



promoting youth involvement and social engagement



# Challenging the stigma of criminalised identity in young people

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## UK Case study: Risky youth and criminalised identities

### CONCEPT

Young people constructed as problematic through negative representations.

Increasing and varied interventions shaped by the political rhetoric of punitiveness resulting in a climate of regulation, criminalisation and reduced life chances.

Qus: How do young people experience this negative construction? What are their responses? What forms do innovation/ resistance/ resilience take?

### METHOD

18 months of engagement and participant observation

20 interviews with young people seen as 'risky'  
◦ eg serving sentences for criminal behaviour, excluded from school, attending interventions designed for young people at risk, living in vilified neighbourhoods.

Age range: 13-32 (most 15-19)

Arts-based & participatory methods

Photo elicitation

Deakin, J., Fox, C., & Matos, R. (2020). Labelled as 'risky' in an era of control: How young people experience and respond to the stigma of criminalized identities. *European Journal of Criminology*.



# Stigma

## What is stigma?

Stigma is *'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' as a result of any attribute or 'undesirable difference' that is 'deeply discrediting'*.  
(Goffman, Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity 1963/1990: 9)

- socially dependent, relational and contextual

### Main criticisms:

- Individualist, reductionist focus
- Failure to account for structural and contextual issues
- Failure to locate within a context of power struggles



## More recent conceptualisations of stigma

Moving on from Goffman: how constructions of inequality are inevitably tied to different forms of social, political and economic power

(Link and Phelan, 2001; Tyler and Slater, 2018)

**BUT:** Accused of further stigmatising vulnerable groups

## Why Stigma?



A logical framework to understand young people's lives

- –how they experience and respond to stigma and marginalisation (as they define it, if indeed they do),

This must not position young people as 'problem' or 'victim' but explore their own understandings of their lives.

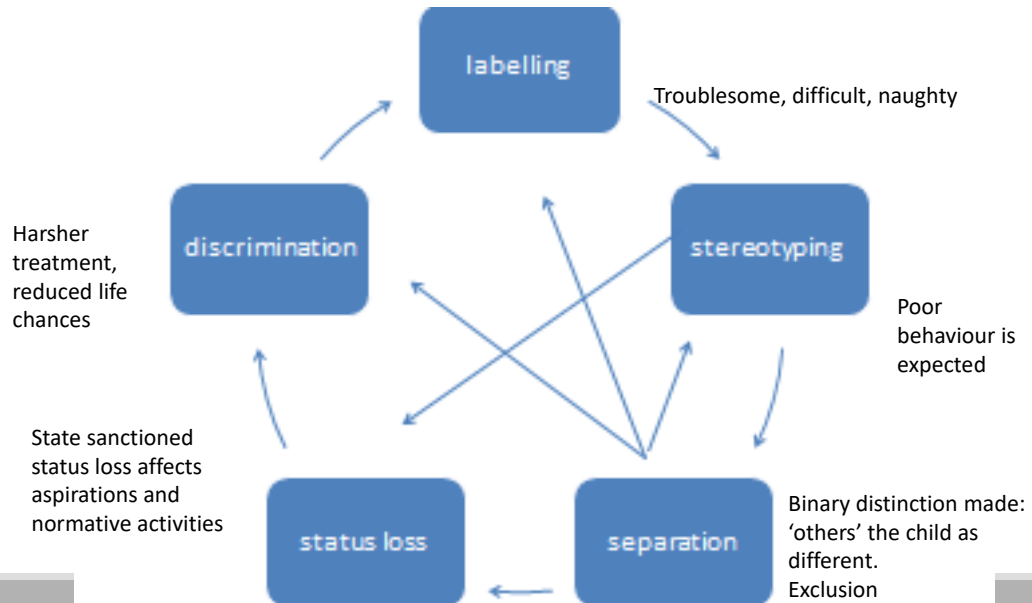
Set up a general experience of stigma as a dynamic relationship between a set of components that we can build responses from.

'[W]e apply the term stigma when elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold'

(Link and Phelan, 2001: 367).



## Education and early stigma



## Policing and street-based stigma: a common story



Descriptions of excessive control, police heavy-handedness, police over-surveillance

Young people feeling they are heavily policed, heavily regulated – an exercise in youth social control.

Clear sense of a 'them' and 'us'

Frustration with police, hostility, problematic relationships.

Lack of trust in police, and lack of trust from police.

## On the police:

*I just can't be bothered with them...They hurt my ears.... They won't listen to me anyway, they'll think that I'm lying or something. And they chase us for no reason; follow us for no reason. When we just ride our bikes... they actually ride behind.... They're grown men – don't they have nothing better to do?(Troy, aged 14)*

*I don't think they should manhandle you like they do... I've seen a police officer manhandle a girl, like push her down on the floor like a man...Like he pushed her down and held her there. She wasn't even struggling. He was just panicking...He didn't know what he was doing. (Jo, aged 19)*

*I would not ring the police, like no matter how frightened I was. Because I feel like they are definitely against me, definitely like. I've had bad like, things with the police, definitely, had bad times. (Amelia, aged 21)*

## Standards for children in the youth justice system, 2019



The principle 'child first' guides the work of the YJB.

1. Prioritise the best interests of children, **recognising their needs, capacities, rights and potential.**
2. Build on children's individual strengths and capabilities as a means of developing a pro-social identity for sustainable desistance from crime. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on **supportive relationships** that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.
3. Encourage children's **active participation, engagement** and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.
4. Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. **All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.**

(p6 edited, bold added)

How can we challenge the stigma of criminalised identity in young people?

## Collaborative steps forward to reduce labelling and stigma

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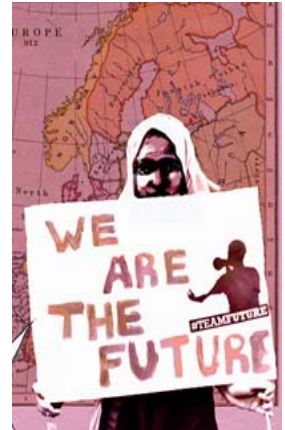
Encourage affective dyadic relationships in policing and interventions

- Recognition and dignity
- Listening, hearing, responding  $\implies$  language
- Cognitive engagement
- Focusing on developmental elements, future opportunity

Safe spaces for expression  $\implies$  Conflict as opportunity

Co-creation of interventions

*every action matters, every choice matters.*



# Thank You!

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