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**HMP Whatton
Achieving Change**

'This isn't a real prison': prisoner safety and relationships in HMP Whatton

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There have been many insightful studies into the sociology of prison life. Focusing on areas such as friendship, resistance, staff-prisoner relationships, trust and the attempt to maintain a coherent identity, these studies have illuminated features of the prisoner — and prison officer — experience which would otherwise be invisible to outsiders. It is generally believed that prisoner culture can be influenced by structural causes relating to the nature of imprisonment, by institutional differences and by the values and beliefs imported by prisoners². Sociologists have therefore insisted that, while they may share certain features, all prisons are different, and we should be slow to generalise from claims about one prison to claims about The Prison, or The Prisoner.

Nevertheless, the majority of studies into prison life have been based on the experiences of adult male mainstream prisoners, which are all-too-often assumed to be shared by the rest of the prison population³. Much less is known about the experiences of other groups of prisoners or the effects of different types of institution. In particular, very little research has been undertaken into the experiences of sex offenders in prison, despite this group making a significant proportion of the prison population: in September 2012, prisoners convicted of sex offences made up almost fifteen per cent of the total adult male sentenced prison population in England and Wales⁴.

The majority of research on the experiences of sex offenders in prison concerns their position at the base of

the prisoner hierarchy⁵. It has also been suggested there is a further hierarchy *among* sex offenders, with those convicted of offences against adults receiving more status while those who have offended against children receive more stigma⁶. On the other hand, Mann has argued that child sex offenders invert the terms of the prisoner hierarchy, arguing that they are superior to mainstream prisoners because they are more educated and their offences are, they maintain, less serious⁷.

Sex offenders in prison face such danger that they are often isolated for their own protection. In England and Wales, they have traditionally been accommodated on Vulnerable Prisoners' Units (VPUs) under Rule 45 (previously Rule 43). Even here, however, they have not been safe from abusive behaviour by Vulnerable Prisoners (VPs) who are not sex offenders, and even from staff⁸. Despite this, sex offenders and VPs are considered among the most compliant members of the prison population⁹. Because of the perceived compliance of VPs, as well as their imported vulnerability, Deborah Drake has called for 'a consideration of the sociology of punishment for vulnerable offenders'¹⁰.

Such a consideration is not just important because sex offenders make up a significant but ignored prison population, but because treatment providers are becoming increasingly aware that 'the context within which treatment is provided may actually prove to be quite important to the overall effectiveness of treatment'¹¹. It was partly for this reason that the HM Prison Service introduced a new strategy for sex offender

1. I am deeply grateful to my MPhil supervisor, Dr Ben Crewe, for his help throughout this project, his assistance with interviewing, and his comments on a draft of this article. I would also like to thank everyone at Whatton, particularly in the Education department, for so graciously hosting this research.
2. Crewe, B. (2007) 'The Sociology of Imprisonment', in Y. Jewkes (ed.) *Handbook on Prisons*, Abingdon: Willan Publishing (pp. 123-151).
3. In this article, 'mainstream prisoners' refers to those prisoners who have not been convicted of sex offences. The term 'mainstream prisons' therefore refers to those establishments which mainly accommodate mainstream prisoners.
4. Ministry of Justice (2012) *Offender Management Statistics Quarterly* [online]. Available at: <<http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/prisons-and-probation/oms-quarterly>> [Accessed 19 February 2013].
5. Åkerström, M. (1986) 'Outcasts in Prison: The Cases of Informers and Sex Offenders', *Deviant Behaviour*, 7: 1-12; Winfree, T., Newbold, G. and Tubb III, H. (2002) 'Prisoner Perspectives on Inmate Culture in New Mexico and New Zealand', *Prison Journal*, 82: 213-223.
6. Vaughn, M.S. and Sapp, A.D. (1989) 'Less than Utopian: Sex Offender Treatment in a Milieu of Power Struggles, Status Positioning, and Inmate Manipulation in State Correctional Institutions', *The Prison Journal*, 69(2): 73-89.
7. Mann, N. (2012) 'Ageing Child Sex Offenders in Prison: Denial, Manipulation and Community', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 51(4): 345-358.
8. Sparks, R., Bottoms, A.E. and Hay, W. (1996) *Prisons and the Problem of Order*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; O'Donnell, I. and Edgar, K. (1999) 'Fear in Prison', *The Prison Journal*, 79(1): 90-99.
9. Ahmad, S. (1996) *Fairness in Prison*, PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge; Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996) see n.8; Liebling, A., Muir, G., Rose, G. and Bottoms, A. (1997) *An Evaluation of Incentives and Earned Privileges*, Cambridge: Institute of Criminology.
10. Drake, D.H. (2006) *A Comparison of Quality of Life, Legitimacy, and Order in Two Maximum-Security Prisons*, PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge: 301.
11. Ware, J. (2011) 'The Importance of Contextual Issues within Sexual Offender Treatment', in D.P. Boer, R. Eher, L.A. Craig, M.H. Miner and F. Pfäfflin (eds) *International Perspectives on the Assessment and Treatment of Sexual Offenders: Theory, Practice and Research*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd (pp. 299-312): 300.

imprisonment in 1991, concentrating them in a smaller number of prisons in the hope that this would 'facilitate a consistency of approach in running treatment programmes, cost effective use of resources and skills, and the provision of a safe and supportive environment'¹². This change in strategy led to HMP Whatton increasingly specialising in the treatment and rehabilitation of sex offenders, and now it only accommodates those who are undertaking or waiting to undertake Sex Offender Treatment Programmes (SOTP). Staff argue that Whatton, a public sector Category C prison, creates a constructive and understanding environment, in which prisoners and staff encourage and support each other through their treatment. Its culture is more commonly compared to that of a Therapeutic Community than a mainstream prison¹³.

This article stems from a broader study which began to explore the sociology of prison life for sex offenders. The article will compare the culture of HMP Whatton and that of the mainstream prisons described by sociologists of imprisonment, drawing in particular on recent studies deriving from the experiences of mainstream prisoners in England and Wales¹⁴. It will outline many differences and similarities between HMP Whatton and mainstream prisons, focusing primarily on experiences of safety and relationships. It will then offer preliminary explanations for these differences and similarities, using Crewe's framework for analysis of the prisoner society, which takes account of structural, institutional and imported factors¹⁵.

The Study

Twenty two prisoners were interviewed overall, nineteen by the primary author and three by her supervisor. In order to reduce the burden on the prison, the research was based in the Education Department, and the sample was selected from its classrooms using an opportunistic selection method. The interviews were semi-structured and qualitative, with a mean length of one hour and 19 minutes. The initial themes and questions were drawn from the sociology of prison life literature, but other issues — concerning, for example, 'grassing' and sexual relationships between prisoners — emerged as significant during the

research process. The interviews were then transcribed word-for-word and coded manually.

FINDINGS

Safety

Experiences of safety vary between prisons but, contrary to popular belief, mainstream prisons are not necessarily marked by regular displays of violence. Nevertheless, lack of control and low levels of trust combine to produce an environment in which prisoners rarely feel completely safe and social control is always 'a matter of degree'¹⁶.

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Prisoners in HMP Whatton, on the other hand, reported feeling remarkably comfortable and secure. While such feelings may be heightened by comparison with the victimisation they reported in their previous establishments, HMP Whatton certainly seemed to be a much safer establishment than most mainstream prisons. Prisoners reported few violent incidents, and very few prisoners could recall having seen a fight there. One Education staff member reported that an incident alarm bell went off once every six months.

HMP Whatton's safety can be attributed to a number of imported and institutional causes. The average age of its prisoners was forty five, much higher than in most prisons, and younger prisoners are much more likely to be involved in violent incidents¹⁷. Forty six per cent of prisoners had indeterminate sentences (either life or Imprisonment for Public Protection) and were unwilling to jeopardise their progression through the system, especially as they were in a Category C prison with the outside world in sight. Similarly, HMP Whatton only accommodated prisoners undertaking (or waiting to undertake) the SOTP, who at the very least were likely to be pragmatic regarding their progression through the system, and wary of being moved to establishments with fewer courses.

Drugs

One commonly expressed reason for HMP Whatton's safety was the rarity of illegal drugs there. Crewe argues

12. Guy, E. (1992) 'The Prison Service's Strategy', in Prison Reform Trust (ed.) *Beyond Containment: The Penal Response to Sex Offending*, London: Prison Reform Trust (pp. 1-7): 1.

13. See Blagden, N. and Thorne, K. in this publication.

14. Of particular importance is Ben Crewe's (2009) *The Prisoner Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, which describes the social world of HMP Wellingborough, which, like Whatton, was a Category C establishment.

15. Crewe (2009) see n.14.

16. Carrabine, E. (2005) 'Prison Riots, Social Order and the Problem of Legitimacy', *British Journal of Criminology*, 45(6): 896-913 (897).

17. Ditchfield, J. (1990) *Control in Prisons: A Review of the Literature*, London: HMSO.

that drugs — particularly heroin and cannabis — play a central role in prisoner life in the early twenty-first century, structuring or distorting the prisoner hierarchy, increasing individualisation, leading to potentially violent power struggles among prisoners, and increasing levels of debt¹⁸. According to the prisoners he interviewed, such changes are apparently ‘generalisable across establishments’, but illegal drugs were noticeable by their absence in HMP Whatton¹⁹.

It is safer, because, like, obviously here they act straight, straightaway, where in other places, it's, you've got drugs and that, they're constantly flowing, and [...] you haven't really got that here. So [in other prisons] it's the fine line where it's gonna be kicking off all the time because someone owes someone something or pads [are] getting robbed or whatever (Darren)²⁰.

Because there were fewer drugs, there were fewer power struggles, fewer prisoners in debt and fewer occasions to enforce loyalty, through violence or the threat of violence.

It seems likely that the absence of drug culture in HMP Whatton reflected the fact that far fewer of its inhabitants would have been involved in the use or distribution of illegal drugs before being imprisoned. However, prisoners offered other reasons, including the small wing sizes, the fact that many prisoners were on indeterminate sentences, and the apparent frequency of ‘grassing’ within HMP Whatton.

It is also worth noting that although illegal drugs were rare in HMP Whatton, many prisoners reported that the misuse of prescription medication was common. Medication was present in the prison through legal and legitimate means: prisoners, many of whom were elderly and had health problems, got it from Healthcare. The supply was secure, therefore its presence did not lead to the establishment of a trading network supported by violence. It is also possible that the availability of medication filled the gap in the market which would otherwise have been filled by illegal drugs.

Masculinity and Status

HMP Whatton’s apparent calm extended from its lack of violence to its everyday social interactions. Many mainstream prisoners adapt to the pains of imprisonment by presenting a front of ‘hypermasculinity’, which necessitates a degree of ‘controlled aggression’ and the ability and readiness to assert oneself through violence²¹. This version of masculinity is partly imported from the lower working-class culture from which many prisoners originate, and is partly a reaction to the structural powerlessness they experience in prison²². This version of masculinity was largely absent in HMP Whatton, contributing to its feelings of safety. Most prisoners were not ‘chasing after power like in a mains prison’ (Anwar), and participants insisted that there was very little need to ‘front’ (Darren). Those who did were ridiculed as ‘plastic gangsters’ (Rob).

The relative absence of this culture of masculine aggression was related to the high average age of HMP Whatton’s population. Furthermore, many prisoners in HMP Whatton were from a middle-class background, where masculinity is expressed differently²³. However, it was also related to broader feelings of resignation among prisoners to their predicament. The most common reaction to questions

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asking whether prisoners felt a sense of power was derisive laughter. Prisoners were aware that they would face stigmatisation on release, but also that they were stigmatised within prison and were at the bottom of the prisoner hierarchy. Sex offenders in prison are often seen as ‘the location of “Otherness” ’ against which, in the absence of women, mainstream masculinity can define itself²⁴. A few participants said that they had sought masculine status in previous establishments, but no longer looked for it in HMP Whatton. Prisoners felt there was no kudos to be earned there; it was considered oxymoronic to be ‘big and hard’ in ‘a sex offenders’ jail’ (Ed).

This does not mean prisoners in HMP Whatton were unconcerned with issues of status. Rather, their battles were conducted on different territory and used different weapons. Middle-class men often equate status with educational qualifications and economic success²⁵. HMP Whatton’s inhabitants sometimes complained about the

18. Crewe, B. (2005) ‘Prisoner Society in the Era of Hard Drugs’, *Punishment and Society*, 7(4): 457-481.

19. *Ibid* p. 461.

20. In order to ensure anonymity, all participants have been given a pseudonym.

21. Jewkes, Y. (2005) ‘Men Behind Bars: Doing Masculinity as an Adaptation to Imprisonment’, *Men and Masculinities*, 8(1): 44-63 (61, 52-53).

22. *Ibid*.

23. *Ibid*.

24. Thurston, R. (1996) ‘Are You Sitting Comfortably? Men’s Storytelling, Masculinities, Prison Culture and Violence’, in M. Mac an Ghail (ed.) *Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*, Buckingham: Open University Press (pp. 139-153): 144.

25. Tolson, A. (1977) *The Limits of Masculinity*, London: Tavistock Publications.

low educational standard of other prisoners. As Rob reported:

I've heard quite a lot of backstabbing and stuff. That's the main thing [...] between a mains' prison and a sex offenders' prison. I find there's not bullying in the sense of making people feel intimidated, but there's a level of 'We're better than you' kind of thing that can come across.

Rather than open teasing or violence, they resorted to what Rob called being 'bitchy', conventionally understood as a feminine trait. The emasculation of prisoners in Whatton was such that, even among sex offenders, their status battles could be criticised for being un-masculine.

Sexual Manipulation

Malik claimed that 'you can't feel that proper safe [in Whatton] cos [...] there's a lot of paedophiles in here'. He felt the need to 'watch out' for 'what they call grooming and everything'. While partly deriving from cultural myths about the sex offender as a manipulative predator ('what they call'), Malik's concerns were indicative of a strain of self-conscious anxiety amongst the younger prisoners concerning sexual manipulation, an anxiety which was not without cause. One participant reported personal experience of sexual manipulation, and another expressed apparently reasonable concern about the relationship between his former cellmate, a man in his early seventies, and a younger man of twenty seven. The rarity of overtly violent incidents in HMP Whatton should not, therefore, obscure an undercurrent of sexual manipulation, which may or may not be related to the nature of HMP Whatton's population.

Relationships between Prisoners

Hierarchy

In mainstream prisons, sex offenders are at the base of the prisoner hierarchy, with those convicted of offences against children receiving the most stigma²⁶. In HMP Whatton everyone had been labelled as a sex offender, and it was frequently claimed there was no hierarchy

because 'we're all sex offenders, no matter what we're in for, we're all exactly the same' (Dave). Rather than passing judgement on people's crimes, prisoners claimed to assess people based on within-prison behaviour: 'you look at the person, not what they did' (Arthur).

Nevertheless, when pushed, it became clear that prisoners struggled to avoid judging those who had committed particularly serious offences, specifically against young children. However, there was not a conventional offence-based hierarchy in HMP Whatton, and these prisoners were not marginalised to the extent that they would be in a mainstream prison:

I wouldn't be friends with them, but if they said 'Alright' to me as I was walking by, I would say hello. I'm not a person who's gonna go 'Yeah, fuck off.' (Mitchell)

I talk to anybody, to be honest. If they talk to me, I'll talk to them, but [...] I wouldn't seek them out. (Malik)

In part this resulted from the involuntary and indiscriminating social interaction imposed by imprisonment. Unlike in mainstream prisons, paedophiles were not a minority, nor were they segregated²⁷. It would be almost impossible, and certainly impractical, to avoid associating with people convicted of such offences in HMP Whatton.

There were further institutional inducements to civility and tolerance in HMP Whatton. The prison's therapeutic ideals promoted courteous interactions between prisoners:

Everyone sort of clicks in some way, cos obviously, especially when you've gotta go on courses and you've, you've got to be respectful to people that, listening to whatever they've done, you know what I mean? You have to be respectful, otherwise you're just getting bad reports. What's the point? (Darren)

Psychological reports can determine progression through the system — a fact borne in mind by pragmatic prisoners²⁸. In this context, the absence of an obvious

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26. Vaughn and Sapp (1989) see n.6.

27. At the time of the research, the Governing Governor said that 692 of HMP Whatton's 838 inhabitants had been convicted of offences against people under the age of sixteen.

28. Crewe (2009) see n.14.

hierarchy can be partly attributed to the coercive power of the institution, and the depth and sincerity of the cordiality promoted should not be exaggerated.

Finally, prisoners had personal reasons for avoiding judging people on the basis of their offences. To put it simply, they did not want to be judged on the same grounds:

At the end of the day, [... my conviction is] who I was. That's part of who I was. It's not who I am now. If people are going to judge me on my past, then I'm not going to want to know them. Because that's not who I am. (Evan)

Prisoners in HMP Whatton tried to protect themselves from stigmatisation by insisting that the offences that they had committed did not accurately represent their current identity, and they tried to retain this principle when evaluating other prisoners. That they did not always succeed can be seen as an indicator of their normality. As Arthur put it, it could be hard to avoid judging people by what they had done because 'you're a human being'.

Trust

Mainstream prisoners often struggle to trust other prisoners. In the five prisons studied by Alison Lieblich, fewer than half of those surveyed reported trusting other prisoners²⁹. Imprisonment places structural limitations on trust by limiting prisoners' control over their environment and forcing them to live among criminals whose claims they have very little opportunity to test³⁰.

Given the nature of HMP Whatton's population, it might be expected that its prisoners were more mistrustful than mainstream prisoners. In fact, the majority of participants reported that 'everybody speaks to everybody in here' (Simon), and so the 'wing atmosphere' was 'friendlier' (Owen) than in other establishments — particularly for those prisoners who had been victimised elsewhere. HMP Whatton was certainly unusually trusting when it came to personal property. Most participants left their doors unlocked and very few reported thefts from cells — a marked contrast to most mainstream prisons. Similarly, many participants reported

that prisoners in HMP Whatton were more willing to lend tobacco and other goods without demanding double repayment (known as 'double bubble'). These feelings of trust resulted in part from the absence of an illegal drugs economy in HMP Whatton, as well as the fact that far fewer prisoners had been convicted of property offences, and contributed to its sense of safety. Nevertheless, a significant group of prisoners, mainly fathers of young children, were concerned about letting anyone in their cells, fearing that they might look at or steal their family photographs. This is also the case in mainstream prisons, and therefore it arguably reflects the paranoia created by imprisonment itself, and not just imprisonment alongside sex offenders³¹.

That said, prisoners in HMP Whatton experienced some specific anxieties relating to the ever-present spectre of their convictions. By inhibiting prisoners' ability to learn more about each other, imprisonment structurally creates mistrust about prisoners' previous lives. All prisoners know about each other is that they have been convicted of a criminal offence. This created particular pressure in HMP Whatton as the offences in question were all sexual, and sexuality is commonly thought to reveal the true identity of an individual³². The majority of prisoners interviewed insisted that offences were rarely discussed openly, but they also accepted that rumours, often originating in SOTP courses, spread quickly.

Aware that this was the case, some prisoners told others what their offences were, but most participants expressed scepticism concerning other people's claims about their convictions. The belief that 'you can't trust anyone in here, because people lie about why they're here in the first place' led prisoners to listen carefully to people's stories, looking for inconsistencies so they could 'catch people out' (Owen). If a prisoner refused to disclose, this was taken to suggest that he had a 'closet full of skeletons' (Troy). On the other hand, 'if you're always discussing your offence, it's because there's something you're trying to cover up' (Sam). Offences in HMP Whatton were 'floating' (Matthew): although prisoners rarely acknowledged discussing them, they were never forgotten and were the source of significant anxiety.

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29. Lieblich, A. assisted by Arnold, H. (2004) *Prisons and their Moral Performance: A Study of Values, Quality and Prison Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

30. Crewe (2009) see n.14.

31. Ibid.

32. Foucault, M. (1976/1998) *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, translated from the French by R. Hurley, London: Penguin Books.

Friendships

Mainstream prisoners rarely foster meaningful friendships while they are in prison. Limitations on trust, the break with pre-prison life and the risk of transfer combine to prevent their instigation and development³³. Although relationships do develop in prison, mainstream prisoners tend to stress their situational and superficial nature, referring to people as 'associates', 'acquaintances' and 'prison friends'³⁴. This was also the case for most prisoners in HMP Whatton:

They're only associates in jail. You're not gonna see them again when you get out. [...] I would probably just stay near with them and that, I won't connect with them. (Ed)

I don't call them friendships in here. I just call them acquaintances, because at the end of the day, there's some people in here you will never ever see again. (Nathan)

Proper friendships are only possible between mainstream prisoners who know each other from previous sentences or who recognise each other from their local area³⁵. Similarly, two of the younger participants in HMP Whatton, both of whom had been on the mains in their previous establishments, claimed that friendships were only possible between people from the same locality because³⁶:

We know what area we're from, do you understand, we know each other. (Malik)

These situations provided more information on which to ground judgements about an individual's character, counteracting imprisonment's constraints on trust.

However, very few prisoners in HMP Whatton thought that being from the same area enabled friendships. As it was a specialist establishment, HMP Whatton's inhabitants came from all over the country and were therefore unlikely to see people they knew or recognised. Furthermore, the territorial attachment to locality, and therefore the inclination to form friendships based on sharing it, is a hallmark of mainstream working-class masculinity³⁷. As many of HMP Whatton's prisoners

came from a middle-class background, they did not import this association.

The class background of many of HMP Whatton's inhabitants also relates to the absence of hypermasculinity in HMP Whatton. Liebling argues that the shallow nature of many relationships in prison results from the protective masks worn by prisoners to help them to survive their sentences³⁸. HMP Whatton's relative safety made it much easier to display frailty and express kindness. The differences between this culture and that which develops on the mains are illustrated by Darren's experiences. Darren had developed close and supportive friendships with other prisoners in HMP Whatton. He spoke movingly of the fact that his friends always 'seem to be there to pick the pieces up', for example after emotional phone calls or on the birthdays of his children. He could cry in front of them without worrying about looking like a 'pussy'. This had not been the case in his previous prisons, where he had been on the mains and had felt unable to display such sensitivity:

[In Whatton,] if I'm in a vulnerable state, I know no-one's gonna try and come and test me. Where in another jail, someone sees that you're vulnerable or you start letting someone pick on you a little bit, that's it, they'll come and bully you and bully you and bully you until you lash out, and then that's it then. So I think that's probably the reason why [I've been able to develop meaningful friendships in Whatton], you know, cos I know it don't matter what state I get in, no-one's gonna come and try and do anything.

Experiences like Darren's challenge the conventional argument that meaningful friendships are impossible in prison³⁹. Counter-intuitively, sex offenders in establishments like HMP Whatton might find it easier than mainstream prisoners to form meaningful friendships, as they do not need to fit into a culture dominated by masculine aggression.

However, friendships between sex offenders faced particular restrictions. Prison life is almost always temporary as prisoners will be released or transferred, a fact which often impedes relationships between mainstream prisoners⁴⁰. Release constituted a particular problem in HMP Whatton, as the licence

33. Cohen, S. and Taylor, L. (1972) *Psychological Survival: The Experience of Long-Term Imprisonment*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books; Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004) see n.29; Crewe (2009) see n.14.

34. Crewe (2009) see n.14.

35. Ibid.

36. 'On the mains': in a mainstream prison but not on a VPU.

37. Ibid.

38. Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004) see n.29.

39. See Crewe (2009) n.14; although see Cohen and Taylor (1972) n.33 for descriptions of intense friendships between two mainstream prisoners.

40. Crewe (2009) see n.14.

conditions for people convicted of sex offences often placed restrictions on communicating with other known sex offenders. Many prisoners in HMP Whatton had lost contact with their family and friends as a result of their conviction, and they now faced losing the relationships they made inside. Sam described the loss of these friendships as 'tragic' and 'choking', and attempted to protect himself by not fully committing to relationships with other prisoners:

If you have a friend outside, you'll be one hundred per cent friends with them. In here, you can only be about seventy per cent friends with them, because it's like every one of your friends have cancer or something, they're gonna suddenly die one day.

These methods may or may not be necessary to prevent further sexual offending. However, there is certainly some contradiction between such elements of the public protection agenda and HMP Whatton's attempts to create an environment in which prisoners supported each other through treatment, attempts which were central to HMP Whatton's rehabilitative identity.

Conclusion

This article has shown that, while there are certain similarities between the social world of HMP Whatton and that which develops in mainstream prisons, there are also significant differences. In part, these differences seem to result from imported differences between sex offenders and mainstream prisoners, in particular their differences in age and class background. Sex offenders also have to deal with the stigma created by their offending, and the resulting lack of mistrust they feel about those with whom they are imprisoned.

It is also clear, however, that many of these differences relate to the particular environment of HMP Whatton, for instance its focus on ensuring civility and tolerance between prisoners. One cannot generalize from the social world of one establishment to the social world of all prisons. Similarly one cannot assume that the experiences of a sex offender in HMP Whatton will be shared by a sex offender elsewhere. The next stage in the development of a sociology of prison life for sex offenders should be a comparative study, taking account of prisoners' experiences in different institutions. This would allow greater distinctions to be drawn between the experience of life as an imprisoned sex offender and the experiences of life as a sex offender in a particular prison.



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