Organisational Evil, Total Institutions, and Epistemic Injustice: Understanding the Savile Sexual Abuse Scandal

Tom Calvard & Kate Sang
University of Edinburgh Business School & Heriot-Watt University
Introduction and Theoretical Background

- ‘Time’s Up’ and ‘Me Too’ movements – sexual predators
- Abuse, harassment and trauma
- Women, children and other vulnerable groups
- Woven into fabric of our organisations and institutions
- Evil requires organisation and social psychology (e.g. Holocaust)
- Some ‘thriving at work’ at massive cost to others?
- Dark side of organisation (complex relation with bright side)
- Risk, reputation, misconduct, disaster, gender, power, well-being
Triadic Framings: Perpetrator, Victim, Environment

Perpetrator(s) ↔ Environment ↔ Victim(s)
Motive(s) ↔ Means ↔ Opportunity
Person(s) ↔ Situation(s) ↔ Interactions

Toxic Leadership Triangle (Padilla et al. 2007)

Sexual Assault Analysis Triangle (Dedel 2011)
Cressey (1950)

- Relieve pressure
- Minimise opportunity
- Target rationalisation
Three Main Organisational Frameworks

• 1) Evil in organisations and dark side of organizational life
  - Banality of evil, administrative evil, wilful blindness

• 2) Total and gendered institutions
  - Tightly organised, closed-off power structures
  - Sexism deeply embedded and seen as ‘natural’ or ‘real’

• 3) Epistemic injustice
  - Not being seen as credible or believed, not being able to articulate

Case Study: Empirical Materials

• 2012, 450+ victims, 13-14 police forces
• IICSA drags on in UK society/state
• Systematic, interdisciplinary literature review
• Journalism/media studies, criminology, social work etc.
• 11 major sources in form of public inquiry reports
• Dan Davies (2014) book, TV documentaries
Figure 5 - Chronology of offending.

Timeline of allegations (including notable locations)

- No. of allegations: 16, 14, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2, 0

- Categories: Other, Duncroft School for Girls, Leeds - General Infirmary, London - BBC Centre, Stoke Mandeville Hospital

MPS/NSPCC (2013)
Figure 2 - Female victims by age.

Figure 3 - Male victims by age.

MPS/NSPCC (2013)
Findings 1/3: Total and gendered institutions

• BBC culture fragmented, alienating, authoritarian, macho
• Difficulty gauging levels of awareness up hierarchy
• Cultural resistance to challenge celebrity or ‘light entertainment’
• Social psychological separations and distances by gender
• The premises, the failures of governance
• The privacy and security turned to predators’ advantage
• Cultural and historical norms
• Everyday relevance for organisations today noted
Findings 2/3: Deviant institutional agents

- Working the dark side of trust – keeping others’ secrets
- Boundary-spanning elite institutions – police, media, charity etc.
- Entrepreneurial, one-man business model (Svejenova et al. 2010)
- Creation of entitled ‘vehicles’ and ‘roles’ for himself
- “treated women as accessible and disposable” (Boyle 2017: 6)
- “no need to chase girls, I’ve thousands of them…you can brush them away like midges” (Savile 2009)
- “the charismatic, articulate, well-networked, caring professional” (Doran & Brannan 1996: 158)
- Gag orders, settlements out of court, litigiousness
Findings 3/3: Epistemic injustice toward victims

- Impressionable, star-struck and vulnerable
- Victims mostly laughed at, ignored, dismissed or told to keep quiet
- ‘VIP’ versus fans ‘looking for a few quid off a newspaper’
- Defining and investigating the abuse becomes part of the abuse
- Various forms of denial strategy possible
- Credibility imbalance unfairly rigged from the outset
- Analogous to how companies deal with regulators, whistle-blowers
- Victims isolated and their power is diluted, also over time
‘Spider’s Web’ Model of Abuse in Organisations

Focal Actors (‘spiders’)
- High status/power/celeb
- Control PR
- Institutional agency
- Patriarchal

Large Organisations (‘silk’)
- Total institution aspects
- Interlock at elite societal level
- Institutional sexism
- Supporting logics
- Solidarity, collusion

Victims (‘flies’)
- Not credible ‘knowers’
- Isolated
- Institutionalised
- Gendered

Organisation of evil, abusive situations & acts
Conclusions and Implications

• Zero-tolerance, reporting, activism, prevention, risk
• But – celebrity and outsider powers and status
• Allies and change agents, trained and empowered (‘spider catchers’?)
• Part of well-being and inclusion agendas (Calvard & Sang 2017)
• Our institutions and how they shape our psychology
• Victims, environments and perpetrators – triadic modelling
• Complicity and institutional discrimination – breaking cycles
• Asking difficult questions about sexual/gendered power and politics
• Identifying vulnerable stakeholders and giving them voice
Thanks for your attention
Keep in touch!

Email: thomas.calvard@ed.ac.uk
Twitter: @TomCalvard