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FROM CELEBRITY CRIMINAL TO CRIMINAL CELEBRITY: CONCERNING THE 'CELEBRIFICATION' OF SEX CRIME IN THE UK

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Abstract

Following the death of Jimmy Savile in 2011, a number of high profile British celebrities have been questioned about or arrested and charged with sexual offences. This article explores whether the high profile and thematic framing of sex crimes antecedent to this will presage any significant changes in how that form of crime, victim and offender is understood. The events leading up to the large numbers of celebrities being accused of sex crimes in the UK are discussed and ways of understanding and conceptualising the emergence of celebrity sex offenders are presented. Dominant discourses about sex offenders and victims of sex crimes are then considered and the implications of recent developments for these discourses are explored. The argument is made that a focus on the 'extra-ordinary' that celebrity sex offending undoubtedly entails will deflect attention away from the family root of most sexual abuse.

Keywords

Sex offending; victims; celebrity; Savile

Introduction

Our concern in this article is to explore aspects of the recent 'celebrification' of sex crime in the UK (Gamson, 1994; Harper & Treadwell, 2013). Sex crime is not a new phenomenon but recent incidents in the UK whereby various celebrities have faced allegations of sexual offending have catapulted the issue afresh into the public imagination. Whilst figures like Billy the Kid in the USA and Dick Turpin in the UK illustrate that the celebrity criminal has been around for some time, the criminal celebrity, and especially the celebrity sex offender, is a rarer more recent object of interest (Greer, 2003).

In the USA, Fatty Arbuckle was tried in the 1920s over the death of a fellow actress but more recently in 2002 Michael Jackson was charged with sexual offences against children. In the UK, Paul Gadd (aka the singer Gary Glitter) and Pete Townsend (guitarist with the rock band The Who) appeared in court in 2005 and 2007 respectively for offences relating to possessing indecent images of children. In the main, however, these have figured as isolated and episodic cases of alleged celebrity sexual offending which Iyengar (1991) has suggested tend to have little social impact. More recently, in the UK, a significant number of high profile celebrities have been accused and/or arrested for sex crimes. This article explores whether the high profile and thematic, as opposed to episodic, framing of sex crimes that arises antecedent to the arrest of so many celebrities can presage any significant changes in how that form of crime, victim and offender are understood (Iyengar, 1991). Though focused on events in the UK we intend the paper to make a contribution to understanding how discourses about sex crimes may be foregrounded and reproduced in other contexts where a number of celebrity offenders may emerge and capture the public imagination. We begin by discussing some of the events leading up to a number of celebrities being accused of sex crimes in the UK. Next we explore some of the ways of understanding and conceptualising the emergence of criminal celebrities, locating this discussion in the broader context of late modernity and the risk society. From there, we explore dominant discourses about sex offenders and the implications of the celebrification of sex crime for how sex offenders and their victims are viewed.

Rise of the Criminal Celebrity

It is apposite to note that 'celebrity' and 'celebrity status' is the epitome of inauthenticity or constructedness (Franklin, 1999), so that defining the field of interest of this paper is not a straightforward task. It is possible to draw distinctions between celebrities (A, B C-list), people who are well-known, people who are notorious and those who are famous. Whilst noting this, here 'celebrity' is used as an all-inclusive term for those who work in the media and thereby attract public attention. The paper focuses on the recent concern with 'celebrity' sex offending in the UK arising from the death and subsequent exposure of Jimmy Savile - a BBC TV presenter and DJ, as a predatory sex offender. In October 2012, twelve months after his death, a television documentary carried allegations that not only had Savile been a predatory sex offender, but that this had been widely known and tolerated by many within the entertainment industry (Exposure: The Other Side of Jimmy Savile, 2012). The 'revelations' prompted a number of Savile's victims to come forward and for allegations to emerge and prosecutions to be instigated against other celebrities. In many instances, as in the case of Savile, some of the allegations were historical, with some dating back to the 1960s, and it was suggested they had not been thoroughly

investigated or prosecuted by the authorities with any vigour at the time. In response the London Metropolitan Police launched Operation Yewtree, an investigation with three strands - into Savile himself, into Savile 'and others' he may have offended with, and into unrelated claims made against other celebrities. Twelve months on, a number of celebrities had become embroiled in the investigations - Stuart Hall, Freddie Starr, Jim Davidson, Dave Lee Travis, Rolf Harris, Max Clifford, Jimmy Tarbuck, William Roache, Michael Le Vell, Paul Gambaccini and Cliff Richards, amongst others are household names in the UK.² The question of which new or 'bigger' celebrity might be questioned or charged has generated feverish public speculation and online gossip. In December 2012 it was suggested 25 additional celebrities would be arrested (Furedi, 2013).

The origins of the criminal celebrity

The public and the media are obsessed with crime and celebrity (Greer, 2003; Thomas, 2005). In a context where urbanisation and globalisation have destabilised the traditional foundations for social order (rooted in religion, local community, nationhood or even gender) discussions about which celebrity one identifies with have come to serve as alternative processes wherein "relationships, identity, and social and cultural norms are debated, evaluated, modified and shared" (Turner, 2003:24). Rojek (2006) contends that historically, as texts, celebrities have served to promote consumption, multiple relationships and leisure. Presently, however, such a text is problematic and the roots of this may be traced to the moral crisis associated with the liberalising legislation and philosophy of the 1960s (Hall et al., 1978). From the late 1970s onwards, fuelled by the emergence of HIV/AIDS, public opinion began to converge on the idea that society had become too permissive and moral standards had declined too far. Bibbings (2009) suggests that a form of heterocrisis explains why subsequently 'pro-family' policies were championed at the same time as 'dissident' groups like single parents and people from the Lesbian and Gay community became the focus of negative rhetoric and exclusionary policies by a range of Western governments. Although from the 1990s onwards a more liberal discourse has re-emerged concerning sexual diversity, linked to this in many contexts has been claims that political correctness, or the desire to promote equality, has gone too far (Ford, 2008; Kohl, 2005; Marques, 2009). Throughout the decades a concern about 'celebrity lifestyles' and behaviours and the impact they, and the media in general, has on public behaviour has never gone away.

The sexuality of celebrities has always been of interest to the public and Surette (1998) argues sexual non conformity has always been associated with and tolerated within the artistic community. Rojek (2006) suggests that celebrities have always been considered more sexually active than non-celebrities. The music industry more so than the TV industry has been associated with a lifestyle of 'sex and drugs and rock and roll'. Osborne (1995:43) argues that in the UK and USA in particular "there is a prurient obsession with the sex lives of all public figures". More recently and in the context of a global economic downturn this interest and concern seems to have increased. Over the last few years the need for personal restraint and self-discipline has been emphasised. Utilitarianism and moderation, however, are not associated with celebrity culture. Indeed, hedonism and

² Only Hall, Clifford and Harris have been convicted of any criminal offence(s).

excessive individualism are increasingly blamed for the financial crisis sweeping the globe (Penfold-Mounce, 2009). As people's sense of self has come to be increasingly defined by which aspects of celebrity culture they consume, then celebrities, it might be argued, have come to be the focus for the establishment of a revised social order based on restraint and austerity. At the same time technological advances mean that celebrities and others in the public eye are presently subjected to a qualitatively different level of attention than at any time in the past. Mathiesen (1997) refers to the power of synopticism whereby in mediated worlds the 'many' are now able to exert control and bring a disciplinary gaze onto the few. Thus, more recently in the UK there has been the emergence of not just the criminal celebrity, but the criminal politician, criminal reporter, and the criminal police-officer.

The construction of the sex offender and their victims

According to Levenson et al. (2007) the nature of most sex crime is misunderstood and the risk of falling victim to a sex offender has hitherto been discursively constructed by the media, and consumed by the public, as arising from 'odd' strangers in public places. In the face of evidence that the typical (convicted) sex offender is likely to be known to the victim and a family member or friend, the typical perpetrator of sexual offending has been constructed as 'male, inherently evil, inhuman, beyond redemption or cure, lower class, and unknown to the victim (who is constructed as female)' (Gavin, 2005:395). Jewkes (2004) describes this as promoting paranoid parenting and pre-occupation with 'stranger danger' in the USA and UK. Also in the face of evidence which suggests victims of abuse are very reluctant to report matters to the police (Crow, 2003) a general distrust exists about the motivations of people who make accusations of sexual abuse. According to Jewkes (2004:159), even when their accounts are believed, victims of sex crime have typically been portrayed by the media as 'partly to blame for their victimisation'. This is especially likely to be the case if they are women who are deemed to have breached conventional gender roles.

Furedi (2013:1) suggests the revelation that Jimmy Savile was a sex offender, however, has been enough to occasion some moral upheaval in UK society and especially amongst people now in their 40s who grew up with the impression of him as an odd, but kind hearted 'people's entertainer'. More recently, in June 2014, UK Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt suggested Savile's actions "will shake our country to the core" (Hunt, 2014). The Metropolitan Police and Crown Prosecution Service have suggested that the investigations and arrests antecedent to Savile represent a 'watershed moment' in the history of investigating and dealing with allegations of sexual abuse in the UK (Jewkes & Wykes, 2012).

Such pronouncements herald the possibility that the arrest of Savile and other celebrities may challenge dominant discourse about sex offenders and presage changes in how sex offending is understood and managed in the UK (Jewkes & Wykes, 2012). Awareness of the problem of sexual abuse might increase because it is well established that the involvement of celebrities with a campaign or social issue increases the coverage given to it (Chibnall, 1977). Changes in the amount of attention given to a particular issue can be associated with shifts in levels of public concern about that issue. Perceptions may be

challenged because some of the celebrities accused of sex crimes occupy a middle ground in people's lives- being neither strangers nor familiars. Thus they are less readily identified as 'odd strangers' or 'the other'. Writing about Stuart Hall in the Daily Telegraph (Stanford, 2013), a reporter observed:

'He was in our lounge in Birkenhead so much, on the snowy TV screen in front of the three-piece, that he almost felt like one of the family.'

As Black (1997:15) argues "intimacy breeds partisanship" and according to Horton and Wohl (1993) a 'parasocial' relationship can exist between celebrities and some of their audience. The familiarity people often believe they have with celebrities and the power of 'identification' with them may partly explain why accusations made against so many UK celebrities were not investigated and were largely disbelieved for so many years. At the same time, however, this familiarity may occasion a more reflective appreciation of the relational and normative foundations of most sex offending. Attendant to a widespread feeling that Savile and some other celebrity sex offenders, 'groomed' the nation, a shared sense of having being victimised may engender a greater sense of affinity with, and empathy for more proximate victims of their crimes. There is already some basis for thinking that the celebrification of sex crime has affected the expectancies and the willingness of victims of sex crimes to come forward. In January 2013 BBC Radio 5 live Breakfast submitted a Freedom of Information request to all 45 UK police forces, asking about the number of allegations made under the Sexual Offences Act since the offending by Savile was made public (Five Live, 2013). Whilst crime reporting had in general reduced, there was a 9.2% rise in all recorded sex offences after October 1, 2012, compared to the six-month period before. In the same time frame there was an increase of around 40% in the reportage of historic sexual offences.

The Celebrity Criminal

Notwithstanding the potentialities highlighted above, here, we argue the celebrification of crime will do nothing to challenge popular understandings about sex offenders or their victims. This is because the celebrification of sex crime locates the 'danger' to women and children within the world of glitz and glamour rather than where it normally exists- in the home and within patriarchal structures. It associates the problem with unusual individual offenders like Savile and the multiple relationships and sexual freedom linked to celebrity culture rather than the heterosexual two parent norm.

After October 2012 Jimmy Savile arguably became the UK's highest profile and most well-known sex offender. Just as Myra Hindley and the police photograph of her with bleach blonde hair taken at the time of her arrest came to symbolise female criminality and evil in the UK (Birch, 1993), images of Jimmy Savile, ironically sporting the same bleach blonde hair, seem set to become representative of 'the sex offender'. A problem with association, however, is that it will likely come to cement in people's minds the association between sex offenders and 'otherness'. Savile fitted the stereotype of 'the other' in that he was an unconventional figure. For example, prior to his public denouncement his 'otherness' had recommended him as a subject for a documentary by Louis Theroux who had developed a niche for himself as a BBC reporter of deviant (albeit rarely criminal) lifestyles and

identities (When Louis met Jimmy, 2000). Finkelhor (1984) argues that one of the preconditions to be fulfilled before a sexual assault is committed is that external inhibitions to such an act are overcome. Savile did this and gained access to victims partly by portraying himself as an eccentric but 'harmless' child-centred philanthropist'. Savile's 'otherness', however, may explain why accusations against him 'stuck' so readily after his death when similar accusations against equally well known celebrities did not. In October/November 2012 various newspapers carried stories alleging sexual abuse by two other well-known British TV celebrities: Wilfred Bramble (Taylor et al., 2012) and Leonard Rossiter (Moyes, 2012). It does not bode well for securing convictions against celebrity offenders that a general reluctance exists on the part of jurors and members of the public to imagine that someone who is successful or famous could be guilty of a crime (Chamberlain et al., 2006). In addition the discussions and evaluations of social issues are effected by the 'meaning transfers' antecedent to involvement with celebrities (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995; McCracken, 1989). Whatever the nature of any particular celebrity's 'real' persona the public's knowledge of them is likely to be fashioned by the way they are presented in the media. Thus we suggest a common experience will be greater unwillingness to believe accusations against celebrities who do not fit the stereotype of a sex offender rather than those who do. Accordingly, it presents as no surprise that a columnist writing in *The Mirror* the day following Harris' conviction (Phillips, 2014) stated:

'Jimmy Savile. Yes, everyone thought he was a total weirdo from the distance of their TV screen. Stuart Hall? Yep, all the signs of a serial sleezeball. Max Clifford? About as surprising as rain in June. But Rolf Harris? Now this truly is shocking.'

Advertisers use the power of celebrity endorsements to forge links between their products and a particularly admired celebrity. More often than not the linkages and meaning transfers are positive in the sense that the dependent variable – whatever a celebrity is linked to, tends to be viewed more positively/less negatively as a result of the involvement with the celebrity. If this phenomenon is translated into the willingness of either the police to take an accusation seriously or a jury to convict, some variations in outcomes would be expected between those who fit the stereotype and those who do not fit the stereotype of sex offender. Moreover that notwithstanding who else is accused or convicted of a sex crime, the name and image of Jimmy Saville will still come to prominence and become iconographic of the typical sex offender.

Even when a more conventional and well-loved celebrity is accused and convicted of a sex crime it does not follow that the public will become more sensitised to the scale and nature of such offending. This is partly because a media 'personality' is not the property of specific individuals, but constructed discursively and thus celebrities can be made and unmade (Turner, 2004). In the case of Jimmy Saville the process of decelebrification has been both discursive and physical, as signs relating to his life and achievements (including his gravestone and plaques commemorating his life) have been defaced and/or removed. In the cases of Stuart Hall and Rolf Harris, who in most respects presented more conventionally than Saville, decelebrification has begun with the removal of the former celebrity's OBE for services to British culture, and the suggestion that Harris' CBE will be removed. Decelebrification is made easier by dint of what Turner (2004:52) has called

'the demotic turn' in celebrity culture in recent years whereby the 'ordinary person' may aspire to celebrity status through appearances on reality TV shows. A decline in deference in general towards people in power renders celebrity status more precarious and prone to deconstruction than it might once have been.

Added to this, the cultures within which journalists and newsrooms operate result in the packaging of news stories (Chibnall, 1977; Ericson et al., 1987). While preference is given in news reports to unusual events, in order to make these meaningful to the audience they are usually tied into existing explanations and stories (Surette, 1998). Complex events are often simplified (Altheide, 2006:416), and because the media industry services the mass market messages are usually delivered in an unambiguous way through simplistic binary opposites such as good versus evil (Osborne, 2002). In the service of decelebrification dehumanising discourses have been mobilised to re-brand former celebrities as 'sicko' 'paedo', 'pervert', 'depraved' and 'evil' as happened in the case of Gadd (Jewkes & Wykes, 2012:938), 'pervert' as in the case of Hall (Lines, 2013) and 'evil Aussie'/child sex monster' in the case of Harris (Pettifor, 2014).

One reason this is to be regretted is that a focus on 'depravity' and evil shifts moves attention away from the outwardly respectable, conventional 'normal' perpetrator of sexual violence. It feeds into stereotypes about sex offenders being readily identifiable and knowable on sight. It also focusses attention away from the way some organisations and cultures facilitates sexual abuse through a culture of silence. Thus Mejia et al. (2012) found that little attention was given to contextual information about the broader causes of sex offending in UK newspaper coverage of child sexual abuse between 2007 and 2009. There are parallels between features of the Savile case in the UK and those of celebrities in other contexts such as the case of Jerry Sandusky in the USA which became a media sensation (Belson, 2012). Sandusky worked as an assistant coach to the highly regarded Pennsylvania State University football team but was revealed in 2011 to have used his position to sexually abuse vulnerable boys. Subsequent enquiries suggested that just as was the case with Savile who offended on BBCTV premises his criminal actions were widely suspected but ignored (NSPCC, 2013). As part of the process of grooming, some offenders can be adept at manipulating workplace structures. In some instances however, it seems an overriding concern to protect the organisation implicated in the abuse can prevail to silence the victims concerned. Sanday (1996) proposed that some cultures can be described as rape-promoting. In a similar vein Stanko (1985) has argued that rape is not a product of male libido but of a culture which encourages men to use sex as a way of 'conquering' women and allows men to exploit and abuse women without fear of punishment. Here, explanations for sexual violence focus not on isolated acts but on the wider social context (Heidensohn, 2002). Suggestions that sexual abuse by celebrities such as Savile were ignored would support the conclusion that some organisations, as well as cultures can be rape supportive. In the Savile case, however, the role maledominated organisations and the social context played in his offending has hitherto attracted comparatively little interest.

Moving on, celebrity trials effectively focus on rich and relatively powerful and charismatic individuals who are alleged to have abused their position of power. Consequently particular discourses around victimisation are amplified in trials involving celebrities.

Celebrities are highly courted individuals, and this courting at times may be understood as fanatical and problematic (as in stalking) or desperate (groupie). This may fuel public understanding that some current offending is 'victim driven'. In many instances accusations made against celebrities appear to have been disbelieved or played down. According to research carried out by the NSPCC some of Savile's victims were laughed at or told they were lucky to have been 'picked' when they reported what had happened to them to the authorities (NSPCC, 2013). Newspaper reports have appeared questioning whether the 'victims' of celebrities were truly 'victims' or simply 'groupies' who concealed their young ages from those whom they courted (e.g. Allen, 2013; Meikle, 2012). Spalek (2006) argues that the credibility of 'victims' (or their entitlement to that status) is assessed according to factors such as their age, gender race and sexuality. As Heidensohn (1985) argues, however, an underlying assumption is often that women are liars, that they make false accusations and that they 'ask for it'. Claims to victimisation are stronger in relation to perpetrators who, ideally, are unquestionably evil. However, conferring unquestionable evilness on celebrities is problematic. In addition to this celebrities may plausibly claim to be the 'real victims' by suggesting their accusers seek to extort money from them. This was the defence mobilised with seeming success by Michael Jackson's lawyers in 2003, and has been discussed in relation to some of Savile's victims (Press Association, 2012). Indeed in 2009 Savile invoked that defence himself, in the first few seconds of an interview with Surrey police over allegations that he had offended:

'...but I've had so much of it in 50 years, it started in the 1950s and it's always either someone looking for a few quid, or story for the paper.'
(Surrey Police Interview Transcript, 2009:3)

It is not uncommon for a lengthy period to elapse before abused individuals are able to process what has happened to them well enough to report their experiences (Connolly & Read 2006). This may explain why many (but not all) of the offences linked to celebrities are historical in the sense they occurred when the adult victim was a child, and the celebrity was a much younger person. Criminal prosecutions of sexual abuse alleged to have occurred in the distant past, however, raise the issue of propriety of holding someone to account for something they may have done 30-40 years previously. In a report by the Metropolitan Police and the NSPCC into the offending of Savile the following point was made (Gray & Watt, 2013:24):

'It would be naive to view this case as the isolated behaviour of an individual rogue celebrity. We do, however, need to recognise the context of the 1960s and 1970s (the peak offending period). It was an age of different social attitudes and the workings of the criminal justice system at the time would have reflected this, even though the abuse committed was as illegal then as it is now. Thankfully attitudes have changed considerably in a relatively short period of time.'

The authors note that while sexual offending was illegal in the 1960s the moral landscape at that time was different to what it is now. Arguably, the point being made is that some behaviours currently perceived as insulting, demeaning and predatory may have been more normalised and acceptable then. Here we contend that evaluation draws primarily

on the history of the men who were engaging in such illegal acts rather than the women and children who were being victimised. Moreover none of the celebrities discussed in this article stand accused of simply being 'inappropriate' or 'caddish' in their behaviour. Savile, for example, stands accused of indecent assault on children as young as five years old. A perception that the 'real problem' is generational may, however, render a more accepting discourse around the celebrity offender and a conspiratorial discourse around victim motivation. As an example, it was widely reported that Bill Oddie, another popular British celebrity, suggested that Rolf Harris should not be demonised for having had a 'morning cuddle with his secretary', notwithstanding the actual charges he was facing, and was eventually found guilty of, were considerably more substantial (e.g. Nolan, 2013).

In addition to the 'generational' explanation of celebrity sex offending, lack of public information about what celebrities have been accused of doing may lessen public understanding of the issues involved. Here, Boutrous and Dore (2004) have noted a tendency for celebrity trials to be less accessible, or more secret, than trials of non-celebrities. Arguments that the pendulum has swung too far in favour of victims of sex crimes have existed for some time (Lees, 1995). It is possible to imagine that a large number of acquittals, as appear to be transpiring, could give rise to further questions about the propriety of prosecuting cases of historic sexual abuse and/or the credibility of witnesses in sex crime cases.

Over the last few decades, new representations of diversity in public discourse have enabled some minority groups to benefit from greater economic, civil and political freedoms, and their members to become more empowered and supported in making their wishes and aspirations known (McNay, 2004). A considerable body of literature attests to how members of the majority group adapt to maintain a dominant position, however, through developing new discursive practices which construct prejudicial views and behaviour as reasonable (Billig, 1988). Research literature points to the growing phenomena of, for example new sexism (Benwell, 2007). The celebrification of sex crime may be understood as part of the ideological spectacle of new sexism, extending and (re)making the legitimacy of patriarchy. This is firstly by dint of the arrest of some individual celebrities making it seem as if there is a genuine commitment to tackling the problem of male violence against women and children. Because the offences occur in a celebrity context, however, and individual men will become demonised, the routine ways women and children are subjected to male violence in the content of 'normal' close relationships will be relegated to an afterthought. Secondly, the arrest of so many celebrities will likely cohere opinion towards an understanding of the public sphere as dangerous. Correspondingly, this constructs family life as safe and preferred for women and children. Finally if, as predicted here, more acquittals than convictions follow, discourses which position men as the real victims of equality of opportunity for women will become more dominant.

Conclusion

Innes (2003) suggests that some crimes have historically become 'signal crimes' which have engendered a 'culturo-criminal discursive shift' in society. In the UK the murder of Stephen Lawrence may be understood as a signal crime that led to changes in police

practices with ethnic minorities in the UK. A creative tension may be occasioned when discourses about one phenomenon (in this case celebrity) collide with another (sex offending). Celebrities are often the loved and adored folk heroes of contemporary society (Penfold, 2004) whilst sex offenders are the monsters or folk devils (Silverman & Wilson, 2002). Thus the alleged sex crimes of celebrities may be thought of as having the potential of becoming 'signal crimes' - heralding changes in how sex offenders and their victims are understood.

In this paper, however, we have argued this potential will not be realised. The large number of arrests will recede in the public consciousness as part of what Olafson et al. (1993:7) call the enduring "cycles of discovery and suppression" of consciousness about child sexual abuse, leaving only the enduring image of Savile. The focus on the extraordinary that this entails will simply further divert attention from the routine ways women and children are oppressed and abused in families (Bibbings, 2009). Crime stories and celebrity gossip make up a very large proportion of media content. Surette (1998:62) describes crime stories involving celebrities therefore as 'super-primary' news stories. The way sex crime stories arise however, and are then packaged, is within the ambit of dominant discourses about that phenomenon. Savile's 'otherness' explains why accusations against him 'stuck' so readily after his death when similar accusations against equally well known celebrities have not. At the same time more conventional celebrities will be 'othered' and demonised to present news stories within dominant discourses to fuel stereotypes about sex offenders. This is of concern because Salter (2003) argues that it is misconceptions about sexual offenders that make people vulnerable to them and that it is only by dispelling the myths surrounding sexual offenders that people may be protected from them. Moreover how sex offenders are viewed has specific implications for policy and practice in relation, for example to sentencing and treatment approaches in the criminal justice system. As Black (1997) highlights, the outcomes of criminal proceedings can be readily witnessed to vary in accordance with the social characteristics of everyone involved. Outcomes become more positive as the social standing, conventionality and the degree of intimacy felt towards those involved increases. Notwithstanding practical difficulties associated involved in prosecuting historical cases of sexual abuse, this sets the scene for a large number of acquittals that will inevitably give rise to further questions about the credibility of witnesses in sex crime cases.

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