted from them. They criticised the prison for

promoting a 'cookie cutter' form of rehabilitation in which prisoners had very little ability to shape their journey or describe their needs. Arjun, for instance, offered the common criticism that the prison seemed to want people to mess around at the beginning of the sentence and then behave themselves: 'That's part of playing the game, because it seems [they're] then being able to say "Well, we've definitely rehabilitated him"'. He felt that there was limited room for him to develop in a way which felt authentic: 'It doesn't matter what you do, things are done to you and you just have to deal with that process' (Category C prison). Prisoners who went on courses felt obliged to talk about their crimes and their moral journeys — central aspects of their personhood — using very precise language which

made it harder for them to talk about it in a way which felt authentic. Lesley, who had been convicted of having sex with a 14-year-old when he was 19, reported whenever he referred to it as a 'relationship' during treatment, he was told at length why it was grooming and not a relationship: 'I couldn't be honest because if I was honest, they would say I was wrong' (local prison).

Prisoners rarely saw officers as being directly engaged in this change process. Their priorities were on the wing, prisoners thought, and officers agreed, describing their role as to keep peace, to get prisoners what they

needed, and to lock and unlock doors, and perhaps to help them with emotional problems. While officers recognised that some aspects of prisoners' behaviour might be inappropriate, or related to 'risk' or 'treatment', they did not necessarily know how to intervene with these behaviours and instead would simply record them on the computer. One life-sentenced prisoner, for instance, reported that he was in his post-intervention review after completing the Extended SOTP (Sex Offender Treatment Programme) and he was told that a Security Incident Report had been put in about him four months earlier because he had said that he found someone in the prison environment attractive. Another young man said that he found out that a female officer had put in a similar report for making a 'flirtatious comment' when he said he liked her new haircut. These men described this strategy of policing as confusing and inconsistent. These men, and others like them, were never told precisely what was wrong about their comments, and this generated significant anxiety and confusion among

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prisoners about precisely what (in)appropriate behaviour looked like. Many prisoners, particularly in the Category C prisons, reported feeling uncomfortable and anxious around female staff members, needing to be careful about their behaviour in case it was misconstrued:

*'I purposefully make sure with all female staff that there is not a chance that my hands could brush them in some way, shape or form, or... So I will back up against a wall. You just don't want — given the nature of the place, you just don't want any comment made back, and it's just better to be safe than sorry.'* (Arjun, Category C prison)

This prison primarily used security processes as a way of monitoring prisoners' behaviour, and paradoxically this strategy of policing made this man feel at risk — of being seen in an unjust light. This had some unfortunate consequences: a large number of the prisoners we've interviewed in England and Wales have said that their sentences have made them less trustful of and more uncomfortable around women, saying that it is easy for them to make false accusations.

The Norwegian prisons, on the other hand, managed prisoners differently. Powerholders did not use formalised risk assessments, and instead made more individualised and discretionary decisions about release, progression or access to children. This carried significant dangers, and prisoners from ethnic minority backgrounds or who otherwise didn't 'fit in' with Norwegian society complained regularly about favouritism and injustice. Nevertheless, release was rarely contingent on the completion of interventions which prisoners had been unable to access, or which prisoners did not describe as useful, and the absence of risk discourse was clear on the wings. Prisoners never described themselves using the sort of language which was common in English and Welsh prisons, and some were so unfamiliar with risk discourse that they asked for clarification when we asked, in interviews and surveys, whether the prison system cared more their risk factors than who they really were.

Norway's more individualised vision of change was also clear in the sorts of treatment programmes and interventions which were available. Whereas in England

and Wales, accredited treatment programmes were the main formally recognised forum for personal development, formal treatment programmes played a much smaller role in the sentences of prisoners in Norway. On the whole, prisoners convicted of sex offences benefitted from the generalised rehabilitative ethos which infuses Norwegian prisons, an ethos which is more about providing people with opportunities to education, work and training than it is about changing their thoughts. Prisoners who engaged in interventions reported having influence over their timing, rather than being forced to undertake them at a time determined

by their sentence plans or the outputs of formalised risk assessments — or, worse, simply when they were available. One interviewee, a man on forvaring — an indeterminate sentence for people who have committed serious offences and are deemed likely to reoffend — described the process by which he changed in his previous prison. He started by telling a friend whom he trusted, a fellow prisoner, about his offences. This friend then helped him to write a letter to the programme staff member, who came to them immediately and let him tell his story in his own words: 'Talk until you're done and I'll understand you', she said. She immediately arranged for him to do a programme, saying 'Now I can help you move

forward, before you lose any more time' (Ulrik, open prison). Significantly, this process had been prompted by the prisoner's own decision to speak to the programme worker, and it took place at a time he felt comfortable with.

At its best, then, change was not something which was done to prisoners to turn them into a particular type of person. Instead, prisoners were conceptualised as moral agents who worked with prison officials in order to foster their own development. Prison officers were much more engaged in this process than they were in England and Wales. They were actively and regularly engaged in prisoners' lives, were confident in their use of power, and considered their jobs to directly contribute to rehabilitation. They were able to intervene in any inappropriate behaviour quickly, naturally, and informally. One prisoner on the treatment wing, for instance, recounted an incident where he slapped the bottom of a female officer while playing volleyball with her on Constitution Day. Immediately everyone went silent: 'I realised what I did, it was a huge mistake. But

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thank God she was just laughing it away and told me not to do it again and I said I won't!' (Anderson). In England and Wales, where disciplinary power was concentrated in the hands of a small number of specialised staff who operated at a distance, such an incident would likely have been written on this prisoners' record and it could have had significant effects on him later on. In Norway, where disciplinary power was more dispersed but also more consistent, the incident was dealt with then and there, by an officer who knew this prisoner, and knew that he recognised he had done wrong. As a result, and unlike in England and Wales, it was rare for prisoners in Norway to say that they felt uncomfortable around female staff.

It was not an unambiguous good that sentences in Norway were less structured, however. Many prisoners, particularly those who served short sentences or were in open prisons, complained about the lack of formal interventions related to their offending. Some worried about their sexual thoughts and feelings, and others described experiencing unresolved feelings of shame which they would benefit from discussing with a professional. Niclas, for example, did not want to be released until he had undergone treatment:

*I certainly need someone to talk to. Yes. I need to have that when I get out, so I don't... yes, there is a lot that still needs to be put in place. That is why I said that if I could be released tomorrow, I wouldn't want to. No. There are still a lot of thoughts. Shame. (High security prison)*

This is an issue which has received political attention in Norway, and the prison service received extra funding in 2019 to cover the costs of implementing treatment programmes in more prisons. Nevertheless, at the time of the fieldwork, some prisoners like Jakobe said that sentences in open prisons don't 'mean much' (open prison), as very little effort is put into what he called 'recurrence prevention' work. While prisoners certainly described advantages to the more individualised treatment which they received in Norway, then, people did find it difficult if they fell through the gaps.

In England and Wales, the 'sex offender' master status carried such weight that prisoners identified its discrediting attributes in their peers. Prisoners quite frequently reported, in interviews and in chats on the wing, that their peers were sinister, dangerous, or groomers, and they often implied that their offending identities were responsible for their behaviour:

*'It goes along with essentially the type of people they are, and whether they've actually put in work to change their characters, because it goes along with their offences.'* (Arjun, Category C prison)

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Prisoners observed, monitored and gossiped about each other, looking out for signs of inappropriate behaviour, and they avoided people who they thought were entrenched 'sex offenders'. Others talked about altering their own behaviour in order to avoid being talked about, for instance by avoiding talking to female officers, transgender prisoners, or even female researchers, in order to prevent adverse inferences being drawn. Much of the regulation in English and Welsh prisons was lateral, then; prisoners reproduced both the ways in

which the prison had constructed them, and the ways in which it sought to monitor them, in their relationships with each other.

Susie Scott has described this as 'performative regulation', which she argues occurs when 'people submit themselves to the authority of an institution, internalize its values and enact them through mutual surveillance in an inmate culture. Power operates horizontally as well as vertically, as members monitor each other's conduct, sanction deviance and evaluate their own progress in relative terms'.<sup>10</sup> William, for instance, said that he used explicitly cognitive-behavioural language when he heard people talking inappropriately: 'I do turn round and say, 'You need to go on the course, and pronto. [...] You need to sort your life out. You need to sort your thoughts out, your patterns'' (Category C prison). Another said he would find it hard in treatment groups not to attempt to assess the authenticity of other people's change:

10. Scott, S. (2010) 'Revisiting the total institution: Performative regulation in the reinventive institution'. *Sociology*, 44(2), pp. 213-231 (p.221).

*'Having heard what they've done, I don't think I could sit in the same room and not try and judge their body language or how they are reacting to certain things that are being said to see whether or not they are taking it on board in the right way.'* (Louis, Category C prison)

This dynamic was not found in Norway, where social relationships among prisoners were simply not structured by discourses of risk and danger. As described earlier, prisoners convicted of sex offences were certainly judged, often excluded and sometimes endangered by 'mainstream' prisoners, but prisoners did not use officially-sanctioned language when they did this.

### **Conclusion: Reintegrative and disintegrative shaming**

To conclude, I would like to argue that the penal systems in both countries operated very differently, and that this had a significant effect on the sort of shame the prisons communicated. Using terms taken from the work of John Braithwaite, I argue that the imprisonment of men convicted of sex offences in England and Wales mostly operated on a 'stigmatising' logic, whereas in Norway it sought to operate on a 'reintegrative' logic; however, it did not always achieve this.<sup>11</sup>

Braithwaite describes 'disintegrative' or 'stigmatising' shaming as morally communicative practices which involve moral humiliation and suggest that people's worst actions constitute who they are and who they can be. This makes it harder to shed disparaging labels — to move from sex offender to ex-offender to citizen — and generates resentment and social withdrawal.<sup>12</sup> So in England and Wales, prisoners convicted of sex offences are constructed as 'sex offenders', sinister and risky objects who can only change if they comply with the officially-sanctioned narrative. They are also subject to tight restrictions on release and will be included in the Sex Offenders' Register. It is very common for people we interview in England and Wales to say they want to move abroad when they finish their licence, indicating that they feel that their citizenship status has permanently changed.

'Reintegrative shaming', on the other hand, shames the act but not the offender — this is linked to the Norwegian reluctance to use the term 'sex offender'. This enables offenders to accept mistakes in

reparative ways, from which they can move on — so people convicted of sex offences in Norway are subject to fewer legal restrictions on release, for example, and they only need to declare convictions which are directly relevant to their employment. However, it also requires the sentence to be experienced as a meaningful ritual, and prisoners in Norway who received no formal interventions or opportunities to talk about their shame, offending or hopes for the future often found their sentences too meaningless to be truly reintegrative.

Almost every prisoner we have interviewed for this project, even those who maintain innocence for their offence, has described wanting to use the sentence as a time of change, personal development and growth. Part of what needs to be done is to help people who want to change — to help sex offenders become ex-offenders — and part of what needs to be done is to welcome them back when they have done so — to grant them their citizenship back. I want to conclude by suggesting that maybe there are dangers in trying too hard to change people. Rowan Williams has argued that people in prison are often isolated from their support structures and placed in an institution which explicitly exhorts them to repent and change.<sup>13</sup> In this context, Williams argues that a chaplain should act as a 'remembrancer', working 'with someone to bring to light a vital sense of what in fact has made them the person they are'.<sup>14</sup> What we should be looking for is not 'dramatic conversion, or even the articulation of repentance in the first place', says Williams, 'but something more like the reconstruction of a person's story, without which the language of conversion and repentance is going to be another image or fiction taking them further away from real needs and real resources'.<sup>15</sup> The language used is religious but the message has wider application. What is needed is not necessarily to change someone from a 'sex offender' to an ex-offender but to help them see that they were never a 'sex offender' in the first place, that the phrase was never an accurate descriptor of who they were. In Williams' words, what is needed is to build on 'different sorts of memory: so that the story that emerges is not one of linear, inevitable progress that towards one disastrous or violent moment. It is a process comparable to the role of creative arts in a prison; a way of asking "Who am I when I'm not a 'criminal?'"'.<sup>16</sup> The challenge for prisons is to ask that question, and to create a setting which makes it easier for people to answer it.

11. Braithwaite, J. (1989) *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also McAlinden, A.M. (2007) *The Shaming of Sexual Offenders: Risk, Retribution and Reintegration*. Oxford: Hart.

12. Scheff, T.J. (2006) *Goffman Unbound! A New Paradigm for Social Science*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press.

13. Williams, R. (2003) 'Ministry in prison: Theological reflections'. *Justice Reflections*, 2, pp. 1-15.

14. Williams (2003), p. 3.

15. Williams (2003), p. 6.

16. Williams (2003), p. 5.