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My research aims to enhance understanding of the issues around the delivery of, and responses to cognitive-behavioural programmes delivered by the National Probation Service in a community setting, by exploring the ways in which gender, specifically masculinity, informs group work interactions with male and female offenders. I am investigating the ways in which gender is ‘accomplished’ within this context, how this impacts upon offenders’ motivation to participate, and the subsequent ‘learning’ that is achieved. My research also endeavours to expand upon the parameters of the ‘What Works’ evidence-based practice agenda and provide a more detailed insight into how programmes are delivered by tutors and ‘negotiated’ by offenders through the use of a predominantly qualitative methodology.

Amidst a range of static and dynamic risk factors associated with a greater likelihood of offending, such as poverty, age and ethnic origin, I have decided to concentrate on gender as it is widely accepted that this is one of the most significant factors associated with criminal behaviour (Messerschmidt, 1993; Farrington and Painter, 2006). It is also recognised that this is a research area which needs to be explored more fully (Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe, 2007; Rock, 2007), particularly in terms of cognitive-behavioural programmes where until very recently issues such as gender and ethnicity have been neglected (Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004). I am therefore observing the delivery of three cognitive-behavioural programmes and conducting semi-structured interviews with offenders, Treatment Managers, and Programme Tutors delivering these courses. For the purposes of my project I am currently defining ‘education’ and ‘learning’ within the context of rehabilitation with regard to offending behaviour, and more specifically in terms of cognitive-behavioural programmes. However, I hope to come to a more sophisticated understanding of the varying distinctions between these terms as my research progresses.

The study involves the consideration of three fields:
1. Theoretical context
2. Policies relating to offenders and forms of rehabilitation.
3. Literature regarding gender, crime and cognitive-behavioural ‘learning’.

In terms of theoretical context, my research will explore some of the epistemological tensions between (and within) the disciplines of criminology, psychology, education and gender studies. With regard to my own theoretical standpoint I am taking a social constructionist approach to gender when exploring group work interactions, and questioning some of the approaches towards ‘learning’ as it is defined within the psychological paradigm of cognitive-behavioural programmes. Clive Hollin (2007) has tracked some of the theoretical developments in psychology and criminology during the
20th century and his chapter sub-headings chart a relationship that began with ‘early accord’, but subsequently developed to a point during the 1960s where there was ‘little common ground’. By the 1970s he describes the two disciplines as ‘not on speaking terms’. Hollin attributes this growing tension to the development of the ‘new criminology’ in the 1970s which focused on social accounts of criminal behaviour and was explicitly Marxist in orientation, whereas psychology continued to focus on the individual for more essentialist explanations of human behaviour. In spite of the social and political slant that the ‘new criminologists’ brought to the discipline during the 1970s, the discipline of criminology is still seen by some researchers as being ‘heavily empirical and often untheoretical’ (Naffine, 1997:5). It has also been accused of ‘positivism’ (the epistemological belief that the social sciences should base their methodology on the natural sciences thereby obtaining an ‘objective’, valid and generalisable truth) and David Smith argues that this ‘positivist’ approach has recently made a dramatic comeback which can be witnessed in the, now mainstream ‘What Works’ agenda for the rehabilitation of offenders, based on cognitive-behavioural theory (Smith, 2004).

The postmodernist movement has not left the discipline of criminology untouched, however, and researchers such as Ngaire Naffine (1997) have argued that criminologists need to incorporate post-structuralist insights into their work and ‘relinquish the traditional scientific desire to document exhaustively, to know fully and hence, to master the individual as scientific object of investigation’ (1997:151). Using Derrida’s concept of language being constructed through ‘différence’, Naffine points to the need to problematize the concepts of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as being natural, stable, and fixed terms. She argues that:

‘We do not discover the world, in its raw essentials, through the rigorous use of scientific method. Instead, we constitute the world and we do so linguistically. We come at the world already within a language, and within that language there is already encoded a particular way of looking at the world, a philosophical framework’. (1997: 140)

Although feminist researchers such as Heidensohn and Gelsthorpe (2007) would tentatively agree with this position, they express concern that these theories will not yield concrete practical insights and they appear to be troubled by the fact that ‘in many respects they make the task infinitely more complex, particularly the new ‘puzzles’ suggested to us by questions of subjectivity’ (2007:390). My research draws on post-structuralist and feminist concepts from researchers such as Naffine, but also aims to develop these ideas beyond the level of theory and explore the ways in which these ideas can have practical applications and outcomes for those working in the criminal justice system.

With regards to theories of gender, I am drawing on the ideas of R.W. Connell (1987, 2002) who has been particularly influential in this area. Connell significantly refuted ‘sex-role’ theory which emerged during the 1950s and ‘60s and has subsequently influenced popular ways of thinking about gender. Although Connell acknowledges that sex-role theory was a conceptual breakthrough which initiated many educational reforms, he argues that ‘sex role’ theory ignores the power and politics inherent in gender relations and ultimately rests upon notions of biology and natural difference. Connell stresses that gender is primarily a matter of social relations and argues against
such biological determinism, although he continues to stress the importance of the body in terms of constructions of gender. For Connell, gender is accomplished in a ‘reproductive arena’ which is essentially ‘the bodily site where something social happens’ (2002:48), for example gender segregation in the work place, or debates and laws on abortion. As such, Connell highlights the centrality of women’s oppression and locates gendered behaviour within the context of power relations. He stresses the need for discovering how gender patterns are constructed and practiced and details the main structures through which the system of gender relations operates: power, production, emotions (or cathexis) and symbolic relations.

Connell also developed the concept of multiple masculinities and most significantly the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ which draws on Gramsci’s theory of hegemony; the cultural domination of one group over another by achieving a perceived consensus or naturalization of ideas. Hegemonic masculinity signifies authority and leadership and although it may not be the most common version of masculinity, it is highly visible. It does not eliminate other forms of masculinity; however it controls and sanctions what is acceptable. Connell also identified several other types of masculinity; ‘subordinate’ masculinities which are oppressed and repressed (for example gay masculinities), and ‘marginal’ masculinities which operate at the intersection of race and class and are contingent upon the sanctions of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, Connell draws attention to ‘complicit’ masculinities comprising of men who do not necessarily subscribe to hegemonic masculinity but who benefit from the power which the hegemonic ideal wields over other groups, mainly women. Connell’s definitions are beneficial to my research in order to aid my understanding of the different constructions of masculinity. However, it is worth bearing in mind the warning from Richard Collier (1998) that although the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is appealing, it can be problematic in that there is a danger for it to become a character type or set of traits which can lead to a universalising and misleading notion of masculinity and an overarching explanation for male criminal behaviour. Therefore Collier stresses the need to conduct research with an awareness of Connell’s principle idea that gender is dynamic and achieved through social practices within social structures, and is never closed, fixed or resolved.

Regarding government policies relating to the rehabilitation of offenders, I am tracking the development of the ‘What Works’ agenda and the manner in which it has been rapidly adopted by the government (Mair, 2004). Prior to the 1970s a medical model based on traditional counselling was being used by social workers in an attempt to ‘treat’ offenders. However, very little evaluative research was conducted on recidivism rates and the research carried out was negative or inconclusive with regards to the effectiveness of these early psychological interventions. Many researchers came to the conclusion that ‘nothing works’ and advised abandoning treatment (Hollin, 2007). Gendreau and Ross (1979) however began to draw on North American and Canadian cognitive behavioural therapy programmes and demonstrated that these interventions were having an impact upon reconviction rates. They concluded that something worked after all in terms of the treatment of offenders (Clarke, 2000). During the 1990s, a range of cognitive-behavioural interventions were implemented in the UK by the Prisons and Probation Service, and a growing body of research reviewing these programmes led to the development of the ‘What Works’ philosophy (McGuire, 1995) which stresses a ‘scientist-practioner’ approach to working with offenders informed by ‘evidence-based practice’ and a belief that punitive measures do not reduce crime. For example, Lipsey
(1995) reviewed 400 studies addressing juveniles in custody and community settings. He concluded that after 6 months of treatment, there was on average a 10% reduction in offending.

The second strand of government policies I am addressing are those related to education. There is a well-established body of research which has demonstrated that poor behaviour, non-attendance or low achievements at school can lead to offending behaviour (Harper and Chitty, 2005; Youth Justice Board, 2006), and although it has been acknowledged that education is just one part of a range of effective interventions, it has been established that raising education and skill levels can help to reduce re-offending (Brazier and Hurry, 2006). Brazier and Hurry acknowledge that although education is evidently extremely important in terms of rehabilitation, further research needs to be carried out in order to more fully understand the barriers to learning and how to effectively engage offenders (Brazier and Hurry, 2006). An initial review of the literature also suggests that comparatively little research on education for offenders in specific settings, notably in prisons or in the community, has taken place. As such, I am interviewing offenders in a community setting as part of my research in order to discuss their previous educational experiences and potential barriers to learning in terms of cognitive-behavioural programmes. In a cognitive-behavioural context, the language of ‘learning’ has developed from theories which aim to ‘teach’ new skills in order to change behaviour. This is evident in the writing of Goldstein, Glick and Gibbs, who developed the Aggression Replacement Training (ART) programme. They emphasise that the programme’s methods ‘are psycho-educational, and its successes are measured in terms of learning’ (1998:209). They also claim that they view ‘the individual in therapy more in educational, pedagogic terms than as a client in need of therapy’. (1998:48). George Mair expresses concerns regarding this approach however, stating:

‘An educative model is used in accredited programmes to remedy the cognitive deficits from which offenders suffer. Probation staff ‘teach’ offenders correct models of thinking from manuals which have to be followed with no deviations. This model, which seems to rely heavily on teaching by rote, is not calculated to appeal to offenders who – almost certainly – have not been successful at school and who may indeed have fallen out of education early. It may also lead to a lack of interest and therefore motivation – and motivation is a key factor in desistance from crime’ (Mair, 2004:4).

With regards to education, my research addresses the ways in which cognitive-behaviourism uses the language of education and ‘learning’ and exploring some of Mair’s concerns regarding the construction of ‘deficits’ and ‘teaching by rote’, particularly in the light of policy research which has stressed the need to actively and creatively engage and motivate offenders in the light of previous underachievement at school.

A vast amount of academic literature has been written in the areas of gender and crime, and there is a growing body of research assessing the ‘What Works’ movement. The following provides a brief overview of significant researchers who will inform my research. In terms of work that has been written regarding gender and crime, Newburn and Stanko state that ‘the most significant fact about crime is that it is almost always committed by men’ (1995:1). This universally acknowledged situation appears to have been accepted since the inception of criminology and the studies of Lombroso.
However, until recently many studies have tended to gloss over this point focusing not on why men commit so much crime, but why women commit so little (Heidensohn, 2002). This perspective has lead researchers to comment that the field of criminology has been ‘alarmingly gender blind’ (Messerschmidt, 1993:1). In more recent years feminist criminology has begun to address this issue and has moved away from seeing female offenders as ‘special’ and male offenders as ‘normal’, instead concentrating on why men are more likely to offend rather than why women do not. Male offenders are also being researched as ‘gendered beings’ (Naffine, 1997:2) on an increasingly regular basis.

Many researchers such as James Messerschmidt (1993) have drawn on Connell’s theory of gender in order to develop new theoretical tools for understanding why crime is committed disproportionately by men. Messerschmidt argues that the socially constructed nature of gender means that, ‘masculinity is accomplished, it is not something done to men or something settled beforehand. And masculinity is never static, never a finished product. Rather, men construct masculinities in specific social situations (although not in circumstances of their own choosing); in so doing, men reproduce (and sometimes change) social structures’ (1993:80). Messerschmidt claims that there are a variety of ways of ‘doing masculinity’ and particular demonstrations of it form part of a behavioural response to particular conditions and situations. He suggests that boys and men will be more likely to turn to crime if other legitimate resources are unavailable. In relation to my own project I draw on Messerschmidt’s notion of masculinity being ‘accomplished’ and the ways in which masculinity and crime operate within specific social structures and institutions. More recently Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have addressed some of the criticisms that have been aimed at the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and also regret that the concept of ‘emphasised femininity’ has dropped out of focus. ‘Gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (real or imaginary) of femininity’ (2005:848). My research aims to take on board this comment by including women as well as men in this study of masculinities. In relation to this, I also address Judith Halberstam’s work on female masculinity in which she claims that ‘masculinity and maleness are profoundly difficult to pry apart’ (1998:1). Through an exploration of the ‘alternative masculinities’ of women, she provides a way in which explicit constructions of masculinity as being separate from ‘maleness’ can be understood (Halberstam, 1998). Female offenders, particularly those who have been convicted of violent offences, have transgressed the culturally constructed boundaries of femininity, so I believe that the concept of ‘female masculinity’ will be crucial to explore in greater depth as part of this research.

In terms of the ‘What Works’ literature, in a recent collection of essays entitled ‘What Matters in Probation’ (2004), researchers have critiqued the cognitive-behavioural programmes for having a flimsy evidence-base (Kendall, 54:2004), a pathological model of ‘cognitive-deficits’ which treats offenders as excluded ‘others’ (Mair, 2004), and for failing to pay attention to gender and cultural diversity (Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004). Criticism of coercive cognitive-behavioural therapy is also voiced from psychologist Ronald Blackburn, who points out that the focus on the individual offender and their ‘cognitive-deficits’, draws attention away from the hidden political nature of interventions, stating that once behaviour has been labelled ‘deviant’, intervention from those in authority ‘may entail the imposition of a particular ideology or set of values. The rhetoric of rehabilitation as a liberal and liberating enterprise conceals the contradiction that it is a strategy aimed at changing the individual to conform with..."
prevailing societal norms’ (1993: 411). In ‘Offending Behaviour Programmes’ (2006) Clive Hollin and Emma Palmer defend the interventions and criticism leveled at them in ‘What Matters in Probation’ by describing the academic debate around the ‘What Works’ movement as ‘destructive in-fighting’. In the same collection, James McGuire vigorously defends the interventions in the following manner:

‘The word programme sounds sinister to some people as it conjures up images of a rigid and insensitive method of working. Indeed it appears to send shivers down the spines of some personnel working in criminal justice. The adoption of such practices has been disparaged as ‘Orwellian’ and comparisons have been drawn with Cold War brainwashing techniques or *Clockwork Orange* scenarios. The reality is more mundane. Delivering programmes is plain hard work and requires considerable skill. It is also more humane and potentially liberating’. (McGuire 2006:70).

I plan to expand upon this debate further in my thesis and will also be exploring the ethical implications of ‘coercive’ therapy alluded to by Blackburn and also discussed at greater length by Christine Padesky (1993), William R. Miller (1994) and Brian Sheldon (1995).

In order to further my overall aim of investigating how male and female offenders ‘negotiate’ cognitive-behavioural programmes run by the Probation Service in a community context, I aim:

- to provide an insight into how programmes are delivered by tutors and ‘negotiated’ by offenders.
- to explore the multiple ways in which gender is ‘accomplished’ through learning interactions and how this relates to male and female offenders’ participation and subsequent learning.
- to identify potential barriers to education and how these link to current motivation and participation in cognitive-behavioural programmes.
- to assess the developing policy attitudes and discourses of the government regarding offending, rehabilitation and the ‘What Works’ agenda, by analysing policy documents and newly published research.
- to consider what the implications of the above are in the context of a probation learning environment and suggest how these issues can be addressed.

I have currently identified five research questions which I hope will enable me to achieve the above aims:

- How do offenders ‘accomplish’ particular forms of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ through group work interactions?
- How does this impact on their attitudes towards, and participation in cognitive-behavioural programmes?
- How do past educational experiences affect current motivation and learning?
• How are the discourses surrounding crime, ‘masculinities’ and ‘learning’ constructed in relation to each other, and how is this translated into policy and professional practice?

• What social and institutional factors affect the quality of programme delivery in a Probation learning environment?

The majority of research that has taken place with regard to cognitive-behavioural programmes have relied on quantitative methodologies, and researchers have argued that this trend for ‘evidence-based’ research designs have largely been driven by pressure from policymakers to provide quick and easily measurable results (Hammersley, 2005; Hollin and Palmer, 2006; Rock, 2007). These studies have tended to focus exclusively on reconviction rates and although they have helped to establish what works, they are comparatively limited when trying to discover how or why these interventions work. Thus, Tilley has said that instead of asking ‘What Works’? A better question would be, ‘what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how’ (cited in Muncie, 2004a: 278). David Smith (2004) argues that ‘the decontextualised preoccupation with outcomes of much positivist evaluation means that most of its results are inconclusive or contradictory, because the theories that it is supposed to be testing depend crucially on the context and process of their implementation’ (2004:43). Government reports have also warned against ‘sausage factory’ interventions (Hobbs and Cook, 2001) and unresponsive ‘one size fits all’ approaches to rehabilitation and learning (Clarke et al, 2004). I would agree with Smith that the contextualised actions of participants, of tutors, the institutional learning environment, and other members of staff in that environment, all have an important role to play in the impact and effectiveness of interventions and I anticipate that my qualitative framework will enable me to explore some of these contextualised issues.

In terms of my contribution to knowledge with regard to gender, crime and cognitive-behavioural ‘learning’, Shaw and Hannah-Moffat (2007) have argued that the majority of meta-analytic studies which have informed the evidence-base of the ‘What Works’ movement have been based on research with young, white, male populations in the USA, and as a result cognitive-behavioural programmes have been designed for white men and simply assumed to be applicable to women and people from non-white ethnic backgrounds. They call for further work in this area in order to explore how women respond to cognitive-behavioural programmes. Heiddensohn and Gelsthorpe (2007) and Rock (2007) have also agreed that further work is needed in the area of gender and crime more generally and argue that a fuller exploration of the area is needed. With regards to including the views of offenders in my research, Brazier and Hurry (2006) have reported that ‘offenders are often excluded and marginalised within the research process. Researchers need to involve more learners who have direct experience of education and training … the criminal justice system is a major context of their lives and they are in the best position to address questions about motivation and further aspirations’ (Brazier and Hurry, 2006). I would support this idea of engaging offenders’ views as an extremely important part of my research and with the data collected I aim to identify how interventions could be improved as a result.
Although the focus of my investigation is primarily on men and the role of ‘masculinities’, in order to more broadly understand how gender is ‘accomplished’, I am also researching the ‘masculinities’ of female offenders (Halberstam, 1998). Therefore, I am observing the delivery of three cognitive-behavioural programmes, comprising both male and female offenders, attending Surrey Probation. I am currently observing two Enhanced Thinking Skills (ETS) groups, and one Aggression Replacement Training (ART) group. The group numbers range from 8 to 13 members. However, it is expected that there will be some attrition of offenders from the programmes and some may not wish to participate, so the actual number of interviews conducted may be relatively small. I am also conducting interviews with the Treatment Managers and Programme Tutors to explore their reactions to delivering these programmes.

I have decided to use a qualitative methodology by observing the groups and conducting semi-structured interviews with participants at the end of the programme. Sessions are being watched on a monitor outside the room and full and informed consent has been requested from participants in advance. I am currently making field notes, not only on what I observe during the session via the camera, but also in reception and the programmes office before and after the session in order to give a more fully ethnographic account of the setting in which the programmes are delivered (Emerson et al, 1995). The field notes I am taking are divided into categories with an emphasis on the study aims and the observation itself has consisted of viewing 5 of the 2 hour sessions at different points in the programme. In terms of my approach regarding the interviews, I would agree with researchers such as Jennifer Mason (2002) who see interview responses as products of interpretive practice. She argues that researchers should not approach interviews with a mindset of ‘knowledge excavation’ and claims that it is impossible to ‘unearth’ relevant data ‘because the phenomenon under research does not have a static decontextual and therefore uncoverable existence’ (2002:227). Instead she suggests that researchers should ‘treat the interview as a site of knowledge construction, and the interviewee and interviewer as co-participants in the process’ (p227). Therefore, I am adopting a semi-structured approach to my interviews as I believe that from this epistemological position, the interviewee is seen as being more than just a ‘passive vessel’ from which to gain knowledge, and both interviewer and interviewee are actively engaged in the process of knowledge production (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997:114). I believe that a semi-structured, flexible approach to interviewing will provide a rich and detailed source of data and allow participants to discuss their previous educational experiences and reflect on their attitudes towards group work and ‘learning’ on the programme.

I am also drawing on feminist approaches to interviewing and considering the potentially hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee. In her influential article ‘Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms’ (1981), Ann Oakley critiques what she sees as the ‘masculine paradigm’ of interviewing which prioritises objectivity and the power of the researcher over the respondent (1981:38). Oakley argues that engagement and reciprocity are vital parts of the interview situation and interviewers who disengage from and objectify their respondents are creating a hierarchical relationship and placing themselves in a position of power. My thesis will address the issues that Oakley raises and discuss the work of researchers such as Diana Scully (1990) who interviewed rapists in a prison setting and as such, found it necessary to challenge some of the limitations of Oakley’s (1981) ideas. Scully argues...
that feminist research needs to do more than just record the experiences of women and that a great deal of work also needs to be done with men. She states that 'while not diminishing the continuing responsibility to illuminate women’s subordinate condition, the debunking of patriarchy is not accomplished by focusing exclusively on the lives and experiences of women’ (1990:3). Scully argues that research with men, particularly those convicted of violent or sexual offences, present very different issues in terms of how to negotiate a ‘non-hierarchical’ interview relationship. In terms of my own identity and standpoint, I will also be discussing the work of feminist researchers such as Ngaire Naffine (1997) and Sandra Harding (1987) who have discussed the need for reflexivity when undertaking research and the need to be aware that 'who is doing the knowing affects what is known’ (Naffine, 1997:29). I would agree with this need for researcher reflexivity and will be discussing my own position as a researcher-practitioner in the course of the thesis and assessing how this will affect my research standpoint. As a white, middle-class woman, I also need to address the way in which this may affect the nature of the interviews, as some participants may equate my position as researcher with that of probation staff, not least because the interviews will be taking place in the Probation Offices. With regard to the ethical issues involved, all participants have been fully informed regarding the project’s aims and objectives and their potential role in the research. They have been asked to provide formal consent to their part in the research with the understanding that they are free to end their participation at any point and it will not be counted against them in terms of their court order in any way. Anonymity has been guaranteed to participants and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of individuals in the publication of the research.

The above has aimed to provide some background information to my field of research and discuss my research questions and methodology. I believe that in order to bring new insights to the area of the rehabilitation of offenders, cognitive-behavioural programmes need to be researched from the perspectives of different paradigms, particularly from feminist and post-structuralist perspectives. I hope that my work will add to the body of work on gender, crime, and cognitive-behavioural ‘learning’, provide a contextualised piece of qualitative research in an area which is dominated by quantitative studies, and include the views of offenders whose opinions are so often marginalised and excluded.

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