Gathering data on allegations of sexual abuse made against former disc jockey, Jimmy Savile

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Background

- ESRC Seminar Series on Moral Panics
- Jimmy Savile sexual abuse allegations
- ITV Exposure Documentary
- Duncroft

Initial Approach

"I blog on the Internet as 'Anna Raccoon' and as such have published several articles on the current 'Savile saga'"

http://www.annaraccoon.com/category/duncroftsavile/page/3/

"However, having found myself at the centre of the 'Duncroft' furore, I have also been given a mound of information which I have not yet published. I am looking for a good home for it! Is there a possibility that we might collaborate in some way? I am not interested in money, nor credit for my contribution, but I am not in good health (I have had cancer for the past two years, and am now - thank God - several months past my 'sell by' date, but I take nothing for granted!) and I am growing concerned that should I kick the proverbial bucket"

"the knowledge and the contacts that I hold will be lost forever, and one day academics will want to piece together the origins of this current panic."

"Although I am both a writer and a lawyer myself, I know it would be unwise for me to embark on a lengthy project like a book at this stage in my life, and really am looking for someone who might be interested in researching the actual truth and delineating the path by which we arrived at the current situation."

ESRC Pilot Urgency Grants Mechanism

The Urgency Grants Mechanism is a pilot launched by ESRC, on behalf of RCUK, to enable us to respond to urgent or unforeseen events (for example the August 2011 UK riots), where there is a strong case for immediate research.

Research to be covered will focus on essential initial analysis and urgent data collection only. A clear strategy for taking the work forward once the urgent phase is completed is required.

The Team

University of Edinburgh

- Dr Mark Smith – Social Work

- Dr Steve Kirkwood – Social Work

- Clare Llewellyn – Informatics

- Laine Ruus - Library

University of Oxford

- Dr Ros Burnett – Criminology

The Study Objectives

- Digitally archive the (primarily) electronic data that Anna Raccoon has amassed in the period since the Savile allegations broke

- Identify from Anna's correspondence and from her knowledge of the identities of key individuals, informants who may be able to cast light on the Savile/Duncroft situation

- Interview those members of Duncroft staff and former residents, whose testimonies may be lost through age or ill-health

- Establish a timeline of events and characters through cross-referencing Anna's data with that set out in official reports such as Yewtree and Levitt

Key Issues

- Presumption of innocence

- Defamation of the dead

- Status of 'victim' accounts

- The idea of 'evil'

- Digital archiving, anonymity, ownership, law & ethics

- The 'politics' of researching sensitive subjects

Dissemination

- Knowledge Exchange event
- Digital archive
- Publications
- Press / social media

Dealing with Data – Challenges

- Urgent collection of data

- Sensitive data set

- Multiple data types

- Cross department collaboration

Cross Department Collaboration

Urgent project with multiple partners meant that we didn't have a completely clear view of the project:

- What the data is

- How the data was to be used

- What an archive is (in particular a digital archive)

- What tools can be used to manipulate and analyses the data

- What services the university library can offer

Cross Department Collaboration

Solution:

- Individual interviews with each of the project team to work with the data and how they envisioned the archive.

- Each was then shown a variety of online archiving tools so they could see what was possible.

- Initially allow complete freedom to the researchers to ascertain the researchers' image of what the system should be.

- The current tools were then used to demonstrate what type of functionality and behaviours were currently possible.
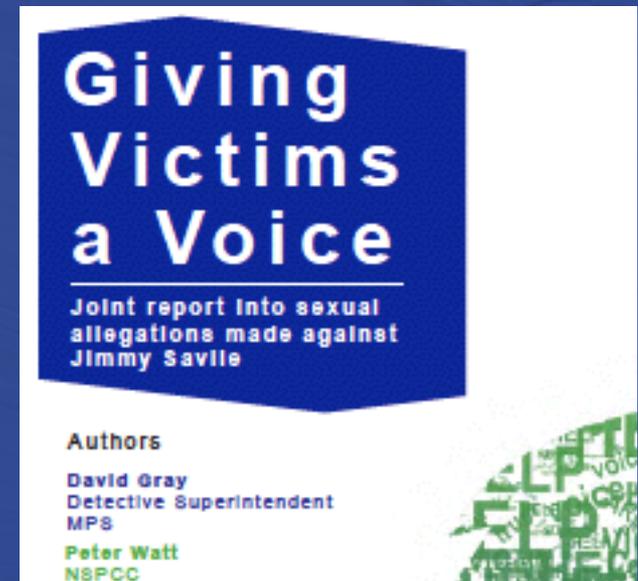
Cross Department Collaboration

Feedback from discussions:

- A very clear idea of what data to collect

- There was some disagreement as to whether the project would be focussing on the archiving or the re-use of data

- A clear view about what they and others would do with this data set:

  - Cross referencing and checking

  - A sense of who the people, the locations and the dates were

  - An illustration of the bigger picture of what is stored in the archive

- Concerns of the researchers was the controversial nature of this data set

  "I'd like it to focus on the items in the story but not to ignore those telling the story.'

Multiple Data Types

- Blog data

- Interview data

- Government reports

- Email data

- Personal archives

Sensitive Data Set

- Trusting collaboration partners - they work with sensitive data all the time

- These are not solved problems

- Consider various anonymisation/pseudonymisation methods

- Use dark archives, data released at a later date

- Get participants to sign data release forms and multiple levels

- Spend time gathering a good advisory group

Urgent Collection of Data

- Gathering the blog data

- Website was taken down prior to the start of the project

- Data gathered from the Internet Archive using wget

- Data harvested to index to improve search and to aid further analysis

- Decisions on levels of recursion

Future Work

- Development of a search interface
- Text mining for people/places and locations
- Seminar for researchers to present the work

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