

NEW MEANINGS, NEW COMMUNITIES AND NEW IDENTITY?

Former (biker) gang members' self-representation
and self-exposure through dialogical practices



CONTENT OF THE PAPER

1. Research questions

2. Overview of research: A Danish sample of 10 formers – positioning the three main cases in the broader context of the Danish (biker) gang environment and meaningful positions over time

3. Forms and content of the dialogical practices

4. Three cases: The Facebook group, Satire and theater, Biographies

5. Analysis across cases:

- Self-representations
- Possibilities for social recognition
- Risks

6. Conclusions



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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1. How can former gang members use self-representations and self-exposure as dialogical practices on diverse platforms?
 2. How does engagements in various types of dialogical practice bring about new meanings in life?
 - Which kinds of engagements help in the process of becoming something new?
 - What are the possibilities of dialogical practice?
 - What are the risks when engaging in dialogical practice?



FORMER GANG INVOLVEMENT AND RESEARCH INVOLVEMENT

Co-researchers	Interviews	Participant observation	Publications
N1: Full member, biker gang	1		In prep.
N2: Peripheral participant, co-leader	3	x	5 (2 English)
N3: Member, biker gang	2	x	1
N4: Peripheral par., leader criminal group	2	x	2 (1 English)
N5: Support group member	1	x	In prep.
N6: Leading member, support group	1	x	In prep.
N7: Lower leading member, street gang	1	x	2 (1 English)
N8: Leading member, street gang	3	x	In prep.
N9: Support & prospect, biker gang	2	x	3
N10: Leading full member, biker gang	2	x	3 (1 English)



POSITIONS, SUPPORT AND MEANINGS IN LIFE

	Years since leaving	Support in the early exit-process	Education	Being a good father	Starting up NGO	Volunt. social work	Payed social work
N1	20	"on my own"	Social worker, alt. edu	x	x	x	x
N2	16	Family	University		x	x	x
N3	11	Project Good Release = "no help"	Alt. edu	x	x	x	x
N4	11	Anger ma.-person, People college	Social worker		x	x	x
N5	10	"no help", film job	Social worker ass.	x		x	x
N6	5	National exit program, NGO	Social worker stud.	x		x	x
N7	5	People college, NGO	(Apprentice)			x	x
N8	5	Family, religious community, legal psychiatry	Religious learning			x	
N9	5	NGO's, People college	Alt. edu.			x	x
N10	5	National exit program = "counter-productive", NGO	(University st.)	x	x	x	x

FORMS OF DIALOGICAL PRACTICE:

	Presentations	Facebook	Media/press	Film	Books	Satire	Blogs/homepage
N1	x	x	x		x		
N2	x	x	x	x	x		
N3	x	x	x	x	x		
N4	x	x	x	x			x
N5	x	x	x	x	(x)	x	
N6	x	x	x	x	x	x	
N7	x	x		x			
N8	x						
N9	x	x	x	x			
N10	x	x	x	x	(x)		x



CONTENTS DISCUSSED IN DIALOGICAL PRACTICES

	Childhood	School / youth club	Criminal or gang environment	Exit process	Social work	Societal needs for change
N1	x	x	x	x	x	x
N2	x	x	x	x	x	x
N3	x	x	x	x	x	x
N4	x	x	x	x	x	x
N5	x	x	x	x	x	x
N6	x	x	x	x	x	x
N7	x	x	x	x	x	x
N8	x	x	x	x		x
N9	x	x	x	x	x	x
N10	x	x	x	x	x	x



THREE CASES:

1. THE FACEBOOK GROUP
2. SATIRE AND THEATER
3. BIOGRAPHIES



CASE 1: THE FACEBOOK GROUP

- Secret group established Fall 2017
- Discussions on (biker) gang related issues
- Book based on personal experiences
- Backing group of professionals and researchers
- Diversity, conflicts and exclusion
- Conference in the making



Interview with Simon, co-creator of the FB-group and former biker gang member



CASE 2: SATIRE AND THEATER

- "The Copenhagen Model"
- Radio entertainment show and satirical theatre play
- Former (biker) gang members involved as actors

Interview with Nabil, performer in the project and former (biker) gang member





DANISH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

AARHUS UNIVERSITY

EUROGANG
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LINE LERCHE MØRCK
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CASE 3: BIOGRAPHIES

- Representations of former (biker) gang members in the media and in biographical books: becoming recognized vs. becoming notorious
- Making good and leading a normal life vs. a "gangster lifestyle"
- Our focus: biographical books/accounts with a social awareness agenda and a social concern

Interview with Richard, author and former biker gang member



SELF-REPRESENTATIONS

- Maruna:
 - Strivings among ex-offenders towards leaving a positive legacy
 - Focus on thoughts, dreams and hopes for the future
- Our co-researchers/participants:
 - 5-20 years further in their life/development after exit
 - Making good *and* doing good





***Well, I always begin my talks by saying:
“Hi, my name is Nabil, I am ... “ (...) my
age at that present time, and then I say: “I
am a former gang leader, and I have been
in the gang environment for 10 years.”***

Nabil





Well, I always begin my talks by saying: “Hi, my name is Nabil, I am ... “ (...) my age at that present time, and then I say: “I am a former gang leader, and I have been in the gang environment for 10 years.”

Nabil



I would probably characterize myself as a man with a big heart for disadvantaged people, and there is a red thread through everything in my life, everything professionally, that goes back to where I come from. I have been disadvantaged myself, so that is where my interest is now that I have become an active part of the society again.

So if I have to describe myself: A social worker with a big heart, and ... extroverted and lively and inventive. And I talk a lot. (laughs)

Simon



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Simon

Well, then I would present my self as a social worker and therapist and ... I have three kids. Like an ordinary person, basically.

Richard



Well, I always begin my talks by saying: “Hi, my name is Nabil, I am ... “ (...) my age at that present time, and then I say: “I am a former gang leader, and I have been in the gang environment for 10 years.”

Nabil (5 years since exit)

I would probably characterize myself as a man with a big heart for disadvantaged people, and there is a red thread through everything in my life, everything professionally, that goes back to where I come from. I have been disadvantaged myself, so that is where my interest is now that I have become an active part of the society again.

So if I have to describe myself: A social worker with a big heart, and ... extroverted and lively and inventive. And I talk a lot. (laughs)

Simon (10 years since exit)

Well, then I would present my self as a social worker and therapist and ... I have three kids. Like an ordinary person, basically.

Richard (20 years since exit)



Processual aspect to identity transformation

☐ *Quite often, people in the environment I came from are rather good craftsmen or mechanics. But I have never been like that.*

(...) And back then, when I left the environment, I found myself in an identity crisis, because I have always been part of a community. And then I was all on my own, actually. So for me, it was difficult to figure out what to do. (...)

But for me, it was all about listening to my heart, and then I realized that I actually had been in all kinds of social classes, and I have always been good at creating relations.

Simon



Fear of loss of identity

” *I hated the gang environment, but at the same time it was where I came from, and it was my identity. It was the person I was.*

And If I had to say goodbye to the gang environment, then I had to say goodbye to my whole identity – who would I then be as a person, right? Then I would be nothing. That was what I was afraid of.

Nabil





POSSIBILITIES FOR SOCIAL RECOGNITION

Social recognition as ...

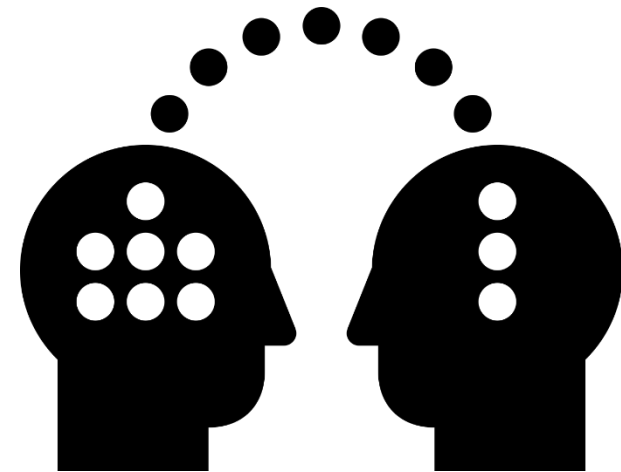
” (...) *the objectification of the other as subject within a cultural form of participation and within a collective*

Nissen (2012)



POSSIBILITIES FOR SOCIAL RECOGNITION

- Creating new knowledge and new relations
- Experimenting with identity and challenging existing views
- Working with life experiences and exposing vulnerability





RISKS

- Reactions from the former (biker) gang environment
- Fear of misrepresentation
- Competitive environment - Risks if critiqueing the established / national exit system



Reactions from the former (biker) gang environment

” (...) *there I subsequently get smeared in the thread [on Facebook] by my old mates and get **called out as untrustworthy**, and **they really try to assassinate my character**. And that one I felt – I know I that I am a sort of person that people either like or dislike. (...) It is always nice to be recognized for what you do, but on the other hand, it’s never nice to be **smeared in public**.*

*I remember I thought: “**Ouch, is this really worth it?**” but then I took a deep breath, and I felt on the inside, and thought that **this is what I want to do**. And in reality it’s what I know how to do, it’s where I have my skills and experience, where someone else would have to study for several years to make it in some industry.*

- SIMON (THE FACEBOOK GROUP)



Fear of misrepresentation

However, I would say, now that **I'm well on in years, people take me seriously**. But when I didn't have the years of experience after leaving the gang environment, **when I didn't have the seniority**, I felt that **I had to work harder than anyone else**, and that's what's going on with Brian Sandberg right now for example. He went from Hells Angels to Bandidos and now he wants to save the whole world. I do not doubt that he really wants to go out and work with young people, but I also think **one needs to go through a process with oneself** before you set out on a journey to save the whole world.

- SIMON (THE FACEBOOK GROUP)



RISKS – DUE TO COMPETITIVE RELATIONS

- Concerns about not being recognized for their contribution
- Risks of criticizing the established system
- Ethical dilemmas: Paradoxes between anonymity/protection and opportunities of recognition through exposure in a scientific article



DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

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New positions and meanings in life – ways of “making good” = engaging in **tough struggles** and **deep meanings**.

Dialogical practice as conflictual and marked by competition: critique of established practices and development of alternatives is often contested by established system, and you have to earn legitimacy over (long) time.

Access, legitimacy and feelings of belonging?

The lone wolf – longing for belonging – seeking and fighting for social recognition

Making good -> possibilities for **becoming something new** – finding new meanings and belongings on ‘this side of the fence’.

Problems of loneliness are partly transcended by engaging in dialogical practices and through ‘making good’ – but enduring risks of stigmatization as ‘former’ - getting better with time: 10-20 years since leaving and formal education – helps. But still a (economic) struggle to get jobs enough to live of.



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