

The Life of a Persistent Young Offender

Their Inner World - Emotions / Cognitions

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Research (and experience) tells us that young people, who are persistent offenders, will often have skewed cognitions (thoughts) about their world. Due to exposure to extreme violence, abuse and neglect, these young people will not necessarily see the world the way we see it. They might expect confrontation every time they see an older male; they might expect trouble from police; they might think that it is ok to steal; they might not consider or even care about the impact of their violence on victims. Their thoughts might be considered to be cognitive distortions and reflect limited empathy and moral development.

The following provides some excerpts taken from various books (criminological or sociological texts) about offenders. These excerpts have been taken to demonstrate how some offenders will think about their world. Read the excerpts and then answer the questions below.

“I couldn’t talk to anybody and I couldn’t trust anybody. I would feel stressed out and I would deal with it by cutting myself”

‘When I used to steal cars I was a pretty ruthless driver. I didn’t care whether I hurt other people on the road or even if I hurt myself’

“Without even thinking about it, I latched onto his bottom lip... I could taste his blood... started grabbing [snooker] balls off the table, hurling them at his head as hard as I could... When I finally calmed down, even though it was a terrible, violent act, I felt happy and excited with what I had done’.

“Even though it’s sad for me to say so now, it was a buzz to hurt people”

“It’s revenge; like, my mum was taken away so I don’t give a fuck about ‘em”

“I was really impulsive. I didn’t think of the consequences, I’d just do something”

“I went and fought my brother and his mates, and my mate and my friends and their brothers and their mates. You know, there was an ongoing war. It was war, mate. For toys I had a collection of slug guns; they were my toys. Knives too; I used to collect knives”

References:

Marshall, P. (2002) *Scarred for Life: the true story of a self harmer*

Korn, N. (2004) *Life Behind Bars: Conversations with Australian Inmates*

Questions:

- What will they think of authority figures?
- Will they take responsibility for their behaviour?
- How will masculinity be understood and demonstrated?
- What might they think of their victims?
- How might a young person, having experienced the above, see the world?