



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

The banality of organisational evil, total institutions, and epistemic injustice

Citation for published version:

Calvard, T & Sang, K 2017, 'The banality of organisational evil, total institutions, and epistemic injustice: Theorising the Savile sexual abuse scandal' Paper presented at The 10th International Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference, Liverpool, United Kingdom, 3/07/17 - 5/07/17, .

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



10th International Critical Management Conference, Liverpool, UK
“Dark Side of Organizational Behavior” Stream

**The Banality of Organisational Evil, Total Institutions, and Epistemic Injustice:
Theorising the Savile Sexual Abuse Scandal**

Thomas Calvard
University of Edinburgh Business School (UK)

Kate Sang
Heriot-Watt University, Dept. of Business Management, Edinburgh (UK)

Abstract

The emergence of cases of widespread sexual abuse spanning decades, often involving victims who were children at the time, and occurring in various significant institutions, such as the church, sports clubs and healthcare organisations, has been a tragic and horrifying revelation for our times. Such events defy easy explanation and leave a legacy of confusion over how such deviant and harmful acts could have gone undetected and/or unpunished for so long.

In the current paper, we analyse the sexual abuse scandal that broke around the eccentric British television and radio personality, Jimmy Savile, with the first abuse claims emerging and being widely published in 2012, about a year after his death. Up until his death, Savile had been generally respected for charitable fundraising work (Greer and McLaughlin 2013), despite rumours and incomplete investigations while he was alive. The tendency to disbelieve, dismiss or ignore allegations of his involvement in at least 500 cases of abuse involving victims ranging from prepubescent girls and boys to adults (Furedi 2013), we would argue, mirrors to some extent the relative tendency to ignore, neglect and suppress difficult ethical, ideological and political issues constituting the ‘dark side’ of research on organisations and institutions (Linstead et al. 2014).

Thus, the current paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of evil, criminal and deviant acts occurring in and around large institutions and organisations through a documentary analysis of the particular social dynamics and interpretations of abuse surrounding the case of Savile and related scandals. This also encompasses how these acts are made sense of in public inquiries and investigations following the spread of abuse claims (Brown 2000), inquiries that often implicate the dysfunctional aspects of large institutions and sections of society, where some investigations are still ongoing and some underlying issues may never be totally resolved.

In analysing the case of the Savile scandal this paper also aims to contribute to existing literature by providing critical organisational research that relates unconventional contexts and samples to important issues of social justice, neglected stakeholders (e.g. children and abuse victims) and significant aspects of organisational deviance less amenable to direct empirical study with primary data (Bamberger and Pratt 2010). Finally, given the striking breadth of institutions involved in, and affected by, the Savile scandal, juxtaposed with the considerable deviant institutional agency of one man, the case provides a potentially fruitful context for building theory around the fluid relationships between structure and agency inherent to institutional work (Zundel et al. 2013).

We hope to make sense of the scale and institutionalisation of Savile's crimes by drawing on three theoretical lenses. First, we consider Hannah Arendt's controversial 'banality of evil' concept in explaining why the vast numbers of non-abusers within institutions such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) did nothing to stop Savile's sustained abuse of children and adults (Arendt 1963). Second, we draw on Arendt's (1973) work on totalitarianism alongside work on 'total institutions' (e.g. Clegg 2006), to better understand why some people did (or did not) comply with the power apparently exerted by Savile. Finally, for those that did raise their concerns, or take complaints to the police, we argue that drawing on theorisations of 'epistemic injustice' allows us to examine who was allowed to know and what was allowed to be known within and beyond these organisations (Fricker 2007).

Together, we combine these three theoretical perspectives on structure, agency, knowledge, ethics and power to suggest that they can go some way toward explaining the sheer scale of Savile's actions and the lack of action against him (along with even some facilitation of his crimes). As a result, we also propose that generalisable themes can be further extracted for explaining related dark, inhumane crimes in organisations and institutions more widely.

The eleven major public inquiry report sources for our documentary analysis are summarised below in Table 1. These were our main sources of data and sample for making a comprehensive qualitative case study of the Savile scandal, although we did rely on some additional secondary materials from outside the category of official reports where appropriate. The latter included resources such as Dan Davies' (2015) book of investigative journalism on Savile, and the various television documentaries made in the wake of the scandal emerging.

Finally, we conclude our paper with implications for future research on the dark side of organisations, particularly investigating how powerful actors can exploit totalitarian or total aspects of institutions and connections to 'the Establishment' elites of a nation (Jones 2015) to commit harmful crimes unpunished and to some extent 'in plain sight' of others. Other related areas of potential value for future research might include the institution of fame or celebrity and its power relations with organisations,

how patterns of epistemic injustice can inhibit sensemaking processes around recognition and reporting of deviant organisational behaviour, discourses of evil or wicked agency in organisations, and the vulnerabilities of victims of abuse in organisational settings. Similarly, we would argue that our paper has some practical, managerial implications in terms of the vigilance and courage needed to break down or challenge concentrations of power and knowledge across institutions and their practices where they permit or conceal acts of violence, trauma and victimisation.

References

- Arendt, H. 1963. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. London: Penguin.
- Arendt, H., 1973. *The origins of totalitarianism*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Bamberger, P.A. and Pratt, M.G., 2010. Moving forward by looking back: Reclaiming unconventional research contexts and samples in organizational scholarship. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(4), pp.665-671.
- Brown, A.D., 2000. Making sense of inquiry sensemaking. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(1), pp.45-75.
- Clegg, S.R., 2006. Why is organization theory so ignorant? The neglect of total institutions. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 15(4), pp.426-430.
- Davies, D., 2015. *In plain sight: The life and lies of Jimmy Savile*. London: Quercus.
- Fricker, M., 2007. *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Furedi, F., 2013. Introduction: Scandals, Panics and Crusades. In *Moral Crusades in an Age of Mistrust: The Jimmy Savile Scandal* (pp. 1-11). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Greer, C. and McLaughlin, E., 2013. The Sir Jimmy Savile scandal: Child sexual abuse and institutional denial at the BBC. *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 9(3), pp.243-263.
- Jones, O., 2015. *The establishment: And how they get away with it*. London: Penguin Books.
- Linstead, S., Maréchal, G. and Griffin, R.W., 2014. Theorizing and researching the dark side of organization. *Organization Studies*, 35(2), pp.165-188.
- Zundel, M., Holt, R. and Cornelissen, J., 2013. Institutional work in *The Wire*: An ethological investigation of flexibility in organizational adaptation. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 22(1), pp.102-120.

Table 1. Major reports investigating charges of abuse relating to Savile

<i>Author and/or institution(s) commissioning report</i>	<i>Title of report</i>	<i>Focus of investigation</i>
Dame Janet Smith and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (2016)	The Dame Janet Smith Review	Culture and practices at BBC
David Gray of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and Peter Watt of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2013)	Giving Victims a Voice	Victims' allegations and justice for victims
National Health Service (NHS); authors and dates various	Various	Various NHS hospitals and trusts where victims allege abuse had taken place
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) (2013)	Mistakes Were Made	Various police organisations and practices
Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) (2015)	Jimmy Savile	Sussex and West Yorkshire Police forces' investigations into Savile allegations
Multiple UK City and County Councils; authors and dates various	Various	Various children's homes and hospitals local to particular areas of UK
Alison Levitt, Q.C. of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (2013)	In the Matter of the Late Jimmy Savile	Investigating a subset of allegations of indecent assault from the 1970s
Kate Lampard for the UK Government's Department of Health (DoH) (2015)	Themes and Lessons Learnt From NHS Investigations Into Matters Relating to Jimmy Savile	Independent oversight of several NHS investigations
Lucy Scott-Moncrieff for the UK Government's Department for Education (DfE) (2015)	Independent Oversight of Investigations into matters Relating to Jimmy Savile at Schools and Children's Homes	Independent oversight of several school and children's home investigations

Sara Clarke for Barnardo's children's charity (2014)	The Report of the Investigation into Matters Relating to the Late Jimmy Savile and Barnardo's Children's Homes in Ilford	Investigation into allegations of abuse relating to Savile and multiple Barnardo's children's homes
Nick Pollard for the BBC (2012)	The Pollard Review	Investigation into the management by the BBC of a Newsnight investigation relating to allegations of sexual abuse of children by Jimmy Savile.