Exploring the gap between media and practice: A feminist analysis of media representations and practitioner perspectives on sexual exploitation of girls and young women

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores media representations about 'child sexual exploitation' (CSE) and the 'practice-based evidence' of specialist practitioners from a feminist perspective. It considers how gender, power and other systems of social oppression relate to CSE. The study was conducted in two phases.

The first phase was a frame analysis of newspaper articles published during two significant periods of increased awareness, policy and practice development in England. The periods chosen were 1997-99 and 2014-15. Newspaper articles were drawn from three national newspapers: *The Times, Daily Mail* and the *Mirror.* A total of 390 articles were analysed. The comparative approach highlighted some distinct changes in the way CSE is represented. In period one young women are represented as both victims and agents. In period two young women are more explicitly framed as 'vulnerable' and abused. The media construction of CSE victims as 'vulnerable' and 'white' are interrogated. It argues that an emphasis on 'whiteness' and 'vulnerability' obscures the socioeconomic position of the young women concerned. The analysis also reveals a change in the media's focus on perpetrators, from their relative invisibility in period one to a racialised media template in period two.

The second phase was qualitative interviews with 20 specialist practitioners. The analysis contributes to current debates about the language and terminology of 'CSE'. It highlights the pragmatic and avoidant 'uses' of the term and suggests that while this acronym may generate resources and responses to young people, it sanitises young women's experiences of rape. The way 'CSE' obscures the structural inequalities that underlie sexual exploitation and prostitution are explored. The final empirical chapter critiques the concepts of 'grooming' and 'vulnerability'. It argues that these are individualising terms which obscure the gendered power dynamics and heteronormativity of the 'grooming' construct. The concept of 'healthy relationships' is also critiqued.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores the gap between media representations of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and the experiences of specialist practitioners working with sexually exploited young people. From a feminist perspective, it analyses news-media representations about sexual exploitation and draws on the narratives of 20 participants to explore how practitioners understand the problem. There are two phases of the research.

The first is a comparative frame analysis of media representations. This draws on two periods of increased focus on the problem, 1997-99 and 2014-15. The second involved undertaking qualitative interviews with practitioners working in either children's charities or violence against women and girls (VAWG) services. This introductory chapter outlines the context and rationale behind the study, the research aims and provides an overview of the thesis structure.

An outline of the media landscape

Following an article published in *The Times* (Norfolk, 2011), there was an explosion of media coverage about CSE in England. However, this was not the first-time sexual exploitation against children and young people had made headlines (see, for example, Gorham, 1978; Brown & Barrett, 2002). Brown and Barrett (2002) suggest that 'child prostitution' was 'rediscovered' in the 1970s and as this thesis will go on to explore further, there were also flurries of media coverage in the 1990s. Its more recent re-emergence into media and public discourses, however, has led to widespread coverage and condemnation.

Some familiar themes shaped recent media representations about CSE. Social workers and police are heavily criticised for failing to acknowledge the extent of the problem, or to act upon suspicions, or indeed evidence, of the widespread sexual exploitation and abuse of young women (see Critcher, 2003; Kitzinger, 2004). A number of Serious Case Reviews and

independent reports published over this period suggest that this criticism is not misplaced (see, for example, Griffiths, 2013; Coffey, 2014; Jay, 2014; Casey, 2015; Bedford, 2015). At the same time, these reports also suggest that the lack of professional responses was more complex than a misguided sense of 'political correctness', as asserted in *The Times* 'expose' cited earlier and by other media outlets (Cockbain, 2013). Indeed, the *only* government sanctioned response to sexually exploited young people prior to 2000 was a criminal one (see, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Phoenix, 2002 & 2010).

The media framing of high-profile cases in areas such as Rochdale, Oxford and Rotherham have been critiqued. The first of these was by Cockbain (2013: 22) who critiqued the media's construction of an 'Asian sex gang' and the reformulation of CSE as a 'new racial crime threat'. As briefly outlined above, sexual exploitation against children and young people is far from a 'new' problem (Pearce, 2009; Hallett, 2017).

Media awareness began as far back as the 19th century (see Gorham, 1978). Feminist groups and children's charities have been advocating for the rights of this group of young people to be protected since that time (Brown & Barrett, 2002 see, for example, Kelly *et al,* 1995; Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Kelly & Regan, 2000; Swann *et al,* 1998; Melrose *et al* 1999; Palmer, 2000). The 'unknowns' that the media more recently claimed to have exposed was the apparent connection between the race, ethnicity and 'grooming' of 'vulnerable' girls and young women, positing that services had wilfully ignored clear evidence out of fears of 'rocking the multicultural boat' (Kenber, 2014a).

A number of analyses followed Cockbain's (see, for example, Tufail, 2015 & 2019; Harrison & Gill, 2015; Elliott, 2019; Cockbain & Tufail, 2020). Tufail (2015) argues that the media representations about CSE in Rochdale and Rotherham vary in considerable ways from

how sexual abuse against women and girls has been reported in other instances, intensifying and justifying the increased scrutiny and surveillance of the British Muslim community.

The Jay (2014) report into Rotherham estimated that at least 1,400 children and young people had been sexually exploited between 1997-2013. The report states: 'By far the majority of perpetrators were described as 'Asian' by victims' (Jay, 2014: 2). Race and ethnicity were also discussed in the Office of the Children's Commissioner inquiry (Berelowitz, 2012 & 2013), in the Home Affairs Committee report on 'localised' grooming (2014) and extensively in the Jay report (2014).

There is evidence that cases involving South Asian men were used to mobilise support for the far right. In 2012, the British National Party nearly caused a trial to collapse (Cockbain, 2013) and the English Defence League have regularly demonstrated outside court houses during high-profile criminal trials (BBC, 2012). In the current context of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in the UK and elsewhere, this was likely an inevitability (see, for example, Dagistanli & Grewal, 2012; Tufail, 2015; Cockbain & Tufail, 2020).

Harrison and Gill (2015) argue that South Asian men have been constructed as the 'folk devils' of a moral panic which links ethnicity with CSE. On one hand this may constitute a 'good' moral panic that raises awareness of the need to protect young people and the improvements needed in response. On the other, it distorts public perception of the issues by recourse to racial stereotyping; this is obstructive to the safeguarding and protection of all victim-survivors (Gill & Harrison, 2015). Moreover, other research suggests that the impacts on Pakistani heritage men, and Muslim men and women are significant, particularly in areas associated with so-called 'grooming scandals' (Tufail, 2015; Britton, 2019).

Britton (2019) has explored the impact of the 'on-street grooming' discourse on Pakistani and Muslim men's sense of belonging in Rotherham after high-profile convictions

and reports published in connection with the area. This research reveals an increase in racism following the Rotherham cases, stemming from a discourse which positions Muslim men, and Muslims in general, as culturally dysfunctional (Britton, 2019). Arguably, it is the racialisation of 'grooming' that has got the agenda talking, but not without costs to victim-survivors, as well as leading to the further demonisation of an already marginalised group. The next section proves a brief outline of the policy and practice context of the research.

The policy and practice context

Following a child sexual exploitation summit in March 2015, child sexual abuse (CSA) was declared a national policing threat (Home Office, 2015). In an interview with the BBC, the then Prime Minister David Cameron, vowed that the Government would 'end the walk on by culture that too many police forces and social work departments have demonstrated' (BBC, 2015). The work of dedicated feminists, researchers and children's charities aside, the Government, policy-makers and society in general, have similarly demonstrated a 'walk on by' attitude to children and young people involved in sexual exploitation, at least up until the turn of this millennium.

The elevation of CSE to a national threat level was preceded by a number of high-profile investigations and convictions. In 2012 in Rochdale, nine men were convicted of offences including rape, sexual activity with a child and trafficking for child sexual exploitation. In 2013 in Oxford, seven men were convicted for offences including rape, arranging child prostitution and trafficking children for sexual exploitation (Home Affairs Committee, 2013). In 2014, the National Crime Agency launched Operation Stovewood, an investigation into 'non-familial child sexual exploitation and abuse' in Rotherham between 1997-2013 (NCA, 2014). In another operation, five men in Rotherham were convicted of CSE related offences in 2010 (Home Affairs Committee, 2013).

From 2012, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) published a number of inquiries relating to CSE in 'gangs' and 'groups' (OCC, 2012; Berelowitz *et al,* 2012; Berelowitz, 2013). Related to this inquiry they commissioned further research related to CSE, sexual violence and gang-associated young people, young people's understanding of sexual consent and the effects of pornography on young people (Beckett *et al,* 2013; Coy *et al,* 2013; Horvath *et al,* 2013). It is against this backdrop of intense concern and media scrutiny relating to what 'CSE' is, how it occurs and what needs to be done about it, that this study was conceived.

Preparation for this research began in 2014. Replacing *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation* (DCSF, 2009), the policy which applies to practice in England was updated in 2017 (DfE, 2017). The media landscape has also changed, at least in terms of the sheer volume of coverage. CSE, of course, has not disappeared from the media agenda and for the foreseeable future it will likely continue to carry significant news-value. However, rather than a rapid and rolling boil of incessant commentary about grooming and CSE, it simmers more gently on the news-media agenda to be periodically called upon to inform audiences that this issue is not solved. These smatterings of coverage are usually seen after new cases emerge which chime with the 'grooming gang' narrative or where there have been new arrests connected to cases which were the original catalysts for the overwhelming amount of coverage that was witnessed at the beginning of this project. The changing policy and media context informed the decision to conduct interviews with specialist practitioners.

Twenty interviews were conducted with specialist practitioners. 'Specialist' refers to practitioners with experience of working with children, young people and families in dedicated CSE services which are funded to provide such support to children and young people. A range of professionals will come into contact with sexually exploited young people. This includes social workers, police, youth justice workers, teachers, youth workers and health professionals

(DfE, 2017). However, as noted, women and girls sector organisations and children's charities have historically undertaken this work, with or without funding provided by local councils.

Interviews were conducted with participants from mid-April 2017 to the end of 2019. Early in the interview process, practitioners and society in general were surrounded by media and public debate about 'grooming' and 'CSE'. By 2019, this was less intense. Nonetheless, the value and meaning of the term 'CSE' is contested.

'CSE': A note on language

'CSE' is an umbrella term used to describe a range of forms and contexts of child abuse, albeit that recent media representations have focused on a model of 'grooming' involving numerous perpetrators and young (white) women. Even before the media 'fixation' with grooming and 'Asian sex gangs' (Cockbain, 2013), the dominance of a grooming model in policy and practice had been subject to scrutiny (see, for example, Ayre & Barrett, 2000; Cusick, 2002; Phoenix, 2002; Melrose, 2010), as has the concept 'CSE' itself.

Debates on the term and definition of 'CSE' are discussed in the following chapters. This thesis aims to contribute towards these discussions. They are summarised here by drawing on Melrose (2013), whose work has been the foundation of the problematisation of both 'grooming' and 'CSE' in many of these conceptual debates.

In brief, Melrose (2013: 15) argues that the CSE discourse constructs young people as '*always* and *inevitably,* passive objects or 'things''. This, she argues, suggests that the *only* way young people become involved in sexual exploitation is through the coercion, manipulation and 'force' of predatory adults and thus young people can never be social actors. She further contends that under particular structural conditions, some young people are making rational but 'constrained choices' in contexts of limited opportunity and diminished circumstances (see

also, Harper & Scott, 2005; Chase & Statham, 2005). This theme is explored in analysis of the news-media stories and practitioner interviews.

'Child sexual exploitation' or 'CSE' is employed throughout this thesis. However, this is not without critical awareness that the term itself is underpinned with assumptions about who these young people are and how they come to be involved in exchanging sex for some sort of 'gain' (DfE, 2017).

Elsewhere, references are made to 'abuse through prostitution'. As will be explored later, 'prostitution' may be considered outdated, even victim-blaming, when applied to young people. It is used here to refer to prostitution as an institution that produces and reproduces systems of inequality and oppression (Melrose, 2010; Coy, 2012, Phoenix, 2019). It is not used to describe individuals or people of any age. This discussion is developed throughout the following chapters, especially in Chapter 7.

Aims and research questions

This research set out to explore the space between media representations about CSE and the experiences and 'practice-based evidence' of specialist practitioners. As noted, there have been a number of critiques related to the recent news-media representations of CSE. However, at various points, including during very critical moments in the development of policy and practice, sexual exploitation or 'child prostitution', as it was previously known, has been considered newsworthy. The first phase of this research is concerned with how news-media representations have changed and developed over time.

The second phase is more explicitly concerned with practice. It explores the way in which media messages, not only recently but also across time, have been rejected or absorbed, how ever implicitly, into practice. This is not only informed by the way the media have framed the problem. Unsurprisingly, this is intimately connected with the construction of policy,

language and terminology and often, the organisational assumptions and philosophies which underpin practice in either a children's sector charity or a VAWG organisation. Indeed, the research itself has its own philosophical underpinnings, and is informed by a feminist analysis of power. Careful consideration is also given to other axes of power and inequality, particularly those of race, ethnicity, class and (hetero)sexuality. This is explored in detail in Chapter 3.

The study addresses five research questions:

1. How have news-media perspectives understood and defined the nature of sexual exploitation of young women by men?
2. What are the links between news-media representations of sexual exploitation of young women by men and the perspectives of specialist practitioners?
3. From a practitioner's perspective, how and when is gender and/or race relevant to sexual exploitation?
4. What issues do practitioners perceive to be the most important in tackling sexual exploitation of young women by men?
5. How do practitioners understand sexual exploitation of young women by men and in what ways do these intersect with structural inequalities?

These research questions are explored throughout the thesis.

Outline of the thesis

This section outlines the structure of the thesis and gives a brief overview of each chapter.

Chapter 2 contextualises the research in the current literature. It tracks both policy and practice developments and outlines the role of children's charity campaigns in shaping these. As policy and practice surrounding CSE has developed over recent years, so has the language used to define and describe the problem. The chapter outlines some of the conceptual

discussions and assumptions which explicitly and implicitly operate to define the nature of the problem in question. It is also concerned with the debates surrounding the separation/conflation between child sexual abuse (CSA) and child sexual exploitation. Linked with these discussions, the chapter introduces the concept of an 'exchange'. This concept underpins the current policy definition. This chapter draws on academic critiques of the term and suggests that it is a fuzzy concept in which the boundaries of its application are unclear.

The final part of chapter 2 provides readers with a snapshot of news-media representations about CSA and CSE. It is not exhaustive; an entire thesis could be dedicated to this alone[1]. Instead, it describes some of the key moments in the history of newspaper coverage about CSA and CSE that are considered as most relevant to this study.

Chapter 3 is a reflective account of the research process and methodology. It outlines the epistemological underpinnings of the study, the research design and process of analysis for phase one and phase two of the research. It starts with a detailed account of phase one: a comparative analysis of news-media coverage about CSE over two time periods (1997-99 and 2014-15). This will describe the rationale for choosing each period, the newspapers selected for analysis and the sampling strategy employed to construct the dataset. It will also introduce some key concepts drawn upon in the analysis documented in Chapter 4. The chapter then moves onto the research design for phase two: qualitative interviews with specialist practitioners, including key concepts, data collection, management and the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. It ends with a discussion about the ethical considerations for both phase one and phase two of the research.

[1] Some of this is explored in a paper titled 'Child sexual exploitation: a comparative frame analysis of news-media coverage over time' (Elliott, 2019). It can be accessed here: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14680777.2019.1690021

Chapter 4: *A step forward and two steps back?* provides an analysis of newspaper coverage over two time periods, using a dataset drawn from three national newspapers. This chapter extends Elliott (2019). It will outline the contradictory ways in which young women are represented in the first period of analysis (1997-99) and suggests that these representations are implicitly related to class and the socioeconomic position of the young women concerned. This contrasts with a significant proportion of the coverage which draws upon research produced by children's charities and their campaigns which sought to reframe 'child prostitution' as a form of child sexual abuse.

As noted, there are already a number of critiques concerned with the media representations about 'grooming gangs'. The analysis presented in this chapter, however, is theoretically distinct. This chapter argues that while the media may have claimed to have uncovered something 'new' – and so cemented in public discourses new words to describe it – discourses related to child sexual abuse and sexual violence against women are reframed and recirculated through the construction of a racialised 'media template' (Kitzinger, 2000) and a racialised 'stranger danger' discourse. Again, careful consideration is given to class and the socioeconomic position of the young women.

Chapter 5: *"I think we just need to name it": But what is 'it'?* contributes to the ongoing debates about the usefulness of the term 'CSE' and relatedly, the concept of an 'exchange' to delineate CSE from CSA. The interview data drawn upon in this chapter shows that, from the view of these participants, there are overlaps and distinctions between sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse. The chapter also illustrates the 'pragmatic uses' of the term 'CSE' in practice contexts, albeit that these do not align with current definitions. The participant's accounts suggest that 'CSE' has some valuable uses. The analysis also explores the consequences of this.

Chapter 6: *What's in a name, anyway?* builds upon the previous chapter to argue that 'CSE' is a term used to avoid and indeed silence, important aspects of young people's experiences of sexual violence and abuse. The chapter locates this silence in words and names. It begins by outlining the way 'CSE' is used to avoid naming rape as rape. It suggests that difficulties may arise for victim-survivors of rape and *not* 'CSE' if they are channelled into CSE specific service provisions. The discussion develops from here to critically evaluate the (almost) wholesale rejection of the term 'prostitution' in relation to 'young people'. The participant's accounts and reflections on the issue of language range from those which assert that 'prostitution' should *never* be said to those which argue that it is vital that these dynamics are named. There are, however, many nuances explored in the chapter which suggest that perspectives on this issue are not as polarised as might be inferred here.

Chapter 7: *A feminist perspective on 'grooming' and 'vulnerability'* explores the interconnectedness of 'grooming' and 'vulnerability' to argue that neither one, nor a combination of the two, capture the social and structural conditions conducive to sexual exploitation against young women. In a similar way to Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter will illustrate how these concepts are utilised in practice contexts in ways which attempt to demonstrate young people's victimhood. It will argue that neither the 'grooming' model or an emphasis on young women's 'vulnerability' capture the heteronormativity that is embedded in the way young people learn about heterosexual relationships. Through the lens of 'sexualised sexism' (Coy, 2014), it problematises 'healthy relationships' and interventions that seek to 'teach' young people about 'grooming' as the end point of prevention work with young people; these approaches do not necessarily challenge heteronormative relationships or the gendered power dynamics in them.

The concluding chapter pulls together the main themes discussed throughout the thesis. It reflects on some of the key arguments made in each chapter, the research questions and the contribution this thesis makes to knowledge.

Summary

The following chapters explore media representations about abuse through prostitution and CSE and the 'practice-based evidence' of specialist practitioners. The research is conducted from a feminist perspective and uses the concept of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2015) to analyse news-media representations and practitioner narratives about sexual exploitation of young women and girls, perpetrated by men. Whilst there is a wide knowledge base about sexual exploitation of children and young people, a feminist analysis is more rarely addressed. Indeed, an overarching contribution made by this study is the feminist analysis of the discourses around sexual exploitation, media representations and practice.

I make no claims to 'objectivity' or to speak *for* the participants. Attention to intersecting systems of power and structural oppressions - particularly those related to gender, class in relation to victim-survivors and race and ethnicity in relation to perpetrators – underscores the analysis throughout the thesis and informs the way in which the data was interpreted. The study also explores the ways in which heteronormative sexual practices create a context for sexual exploitation of young women by men.

The next chapter reviews some of the existing literature about sexual exploitation of children and young people. Like the media, research and commentary related to CSE has increased at a rapid pace. The chapter draws on the literature and research most relevant to this study. As the thesis unfolds, it will hopefully be clear to readers that much of the research published around the period in which 'child prostitution' was established as a policy concern, holds as much relevance today as it did around 20 years or so ago.

Chapter 2: Tracing policy, practice and media responses to CSE

Introduction

This chapter is a narrative literature review (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016) of published material on sexual exploitation of children and young people, including that published during this study. The material was selected and sourced to address the research questions and provide an historical overview of thinking and research on abuse through prostitution and child sexual exploitation (CSE). The review was guided by the questions and makes no claim to being a systematic review of the literature.

Sources were located using search terms the 'child prostitution'; 'abuse through prostitution'; 'child sexual exploitation' and 'grooming' in social science research databases. Databases included the Wiley Online Library; Sage Publications; Ebsco and Science Direct. Google searches, using the same search terms, were used for relevant policy documents and reports published and/or commissioned by third sector organisations. Each source was evaluated in relation to the aims of this study and those which are included were directly relevant to the search questions. The chapter is organised thematically covering: definitions of CSE; the limitations of language and policy approaches; practice and professional approaches to CSE and an overview of the literature about media representations of child sexual abuse (CSA) and child sexual exploitation.

The chapter traces changes in terminology and definitions, policy development and practice responses to sexual exploitation. It starts with an overview of the conceptual discussions concerning the definition of CSE and the separation/conflation between child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child sexual abuse (CSA). It will also discuss practice responses to CSE, addressing some of the tensions between safeguarding sexually exploited young people as victims of abuse and the ways this may conflict with perceptions of a young person's agency,

choice and decision making. Finally, the chapter provides a brief historical overview about news-media representations of CSA and CSE in order to contextualise the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Defining child sexual exploitation

This section outlines the current policy definition of CSE before it maps the series of historical developments in policy and practice approaches.

The term 'child sexual exploitation' was officially adopted in 2009 after publication of *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation* (DCSF, 2009). This guidance applied to England and Wales. In 2017, guidance for professionals working in England was updated (DfE, 2017). This replaced the 2009 guidance and updated the definition of CSE.

> Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance in power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology (DfE, 2017: 5).

Underlying this definition is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator(s) and young person. The guidance notes that whilst age may be the most obvious form of power imbalance, sexual exploitation can also occur due to a range of other factors such as gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status and access to economic and material resources. Indeed, the guidance also lists a number of 'vulnerabilities' which could make young people more 'susceptible' to CSE. These include 'economic vulnerability'; insecure accommodation;

living in care; 'social difficulties'; connections with family members/others involved in adult 'sex work' and having friends who are being sexually exploited (DfE, 2017: 8). The guidance is clear that 'child sexual exploitation can also occur without any of these vulnerabilities being present' (DfE, 2017: 8).

Sexual exploitation is understood to occur in a wide range of contexts. This includes 'inappropriate relationships' between an older perpetrator and young person, a 'boyfriend' or 'grooming' model, in which a young person believes they are in a relationship with a perpetrator and is coerced to have sex with his friends/associates, peer exploitation and organised sexual exploitation and trafficking (Barnardos, 2011). There has also been some focus on the sexual exploitation of gang-involved or gang-associated young people (Beckett *et al,* 2013 see also, Firmin, 2011 & 2013; Pitts, 2008 & 2013).

The term 'CSE' has a broad application and this has created some confusion in practice (Beckett & Walker, 2017). Some of this confusion can be related to the broadness of the 'CSE' concept itself (discussed later) and the vagueness around what constitutes an 'exchange' (Beckett & Walker, 2017; Kelly & Karsna, 2017).

An 'exchange' of something either tangible or intangible is defined as the 'core dynamic at play' in all forms and contexts of sexual exploitation (DfE, 2017: 6). This gain could be for the young person, the perpetrator(s) or both. Intangible gains might include power, status and affection and child sexual abuse (CSA) might also involve tangible rewards such as sweets, gifts, cigarettes and alcohol. The parameters of what young people receive in CSE which distinguish it from CSA are unclear (Kelly & Karnsa, 2017).

Kelly and Regan (2000: 15) argue that there are similarities and differences between sexual exploitation and other forms of CSA. Crucially, they argue that sexual exploitation 'embodies additional dynamics and realities'. They also point out that there may be a number of exploiters involved in the organisation of sexual exploitation who are known to the young

person; however, CSE also involves a large number of abusers who the young person does not know. Furthermore, there are a range of myths and stereotypes which operate to blame victims and excuse perpetrators in all forms of abuse but in the context of sexual exploitation, there are additional layers of misunderstandings related to the sex industry which serve to blame victims and excuse the exploiters and abusers (Kelly & Regan, 2000).

As noted above, 'CSE' is now applied to a wide range of forms and contexts of abuse where an 'exchange' of some description is defined as the signifier which demarcates sexual exploitation from other forms of child sexual abuse. However, that young people exchange sex for something they need or want is not new (Hallett, 2017). Indeed, the origins of the issue can be traced back to the late 19th Century when journalist W T Stead published a series of articles about child prostitution in Victorian London (Gorham, 1978; Brown & Barrett, 2002).

Child prostitution to child sexual exploitation: criminalisation to victims of abuse

Progress towards greater awareness of the violence experienced in childhood began in the 1960s with a focus on physical abuse. This was followed by neglect and sexual abuse in the 1970s/80s and then 'organised' abuse, sexual exploitation and child prostitution in the 1990s (Kelly & Regan, 2000). There are some notable earlier exceptions which addressed the issue of child prostitution (see, for example, Burgess & Clark, 1984; Sereny, 1985; Ennew, 1986; Wild, 1989).

As discourses around child sexual abuse were being constructed throughout the twentieth century – and responses were being developed - discourses relating to child prostitution were constructed rather differently to those of the former (Brown & Barrett, 2002). These drew directly upon discourses about adult women in prostitution as lacking in morals and as outside of socially accepted norms (Barrett & Brown, 2002; Brown, 2004). For a large part of the twentieth century, young people abused through prostitution were considered as 'dangerous' and 'corrupting' of other children (Brown, 2004).

> Child prostitutes have been perceived… as *not* asexual, dependant, moral or 'real' children, but also *not* as adults. This tendency for negative abstraction has led to assumptions about what child prostitutes are, so that they have been seen as sexually assertive, independent, immoral, and as a distorted or perverse form of childhood or something 'other' (Brown, 2004: 345).

The construction of young people involved in prostitution as something 'other' led to the condemnation and routine criminalisation of the young people involved (Brown & Barrett, 2002). In the period between 1990-99, a total of 1,961 proceedings were brought against young people at the magistrates' courts for the offence of persistently loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution. In the same period, 1,785 were found guilty (Phoenix, 2012).

Young people involved in prostitution presented a challenge to 'childhood' and to the concept of an 'innocent' and 'helpless' child victim (Arye & Barrett, 2000; Brown & Barrett, 2002). These young people were most often teenagers who appeared to be exercising a degree of control over their circumstances and professional interest rarely moved beyond a focus on their 'bad' behaviour (Shaw & Butler, 1998). As a consequence, they were excluded from the welfare provisions available to children abused in different contexts (Ayre & Barrett, 2000). Melrose (2004: 18) notes: 'It was not a problem that practitioners and policy makers were prepared to confront'.

In the 1990s there was a stream of campaigns and research disseminated by prominent children's charities (see, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Kelly *et al,* 1995; Barrett, 1997; Swann *et al,* 1998; Melrose *et al,* 1999). This research documented the connections between running away, either from home or local authority care, and prostitution (Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Pitts, 1997; Melrose *et al,* 1999).

Lee and O'Brien (1995) found that one in seven of the young people who took part in their study had exchanged sex in return for money, shelter or other means of survival since

running away. Writing slightly earlier, Green (1992: 5) similarly noted that young people may provide ‘sexual services in exchange for some sort of payment, such as money, drink, drugs, other consumer goods, or even a bed and roof over one’s head for the night’.

Peer group association and ‘drift’ into prostitution were also common explanations for how young people became involved (see, for example, Jesson, 1993; Pitts, 1997; Melrose *et al,* 1999; Pearce *et al,* 2002). In a report for the Children’s Society, Melrose and colleagues (1999) found that more than half of the participants said that they had become involved in prostitution through peer groups (n=27 of 50). Ten of these participants said that they were coerced by another person. This finding, along with a sizable amount of other research, presents a challenge to the apparent dominance of the ‘boyfriend’ model.

The boyfriend model was developed by Barnardos (Swann *et al,* 1998) and was based on their work with young women and girls in the Streets and Lanes Project in Bradford. This describes a process in which a young woman is coerced into exchanging sex by an older man who pretends to be her ‘boyfriend’. Swann (1998 & 2000) defines a process of ‘ensnaring’, ‘creating dependency’ and ‘taking control’. In the final stage of ‘total dominance’, a young woman is coerced into having sex with his ‘friends’ for payment. The love and affection for the ‘boyfriend’, alongside threats, actual violence, overt and more subtle forms of control sustain the abuse of young women through prostitution (Swann, 2000). This model parallels with the ‘procuring strategy’ described by Barry (1984) in *Female Sexual Slavery*.

Prior to 2000, there was no distinction between the involvement of adults and children in prostitution (Melrose, 2013). As already noted, young people in prostitution were responded to as offenders and not as victims of abuse. The work of prominent children’s charities, especially the Children’s Society and Barnardos, forced the issue onto the political agenda. This culminated in the first guidance which addressed children and young people’s involvement in prostitution, published in 2000 (DoH/HO, 2000).

Publication of *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (DoH/HO, 2000) was the first time that young people abused in contexts of prostitution were officially acknowledged as victims. This guidance described in detail how agencies should work together to safeguard children and young people. It represents a significant shift in terms of how young people should be responded to.

> Children involved in prostitution should be treated primarily as the victims of abuse, and their needs require careful assessment. They are likely to require the provision of welfare services and, in many cases, protection under the Children Act 1989 (DoH/HO, 2000: 3).

Criminalisation nonetheless remained a possibility for young people who were considered as 'persistently and voluntarily' soliciting or loitering in a public place for the purposes of prostitution (DoH/HO, 2000). 'Persistence' referred to circumstances in which a young person was considered as voluntarily continuing to exchange sex while support had been put in place to enable 'exit' – arguably, a rather linear approach which was devoid of the complexities involved in supporting young people entrapped in prostitution.

The 2009 guidance (DCSF, 2009) advised against prosecuting young people for prostitution related offences.

> '[T]he criminal law is rarely an effective or appropriate response to children or young people under the age of 18 found loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution…' (DCSF, 2009: 75),

However, a disconnect between policy and criminal law meant that it remained *legally* possible to prosecute children and young people aged 10-17 years old for offences relating to prostitution. In practice it was therefore possible to criminalise a young person for what policy defined as victimisation and abuse, even if the child did not have legal capacity to consent

(Pearce, 2009; Phoenix, 2010). This anomaly persisted until the 2009 (DCSF, 2009) guidance was replaced in 2017 (DfE, 2017).

The Barnardos (Swann *et al,* 1998) *Whose Daughter Next?* campaign was highly influential in shaping policy and practice responses to sexual exploitation (Phoenix, 2002; Melrose, 2004, 2010 & 2013). As part of this campaign Barnardos argued that referring to a child as a 'prostitute' implies that they are making 'informed choices and decisions' (Swann, 2000: 286). They asserted that the young women involved were not 'prostitutes' but victims of child sexual abuse. It followed that the pimps were adult abusers and the 'clients' were child sex offenders (Swann *et al,* 1998; Swann, 2000).

A number of authors argue that it is essential to remain open to the fall range of possibilities and complexities conducive to young people's involvement in prostitution and sexual exploitation (see, for example, Melrose *et al,* 1999; Kelly & Regan, 2000; Arye & Barrett, 2002; Cusick, 2002; Pearce, 2006; Phoenix, 2002; Coy, 2009a; Melrose, 2010 & 2013; O'Hara, 2019). Amongst these, Phoenix (2002 & 2019) and Melrose (2010 & 2013) have been two of the most critical voices.

Limitations of language and the policy approach

Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution (DoH/HO, 2000) has already been identified as a key milestone in history. For the first time, young people involved in prostitution were explicitly brought into the purview of safeguarding and child protection systems. However, the capacity of a child welfare approach to respond to *all* young people involved in prostitution or sexual exploitation is contested. These conceptual debates are as much to do with the language used to name the problem as with the policy formulation itself.

Phoenix (2002) argues that the Barnardos (Swann *et al,* 1998) reconceptualisation of the 'prostitution triangle', associated with prostitutes, pimps and clients, to the 'child abuse triangle' is more than semantics. Such renaming, she argues, verges into theories of causation

which serve to decontextualize young people's commercial sexual exchanges from the institution of prostitution (see also, Melrose, 2010 & 2013).

In her critique of the 2000 policy (DoH/HO, 2002), Phoenix (2002: 636) argues that young people involved in prostitution are constituted as 'always and already victims of child (sexual) abuse and the violence of men', rendering redundant the discussions about young people's agency and decisions to exchange sex in response to poverty and/or limited material and social opportunity. This thesis aims to explore both of these positions, through analysis of media representations and in the analysis of the interviews. CSE and prostitution can be understood as violence, abuse and 'grooming' by men but this can exist alongside young people's survival, agency and decisions to exchange sex and it need not be seen as one or the other.

Similarly, Melrose (2010 & 2013) is critical of the 'pimping and grooming' model which dominated policy and practice. She argues that this 'discursive formation' (Melrose, 2013) is derived from a model of western childhood through which young people (especially young women) are constructed as innocent, asexual, vulnerable and helpless (Melrose, 2004 & 2013). Because this model dominates the way young people's involvement in commercial sex is understood, policy and practice are developed in response to a typology which accounts for *some* young people's experiences of exchange-based sex but not *all* young people (Melrose, 2013).

Melrose (2004: 19) notes that talking about young people involved in prostitution had become a 'semantic minefield' but that the language used to capture the problem is vital in terms of how the problem is understood and responded to. Through the 1990s there were some key shifts in language: 'abuse through prostitution', then 'commercial sexual exploitation' and now 'child sexual exploitation' or 'CSE' (Melrose, 2013).

Since 2009 (DCSF, 2009), 'CSE' has become thoroughly entrenched in policy and practice discourses (Beckett & Walker, 2017), albeit without harmony since the debates relating to language, definition and the way these inform responses have continued unabated (see, for example, Martin *et al,* 2014; Kwhali *et al,* 2016; Coy, 2016; O'Hara, 2019; Phoenix, 2019).

These debates are concerned with the concept of 'CSE' and can be broadly split into two positions. In the first are those who argue that collapsing CSE into the broader category of CSA obfuscates the 'additional dynamics and realities' (Kelly & Regan, 2000: 15) associated with sexual exploitation and abuse through prostitution (although the latter term is no longer used in policy) (see, for example, Phoenix, 2002 & 2019; Melrose, 2010 & 2013; Coy, 2016; O'Hara, 2019). In the second are those who argue that no distinction should be made between CSE and CSA (Martin *et al,* 2014; Kwhali *et al,* 2016; Gladman & Heal, 2017; Beckett & Walker, 2017; Eaton, 2019).

As awareness of the range of different ways children and young people experience abuse (notably, mostly in contexts outside of the family) grew, so did the parameters of what the CSE concept encompassed. Melrose (2013) argues that the 'expanding discourse' around CSE has lent an elasticity to the term, such that it has become 'vague' and 'meaningless'. It is possible, she argues, that almost any form of adolescent sexual activity and relationships can be brought into the realm of child protection (see also, Phoenix, 2019). Indeed, the origins of the issue – specifically, that of child prostitution - was a far narrower conceptualisation (Beckett & Walker, 2017).

More recent analyses assert that it remains essential to recognise the agency and the structural conditions under which young women (and adult women) make decisions to exchange sex (Coy, 2016 see also, Phoenix, 2019). Drawing on Melrose (2013), Coy (2016: 576) argues that the erasure of 'abuse through prostitution' has facilitated the dominance of a

'grooming' model which suggests that 'young women can never be actors, only acted on'. She argues that this has implications; it obscures the significance of a gendered pattern in prostitution and sexual exploitation, it makes invisible the men who pay and puts limitations on how the issue is addressed in policy (Coy, 2016).

Building on Coy (2016), O'Hara (2019) similarly argues that the dominance of a grooming model disappears male demand for prostitution. She further contends that the 'pimping' element, in which exploiters coerce young women into commercial sex in order to supply sex buyers with children, is made invisible in policy and legislation. The invisibility of perpetrators is returned to in later chapters.

As noted, an 'exchange' is the key signifier which distinguishes sexual exploitation from child sexual abuse (see DfE, 2017). This could be the giving of love and affection or money, shelter or other material goods. This is a more extensive meaning what most would likely consider as 'prostitution' (Beckett & Walker, 2017). As Phoenix (2002: 361) argues, the 'bottom line' of prostitution is economic need and thus not a desire or need for 'love' or emotional connection.

This position raises questions about the conflation between child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse. This is not to argue that young people's involvement in prostitution and commercial sexual exchanges is not abusive. As Kelly and Regan (2000: 16) argued 20 years ago, 'child prostitution always involves sexual abuse'; a reality captured in the phrase 'abuse through prostitution' or 'commercial sexual exploitation' (Melrose, 2013). They, nonetheless, expressed caution with abandoning the term 'prostitution' altogether.

> [T]o stop using the term prostitution altogether with respect to children would have a number of unhelpful consequences: it would disguise the particular contexts and forms of sexual abuse which a section of children experience; it removes from awareness the reality that they have been prostituted – a reality in which a number of adults as

> recruiters, pimps and customers will be implicated; it deprives us of the opportunity to make connections between child and adult involvement in the sex industry (Kelly & Regan, 2000: 16).

More recently, Ann Coffey MP, as well as Barnardos (Champion, 2014), campaigned for the removal of all references to 'children' and 'prostitution' in law. In her independent review of sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester, Coffey (2014: 53) argued: 'Because [CSE] used to be seen as child prostitution, the children were not seen as victims and their sexual abuse was seen as self-inflicted'. This assertion was supported in both the Jay (2014) and Casey (2015) reports about CSE in Rotherham.

In 2015, the Serious Crime Act replaced all references to 'child prostitution' in the Sexual Offences Act (2003) with the phrase 'sexual exploitation of a child' (Beckett & Walker, 2017). Thus, the disconnect between CSE and prostitution, how ever haphazardly achieved (see Beckett & Walker, 2017), is now embedded in both policy and criminal law.

Others are critical of the categorisation of CSE as distinct from CSA (Martin *et al,* 2014). In an NSPCC report about CSA/E and social work practice, the authors state: 'Sexual abuse is sexual abuse' (Martin *et al,* 2014: 28). Outside of the debates about terminology, definition and CSE, this might read as the authors stating a fact so obvious, that it need not be said. Within this context, however, it takes on a different meaning. Indeed, the literature reviewed in the previous section, illustrated that child prostitution was historically seen as something 'other' than child sexual abuse (Phoenix, 2010). Thus, whilst recognising that sexual abuse takes different forms, the underlying contention here is that CSE *is* child sexual abuse and as such the fundamental issue is the need for safeguarding the welfare of the child and investigation under section 47 of the Children's Act 1989 (Martin *et al,* 2014).

Other critiques of the separation of CSE from CSA rest on the concept of an 'exchange'. Eaton (2019) argues that retaining the concept in current CSE definitions means that it is not

dissimilar from its former conceptualisation as child prostitution. She argues that this is problematic because 'it positions the child as having agency and choice' (Eaton, 2019: 6). Whilst a high degree of control may be present in some cases, the positioning of young people as without *any* agency, becomes problematic when a young person initiates sexual exchanges and/or is resistant to service interventions (Beckett, 2019). However, the receipt of material goods and/or money, has caused some to consider that the child is consenting or complicit in the abuse (Eaton & Holmes, 2017).

Beckett and Walker (2017) suggest that CSE has been informed by a 'puppet on a string' pattern identified by Barnardos (2011). They also point to considerable research which illustrates that the balance of power in CSE contexts is often more complex than a simplistic binary between agency and choice versus compulsion through threats, coercion and force (also see, Melrose, 2010; Pearce *et al*, 2002 & 2013; Pitts, 2013; Hallett, 2017; Beckett, 2019). Again, related to the fuzzy concept of an exchange, Beckett and Walker (2017) suggest that in the current context, the dichotomy between CSE and other forms of CSA is not necessarily a helpful way of reflecting the realities of young people's experiences.

Hallett (2017), however, argues that exchange is fundamental to understanding CSE and this is the key concept which makes sexual exploitation distinct from other forms of child sexual abuse. In interviews, Hallett (2017) found that some young people described acute awareness of the exploitative nature of their relationships; a challenge to the notion that 'grooming' removes any sense of power or determination from young people (see Casey, 2015). She suggests that young people stayed in these relationships because they were one way of meeting their needs, especially if a young person felt unseen by others. For some of the young people in this study, exchanging sex was a 'least-worst' option.

These conceptual discussions aside, there have been considerable developments in terms of policy responses to CSE since the issue of child prostitution was first identified as a

social problem in Victorian times, even if debate continues regarding the shape and form of these guidelines. However, a number of reports published in the aftermath of high-profile cases in areas such as Rochdale, Oxford and Rotherham suggest that practice responses remain lacking.

Practice and professional responses to CSE

In recent years, there have been a number of serious case reviews and independent reports about CSE (see, for example, Griffiths, 2013; Coffey, 2014; Jay, 2014; Casey, 2015; Bedford, 2015), alongside action plans and parliamentary inquiries (see, for example, Home Affairs Committee, 2013; DfE, 2011 & 2012; Champion, 2014; HM Government, 2015 & 2017). All of these reports are framed through a lens of 'vulnerability'.

One early report to emerge was a thematic assessment of 'localised grooming' (CEOP, 2011). Another explored the extent and nature of Local Safeguarding Children Boards' responses to CSE and implementation of the 2009 guidance (Jago *et al,* 2011). This report documented pockets of good practice. However, a concerning finding was that only a quarter of LSCBs were implementing the Government guidance (DCSF, 2009). This suggests that policy was not filtering through to practice on the ground.

Coinciding with the conviction of nine men in Rochdale for the sexual exploitation of five young women, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) launched a two-year enquiry into sexual exploitation in 'gangs' and groups (Berelowitz *et al,* 2012 & 2013). This report estimated that 16,500 children and young people were 'at risk' of CSE and 2,409 young people were known to have been victimised by 'gangs' or groups (Berelowitz *et al,* 2013). Whilst estimating the prevalence of CSE is complex, numerous studies illustrate that sexual exploitation is disproportionately gendered: the majority of victim-survivors are young women and girls and the majority of perpetrators are men and boys (see, for example, Kelly *et al,* 2000; Berelowitz *et al,* 2013; Beckett *et al,* 2013; Kelly & Karsna, 2017).

Whilst a gendered pattern in CSE in clear, estimating the scale of CSE is complicated by definition. As outlined in the previous section, CSE is broad term which is open to interpretation and there is variation between individuals and agencies as to whether a case is designated 'CSE' or 'CSA' (Kelly & Karsna, 2017; Beckett & Walker, 2017 see also, Martin *et al,* 2014).

Kelly and Karsna (2017) also found that the expert participants in this study demonstrated concern that the case in Rotherham and a 'pimping and grooming' (Melrose, 2013) model had come to define sexual exploitation against children and young people; assessments used by agencies to measure CSE indicators were implicitly informed by this model. As a consequence, they note that the trafficking of young people for sexual exploitation and the selling of sex by young people outside of this model were, at times, considered separate from CSE. Although there are these complexities involved in estimating prevalence, using data extrapolated from the Child in Need Census 2015/16, they suggested that 17,600 children and young people were identified that year as at risk of sexual exploitation (Kelly & Karsna, 2017).

However, like all forms of sexual violence and abuse, sexual exploitation against children and young people rarely comes to the attention of services and prevalence studies are likely to underestimate the scale of the issue.

> What is clear from the existing evidence base is that child sexual exploitation is happening across the country. Areas that proactively look for child sexual exploitation, and create the appropriate conditions for identifying and responding to it, are uncovering a problem (Beckett *et al,* 2017: 11).

The OCC report noted that many agencies and services were failing to effectively safeguard children and young people: 'Many agencies are *forgetting the child*. Children who are at high risk of CSE, or already victims, are often simply ignored or discounted' (Berelowitz *et al*, 2013: 8 original emphasis). Again, common phrases used by professionals at all levels focused on

young people's 'bad' behaviour. This included language such as 'prostituting herself', 'sexually available' and 'asking for it' (Berelowitz *et al,* 2012: 12 see also, Coffey, 2014; Bedford, 2015). Taylor (2020) argues that 'victim-blaming', as identified in these examples, is pervasive in responses to victim-survivors of sexual violence and abuse. She defines victim-blaming as: 'The transference of blame from the perpetrator of a crime to the victim' (Taylor, 2020: 33).

The concepts of 'blame' and 'responsibilisation' are used throughout the thesis. Whilst these concepts are related, there are nuances in the way they are applied. 'Responsibilisation' is used to refer to the way young people are positioned as having responsibilities to engage with and act upon what professionals and others require of them (Hall *et al,* 2017). This focuses more on the agency of victim-survivors and their role and responsibilities to mitigate individual 'risks'. These responsibilities are abstracted from structural conditions and from an individual's location within social systems of power and inequality. Where young people may be perceived as failing to fulfil this role, professionals may reproduce the power and control dynamics of violence and abuse (Coy & Kelly, 2019) and/or discharge their duty of care based on attitudes which imply that different 'choices' and decisions are possible.

Both the Jay (2014) and Casey (2015) reports uncovered patterns of blame and responsibilisation in professional attitudes towards young women. An Ofsted (2016) inspection of five local authorities found comments about the 'promiscuity' of young people in a small number of cases. This report also commented that significant progress has been made in a number of areas and that this was having a positive impact on the experiences of children and young people (Ofsted, 2016).

The Jay (2014) report, an independent review of responses to CSE in Rotherham 1997-2013, was met with a flurry of publicity and media coverage. The report noted few instances of good practice but this did include training which was delivered to a range of agencies and

improved methods of recording CSE. Police and local magistrates, however, did not participate in any training. Jay (2014: 84) notes that 'examples of poor practice and negative attitudes were far more prevalent'. This included lack of interest in CSE, lack of interventions, inter-agency working and a reluctance amongst police to respond to missing persons reports. Jay (2014) also found evidence that police had threatened to arrest some young women for 'wasting police time'.

In her report aimed at local councils, Casey (2015) similarly points to the negative attitudes found in Rotherham which blamed young women. She argues that Rotherham is not alone in having 'significant failings'. This report emphasises the significance of 'grooming' to CSE: '…where there is a victim, a crime has already happened, a child has been groomed, abused and manipulated' (Casey, 2015: 5).

A review of practice in London (Beckett *et al,* 2014) is more encouraging. This report suggested that significant work is underway in most London boroughs and notes some positive developments in practice responses to CSE. The majority of boroughs had either completed or were in the process of developing mechanisms to measure the scale of the problem locally. All but one of the 30 boroughs which participated in the study had or was in the process of assigning CSE co-ordinators/leads and just under three-quarters had developed formal partnerships with voluntary sector organisations.

Whilst the authors note that there is considerable room for improvement, they also found that the boroughs were actively identifying the challenges and areas which needed further development (Beckett *et al,* 2014). This included: on-going support provisions for young people; development of preventative strategies; knowledge around the different forms of CSE, such as peer-on-peer exploitation; more consideration of the vulnerabilities of specific groups, such as young people in care; and the identification, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators. On this latter point, it should be noted that research with young people who have

been through the Criminal Justice System described a disempowering process (Beckett & Warrington, 2015), akin to the revictimisation that adult women have described through rape investigations and criminal trials (see, for example, Martin, 2005). This may suggest that prosecution is not always a priority for young people.

Although there is other evidence which suggests that practice responses to CSE have improved considerably, serious case reviews and independent reports have consistently criticised both the negative attitudes of professionals towards young people and the way these perceptions have impacted their decision-making (Reisel, 2017 see, for example, Griffiths, 2013; Jay, 2014; Coffey, 2014; Casey, 2015; Bedford, 2015). This predominant focus has rendered perpetrators invisible.

Following these reviews, in particular those by Jay (2014) and Casey (2015), *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation* states: 'The Government deplores the sexual exploitation of children, and will not tolerate failure at any level to prevent harm, support victims and bring offenders to justice' (HM Government, 2015: 1). This report claimed the Government would 'eradicate the culture of denial' around CSE and announced plans for a consultation on extension of the 'wilful neglect' offence to children's social care and other practitioners working with children. These proposals were rejected by the Government in 2016 (Stevenson, 2018).

Arguably, the 'culture of denial' (HM Government, 2015: 1) surrounding CSA and CSE is long established. Research which explored social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation identified three overarching and intersecting discourses which influenced institutional responses between 1940 and 2017. The first was defined as 'discourses of deflection': those which deflect responsibility away from perpetrators or institutions. The second was 'discourses of denial': those which deny the harms associated with CSE or CSA or play down its prevalence. The third was 'discourses of disbelief': those which

demonstrate an absolute refusal to accept that child sexual abuse or sexual exploitation had occurred (Lovett *et al,* 2018).

Recent work by Firmin (2018) on 'Contextual Safeguarding' has led to a significant shift in policy and practice approaches to CSE, peer-on-peer and extra-familial abuse. Contextual Safeguarding makes apparent the need for multiagency intervention into the environments and social contexts in which young people experience violence and abuse. This necessitates the need to move beyond individualised and more traditional approaches which focus on the family (Firmin, 2018; Firmin & Lloyd, 2020). In other words, rather than a focus on minimising individual vulnerabilities, attention is shifted to the 'conducive context' (Kelly, 2007) in order to safeguard young people. Contextual Safeguarding was raised by a participant who took part in an interview late in 2019, signalling to its importance in shaping practice. Other research has been concerned with professional decision-making and has evaluated the confidence of social workers in managing CSE and CSA cases.

Reisel (2017) examined professional perceptions and decision-making in CSE cases using hypothetical case studies with 10 participants who worked for a local authority. The participants were provided with a total of nine vignettes (CSE=6, other forms of 'risk'=3) and asked to rank these in order of concern. The participants' reasoning was explored during interviews.

Reisel (2017) found that choice and age guided how professionals assessed each case, suggesting that older young people were considered as less in need of intervention. Reisel (2016) parallels this with recent literature about 'grooming', a process in which young people are manipulated into maintaining a relationship with an abuser. If it was perceived that a young person had consented, it was suggested that they would be less harmed by their experiences. Consent or expressions of choice and agency implied a young person was not a 'complete victim' (Reisel, 2017: 1297).

This chimes with Pearce's (2013) model of 'abused consent' which entails coerced, normalised, survival and condoned consent. Where consent is coerced, through grooming for example, professionals may 'condone' consent in *unconscious* ways due to lack of knowledge, awareness and training. Pearce (2013: 67) argues that this is different from professional negligence whereby CSE is ignored or excused *because* the young person is 16-17 years old or because of attitudes such as 'they will do it anyway'. A report by the Children's Society also suggests that 16-17-year olds can struggle to access support because statutory services either discharge duties or reduce support at 16-years old. This indicates a confusion or reluctance amongst professionals regarding intervention when a young person is legally able to consent to sex. This may mean that coercion and manipulation to perform sexual activities is overlooked (Pona & Baillie, 2015).

Serious case reviews and many of the recent reports about CSE (see, for example, Griffiths, 2013; Jay, 2014; Coffey, 2014; Casey, 2015; Bedford, 2015) have inevitably focused on the role of social care and social work practice. Bedford (2015) suggests that a lack of knowledge amongst social care - and indeed, the police - about grooming and CSE had delayed interventions to safeguard young women. This again suggests that a focus on young women's behaviour and their apparent wilfulness led to professional inaction.

> The more determinedly self-assertive, disruptive or extreme the child's behaviour, the more self-determination they were assumed to have. In fact, the opposite was true (Bedford, 2015: 36).

A study commissioned by the NSPCC undertook focus groups, semi-structured interviews and analysed quantitative data in six local authorities to examine the extent to which social workers felt confident in working with cases involving CSA or CSE (Martin *et al,* 2014). Their findings suggest that confidence amongst social workers is more evident when working with

intrafamilial sexual abuse than CSE, where multi-agency responses are required (see also, Kwhali *et al,* 2016).

As noted earlier, the reorganisation of the child welfare system in the 1970s was not designed with the needs of young people abused through prostitution in mind (Ayre & Barrett, 2000); it was not until the turn of this century that abuse through prostitution was considered a form of sexual abuse (see DoH/HO, 2000). Children's social care has predominately focused on abuse within the context of the family (Bilston, 2019) meaning that education and training does not equate to a preparedness to manage cases outside of a familial context.

Indeed, the NSPCC study (Martin *et al,* 2014) found that whilst social workers felt more confident managing intrafamilial CSA cases, the participants expressed that the pre and post qualifying training they received, was insufficient preparation for both CSA and CSE work (see also, Kwhali *et al,* 2016). Social workers were also unsure of their role in multi-agency working, with some suggesting that cases of grooming and CSE were matters for the police. Moreover, at organisational level there was little concern for the intersecting needs of children from minoritised groups, an issue which the participants found to be problematic (Kwhali *et al,* 2016).

Reflecting back to the debates about definition, Kwhali and colleagues (2016) suggest that the separation of CSE from CSA may negatively impact the interventions available to sexually exploited young people. Defining CSE as child sexual abuse is argued to be a way of streamlining practice on both CSA and CSE.

Brown (2017 & 2019) notes that CSE policy and practice interventions focus on identification of vulnerability and 'vulnerability management'. Albeit that these are contested, there are a range of 'risk factors' and vulnerabilities associated with CSE. These include prior experiences of abuse; bereavement; running away/going missing; drug and alcohol use and self-harm (see DfE, 2017). At the same time, current policy is careful to point out that CSE can

happen to ‘any child, in any community’ (DfE, 2017: 7); all, some or none of these factors may be present in cases of CSE. However, recent reports illustrate that (see, for example, Berelowitz *et al* 2012; Jay 2014; Bedford, 2015) when young people appear to transgress notions of vulnerability and victimhood intervention is not always seen as required and/or can lead to punitive responses (see, for example, Phoenix, 2012b; Pearce, 2013; Hallett, 2017; Brown, 2019; Beckett, 2019).

The following section reviews the literature and commentary on media portrayals of CSA and CSE in England. As already discussed, the media have had a key role in shaping the public narrative around CSE. This began in 2011, following a front page ‘expose’ about ‘grooming’ and ‘Asian sex gangs’ published by *The Times* (Cockbain, 2013).

An overview of the literature about media representations of CSA and CSE

Starting with child sexual abuse, this section gives a brief overview of the history of news-media representations about CSA and CSE.

A short history of child sexual abuse and the media

Feminist analyses of news-media coverage about sexual violence and abuse has focused on the representations of victims, perpetrators and how the media have constructed the problem (see, for example, Soothill & Walby, 1991; Kitzinger & Skidmore, 1995; Carter, 1998; Skidmore, 1998; Kitzinger, 2004). Child sexual abuse emerged as a specific issue in the media in the mid-1980s with a focus on intra-familial abuse. However, this was soon overshadowed by the Cleveland, Rochdale and Orkney cases (Kitzinger, 1996 & 2001).

Following high-profile cases of familial and organised abuse in Cleveland, Rochdale and Orkney in the 1980s to the early 1990s, Kitzinger and Skidmore (1995) reported that journalists described a sense of ‘child abuse fatigue’. They argued that this negatively informed the news selection process, leading to a large amount of coverage about child sexual abuse going unreported. In 1993 the concept of ‘false memories’ of abuse emerged (Kitzinger, 1996).

News-media coverage was saturated with stories about child sexual abuse and the supposedly unscrupulous practices of therapists who were accused of 'implanting' false memories of abuse. This was used to discredit some adults' accounts of childhood sexual abuse. Similar to the cases in Cleveland (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), concern was not with sexual abuse of children but with the parents and particularly for the fathers accused. The False Memory Foundation dissolved in December, 2019 (www.fmsfonline.org) but had shifted the emerging discourses of belief back to one of scepticism.

By the mid-1990s the news-media and audiences were captivated by a 'stranger danger' discourse and the threat posed by 'paedophiles' outside the family. The 'paedophile' became the dominant lens through which the threat of sexual abuse towards children was conceptualised (Kitzinger, 2002). At its peak, the *News of the World* launched its controversial 'naming and shaming' campaign. Following the abduction and murder of Sarah Payne the newspaper galvanised widespread public support. Accompanied with pictures, the paper disclosed the details of convicted sex offenders and made demands for a public sex offenders register (Bell, 2007).

The relative invisibility of sexual exploitation of children compared to other forms of child abuse means that, until fairly recently, the literature is thinner on this topic. There are, however, some periods of note.

The media and CSE

As already noted, awareness of 'child prostitution' in a news-media outlet is first documented in a series of sensationalist 'Maiden Tribute' articles written by journalist W T Stead in 19th Century London. Stead vowed to 'open the eyes' of the public to what he described as a 'veritable slave trade'; widespread child prostitution in London and the organised trafficking of English girls to Europe (Gorham, 1978: 353). Gorham (1978: 353) notes that he described in sensationalised detail the rape of young women who had been

'snared, trapped and outraged either when under the influence of drugs or after a prolonged struggle in a locked room'.

The young women who were the subjects of his articles were almost always working-class and portrayed as the innocent and passive victims of rich and 'evil' men. This campaign against child prostitution was widely credited for establishing grounds to increase the age of consent to 16 in the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, commonly known as 'Stead's Act' (Gorham, 1978).

Discourses about the 'white slave trade' in women and children were stoked periodically by the popular press through the 1920-30s, further obscuring the poverty and deprivation facing women and children in prostitution in this period. During the 1970s, child prostitution was 'rediscovered' (Brown & Barrett, 2002).

The Times, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph* had key roles in the 'rediscovery' of child prostitution during the 1970s. Generally, still considered as outside the remit of child welfare (Ayre & Barrett 2000), *The Times* covered at least eight significant news stories about child prostitution (Brown & Barrett, 2002). These were about the abuse of boys connected to the Playland arcade; the centre of a 'male prostitution ring', and another case involving the prostitution of young women living in local authority care (Brown & Barrett, 2002). The latter received more extensive coverage and was said to have caused 'public outcry'. These representations drew on familiar themes of 'victim/threat' and proposed a dichotomy of adult coercion and force and peer pressure and delinquency (Brown & Barrett, 2002).

The amount of coverage about CSE more recently has been unprecedented. This followed a front-page article published in *The Times* headlined: "*Revealed: conspiracy of silence on UK sex gangs"* (Norfolk, 2011). This article was a catalyst for a flood of other news-media which sought to interrogate an apparent link between the ethnicity of the perpetrators

and 'on-street grooming' of white young women (Cockbain 2013; Gill & Harrison 2015; Tufail 2015).

Cockbain (2013) was one of the first to criticise the focus on race and 'Asian grooming gangs'. She argues that the terms 'Asian', 'Pakistani' and 'Muslim' have been frequently conflated in the coverage and asserts that the construction of 'grooming' as a 'racial crime threat' is founded on spurious statistics. Cockbain and Tufail (2020: 3) later argue: 'Muslim grooming gangs' have become a defining feature of media, political and public debate around child sexual exploitation', leading to the demonisation of young Muslim men. As noted, the highly publicised Jay (2014) report, devoted considerable space to concerns relating to race and ethnicity.

Similarly, Gill and Harrison (2015: 34) argue that a 'moral panic concerning 'South Asian men' grooming white girls for sex' has emerged across the UK in which CSE is constructed as a problem of 'Asian' masculinities and 'Pakistani Muslim culture'. In response to the heightened media coverage about Asian men targeting white girls, The Muslim Women's Network published a report titled *Unheard Voices* (Gohir, 2013). This report suggests that 'honour' and 'shame' can prevent young women from coming forward (see also, Sharp, 2013). Gohir (2013) also found evidence of perpetrators targeting young women within the same ethnic group or religious background, signalling that gender is more significant than race.

Whilst there has been an emphasis on the ethnicity of perpetrators in high-profile cases, as will be explored in Chapter 4, far less consideration has been given to the gender of the exploiters and abusers in recent cases. The significance of gender to sexual exploitation in explored throughout the thesis.

Summary and reflections

This chapter has illustrated the evolution from 'prostitution' to 'CSE' in policy and practice. Policy has developed considerably over the past two decades. Significantly, sexually exploited young people have been repositioned as victims of abuse. Tension nonetheless remains surrounding the most appropriate use of language to describe sexual exploitation, one contention being that 'abuse through prostitution' captures something particular about this form of abuse that 'CSE' does not. Nonetheless, following successful campaigns by children's charities who argued that 'prostitution' implies 'choice', policy discourses have abandoned the term 'prostitution' in relation to children entirely. The literature reviewed here suggests that the reality of young people's experiences is more nuanced than this argument might imply. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 6. The chapter has also drawn attention to the on-going debates around the concept of an 'exchange' to delineate CSE from CSA. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

There have been considerable strides towards more effective responses to CSE; albeit, that there is also significant evidence which suggests that practice responses are inconsistent. Where there are interventions, these can lean towards the responsibilisation of young people, particularly when CSE occurs outside of the dominant 'grooming' model and/or young people are perceived as something less than a 'vulnerable victim'. These themes are discussed throughout and particularly in Chapter 6.

The final section of this chapter provided readers with a brief overview of media representations about CSA and CSE. This provides some context for the news-media analysis in Chapter 4. The next chapter provides a reflective and detailed account of the research process and methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the research process and the methods used to address the research questions. The aim of the study is to explore the gap between media representations about child sexual exploitation (CSE) and the practice-based evidence (Fox, 2003) of specialist practitioners. The research was therefore conducted in two phases: a comparative analysis of newspaper coverage about CSE over two time periods followed by interviews with practitioners working in specialist services within children's charities or in specialist violence against women and girls organisations.

The first part of this chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the research before describing the methodology for both phases of the study. The final section discusses the ethical considerations.

Feminist research and epistemology

Feminist theorists and researchers have challenged the androcentrism of the social sciences (Oakley, 1980; Hill Collins, 2000; Harding, 2004). A central argument is that researchers have positioned the male experience as the 'norm' such that men have been granted power to define issues, language and develop theory (Oakley, 1980; Letherby, 2003; Hesse-Bider, 2012).

> [S]ociology has been in its mode of thinking, methodologies, conceptual organisation and subjects of inquiry, one of the most sexist of academic disciplines… [T]he male social world has constituted the world of male sociology (Oakley, 1980: 71).

Feminists have also critiqued the idea that certain ways of knowing are privileged. Research conducted from within positivist paradigms have historically been linked with generalisability, measurability, 'neutrality' and rationality such that these ways of producing knowledge have been granted an authority in academic research (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 2012).

However, these concepts are not easily adaptable to the study of subjective experience and social realities (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Although the qualitative interview was once hailed as *the* feminist method, feminist researchers make no such claims to 'a' feminist method (Kelly *et al,* 1994): any method can be employed in either feminist and non-feminist ways (Letherby, 2003). Indeed, feminist researchers utilise a range of methods, including those traditionally associated with positivism. Rather, feminism is a 'theory' and 'practice' (Letherby, 2003). According to Skeggs (1994), what differentiates feminist research from other forms of academic research is the fundamental belief that society is unequal and hierarchical and that this has been reflected in research practices. Because society is organised and structured by patriarchy and other systems of oppression, feminist research should seek to challenge systems of power and contribute to social change (Letherby, 2003). This means moving beyond an analysis of sex and gender to examine the interlocking and intersecting systems of power and privilege which organise and structure society – including racism, classism, sexism and other systems of inequality - and how these shape identities and experience (Hill Collins, 2015).

Intersectionality

The origins of intersectional thought and practice are rooted in the activism and scholarship of Black feminists, community activists and intellectuals (Hill Collins, 2015; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). As far back as the late 1800s and into the early twentieth century Black women were writing, speaking and campaigning about the ways race, class and gender work together to structure and sustain Black women's oppression (Hill Collins, 2000). Whilst the fundamental tenets which underlie 'intersectionality' have a long history in Black feminist thought and activism the concept itself, now used widely across a broad range of academic disciplines, emerged most strongly the 1980s and 1990s following two influential papers by written by Crenshaw (1989 & 1991).

Intersectionality alerts us to the social, political and material realities which flow from interlocking systems of power and oppression and the ways these operate to produce social injustice and inequalities for the people within them (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2015). So, whilst women as a class are collectively and individually disadvantaged by sex and sexism, Black and minoritised women's lived experiences are shaped by the interconnectedness of both sexism *and* racism. Black feminists have argued that these oppressive systems cannot be reduced to a single axis of power because freedom from patriarchy cannot be achieved for *all* women whilst structural racism remains intact (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2000).

Hill Collins (2015) posits that intersectionality is a knowledge project and analytical strategy which is attentive to power relations and the way these produce complex social inequalities. This view of intersectionality suggests a need to move beyond singular framings of identities as distinct, static and unchanging to a focus on the ways socially constructed categories intersect to create social experiences which are multidimensional and shaped by interlocking systems of power and privilege (Hill Collins, 2015; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

In this study I use intersectionality as an analytical strategy to explore how coexisting systems of oppression and complex inequalities are reproduced in news-media framings of sexual exploitation and how these systems of inequality were discussed by interviewees. In the analysis of newspaper materials, I explore the intersections of gender and class in shaping news-media stories in relation to young women. Gender, race and ethnicity, as the most salient axes of power that were discussed in the news-media stories, are explored in relation to male perpetrators. The focus of this analysis is limited to sexual exploitation in the context of England and does not extend outwards to explore news-media framings of sexual exploitation in international contexts. The analysis of interview data focuses most explicitly on the intersections between sex, class and (hetero)sexuality.

Whilst my aim is to *use* intersectionality as an analytical tool, rather than a descriptive device to categorise groups of people (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017), I do not engage with every possible dimension of experience or all axes of power conducive to social inequalities and sexual exploitation. For example, while I discuss race and ethnicity in respect of male perpetrators, the analysis in relation to Black and minoritised young women is less developed. This silence is reflective of practice responses to Black and minoritised groups which mean that a significant proportion of victim-survivors of sexual exploitation are not being identified (Davis, 2019).

Additionally, I do not engage in detail with the issues that impact disabled or LGBT young people (for an overview, see Fox, 2016). Heterosexuality, as an institution which reproduces sex-based inequalities and privileges which are reflective of patriarchal structures, and heteronormativity is however analysed in-depth. I will go on to argue in Chapter 7, heteronormative relationships are a key site in which gendered power relations play out and this is of particular significance, but rarely addressed explicitly, to sexual exploitation perpetrated by men and boys, against young women.

As noted earlier, intersectionality is rooted in Black feminist thought and activism. Hill Collins (2015) recalls how the concept has travelled from social movements into the academy and the ways its rapid growth has abstracted some of its fundamental tenets from its original intent. She describes intersectionality as a travelling knowledge project, in which Black and lesbian women were at the forefront.

Now used (or noted) extensively across a range of academic disciplines, its value does not simply lie in its more recent application by academics and social scientists engaged in the world of theory or research. Rather, intersectionality was always intended to be an accessible tool available to anyone in order to make sense of their individual location within systems of

power, how these shape experience, identity and ways of knowing (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020). As Hill Collins and Bilge (2020:2) write: 'Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves'. Relatedly, my individual biography and social location within intersecting systems of power and privilege are important considerations in how I have approached and undertaken this study.

Locating myself in the research

Feminist researchers and theorists have problematised the emphasis in academic research on 'objectivity'. According to Harding (1991), no research is wholly 'objective' or 'value-free'. Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that 'objectivity' and the elimination of bias in research is impossible. As researchers, we occupy positions in the social world and bring our personal experiences and perspectives to the research process (whether or not this is acknowledged) and as such, we cannot and should not make claims to objectivity. Because 'knowledge' is socially situated, it is essential to acknowledge the self its production (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Letherby, 2003). According to Hill Collins (2000: 270):

> Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge… [I]ndividuals and groups forwarding knowledge claims without owning their position are deemed less credible than those who do.

I am a feminist researcher, practitioner and activist. I have worked in the violence against women and girls sector for around 10 years and whilst conducting this study, for an organisation that is rooted firmly in feminist and anti-racist practice and activism. In whatever capacity, my practice has focused on the needs and experiences of women and girls who have experienced men's violence. This is underscored by my commitment to feminist politics, activism and a feminist analysis of the social and structural causes of men's violence against

women and girls. Holding a focus on patriarchal/social contexts and anti-racism, as well as the needs of individual women, is central to my practice and theoretical perspective.

The centring of women and girls, particularly but not only who are victim-survivors of men's violence, in my experiences as a practitioner and activist shaped the focus of this research. This is perhaps most evident in that the focus of this study is about sexual exploitation perpetrated by men against young women. As already noted in Chapter 2, there is of course an empirical basis for this gendered focus, as is evidenced in the gendered disproportionality of sexual exploitation. Yet, as a practitioner and an activist, I am witness to the ways in which the gendered dynamics inherent to all forms of violence against women and girls are downplayed or frequently met with a series of what could be termed: 'Yes, but…' statements in common discourse.

Thus, each phase of this study, from the overall research design, the questions I asked, my interpretation and analysis are shaped by my positionality as a feminist practitioner and my understanding of sexual violence as a gendered problem which stems from the power and privilege ascribed to men over women and the ways this ascribed status interacts with other socially constructed categories and oppressive systems (see Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2000; Deer, 2015).

The participants who took part in this study came from a range of professional backgrounds, experience, services, political and philosophical positions and of course, within feminism there are a diversity of views and perspectives. While some of these aspects of experience and perspectives align with my own, I did not set out to approach this study, either during interviews, interpretation or analysis in order to seek (dis)agreement or conflicts in the practitioner narratives that do not sit neatly with mine. Rather, my aim was to articulate an account of these narratives through an explicitly feminist and intersectional lens, in order to

complicate the discussion and the obfuscation of sex and gender within framings of sexual exploitation of young women in media, practice and research: in each of these arenas the gendered pattern to ‘CSE’ is often observed but a rigorous feminist analysis is rarely applied.

As noted, sex and gender are not the only axes of power that are significant to sexual exploitation of young women by men and I did not approach this research only as woman, a practitioner or as a feminist or as a combination of all of these. My position within intersecting axes of power and privilege have either more or less overtly influenced the research process, albeit that these have been guided by my ontological and epistemological assumptions as a feminist, a practitioner and an activist.

For example, my social location in terms of social class have contributed to the salience of socioeconomic background and class in the thesis. From very early on I was keenly aware of the ways growing up in the last remaining council house on our road marked us as in some way ‘different’ and from my early teens, earning money to pay for the things I saw others have was far more important than any educational attainment. As an academic researcher, a position which generally confers power and privilege, my identity and the way I see the world is closely tied to my working-class roots; positioning me as an outsider within the academy.

Relatedly, my position in terms of sexuality has contributed to the emphasis on heteronormativity in this study. This is also connected to my practice experience, since it is within heterosexual relationships and encounters that a conscious or unconscious adherence to heteronormative scripts are the most overt. This is of course not to imply that power dynamics, coercion and control are *always* absent in same-sex relations or that, by virtue of rejecting heterosexuality, these relationships never conform to heteronormative practices. Nonetheless, the focus of this study is sexual exploitation perpetrated by men against young women and as

such, heteronormativity and its implications for CSE practice and prevention are only considered in respect of heterosexual relations.

So far, I have considered my social location in terms of intersecting systems of oppression, identity and their relevance to this study. Another important consideration is where I sit in terms of race, ethnicity and the power and privilege afforded to me as a white woman engaging with racism and racialisation in the media representations and in the participant accounts. I do not live the impacts of structural racism in my everyday life. However, engaging with racist tropes evident in the media and in (a minority of) the participant narratives has encouraged an increasing reflexivity in respect of whiteness and the power this affords me.

For example, I believe that to some extent it is by virtue of me being white which enabled the few (white) participants who endorsed racist tropes and cultural stereotypes to openly voice these views, even when these are in opposition to the way they described their everyday practice. I have since questioned what it meant for me to be part of those interactions and I have reflected on the extent to which I felt complicit. Certainly, as an advocate for victim-survivors, I recognise that I have a duty to challenge the structural and everyday racism experienced by Black and minoritised women. This is where my role as a researcher diverged from my role as a practitioner, as in this study my interest was to document what participants think, what they think they know and the implications this has for policy and practice.

The first phase of this study is about news-media representations of CSE. It is concerned with how systems of power are evident in the way the media construct news stories about CSE and the way media representations shape and perpetuate systems of power, particularly those relating to gender, class, racism and racialisation.

Phase one: data collection and sample

Phase one of the research was an analysis of printed news-media coverage about CSE. As shown in Chapter 2, there have been a number of critiques about recent coverage, published both before and during the course of this study (see, for example, Cockbain, 2013; Tufail, 2015; Harrison & Gill, 2015; Tufail, 2018; Cockbain & Tufail, 2020). The analysis which follows this chapter, however, is distinctive in its comparative approach. I also employed a rigorous methodological approach to data collection. It aims to analyse and contrast news-media framings about sexual exploitation of children and young people across two periods of increased media and political concern.

As noted in Chapter 2, sexual exploitation or 'child prostitution' has attracted media attention at different points in history. Prior to the publication of *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (DoH/HO) in 2000, children's charities had launched campaigns to raise awareness amongst policy-makers and the public about this form of abuse. Thus, I chose the first timeframe as 1997-99, referred to from here as 'period one'. For reasons already noted, 'period two' was set to cover 2014-15.

UK newspapers are traditionally categorised into 'broadsheet', 'midmarket' and 'tabloid' press. Publications of whatever type tend to align themselves with the politics of the left, right or somewhere in between.

Broadsheet publications are often characterised as more serious in nature, with a focus on 'hard news' (Mendes, 2011). Arguably, broadsheet news is concerned with reporting 'facts'. However, debate is ongoing as to whether journalistic 'objectivity' is possible (Friedman, 1998; Durham, 1998; Ryan, 2001; Munoz-Torres, 2012). As above, news is produced with an intended audience in mind (for example, right/left leaning) and is socially and culturally embedded within the perspectives and opinions of powerful social groups (Richardson, 2007).

Drawing on standpoint theory, particularly the work of Harding (1991), Durham (1998) rejects claims to 'objectivity'.

> '[T]he entire epistemology of 'objectivity' journalism has fallen from grace… Under scrutiny, its philosophical underpinnings have been challenged, revalued, and ultimately rejected' (Durham, 1998: 117).

Tabloid journalism is most frequently associated with sensationalism, entertainment and 'soft news' (Mendes, 2011). Although Franklin (1997) has argued that the division between broadsheet and tabloid press are no longer distinct, the midmarket press typically falls somewhere between these categories. With these variations in mind, I selected a broadsheet (*The Times*), a midmarket (*Daily Mail*) and tabloid publication (*Mirror)* for analysis.

The Times has had a critical role shaping narratives about CSE (see Chapter 2). Andrew Norfolk, lead investigative journalist for *The Times* has written extensively about sexual exploitation by groups of 'Asian' men in locations such as Rochdale, Oxford and Rotherham. Norfolk challenges the perception that his intention was to emphasise the ethnicity of the perpetrators but that his motivation was to shed light on the inaction of institutions which enabled the perpetrators and allowed CSE to continue unchecked (Bindel & Niblock, 2017). Despite these contestations, *The Times* has had a central role in the construction of news frames about sexual exploitation and was chosen for this reason.

The *Daily Mail* has the highest circulation among midmarket newspapers. As of August 2019, over 1.1 million copies are distributed every day (Newsworks, 2019). Critics often characterise the publication as 'reactionary' and 'unsympathetic' to minoritised groups (Cathcart, 2017). It also has one of the highest readerships amongst women (Bingham, 2016). Curiously, the *Daily Mail* is also well known for its criticism and disapproval of women's

behaviour, especially when it is perceived to contravene traditional feminine roles (see, for example, Meyer's (2010) analysis about rape and alcohol).

The paper generally espouses moralistic values such as 'respectability', is supportive of the traditional nuclear family and is vocal in its support of anti-immigration policies. It is also punctuated by anti-feminist themes (Meyer, 2010). For these reasons, this was an important paper to include in the analysis.

The Times and *Daily Mail* are centre-right or right leaning publications. Historically, both newspapers have supported a Conservative government and/or party leader (McKnight, 2009; Gaber, 2014). Therefore, I selected *The Mirror* as the tabloid publication for its variation in style and as a more 'liberal', left-of-centre newspaper. National daily and Sunday editions of all were included in the sample.

Search and inclusion strategy

I used Lexis Nexis, an online search engine, to generate newspaper articles about sexual exploitation published during period one and period two. Pictures were not available.

As described in Chapter 2, language and terminology in the CSE field has been a consistent topic of discussion (see, for example, Melrose, 2010 & 2013; Phoenix, 2010 & 2019 see also, Chapter 5 & 6). 'Child prostitution' and 'abuse through prostitution' were commonly used terms during the 1990s to around the mid-2000s. Currently, 'grooming' is frequently associated, or indeed, conflated with CSE in media, policy and practice (Cockbain, 2013; Melrose, 2013; O'Hara, 2019). I defined search terms with these considerations in mind.

All of the articles generated by the terms 'child prostitute'; 'child prostitution', 'sexual exploitation' and 'grooming' were reviewed. During the initial reading of articles published in period one, I discovered two high-profile cases about three young women who were abused through prostitution. Because of the significance of this coverage to media representations

about CSE at the time, I used their names as additional search terms, in order to generate all of the coverage related to these two cases within the set period. Prior to any exclusions, the total number of articles was 232 for period one and 1,990 for period two.

Four of the articles generated for period one were duplicates. These were removed leaving 228 articles. For period two, 305 articles were duplicates and were removed, leaving 1685. The remaining 1,913 for both period one and two required extensive 'cleaning'.

For example, in the English language there are numerous meanings of the term 'grooming' and for period two, this yielded a high number of pieces that were either irrelevant or were outside the scope of this study. For example, about personal grooming (n=434) or animal grooming (n=154). Moreover, whilst this term is commonly used in the CSE field (see Chapter 7), and particularly in relation to 'Asian grooming gangs' in media representations, it is also widely used in a range of forms and contexts of violence and abuse that are not defined in policy terms as sexual exploitation. This includes child sexual abuse where there is no 'exchange' (n=153).

Furthermore, articles that discussed 'grooming' in relation to terrorism and radicalisation and where sexual exploitation was not explicit in the media's framing of these cases were screened out (n=54). An unforeseen consequence was that media articles which related to the three young women from east London who were coerced by men to travel to Syria were not included in the dataset. Given the more recent media interest, political rhetoric and decisions that have resulted in the statelessness of young women such as Shamima Begum, the extent to which these contexts of abuse and exploitation (even if they are not clearly defined as such in policy) are drawn into the discourse and debates surrounding 'CSE' in media coverage and political discourse would make a valuable contribution to the field.

Appendix 1a contains a detailed breakdown of the articles that were excluded from the dataset. After articles were screened out, a combined total of 1,118 articles remained for period one and period two. I considered this number too high for qualitative analysis where the aim was to provide 'information rich' and 'in-depth understanding' (Patton, 2002: 230) about the way the UK news media represent CSE. I therefore devised a sampling strategy in order to reach the final total of pieces to be included in the analysis (total for period one and two = 390).

Inclusion criteria was based on three categories. (1) Articles that were published in national editions, including Sunday papers (2) Articles of more than 300 words (3) Articles about CSE in England. Cases about CSE in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, which have a different policy[2] and/or legal context (see DoH NI, 2017; Scottish Government, 2016; Welsh Assembly Government, 2011), or those commonly referred to as 'sex tourism', were excluded. As a result, articles about the sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking of young women by Jeffrey Epstein and others were excluded from the dataset (see Tables 3:1-3:13 & Figures 3:1-2 in appendix 1a for a breakdown of the articles and reasons for exclusion).

Congruent with other news-media analyses (see, for example, Galeste *et al*, 2012; Lloyd & Ramon, 2015; Boyle, 2017), the number for period one and two combined was 390 articles. An outcome of the sampling strategy was that far fewer articles from the *Mirror* were included in the final dataset. Overall, the dataset was made up of *The Times* (n=215), *Daily Mail* (n=150) and the *Mirror* (n=25) with significantly more coverage in period two (n=325) compared with period one (n=65).

All of the articles were downloaded and labelled to identify the source and publication date. To manage this large dataset, I uploaded all of the articles into NVIVO (version 11) and

[2] The Northern Ireland Department of Health adopted the DfE (2017) definition in 2017, this replaced the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland 2014 definition. In January 2017, the Welsh Government commissioned a review of the Wales Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation. A consultation review was published in February 2020 (Welsh Government, 2020).

into folders labelled 'period one' or 'period two'. The next section describes the approach to coding and analysis.

Analysis of newspaper materials

There were three layers to the analysis of newspaper coverage. The early stages involved familiarisation with the dataset. This involved actively reading and rereading the articles, thinking about each piece and making notes in a research diary. These notes were early thoughts and considerations about any commonalities or differences in the representations, any changes in the way CSE was being discussed in the two periods and anything that struck me as interesting or significant. From here I devised a structured proforma to systematically check for certain content (see appendix 1b). This was informed by my position as a feminist, as a frontline practitioner in a violence against women and girls service and by the research questions.

The proforma addressed language and terminology used to discuss and describe sexual exploitation, victim-survivors and perpetrators. Empirical data shows an asymmetric pattern of victimisation and perpetration; girls and young women are disproportionately victimised and the perpetrators are disproportionately male (see Chapter 2). Identifying whether the sex of the perpetrator was noted, whether this was descriptive or analytical, was also tracked. The proforma also covered how issues of 'race' and 'culture' was present in the text and how central these concepts were to the messages conveyed in each piece.

Each article was labelled either as a 'specific case' or 'wider context of CSE/child prostitution'. The former focused on individual victim(s) and perpetrators and the specificities of each case and/or the victim-survivor experience. The latter was concerned with charity campaigns, policy developments or those which followed the release of a regional or national

report or serious case review. Editorials and 'letters to the editor' segments were coded separately as these made more explicit the opinion of the author or journalist.

The final layer of the analysis was the development of codes. Codes were developed inductively and in conjunction with the proforma. These were short phrases to capture the meaning or my interpretation of the text. These included: 'prostitution/CSE as young woman's choice/agency/lifestyle'; 'young women represented as vulnerable'; 'victims racialised'; 'perpetrators racialised' and 'culture/religion as explanation/causation'.

Framing media discourses

I used frame analysis to identify and deconstruct journalistic discourses about CSE. Goffman (1974) describes how 'primary frameworks' structure an individual's sense of reality, providing background understandings to the event it describes. These primary frameworks are defined as 'schemata of interpretation' and 'render[s] what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful' (Goffman, 1974: 21).

Goffman (1974) conceptualises two primary frames: 'natural' and 'social'. Natural frameworks, as in the natural and biological sciences, are directed by determinism and are argued to be 'purely physical'. Social frameworks may be more malleable or less organised, but in whatever form or shape, they provide categories of meaning which social actors use to make sense of new information and/or to ascribe meaning to a particular event. Individuals may use a complex range of socially constructed frameworks to make sense of a particular event/information or text. Media and journalistic discourses are tailored – either consciously or subconsciously – in order to influence or shape audience interpretation of past or future events (Tewsbury & Scheufele, 2008).

Framing is an enduring concept in media and communication studies and is a popular way of analysing and investigating the content and effects of news-media (de Vreese &

Lecheler, 2012). It has been influential in examinations of how the media frames crime, social movements and sexual violence against children and young people (see, for example, Ashley & Olsen, 1998; Kitzinger, 2000 & 2004; Hayward & Presdee, 2010; Park *et al*, 2012; Singh, 2018). The way frame analysis is applied varies across disciplines (Tewsbury & Scheufele, 2008) and in the early 1990s, media and political communications scholar, Robert Entman, made the case for 'clarification of a fractured paradigm'.

Entman (1993) defines four aspects of frames. He describes frames as a useful way to capture the power of a communicative text in the way they define a problem, diagnose the causes, make moral judgements and suggest remedies. When identifying the power of frames in a text attention is given to key aspects. These include the *selection* and *salience* of themes and attention to what the frame omits, which in turn supports the hegemonic frame.

> To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described* (Entman, 1993: 52 original emphasis).

Frames are shaped by cultural contexts, the communicators' own belief system and are defined by what they include and exclude. Reporters may intend to follow the rules of 'journalistic objectivity' (and news will convey both information and frames) but simultaneously communicate a dominant framing of a news-story that provides a preferred reading for audiences (Entman, 1993; Tewsbury & Schuefele, 2008), even if this is resisted by readers.

Frame analysis is the approach taken to identify the selection and salience of themes in newspaper articles about sexual exploitation of children and young people. I was concerned with what information, ideas, causes and solutions were conveyed in news-media texts and

how the problem of CSE was represented. Closely related to framing, I also drew upon Kitzinger's (2000) concept of 'media templates'.

Constructing template events

Kitzinger (2000) points out that in every mass media society high-profile events have specific reference points. In frame theory, these are the frames of reference we all use to make sense of a social reality and of society. While media templates are closely related to framing, templates are a distinct concept which influence public perception of an issue or event and impacts what needs to be done to effect change. Frames may be more or less organised and evolve according to time and place. A media template, however, endures far beyond the conclusion of an event or episode and becomes inseparable from wider issues in public debate (Kitzinger, 2000).

Kitzinger (2000 & 2004) developed the concept of a media template through her examination of the 'Cleveland scandal'. In Cleveland, 165 children were diagnosed by two doctors as being sexually abused, claims that were strongly contested by the children's fathers and families. Kitzinger (2000 & 2004) illustrates that the media had a central role in constructing the narrative surrounding the Cleveland cases, both at the time and subsequently. Siding with the fathers and their families, the social workers and the doctors involved in these cases were represented as overzealous and their interventions to protect children they believed to have been subject to sexual abuse, were deemed disproportionate.

Many of the children had physical signs of sexual abuse and anal rape (Campbell, 1988). These contested cases prompted a public inquiry (Butler-Sloss, 1988), not into whether the abuse had taken place, but into the responses of doctors, social workers and children's advocates (Campbell, 1988).

Through content analysis of media coverage, interviews with journalists and focus groups with media audiences, Kitzinger (2000 & 2004) demonstrates how Cleveland became

a lens through which other stories about child sexual abuse were told. She draws on cases in Orkney, in which nine children from five separate families were removed from their home (and subsequently returned to their families), and illustrates that these cases were underscored by the same media frames as in Cleveland: social work incompetence and the overzealous interventions into the lives of innocent families (Kitzinger, 2000). She argues that the cases in Cleveland were used as a template through which the media and public responded to the cases in Orkney.

Thus, media templates are characterised by their rigidity and operate within and contribute to an overarching frame (Kitzinger, 2000). Templates act as a way to understand current events or a news story and to understand and define patterns in a social problem.

> [Media templates] are defined by their lack of innovation, their status as received wisdom and by their *closure*. Far from opening up historical reflection they reify a kind of historical determinism which can filter dissenting accounts, camouflage conflicting facts and promote one type of narrative (Kitzinger, 2000: 75-76).

I draw on this concept to illustrate the ways in which a rigid and precise media template emerges in period two's coverage as a dominant way of defining and understanding the sexual exploitation of young women.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of salient themes that I identified through coding each article, the way themes shaped news-media frames and, in period two, the way a racialised media template operates in journalistic practices to tell news stories about CSE. The second phase of the research involved interviews with specialist practitioners.

An outline of the methodology for phase two

Phase two of the research aimed to explore the gap between media representations of CSE and the 'practice-based evidence' (Fox, 2003) of specialist practitioners. This phase involved

qualitative interviews with practitioners working in violence against women and girls organisations and children's charities. It starts with a discussion about 'practice-based evidence'. This is followed by an outline of the sample of specialist practitioners and a discussion about the interviews and analysis of the transcripts.

Practice-based evidence

As noted, feminist researchers have critiqued epistemologies which privilege particular ways of knowing over others, as well as the methods traditionally seen as the 'best' way of producing knowledge (Stanley & Wise, 1993; Ramazanoglu with Holland, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist researchers have also critiqued positions which assume that the researcher and/or academic has privileged knowledge over participants and thus have sought to challenge the power dynamics involved in research (Oakley, 2000). 'Practice-based evidence' is a way of challenging these power dynamics by positioning the practitioner as the producer of expert knowledge about their field.

> [R]esearch constructs 'practice' as an irrational *other,* the other pole of a binary opposition. As such, the 'truth' of research – paradoxically – must sustain itself unsullied by the threatening irrationality of the practical world, while at the same time claiming to be supremely relevant and valid for these practical settings (Fox, 2003: 85).

Practice-based research is a way of challenging a 'hierarchy of knowledge' which positions academic research as superior to other ways of knowing and learning about the world (Fox, 2003; Coy, 2014).

Coy (2014) has argued that the practice-based evidence of specialist women's organisations is often understated (see also, Coy & Garner, 2012). This is as if to suggest that working with and learning from victim-survivors is not counted as a 'valid' form of data. She argues that this knowledge is not 'anecdata', as it might be perceived from the ivory towers of

academia. Practice-based evidence is 'expertise accumulated through decades of direct intensive, reflective interactions with women, young people, children, men' (Coy, 2014: 6).

As a frontline practitioner in a specialist women's organisation, and as a researcher, I am situated in both the 'practice' and 'research' fields. As a practitioner, I am aware of the challenges, the physical and emotional demands and indeed, the rewards, of direct work with victim-survivors of violence and abuse. To greater or lesser extents, I can relate to the experiences that the participants described. This situated me in a particular position to convey an understanding during the interviews as I am not outside the practice field. Similarly, it was important to remember that when in the 'research' field it was not my role to challenge attitudes which, as a feminist practitioner, I might find problematic. My role as a researcher during these encounters was to learn from others, rather than to counter views in the way I might as an advocate for victim/survivors. The next section describes the sample of practitioners.

Building a sample of specialist practitioners

A range of professionals come into contact with young people affected by CSE. These include social workers, youth workers, teachers, residential care workers, health workers and police. Although workers in these professions have a key role in identifying and responding to CSE (Hallett, 2017), caseloads and experience around CSE are likely to be highly variable. This is especially since CSE has only relatively recently become a mainstream safeguarding concern (see Chapter 5).

This research is also concerned with how media and practice discourses about CSE have changed and developed over time. Children's and women's sector organisations have been doing direct work with young people and families around CSE for decades. Children's charities in particular have been hugely influential in shaping policy, legal and practice approaches to CSE (see, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Pitts, 1997; Swann et al, 1998;

Palmer, 2001; Barnardos, 2011 & 2014). Evaluations of specialist services also show that statutory agencies benefit from the specialist knowledge and skills of women's organisations, which in turn, can inform mainstream practice (Coy, 2016b). Because of the history of working with young people and developing responses to sexual exploitation, I approached children's charities and women's sector organisations with the view that their practice-based evidence would bring valuable insights to this research.

As already noted, a range of professionals will come into contact sexually exploited young people. The participant sample reflects where the work and practice on child sexual exploitation has emerged and only includes practitioners who worked in either children's sector charities or violence against women and girls organisations.

The participants represented a range of towns and cities across England. In terms of geography, there are distinctions in respect of the demographics of the communities where the services are based and indeed, in terms of the localised patterns that have been observed in respect of sexual exploitation. However, given that I chose not to ask the participants to provide demographic information, it is not possible to provide a detailed account of their social location within intersecting systems of power and privilege. Upon reflection, I would choose to do this in future projects.

That said, there was a lack of diversity amongst the participants in terms of ethnicity. Partly, this reflects the practicalities of who I was able to reach and interview and the workforce profile in the CSE arena. That the sample is mainly white practitioners may partly account for a lack of curiosity about race and ethnicity in respect of victim-survivors.

Practitioners were contacted by via publicly available email addresses, both on organisation websites and through the National Working Group (NWG) website (www.nwg.org.uk). Practitioners had given permission to make their contact details public,

however, I sought confirmation from the NWG to use the directory for this purpose. They had no concerns. Practitioners were also accessed through my own contacts in the women's sector and through introductions from my PhD supervisors.

After approval from the London Metropolitan University Ethics Committee, I invited practitioners to take part in either a face-to-face or telephone interview. All prospective participants were provided with an information sheet. This outlined the purpose of the research, confirmed that the study had ethical approval and informed the practitioners how the data would be used (see appendix 2a).

All of the participants are anonymised by number in the analysis of the interview data illustrated in the following chapters. The table below outlines the participant role within their organisation. There is a short description of their professional experience to give readers some context as to where their practice experience is derived. This is intentionally vague to ensure participant anonymity. Eighteen female and two male practitioners took part in an interview.

Table 3:14: Participant role and expertise

Participant 1	Social worker for a children's charity service. Direct case work with sexually exploited young people and facilitating group work with young people and training professionals.
Participant 2	Manager for a children's charity service. Fifteen years of direct work with young people.
Participant 3	Senior outreach worker for a youth project. Around 20 years of experience supporting adult women in prostitution and sexually exploited young people.
Participant 4	Team leader in a violence against women and girl's service. Ten years of experience in the women's

	sector, including direct work with sexually exploited young women.
Participant 5	Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA). Fifteen years of experience as a case worker and an ISVA in a children's organisation.
Participant 6	Case worker for a children's charity service. Fifteen years of experience supporting young people in drug and alcohol services and in sexual exploitation services in the children's sector.
Participant 7	Manager for a local authority sexual exploitation service. Prior experience included working in sexual health services.
Participant 8	Manager of a children's charity service. Prior experience based in youth work and direct work with sexually exploited young people.
Participant 9	Manager of a CSE service based in the children's sector. Experience includes direct work with young people, training and facilitating group work in schools, youth hostels and other youth settings. Also has many years of working with victim/survivors of domestic violence in the women's sector.
Participant 10	Outreach worker for a women's sector charity. In post for up to one year prior to the interview. Direct work with sexually exploited young women.
Participant 11	Case worker for a children's charity. Direct work with sexually exploited young people, group work and training professionals.

Participant 12	Manager of a children's charity service. Began work in drug and alcohol services and moved to a sexual exploitation service more than five years ago. Direct work with young people and overseeing the service.
Participant 13	Lead in a children's charity. Prior experience as a caseworker and manager in various children's organisations, including group work with young people, training professionals and strategic work.
Participant 14	Social worker in a children's charity service. Direct work with children and families around CSE.
Participant 15	Senior manager of a charity. Oversees all sexual violence services, including the young people's service.
Participant 16	Manager in a children's charity service for up to 15 years.
Participant 17	Senior manager of a women's sector charity, prior experience in homelessness services and youth work.
Participant 18	Manager of a children's service. Twenty years of experience working with children and young people, including as a social worker. Experience also in youth homelessness services.
Participant 19	Senior manager of a children's charity service. Prior experience as refuge worker/manager and in sexual violence services.
Participant 20	Manager of a children's service. Trained as a social worker before moving into children's charity sector.

In the following section I reflect on the interview process with the participants.

Interviews with specialist practitioners

Interviews are a valuable method used to explore experiences, views and perspectives by asking open-ended questions (Silverman, 2006). Brennan (2017: 28) writes: ‘Simply stated, an interview is a focused, purposeful conversation between two or more people’. I used semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and practice-based evidence of specialist practitioners.

The majority of the participants took part in a face-to-face interview either at their place of work (n=12) or in a local café (n=2). The remaining six participants chose to take part in a telephone interview. Telephone interviews are a potentially more convenient and less disruptive way of taking part in research, especially in contexts of high caseloads and time constraints. Geographical distance was another element to consider. However, the participants were not asked to travel to take part in an interview and many of those who took part in face-to-face interviews were based some distance away from London.

At the time, and if the participant agreed, I felt it was important that an interview in person would be the best way to generate the richest data. However, I realised that the data generated from telephone interviews were equally as insightful as those conducted face-to-face.

Traditionally, the telephone has been used as a way of gathering quantitative data using surveys (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), although telephone interviews have also been used to gather qualitative data about sensitive or potentially stigmatising subjects (see, for example, Coy *et al,* 2007 on research about men who pay for sex). Thus, there may be times when a telephone interview is the most suitable method.

The main concern around qualitative telephone interviews versus face-to-face interviews is the quality or richness of the data they provide (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Equally, the opposite maybe true in that the telephone provides a sense of anonymity that face-to-face interviews do not. Participants may also feel a greater sense of control over the interaction.

While I did not consider this research 'sensitive' in the same way as engaging with, for example, men who pay for sex (Coy *et al,* 2007) there are nonetheless contentious issues within the media representations about CSE, including racism and Islamophobia. Moreover, the topic of conversation was about sexual exploitation involving children and young people, a subject that many people outside of this field may well find distressing. A telephone interview would not be the most appropriate form of interview under all circumstances. However, this was not the case for this sample of participants, who were selected because of their expertise around CSE.

As noted, despite concerns around the quality of the data gathered over the telephone (see, for example, Cohen *et al,* 2007), including my own initial apprehension, there was no significant differences between the richness of the data generated using the telephone and in person, despite that I was unable to observe non-verbal cues on the phone. The most important part of conducting any interview was the ability to build rapport with the participant by actively listening, use of fillers[3] and silent pauses to convey listening and understanding (even more important on the phone) and use of open questions to encourage elaboration (Clark & Fox Tree, 2002; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I used a topic guide, which was developed with the research questions in mind, to give some form to the interviews. This allowed space to explore issues that I wanted to probe further

[3] This is to refer to 'fillers' such as 'um' and 'uh' (see Clark & Fox Tree, 2002).

or which spoke to what other participants had said about a particular subject. The first part of the topic guide was intended both as a ‘warm up’, where I asked the participant about their current role and background, and to learn more about their professional experience and expertise.

This led onto questions about how the participants understood CSE, what they characterised as its defining features and any changes they may have witnessed over the time they had been working with young people. The next part focused more explicitly on their understandings and reflections on media representations of CSE, any specific cases they may have followed in the press and what they felt was accurate or inaccurate in terms of those representations. I then explored what they thought, if anything, needed to change in the media coverage. The interview concluded by exploring practice approaches: what needed to change and any impacts they perceived of the media representations on practice and policy (see Appendix 2b).

Though presented neatly here, the practice of conducting and being part of the interview process did not always follow the linear approach in the topic guide. Participants would frequently pre-empt questions and sometimes go off on a tangent and need to be brought back to the original topic. On the other hand, some participants would seek clarification that they were not going off subject when in fact they were offering valuable insights into the topic.

This was perhaps most apparent in a telephone interview when a participant stated: ‘Does that make sense? I’m waffling along here’ (Participant 18). Another participant, who also took part in a telephone interview, asked: ‘Does that answer your question?’ (Participant 19). A short summary of what I had understood in each case was sufficient to give the participants clarification.

As soon as possible after the interviews I made notes about how it went and anything that struck me as particularly noteworthy about the interaction. I transcribed the interviews verbatim.

Transcription and early reflections

I scheduled time to transcribe the interviews as soon as possible after they had taken place. This was to ensure that I did not have to rely solely on the audio recordings about the meanings the participants conveyed during the interviews. This approach was to minimise the chances of errors in the final transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was labour intensive, especially if I had conducted more than one interview on the same day or if the recording had background noise of, for example, a busy café.

The transcripts were typed verbatim and punctuated to convey my understanding of the intended meaning. I did not follow the arduous conventions required by some types of conversation analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2007) but I did record fillers and emphasis on words as spoken by the participant. However, for readability I removed these during the write up of the analysis. Emphasis on words as spoken by the participant are presented in italics in Chapters 5-8. All of the transcripts were anonymised and each line and page were numbered and stored on a password protected laptop.

During transcription I recorded notes in the margins using the comments function in Microsoft Word. As I became more familiar with the data, I was able to see connections, links and discrepancies between the participants accounts while transcribing. These observations were also recorded in the comments section in Microsoft Word. The next section outlines the method I used to analyse the interviews.

Thematic analysis of the interviews

There are a number of approaches to thematic analysis (see, for example, Attride-Stearling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006 & 2019; Howitt, 2010). In a paper which proposes a rigorous and systematic approach to conducting thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006: 77) state: 'Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used analytic method…'.

The authors outline an approach to thematic analysis that is theoretically flexible and aims to reflect a reality which goes beyond the 'surface meaning' of the data. It is therefore essential that researchers acknowledge their epistemological and theoretical assumptions (Braun & Clark, 2006 & 2019). In other words, there is more than one way to interpret data as this is informed by the theoretical assumptions made by the researcher. Braun & Clark (2006: 96) argue: 'Themes do not just 'emerge'', which suggests that themes already 'exist' in the data and are waiting to be 'discovered'. This implies that the researcher is passive, rather than active, in the construction of codes and themes.

As I have noted, this study is conducted and informed by my position as a feminist researcher and my experiences working in organisations underpinned by a gendered analysis of violence against women and girls. I explored how the participants reflected on and discussed gender and other axes of power and structural oppressions in their narratives.

My aim was to be systematic in my approach to analysis and to go beyond 'surface meanings' in the data (Braun & Clark, 2013). Rather than to simply summarise everything the participants have said about a particular issue I critically engaged with the data in order to capture shared meanings across the participants narratives - even if these appear disparate or disconnected on a surface level - and to tell their stories as I see them, rather than to seek an objective 'truth' (Braun & Clark, 2013).

Coding and developing themes

Analysis began with familiarisation with the interview data. I read the transcripts a number of times, noting anything of interest. I then wrote a short summary of around 200-300 words for each transcript. This consisted of a brief overview of some of the central topics/points of interest before systematic engagement with the data.

Codes were developed inductively and were used to identify anything of note within the data. This was a word or short phrase to capture the essence of a data item. Everything that was significant to the research questions were coded. Codes were either a word or phrase which drew directly on the participants' use of language. For example, 'safeguarding the body'; 'young women are almost vilified'; 'victim tag' is stigmatising' and 'the media was a catalyst for so many things to happen' or more codes that reflected key concepts such as 'rejects racialised media template'; 'exchange can mean almost anything'; 'grooming is a defining feature of CSE'; 'new language reflects positive change'; 'prostitution conceptualised as choice'; 'responsibilisation of young people/young people blamed for abuse' and 'sexism encourages young women to see themselves as objects/male gaze'.

Initially, the data was coded by hand on a hard copy of the interview transcript. I welcomed this as an opportunity to move away from the computer screen; putting pen to paper offered a different way of the engaging with the whole dataset and, in a sense, becoming much 'closer' to the data than might have been possible through a screen. In a practical sense, this also meant that I was more easily able to read, compare and contrast segments of the interview data without the need at this stage to flick through screens and documents. After the transcripts were coded, I then uploaded all of the transcripts into NVIVO (version 12) and copied across the codes, memos and annotations for ease of access when developing themes.

Themes were defined around ‘central organising concepts’ (Braun & Clark, 2013 & 2019). They were distinct themes, made up of numerous codes and subthemes, but each had a relationship or common thread. As I began to build and define themes, I created a new label which captured the theme in NVIVO and linked to every code/text segment which spoke to the overarching theme.

Some of these themes are used as titles for the chapters which follow. For example, *‘I think I just need to name it, but what is ‘it’’* was underpinned by codes which included ‘exchange can mean almost anything’; ‘exchange implies complicity’; ‘CSE is too broad’; ‘CSE *is* child sexual abuse’ and ‘CSA/E is *all* about grooming’. This spoke to another theme called: *What’s in name?* although it was analysed separately. The story of this theme began with the terminology of ‘child prostitution’ and was used for codes which more explicitly captured the way the participant’s spoke about the language of ‘CSE’ and ‘child prostitution’. Codes which sat underneath this theme included: ‘child prostitution is not *supposed* to be used anymore’; ‘prostitution conceptualised as choice’; ‘naming avoids certain realities’ and ‘the sex industry creates a context for CSE’.

After the development of themes, I selected the most salient extracts of data to tell my story about the participant’s accounts. The next section outlines the ethical considerations for both phase one and phase two of the research.

Ethics

Phase one of the research draws on newspaper articles already available in the public domain. Whilst ethical approval was not required at this stage, there were still some ethical considerations. Firstly, in period one of the analysis young women abused through prostitution were identified using their real names.

The Sexual Offences Act 1992 imposes a lifetime ban on media reporting any information likely to identify a victim of a sexual offence. Victims under 16 can never waive their right to anonymity (Judicial College, 2016). If considered a victim of a sexual offence, the media would not have legally been able to name these young women. This tells us something of the historical context and, as already noted in Chapter 2, prior to *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (DoH/HO, 2000), young people abused through prostitution were routinely criminalised. Some names have been redacted – including family members of the young women.

An exception to the above law on media reporting is where a person has died. Two cases analysed in the period one dataset are about young women who were abused through prostitution and died of drug overdoses.

Readers will see in Chapter 3 that the media frequently drew upon coarse and judgemental language to describe these young women, their friends and their families, particularly in the period one dataset. This was something I expected. Nonetheless, there was something uncomfortable about reading about young women's experiences of violence and in some cases their deaths, and using this for academic research.

As noted, the analysis involved reading these pieces numerous times - enough times that certain phrases and extracts are committed to memory. I have always tried to hold onto the fact that the young women I am reading, hearing and writing about are not simply 'cases' or the 'objects' of my research in the way that they (in my view) were treated as 'objects' in the media reports. This is not a tension I have resolved but I hope that my analysis and critique will contribute to challenging some of the attitudes expressed in these pieces that the thesis suggests, are still prevalent today.

Ethics approval for phase two of the research was sought from the London Metropolitan Ethics Committee. This was approved before I made any contact with practitioners or organisations. When this was granted, I contacted practitioners and organisations with an outline of the research and an invitation to take part (see appendix 2a). The participants were not offered any incentives. They were asked to read and sign the consent form attached to the information sheet prior to the interview. One participant did not consent to an audio recording but agreed that I could take notes during the interview.

The participants were assured anonymity and any information that could identify the participant or organisation was not used. Participants were not asked about individual cases and when these were discussed no identifiable information about a young person was given. As experts in their field, the participants were accustomed to working within their own codes of practice and confidentiality. There were no issues around breaching the confidentiality of young people or any safeguarding concerns.

One of the participants took a brief pause during the interview. During this interaction he was recalling memories of women he had worked with in their adolescence who he knew to be involved in prostitution as adults. He described their faces coming to mind as he spoke. I asked if he wanted to take a break, which he declined. There were no other signs of the participants becoming distressed during the interviews.

Audio recordings were stored in a locked office. Transcripts did not contain any identifiable information about the participants and were stored on a password protected laptop. The participants are anonymised by number in the following chapters.

Throughout the process of conducting this study and producing this thesis I was working as a frontline practitioner in a women's sector charity. Conducting PhD research, especially in combination with frontline work and other commitments, is a physically and

psychologically demanding task. Practical steps such as instilling a routine, time management and setting achievable deadlines were essential to the completion of this work. More difficult was managing the emotional and psychological toll of conducting research about sexual violence. I have many years of experience working in frontline services and have developed coping strategies for my own self-care in this context. However, conducting research in relative isolation can feel draining and sometimes, very lonely. During these moments I realised the importance of supervision – not only to talk about how the work is going but also to reflect on how I was managing in this process.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach to phase one and two of the research. I have introduced some of the concepts which will be drawn upon in the following chapter and the philosophical underpinnings of the research and analysis. The chapter has also provided a reflective account of coding, development of themes and the analysis for phase one and phase two of the study. During coding and analysis, my intention was to consider the ways in which structural inequalities are reflected in news-media stories about CSE and in the practitioners' narratives. The next chapter is based on phase one of the study; a comparative frame analysis of news-media representations over time.

Chapter 4: A step forward and two steps back? Media representations of child sexual exploitation in England

Using frame analysis, this chapter explores news-media representations about abuse through prostitution and sexual exploitation of children and young people in order to trace how news-media framings have changed over time. The two periods analysed are considered as critical points of public awareness, policy and practice development. 'Period one' is 1997-99 and 'period two' is 2014-15. The analysis draws on a dataset drawn from three national newspapers; *The Times,* the *Daily Mail* and the *Mirror*.

Analysis of period one

The coverage in period one can be split into two broad categories:

- Those which document policy developments and the campaigning by children's charities;
- Coverage which focuses on specific cases about sexually exploited young women.

A smaller, but distinct category of articles is characterised by discourses that are related to the role of parents – especially mothers – in protecting children from CSE; this cuts across both period one and two. This section begins with an analysis of the wider context of the newspaper coverage before focusing on two specific cases. It ends with an analysis of the coverage about the media representations of parenting and the way these illustrate intersecting inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991) of gender and class.

The wider context: policy development and campaigning charities

As noted in Chapter 2, throughout the 1990s there was growing concern amongst researchers, academics and children's charities about abuse through prostitution (see, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Barrett, 1997; Swann *et al,* 1998; Melrose *et al,* 1999). At this time, 'child

prostitution' was marginal and even absent, in mainstream child protection and social work practice because it was not understood as an issue of child abuse (Melrose, 2004).

The coverage in this category is mostly sympathetic to the aims of charity campaigns. These campaigns were targeted towards policy makers and sought to galvanise a welfare response to young people abused through prostitution (see Chapter 2).

> Child prostitutes are to be treated as victims rather than criminals in a response to a report by Barnardos… Young prostitutes are often emotionally dependant on their pimps and become 'willing victims' who will agree to any demands to try to preserve what they thought was a stable relationship (Henderson, 1998[4], The Times).

The 'boyfriend' model described in the Barnardos *Whose Daughter Next Campaign?* (Swann *et al,* 1998) appears as one explanation for how young women become 'ensnared' into prostitution.

> A crackdown on pimps who lure children into lives of prostitution and sexual abuse will be announced this week. Ministers will urge police and social workers to target the growth of child prostitution and prosecute pimps and their clients with the full force of the law (Duckworth, 1998, Daily Mail)

Barnardos (Swann *et al,* 1998) also argued that to use the term 'prostitution' in relation to children belied its reality as a form of child sexual abuse. They asserted that 'prostitution' should never be used in this context (see Chapter 2).

Whilst supportive of the charity's cause, the language of 'pimps', 'clients' and 'prostitution' remained entangled within media representations of both the campaign and the

[4] I have chosen to also reference the title of the newspaper publication in the text so it is clear where each example is drawn. Particularly in period two, this also illustrates the significance of *The Times* in shaping the news-media framings of CSE.

problem that needed addressing. It is nonetheless a signal towards the success of the Barnardos campaign; an immensely significant moment in the history of awareness, the development of policy and innovation in responses to a section of young people who had largely been ignored by statutory services or criminalised by the police and criminal justice system.

> Barnardos identified a four-stage process by which vulnerable children were lured into prostitution by serial pimps. The first, ensnaring, involved the young man impressing the girl with his maturity, money and lifestyle. He makes her feel special and important, lavishing attention on her, buying her clothes and jewellery… The further stages, creating dependency, taking control and total dominance, finally results in the girl becoming a 'willing victim'. She agrees to have sex with someone else, often one of his 'friends', to prove her love for him. After a few months, the girl may be 'sold' on to another 'boyfriend' and her 'boyfriend' will move on to ensnare another vulnerable girl into prostitution (Henderson, 1998, The Times).

Here, children and young people are constructed as without agency; powerless to resist the affection, 'love' and demands placed upon them by men who pretend to be their 'boyfriends'. Regardless of the threats, violence and abuse they experience young women are framed as *emotionally* dependant on coercive and controlling men and as such will do anything to maintain the 'love' relationship (see also, Phoenix, 2002).

As noted in Chapter 2, the dominance of the 'boyfriend' model has been critiqued as an explanatory framework for understanding sexual exploitation (see, for example, Phoenix, 2002; Ayre & Barrett, 2002; Coy, 2009; Melrose, 2010 & 2013; O'Hara, 2019). There has been a tendency to draw upon this pattern to explain the involvement of *all* young people, thus obscuring the social and material conditions which structure prostitution (Phoenix, 2002;

Melrose, 2010). At this time, however, media representations about how young people become caught up in the sex industry was more nuanced than might be suggested in the above examples.

> A Council of Europe report in 1993 referred to emotionally damaged youngsters from broken homes, runaways, drug users and street children. Studies in Britain point to young runaways from their homes and from placements in care. The Children's Society's 1994 study found that most run away before 16 and that one in seven of these young people had provided sex for money. Those involved preferred to refer to it as a 'survival strategy' rather than prostitution (Levy, 1997, The Times).

This chimes with much of the research published around this period which demonstrated that prostitution was a survival strategy for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people (see, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Kirby, 1995; O'Neill *et al,* 1995; Pitts, 1997; Melrose *et al* 1999). Research similarly documented that 'risk factors', such as running away and/or experiences in local authority care might increase the possibilities of abuse through prostitution.

This suggests that *The Game's Up* campaign, launched by The Children's Society in 1995 (Lee & O'Brien, 1995) had succeeded in promoting awareness of the individual and collective needs of young people *and* the socioeconomic difficulties they faced. The representation of children and young people as 'damaged', either as a result of sexual exploitation or because of whatever preceded it, is nonetheless problematic. It suggests that there is something inherently 'wrong' with a child who has been exploited and abused. This resonates with parts of the coverage in period two: 'In retrospect, [she] was the ideal victim: emotionally damaged, wary of authority and dangerously naïve' (Driscoll, 2015, The Times).

Other coverage makes more explicit the links between poverty and prostitution. Albeit couched in sensationalist language typical of the tabloid press this is most explicit in an article published in the *Mirror.*

> Prostitution is a seedy world of crack cocaine and heroin, black eyes, slashed faces and the threat of death from AIDS. But more and more women are forced into it through poverty. And so are young girls… Many are alcoholics and wrecked by drugs. What money isn't spent on drugs and contraception goes to their pimps (Mellor & Riches, 1998, Mirror).

Research shows that the 'threat of death from AIDS' is not the only danger facing women involved in prostitution. Evidence suggests that this group of women are significantly more likely to be the targets of physical violence, rape, sexual abuse and murder perpetrated by men (Salfati *et al,* 2008). Nonetheless, the link between poverty and involvement in prostitution is significant. This is a common theme in this subset of period one articles.

> The children, often driven on to the streets because of abuse or broken homes were committing a survival offence, just to 'get money, food and a bed for the night' (Gibb, 1997, The Times).

Overall, the coverage in this first category of articles largely is supportive of the aims of campaigning charities. However, there are a minority which speak to the discourses of 'disbelief and deflection' (Lovett *et al,* 2018) that punctuated media coverage in the 1990s-2000s. For example, this is identified in an article accompanied with the headline: 'Charities accused of exaggerating child prostitution'.

> Charities are being accused of exploiting child prostitution in an increasingly aggressive battle for donations from the public… Rival organisations portrayed themselves as pioneers in the field of child prostitution, issuing publicity material

> including harrowing stories of grim childhoods wrecked by adult pimps and paedophiles (Kennedy, 1997, The Times).

As Chapter 2 noted, the news-media are not immune from engaging in such emotive discourses about child sexual abuse; in the 1990s and 2000s the midmarket and tabloid press was notorious for it (Kitzinger, 2002 & 2004). Indeed, in another article the *Daily Mail* (Lee-Potter, 1999a) warns readers of the dangers of 'drug pushers, paedophiles and perverts [to] adolescents who are streetwise but emotionally as vulnerable as babies'. These young people, the article suggests, 'have chosen a terrible life where their only currency is their youth'. As will be explored in Chapter 6, 'youth' is one of the most highly valued commodities in the sex industry and one which male sex buyers are prepared to pay a premium for.

Elements of *The Game's Up* campaign were condemned in other parts of the coverage for resorting to 'shock tactics'. This condemnation was in reference to a series of posters with the strapline: 'Why go six thousand miles to have sex with children when you can do it in Britain?'.

> The seaside town of Bournemouth fears that it could become a magnet for paedophiles after being featured in a charity campaign against child prostitution… Officials in the Dorset resort said that the leaflet implied that Bournemouth was a centre for child sex tourism. They feared that it could wreck its image as a resort for family holidays, and attract paedophiles (Jenkins, 1997, The Times).

The Children's Society campaign was launched to raise awareness of the criminalisation of children and young people for offences related to prostitution. The arm of the campaign referenced in *The Times* extract above was to draw attention to the adults who pay young people for sex, rather than the young people themselves. Alongside this, the campaign sought to challenge the belief that child prostitution was a problem confined to certain areas of England

or countries that might be connected with ‘sex tourism’; child prostitution was happening and it was happening everywhere, including in areas associated with family fun and summer holidays.

Elements of the ‘stranger danger’ discourse that was so prominent in the 1990s (see Chapter 2) can be seen here. Focus is not on the ‘ordinary’ men who pay young people for sex, or even the young people themselves, but on the threat of the sinister ‘other’ to innocent children and families. Following an apology from the charity’s chief executive, the poster was withdrawn from the area.

The second category of articles in period one focus on specific cases about abuse of young women through prostitution.

Media representations of young women abused through prostitution

The cases discussed below were made particularly newsworthy because two young women died of drug over doses during the period in which they were abused through prostitution. The first is about a young woman called Aliyah Ismail, which was covered most extensively by the *Daily Mail.* The second is a case about a young woman called Lucy Burchell. Lucy’s best friend also features heavily in the coverage about this case. The analysis explores the entanglement of representations which simultaneously position these young women as helpless victims, as sexualised objects and as ‘bad girls’. It starts with an analysis of media representations about the Aliyah Ismail case.

Aliyah Ismail was 13-years-old when she died of a drug overdose whilst under the care of a local authority. Social workers are criticised throughout this coverage for failing to prevent her death. This is represented as a failure caused by social worker incompetence, deep-seated apathy and disregard.

> Yet again a local council has been exposed for its bungling indifference to the fate of a vulnerable child in its care… An official report found that: 'Many agencies acknowledged the concerns. Few had the tenacity to follow up these concerns'. In other words, they shuffled the papers, drew their pay and went home while Aliyah went on the streets to sell herself (Tebbit, 1999, Daily Mail).

The incompetent social worker is a commonly invoked frame in media coverage about child abuse (see, for example, Kitzinger, 2000 & 2004). Another article claims to tell the 'shocking story of a girl who was failed by everyone who could have helped her' (Goodwin, 1999a, Daily Mail). Through this lens of professional failure, Aliyah is framed as vulnerable and abused, worthy of protection by virtue of her age and 'innocence'.

> The sordid details of Aliyah's short life present a parable of innocence betrayed, of the pornographer, drug dealers and pimps eager to abuse and exploit a fragile child, 'friends' who taught her the tricks of the whoring trade, punters willing to pay for sex with a little girl and the boyfriend who didn't even know her name (Goodwin, 1999a, Daily Mail).

These are common themes in the framing of this case. They are shaped by socially constructed notions of childhood and are made more meaningful through the juxtaposition of a 'little girl', a symbol which embodies innocence, fragility and vulnerability with 'whoring' and sex. This undermines what culture defines childhood to be as a time of innate innocence, dependence and asexuality (Kitzinger, 2015) and makes more salient the victim frame. However, she is not straightforwardly represented as a victim of abuse. Themes of agency and self-determination operate alongside themes of the innocent child victim of social worker incompetence and indifference.

> Aliyah's entry into the underworld was complete when she posed for a pimp taking pornographic photographs. By the time she died, a month short of her 14th birthday, she had at least four sexually transmitted diseases. She had carved out a patch on the Edgware Road where she touted for business and acquired a boyfriend to protect her… Aliyah now abandoned all attempts to conceal her *squalid existence*, frankly telling social workers that she was working as a prostitute and taking hard drugs (Doughty & Purnell, 1999, Daily Mail, my emphasis).

The representation of an 'underworld' suggests that prostitution is not reflective of societal norms but exists as a distinct space that is occupied by the 'others', described in one disparaging article about King's Cross – known as a soliciting area in London and where Aliyah was sexually exploited - as 'human flotsam' (Goodwin, 1999b, Daily Mail). In contrast to the 'parable of innocence betrayed' storyline, here she is framed as active, sexually experienced and skilled at establishing herself in a 'underworld' of crime and commercial sex.

Moreover, there is something jarring about the description of a young woman's experience of sexual exploitation as a 'squalid existence'. This language implies a level of immorality and repugnance typical of the representations associated with adult prostitution in which women are positioned as infectious and morally flawed (O'Neill, 1997; Brown & Barrett, 2002).

The tone of these articles is very different from those described earlier where there is an urgency to 'prosecute pimps and their clients with the full force of the law'. In some parts of the coverage, Aliyah is explicitly sexualised and the victimisation she experienced is presented to audiences in overtly salacious ways, conforming to the cliché - 'sex sells' (see also, Soothill & Walby, 1991) - even when it involves violence and abuse against young women.

> Several of Aliyah's friends say they have seen pictures of her… The photos are pornographic, aimed at the paedophile market. In some, Aliyah is wearing her school uniform, or part of it. At 13, she was, after all, a genuine school girl… Aliyah was also learning about *her* trade. She amassed an assortment of tacky underwear – peephole bras, fishnet knickers, stockings and suspenders – and she was beginning *to carve out a patch for herself* on the Edgware Road… [I]n the autumn of 1997 she returned to England as a sexually innocent schoolgirl with fine academic prospects. By January 1998 she was known as 'Aliyah Hurley the slag' and her brother… discovered she had slept with several of his friends (Goodwin, 1999a, Daily Mail, my emphasis).

Here, she is represented as both a sexual subject and a sexual object. This framing does not invite audiences to empathise with a victim of abuse through prostitution. Rather, she is represented as sexually promiscuous, wilful and self-determined. There is evidence that these themes, which have been prevalent in news-media representations about sexual violence more generally (see Soothill & Walby, 1991), continue to shape attitudes and responses to sexually exploited young women (see, for example, Coy, 2008; Berelowitz 2012 & 2013; Gohir, 2013).

Abuse through prostitution is frequently represented as 'work' or a 'lifestyle', common themes in discourses applied to adult women and prostitution. Selection of key phrases such as 'carve out a patch', 'touted for business' and 'sordid lifestyle' make salient the supposed 'choice', corruption and immorality of young women abused through prostitution such that their stories - as told by the media - do not read much like victimisation and abuse. These themes are also identified in the representation of another case about two young women.

The depiction of the Lucy Burchell case follows some key themes. First, she was 'led astray' by friends and a TV programme called *Band of Gold.* Second, she was clever and did well in her GCSEs.

Band of Gold (Granada, 1995-97) was a television series which followed the lives of women living in an economically deprived area of Bradford as they drifted in and out of prostitution. They are poor and prostitution is a way to make ends meet. The women in the programme are subjected to abuse, controlling men and are targeted by a serial killer.

> A schoolgirl was tempted into prostitution by watching ITV's vice drama Band of Gold, a murder trial heard yesterday. After deciding that being a hooker - like those portrayed in the series - was 'a good idea', 16-year-old Lucy Burchell caught a bus to her local red-light district and embarked on an astonishing double life. By day, the bright teenager attended school, studying for her GCSEs. By night, controlled by a pimp and with her brown hair bleached, she sold her body (Golden, 1997a, Daily Mail).

Similar to the way prostitution is framed as an 'underworld' in the Aliyah Ismail case, Lucy is represented here as leading a 'double life'. This implies she was living in two different worlds; the wholesome and good versus the immoral and bad. In the former she is clever, has lots of friends and fulfils the stereotypical role one might expect of a young woman from a middle-class background. The latter is shrouded in secrecy, illegality and underage commercial sex and is signified by the change in her appearance.

A statement by a teacher expressed shock and disbelief at the circumstances surrounding Lucy's death.

> She was a happy, smiling girl… She was popular. Of all the pupils in her year, I wouldn't have expected her to get involved in what I read about (Golden, 1997a, Daily Mail).

Of course, shock and confusion are understandable responses. Nonetheless, a subtext could read that what is the most shocking and the most unbelievable is not necessarily that young

women are sexually exploited in contexts of prostitution but that ‘of all the pupils in her year’, this could happen to a smiley, popular and happy girl.

This reflects much broader social and cultural attitudes of the 1990s in respect of young women and prostitution. Melrose (2004) notes that sexual exploitation of young people through prostitution was not an issue practitioners and policy makers were prepared to confront. As illustrated earlier, this resistance was also identified in the first category of articles analysed for this period.

> [F]ormer president of the Association of Directors of Social Services, said: ‘We still are a society where children are valued and we are beginning to suggest that that isn't the case. We must have a sense of balance. We mustn’t get into the mindset where we see child abuse and child prostitution lurking around every corner’ (Kennedy, 1997, The Times).

Where young women and prostitution was acknowledged as a problem, it was attributed to a few ‘bad girls’ in localities such as Birmingham and Manchester (Melrose, 2004). Lucy, as a young woman from a middle-class family without any prior involvement with services, did not fit into this explanatory framework.

The coverage about this case makes numerous references to a ‘pimp’. For example: ‘She had a pimp, worked from a pitch outside a public house, and in between clients she would telephone a school friend’ (Tendler, 1997, The Times); ‘In March 1996, she began seeing an older man who acted as a pimp for several prostitutes’ (Lee, 1997, The Times); ‘She met a boyfriend, who became her pimp’ (Golden, 1997b, Daily Mail).

Despite this acknowledgement there is no investigation or discussion about who this man was or the part he played in organising and profiting from the prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and girls. That she had a pimp is simply a taken for granted aspect of a

prostitution story such that the role men typically play in terms of the organisation and profiteering from sexual exploitation are hidden in plain sight – as are the men who pay to abuse them (see also, Barrett & Brown, 2002; Melrose, 2004; Coy, 2016, O'Hara, 2019).

An extensive body of research calls into question the apparent influence of a television programme – which depicted a grim view of prostitution as it traced the lives of women as they tried to exit – on Lucy's decision to exchange sex (see, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Barrett, 1997; Swann *et al,* 1998; Melrose *et al,* 1999; Melrose, 2010). It is nonetheless a significant theme in the newspaper coverage about this case.

> Lucy Burchell worked from a regular patch outside the Dog and Partridge pub in the red-light district of Walsall, one of 30 regular prostitutes. Her age did not make her stand out - a dozen of the girls were under-age, including one of Lucy's closest friends… Among her schoolfriends it was an open secret. Among the adults whose lives Lucy touched it seems to have been something they either were not aware of or could not stop. According to some of her friends Lucy believed the world of vice was one of glamour and excitement and was encouraged by a television series about prostitutes called Band of Gold (Lee, 1997, The Times).

Arguably, it would seem absurd to suggest that a dozen young women watched a TV programme about prostitution which made it seem like a 'good idea'. This individualised narrative obscures the social and economic inequalities which underlie prostitution and sexual exploitation (Phoenix, 1999 & 2002; Melrose, 2010 & 2013) – as is illustrated in the coverage about policy and the wider context. Elsewhere, the *Band of Gold* narrative is also challenged, albeit not for the aforementioned reasons.

The most rigorous challenge to this narrative is most salient in the representation of Lucy's best friend.

> Lucy was not as streetwise as the other girl – she was of more influence than the TV programme. I think the lesson parents can draw from this tragedy is to that they need to be aware of the influence of peer pressure (Golden, 1997b, Daily Mail).

This quote was taken from a statement made by another one of Lucy's teachers. As noted earlier, this draws on longstanding discourses which frame young women abused through prostitution as 'bad girls' (see, for example, Brown & Barrett, 2002; Melrose, 2004) who are corrupting of the 'good' ones. There are a number of other implications through the designation of her friend as 'streetwise'.

'Streetwise' is a term that is commonly applied to adult women in prostitution (see, for example, Sharpe, 1998) and may imply some sort of propensity for 'risk-taking' and criminality. It is argued here that the term 'streetwise' is code for a 'different' type of life. That is, those led by working-class and socioeconomically deprived children and young people and which may be perceived as existing outside idealised versions of 'childhood'. This may be particularly so for young women who occupy street-based subcultures or spend time outdoors. Hanging around in public spaces is not traditionally considered as an appropriate activity for girls and has historically been perceived as a transgression by those who do (see McRobbie & Garber, 2000).

This feeds into notions of deserving and undeserving victims; those who *appear* 'invulnerable' and able to fend for themselves warrant little or no concern. Farley (2003) makes a similar observation.

> [I]f observers don't observe the stereotype of 'harmful' prostitution, for example, if they do not see a teenaged girl being trafficked at gunpoint from one country to another, if what they see is a streetwise teenager who says 'I like this job, and I'm making a lot of money', then they don't see the harm (Farley, 2003: 248).

Lucy's best friend was living in local authority care at the time they were both being abused through prostitution. This is significant to the minimisation and sometimes the outright dismissal of the victimisation she also experienced in the framing of this case. Some of this may be due to the historical context in that young people's involvement in prostitution was not defined as child sexual abuse in policy or legal arenas (Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Barrett, 1997; Brown & Barrett, 2002). It could be argued that it was only because of the finality of death that the two cases described here made headlines at all.

However, recent evidence suggests that little has shifted in terms of the attitudes towards (working class) young people who may be perceived as 'streetwise', 'troublesome' or 'out-of-control'. The *National Child Protection Inspection* report into the Metropolitan Police Service found that when young people repeatedly 'go missing' – a known indicator of CSE - police inaction was justified on the basis that young people were assessed as 'streetwise and able to take care of themselves' (HMIC, 2016: 47).

Social class permeates the broader framing of the coverage about Lucy and is indicative of a complex picture in which working class and socioeconomically disadvantaged young women – at least in the context of abuse through prostitution - are not perceived as 'real' child abuse victims, even *as* children (the concept of a 'real' child abuse victim is expanded on in the following chapters, especially see Chapter 5). Arguably, this has as much resonance today as it did in the framing of this case. Recent reports into responses to CSE in areas associated with significant levels of poverty and deprivation illustrate this.

> Victims in many high-profile cases frequently went missing – disappearing overnight sometimes for days on end… The children were talked about as 'streetwise'. This in itself indicated an abrogation of responsibility – as if children were capable of choosing

a lifestyle on the margins of society, among adults who prey upon them, and should be left by professionals to 'get on with it' (Casey, 2015:10).

Young people who live in care or are from poor working-class backgrounds are, arguably, already perceived as 'on the margins' of society, particularly in a social context in which the institution of the family is held in high esteem. Indeed, research suggests that young women in care may grow up feeling stigmatised; 'different'; rejected and abandoned (O'Neill, 2001; Coy, 2009).

As is illustrated in the 'bad girl' framing outlined here, prejudice and discrimination may also mean that working-class young women are judged as worth less than their peers from middle class or seemingly more 'ordinary' backgrounds. This is different in significant ways from 'drifting' into prostitution through peer association (see Melrose, 2010). Lucy's best friend is said to have exerted a 'pernicious' (Lee, 1997, The Times) influence over her when she was not in a 'streetwise' position to protect herself from the dangers associated with prostitution. In turn, it is implied that Lucy's friend – and other working-class girls – are less likely to experience harm through prostitution.

Thus, the 'take home' message is that parents should be wary, not of exploiters and abusers - who are a meagre footnote in the media's coverage of this case - but of 'corrupting' and 'streetwise' girls likely to lead 'happy' and 'popular' young women into the dangers of prostitution and drugs.

Social class is also salient in the media's framing about what needs to be done to tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse through prostitution.

Bad parenting

From the 1960s and especially the 1970s, clinical discourses surrounding intrafamilial abuse considered mothers as 'collusive' in the sexual abuse perpetrated by fathers against their

daughters (Lovett *et al,* 2018). More recently, research has shown that when mothers speak out against child sexual abuse perpetrated by fathers/partners, professional responses draw on heteronormative discourses that blame women for 'failing to protect' their children, being 'bad mothers' or having poor taste in men (McLaren, 2012: 439).

Here, discourses of bad parenting are framed slightly differently and are shaped by sex, class and age.

> We've become destructively politically correct in Britain. It's increasingly difficult to speak the truth, which is that most runaways on our streets are the sons and daughters of women who are constantly pregnant by different men… We have created a welfare system where irresponsible women know that they can continue to conceive and state money will always be available... It's surely madness to say any woman has the right to have as many babies as she wants by uncaring men and expect the state to support her… Any sensible government ought to give every financial incentive possible to couples to get married… This Government has tried to get mothers back to work, but the most vital thing is to stop unemployed, single women having endless children, only financial strictures can do that (Lee-Potter, 1999a, Daily Mail).

Here, the journalist positions herself as 'brave' enough to speak a 'truth' that others dare not voice. This is justified as 'concern for the children'. However, throughout the 1990s proponents of New Right ideologies overtly demonised single mothers as 'benefit scroungers' and one Conservative MP even suggested that unmarried mothers should give up their children for adoption (Atkinson *et al,* 1998). This drew upon longstanding discourses about 'bad mothering' from the 1950s and was particularly associated with working-class families (Chambers, 2001).

New Right rhetoric merged into mainstream Conservative politics and was epitomised in the 'Back to Basics' campaign. This campaign privileged the white middle class and nuclear family, traditional 'family values' and economic self-reliance (Chambers, 2001). Both the campaign, and the assertions in the *Daily Mail* article above operate around well-worn cultural scripts that construct female sexuality as dangerous, especially when expressed outside the confines of marriage.

'Bad parenting' is also identified in the coverage about the Aliyah Ismail case. There is an imbalance here towards her mother, who is described as living 'alone in a rundown council flat' (Goodwin, 1999a, Daily Mail). In one particularly cruel example she is described as being 'too depressed to look after her own child' but 'clearly not too depressed to try to get money from those who made mistakes but at least did more for Aliyah than her own parents ever did (Lee-Potter, 1999b, Daily Mail). In contrast, Lucy's mother is described as 'acting so responsibly' (Lee, 1997, The Times).

As noted, much of the analysis above is resonant with the New Right thinking which dominated political discourses throughout the 1990s. However, discourses of bad parenting are also apparent in parts of the coverage analysed in period two.

> Endless research proves that children who grow up without fathers suffer in all kinds of ways. The truth is the state incentivises a fatherless society. Young women know it will act as a surrogate, providing money and housing but, of course, failing to provide the love and moral guidance a real father should to a child's life. The system does its best, but no amount of money can ever compensate for the support of a proper home. Meanwhile, young people whose childhoods are spent in care are inevitably the most vulnerable in our society. The absence of affection and stability in their lives makes them particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Indeed, many of those who were

> victims in Rotherham and Oxfordshire of the grooming gangs came from such backgrounds (Vine, 2015, Daily Mail).

Again, sexual exploitation of young people is explicitly related to class and age. Young women are framed as solely responsible for sex, contraception and for raising any children that result. When things go wrong, it is young mothers who are blamed and held accountable in ways which bear no equivalence to that of 'uncaring men' or absent fathers. This clearly resonates with the period one articles discussed above and the New Right rhetoric that was often reinforced by mainstream Conservative politicians in the 1990s. For example, Peter Lilly MP claimed in his 'benefit offenders' speech in 1992: 'There's young ladies who get pregnant just to jump the housing queue. And dads who won't support the kids of the ladies they have kissed' (Tory Party Conference, 1992).

More than 20 years later, the state is said to 'incentivise' lone motherhood as if to suggest that single mothers are the financial beneficiaries of an already too generous welfare system that is easily manipulated by the 'feckless' working class (Vine, 2015, Daily Mail). This is despite that it is single mothers who are disproportionately impacted by poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage; social problems that have been amplified through austerity policies and welfare reforms (Fawcett Society, 2012; Rabindrakumar, 2013; Quaid, 2018).

Discourses of 'mother blame' and 'collusive mothers' were evident in the serious case review about sexual exploitation in Rochdale, another way in which responsibility is deflected from perpetrators and institutions towards individuals (Lovett *et al,* 2018). This deflection, albeit through the more gender-neutral lens of 'bad parenting' was also identified in the period two dataset. It is most explicit in a 'Questions about the Rotherham sex scandal' letters section published in *The Times.*

> [T]heir bad parenting created the aggressive, damaged individuals so desperate for love and care that they self-medicate with drink and drugs and cry when they leave the police station because it is the only place they are warm, clean and safe. Parents who allow their children to end up in the care of the state must be made to pay. Home owners should have a charge put on their property and those in council accommodation should be moved to smaller properties and pay a levy with their rent (The Times, 2014).

Another reference to 'bad parenting' is made in relation to a case in Buckinghamshire.

> Inadequate parental supervision turns some underage white girls into an easy target for Asian sex-grooming gangs (Norfolk, 2015a, The Times).

The next part of this chapter is an analysis of the coverage in period two. Here, there is an explicit focus on perpetrators.

Period two: construction of a racialised media template

There was a significant amount of coverage about sexual exploitation in period two (see Appendix 1a: Figure 3.2). This focuses on cases involving a large number of perpetrators and victims. Largely, the media's framing of CSE are shaped the signifiers of 'culture', 'race' and religion and through the racialised construct of 'grooming gangs'. The analysis builds on a growing body of work about media representations, CSE and 'on-street grooming' (see, for example, Cockbain, 2013; Harrison & Gill, 2015; Salter & Dagistanli, 2015; Tufail, 2015 & 2018; Cockbain & Tufail, 2020).

Sexism, racism and political correctness

The concepts of 'race' and 'culture' are central features of the way news stories about CSE are framed. Drawing on Kitzinger's (2000 & 2004) concept of 'media templates', this section

explores the ways in which a racialised media template operates as an explanatory framework for conceptualising ‘grooming’ and CSE in period two.

Terms such as ‘street grooming’ and ‘child sex grooming’ are used interchangeably throughout the coverage in 2014-15 to capture a supposed racialised pattern of CSE (see, for example, Cardy, 2014, Mirror; Mostrous, 2014, The Times; The Times, 2015a; Bentley, 2015, Daily Mail). These cases follow a similar pattern to that documented in a Barnardos (Swann *et al,* 1998) report more than 20 years ago, later described by Melrose (2013) as a ‘pimping and grooming’ model.

> The victims were always aged 12-15, the first contact was in a public place - a shopping mall, a town centre, a bus or train station - and a grooming process developed in which girls were initially flattered and excited by the attentions of young men a few years older than them who took an interest, offered the adult thrills of cigarettes, alcohol and rides in flashy cars, then wanted to become their boyfriends. A sexual relationship developed in which the girl was sooner or later asked to prove her love by sleeping with his best friend, then with more friends (Norfolk, 2014a, The Times).

As Chapter 2 and the coverage analysed in period one illustrated, that men operate in this way to entrap young women in contexts of sexual exploitation is not new. The ‘discovery’ that the media laid claim to was ‘evidence’ of a racialised pattern of perpetration and victimisation in CSE.

> [T]he vast majority of convicted child-sex offenders in this country - take your pick from crimes against boys, or pre-pubescent children, or institutional or online crimes - are white British men, usually acting alone. What made this street-grooming model so different? An extensive three-month trawl through court records and local library newspaper archives eventually produced some startling figures. Since 1997 there had

> been 17 court cases from 13 towns and cities in which two or more men had been convicted of sexual offences linked to the street-grooming exploitation of young teenage girls. Of the 56 men convicted, three were white and 53 were Asian. Of those 53 men, 50 had Muslim names and the vast majority were members of the Pakistani community. We had the figures to support the theory. Now we had to decide what to do with them (Norfolk, 2014a, The Times).

These occasional reminders that most convicted sex offenders are white-British men are also seen in other parts of the coverage (see, for example, Afzal, 2014, Daily Mail; Norfolk, 2015b, The Times). However, this 'new' discovery is underscored by the notion that Asian men specifically target young white women to groom for sexual exploitation (also see Cockbain & Tufail, 2015).

Following the publication of the Jay (2014) inquiry in Rotherham, which dedicated a large amount of space to race and ethnicity, there was a slew of criticism aimed at the Office of the Children's Commissioner report (Berelowitz *et al,* 2012 & 2013) for apparently skirting around the significance of 'race', ethnicity and culture to grooming and CSE. Much of this was aimed at the report author, the then Deputy Children's Commissioner, Sue Berelowitz. In one, more measured example, she was described as having a 'tragic blind spot' on the issue of race and ethnicity.

> Growing awareness of such crimes led to claims that Ms Berelowitz was guilty of a wilful denial of reality in the name of political correctness. It is not, however, the case that she failed to acknowledge that groups of Pakistani-heritage men have groomed and abused white girls. The focus on ethnicity troubled her because of her own belief that the essence of all sexual abuse was male violence against women… Ms Berelowitz argued that such crimes were seen in every 'town, village and hamlet'. For her, 'the

> single most important common denominator… is that they are male'. Cases involving Asian abusers were down to local demographics (Norfolk 2015b, The Times).

One of the OCC reports in question acknowledged that: 'Gender is the single most significant identifying feature of perpetrators' (Berelowitz *et al,* 2012: 103). Whilst this report observes the significance of gender to sexual exploitation, both in terms of perpetration and victimisation, it is not a robust analysis of CSE or sexual abuse as a form of male violence against women. Moreover, there is research which suggests that racially homogenous offending groups primarily reflect ethnically homogenous social networks (Cockbain *et al,* 2011). This is dismissed as having any significance in the media's representations of CSE, as is the media's refusal to centre the way gender, patriarchy and social hierarchies intersect with power and sexual violence more broadly (see also, Tufail, 2018; Harrison & Gill, 2015), despite its own observations that most child sex offenders are men.

The media response to the Jay (2014) report was, perhaps unsurprisingly, more favourable. As noted already, this review estimated that at least 1,400 young women had been sexually exploited in Rotherham between 1997-2013 and stated: 'By far the majority of perpetrators were described as 'Asian' by victims' (Jay, 2014: 2). This, according to the news-media, was all the proof that was needed to confirm that the media had been right all along; services had failed to intervene because of political correctness, leaving perpetrators free to abuse white young women with impunity for more than 15 years.

> When I wrote about the scandal, I was branded racist. The reason? I dared mention the truth: that most of the victims were white or of mixed race, while all too often the perpetrators were of British-Pakistani heritage. Vindication came in a major report last year by Professor Alexis Jay, who confirmed that the greatest number of abusers were from this community. Of course, the vast, decent majority of Muslims must, surely, be

> as disgusted as the rest of us at the abuse. But this racial element remains an uncomfortable aspect of these obnoxious crimes, which was confirmed again yesterday… And so, we reach the crux of the problem. I believe the crimes were not tackled and, indeed, were covered up in Rotherham because the racial make-up of the sex gangs made the whole issue taboo for politically correct politicians, social workers and police (Reid, 2015, Daily Mail).

The publication of Jay's (2014) inquiry inevitably led to widespread condemnation of services and left-wing commentators who were judged to have ignored the 'racial elephant in the room'.

> [T]he racial component of this scandal reflects an attitude widely shared on the left. It is an attitude that says political correctness comes before the welfare of teenage girls, who have already been betrayed by social services, the police and often their own families. It is an attitude that delayed action against grooming, prolonged the suffering of victims and left their families, as one father put it, in despair. It is painfully clear now that a deeply ingrained misogyny among a minority of men of Pakistani origin is behind the curse of the grooming gangs (The Times, 2015b).

Following a number of serious case reviews and independent reports, there were calls for those in charge to step down and jubilation when they eventually did: 'At last! Crime tsar who ducked blame in abuse storm resigns' (Brooke, 2014, Daily Mail).

Research shows that there is a long history of inadequate responses to sexual exploitation and violence against women in general (see, for example Melrose, 2004; Kelly *et al,* 2005; Temkin & Krahe, 2008; Pearce, 2009; Jago *et al,* 2011; Walker *et al,* 2019). Nonetheless, allegations of political correctness are by far the most dominant in the media framing of these cases.

> A scathing report found senior figures at the Labour council suppressed details of how the town's Pakistani community groomed generations of girls for sex. As many as 2,000 children and young girls were sexually abused in the small town while councillors - obsessed with political correctness - refused to confront the problem for fear of appearing racist (Tozer *et al,* 2015, Daily Mail).

In Rotherham, Jay (2014) found that several members of staff described nervousness about identifying the ethnicity of the perpetrators for fear of being thought racist. Others suggested that they were told in clear terms by managers not to. Jay (2014) also described a 'macho', 'sexist' and 'bullying' culture within the council which was 'not an appropriate climate in which to discuss the rape and sexual exploitation of young people' (Jay, 2014: 101 see also, Casey, 2015). There are two articles published in *The Times* that make reference to this.

> Evidence was also found of a 'macho, sexist and bullying' culture within the town hall. Female social workers were advised by senior managers to wear short skirts if they wanted to make progress in their career (Norfolk, 2014b, The Times).

> Alexis Jay's report criticised a macho council culture in which female staff were routinely subjected to sexist bullying (Norfolk, 2015c, The Times).

This was an opportunity for the media to engage with sexism, male-power and problematic masculinities conducive to both the sexual harassment reported by female members of staff *and* the systematic perpetration of sexual exploitation by groups of men in Rotherham. Had this been the case, a more complex and nuanced conversation which took account of gender and power relations in a sexist society may have followed. Instead, the lack of intervention is positioned squarely with 'political correctness' (also see, Cockbain, 2013; Harrison & Gill, 2015; Tufail, 2015 & 2018; Cockbain & Tufail, 2020). This, along with the overt racialisation of the problem, is an obstruction to a gendered analysis and/or alternative perspectives.

Learned through culturalised patterns of socialisation, the perpetrators in these cases are, however, represented as embodying deeply misogynistic attitudes towards women. ‘Misogyny’ is read through an explicitly racialised lens, reinforcing Islamophobic and racist tropes.

Culturalising ‘misogyny’

‘Misogyny’ is defined as hatred of women (Taylor, 2020). The value of this concept to challenge the structures of power and inequality which underlie violence against women and girls is contested (see, for example European Commission, 2010; Kelly, 2010a; Gill & Mason-Bish, 2013). Where journalists propose theories of causation for grooming and CSE, they rely heavily on this concept.

> [I]t would be foolish not to accept that there is a cohort of men from mainly Muslim-faith ethnic minorities, in particular from Pakistan, who view women as different from the rest of us… Make no mistake this is the result of a culture in which women in general are too often viewed as second-rate citizens and white women in particular as third rate. It is a result of the twisted dogma of multiculturalism, whose proponents insist that a culture with diametrically opposite views on women to our own should be allowed to exist in Britain without repercussions (Pemberton, 2015, Daily Mail).

Here, misogyny is framed as determined by a culture that is fundamentally at odds with ‘our own’. This is not to argue that perpetrators of sexual violence do not hold women and girls in contempt in a general sense. However, the article asserts that ‘Muslim faith ethnic minorities’ hold sexist and misogynistic views about women and implies that when these intersect with racial prejudice against white people, grooming and sexual exploitation of white girls is the end result.

Indeed, this example urges Pakistani-Muslims to face up to the 'deeply ingrained' (The Times, 2015) hatred of women.

> Muslims must tackle the misogyny in their midst. Most British Pakistanis are appalled at the horrors of Rotherham, but they have to confront the attitudes that caused it (Syed, 2014, The Times).

'Culture' is a term applied to minoritised groups. White people are rarely described as having 'culture' and it is difficult to imagine mainstream media calling on white people to challenge what it is about 'white' or 'British' culture that perpetuates the violence against women and children perpetrated by white men. A study about media representations of domestic violence notes that the majority of the coverage focuses on cases involving white perpetrators (Lloyd & Ramon, 2016). Unsurprisingly, a racialised framework (albeit under a cultural guise) is not used to explain this violence.

In contrast, CSE – along with terrorism and child marriage – are explicitly defined as 'crimes of culture', thus making invisible the patriarchal social structures conducive to violence against women and children (see also, Harrison & Gill, 2015).

> There is usually a common theme to such crimes of culture. So often, when imported beliefs and practices clash with English law, under the spotlight are cases involving sex, violence and cruelty. And the victims are invariably women or children…[T]his is also a world in which avowedly devout terrorists of Islamic state recently published a manifesto declaring it was 'legitimate for a girl to be married at the age of nine'… When marriage at such a young age is viewed by some back home as culturally acceptable, is it really a surprise that some Muslim men in Britain have not appeared to share the sense of revulsion that is instinctively felt by their non-Muslim neighbours

> when it comes to the idea of having sex with a 12-year-old? (Norfolk, 2015d, The Times).

As noted in Chapter 2, measuring the prevalence of CSE is difficult. What empirical data is available suggests that men are the largest group to perpetrate CSE and the largest proportion of these are white men (Berelowitz *et* al, 2013; NPCC, 2017; Kelly & Karsna, 2017). Not all 'non-Muslim neighbours' – if that is to also mean white-British men – are 'instinctively' repulsed by the sexual exploitation and abuse of young women.

Harrison and Gill (2015) draw on the concept of hegemonic masculinity in their analysis of news-media coverage about South-Asian men and CSE. Hegemonic masculinity is understood as the 'most honoured way of being a man' and requires 'all men to position themselves in relation to it' (Connell, 1995: 258 cited in Harrison & Gill, 2015). Hegemonic masculinity is said to privilege attributes such as physical strength and toughness, aggression, lack of emotion, control and domination (Connell, 2009). Arguably, this concept has a broader application than 'misogyny'; hegemonic masculinity draws attention to the ways power is distributed between men/masculinities and, as Harrison and Gill (2015) point out, its relationship with patriarchy.

> [Hegemonic masculinity] is premised on cross-cultural patriarchal values and norms; there can be no South Asian/Muslim 'version' of hegemonic masculinity. It is the relationship between patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity that is key to understanding all forms of violence against women and girls (Harrison & Gill, 2015: 43-44).

Though there have been a number of similar cases involving white men which coincided with 'grooming' cases about Asian men (Tufail, 2015), there is no comparable coverage about CSE perpetrated by this group. For example, there is an article about case about a 'sex-abuse ring' involving 10 suspects. Six were cleared of charges and the other four - two men and two women

- were found guilty of charges related to CSE. The ethnicity of the perpetrators was not noted. Further investigation found that the offenders were white-British (*The Times*, 2015). This indicates that the men's whiteness was not deemed relevant to the abuse they perpetrated.

Another case where the race and ethnicity of the perpetrators are not noted involved a form of CSE in which 'paedophiles' were described as 'grooming' children and young people to share child abuse images and videos over the internet.

> Many of the victims appear to live in middle-class houses, with teddies and toys visible in the background… One girl, aged around nine, was instructed to perform sex acts on herself while wearing her school uniform… [CEO of the Internet Watch Foundation] said: 'This was a sweet child, around the top end of primary school, in a lovely bedroom. It looked like a very nice, ordinary middle-class home. It wasn't like she was in a hut somewhere' … According to IWF researchers, just over a tenth of the pictures and films are sold online for money - with fees ranging from the price of a cup of coffee to thousands of pounds. The rest are passed around for free. Many criminals are obsessed with collecting, and offer to do 'swapsies' with other perverts, in the same way children exchange football cards in the playground (Ruston, 2015, Daily Mail).

Though it is implied here that the entrapment of children by adults to generate abuse images is a modern phenomenon, 'child pornography' featured in early debates about 'organised abuse' (see Chapter 2). However, the ubiquity of the internet in young people's lives has given rise to increasing concern, particularly in the media, about the safety and 'risks' this poses to children (Jewkes, 2010). In the above article, parents are urged: 'not to leave young children alone with webcams or other devices capable of streaming videos over the internet', thus feeding into a discourse of 'stranger danger' (explored in more detail later). Safeguarding children from 'obsessive' 'paedophiles' and 'perverts' in this context is framed as a matter of individual

responsibility. It is not positioned as a 'cultural' problem but a problem stemming from the compulsivity of a subsection of men and the apparent parental naivety in terms of the 'risks'.

However, the comparative silence surrounding the sexual exploitation and abuse of young women by 'ordinary' men, and the silence surrounding whiteness (which in turn others perpetrators of colour), supports the analysis of the racialised media template. Other cases identified in the analysis also illustrate this.

Both *The Times* and *Daily Mail* cover two cases in a series of articles about groups of Somali and Roma men. These cases are organised around similar ideas and follow the same racialised pattern.

> You failed to respect Britain! Judge blasts migrant child sex gang as he sends them to jail (Stevens, 2014a, Daily Mail);
>
> Somali gang raped British school-girls and told them: it's all part of our culture (Salkeld, 2014, Daily Mail);
>
> Girls aged 11 were groomed for abuse when a group of Somali men embarked on a two-year campaign to use and sell British children for sex (Norfolk, 2014c, The Times).

Although not as high-profile, like the men in Rochdale, Rotherham and Oxford, the men in these cases were convicted of a range of offences including rape, sexual assault and facilitating child prostitution. In the same way as high-profile prosecutions, when reported through the racialised media template it becomes that CSE perpetrated against 'British' children is not only more newsworthy but that there may be an (un)spoken right to be *more* offended by it because *those* men do not *belong* here.

> A judge has told members of a gang who raped, sexually abused and forced girls as young as 12 into prostitution that they had done a 'disservice' to their Roma community… Sentencing the gang, Judge John Bevan QC, singled out the ethnicity of

> the four Roma members who are from the Czech Republic and Slovakia and criticised their failure to learn English (Kenber, 2014b, The Times).

The commentary in the *Daily Mail* was typically more loaded.

> An immigrant child sex gang was jailed yesterday by a judge who condemned them for failing to respect Britain by abusing young girls and failing to learn English (Stevens, 2014a, Daily Mail).

These examples position both the sexual exploitation of young women and an inability to speak English as equivalent acts of contempt and defiance against the 'host' nation.

> The latest case comes after seven Oxford men, mostly of Pakistani heritage, were convicted at the Old Bailey last year of running a paedophile sex ring. That trial followed another… concerning nine Asian men based in Rochdale. Peterborough has seen a sizable influx of immigrants in the past ten years, leading to racial tensions in the city (Stevens 2014b, Daily Mail).

As 'evidence' of these 'racial tensions', the article goes onto reference the 9/11 terror attacks in the US, the murder of a young man by 'Muslim youths' in a 'racist killing' in 2001, a 'violent clash' in 2004 between 'Pakistani', 'Afghan' and 'Iraqi' men and another 2004 'clash' between 'Pakistani and Iraqi groups'. Aside from the racialised othering of the perpetrators, there is no substantive connection between these decade old events and CSE. Another article about a separate case followed a similar pattern.

> The prostitution network is not the first to be uncovered which involves Roma immigrants, one of the UK's fastest growing ethnic minorities… The UK is believed to have one of Western Europe's largest Roma communities, with an estimated 200,000 people. Some expect the number to rise further after immigration bars were lifted for Romanians and Bulgarians (Greenwood 2014, Daily Mail).

Though not explicitly stated, one possible reading suggests that case was not the first, it will not be last and we can only expect sexual exploitation to increase as more Roma people settle in the UK.

While there are far fewer articles in number compared to coverage about Asian men, While there are fewer articles in number compared to coverage about Asian men, the framing of these cases illustrate the rigidity of the narrative which underscores the racialised template: the perpetrators are racially and culturally ‘other’, they operate in defiance of British cultural norms, values and expectations (which, whist not explicitly stated are positioned as egalitarian and non-violent) and make little or no effort to learn about, or assimilate to, the majority culture.

The racialised media template in a wider context of culturalised crime

The racialised threat of Muslims already exists in public discourse (Patel, 2013; Tufail, 2015). Patel (2013: 37) notes that ‘ethnic markers of crime are now largely based on cultural racism’.

> Older and soundly disputed ideas of ‘black criminality’ are not only being re-worked, but are done so in ways that are more palatable, directly taking brown bodies as objects in need of state intervention. It does this while either claiming not to be racist in the biological sense of the term, or by suggesting that any ensuing discrimination is somehow legitimated (Patel, 2013: 37).

Tufail (2015) argues that this can be evidenced in discriminatory counter-terrorism policies and, one might argue, quasi concern about Muslim women’s rights.

> MacShane [former MP for Rotherham] said that he had been aware of ‘the oppression of women within bits of the Muslim community in Britain’ and the problem of marriage between cousins but had not looked into grooming even though it had first been raised by a fellow Labour MP, Ann Cryer, a decade ago. ‘Perhaps yes, as a true Guardian

> reader and liberal leftie, I suppose I didn't want to raise that too hard', he admitted (Kenber, 2014a, The Times)

The extent to which this is genuine concern for Muslim women's rights, rather than as a tool to illustrate the racialised template's validity as not rooted in racism, is questionable. This is perhaps most salient in the example below.

> We are only beginning to understand the potency of Islamic fundamentalism, with its dangerous notions of received truths and moral superiority. It manifests itself in more ways than jihadism. It also drives the attitude behind coerced marriages, female genital mutilation and the dehumanising absurdity of the burka… I suspect that few of the Pakistani men involved in child sexual exploitation were Islamic extremists in the sense of wanting to become jihadists, but the connection is there in a subtler way (Syed, 2014, The Times).

Orientalist (Said, 1974) scripts are drawn upon here to frame Pakistani-Muslim culture as depraved, irrational and 'different' and in opposition to 'ours' as rational, virtuous and 'normal'. Veiling in particular has been subject to intense political scrutiny on an international scale and is often read as sign of hostility towards Western and Eurocentric cultures (Humphrey, 2007). However, it is the apparent 'perversity' of Muslim masculinities (Dagistanli & Grewal, 2012) and the disregard for women's rights that is placed under the microscope here (see also, Tufail, 2015 & 2018).

> Scandals like the abuse in Rotherham are a direct result of social mores that endorse female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and honour killings and of a culture that holds that because white women wear revealing clothes, they must be prostitutes, regardless of their age. For change to happen we first need to accept there is a cultural problem (Pemberton, 2015, Daily Mail).

The intention here is not raise public awareness of violence against South-Asian or Muslim women but to portray a culture as an inherently violent threat to 'British way of life'. As Humphrey (2007: 14) argues: 'When crime is blamed on culture either culture is criminalised or crime is culturalised'.

The narratives which underscore the racialised media template are not new. The media have a long history of vilifying Black men and masculinities through discourses of crime, deviance and violence (see, for example, Hall *et al,* 1978; Soothill & Walby, 1991; Owens Patton & Synder-Yuly, 2007; Cushion *et al*, 2011). The racialised template can be read as a reconceptualisation of these colonial discourses in which the identity of those considered a threat a redefined as the brown, Muslim man and immigrant.

> [T]here is a shift to include new communities and develop racial myths for new circumstances… the black rapist becomes the brown man from a backward and misogynistic culture, anti-feminist, sexually frustrated by traditional culture, addicted to honour killing and viewing women as tradable objects (Bhattacharyya, 2008: 97-98).

These sections have outlined the ways in which perpetrators of grooming and sexual exploitation – and South-Asian and 'immigrant' cultures generally - are framed as 'other' through the lens of a racialised media template. As briefly outlined in Chapter 2, perpetrators of child sexual abuse have routinely been represented in terms of their absolute 'otherness' in relation to the majority (Kitzinger, 2004; Greer & Jewkes, 2005). The analysis in the following section explores in some more detail the narratives which underscore the racialised media template. It suggests that discourses about 'paedophiles' and 'stranger danger' are reformulated and recirculated through this racialised template.

Racialising 'stranger danger'

As noted in Chapter 2, media coverage in the 1990s was saturated with stories about the threat of 'paedophiles' to young children. Alongside this was a prominent discourse about 'stranger danger' (Kitzinger, 2004). Fuelled by the tabloid and right-wing press, parents and members of the public organised to protest the release of convicted sex offenders into communities without public knowledge. Demands were made for a child sex offender disclosure scheme, similar to that of 'Megan's Law' in the USA (Kitzinger, 2002). Known as 'Sarah's Law', this came to fruition in April, 2011 (Home Office, 2012) after a long campaign by the tabloid press.

Kitzinger (2004: 142) argues: '…the media and broader cultural stereotypes encourage a focus on threats from outsiders'. Notably, these campaigns and protests focused on men convicted of sexual abuse offences perpetrated outside of a familial context. A defining feature of 'stranger danger' is the threat to young children and families posed by 'paedophiles' who are constructed as sick and compulsive and are dehumanised in ways to illustrate that such men are less than 'ordinary' (Kitzinger, 2004).

The predominance of the 'grooming gang' narrative reinforces the notion that the biggest risk facing children and families are from predatory strangers. As the above analysis explored, the racialised media template is littered with additional layers of otherness which contribute to a globalising discourse about the perceived threat of Muslim men (see Dagistanli & Grewal, 2012). Following Donald Trump's claims during his presidential campaign that some British localities are 'so radicalised' that police fear for their lives, *The Times* ran an article headlined: 'In Preston, we don't bother them, they don't bother us'.

> When the Lancashire Evening Post ran a robust dismissal of Trump's claims, everyone was in agreement until the readers' comments at the end. 'There may not be no-go areas for police; however, how about asking white natives if they feel safe in Muslim parts

> of town? I wonder if teenage girls would be free to go to Muslim areas of town, free from harassment and grooming' one [member of the public] demanded, referring to the Rotherham scandal of Asian gangs grooming young white girls for sex… Online and often anonymous comments are hardly a basis for reasoned debate but some dissenting voices may reflect a truth that multicultural Britain prefers to ignore (Gillespie, 2015, The Sunday Times).

The assertions made here are not challenged by the journalist – there is even tacit agreement. As a recent report to investigate sexual harassment in public space states: 'Sexual harassment pervades the lives of women and girls and is deeply ingrained in *our* culture' (Women and Equalities Committee, 2018: 3 my emphasis).

Ahmed theorises that a 'stranger' is not somebody we do not recognise. A stranger is an 'object of knowledge', a socially constructed figure that we (the 'community') *already recognise* as not belonging (Ahmed, 2000a: 49).

> Strangers are not simply those who are not known… but those who are, in their very proximity, already recognised as not belonging, as being out of place… [T]he stranger is 'known again' as that which has already contaminated such spaces as a threat to both property and person (Ahmed, 2000b: 20 original emphasis).

When violence, abuse and sexual exploitation against young women is attributed to the racialised 'stranger', the status quo is not challenged.

High profile cases from further afield, in which men involved in multiple-perpetrator rapes are identified as Muslim, shows that this racialised template has reach beyond England, with examples of the template in operation in both France and Australia (see, for example, Humphrey, 2007; Dagistanli & Grewal, 2012) and according to *The Times* (Philips, 2015), in the Netherlands too.

Like the 'paedophiles' of the 1990s press, brown, Muslim men and immigrant 'strangers' are framed in terms of their racialised 'otherness'. Similarly, the racialised media template operates to separate perpetrators from men and masculinity in general such that the men of 'grooming gangs' are constructed as 'stranger than other others' (Ahmed, 2000b: 23).

The racialised media template also positions white young women as at increased 'risk' of grooming and sexual exploitation. Whiteness and 'vulnerability' are central to the way victim-survivors of CSE are represented in period two's coverage. These themes are explored in the final section.

Troubling 'whiteness' and 'vulnerability' in media representations of young women: making class visible

The representations of young women in period two are shaped by two connected themes: 'whiteness' and 'vulnerability'. This section explores how these concepts obscure the significance of social class, and the way this intersects (Crenshaw, 1991) with gender, race and ethnicity. It starts with outlining problems with the emphasis on white victim-survivors of CSE in the media. Namely, that this obscures the victimisation of minoritised young women.

Recognition in the media that young women from minoritised groups are victimised in contexts of sexual exploitation are sparse. When references are made, they follow similar themes explored in the previous sections.

> For many years political correctness has led to the identity of the community involved in the sexual grooming of children and young women in the UK being described as Asian rather than Muslim… Sikh and Hindu communities have for decades been at the receiving end of predatory grooming by members of the Muslim community and have for some time been campaigning in the UK for recognition that there seems to be a clear pattern emerging in recent high-profile sexual grooming gang cases. This pattern

> clearly highlights that these gangs seem to predominantly originate from a Pakistani Muslim community, while their victims are almost always of white, Hindu or Sikh background. We urge the prime minister to tackle head-on why young Muslims in the UK have this disrespectful attitude towards women in other communities (The Times, 2015c).

This letter, signed by a coalition of Sikh and Hindu organisations, might be read as an attempt to challenge the perception that only white-British girls are sexually exploited. However, the underlying narrative serves to reinforce the notion that political correctness has gone too far and Muslim masculinities are dangerous. An editorial in *The Times* follows a similar thread in an article headlined: 'We must say the unsayable about Rotherham…'.

> It's not Pakistani Christians, Hindus or atheists who are involved in these crimes. Nor is it just white girls who are targeted: Sikhs have been complaining for years that their girls are attacked by Muslim men. In Australia, gang rapes in Sydney in 2000 were committed by Lebanese Australians. In the Netherlands, it's Moroccans and Turks who have entrapped non-Muslim girls as sex slaves. The reason is that in Muslim society women are treated as inferior people, and non-Muslims are widely regarded as trash. That's why decent British Muslim leaders have reacted to Rotherham with horror and shame (Philips, 2015, The Times).

This columnist suggests that society is 'gripped' by a 'terrifying group-think' in which people are scared to speak the truth about Islam – apparently 'the greatest PC unsayable of the lot'. Thus, when the victimisation of young women from some minoritised groups is noted, the extent to which this is brought into discussions about 'Muslim sex grooming' (Norfolk, 2015e, The Times) with a true sense of care and concern for their welfare and experiences, is questionable.

The majority of young women discussed in high profile cases, serious case reviews and independent reports lived in some of the most economically deprived areas in the country. Many were in either in local authority care or had been subject to social care intervention for much of their lives (see Griffiths, 2013; Jay, 2014; Bedford, 2015; Casey, 2015). Media coverage has also highlighted a relationship between local authority care and sexual exploitation.

> [CSE] went on for years under the noses of the police, who, the [Oxford] serious case review said, had 'no human connection with the girls'. Like the gang, they regarded the girls, many of whom came from troubled backgrounds or were in care, as trash. As in Rochdale and Rotherham, the authorities ignored warnings or believed that, even if underage, the girls were making a 'lifestyle choice' in taking drugs or having affairs with older men (Driscoll, 2015, The Times).

Here, sexually exploited young women are marked out as in some way 'troubled'. Arguably, this is not dissimilar to the 'bad' girl narrative that shaped both the representations of young women abused through prostitution in period one and the responses of professionals to young women in period two. Like 'bad girls', 'troubled girls' are widely perceived as overtly and dangerously sexualised. Indeed, this is the same discourse that justifies the incarceration of young women in secure units in the name of 'protection' (O'Neill, 2004).

As this article suggests, young women were viewed by agencies as both troubled and troublesome.

> Scared and vulnerable children who were repeatedly subjected to brutal group sex crimes, and whose will to resist adult abusers was stripped from them by intimidation and threats of violence, were dismissed by agencies as 'very difficult girls making bad choices' (Norfolk & Coates, 2015, The Times).

As already illustrated, the coverage analysed is highly critical of police and social workers for failing to intervene to safeguard young women who are recognised in the articles as 'vulnerable'. Though there are few examples which move beyond the narrative of political correctness, there are some useful critiques of professional responses identified in the coverage. Drawing on a case study, Norfolk and Kenber argue that Rotherham police dismissed allegations of rapes and sexual abuse because they viewed young women as 'silly girls' and 'lovesick teenagers'.

> [Her] file is a training manual in how not to conduct a criminal inquiry into sex offences against a child… [W]hen a 999 call was made after the 13-year-old broke down and told her mother of multiple rapes, a series of neatly typed reports laid bare the prejudice of investigating officers. South Yorkshire Police looked at an abused child and saw a naughty girl… [She] is a troubled child steeped in a cycle of abuse. She does not fit the police's narrow understanding of how victims should talk and behave. Instead of supporting a vulnerable child, they seemed to seek reasons to challenge her credibility… The first police officer to speak to the family [made] the mistake of concluding that violent sexual attacks should not be classified as rapes if the victim remained in contact with the alleged offender (Norfolk & Kenber, 2014, The Times).

The idea that 'children lie' about sexual abuse has been identified as an enduring discourse in legal and Criminal Justice System (CJS) responses (Lovett *et al,* 2018). Research also illustrates that conviction rates for rape and sexual assault are consistently low (Kelly *et al,* 2005; Temkin & Krahe, 2008; HMPCPSI, 2019). Kelly (2010b) connects the way the 'incredible words of a woman' are related to social, cultural and media discourses which invoke the notion that false rape allegations against men are common and are undermining the CJS.

Intersecting patterns of sexism and racism may mean that Black women are positioned as the least credible of rape victims by the police and CJS. Moreover, cases of rape against Black women are frequently ignored by the media (Crenshaw, 1991 see also, Sood, 2018). Sexualised images of race operate to construct Black women as promiscuous and hypersexual such that rapes against them are less likely to result in a conviction (Crenshaw, 1991; Sood, 2018). Conversely, representations of white female sexuality as more 'vulnerable' to rape increases the likelihood of arrest and prosecution (Crenshaw, 1991). A more recent exploration of state responses to Black and minoritised women's experiences and reports of sexual and domestic violence found that police failed to respond appropriately and at times, officers ignored women's reports of marital rape (Sisters for Change, 2017).

As the example above notes, the 'credibility' of victim-survivors is often on trial regardless of whether or not a case makes it to court (Kelly *et al,* 2005; Kelly, 2010). Research which explored young people's experiences of the CJS in CSE cases found that the loss of power and control experienced by young people through investigations and/or trial mirror the dynamics of abusive relationships. Furthermore, victims and witnesses may experience the CJS as a form of revictimisation. From early on in the investigative process, young people described feeling judged, as lacking credibility and being made to feel culpable for the exploitation and abuse they had experienced (Beckett & Warrington, 2015).

More recently, evidence suggests that age and gender are significant factors in determining how the CJS is experienced. Compared to men and older women, young women are less likely to gain a conviction (Walker *et al,* 2019). This research also found that Black and minoritised groups are underrepresented in the CJS. The authors infer from this that minoritised groups are less likely to seek a criminal justice response to rape and sexual violence (Walker *et al,* 2019).

Seeking reasons to challenge young women's credibility or commitment to 'real rape' myths and stereotypes (Estrich, 1987) are part of a culture in which the CJS fails victim-survivors who seek justice by way of a criminal conviction (Walker *et al,* 2019). The overwhelming dedication in the vast majority of the period two coverage which asserts that misplaced political correctness shaped police and service responses to young women, obscures this more complex picture.

There is, however, another article published in *The Times* which claims to challenge this dominant framing of political correctness. This is headlined: 'Town that didn't think its lost girl's worth saving; It wasn't political correctness but callousness that abandoned vulnerable children to the Rotherham sex abusers'.

> Asked why [police and social workers] ignored 1,400 girls sexually abused by Pakistani Muslims, shoved under your nose in three major reports, it's easy to blame mimsy leftie multiculturalism. It sounds a lot better than the truth: that you didn't think these victims worthy of police time, council resources or upsetting Asian political allies... If a Rotherham taxi service run, say, by ex-miners had groomed, raped and trafficked girls, would the drivers have been rounded up faster?... How did the police view these lost girls; tarted up beyond their years, rowdy, bawdy, wandering streets at 2am to drink and get into cars with men?... We agree that the very young must be protected from paedophiles. But what about post-pubescent girls, sexually active even if underage? The grotesque saying 'old enough to bleed, old enough to butcher' has as much resonance in the poorer parts of Rotherham as in child-bride marrying, rural Pakistan (Turner, 2014, The Times).

The framing of this article does not to bring attention to the socioeconomic position of the young women sexually exploited by so-called 'grooming-gangs' or indeed, the way in which

class and 'out-of-control' femininities interfaced with the persistent dismissal by professionals who described them as 'slags' and 'child prostitutes' (Narain & Tozer, 2014, Daily Mail). This feeds into broader political and media discourses which frame the social problems facing poor and socioeconomically deprived white people as the fault of immigrants and minoritised groups (Pall Sveinsson, 2009).

A handful of articles analysed in period two make reference to Rochdale, Oxford and Rotherham as economically deprived areas. These are limited and when they do appear, the recognition acts as story-telling devices rather than as a means to draw attention to the structural conditions of young women's lives.

> This disturbing underworld [of child sexual exploitation] existed alongside the beauty of the City of Dreaming Spires. Students and lecturers at Oxford University strolled to colleges or riverside pubs, oblivious to the wan, undernourished teenagers hanging around the shops and parks (Driscoll, 2015, The Times).

The young woman who is the focus of this article was adopted by a family as an older child. She is quoted in the article: 'I just didn't know what to do with this very loving, affectionate, quite well-off family. I'd never known anything like that before'. This is framed by the journalist as her feeling 'more at home' in the 'seedier side' of East Oxford as she goes onto note that 12 out of the 85 districts in the county are among the most deprived 20 per cent in England. Again, sexual exploitation is represented as outside of social norms.

Tufail (2015) argues that it is important to recognise the vulnerability of the young women in cases like Rochdale, Oxford and Rotherham. Indeed, 'vulnerability' is a key concept through which sexually exploited young women are framed. Central to this recognition is the representation of victims as 'white'. An article headlined: 'Girls lured into sex trade for the price of a meal at McDonald's' quotes at length the judge's closing remarks.

> Judge Bevan said the defendants grotesquely took advantage of her vulnerability. He added: 'For the price of a McDonald's, a milkshake and a cinema ticket… by the age of 13 she was sexually experienced, confusing sexual gratification for friendship and love. Why these defendants focused their attention on white under-age girls is unexplained, but I have no doubt vulnerability played a substantial part in it. If they had pursued Asian underage girls, they would have paid a heavy price in their community' (Gysin, 2015, Daily Mail).

The media extracts documented above illustrate that for young women who do not 'perform' vulnerability (Brown, 2017) along the lines of innocence and passivity may be responsibilised by services as willing and self-determined. The media attention in this respect should be welcomed as an attempt to broaden societal perceptions of how 'vulnerability' and 'victimhood' can manifest in ways which some may find unpalatable.

Nonetheless, the emphasis in the media on 'grooming' and 'vulnerability' obscures the significance of gender and class to young women's entrapment in sexual exploitation. 'A good time, alcohol, free food and a ride around in a flash car' (Gysin, 2015, Daily Mail) are signifiers of participation in consumerist society such that takeaway food, alcohol and gifts may come to be seen as special to young women who cannot afford them. This maybe particularly so if, like many of the young women in high profile cases, they have experienced the loss of family and relationships through placements in local authority care (O'Neill, 2001; Coy: 2009). These material gains may also fulfil an emotional need.

This dynamic is more complex than is suggested in media representations which claim young women are 'lured into the sex trade' for a McDonald's meal or are 'groomed' by predatory men who take advantage of their 'vulnerability'. As will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7, in the same way that the giving of gifts by men in heteronormative relationships

may be interpreted as signs of love and commitment, the giving of gifts in order to entrap young women in contexts of sexual exploitation and abuse may also be perceived as symbols of love and care. Thus, an economic/material exchange may fulfil a myriad of needs/wants and sometimes these can coexist.

Thus, representing victim-survivors of CSE primarily in terms of 'vulnerability' does not fully capture the social realities of the young women involved in these high-profile cases; this disguises the significance of gender, class and socioeconomic inequality to sexual exploitation.

Concluding summary

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of news-media coverage about abuse through prostitution and child sexual exploitation over two periods (1997-99 & 2014-15). There have been some key shifts in the way news stories have represented the issues across these timeframes.

The language used to capture the problem has changed significantly and the media have invented new words which emphasise a supposedly racialised pattern of 'grooming'. Indeed, pre-existing discourses about 'gangs', a term which is often applied in racist and classist ways (see, for example, Pitts, 2013), may account for the ways 'grooming gangs' was mobilised and applied specifically to groups of Asian men in recent coverage.

Through analysis of news-media coverage, I argue that the 'racialised media template' is the dominant lens through which stories are told and this obscures the significance of structural inequalities of sex and gender to sexual exploitation. Whilst there were variations in style between each publication, for example the language used by the *Daily Mail* was typically more loaded, there was no marked difference in terms of the way news-stories were framed. The majority of articles were about the 'grooming' of white young women by Asian men and

there was strong adherence to the racialised media template across the dataset of newspaper articles.

Indeed, the language of ‘grooming gangs’ is thoroughly entrenched in media and public discourse. Published in 2017, the Quilliam report *Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation: Dissecting ‘Grooming Gangs’* (Rafiq & Adil, 2017) claimed that 84 per cent of ‘grooming gang’ offenders were Asian. Although this assertion was based on a small sample of 58 cases of group-based CSE over a period of twelve years (2005-2017), the report nonetheless attracted extensive media coverage (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020). Cockbain and Tufail (2020) have since discredited the study as methodologically flawed, noting the report’s findings were cited almost uncritically by the right-wing press. Arguably, this illustrates the durability of the racialised media template to shape discourses surrounding CSE.

The representations of young women have also changed. Young women were overtly sexualised in period one and there has been a move to explicitly acknowledge their victimisation in period two – and to challenge the services which positioned these young women as ‘streetwise’. Despite these advances, the significance of poverty, class and socioeconomic disadvantage that were apparent in a section of the news-media coverage in period one, have disappeared. These systems of inequality have been obscured by a racialised media template and the emphasis on young women’s whiteness and ‘vulnerability’ to racialised ‘strangers’. The centrality of ‘whiteness’ in the media representations and to socially constructed ‘vulnerability’ may mean that Black and minoritised young women are denied access to help and justice.

The next chapter: *I think we just need to name it’: But what is ‘it’?* moves to the analysis of the interviews with specialist practitioners. It explores the way the participants understood the defining features of ‘CSE’.

Chapter 5: ‘I think we just need to name it’: But what is ‘it’?

Introduction

Feminist researchers have highlighted the importance of words to name and define experiences of sexual violence (Kelly, 1988). Spencer (1998: 99) writes that: ‘Those who have the power to name the world are in a position to influence reality’. Referring to the international definition of sexual exploitation of children, Beckett and Walker (2017) argue that ‘words matter’ – inconsistent use of language lead to inconsistent responses (Inter-agency Working Group, 2016).

This chapter explores the ways in which the participants understood child sexual exploitation (CSE) in practice. The importance of words and names was significant in a number of ways in the participant’s reflections on the terminology of ‘CSE’ and relatedly, the concept of an ‘exchange’. It begins with a discussion about what one of the participants described as a ‘stretch’ of the term ‘child sexual exploitation’ before an exploration of the ways the term ‘CSE’ is operationalised in practice and its implications.

‘CSE’: A term without meaning?

Since the emergence of ‘CSE’ in policy discourses there has been considerable debate about what it means and how it is applied in practice (see, for example, Melrose, 2010 & 2013; Coy, 2016; Beckett & Walker, 2017; O’Hara, 2019). As Melrose (2013) notes, once understood to mean sexual exploitation in commercial contexts, ‘CSE’ captures far more than what was previously understood as ‘child prostitution’ (see also, Beckett & Walker, 2017). This is evidenced in the way the participants discuss the sexual exploitation of children and young people, a term used to describe a wide range of forms and contexts of abuse.

> I’ve seen it on different levels with different young people that we’ve worked with being really, you know, entrenched in some real serious cases of multiple men, gangs,

> trafficking and then also on the other side of it we had a young person in a hostel recently and the relationship that she'd got into with a guy, there wasn't any further intent into kind of her being exploited outside of their relationship but in terms of their relationship, you know, the expectation of the sexual behaviour from him from her and kind of that manipulation into thinking that she should be doing what he's asking. So, you know, it does come in different forms, it is seen in different ways (Participant 6).

Whilst there will be similarities in terms of gendered power and control, the dynamics of cases in which exploiters organise and profit from the rape and abuse of young women will diverge in significant ways from contexts in which an abuser coerces a young woman into sexual behaviour with him alone - even whilst here, both are described as 'child sexual exploitation'. Were it not for age, the latter context would most likely be defined as domestic violence, at least by specialist domestic violence services. These observations are identified in the account of another participant.

Reflecting on the extensive meaning of 'CSE', this practitioner described what she perceived as a 'stretch' of the term, echoing Melrose's (2013) earlier assertions that the expanding discourse around CSE has rendered the term 'vague' and 'meaningless'.

> There was kind of a big stretch of the term and lots of different forms of CSA were being brought into that… So, you have young women who were in, what they would define as relationships, which were really adult sexual abusers and it was more in forms of sexual violence but they used the guise of a relationship in order to bring the young woman in. And then that would be seen very much as sexual exploitation when actually that had more parallels with CSA, which obviously, it is. But then it gets seen as sexual exploitation and the same as an older man grooming a young girl and then wanting her to have sex with other men… and then getting money from other men who then sexually

> abuse her. So, it's, how those things work, it's like, really, really different (Participant 4).

For this participant, a commercial element is integral to understanding sexual exploitation, which will usually involve exploitation and abuse perpetrated by a number of men. However, as this account and those of the other participants suggest, the abuses for which practitioners are supporting young people are less prescriptive and may not involve any kind of commercial or tangible gain.

Aptly titled *Grappling with Smoke*, Gallagher (1998) similarly notes the many nuances which arise when investigating, managing and responding to sexual abuse involving multiple perpetrators. These include tracing and identifying the number of potential victim-survivors, levels of uncertainty that may not be *as* present in familial contexts and significantly, that victim-survivors are far less likely to disclose because of carefully orchestrated 'inducements' designed to trap children in contexts of habitual sexual abuse. Today, these inducements would be described as an 'exchange'.

Exchange: 'It's almost just child abuse'

All of the participants noted that an 'exchange' is a key feature of CSE. Their observations stay close to the policy definition which focuses on an imbalance of power between the perpetrator(s) and victim(s), whereby a child or young person is coerced, manipulated or deceived into 'exchanging' sex for something they need or want. 'Something' can include both tangible and intangible gains for the perpetrator and/or victim (DfE, 2017).

> Basically, it's when sex is given in exchange for something else and there's a power imbalance, in a nutshell that's what it is. And when I say in exchange it could be for money, it could be for drugs but it could also be for other things like power, prestige, affection and that one may be harder for people to see, people say: 'But there's no

> exchange, it's not exploitative', but that young person is in desperate need of some kind of attention or affection and they're getting that from a male but he's using it like 'I give you this affection as long as I get sex', or, I say male, it could be anyone. So, it's kind of an exchange without the love, the respect, the relationship… and there's a power with it. The young person feels they have to give sex to get something that they want (Participant 1).

Whilst this interviewee immediately shifts away from his initial observations relating to the gendered pattern he observes in his practice, he nonetheless alerts us to the extensive meaning of the term 'exchange' - understood as that which can be measured and that which is harder to define or indeed, for others to *see.* Another participant followed similar reasoning.

> It could absolutely be just love or kind of, feeling like you're being cared for, you're being listened to. I feel like when you think of exchange, yeah that can be problematic because everybody automatically assumes that a young woman is gonna have a new phone or she's going to have money, new trainers, those kind of, really materialistic things. But there might be an exchange of something *completely* unnoticeable for a lot of people… I mean it's such a broad, it's almost just child abuse (Participant 10).

Debate is ongoing in research and practice about the value of the exchange concept to delineate CSE from other forms of child sexual abuse (CSA) (see, for example, Beckett & Walker, 2017; Eaton, 2019; O'Hara, 2019), especially since the giving of emotional warmth, gifts and other 'rewards' are tactics used by perpetrators of all forms of sexual violence and abuse to control children and young people. For example, a large-scale representative survey of the general population in Ireland notes that 'bribery' was reported as the most common control strategy used by perpetrators of child sexual abuse, For example, offering sweets, money, cigarettes and other treats (McGee *et al,* 2002).

As Beckett and Walker (2017) note, the concept of CSE is far from its origins as 'child prostitution' which related to money or other equivalent gains. This original formulation also included 'child pornography', similarly defined in terms of its commerciality (see, for example, Gough, 1996). As will be explored in the following chapter, part of the reason for moving away from the language of 'prostitution' was because it implied a level of choice, complicity and consent (Swann *et al,* 1998; Swann, 2000). Arguably, retaining the exchange concept within the current definition has the same implications, though they are perhaps more implicit.

> This whole thing where with sexual exploitation the thing about the exchange is the young person feels complicit… As well, like I say, there is usually, there probably were some unwise choices made by that young person in terms [of]: 'Yeah, but I was told I shouldn't go to this party' or 'I snuck out the house to go to a party' or 'I was told this boyfriend wasn't good so I should've listened'. But again… maybe that's why they blame themselves and then on top of that its full of people that are also giving that blame then you know that can be really powerful (Participant 1).

Other researchers have argued that exchange is what makes CSE a unique form of child sexual abuse, drawing attention to young people's experiences of unmet needs: both emotional and practical (Hallett, 2015 & 2017). Exchanging sex, Hallett (2017) argues, is a response or way of coping with circumstances, bringing attention to the agency and the object/subject experiences of young people. Certainly, Hallett's (2015 & 2017) analysis suggests that the concept has value. Nonetheless, as participant 1 above points out, retaining the concept within the current definition may also serve to legitimise the perspective of the exploiter and result in the blame and responsibilisation of young people. Moreover, the use of 'unwise choices' in this participant's accounts, is telling. As he later states:

> Nearly every time there'll be a professional or family members who has a real kind of blame motive towards that young person… The young person can really feel that and buy into it and that can be part of the recovery, it's not your fault, it's not your fault. You made mistakes, yeah. And it's the same thing as somebody walks out clubbing, goes to town and walks home in a short dress, is it their fault if they get raped? No! It's the rapists' fault that they got raped! It's not, ok you may have made unwise choices but it doesn't attribute blame. And that's kind of a real thing that we have to work through and fight off whether it be with school, parents, social workers, whoever it might be (Participant 1).

The participant here is obviously very critical of the gendered blame and judgements experienced by young women. Indeed, a prominent theme across the interview data is that the blame and responsibilisation of victim-survivors continues to negatively impact professional responses. Along with many of the other practitioners, participant 1 above expressed that a large part of practice is spent countering the attitudes which responsibilise young people. In referencing 'unwise choices', the participant nonetheless falls into the same trap as he critiques by drawing upon long-established stereotypes about rape. Being female, alone in public at night are precisely the sort of judgements which blame victim-survivors of rape (Estrich, 1987; Jordan, 2012; Taylor, 2020).

For many of the practitioners in this sample, the exploitation and meeting of *emotional needs* by perpetrators punctuate young people's experiences of sexual exploitation. Exchange of money or other material gains is not necessary for the abuse to be defined as CSE.

> I guess in terms of, you know, kind of definitions we would see actually that there *is* still some form of exchange though it might not be a financial exchange. In fact, it's *very rarely* a financial exchange for our children. It might be about exchange of

> affection or attention or our children might have needs around… they might lack belonging, they might lack esteem, they might not feel like they fit in and the person who exploits *them* will exploit *that* rather than, you know, substances, money, mobile phones. And actually, you know, our children are very easily targeted and exploited *because* of emotional need, you know, rather than any financial need that they may have (Participant 18).

These observations are largely reflective of others whose practice was based in children's charities where they draw upon 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (see, for example, Quigg *et al,* 2018; Asmussen *et al,* 2020) as an explanatory model (see also, Eaton, 2019). This is arguably, a model characterised by determinism.

> It's due to things that have built up from birth even. So mental ill-health with parents, domestic abuse, substance misuse, so its trauma basically. So, if they've experienced different types of trauma, by the time they get to being a teenager their kind of childhood has been quite unstable (Participant 12).

This suggests that experiences of trauma and abuse may increase the likelihood of being drawn into emotional exchanges. As Chapter 2 outlined, there are a number of 'vulnerabilities' associated with CSE, including experiences of abuse. However, such individualised approaches can mean that the causes of sexual exploitation and abuse are positioned within the young person, therefore obscuring structural inequalities. It may even suggest that there is something within a young person needs to be 'fixed', in turn concealing the contexts and strategies that perpetrators use to entrap children and young people in sexual exploitation and abuse (see also, Eaton, 2019). Moreover, that perpetrators might seek to fulfil a young person's emotional wants or needs is not distinct from sexual exploitation, as the participants recognised.

> When you look at *any* form of sexual abuse we see power imbalances, we see secrecy,

> we see stuff that is hidden in nature, we see elements of control, we see exchange, either, you know, withdrawing something that the child might need or want or that exchange of emotional connection (Participant 18).

As the net of what counts as 'CSE' is cast wider, the distinction between child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in practice is increasingly difficult to make sense of. This participant spoke the most clearly about the conflation between CSE and CSA and the difficulties this presents in her practice.

> There was another young woman that we worked with who was sexually abused by an older male of 19, actually he had a record of CSA and he went to prison for it. And eventually actually she ended up getting pregnant by him which did mean that they put him in prison, luckily, but a bit too late. But you know, again she was 13, he was 19, that was clearly, inappropriate doesn't sound strong enough, but that is an adult exerting power over a young person for their own sexual gain… That's about power and control, there's nothing around that kind of exploitation. And I think a lot of people wanted to get away from the economic element to [child sexual exploitation] but that is part of what defines it (Participant 4).

O'Hara (2019) notes that the terminology of 'CSE' downplays any commercial exchange leading to a blurring of what she defines as the 'key distinction' between sexual exploitation and other forms of child sexual abuse. Arguably, an exchange of money may imply consent, complicity and culpability in ways which other types of exchange do not. Indeed, an exchange without money could make some forms of CSE *appear* less like prostitution (see Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion). The observations made by the participant above offer some insights into what is lost when the parameters of an 'exchange' are nondescript – economic

wants or needs disappear and subsequently, so do the class and socioeconomic structures and inequalities which underlie some young women's experiences of exchanging sex for money[5].

Beckett and Walker (2017) note there have been recent attempts to clarify the exchange concept in policy terms; an exchange should be the 'core dynamic' and not incidental to the abuse (DfE, 2017). However, despite this attempted clarity the policy leaves ample space for interpretation.

> If sexual gratification, or the exercise of power and control, is the only gain for the perpetrator (and there is no gain for the child/young person) this would *not normally* constitute child sexual exploitation, but should be responded to as a different form of abuse (DfE, 2017: 6 my emphasis).

The vagueness around what 'CSE' is and a lack of clarity about what constitutes an 'exchange' is evidenced in the participant accounts' as they grapple with changing concepts, definitions and attempt to apply them in their practice. Beckett and Walker (2017) make a convincing argument when they suggest that it may be time to move beyond CSE's current usage. They are critical of the binary between CSE and other forms of child sexual abuse and argue for a conceptualisation of CSA that acknowledges exchange as one defining feature of abuse. There appears as though momentum for such an approach is gaining traction in practice.

> One of the challenges around child sexual exploitation is its almost become this separate entity … [I]f we just focus on the child sexual abuse umbrella and then you've got CSE, HSB the harmful sexual behaviour, the peer-on-peer, familial, extra-familial abuse and if you look at all those different settings, we're all talking about the same stuff. But for

[5] See Hallett (2017) for examples of recent cases which mirror some of the patterns observed in earlier studies about exchanging sex as the 'least-worse' option for economically disadvantaged young people. See, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Pitts, 1997; Melrose *et al,* 1999; Chase & Statham, 2005; Harper & Scott, 2005; Pearce, 2009.

> some reason, I think because of the media attention and the policy implications for me of having a CSE definition I think the way it's been framed and kind of indoctrinated is that when you talk to practitioners, when you talk to professionals, when you talk to young people its seen as it's something very specific. You know, child sexual abuse is always exploitative, it's all about grooming… I think we struggle still just to say child sexual abuse. And I think we just need to name it. We're talking about child sexual abuse. Child sexual exploitation is child sexual abuse (Participant 13).

Because of the continued ambiguities surrounding what 'CSE' is and what it is not, the next section explores the way the term is applied in practice.

Pragmatic uses of the term 'CSE'

Whilst not intended to imply there is a disconnect between theory and practice, analysis of the participant's accounts illustrate that the term is utilised in a number of practical and pragmatic ways. This suggests that these uses can be a benefit to the young people to whom the term is applied, as well as to the professionals supporting them.

'CSE' generates resources and response

Whilst the negative implications of the media representations about CSE cannot be discounted - and there are many critical voices within this sample of practitioners related to the racialised media template already discussed - almost all make note of some of the more positive outcomes related to the explosion of media coverage.

> I think media is very powerful absolutely and think yeah, it can really drive policy definitely and I think it has with CSE in a positive [way]. I think it's been positive how it has influenced policy here, the fact that there is much more robust planning in place, multi-agency responses, more of a culture with professionals to move away from the blame and not to blame young people and to put in support. And funding! You know,

> we're funded! So again, if it wasn't for the media making such a thing of it, I guess people would maybe not look to fund it in the same way. Because yeah, media is kind of the eye isn't it that people look into the other world and think 'oh that's happening out there' and as they sensationalise people think this is a major issue (Participant 1).

It could be argued that the term 'CSE' carries more currency than it perhaps did prior to the media's racialisation of the problem. Indeed, 'CSE' is a term which holds literal currency in the form of the commissioning and funding of specialist services in a way that has not historically been the case.

> I feel it's a much more current thing when actually, so I said, it's been *for-ever* and it just feels like it's gotten a new name. So, it feels like it's a buzz word and its *fundable.* If we can direct funding to children [who] are at risk or are being sexually exploited then obviously, we want that (Participant 17).

Despite the media uptake of CSE, it would be remiss to not acknowledge the lobbying and research of feminists, academics and children's sector charities that forced CSE onto the policy agenda as a context of abuse which needed urgent and robust response (see, for example, Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Kelly *et al,* 1995; Melrose *et al,* 1996; Pitts, 1997; Swann *et al*, 1998; Kelly & Regan, 2000; Pearce *et al,* 2002; Barnardos, 2011). Indeed, a number of participant's noted that when 'CSE' began to emerge in practice contexts, predominantly around the mid-2000s, there followed a range of strategic and multi-agency responses designed to safeguard young people.

> I would say there's a lot more recognition of it in some ways. There's obviously a lot more policy and structures put in place, so within the lifetime of working with that project there was this development around the multi-agency planning meetings with children's social care, multi-agency sexual exploitation meetings and really bringing

> about a structure about what we do when we realise that a young woman is at risk of sexual exploitation (Participant 4).

> I go to police tasking groups where we review all the young people's cases that the police are looking into and health [services] are sat around that table, so we really look at the collective communication across these organisations. It's brilliant really that we've made these achievements (Participant 2).

As discussed in Chapter 2, research suggests that multi-agency responses to CSE have improved considerably over recent years. In 2011 a report suggested at only a quarter of Local Borough Safeguarding Children Boards were implementing the 2009 guidance (Jago *et al,* 2011). Although smaller in scale, a report three years later, which focused on practice responses within London was markedly more encouraging and noted that significant work was underway in each borough to ensure a co-ordinated and strategic response (Beckett *et al,* 2014). Certainly, there was a general sense amongst all of the participants that responses to CSE have improved in both policy and practice terms.

> I think, yeah, the profile has *massively* increased. I think, you know, not that you would *ever, ever, ever* want a Rochdale or a Rotherham or a wherever else but it is those cases that have formed such public outcry, particularly Rochdale. I mean Rochdale was the *absolute* catalyst for so many different things to happen… We had no legislation, we had no government cross-party policies, there were no action plans. You know, and obviously all of that came after Rochdale... So, you know, there's been a *massive* sea change I think in terms of CSE. I think we've still, *still* got a long way to go actually. [B]ut I think things are certainly *much* improved in my area of the world shall we say (Participant 16).

> If I'm making a referral to children's services there's these constant reminders about

> sexual exploitation and making sure that we're gathering that evidence etc, etc. and that we have the right resources available to us. So, I think there's been some profile improvements (Participant 9).

Parton (1984) argues that responses and understandings of child abuse change overtime. These are informed by the language, concepts and definitions available to help practitioners make 'it' make sense. This is particularly evident in the evolution to 'CSE'. As highlighted below, the application of CSE to young people's experiences gives access to support that otherwise, might not be available.

> I've been practicing in this area of work for around about twenty years now and started off life, you know, in a youth homeless leaving care service working with *lots* of children who were being exploited, sexually and otherwise but we didn't particularly have the labels for it at that point… I guess the label in that context has been quite helpful. Because it's opened the doors to the right kind of support (Participant 18).

However, a common theme in the interview data was that traditional approaches to safeguarding were ineffective to support sexually exploited young people and may even increase the 'push' away from services and the 'pull' towards a perpetrator. This suggests that the legacy of the 'bad girl' narrative explored in Chapter 4 - particularly evident in relation to abuse through prostitution - remains strong, regardless of the language used to describe the sexual exploitation and abuse of young women

> A lot of the young women feel like they're in trouble by social services for the experience that they're facing… Then their safety plan that they come up with, with family and social workers is to remove a phone, to remove travel cards or cut their pocket money shorter to stop them… [I]f they feel like everything is being taken away anyway then I feel like there's some sort of, well what's the point? Like, it's not

> preventative in *any* way. It's very much kind of the same as you know - 'don't go outside, don't go and drink, don't do this, watch what you're wearing'. It's all of these very victim-blaming things that women have been told for hundreds of years! It also opens that kind of pull/push factor of you're feeling like everybody is on your case at home or school or social services or even the police and then you've got somebody who's kind of manipulating you anyway and coercing you into, you know, this will be really great. I think it just really opens the path of the push and pull factor of a perpetrator (Participant 10).

In as much as the 'CSE' label generates response, such punitive responses become part of the problem and can thus compound the difficulties facing young people. A 'CSE' label can cause young people to be seen as 'objects of concern' (Hallett, 2017), or as the participant above described it: 'Just another case' (Participant 10). This positions young women as objects in need of control, monitoring and surveillance, thus mirroring the way men use female bodies as objects of commercial and sexual use.

> The difficulty is, yeah, social care has to safeguard the child so what they end up doing is safeguarding the body…. Move the body but actually then what support is in place? So especially the young girl I was talking to yesterday, she's got no counselling in place, she's got no one-to-one support in place at the moment…. [S]he had all that here and that's all gone now. So now she's got no one to talk to. So, she's saying: 'I need somebody to talk to, I haven't got no one to talk to and I'm going to really hurt someone because I'm so angry' (Participant 12).

As the participants recognised, it is vital that young people have a sense of control, 'empowerment' or increased 'space for action' (Kelly, 2003) as they move forward.

> It's about control for them, so they've lost control, they've lost power, helping them to get control. And empowerment plays a big part in that recovery process (Participant 1).

> In that first borough my role was to get CSE on everyone's agenda and really trying to get services to take some responsibility within their own service and also that young people are in control of that and [the] potential to not want to turn up (Participant 7).

> We have to have consent of the young woman, that she wants to access the service because that's then already an empowering choice that she's made. She's probably not had a lot of chances to make those choices for herself (Participant 10).

In some way, all of the participants spoke of the importance of understanding the wider context of young people's lives. CSE might not be the most significant thing happening in the context of a young person's life for *them*, even if professionals feel an understandable need to make it stop and/or they work in seemingly more narrow and inflexible systems which focus on reducing 'risk' of CSE without consideration of the bigger picture.

> CSE is a symptom isn't it of what's happened previously in your life, it's not, you know it's not a new thing. It's just something that I think is more of a referral route into services than anything else really… So, you know, we very often will get a referral for a young person, we're a CSE service so all the young people we work with have experienced some level of CSE. But actually, for that young person often that isn't the issue. The issue is in fact that they're living in a relationship where their dad's kicking holy hell out of their mum or they've been sexually abused. You know, there's a lot obviously, you know, going on for that child or young person than just the CSE. That is what is presenting to us at the time (Participant 16).

Whilst 'CSE' gets young people a service, the potential is there for it to supersede everything else that is happening in the context of a young person's life. The practice-based evidence

strongly suggests that this can be averted by the continued funding of specialist services where there is flexibility and considerably more time to work on building and maintaining relationships. As one participant stated: 'It's all about the relationship' (Participant 20). This point is expanded upon by a participant who expressed concern that independent, specialist services were being replaced by CSE teams within children's services in her locality.

> I think that we need more resources of independent services to be supporting young people because I don't believe that it's always that effective through children's services. I think their approach doesn't necessarily always work… A lot of work is trying to build a bridge between the social worker and a young person in order to kind of get the right support, or keeping that work very separate because the young person did not want anything to do with the social worker [because] the practice is much more around, we need to stop that, so we'll put an end to that, they won't see that person. Rather than really going at it from a sense of really trying to work almost therapeutically with the young person to try an understand their experiences… [N]ot stopping them from doing that but looking at building on their support networks, their friendships, their sense of self-worth as ways of kind of filling in the gaps which a perpetrator fills, I think. So, who works with the young person I think is quite important (Participant 9).

Here practitioners are reflecting on the value of the term 'CSE' in that it generates resources for, and responses to, sexually exploited young people in ways not witnessed previously (see, for example, Brown and Barrett, 2002; Melrose, 2004); as the many reports into practice responses also evidence (see, for example, Jay, 2014; Casey, 2015). 'CSE' gets the attention of services, 'CSE' gets young people noticed and 'CSE' is a way to get a response. Significantly, 'CSE' is no longer confined to the peripheries of mainstream practice. Thus, whilst 'CSE' is now *fundable* (Participant 17), a consequence is a displacement of CSA (see also, Beckett & Walker, 2017) and also of a gendered analysis and response. The next section

describes some of the assumptions evident in the interview data about what 'CSE' means in practice.

'CSE' describes extra-familial abuse in adolescence

Given the wobbly foundations of the policy definition as rooted in a vague concept of 'exchange', the interview data illustrates that many of the practitioners cast their own interpretations based on what they see in their practice. This shows that 'CSE' is used to describe:

- Sexual violence and abuse outside of a family context
- Sexual violence and abuse experienced by adolescents

Neither of these classifications are rooted in the policy definition (see also, Beckett & Walker, 2017; Karsna & Kelly, 2018).

As noted in Chapter 2, from around the 1980s researchers and campaigners started to theorise and raise awareness of sexual abuse outside of the family under the term 'organised abuse' (see, for example, Burgess *et al,* 1984; Wild, 1989; Hunt & Baird, 1990; Creighton, 1993; Kelly *et al,* 1995; Bibby, 1996; Gallagher, 1998). At the time, allegations of organised abuse sparked immense controversy and both professional and victim-survivors' accounts were regularly met with an almost comforting disbelief that such abuses of power and sexuality, which challenged the so-called benevolence of masculine sexuality, could not be true. This was especially the case in media discourses permeated by issues related to 'false memory syndrome' (Salter, 2013).

'Organised abuse' provided a framework with which to analyse patterns of abuse involving multiple perpetrators and victim-survivors (La Fontaine, 1993; Salter, 2013). To a lesser extent than those described as 'paedophile rings/networks' this included contexts that were described as 'child prostitution' (Gough, 1996, see Burgess *et al,* 1984 for an early

exception). Interestingly, this participant draws a parallel between what might be termed as 'paedophile rings' and sexual exploitation.

> When it first came out and it all blew up it was all about, well to be honest with you I would say it's no different from paedophile rings. So, you know, years ago we didn't say exploitation we said sexual abuse and paedophile rings didn't we? There was a different language and terminology. And now, that it came out obviously oh, its sexual exploitation, we gotta deal with this sexual exploitation (Participant 12).

As already explored in previous chapters, the stereotypical view of men who sexually abuse children as 'paedophiles' has dominated news-media discourses since the 1990s and this has been subject to much critique, especially by feminist researchers (for example, see Kelly, 1996; Kelly *et al,* 2000; Kitzinger, 2002 & 2004). Similarly, the term 'paedophile rings' has been criticised for drawing upon a psychiatric model which implies that groups of men come together because they have a pathological desire to abuse (young) children (Salter, 2013). The participants' accounts are reflective of research which indicates that older children and young people are more likely to be identified as victims of CSE (see, for example, Jago *et al,* 2011; Berelowitz *et al,* 2012; NPCC, 2016; see also, DfE, 2017).

Moreover, evidence suggests that group-based sexual offending may become a socially accepted element of pre-existing social networks, rather than any pathological desire to abuse children (Cockbain *et al*, 2011), as is implied by the clinical/psychiatric term 'paedophile'. Proponents of the far-right have also drawn on a racialised 'stranger danger/paedophile' model explored in Chapter 4 in relation to CSE in attempts to shore-up support for their Islamophobic and racist ideologies[6].

[6] For example, see the BNP election communication titled *'Our Children are Not Halal Meat'* which talks of a 'culture of silence' surrounding the so-called 'Muslim paedophile gang scandal' http://britishnationalpartynews.blogspot.com/2011/01/british-national-party-launches-our.html

Whilst there has been attention in research and practice circles to the extra-familial sexual abuse of children, including that of child prostitution under the term organised abuse, all of the participants' accounts suggest that in practice 'CSE' has shone the brightest light upon the sexual violence and abuse experienced in adolescence, as opposed to young children (also see Beckett & Walker, 2017).

> [P]art of that's about who perpetrates that to a certain degree and obviously child abuse is considered to be much more around sort of family members (Participant 9).

> I think it is something that tends to be more classified as, as a teenager or adolescent because I think, I think if you think about language, we very rarely talk about a nine or a ten-year-old being sexually exploited. We talk about them being sexually abused, whereas the language shifts when it's a young person over, you know, an adolescent for example (Participant 16).

> Largely we've understood that a lot of the abuse in a CSE context happens outside of a family home… [B]ut I think what we're beginning to see is that people might be throwing baby out with bath water there so they think we only have to keep children safe in communities. And what we know from our children is a lot of the time they're unsafe in communities and they're hanging out in unsafe places in communities cause home is not *that* much safer (Participant 18).

Writing 20 years ago, Kelly and colleagues (2000) noted concerns that there was a danger of sexual exploitation and organised abuse in families becoming invisible. As illustrated in the participant's accounts, in practice sexual exploitation is rarely located within familial contexts. Albeit that the current policy definition makes no reference to CSE as explicitly occurring outside of the family, the policy framing is largely focused around extra-familial sexual exploitation and abuse. The guidance notes that 'though child sexual exploitation can occur in

the family', a broader perspective than intra-familial child abuse may be required in the majority of cases (DfE, 2017: 16).

The responsibilisation of sexually exploited young people is a recurring and dominant theme and this underscores the practice-based evidence of the participants.

> I still think there's an issue around the categorisation of it because I *still* think there are certain people and professionals who think that there *has* to be an element of *choice.* And do you know, with sexual abuse its very clear that the young person is a victim, they haven't chosen that, it's been done *to them*. I still think there's some, it's really hard to put into words but there's *still* some sense of, well if the young person hadn't been at that party or if they hadn't drunk that amount of alcohol or if they hadn't taken those free drugs then that wouldn't have happened to them (Participant 16).

Similar to Estrich's (1987) concept of 'real rape', this account illustrates the way perceptions of a 'real' child abuse victim operates to deny young people understanding, empathy and, as in the example below, protection as victim/survivors of sexual exploitation. Indeed, this was a concern shared by numerous participants.

> I mean last week a young person who has a history of showing signs of being at risk of sexual exploitation - a long history - went to stay with what she called 'friends'. The police got involved because she refused to leave the property and the father couldn't get her home. So, they went to the property, they shared the fact that they had got her out of the property and taken her home but they had no concerns for her whatsoever. Despite the fact that she reported having sex with two adult males and an adult female… I think if a young person doesn't recognise it themselves and they are saying they want something or to stay somewhere or they're fine then the police are saying well, they're fine and not necessarily looking at their duty to protect a child. Yet, if that was a child

> who was talking about, you know, abuse from a family member or my dad's mate came round, you know, they would take that very seriously I suspect. Well, I'd like to think. But I think because that young person's 15 [and] they were wanting to be in that property they couldn't see that as an abusive situation (Participant 9).

In as much as the practice-based evidence signals to responses that are much improved, it also illustrates that there continues to be some very basic misunderstandings about the nature of CSE. When agency is conflated with 'choice' – as if to suggest there are infinite choices available – in this scenario, it overrides statutory duty to safeguard. In the above participant's estimations, the response to a younger child abused within a familial context would be markedly different.

Age and context are significant factors to consider in the social construction of the 'real' child abuse victim as one who is perceived to lack the agency and supposed self-determination of a young person approaching or over the age of consent.

> There's a lot of blame put on the young person in a lot of circles and that's part of what we do with training, try to get people to take the blame away and look at them like a victim. If a young person was being sexually abused in the home by a relative there would be no blame at all whereas with CSE it's a massive thing, it's a hurdle to get over…Whereas I think maybe with familial there could be that element to it but it does tend to be much more clear cut, you know, the power, manipulation [and] control, rather than a kind of agreement (Participant 1).

In a similar way to how the exchange of money is perceived to demonstrate 'consent' in adult prostitution, to some extent the policy definition of CSE may also imply a young person's consent, complicity or 'agreement'. As a number of examples above suggest, young people might feel and say this too.

Beckett and Walker (2017) observe that it is common for people to struggle with the notion that a young person might gain 'something' from the abuse, which in turn may obscure the abusive nature of CSE. As they point out, this issue is one of education rather than definition. Indeed, this common theme in the practice-based evidence indicates how narrow versions of victimhood, which imply that victim-survivors embody near total passivity, minimises the impacts of sexual exploitation and abuse of young people who do not fit into a stereotypical construct of a child abuse victim.

The next section draws on the interviews conducted late in 2019, which showed a change in focus, from CSE to 'child criminal exploitation'.

'CSE' in 'CCE': Getting lost in an acronym soup?

Both CSE and CCE are criminal. However, child criminal exploitation (CCE) is typically associated with 'gang[7]' activity and organised crime. Media and policy narratives have tended to focus on 'county lines' and drug activity as a 'new' issue (see Windle & Briggs, 2015; Robinson *et al,* 2018; Moyle, 2019). Research has also shown a link between youth offending and sexual exploitation (see, for example, Phoenix, 2012; Cockbain & Brayley, 2012) and CCE has some overlaps with sexual exploitation of children and young people. This is reflected in the Home Office definition.

> Child criminal exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance in power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been

[7] There is little consensus on what a 'gang' is or even whether they exist. According to Hallsworth and Young (2004) the concept of a 'gang' is so broadly applied that delineating what a 'gang' is and when a group is/is not a gang is problematic. They propose a 'pyramid of risk' model in which they distinguish between peer groups, gangs and organised crime groups. The risk of engagement in criminal activity and the seriousness of the crimes range from low risk (as in peer groups) through to high risk (as in organised crime groups) (Hallsworth & Young, 2006). However, the term is often applied in stigmatising, racist [and also classist] ways in the media and Criminal Justice System (Pitts, 2013).

criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through use of technology (Home Office, 2018).

Research suggests that boys and young men from minoritised groups are disproportionately exploited through CCE (The Children's Society 2019, Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020). The participants also observed a gendered pattern: 'A lot of our kids currently go missing, mainly boys, but there are some girls but boys it's county lines' (Participant 20).

The line between criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation is not distinct. As one participant stated: 'There will be tons of overlap' (Participant 19). Indeed, coercion to perpetrate crimes may feature in some young women's experiences of sexual exploitation. A report published by Race on the Agenda showed that gang associated young women may be used as 'sexual currency' by organised criminal groups or 'gangs', and this may also involve the coercion of young women into organised prostitution and/or to move, sell and hold drugs and/or weapons for boyfriends, male family members and their associates (Firmin, 2011).

Whilst the criminal exploitation of young people has been subject to increased attention, adults are also targeted and exploited by organised groups. A recent study showed that adults in 'vulnerable groups' - often homeless and/or drug dependant, perhaps with intersecting needs around disability and/or mental health difficulties - are also targeted by perpetrators. Exploitation through county lines activity is understood as a consequence of 'constrained choice' (Moyle, 2019). The discourse here is thus more nuanced than the 'grooming' framework which dominates CSE, albeit that child criminal exploitation may not be seen in terms of constrained choice in practice.

Moyle's (2019) also identified that perpetrators – usually lower-level drug dealers - undertake gendered recruitment strategies. Aligning with the 'boyfriend' model (Swann *et al,*

1998) in CSE, men pose as ‘boyfriends’ in order to coerce adult women – often dependant on drugs and involved in street-based prostitution - into county lines activity and/or to sell drugs out of her home (known as ‘cuckooing’).

Some of the participants suggested that the recent emphasis on CCE in policy and media discourses means that child sexual exploitation is becoming less of a priority.

> I think the focus on sexual exploitation has taken a little, I think it’s going in the shade a little bit at the moment and county lines is taking priority. Rightly so to a degree at the moment but actually we don’t want to forget about sexual exploitation, that might push it back where that was not long ago (Participant 12).

Although no question specifically relating to CCE was asked during the interviews, a number of participants who took part in an interview late in 2019 described observing a similar trend.

> I’m not really answering your question but I think this is important to say. I think it’s absolutely fundamental that CCE is pushed forward as a risk and a vulnerability for young people and as a *massive* issue for society as a whole, but my fear is that CSE becomes yesterday’s news. And actually, what we’re hearing from lots of local authorities is CSE is now mainstream, they don’t have specialist services because they know how to do CSE now and the new thing is CCE… From a media perspective or from a, even from a service perspective… I certainly really recognise locally in the past 12 months that the focus is *so much* more on CCE than it is on CSE and it does just concern me a little bit (Participant 16).

As this participant notes, the emphasis on CCE may be connected to the mainstreaming of sexual exploitation into statutory services.

Another participant highlighted how a recent focus on CCE was shaping responses in her locality. Multiagency meetings, previously defined as multiagency sexual exploitation

panels or 'MASE' were to be expanded to include cases of criminal exploitation, now labelled as 'multiagency child exploitation' panels – therefore eliding the different dynamics and the gendered structures of each form of abuse. She acknowledged that there was, at least some surface benefits, to this approach: 'Probably the reasons why those young people are involved are the same, to a degree' (Participant 20).

There are commonalities in the social conditions which structure young people's abuse through CSE and CCE, specifically class, poverty and ethnicity. Bateman notes that the youth justice system consists of a 'series of filters' that operate to the disadvantage of socioeconomically deprived and minoritised young people: 'Direct and indirect forms of discrimination, on the basis of ethnicity, exacerbate the impact of disadvantage' (Bateman, (2017: 22). This chimes with the observations of this participant when she commented on the institutionalised racism that underpins Black young women's pathways to specialist support.

> We worked with more Black young women than white young women and we found that our white young women came to us through children's social care and our Black young women came through prisons and criminal justice systems… The institutionalised racism comes through (Participant 4).

Albeit that there are some exceptions (see Chapter 7), as whole there was little discussion amongst the interviewees in respect of how Black and minoritised young women's experiences of sexual exploitation and service provision intersect with race and ethnicity. The observations of participant 1 above nonetheless illustrate the long-standing perception, reinforced in the media narratives analysed in period two, that to be white is to be more 'vulnerable' and more in need of protection (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2019).

There are significant levels of crime and sexual violence associated with gangs and young women are at significantly greater risk of sexual victimisation (Beckett *et al,* 2013).

Beckett *et al* (2013) also illustrate the ways power operates between young men in a 'hyper'-masculine environment. Akin to what Connell (1995) conceptualised as hegemonic masculinities (see Chapter 4), power relations also operate between men, young men and masculinities in gang contexts. Thus, there are undoubtedly connections that can be made between youth offending, CCE, CSE and gender, class, race, ethnicity and other forms of structural power. These need to be empirically explored.

Whilst there will be overlaps between both forms of exploitation, not least the way in which structures of oppression and inequality create a context for CCE and CSE, child sexual exploitation is a specific context in which exploiters are motivated by profit, power and control over (and also between) young people *through* sexual violence and abuse. For this participant, CSE should therefore be responded to as a distinct category of exploitation.

> Sometimes you'll almost hear something about how, you know, we've solved CSE, we've had enough, we've had X amount of years working on CSE and we'll dilute that into something else… What happens now, whether this is going off slightly, but there's a lot. Recently there's a demand to put criminal exploitation on the same agenda as sexual exploitation... And they're calling them exploitation teams and in some respects we're gonna lose some of the expertise that came out, [especially after Rochdale]. We *very much* feel that the sexual violence agenda is part of CSE but maybe that dilutes a little bit when you've got a lot of other young people demanding services, that are *not* part of the sexual violence agenda (Participant 19).

Arguably, moves to absorb 'CSE' and 'CCE' under the all-encompassing term 'child exploitation' is an avoidant use of language which occludes the specific dimensions of each form and context of abuse.

As noted in Chapter 2, there are differing views about whether CSE is distinct from child sexual abuse. What is clear from the participants' reflections on the term 'CSE' documented in this chapter is that the concept has raised the profile of the sexual violation of adolescents (see also, Beckett & Walker, 2017). However, Beckett and Walker (2017) are critical of an apparent 'hierarchy of harm' in which funding of CSE services are prioritised over other forms of sexual abuse, less in the public-eye at a given time. This is apparent in a comment made by another participant.

> I guess where you've got children where there's dual concerns, which label takes priority? So, is this child, a child that we're working with about CSA, CSE, HSB, CCE? You know, the whole kind of acronym mix becomes a bit silly sometimes. What we really need to get back to is we're working with children whose behaviour is outside what we might expect for other children their age and the question we should be asking is *why*? Because most children are *not,* we don't have that concern about most children so *why* do we have the concern for this child? And we get caught up in labels and labels can be very helpful if we're looking to access services or support but to the children themselves, I'm not really sure how helpful they are (Participant 18).

Her observations here are illustrative of the ways in which the conceptual distinctions we might make in academia, policy and practice might not always be reflective of young people's experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse. This is indicative of the ways in which CSE is part of a continuum of abuse experienced in childhood (Kelly *et al,* 2000).

However, the accounts of several participants documented in this section suggest, a similar pattern identified by Beckett and Walker (2017) appears to be emerging in respect of CCE where a new priority has come and cast a shadow over sexual exploitation. Thus, in the same way child sexual exploitation has eclipsed child sexual abuse, in a context of increased

focus on CCE, this pattern may be replicating itself such that child *sexual* exploitation is less visible.

This is not to suggest that criminal exploitation should not be responded to with the same apparent eagerness as has been witnessed over recent years in regards to CSE, especially in terms of political and policy discourse. However, practitioners are pointing to the potential pitfalls if young people's experiences of criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation, and the responses to them, become homogenised under the label 'child exploitation'.

Concluding summary

This chapter has analysed the how the participants understood and defined 'child sexual exploitation' and how the term is applied in practice. 'CSE' was used to describe a wide range of forms and contexts of violence and abuse against young people. These were far more nuanced than the media's emphasis on 'grooming' perpetrated by groups of Asian men, albeit that grooming was a predominant feature across the interview data. The grooming concept is critiqued in Chapter 7.

Overwhelmingly, the participants understood an 'exchange' (emotional, material, both) as a defining feature of sexual exploitation. However, given the expansive meaning of 'exchange', this chapter suggests that the concept lacks the precision required to make any meaningful distinction between child sexual *exploitation* and child sexual *abuse*. Nonetheless, exchange was considered important to acknowledge because it draws attention to young people's sense of agency. That said, the exchange concept was also shown to reinforce a sense of complicity, especially if professionals are unable to see beyond this and the appearance of young women as making 'choices'. These dynamics need unpicking without reinforcing stereotypical notions of a 'real' child abuse victim as embodying near total passivity.

The failure to recognise young women as 'real' child abuse victims continues to position them as responsible for making certain choices and/or justifies interventions which 'safeguard the body' with little attention given to wider context of young women's lives. Indeed, as the recent media coverage, and the series of serious case reviews and reports following high-profile cases have shown (see Chapter 4), too many young women were perceived as 'difficult girls making bad choices' (*The Times,* Norfolk & Coates, 2015) and this was a significant factor which enabled male perpetrators to act with impunity over many years. Whilst a common theme in the participant narratives was to highlight the importance of the media coverage in terms of prompting repeated Government response, this nonetheless illustrates how little has changed in terms of the attitudes surrounding victim-survivors.

This chapter also explored the pragmatic uses of 'CSE': a term which generates resources and responses to young people abused in extra-familial contexts, though these additional classifications are not rooted in the policy definition. Catalysed in part by the accelerated media coverage following Rochdale, CSE is no longer on the peripheries of child protection practice. 'CSE' gets the attention of services, galvanises responses to (some) young women and indeed, generates resources in the form of funding.

Though there were a minority of exceptions, as noted in the Chapter 4, the dominant media framing rarely moved beyond issues of 'political correctness' to explain the lack of statutory response to sexually exploited young women. It is somewhat of a perverse irony that shifts in practice and policy response have occurred in response to the racialisation of male perpetrators. Moreover, this is with little political challenge to the inherent racism of these media narratives or indeed consideration of the patriarchal conditions and structural inequalities of sex, gender and class which both enable perpetrators *and* shape practice responses to young women. Though not a common theme, one insightful and important

observation illustrates that race and racism are significant factors impacting upon Black and minoritised young women's routes into services.

Overall, the participant accounts demonstrate that they have seen considerable strides towards greater awareness of sexual exploitation in practice settings following high-profile cases. Despite these advances, three practitioners who took part in an interview in 2019 expressed concern that as awareness of 'criminal child exploitation' (CCE) increased, CCE would eclipse CSE, leading to a thinning of the expertise and development of practice knowledge about sexual exploitation as a specific form of sexual violence. Of course, we can and should care about both of these forms of exploitation and this was evident in these practitioners' accounts. Whilst there are connections between these forms of exploitation, as there are in all forms of child abuse and violence against women and girls (see Kelly, 1988), moves to absorb child sexual exploitation and criminal child exploitation under the catch-all term 'child exploitation' occlude the specific dynamics and dimensions of these forms and contexts of violence and abuse and the intersecting axes of power that underscore them.

I argue in this chapter that 'child exploitation' is an avoidant use of language. This further complicates the already confusing language surrounding sexual exploitation specifically, but also the inadequacies and euphemisms of the language surrounding men's violence against women and girls generally, not only, but particularly in the media.

The next chapter, *What's in a name, anyway*?, expands on the avoidant uses of 'CSE': an acronym that avoids naming what is happening to young women, which silences the reality of rape and has rendered 'prostitution' unspeakable in relation to 'children' and 'young people'.

Chapter 6: What's in a name, anyway?

Introduction

Feminist researchers and activists have explored the relationship between language and the silencing or voicing of women's experiences of sexual and domestic violence (Schechter, 1982; Kelly, 1988; Kelly & Radford, 1990; Clark, 1998; Pande, 2013; Warshaw, 2019). Language and names reflect the way an issue is perceived and the seriousness of the subject matter.

> In order to live in the world, we must *name* it. Names are essential for the construction of reality for without a name it is difficult to accept the existence of an object, an event, a feeling (Spencer, 1998: 97, original emphasis).

In other words, if something cannot be named, it *appears* as though it does not exist. Naming brings acknowledgment, so it becomes a social reality (Kelly, 1988).

The previous chapter explored the way 'CSE' is used in practice to capture a wide range of forms and contexts of sexual exploitation and abuse experienced by young people. This chapter builds on this discussion and illustrates the way 'CSE' is used as a way to avoid certain realities such that what is happening in the lives of some young people, is left unsaid.

Avoiding 'truths'

Chapter 5 began by describing what one of the participant's perceived as a 'stretch' of the term 'CSE'. Below, this participant expands on this observation.

> I think as well, particularly around some of the ideas – I don't particularly like the term – around peer-on-peer abuse. A lot of that got defined as child sexual exploitation but some of it is actually quite different and kind of more parallel to what young people see adults doing. You know, it's like sexual harassment in the classrooms, its sexual abuse, its rape… [Y]ou do get the ones that are more linked in terms of sexual exploitation, that young women are being coerced, there will be reasons they're coerced, there'll be

> a kind of an ongoing pattern but also quite often it will be that a young woman was raped in school and then that gets defined as sexual exploitation but then I'm like no, she was *raped.* But then also that means we don't have to say the word and it covers it a little bit. So, it's like you don't really need to say what's happening here (Participant 4).

This participant refers to the way we use language, words and names to define a reality. If one cannot say 'sexual harassment', 'sexual abuse' or 'rape' it removes from a young woman's reality that this is what occurred. Reality is shifted towards an arguably more comfortable 'truth' for professionals and others in a privileged position of naming young women's experiences on their behalf. Sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape are disappeared.

The feminist movement has been instrumental in improving public responses to rape and sexual violence (Jordan, 2012; Cook, 2012; Warshaw, 2019). Nevertheless, the social, cultural and legal silencing of rape and of women's voices has a long history.

> Four decades of feminism may have improved services available for many victims/survivors but have made little dent in rape's occurrence or the attitudes surrounding it. Despite the insights gained and advances made, there are many ways in which rape is still shrouded in silence (Jordan, 2012: 258).

Jordan (2012) identifies a number of ways in which rape is silenced. For complex reasons, victim-survivors of rape may silence themselves. She relates this to the predominance of 'real rape' myths, the rigidity of criminal law definitions and because of the apparent normalcy of sexual coercion and pressure in heterosexual practices (see also, Estrich, 1987; Kelly, 1988; Holland *et al,* 2004; Gavey, 2019; see also, Chapter 7). Jordan (2012) also describes the way rape is silenced by others: the perpetrators; the criminal justice system; researchers/academics; the media and by formal and informal support networks.

The use of sexual exploitation as a way to avoid naming what is happening in the lives of young women is another way in which rape is diluted, sanitised and silenced. These two insightful accounts locate this silence in words, names and definitions.

> If a woman is walking down the street and she gets raped then *that's* what happens to her. You know, and it's reported as a *rape*… If a young person gets raped as part of being sexually exploited, I think we always refer to that (Participant 16).

> [I]n lots of ways I think the term sexual exploitation is quite blanketing in a way because it's not specific, it doesn't talk about what's actually happening to these young women (Participant 4).

Addressing widespread violence against Native American women, Deer (2015) argues that rape is a political construct, its roots are not biological but are located in a long history of structural oppression. Deer (2015) uses 'rape' to encompass a range of violence that involves abuse of sexual power. She points to how the psychological and spiritual ramifications of rape are sanitized through language such as 'sexual assault', 'sexual abuse' and even more problematic terms such as 'non-consensual sex' and 'nonviolent rape' in the US legal landscape. This participant raised similar questions about the term 'CSE' and the way it sanitizes the violence young women are subjected to.

> In terms of, you know, that long term impact and the fact that, you know, we're talking about children who have been sexually exploited… what does 'CSE' mean? It means rape, it means being trafficked, it means potentially being locked in a flat all night and not being able to get out (Participant 16).

In practice, 'CSE' is an acronym used to encompass a wide range of sexual violence, including rape. However, the definition itself avoids explicitly naming the acts of sexual violence involved. The commonly used term 'CSE' (and for brevity, these chapters are no exception)

even further dilutes the violence and its impacts since it is merely a collection of letters which would probably mean very little to many outside the field.

Chapter 5 explored how the term ‘CSE’ is used to galvanise responses to young people. In this practical sense the term has value. However, just because the term gets (some) young people *a* service, it does not necessarily mean it is the right or most appropriate one (see also, O’Hara, 2019).

Earlier, participant 4 described the way young women’s experiences of rape are defined by professionals as ‘CSE’. Where this occurs, young women are channelled into CSE specific services and interventions. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, such interventions often focus on how young people can recognise ‘grooming’, ‘keep safe’ and reduce the ‘risks’ associated with CSE. Such interventions might be considered ineffective - even victim-blaming (see, for example, Eaton, 2019) - under many circumstances but this is amplified when a young woman has been victimised through rape. This is the case whether or not rape was a single occurrence or as part of an ongoing pattern in an intimate relationship.

> One of the young men that I’m talking about… his way of manipulation and control is because he doesn’t want to feel on his own, rejected. Because he’d already been rejected and he’s on his own. He’s completely separated from his family. So, whoever then he gets with he will then, basically then he, did he exploit? It could be exploitation but actually it’s just turned into a very, very unhealthy, toxic, domestic abuse relationship (Participant 12).

A response from a sex specific, specialist sexual violence service, such as Rape Crisis or a specialist domestic and sexual violence service, is potentially more appropriate (see Women’s Resource Centre, 2007; Girlguiding, 2007).

Language and terminology in the field of sexual exploitation of children and young

people has been a consistent topic of discussion and debate across policy, practice, research and academia. Much of this relates to 'prostitution' and whether this language should ever be used in relation to young people and whether prostitution represents victimisation or agency (see Chapter 2). Numerous participants reflected on these debates during the interviews and particularly those with many years of practice experience in the CSE field. The following section explores the divergent views and perspectives on retaining or rejecting the term 'prostitution'.

What can(not) be said? 'Children' and 'prostitution'

For several of the participants, the shift in language from prostitution to sexual exploitation was considered one of the most significant and positive developments in CSE policy and practice. This is reflected in the account of a CSE service manager.

> Language has been the main thing because when I started prostitution was the word that people were desperately battling that we didn't have attached to children that were being exploited. And I'd say that that has been very successful, I rarely if ever hear the word prostitution being used against a child now so that's a massive shift and I think very successfully achieved… We're recognising that difference between being *exploited* and *choosing*, so I think there has been a massive shift (Participant 2).

Because concepts of choice, consent and agency permeate discourses relating to adult prostitution (Farley, 2003; Jeffreys, 2012), to use 'prostitution' in relation to 'children' is said to imply similar notions of choice, consent and complicity. Indeed, 'prostitution' is represented here as a term which can be used *against* a child so to deny them access to help and support through welfare provisions as a victim of abuse.

Throughout the twentieth century, prostitution has been framed as a criminal justice problem related to the *visibility* and 'nuisance' caused by street-based prostitution (Phoenix,

2019). As noted in Chapter 4, discourses around prostitution are punctuated by moralistic judgements about women who have been stigmatised as ethically flawed and as reservoirs of infection and disease (O'Neill, 1997; Coy *et al,* 2012; Phoenix, 2019). Women are obviously not the only people involved in prostitution, there are men who pay and there are men who profit, but the harshest of judgements are nonetheless reserved for women.

As seen in the example above, prostitution discourses operate to imply 'consent' (Phoenix, 2019). Implicit in the participant's account is the perception that adult women 'choose' to sell sex. When women are perceived as consenting, they are not seen as in need of support. In this way, 'choice' obscures the harm women and some men experience in prostitution (Farley, 2003).

Similar objections to the language of prostitution are seen in other accounts. The 'model' the participant below rejects aligns with the media representations of sexual exploitation in period one of the media analysis: a vivid, and often sensationalised, picture of young women who could be seen in the same street soliciting areas as adult women (see Chapter 4). In this coverage, street-based prostitution was the context in which young women experienced multiple abuses by multiple men.

> I think it was because, just actually seeing young people hanging around on the street corners and then potentially going off in cars it was based on a model of looking at what older working, you know, it was kind of a similar pattern to what you would think of as older working women stood on a street corners, car approaches and you get into the car. I think there was very much a lack of understanding around it at the time. So, people - just to give it a name - it was collectively thought that everybody was a prostitute and everybody was involved in prostitution which wasn't necessarily the case (Participant 5).

Research based on the experiences of 55 young women in England notes that 'getting into men's cars' was an early warning sign that a young woman might be 'at risk' of or experiencing sexual exploitation and/or prostitution: 21 of these young women described themselves as 'selling sex' or self-defined as 'prostitutes' (Pearce, Williams & Galvin, 2003). Use of the term 'child prostitution' was more than to 'just give it a name' as this language was based on what was being observed by services, what was being documented by research and significantly, on how young women themselves were defining and understanding their experiences.

Again, underlying the rejection of the term 'prostitution' is an assumption that all prostitution involves some element of voluntarism and choice. This language is thus seen as an indication that responsibility for the abuse was positioned with the young person. The participant goes on to describe sexual exploitation as part of a 'bigger agenda'.

> I think over the years since I started this, we've become more aware that it's not actually been a choice, that there is a process behind what happened which was recognised as being groomed. That, you know, young people don't suddenly decide I am going to go and exchange sexual activities for somewhere to stay or if I need something to eat. There was a much bigger agenda behind that, there *was*, and it soon became realised that young people couldn't make the decision to be involved in prostitution, which was how they were initially labelled when I first started this job (Participant 5).

This assessment sits more comfortably with the designation of sexual exploitation as child sexual abuse. As in the 'stranger danger' discourse discussed in Chapter 4, here a young person is situated as the object of adult predation. Melrose (2013) has critiqued the dominance of the 'pimping and grooming' model in CSE policy and practice. She argues that this 'discursive formation' (Melrose, 2013: 158) has rendered other routes into the sex industry 'unspeakable'. In turn, this has obscured the significance of poverty and socioeconomic status to CSE.

Indeed, 'grooming' is a key concept through which sexual exploitation is understood (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion). This is seen in the reflections of a CSE service manager who also suggested that the language of prostitution might imply that CSE is a 'lifestyle choice'.

> I think it's a tricky one isn't it, because I think whatever view we have of prostitution, and we obviously know that lots of adults who get involved in sex work or prostitution *don't* have *choice*. We kind of *know* that but actually you've gotta draw the line somewhere and as an *adult*, you know, you can argue that a lot of those people don't have choice but children and young people certainly have *no* choice. And actually, we're talking about sexual abuse aren't we when we're talking about CSE… I think it's all about that consent issue isn't it and actually even for those 16/17-year olds who *legally* can give consent, when we think about CSE we know it's about lack of power and choice and grooming process, whatever you think of that terminology. And I think it's always got to be about seeing the young person as a victim first and foremost hasn't it. And I think, you know, using very out-of-date terminology just isn't helpful (Participant 16).

There are nuances in this account; prostitution is not uncritically framed as an issue of individual 'choice'. Nonetheless, because prostitution discourses work to imply consent, young people are situated in a position where they must be *seen* as unable to exercise any degree of choice or agency – whether or not this is the case – in order that they are responded to as a 'real' and 'deserving' victim of child sexual abuse (see also, Beckett, 2019). As another participant stated: 'It's great that they don't use child prostitution anymore. It's not terminology that you can use to describe a child… It's child abuse' (Participant 12).

The association between prostitution and choice is a prominent theme and is viewed as the main reason young people and prostitution is 'not supposed to be used anymore', despite the ways CSE overlaps and intersects with prostitution (see, for example, Melrose, 2010 & 2013; Coy, 2016; O'Hara, 2019).

> I heard a teaching assistant in one of my groups mention it as well, about being prostituted and that word being used… I think it's not supposed to be used anymore in terms of sexual exploitation or young people because if they're under 18 then they can't be seen to be choosing to do that. There must be something behind it, they must be being exploited. But you know, you still hear it used. You still see it used and it kind of gives the impression that the young person is choosing. Because, a prostitute, over 18 they might still be being exploited in some way but it's a different choice isn't it… *But if you think about it, that's kind of what the exploitation is*. But you know, there's something going on for that young person to be exchanging sex for money and it's not something that they're choosing in any way (Participant 6, my emphasis).

The reflections of these participants need to be understood in the historical context. As discussed in Chapter 2, young people abused through prostitution were dismissed by agencies, stigmatised rather than helped and regularly criminalised, even if they were under 16 and legally unable to consent (see, for example, Ennew, 1986; Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Swann *et al,* 1998; O'Neill, 2001; Brown & Barrett, 2002; Melrose, 2004; Phoenix, 2012; Jay, 2014; Casey, 2015). Until 2000, there was no official guidance which related to sexual exploitation (or abuse through prostitution) and even at this point, young people could be criminalised for prostitution related offences (see DoH/HO, 2000).

Indeed, beyond the 'political correctness' narratives, the articles reviewed in period two of the media analysis (see Chapter 4) illustrated how statutory agencies failed to safeguard

young women because social workers and police considered them to be 'consenting' as 'child prostitutes' – young women were viewed as 'slags' and not as sexually exploited children (Narian & Tozer, 2014 see also, Griffiths, 2013; Bedford, 2015; Coffey, 2014). According to Jay (2014: 59):

> The implied equivalence of child sexual exploitation with child prostitution was common in the 1990s and should not have persisted until 2005. It suggested that payment or reward was always involved and it made no mention of the criminal nature of the activity. It might even imply that the child's consent is mitigated by its gravity.

Thus, to speak of 'children', 'young people' and 'prostitution' is framed as to collude with the notion that young people 'consent' and therefore do not need help. To some extent, the resistance to this language as illustrated here, may be understandable.

However, as McMullen (1987: 35) writes: 'Prostitution is a behaviour – not a person – and prostitution is merely a term which describes a person's behaviour'. More than this, prostitution and the sex industry are distinctly gendered in that those selling or exchanging sex are disproportionately women and girls and that those who pay are disproportionately men (Coy, 2016), and the latter is true even when it is men or boys selling or exchanging sex. Indeed, there are perspectives in this sample of practitioners which do not conform entirely to the narrative which implies that prostitution equates to voluntarism and choice.

Uncomfortable realities: young people and prostitution

Following a campaign by Ann Coffey (2014) and Barnardos (Champion, 2014), the Serious Crime Act (2015) replaced all references to 'child prostitution' and 'child pornography' under the Sexual Offences Act (2003) with the phrase 'sexual exploitation of a child' (Beckett & Walker, 2017). As the accounts above illustrate, it has become controversial to speak of 'young

people' in relation to 'prostitution'. The policy and legal landscape undeniably suggest that in this current time and place, it is 'not supposed to be used anymore'.

Whilst several participants made links between sexual exploitation, the system of prostitution and the sex industry, the importance of retaining the framework of prostitution was articulated most explicitly by a practitioner who worked for a small violence against women and girls organisation.

For this participant, the sexual exploitation of young women is inextricably connected with prostitution involving adult women. The well-intended eagerness of children's organisations to cement a distinction based on age obscures the context in which both women and children experience exploitation and abuse (see also, Melrose, 2013; Coy, 2016). Jeffreys (2000) has usefully termed this as the 'false distinction' between adult and child prostitution.

> I think that's one of the major things that's been really problematic around sexual exploitation, particularly the way it's been removed from the women's sector and a feminist analysis to children's organisations and how they understand it and it becomes very devoid from all of these things going on here. Particularly in terms of – which is, obviously is a benefit in *some* degree - is that it got really detached from prostitution and part of the reason for that was obviously a positive thing around the agency of the young women but if you don't put it in a context of *this* is what's happening to adult women, this is what creates a market for it, it doesn't really make sense in its own right. And, therefore, as well that's when you kind of get the flip of well, they turn 18, well is it a choice now? (Participant 4).

Her insightful observation about the 'flip' of when a young woman turns 18 moves this notion of individual 'choice', 'agency' and 'consent' in prostitution into a more critical space. As others have also noted, the exploitation and abuse experienced by young women is not simply

magicked away by flimsy notions of choice and self-determination the moment she turns 18 (see also, Kelly & Regan, 2000; Raymond, 2013; Coy, 2016).

Although the participant below did not advocate using 'prostitution' in relation to young people, similarly because it 'confuses the agency of the child', a senior manager of a CSE charity nonetheless made a similar point.

> We've got at least two cases open here now where the child's just gone beyond their 18th birthday and is now being exploited as an adult in a way that looks like organised prostitution. I guess there's still, you know, CSE can be evidenced as a route into prostitution or adult exploitation, kind of that thing where all of a sudden it's your 18th birthday and you're making a choice and really your life hasn't changed from the week before very much, it kind of evidences that doesn't it really (Participant 19).

Here, the participants problematise the dichotomy between abuse as a child versus 'choice' as an adult and draw attention to the artificial nature of these polarised categories. Indeed, research shows that many women become involved in the sex industry prior to their 18th birthday (Melrose *et al*, 1999; Nixon *et al* 2002; Farley, 2003; Coy, 2008; Raphael, 2012; Coy, 2016). That is, they were sexually exploited as children and this exploitation continued into adulthood. Moreover, the life stories of women in prostitution are frequently punctuated by experiences of abuse and a disproportionate number of these women have grown up in or around the care system (O'Neil, 2001; Coy, 2009; Matthews *et al,* 2014). Another participant reports a similar pattern in his own practice.

> [We] developed a project around sex working with a new worker at the time who was very much into prevention of sexual exploitation, although we didn't use that terminology at the time. And then we were seeing as a way to try and stop [it], because there was a huge sex industry in this area at the time, and the young people who ended

> up sleeping rough had a tendency to get involved, especially young women but of course young men as well… I'm not saying we had a 100 per cent success rate, but maybe a 90 per cent success rate at getting young people away from any sort of environment but sometimes people, with substance misuse or the abuse they suffered before coming here may had prevented them from leaving and there was a small number in that group of young people [who] continued on sex working and now they're a prostitute 20 years on (Participant 3).

His account demonstrates that the issues which precipitated involvement in prostitution in adolescence, remained significant factors conducive to women's entrapment in prostitution well beyond 18-years-old. The notion that women in these circumstances 'choose' is a misconception which assumes there was a 'range of options' to begin with (AGGP, 2014: 7).

> The thing around kind of wanting to say, right ok, we need to get rid of all the policy that refers to under-18s as prostitutes or being prostituted, again it's like one of those things that if you're in the mind-set of prostitution being very choice based and that you can just go into it, free of coercion, free of constraints and make that decision. But if you don't see it in that context then it's not necessarily such a major problem to define it around prostitution and it actually makes more sense because this industry, for want of a better word, creates the context of this sexual exploitation here and what we've done is go well, no, actually, that's really scary so we want to throw that away as far as we can over there and then we'll just call it this other thing… Because we're saying, oh these young women, they are doing this to themselves if we define it in the way of prostitution (Participant 4).

This accords with the account of another practitioner. This participant was the manager of a service for LGBT young people. Though this study does not analyse in detail the factors

conducive to the sexual exploitation of LGBT young people, throughout the interview she spoke about the significance of homophobia, discrimination and the long history of oppression against LGBT people as a factor conducive to sexual exploitation.

> The research shows that one in ten young LGBT people have been made homeless when they come out. It's a massive hidden issue and once you become homeless as a young person as you'll know you don't have access to benefits. You don't have the safety nets, particularly if you have been thrown out from home, from your family and community, you don't have the safety nets to protect you and therefore you are fast tracked into either a highly sexualised adult world, online particularly… or into taking, making choices that are not really choices to survive… And some of those young people will be what we would define as sex working but they won't see it as that and then they are fast tracked into that world (Participant 15).

The 'world' she refers to is prostitution, thus making visible the context in which some young people experience sexual exploitation and abuse (Melrose, 2013). There is no 'grooming' involved in what she describes here and young people are not passive in these exchanges. Rather, young women and young men are actively making decisions in circumstances of limited and constrained choice (see also, Pitts, 1997; Pearce *et al,* 2003; Chase & Statham, 2005; Harper & Scott, 2005; Hallett, 2017; Beckett, 2019). Acknowledging this does not diminish or excuse the abusive nature of these commercial sexual exchanges. Indeed, it is essential this is recognised because it brings into view the socioeconomic and structural power relations that shape young people's (and indeed, adult) involvement in the sex industry (see also Melrose, 2010 & 2013; Phoenix, 2010 & 2019; Coy, 2016; O'Hara, 2019).

This raises questions as to whether practice, which predominantly focuses on the relationship between a child and an abusive adult, is positioned in a way which meets the needs

of young people who are involved in these more transient forms of exchange in return for something they need or want (see also, Pearce, 2006; Melrose, 2010; Phoenix, 2010 & 2012; Hallett, 2017).

> We have to kind of understand their reality in order to work with them and understand that they can go to the same flat, the same street corner as an adult woman and be picked up by the same punter. And that is really important because without that understanding of the connections between the two, we kind of really lose the whole idea of it. And it just comes to this strange thing that individual men do because they're sick and they're monsters and they're paedos (Participant 4).

Here, the participant is critical of the way in which othering processes, especially in media discourses, operate to dehumanise perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse against children (see also, Soothill & Walby, 1991; Kitzinger, 1999 & 2004). Where men who pay adult women for sex may be considered 'ordinary', those who pay to abuse young people are constructed as deviant outsiders. The exercise of patriarchal and economic power common to paying women and young people for sex are collapsed into individualised narratives which in turn, individualise social inequalities, such that they are unseen.

Period one of the media coverage focused explicitly on young people – particularly young women – who were abused through street-based prostitution (see Chapter 4). Some of the participants perceived that this pattern may have changed in relation to young women in that they are less likely to be observed in street soliciting areas in a way that has been witnessed in recent decades.

> [W]hen I worked in the job years ago you would see 13 and 14-year-old girls stood on the street *around* adult prostitution, there wasn't much differentiation between the fact that that woman was 20 and that women was 14. They were stood on the same street

> with the same punters buying sex off them, criminalised by the police. But I don't think you'd see that now because I think sexual exploitation is a lot more hidden. I wouldn't be surprised if 14 or 15-year-old girls weren't put on the street to sell sex but they would be put in *other* establishments to sell sex, or on the internet (Participant 19).

New technologies such as the internet, smart phones and the rise in e-commerce and globalised markets have changed the landscape of prostitution and the sex industry worldwide (Jeffreys, 2009; Phoenix, 2012; Jrykinan, 2012). In England and Wales, indoor prostitution makes up the largest and least visible part of the sex industry (Home Affairs Committee, 2016). Many of the young women who were involved in high profile cases were taken to 'parties', hotels and B&B's where they were sexually exploited and abused by men for payment (see, for example, Bedford, 2015). However, street-based prostitution has not disappeared and it would be dangerous to assume that young people are no longer abused in this context. Rather, the proliferation of new technologies has augmented the contexts in which (most predominately) women's bodies are commodified in a globalised sex industry (Jeffreys, 2009).

In 2009, Jenny Pearce published a book titled: *'Young people and sexual exploitation: It's not hidden, you just aren't looking'.* In some ways, 'CSE' is no longer a 'hidden' problem. As Chapter 4 illustrated, coverage and media interest in sexual exploitation and 'grooming gangs' has exploded during the last decade. This coverage, along with the publication of new guidelines, government strategies, reports and inquiries (see Chapter 2) have culminated to create a context in which *certain forms of* sexual exploitation are at the forefront of professional consciousness and public imagination (see Chapter 4 & 5).

For example, the recent Home Office (2020: 11) report focuses explicitly on group-based sexual exploitation 'in the community' to the exclusion of CSE perpetrated, for example, in schools, peer groups, institutions or online by individuals or groups or indeed the abuse

experienced by some young women through prostitution. As a number of the accounts above illustrate, certain words and phrases have become almost mandatory such that it is deemed contentious, stigmatising and even collusive to the blame and culpability of young women to speak of their involvement in 'prostitution'.

Yet, as one of the participant's stated in relation to the continued challenge of victim-blame: 'We changed the language but we didn't change the meaning' (Participant 4). In other words, the separation of 'children' and 'young people' from the language of 'prostitution' has not changed the underlying attitudes which blame and responsibilise sexually exploited young people.

The next section explores in more detail some of the consequences of the wholesale rejection of the term 'prostitution' in relation to young people and CSE.

Prostitution and CSE: Reaching for a feminist analysis

As many of the examples already illustrated suggest, the significance of gender and a gendered analysis of prostitution and the sex industry underpinned the understandings and practice of a participant who worked for a violence against women and girls organisation.

> That's a real difficulty and… also in terms of response to how we stop the problem. Well how do you stop it when it's allowed over here and are we saying that this is just something that children shouldn't get involved in or are we saying that the concept of it is problematic? I think that's one of the real losses around how it's become very much the policy being focused around children, social services and children's organisations and how they've framed it but it becomes this idea of adults do bad things to children and its really out of context of structural inequality around women, what that means and what actually happens to women across their life course (Participant 4).

Here, she reflects on what she perceives as a schism between social work and children's organisations discourses and knowledge about CSE and feminist analyses of prostitution and the sex industry. As Phoenix (2019) argues, social work discourses have reframed young people's exchange based sexual relationships as a different 'object of knowledge' to that of the violence and exploitation experienced by adult women in prostitution. This is despite the connections already noted between local authority care and prostitution. Interventions are shaped not in response to prostitution but the 'risky' and/or seemingly abusive relationships involving young people (Phoenix, 2019 see also, Melrose, 2013; Chapter 5).

Although discourses of child welfare/protection may account for generational power relations between adults and young people (see Chapter 7), for this practitioner, where the problem of sexual exploitation and prostitution begins is rooted in the patriarchal structure of society. As argued in Chapter 4, this is shaped by the socioeconomic position of young women (who, as a participant pointed out earlier, have less access to economic power by virtue of their exclusion from welfare benefits in most cases), but also by race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. Thus, when framed as a *social* problem (Kelly, 1988), rather than an individual, pathological or biological problem, this analysis opens up solutions that move beyond safeguarding individual children and young people to those which seek social and structural change.

As seen in the previous section, a number of participants made connections with prostitution, the sex industry and sexual exploitation of young people and this was not always to refute an apparent link. This included participants whose practice experience was based largely in children's organisations or local authorities.

> For me, culturally, it could be your upbringing and your understanding of basically what's right and wrong in relationships. The distortion, the neglect, the abuse, the

> trauma. It's exploitation so it's about the power isn't it… [S]o there's the exploitation of women, especially Eastern European women that are trafficked over here and then they're made to work in brothels, so that's exploitation. It makes sense to me as to why they do it because of all the money. These men are making money from the women, there's nothing else about it. Why they think it's ok to treat women like that? I think we'd have to dig deeper and find out why men think that's ok, to abuse and rape women. And also, for people to know that these women have probably all been trafficked and you're coming to pay for sex, why do *you* think that's ok? (Participant 12).

Here, the participant is grappling with some of the possible causes of sexual exploitation against young people. She flits between more individualist 'cycle of abuse' narratives – a theory that has been subject to critique because it does not account for structural influences, nor does it explain the gendered patterns of perpetration/victimisation (see, for example, Lamb, 1999; Kelly *et al,* 2000) – and consideration of the way male entitlement underscores men's decisions to buy sex (see Coy *et al,* 2007 & 2012).

Building on Melrose (2013), Coy (2016) argues that the construction of sexual exploitation as child sexual abuse, rather than as abuse through prostitution, makes invisible the men who pay young women for sex. Interestingly, the Oxford Serious Case Review draws direct parallel to *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (DoH/HO).

> What the Oxfordshire girls were involved in was very akin to [abuse through prostitution] some were literally involved in prostitution and some were trafficked for sex (Bedford, 2015: 68).

Although underplayed in the media representations of CSE in period two's coverage, Chapter 4 has already argued that both gender and class was significant to the way in which these young women were targeted and victimised. Presumably, 'literal' prostitution is to refer to the way

young women were procured by men for male sex-buyers in exchange for payment; a very different context to one in which a young woman exchanges sex for 'love' or emotional warmth with an older male (see Chapter 5).

Another participant, who worked for a local authority, more explicitly took up the issue of male entitlement, male demand and the commodification of women's bodies, racialised and young, in the sex industry.

> I suppose the other side of the coin is who is it that pays to have sex with a child? I don't think we ever talk about that. And it's about the societal expectations that men have that bodies of a certain age are no longer desired or what is desirable is young flesh, fresh meat, you know. And there's money, people will pay for that. You know, and they'll pay for someone from Vietnam or they'll pay for someone who's blonde or whatever so it's purchasing that service isn't it. So that's the demand bit (Participant 7).

Melrose (2013: 15) writes: 'A 'youthful' body has a very high premium in Western culture, (not only in the sex industry but in the culture generally)'. A report about the increased sexualisation of girls notes the way adult women are 'youthified' in media and advertising (APA, 2007, also see Kelly *et al,* 2000). Another participant also points to the way erotised youth is used as marketing tools in the sex industry, thus normalising the notion that this is what men, who are the dominant users of pornography and prostitution (O'Neill, 2001; Jeffreys, 2009), want.

> It's like pornography you know, barely legal and that there's creation for young women looking as young as [possible] and somehow, it's ok for men to look at pictures of 18-year-olds who look like they're 14 as long as we know they're really 18. It's like, *what*?!

> What kind of world are we living in where that's ok? Actually, a man buying a 14-year-old is really, *really* wrong, well actually that doesn't really make sense! (Participant 4).

The influence of pornography on young people's perceptions of what might be considered 'normal' or acceptable in relationships was a concern raised by another participant.

> I think [pornography is] a really dangerous thing. And I think now it is so readily available I feel like the average age [for viewing pornography] is getting younger, I think it's like nine to 11 now that the average young person sees pornography. If that's what young people are seeing I feel like that gives a massive level of imbalance towards young women. How they're meant to manage, you know, what people deem as normal, pictures that are normal to be sending or pictures that they should be sending because that's [perceived to be] what men like or boys like… The way that that's so in society now. I mean you see it within magazines or adverts, I feel like somethings are quite pornographic, even in the mainstream (Participant 10).

Here the participant draws attention to the way in which sexualised culture and media utilise the signifiers of the sex industry as marketing tools (see Coy *et al,* 2011). In this context, the distinction between 'adult' and 'child' are increasingly ambiguous (Kelly *et al,* 2000; APA, 2007; Coy, 2009b; Moran, 2013).

Two examples illustrated in the previous sections suggest that the men who pay adult women and young women for sex are not distinct groups. Research about young people's involvement in the global sex industry supports these assertions (O'Connell Davidson & Sanchez Taylor, 1996; O'Connell Davidson, 1998). This is stated much more explicitly in the below extract.

> I think as well as the thought that they can buy sex, which again has always been available you know, in any society pretty much, historically and globally. You know,

> you can buy sex so the potential to purchase a young person is just taking it a little bit further isn't it. If you can turn a blind eye to the fact that the woman you're screwing is, you know, probably been trafficked from Eastern Europe and has to take drugs to deal with what she's having to face then you can probably turn a blind eye to the fact that she's a 14-year-old. She's a 14-year-old, she's got makeup on, lots of flesh showing in what's she's wearing, she's got heels on you know, she looks 18, so I can justify it to myself really… I think actual paedophilia is quite a different thing and I don't think we've got our heads around that… it's almost like part of the unspoken men's rights, if I can buy sex, I can buy sex with who *I* want to as part of their power. It's like buying cigarettes or buying alcohol or going on holiday, it's something they can *choose to do* (Participant 7).

Here, the participant draws upon what Kelly (2003) has critiqued as the 'wrong debate' in respect of the 'forced' versus 'free' binary in relation to the international trafficking of women into prostitution and sexual exploitation. Implicit in the account above is that while some women are coerced and 'forced' into prostitution, if they are perceived as exercising any agency then they are not victimised (Kelly, 2003). Indeed, a comparison between adult women who are trafficked and sexually exploited where this involves overt violence and control with young people exploited in commercial contexts is, arguably, a more comfortable one than that between adults and young women who exchange sex where they may appear as making decisions to do so.

Moreover, there is little consensus regarding what 'actual paedophilia' is meant to mean. Feminist analyses of child sexual abuse have critiqued the pathological construct of the 'paedophile' (see especially, Chapter 4). The majority of men who sexually abuse children or pay to use young people's bodies in prostitution do not fit into the clinical definition of a 'paedophile', but are 'ordinary' men with 'ordinary' sexualities (Kelly, 1996). As Sara Swann,

a social worker for a Barnardos CSE project stated in 1996: 'What is a paedophile anyway? As far as we can see in this project, he's over thirty, drives a nice car and has a wife and kids' (cited in Kelly *et al,* 2000: 78).

As noted, whilst there has been a considerable amount of attention given to the exploiters in high profile cases, particularly in the media where an apparently culturally rooted misogyny has been framed as specific to Pakistani and/or Muslim men (see Chapter 4), far less attention has been given to the men who pay women or young people for sex (see also, Coy, 2016; O'Hara, 2019).

The importance of challenging male demand, male entitlement or 'unspoken' right to pay for sexual access to women and young people can be drawn from these accounts. This suggests that without this, CSE practice is not dealing with the core issues. However, the extent to which male entitlement is literally 'unspoken' and not already an undercurrent of the way female bodies are commodified, sexualised and objectified, not only by the sex industry but in 'post-feminist' culture (Gill, 2007) in general, is questionable (see Chapter 7). Referring to the wider impacts of media and sexualised culture on young people's identity, this participant highlighted the challenges for young men to construct masculinities which resist pervasive messages which sustain and reinforce male entitlement and the sexualised objectification of women.

> [It is difficult] for boys and young men too. You know, I don't want to be going out and sexualising and harassing girls. There must be something wrong with me!... I think it may not have that, such an overall effect on some young men but definitely that sense of identity, what is it to be male?... I think that's really difficult for young boys and men to challenge because they are literally bombarded with that sense of, this is what you want remember? This is what you're entitled to so go and get it (Participant 9).

Coy, Horvath and Kelly (2012) suggested that the tide is turning in relation to adults as both policy and research move towards exploring and addressing the role of demand in maintaining prostitution (see also, O'Connor & Yonkova, 2018). However, the resistance in policy and practice to such an approach in relation to sexual exploitation of young people is evidenced in the account of this participant.

> I have heard people challenge, you know, who is it that's paying for this question, but it doesn't go any further, it doesn't go onto an agenda at a board meeting… I think for a lot of people it's about just keeping a child safe or its about, and all those things are important but you know, there's a limit to that. You've got to say, hang on a second, as well as talking about that, we need this, this is where you need resources, it's a very big piece of work even to just get your head around I think (Participant 7).

O'Hara (2019) argues that the dominant discourse around CSE is no longer a 'pimping and grooming' model (Melrose, 2013), but a 'grooming' model, which has made both the exploiters (i.e. the pimps) and the men who pay invisible. Indeed, as illustrated in Chapter 5, the giving of emotion – which does not make any distinction between CSE and child sexual abuse – is sufficient under current definitions for abusive relationships to be defined as 'sexual exploitation'. However, the emotional and practical needs of a young woman who has been kicked out of home with no way to support herself and nowhere to go are likely to be different from a young woman who feels loved and in love with an abusive adult who acts like a boyfriend.

Drawing on the narratives illustrated in this section, I argue that the separation of 'prostitution' from child sexual exploitation in both policy and practice has served to render invisible the structural dynamics related to gender inequalities, gendered power relations and the socioeconomic disadvantages conducive to exchanging sex for money or some other

tangible gain. Indeed, the social and structural conditions which underscore prostitution and sexual exploitation in commercial contexts 'span the age of majority' (Coy, 2016: 588).

Beckett and Walker (2017) argue that it is time to move beyond definitions which position 'CSE' as the only sub-category of child sexual abuse and to a conceptualisation which recognises 'exchange' as one dynamic of an abuse experience. However, the contention here is that in order to recognise and indeed, to divert young people away from prostitution, we must first be able to name it (see also, Melrose, 2010 & 2013; Phoenix, 2019). Moreover, it is necessary to recognise that it is not possible to categorise different forms of sexual exploitation based on age alone, this obscures the structural and material realities conducive to sexual exploitation and abuse through prostitution.

Concluding summary

This chapter has explored the avoidant uses of 'CSE'. Drawing on the participant narratives, I argued that 'CSE' is an acronym which dilutes and sanitises rape. When rape, either as a single act of violence or as part of an ongoing pattern in a relationship, is defined as 'CSE', young women may be channelled into services which are not necessarily best placed to offer support. Furthermore, when rape is unnamed it obscures the reality that a significant proportion of women and girls experience rape across their lifetime. The broad application of 'CSE' to young women's experiences of sexual violence also makes invisible the social and political causes and consequences of rape and the male entitlement that underscores it. This is analogous to the way in which the racialised media template, and the invention of new terms such as 'grooming gangs', vanishes the gendered and socioeconomic dynamics conducive to sexual exploitation of young women by men.

The analysis has also documented the range of views and perspectives on use of the term 'prostitution' in relation to young people, with a particular focus on young women. It

details the multiple nuances in the participant accounts in respect of abandoning or retaining the concept. A significant number of the participants argued that because ‘prostitution’ implies agency and choice, it should not be used in relation to children. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of an ‘exchange’ – on which definitions of ‘prostitution’ are often based - was also argued to imply and infer these meanings, albeit that they more implicit.

Media narratives surrounding use of prostitution suggest that when young women were stigmatised *as* ‘child prostitutes’ (*Daily Mail*, Narain & Tozer, 2014) by professionals, they were not seen as children in need or even worthy, of protection. Indeed, to label a person a ‘prostitute’ may eclipse all aspects of individual identity, personhood and operates to construct prostituted women as deviant outsiders making poor choices (O’Neill, 1997 & 2001). Whilst a common theme in the participants’ accounts was that policy and practice responses to CSE had improved, particularly in the aftermath of high-profile cases, a critical issue was the extent to which young women continue to be blamed and responsibilised by services. The prevalence of this theme suggests that the move away from this terminology has not necessarily resulted in more recognition of harm to the extent that all young women are protected as victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

To be clear, the analysis I presented in this chapter is in no way advocating that sexually exploited young women should be labelled as ‘prostitutes’. This term, along with a range of other stigmatising terms and euphemisms, which operated to overstate young women’s agency and to understate their victimisation, were uncritically applied to young women abused through prostitution in the coverage in period one (1997-99). The analysis of this early coverage also demonstrated that young women’s social location within class structures and/or their status as ‘looked after’ children were factors in shaping how they were represented and the amount of sympathy afforded to them and their families. This was irrespective of the often dehumanising, demeaning and sensationalist language used to describe their victimisation. This suggests that

there are other factors at play beyond language which determine how and when young women are granted 'victim' status.

The socioeconomic position of the sexually exploited young women in recent high-profile cases, and that many of these young women were either in or around the care system, is of continued significance. The overarching emphasis in the period two (2014-15) coverage on 'vulnerability' and whiteness obscured intersectional power relations of sex, gender and class and how these determined professional responses, or the lack of, to them. As already discussed, the participant accounts evidence that individualistic notions of 'choice' continue to shape professional responses to sexually exploited young women, obscuring the structural positions conducive to sexual exploitation.

By drawing on the layers of nuance in the participant accounts, and building on work by Melrose (2010), Coy (2016), O'Hara (2019) and Phoenix (2019), I argue that moves to disconnect all of what can be termed 'CSE' from the system of prostitution, particularly but not only in the aftermath of high-profile cases (see, for example, Coffey, 2014), obscures the continued relevance of this system and the sex industry to sexual exploitation. This chapter explored the multiple consequences of this avoidance.

One of the consequences of the wholesale rejection of the term 'prostitution' in policy and legislation outlined in this chapter is that it the exploiters and the abusers who pay young women for sex vanish from view. Further, I argue that because the prostitution system itself is defined by intersecting systems of power and privilege, perspectives which suggest that young women (or indeed, adult women) 'choose' or enter into this system without constraint obfuscates the structural inequalities which afford men power and privilege over women. One participant alluded to the neoliberal capitalist patriarchy which underscores the sex industry, she asserted buying sex is something men can 'choose to do', reversing the focus of choice and

highlighting how uncommon this framing is in both practice and in media representations. Though the participants did not agree on language, nonetheless, several made connections between CSE, prostitution and the sex industry, illustrating that this is not merely an academic or conceptual debate.

The continued relevance of prostitution is particularly salient in contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage and in respect of young people involved in more transient forms of exchange to meet material needs. Whilst early media coverage framed prostitution as an ‘underworld’ that is distinct from mainstream society, there was an awareness for many interviewees that selling or swapping sex was a survival route for some young people. I argue that the institution of prostitution mirrors and shores up structural power relations in patriarchal societies in which male privilege and male sexual entitlement are normalised.

The chapter has also argued that the disjuncture between CSE and prostitution serves to sever the connections between men’s use of women’s bodies in the sex industry and the sexual exploitation of young women. Indeed, youth is one of the most highly valued commodities used within the sex industry and one that those who pay for sex are willing to pay a premium for. A number of the participants pointed to the impacts of the wider sex industry, especially pornography, for young women which forms part of the conducive context for sexual exploitation. Foreclosing what can and cannot be said in relation to young people renders invisible the coexisting structures of inequality - related to gender, class, race, (hetero)sexuality and age – which shape adult and young women’s decisions to exchange sex for money or other material needs. Naming this wider context creates opportunities to challenge this system in ways which move beyond safeguarding individual young women.

Chapter 7 develops the discussion surrounding ‘grooming’ and ‘vulnerability’ in CSE discourse with a particular focus on sex, gender and heteronormative sexual practices.

Chapter 7: A feminist perspective on 'grooming' and 'vulnerability'

Introduction

This chapter explores 'grooming', 'vulnerability' and the interconnectedness of these concepts in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE). Overall, the participant's accounts suggest that both of these terms have some valuable uses in the context of practice. However, the chapter will go on to argue that neither 'grooming', 'vulnerability' or a combination of the two captures the complex and, at times, deeply sexist and heteronormative realities of the social and cultural milieu in which young women and men learn about gendered society and (hetero)sexual relationships. Drawing on the participant narratives and with reference to the media analysis (see Chapter 4), the final sections of this chapter explore the ways in which gender, heteronormativity and the 'sexualisation' of culture create a 'conducive context' (Kelly, 2007) for sexual exploitation.

'Grooming' and CSE: implications of the racialised media template

The concept of 'grooming' has featured heavily in media representations about CSE (see also, Cockbain, 2013) and to varying extents, all of the participants discussed grooming. One of the participants observed that the language of 'grooming gangs' - a racialised media construct to refer to South Asian men sexually exploiting white girls (see Chapter 4) – had become so entwined in practice discourses that accuracy is not needed in order to communicate what this is meant to mean.

> The thing is it's now become normalised to talk about 'grooming gangs' and what we basically should just be saying is let's not hide behind that, be brave and say what you mean! What you're talking about is South Asian men, you know. But we say grooming gangs now… The media narrative, that has compounded that. I think that's again, really harmful (Participant 13).

As illustrated in Chapter 5, the participants described working around a wide range of forms and contexts of CSE which did not fit neatly into the media's conceptualisation of the problem. In all of the accounts, the racialisation of CSE was considered a dangerous and flawed representation of the issues involved.

> I think the biggest kind of issue or fear I have with it is their umbrella terming of Asian males and I think that has been a big failing when it comes to the media… Because when we look at statistics it's still in place that white men, British white men, are the highest statistic in the UK for sexually harming children but how you look at it in the media it's Asian men. There has been a lot more interest by the media to show another circle of Asian men who are abusing 'our' children… There was another one, predominately white-British men but it barely got a look in… [The media] are basically scapegoating and along with everything else that's going on in the media around, you know, terrorism, ISIS and things like that. Well, it's scary when I think about how they could create a whole community within a certain area of being a negative rather than actually recognising that it's just a small number and it isn't all Asian men (Participant 2).

Many of the other participants also pointed to the wider context of Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, anti-immigration policies and Brexit as bolstering what is conceptualised here as the racialised media template. This illustrates the way grooming and CSE has become woven into these discourses. The analysis of recent media coverage in Chapter 4 also suggested that whilst the template excluded cases involving white-British men, it was the lens through which other stories involving perpetrators from minoritised groups were told.

> Actually, what we're seeing locally at least is that it is much more a general focus on BME males rather than this explicit focus on Asian or Muslim men (Participant 16).

A number of the participants also made similar remarks related to the framing of CSE as Asian men sexually exploiting ‘our’ (white) children. However, only a handful of participants expanded on the wider implications for Black and minoritised young women. These are captured most vividly in the below example.

> These concerning comments about ‘our British girls’… Like Tommy Robinson and how he’s been able to completely exploit that now to be like ‘*our* women, *our* white-British girls’ because these bloody animals are coming and abusing them. I think the media have a lot to answer for. And I find it interesting, ‘our girls’ especially when you think about it in the context of violence against women and girls, it’s this property. It’s this belief of property, that they belong to us – so we can abuse them, because that’s exactly what you do, we can do this, we can abuse and harm but not ‘The Others’. They’re not allowed to do that… And again, the notion is [in] society: ‘Oh that doesn’t happen or *we* don’t do stuff like that’… We’re not talking about victims of abuse from those communities, we’re not talking about victims of abuse from Black, African, Caribbean backgrounds. It’s just, we’ve silenced those groups completely. I think the media has a lot to answer for (Participant 13).

Here, the media framing of CSE and the political discourse following high profile cases have operated to silence minoritised young women’s experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse. As the participant above suggests, the indignation expressed in a large section of media – as well as by proponents of the far-right – was not ignited by the sexual exploitation and abuse of young women, or indeed, the failure of services to act. Rather, this was underscored by a sense of white male entitlement, ownership and patriarchal control over ‘their’ women without consideration of the violence and abuse experienced by women and girls from minoritised groups or indeed, the violence perpetrated by white men in the same contexts.

Following the Rotherham case, research documents an increase in racism and Islamophobia perpetrated against Muslim groups in the aftermath of the intense publicity about CSE and 'grooming gangs' in the area (Britton, 2019). Another participant similarly suggested that the racialised media representations surrounding CSE had prompted an increase in racism towards South Asian young women in her locality.

> One of the things certainly that's come out of… some of the bigger inquires and investigations and we're talking about kind of, you know, kind of Rochdale, Rotherham, Oxford. You know, those kinds of headline grabbing coverage by media then I would say… race certainly is an issue that's been grabbed on, isn't it? … I worry and I wonder about the impact for children living in Asian communities particularly. You know, what we hear from our children in those communities is actually that media coverage might have made things *worse* of them because they live in those communities. They will experience a lot of stereotypical beliefs from you know white western friends about what dad, uncle, brothers might do. They also would say that actually it was happening to us as well but nobody asked us. Because you all thought this only happened to white girls… I'm not sure the media has been balanced with the reporting. And that's not just the media, I think that's the inquiries themselves (Participant 18).

These few, albeit very insightful accounts, suggest that South Asian young women are silenced both by racism and by the notion only white girls experience CSE (see also, Gohir, 2013): their narratives and experiences are not valued because they fall outside, or indeed, challenge the dominant conceptualisation of grooming and CSE. Their voices are thus 'unheard' (Gohir, 2013).

> It’s still the stories of young white women that are the stories that are told about child sexual exploitation... I think there’s still [a] really big cultural bias and particularly if it’s a young middle-class white woman then its *properly* a story. Whereas, it wouldn’t probably get the same traction if it’s a group of young BME women being exploited for gangs and drugs. It’s like well, they probably got themselves into it didn’t they… There’s also the thing that its downplayed and under-valued in terms of their experiences. So, it’s not considered child sexual exploitation or it’s considered ‘culturally’ normal or socioeconomically normal and I think we see that in people not accessing support (Participant 17).

Though the majority of the participants expressed criticism of the media emphasis on young white women, few of the participants discussed in detail race and ethnicity in relation to victim-survivors or the specific issues which impact them (see, for example, Sharp, 2013; Gohir, 2013; Beckett *et al,* 2013; Fox, 2016; The Children’s Society, 2018). This is perhaps an indication that little has changed since Patel and Ward (2006) argued for a wider discussion about the ways in which black and minority ethnic young women experience or come to be ‘at risk’ of CSE. However, a minority of participants acknowledged what they perceived as an underrepresentation of ethnic minority young women accessing their services.

> We get our referrals from local authorities. I would say that our service would you know, we would *not* get the amount of referrals for minority groups that we should be getting. Because I think there’s barriers to our frontline workers in social care, policing and health in reaching out to those communities. But I think, you know, there’s barriers across all of the systems really for minority groups… [F]rom our service we see very small numbers from minority communities and we know that there’s likely to be more children in those communities who can benefit from support and help. But we largely rely on frontline workers identifying concern and referring into us so, in some ways we

> will only ever work with the children that have [been] identified from systems outside our service. You know, it would certainly be an area where I would encourage more thinking (Participant 18).

> We don't *see* women of colour in our service so much. I mean, we do but not nearly as much as is other women… You really need to be out there so this whole thing of 'hard to reach' groups, actually we need to be out there trying to reach people because they aren't gonna wander into us. I think some agencies are doing it quite well but I think there is still a gap in terms of ensuring that young BME women who are being sexually exploited *see themselves* as being sexually exploited and deserving of support (Participant 17, my emphasis).

As will be explored further later in this chapter, there are a range of factors associated with sex, gender and heteronormativity which may factor into whether a young woman 'sees herself as being sexually exploited'. In any case, it is the role of practitioners to do the unpicking work with young women in order that they are able to make sense of their experiences and are protected from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Albeit that this was not a common theme across the interview data, the examples above illustrate an awareness in practice of both the need to ensure services are accessible to young people from minoritised communities and the problematic framing of particular groups as 'hard to reach'. This framing shifts attention away from the ways in which services that are implicitly informed by a focus on white young women (see Patel & Ward, 2006) are not meeting the needs of minoritised groups. Indeed, another participant similarly suggested a relationship between the racialised media representations and the way the organisation of services may reduce space for action (Kelly, 2007).

> [Minoritised young people] are made to feel like [their] narrative just doesn't mean anything… I think that's really traumatising and really harmful… They just float around, non-existent, even though they're right in front of us. They're our next-door neighbours but they've now become 'hard to reach' (Participant 13).

All of the participants were critical in some degree of the media's representations about grooming and CSE. However, even when having previously rejected the media's conceptualisation, a minority of the participants nonetheless endorsed many of the same messages perpetuated in the coverage.

> It's not as much as in the media anymore [but] there was the massive thing about Asian males [and] white girls which then stirs up a lot of, obviously race issues… The focus can then go somewhere else, not on the crime. Because a lot of people are focusing on 'you're targeting our white females'… But then also how different are they to a paedophile ring who are all white males targeting boys and girls? … Obviously, we have got the Asian men who probably have a lot less respect for the white females… They're not gonna do it to their own women because they're so, because culturally obviously the way that we know that they are in regards to how they expect their women to behave, dress, conduct themselves and what's allowed etc. It's very different to how white females or any other female can act in public… So, it's about attitudes, isn't it? Values, morals (Participant 12).

As the participant points out, the connections between a 'paedophile ring' involving white men and CSE involving Asian men are obfuscated by the media's focus on a supposed racialised pattern. Nonetheless, 'their own women' – meaning South Asian and Muslim women as a whole - are positioned as entirely submissive to men and as the subjects of patriarchal control and domination in a way which white women are not. However, as documented in the Jay

(2014) report, Pakistani-heritage women spoke of feeling disenfranchised by a reliance on imams and elected council members as the main channel of communication with the Pakistani-heritage community in Rotherham. Clearly, these women have voices and opinions but they simply had not been asked.

Whilst South Asian 'values' and 'morals' are assumed to be the most patriarchal of all, perhaps ironically, it is also implied that South Asian and Muslim women do not experience sexual violence and abuse. Harrison and Gill (2018) note a range of barriers which impact on South Asian women's access to support, including the way 'honour' influences disclosure and help-seeking. They suggest that raising awareness of sexual abuse and services in local communities, enhanced outreach programmes, peer support and access to women-only spaces are essential to the protection of South Asian women and children. Indeed, the NGOs who participated in the study had already implemented these strategies with positive outcomes: 'We can no longer claim that some groups are hard to reach when there are mechanisms and strategies indicating that this idea is simply not true' (Harrison & Gill, 2018: 288).

However, as participant 17 above pointed out, when minoritised women do experience violence, this may be considered by others as 'culturally normal' and therefore not as victimisation.

> Well, I think, you know, when we have people coming over from different countries and maybe they don't see women as being on the same level as them, intellectually, physically, you know. There's still that whole gender type of women needing to be cooking and then being in the bedroom and they're there to serve the purpose of looking after their man (Participant 5).

This cultural relativism was explicit in the media narratives around grooming and CSE (see Chapter 4) in which South Asian cultures were framed as inherently misogynistic and

positioned as fostering men's violence towards women and children. This narrative occludes the patriarchal systems conducive to sexual violence against all victim-survivors. However, some of these perspectives are indicators of how the racialised media template obstructs an intersectional analysis of gender, race, ethnicity and class (Crenshaw, 1991).

Interestingly, the impact of this template was commented on by the participant above in relation to 'educating young people to keep safe'.

> [W]hen you talk to girls about who they think could be a potential groomer, I use cards, they're just random cards of people. So, there are men, women, young, old, different codes of dress, different backgrounds and whenever I say: Who do you think could be a potential groomer? They always go for the Asian male in his early twenties. I always say: Why do you think that? Well, that's what I've heard, it's only them that do it. And I say well where have you heard that from? Oh, my mum told me or I've seen it on the TV or they've seen it somewhere so for them now, that's the only category of a person that they need to fear. They don't ever think anybody else is going to want to potentially try and groom them or exploit them because of what they've seen (Participant 5).

This interview was conducted when the media's coverage about 'Asian' men and grooming was at its peak. It is notable that this is described as a negative implication directly associated with the media discourse. This represents the contradictory ways in which the practitioners challenged the media narrative but also the ways in which particular elements of the racialised media template was endorsed, albeit in a minority of the accounts. The following section explores the centrality of 'grooming' to CSE.

The pragmatism and appeal of the 'grooming' construct

For many of the participants, grooming was understood as a defining feature of CSE and thus informed their responses and interventions with young people. Indeed, grooming was often

described in ways which depicted it *as the problem* (see also, Hallett, 2017). As already noted, Melrose (2013) and O'Hara (2019) have critiqued the way 'grooming' has become a euphemism for sexual exploitation. This is reflected in a statement made by participant 16: 'I think it's been used like that… As a bit of an interchangeable word really'.

Despite the pervasiveness of the term in relation to CSE, research shows that most child sexual abusers – including intra and extra-familial abusers - target children and young people through a process of 'sexual grooming' (Craven, Brown & Gilchrist, 2006). Previous literature has critiqued the conflation between sexual exploitation and grooming (see, for example, Melrose, 2013; Cockbain, 2013; Hallett, 2017; O'Hara, 2019). However, the accounts of many of the participants, including those who were more critical of this language, suggests that the concept is of some practical use.

Chapter 5 documented the pragmatic uses of the term 'CSE' in practice settings. Similarly, the participants' reflections broadly demonstrate that the term 'grooming' has some pragmatic uses. First, the language and simplicity of a 'grooming' model may help professionals and young people 'make sense' of the psychological pull of a perpetrator.

> [I]t could be seen as a very simplistic way that young people become coerced into being sexually exploited or indeed criminally exploited. We know that it's not a linear thing. We know that it's not so easy as that happens and that happens and that happens and that happens. However, young people *understand* the term 'grooming'. You know, we work with a lot of young people who have been exploited but we also work with lots of young people in universal services and they understand it. *They know what it means*… I think it's very important to identify what hat your wearing when you start talking about the use of that particular language. You know, young people they watch Eastenders, they watch Hollyoaks, they watch Emmerdale, you know, and that's where

> they get - as we all do - a lot of our information from and grooming is a phrase that's used in lots of those different contexts. So, I wouldn't like to lose it but I think there's got to be some context around it… because when you look at it face-value it is quite [a] simple, linear process isn't it really (Participant 16).

Secondly, where young women in particular have historically been framed as wilful 'prostitutes' or as 'streetwise bad girls', the emergence of grooming in practice, media and common vernacular has contributed to dilute stereotypes which emphasise young women's agency and obscure generational power inequalities.

> I think there's a better understanding… It's not just young girls trying to be flattered by older men. There's like that understanding of grooming and the power imbalances that are inherent in exploiting children sexually. I think that's kind of come to the fore a lot more… [S]o I think that trope of the older man and younger girls has been understood more as an exploitative relationship rather than a consensual relationship, that's really useful… I guess with the exploitation thing particularly around that giving love for kind of, for performing sexual activities that has always been a hard one to explain, when you see the ones like Rotherham and stuff where actually, they're victims (Participant 17).

This suggests that an understanding of 'grooming' in the context of CSE has invoked the exploitative nature of 'relationships' that might have once been viewed 'consensual'. Indeed, this is partly what the Barnardos (1998) conceptualisation of the 'boyfriend' model aimed to achieve where age gaps between young women and older men were problematised as an indication of abuse. As such, in the context of CSE, the term 'grooming' puts a framework around certain types of behaviour which enables professionals to recognise and understand how and why young people become entrapped in contexts of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Thus, ‘grooming’ *may* serve as a way to diminish the responsibilisation of sexually exploited young people and draws attention to the agency of the exploiters. Thus, ‘grooming’ *may* serve as a way to diminish the responsibilisation of sexually exploited young women and as the insightful example below highlights, draws attention to the agency of the exploiters.

> It’s actually what the perpetrator does, it’s not about what the young person does… It’s very much about putting it, putting the onus on the perpetrator as well in terms of *that* is the behaviour they use to manipulate, coerce and whatever, whatever (Participant 16).

Nonetheless, as the analysis will go on to suggest, the appeal and acceptance of the grooming model in practice and in various types of media is partly due to its accessibility and simplicity as an explanatory model. As suggested in Chapter 4, there is nothing particularly new or challenging about the grooming concept. Indeed, part of its allure is because it already speaks to popular discourses about ‘stranger danger’, ‘vulnerable children’ and the apparent perversity of a minority of men.

> In many cases they’re being portrayed as these monsters who are doing this and we have to look out for the monster and somehow, we’ll just be able to walk into the chip shop and recognise that man, he is definitely one of the ones doing it… You know, they’ve got enough power that they can wield with a bag of chips and they’re out there just preying on young women (Participant 4).

The idea that young people are individually and collectively ‘vulnerable’ to grooming is notable in many of the participant accounts. The next section explores the way ‘vulnerability’ is tightly bound with the concept of grooming.

'Vulnerability': The 'groomers' accomplice

As noted, the concept of 'grooming' was significant to the way many of the participants described the defining characteristics of CSE.

> It's when any young person is kind of manipulated into believing something isn't what it is and then given things, not necessarily gifts or anything but something that that young person needs at a given time and then kind of enticed into sexual behaviours with that person. *There's obviously usually a grooming process*. That can be a couple of weeks, a couple of years, it depends… I mean we talk with young people a lot about consent as well, so they're kind of enticed into thinking they're giving consent when they're not (Participant 6, my emphasis).

As noted, research evidences that sexual exploitation does not *always* involve elements of what might be described as 'grooming' (see, for example, Pitts, 1997; Pearce, 2002; Firmin, 2010 & 2013; Phoenix, 2012; Beckett *et al,* 2013; Hallett, 2015 & 2017). However, the notion that young people are collectively 'vulnerable' to a process of grooming and manipulation is a notable theme in the interview data.

> Children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by virtue of their age (Participant 20).

> It's confusion as well. It's naivety. It's the belief that this person really does love and care about me and you're just coming in and interfering (Participant 12).

> I think that what we know in our service is that actually *anyone* is susceptible to being groomed and exploited in *any* way. And there are sometimes things that do make young people more vulnerable but it is always, you know, a young person can be more vulnerable on one day when they're feeling upset and down (Participant 6).

Thus, young people are perceived as universally vulnerable because of age and development. Underpinning these assumptions is the normative perception of 'children' and 'young people'

as innately vulnerable and so *all* young people are considered 'at risk' (see also, Brown, 2017; Hallett, 2017). Whilst some factors may be mitigated by individual circumstance or intervention, some level of vulnerability and risk is inevitable (Brown, 2017). Thus, young people are perceived as universally vulnerable because of age and development. Underpinning these assumptions is the normative perception of 'children' and 'young people' as innately vulnerable and so *all* young people are considered 'at risk' (see also, Brown, 2017; Hallett, 2017). However, as noted by participant 5, there is a distinction between 'vulnerability' to CSE and actuality.

> For a start we need to get rid of these risk assessments. I hate them, they're dreadful. This is my real bug bear. We have a risk assessment that's broken down into low, medium and high. Now, there's nowhere on that risk assessment that identifies anybody as being an actual victim (Participant 5).

As she further stated, many of the young women she was supporting had gone 'beyond risk' in that they were an 'actual victim' of sexual exploitation. Nonetheless, a predominant perception amongst a significant number of participants is the notion that while some factors may be mitigated by individual circumstance or intervention, some level of vulnerability and risk is inevitable (see also Brown, 2017).

The apparent 'innateness' of children's vulnerability is deeply embedded in western discourses about children and 'childhood' (James *et al,* 1998; Melrose, 2013). This is entangled with understandings of 'youth' and 'adolescence' as a transitional state which is marked by a burgeoning want and/or need for independence from adult authority. Whilst this is perceived as a natural process, it is nonetheless understood to be a time characterised by danger and risk.

> Young people are easy to exploit aren't they, particularly adolescents. By the very nature of them being a teenager it makes them vulnerable because they have hit that age

> where they're less likely to tell an adult as well… They are by the very nature of what they're going through, removing themselves from authority, they're removing themselves from that parental responsibility and peers become so much more influential. Risk taking increases when they are with peers than when they're not (Participant 15).

> If you're a child, teenage child, you know, teenagers generally it's a time in their life where they are questioning identity, where they might be comparing themselves to peers, feeling different, esteem has taken a dent. And, you know, for those children actually being contacted online by somebody who is liking their pictures, who is there for them when they've fallen out with parents or friends, it feels very different to if they are just sat next to that person on a bench in a park somewhere. In the context of an online kind of targeting and abuse then children I think are not *always* as clued up really to the tactics used and I guess it's normally happening in a place of safety for those children cause it's happening usually in their bedroom and their family are downstairs, it feels safe, it doesn't feel risky or dangerous (Participant 18).

As also noted in Chapter 5, individual factors were said to increase susceptibility to the manipulation and grooming by exploitative adults.

> I've worked with cases where we've had girls that come from really, you know, normal backgrounds. There's a mum, dad, they've got everything they want within reason and from the outside it looks like they have quite a well-adjusted life and they attend school. But when you look deeper there's *always* something there. One case that springs to mind is she was being bullied when she was really young, and we're talking about maybe primary school age, and that had stayed with her throughout her entire life until she got involved with a group of men and they were paying her lots of compliments

and being really nice to her. And it didn't matter how much love mum and dad were putting in, that bullying issue was still there and it was really easy for them to exploit that and take advantage of that (Participant 5).

Whilst research does document correlations between life experiences, such as living in care and abuse, individual vulnerability is framed as to underlie experiences of sexual exploitation and here its causes are understood as rooted in one's own psychology. In this way, it is the 'task' of practitioners to seek out what made that individual young person *more* vulnerable to the deliberate targeting by predatory 'groomers' - who are adept at 'knowing where the vulnerabilities are' (Participant 18) - so that these underlying vulnerabilities and needs can be mitigated in the future.

> A lot of young people have vulnerabilities where there will be low self-esteem or problems at home, [with] family and they're looking for some kind of belonging or stability somewhere else. So, people are looking to exploit that. Why they do it, that's kind of perpetrator mentality. You know, there's different reasons but I think definitely with the online situation as well, [they are] looking for some kind of affirmation, attention. Especially for a young person, maybe having low self-esteem, initially that's just exactly what the groomer gives. They look out for those things. So, a young person maybe feels a bit insecure about their body just piling on the praise: 'Oh, you've got a beautiful body, you're gorgeous, you're this'. [It is] something they're not getting from anywhere else which is what they need. So, I think those things leave vulnerabilities (Participant 1).

> For the child, if we don't work with the underlying needs that made them vulnerable to that behaviour occurring in the first place we can disrupt and we can remove and we can prosecute but there will always be somebody who is able to target that child because

> they're *not* addressing the underlying needs (Participant 18).

Few of the participants were critical of the concept 'vulnerability'. It was used as a way to both explain the sexual exploitation of young people and to some extent, as an attempt to counter the responsibilisation of young people by invoking sympathy and compassion (see also Brown, 2017).

Similar to the use of vulnerability and grooming in the media's representation of CSE, these were the dominant concepts drawn upon to explain the entrapment of young people in sexual exploitation. However, there were also some notable exceptions and nuances in the interview data.

Beyond vulnerability

Several participants expressed an uneasiness with the term 'vulnerability' in CSE practice and social work discourses more generally. Interestingly, the participant quoted below drew on the concept throughout the interview to make sense of the factors which 'push' and 'pull' young people into sexually exploitative situations. However, later in the interview she also noted the ways in which it deflects attention away from the perpetrators of this form of abuse.

> Even if you looked at 'oh they suffered from bullying', they were vulnerable for these reasons, so that's why then. Still we're looking at what made them vulnerable rather than focusing on the perpetrator and I suppose it's been quite interesting recently, there's loads isn't there, on Facebook and social media as well. There's one that I've seen a number of times about rather than thinking about them as mothers and sisters, think about them as sons and fathers, so think about the perpetrators in that respect rather than the victim and I thought that's interesting. But I'm not sure how impacting that is because it's that thing again, it's very easy for us to look at the victim rather than thinking about a son or a father doing that to someone (Participant 2).

This demonstrates the difficulties in challenging its pervasiveness in practice; 'vulnerability' is the most dominant framework available to practitioners in their efforts to understand and make sense of why sexual exploitation happens and who it happens to, albeit at the expense of the acknowledgement of the ordinary men who abuse by paying for sex. Thus, even when the term feels inadequate, alternative conceptualisations which bring the *perpetrators* – and socially constructed masculinities - explicitly into view, can *seem* beyond reach.

> Talking about sexual exploitation or domestic violence or abuse, actually what I feel is happening continuously is we are not talking about the actual issue which is how boys and men behave. We're not talking about that. So, you know, stories about sexual exploitation will be because its these Asian men, it's the Asian part, so that's the problem…. We're not talking about men being a problem. And how we have contributed to that and created that (Participant 9).

Indeed, this is reflected in the media's resistance to comments made by Sue Berelowitz in which she had attempted to draw attention to the fact that most CSE perpetrators are male (see Chapter 4).

Another participant was overtly critical of the pervasive use of the term vulnerability to describe the young women she works with. Reflecting on her practice-based evidence working for a feminist organisation, she notes how the concept undermines young women's sense of agency, resistance and ability to manage in circumstances where their space for action (Kelly, 2003) is constrained by age, the perpetrator(s) and the (dis)enabling context captured in 'safeguarding the body'. This may include social care, criminal justice systems and third sector organisations. Her reflections are entwined with the concept of a 'victim', arguing that both of these terms are suffused with social stigma: they may recognise 'harm' - or the apparently increased potential for it - but deny young women's strength and resistance.

> If you say 'victim' it can, I dunno if it comes along with a lot of victim-blaming language around that victim… It's the same thing as 'vulnerability', it really defines that person. Whereas, for me something makes that person vulnerable, like the situation around them. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are a vulnerable person. I feel like it minimises stuff as well to use those terms... They're so incredible, incredibly resistant, like resistant to all of this rubbish that's happening around them. I feel like young women have a really hard time and actually we should really be encouraging them to be themselves and make their choices… A lot of the young women I speak to hate being called vulnerable because they do have a voice, sometimes it's easier for them to not use it (Participant 10).

Here, 'vulnerability' is defined by the context. In this way, vulnerability to sexual exploitation is not considered inevitable by virtue of age and development: context and intersecting systems of inequality (Crenshaw, 1991) create vulnerability rather than individual characteristics or experience. For example, as noted in Chapter 4, local authority care is a context which may increase vulnerability to CSE. The intersections of gender and class were significant both in terms of how these axes of power shaped the media representations about specific cases and the way in which these systems were overwritten by an emphasis on individual vulnerability.

More recently, Crenshaw (2020) has discussed the concept of 'intersectional vulnerabilities' in which she connects vulnerabilities within intersecting structures of power. In this way, vulnerability is not located within individuals or groups but is structured by their position within systems of power and oppression.

However, narrower conceptualisations of vulnerability and the perception that this may imply passivity or weakness is understood as one way in which young women are silenced by the agencies charged with protecting them since it positions them as *unable* to take an active

role in safeguarding *themselves* (see also, Warrington, 2013). From the view of this practitioner, it is not the case that young women have nothing to bring to the safeguarding process, as might be implied by an emphasis on their apparent vulnerability or status as a 'victim'. This is not to argue that vulnerability is insignificant and should not be acknowledged. However, as Tufail (2015) points out the concept - at least in its narrower applications - assumes an apolitical [and ungendered] position.

A notable thread throughout the practice-based evidence of the participants who either work/ed for VAWG organisations was the significance of gender to sexual exploitation. For example, participant 10 - who worked for a small project that provides support and advocacy for young women - made numerous references throughout the interview to suggest that the individual and collective needs of young women are consistently overlooked.

> I feel like that's actually a thing that's missed quite a lot. Now reflecting back on even… how I was thinking about violence against women. I feel like girls and young women seem to be missed out quite a lot and especially kind of, yeah, young women, the adolescence age. They seem to just be missed from a lot of things (Participant 10).

Elleschild (2013) argues that through the discourse of welfare protection, 'young people' 'go missing' in policy reform because they are reconfigured as 'children'. She argues that '…a four-year-old is very different from a 17-year-old yet both are conceptually merged' (2013: 216). As seen in the participants' narratives above, the argument that 'youth' is a valuable concept to hold on to is an important one. However, a common theme in a number of other accounts indicates that the way this intersects with sex and a gender is also of significance.

> [T]here's also this other pervasive idea around this idea that it could happen to just any young person… [I]t's kind of like that same thing around stranger danger and kind of like somehow young women just need to be checking in bushes because sexual

> exploitation is just going to happen to them but not just young women but also young men as well. Which is also one of the things that took it out of context and you see a lot in the children's policies. Like we'll take away any mention of young women, this is a young person because we know it happens to young boys and it does happen to young boys but we know in a very different context and for slightly different reasons. And also, with that comes this idea, and this isn't to say women never do it [but] we know that predominantly even if we are talking about young boys its men doing it but somehow, it's like: 'Oh, women are doing it as well' (Participant 4).

Whilst the unclear definition of CSE poses a problem for data capture (Beckett & Walker, 2017; Kelly & Karsna, 2017), as noted in Chapter 2, sexual exploitation tends to follow a gendered pattern of perpetration and victimisation. It is disproportionately perpetrated by men and young men, against young women (see Kelly & Karsna, 2017). This does not mean that young men and boys are never victimised through sexual exploitation or that women never perpetrate it.

> Of course, exploitation can happen with both boys and girls. Just like any kind of abuse can but it is massively disproportionate (Participant 10).

This gendered asymmetry of sexual exploitation requires analysis, understanding and explanation (Coy, 2016).

However, the positioning of young women through the ungendered construct of 'young people' makes invisible the gendered inequalities and gendered pattern of victimisation which underlie sexual exploitation. Indeed, the practice-based evidence of the participants who worked in VAWG organisations and those whose perspective took an analytical view of sex and gender revealed the significance of these social factors to sexual exploitation both in terms of understanding the problem and responding to it. However, an analysis which interrogates

this gendered disproportionality is largely absent in recent discussions about CSE (indeed, the analysis of new-media coverage in Chapter 4 illustrated a resistance to it) such that young women 'go missing' in policy and mainstream practice. Subsequently, a gender analysis is absent and young women 'go missing' in policy and practice responses. For example, written in the shadows of cases such as Rotherham, Casey (2015: 3) states:

> …the victims are children however they present themselves. They cannot consent to their abuse, all the more given that grooming itself removes any real sense of self-determination from these children. There should be no scenarios in which victims are viewed as young women or as making choices.

The tension here is that in order for young women to be viewed as 'real' child abuse victims they must be infantilised in ways that position them as entirely powerless and lacking in any agency. They are not even viewed as 'young women' because this is to infer a level of *in*vulnerability that is deemed incompatible with socially acceptable constructs of victimhood which – particularly in relation to 'children' – invokes a narrative of 'tragedy' and suffering.

Stories of tragedy and suffering

Whilst most participants employed the term uncritically, other practitioners also challenged the narrative around vulnerability to grooming and sexual exploitation in more implicit ways. Referring to the recent media representations (see Chapter 4) of victim-survivors of sexual exploitation in Rochdale, Rotherham and other high-profile cases, participant 15 noted the way a 'tragedy narrative' carries currency in the bureaucratic and competitive nature of funding and commissioning services.

> I think that the other aspect of it that perhaps doesn't come across so much in the media is about how we empower and bolster young people themselves, how we validate their coping mechanisms and their resilience and their survival because young people are

> amazing!... I mean [sexual exploitation] does have a massive impact but the way that they can also keep going is quite incredible and I think we don't necessarily honour them enough for that… So, we have a narrative that's very much, a tragedy narrative if you like. And I think sometimes we have to be very careful as organisations working in the sector. Particularly when you're talking about commissioning of services, we all want to present how *needed* our service is and sometimes it's very easy to kind of slip into that narrative about how terrible it all is so we need the money then to tackle it… [Y]ou're being asked all the time by funders for case studies and they want the really *gritty hard-line* stuff (Participant 15).

Where it can 'evidenced' that sexual exploitation causes long-term and irreparable harm, services stand a better chance of being granted funds. This is regardless of whether victim-survivor's stories and experiences correspond with this narrative of tragedy and suffering. As Lamb (1999: 115) writes, 'suffering creates drama'. However, through this narrative, important aspects of young people's experiences – their survival, their ability to cope, their resistance – become invisible, maybe even to themselves.

Participant 2 made similar observations in regards to the techniques used by children's charities in advertising campaigns.

> [W]hen you think about NSPCC adverts, and this is where it works alongside the victim blaming because who you see as a victim isn't what you're, what you're seeing isn't a child who's been sexually exploited, gone to a party and got drunk. You're not visualising a real child essentially. So, and then the NSPCC adverts, whilst they're brilliant, on the flip hand they create this persona of children being all sweet and innocent. So then when you actually meet these children or young people, when you actually hear their real stories, they don't correlate. So, it's a real mix of, so we want to

> use resources to support young people to understand but they can't relate to it because they're looking at all these sweet and innocent children and they're going well, that's not me! You know, so there's that kind of crossover of how the media can work with us or against us (Participant 2).

Such emotive narratives are characteristic of many of the advertising campaigns about child sexual exploitation. For example, the *Stolen Childhood* campaign launched by Barnardos in 2002 included a series of posters in which young children are depicted with worn and haggard faces. The perpetrators tower over the young victims, symbolic of their power and dominance. In stark contrast, young children are depicted as wholly powerless, compliant, helpless and in need of rescue (see appendix 3 for examples of the 'Stolen Childhood' campaign materials). Such campaigns may serve to generate public sympathy and funds for the 'sweet' and 'innocent' (also see Melrose, 2013) but, as the participant above illustrates, they are not all that reflective of the young people victimised through sexual exploitation.

Beckett (2019) argues that is it necessary to move beyond binary conceptualisations of 'victimhood' versus 'agency'. She points out that when young people are seen to be exercising any degree of agency or initiative, even in circumstances of constraint, they can be seen as less deserving of support. As explored in Chapter 4 in relation to representations of young women – they may be considered as 'streetwise' and thus impervious to harm.

> The thing that I come across quite often is that professionals they want to see results really quickly. So, for someone who is working with a young person that is being sexually exploited, three months, six months, nine months, you know, if they are still being exploited and there [are] still vulnerabilities, they're like: 'Since working with you what difference [has the support worker made?] You are not having an impact' and I'm thinking if you think that sometimes this person has been exploited for a really long

time how do you expect to see changes in six or nine months? It takes longer than that!... And I think then, some professionals, they think that she must be enjoying that it's happening to her and you think like, really?! (Participant 8).

The ways in which young women in Rochdale and Rotherham were dismissed by agencies as 'wayward working-class girls who were out of control' (Participant 15) is an example of what can happen when victim-survivors do not present as 'vulnerable', 'sweet' or 'innocent' (see Chapter 4), as if to imply that to be (or be seen) in this way is to take on more harm. As another participant suggested, anger can be a form of self-protection, resistance and a way of asserting oneself. She described supporting young people and professionals to recognise this.

> It's about, you know, finding out what the young person's strengths are, what their hopes and dreams are for the future, what their fears are, what they think about what's happening to them. Because we're trauma informed, we work a lot around coping strategies and actually helping young people understand that some of their behaviour has been a coping strategy to what they've been through and whilst it was helpful at the time, it's probably no longer helpful now. And actually, working with them around readjusting some of those coping strategies, but actually doing that with the professionals that they're with as well. So, when you get a residential worker: 'Well they kicked off again last night' … It's just about trying to reframe it: 'Well, yeah, they *did* because you restrained them or because in the space, actually, they're frightened' (Participant 16).

The next section is a more detailed examination of 'healthy relationships', grooming and heteronormativity.

'Healthy relationships' and grooming

Whilst in a very restrictive and linear way, 'grooming' makes apparent the power imbalances

related to age and the forms of power and control used by exploiters within this dynamic. Often discussed through the lens of 'healthy relationships', a prominent theme in the participants' narrative relates to the importance of creating spaces where young people are able to discuss and learn about sex, relationships and consent. This included educating young people about the 'risks' associated with CSE, how to 'keep safe' and to understand the 'grooming process'.

> The activity is like what a groomer might say and what might be the actual meaning [and] what they're trying to get from that. And as we go through it always comes to the forefront of your mind: What does this look like? What's forming here? What is it like? Is that how a relationship forms? … [S]o there's confusion with that. Certainly, talking with young people about what a healthy relationship looks like, what it doesn't look like and the grooming process is aimed to *look just like that* so sometimes it's really difficult because they don't recognise what it is until it too late if you like, its already started (Participant 6, emphasis added).

In terms of raising awareness, there is nothing inherently wrong in talking to young people about grooming. Whilst 'grooming' is commonly conflated with 'CSE', it is nonetheless a reality that some young people face in contexts of sexual exploitation. However, this participant was overtly critical of education programmes framed in terms of 'healthy relationships'.

> I think that the way that we frame it for me is already very victim-blaming. Just the fact that you're going to be at more risk if you haven't attended a programme about healthy relationships and now you have that you're not as at risk. So, therefore if something happens to you, it's something that *you've* then done (Participant 13).

Research suggests that women and young women in heteronormative relationships may 'consent' to sex even if it is not wanted or desired (see, for example, Kelly, 1988; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gavey, 2019). Overt pressure or manipulation from a partner may not always

be present (Gavey, 2019) and it may look and even feel just like a 'healthy relationship'. As many of the participants' described, entrapment in sexual exploitation through 'grooming' is a gradual and insidious process.

> The grooming stage is very manipulative and it's not immediately a contract, ok, you can stay in my house if you give me sex. Often people will be like 'no!' and will leave. But it's a case of they nurture them to begin with.… It starts off like a loving relationship but then it [becomes] kind of much more, you *owe* me and sex is demanded and it's abusive and oppressive. So, yeah, it's kind of where sex is expected in exchange for something and the young person feels they have to give it, they're compelled to give it. But yeah, often, it starts off they believe its mutual, they believe its loving, they believe its friendship and that's how the grooming works with it really (Participant 1).

This chimes with adult women's experiences of domestic violence and coercive control where it can feel like a 'loving relationship'. As Stark (2007) argues, abusive men do not always assert their dominance through overt fear or 'extreme' violence and this is not always necessary to achieve domination. Indeed, the efficiency of coercive control and the difficulties in identifying it is that its strategies are rooted in the normative expectations of femininity and masculinity in public and private spheres (Stark, 2007). It is these structural conditions of inequality which enable abusive men to have power over women in intimate relationships.

The dynamics of coercive control and violence in adult heterosexual relationships are also reflected in research about young people's intimate relationships. Similarly, research documents how normative ideas about masculinity and femininity contribute to maintaining gender inequality, as well as to the normalisation of young men's use of sexual coercion and violence in romantic relationships (Chung, 2005). Further research about 'teenage partner violence' suggests that the dynamics underpinning this violence are highly gendered (Barter,

2009). Indeed, Barter (2011: 111) describes the violence in young people's intimate relationships to be 'a thoroughly gendered affair'.

The simplicity of the grooming narrative does little to theorise, explain or determine the ways in which the behaviours and processes it refers to are socially and culturally embedded within gendered social norms and heteronormative discourses.

'Love' and romance

Jay's (2014) inquiry into sexual exploitation in Rotherham notes that it is typical for young women to believe they are in a 'relationship' with a perpetrator who pretends to be her 'boyfriend', a pattern also identified in the *Whose Daughter Next?* (Swann *et al,* 1998) report published more than 15-years earlier. As noted in Chapter 5, the 'exchange' that is often described to underlie this form of abuse are often feelings of 'love' and a genuine sense of care and mutuality. Yet, in the context of CSE, these emotions are pathologized through a lens of vulnerability and considered as 'unhealthy', despite that these are feelings that most would likely hope to have in long-term intimate relationships, at least if these relationships are to be measured as 'healthy'.

As in the boyfriend model, 'groomers' are said to foster such feelings of 'love' and 'care'. However, as the account below suggests, the distortions created by 'groomers/boyfriends' within this dynamic are not the only factor to create circumstances which limit young women's ability to recognise sexual exploitation and abuse.

> [I]t's really important that we talk about the difference between boys and girls and men and women who are being sexually exploited because I think that for young females it is difficult for them to recognise that they're being exploited because they are brought up to be pleased about the fact that a male is showing an interest in them. So, this is a positive and their friends will tell them this is positive and even family will tell them

> this is positive… They have been essentially groomed by society that this is a positive thing! So, when someone comes in and says: 'I'm really worried about you', there's a real confusion about what is going on here. They might know that person is not necessarily perfect and they know what they're doing isn't right or they feel uncomfortable but they don't understand *why* they do… They can't *really* make sense of it because we are constantly telling them, you know, this is good, you're female and a big part of what makes you valuable is that you get the sexual attention of men (Participant 9).

This participant worked for a small children's charity and also had many years' experience working with adult victim-survivors of domestic violence and abuse, which she suggested had significant correlations with CSE. Her insightful observations shift 'grooming' beyond the realm of pathologizing individuals - either as predators or as 'vulnerable children' - and brings into view the role of patriarchal society and the constraints it places on young women's ability to resist (hetero)sexual activity; exploitative, coercive or otherwise.

Heterosexuality is theorised as a social and political institution that regulates and shapes daily life (Farvid, 2015). Men/masculinity and women/femininity are constructed differently; the former often in opposition to the latter (Hollway, 1984; Hird & Jackson, 2001; Holland *et al,* 2004). Men and masculinity are constructed as active/pursuant and women and femininity as passive/submissive (Hollway, 1984; Hird & Jackson, 2001; Holland *et al,* 2004). However, as this chapter will go on to explore, the reality is rarely this simple as discourses related to male and female heterosexuality are multiple and collide with one another in a complex web of contradictions and inconsistences.

Holland *et al* (2004) argue that for young women to achieve conventional femininity (and men masculinity), they are expected to aspire to a [hetero]sexual relationship, have faith

in ‘love’/romance and go along with sex, even if it is unwanted, in order to make men happy. The reflections of participant 9 above offer a glimpse into these heteronormative expectations, the related gender, feminine and masculine roles and their significance to ‘grooming’ and sexual exploitation (see also, Coy, 2019).

In participant 9’s account men are positioned as sexual subjects. That is, as *showing an interest.* In many ways this is analogous to a ‘boy-meets-girl’ romance and a socially accepted norm of heterosexual romantic discourse (Walkerdine, 1984; Hird & Jackson, 2001; Chung, 2005). A similar discourse has been identified in Earle and Sharp’s (2008) analysis of online accounts written by men who pay for sex. They found that sex buyers frequently draw upon discourses of romance which echo those of consensual heterosexual courtship. For example, the giving of chocolates or flowers so to reinforce a sense of intimacy and reciprocity.

Similarly, in her analysis of prosecution case files about international trafficking, Turner (2014) suggests that heteronormative dating and courtship rituals function to facilitate the recruitment of women into prostitution and sexual exploitation. The recruitment processes she describes illustrates how heteronormativity and masculine constructions of masculinity and femininity are woven into male recruitment strategies such that the deceptive tactics employed by men to entrap women are hidden in plain sight.

Drawing further on participant 9’s reflections, as men are situated as sexual subjects, young women become their ‘objects’. As the objects of masculine desire young women’s ‘value’ and worth is affirmed by the sexual attention they receive from men. In this sense, young women have ‘achieved’ femininity (and men, masculinity).

In cultural discourses of romance, love and sex are bound together such that regular sex is considered a ‘natural’ part of a romantic relationship (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Barter, 2009;

Gavey, 2019). Where regular sex is not present, these same cultural scripts might also suggest that the relationship is 'unhealthy'.

Gavey (2019) identifies an 'economy of sex' in heterosexual relationships which operates around shared acceptance of the male-sex drive discourse (Hollway, 1984) which suggests that men's biology is constituted through a consistent 'need' for sex. In an economy of sex, Gavey (2019) argues that a woman may give sex in exchange for 'love' or as a sign of commitment. This is akin to what Holland and colleagues (2004) describe as the 'male in the head' - that women privilege men's wants and desires over and above their own, they may even make them their own.

Though not applicable to all accounts, for several participants deconstructing these cultural messages and sexual scripts was fundamental to their support and interventions with young women. This can involve taking a step away from the specificities of victimisation in order to recontextualise experiences within wider society and beyond *individual* experience.

> I think it's also quite empowering for the young women. Especially young women who maybe don't have that many role models to then be working with what they see as a strong woman who cares about women, who wants to support women. I think that's a really positive thing. That actually they're seeing that you can be strong and have opinions and kind of understand the gender boxes and how society kind of places women. And I think also exploring those things with the young women as part of their support to move forward and understand the situation. It's a massively productive, preventative and empowering thing for them [because] it kind of gives more hope to these young women… In some of the sessions we don't focus on any of the experience that they have faced. Actually, we will just focus on positive things or positive affirmations or gender roles. We can look at so many more things and not have to focus

> on what's actually been the experience in order for them to start feeling like they are worth something and they do have a right to have a voice (Participant 10).

This participant spoke passionately throughout the interview about the significance of the feminism that underscores her practice. There was no talk of 'educating' young women about 'healthy relationships' or how they can 'keep safe'; messages which have permeated campaigns targeted at women around rape and sexual assault for decades and underpins the sex and relationships education described by many other participants.

Irrespective of the type of organisation in which the participants practiced, all spoke of the importance of building and maintaining trusting relationships with young people, recognising their strengths and the importance of responses which focused on centring their needs. The analysis also revealed that when a participant had a more explicitly feminist or gendered way of working with young people, their practice involved asking different questions and they formulated different approaches and understandings from those that might be more commonly associated with mainstream practice. The value of a practice response informed by a gendered analysis is evident when the wider knowledge base about sexual violence, rape and consent is considered.

'Consent' in heteronormative relationships

Drawing on Jordan (2012), Chapter 5 noted the ways in which victim-survivors experiences of rape are silenced. However, an extensive knowledge base illustrates that in the lived experiences of women and young women, the 'grey' area between rape and consensual sex in heteronormative relationships is vast (see, for example, Kelly, 1988; Hird & Jackson, 2001; Holland *et al*, 2002; Barter, 2009; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Brady *et al* 2018; Gavey, 2019). Notably, Kelly's (1988) concept of a continuum of sexual violence captures the ways in which coercion and pressure are present in women's experiences of unwanted sex: 'consent' and 'non-

consent' is not a distinct binary, a reality she argues is not easily captured within the rigid parameters of criminal law.

Young people's (mis)understanding of consent was an issue discussed by many of the participants. They also argued that education about sex, relationships and consent was inconsistent.

> Sex education is so lacking for young people. I think it's improving but every young person needs to hear this… You know, sex is not just physiological, you know, this is how to put a condom on, this how babies come, this is how you avoid STD's…. It's not just about did you say 'no' did you say 'yes'. It's the whole thing of did someone give you the respect and freedom to say yes or did you feel under pressure, you know. Consent is massive and young people tend to look at it just from the legal perspective and we try to put it out there about what is true consent, you [are] give[n] time to think, time to decide, there's not manipulation and I guess even looking in a relationship where there's, kind of someone's eager to take things to the next level where's your timeline? When would you ideally have sex and why would you change that if that's where you've set it? (Participant 1).

There has been growing attention given to young people's understanding of sexual consent in research and policy (see, for example, Hird & Jackson, 2001; Barter, 2009; Coy *et al,* 2013; Beres, 2014; Coy *et al,* 2016; Brady *et al,* 2018; DfE, 2019). As the participant above describes, negotiating sexual consent is complex and may involve verbal and non-verbal signals (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Brady *et al,* 2018). However, whilst overt pressure and manipulation may be present from within the context of a relationship, as is the case in the conceptualisation of 'grooming' by deceitful men who act like 'boyfriends', the social construction of femininity and masculinity can mean that young women's ability to refuse and resist sexual activity can

buckle under the omnipresence of heteronormativity.

> I very much recognise that the young females - whether they were showing the early signs of exploitation or are right at the end - really, really continue to struggle around their identities as a female and what's *wanted* and *needed* by society for them to be recognised were the *very* things that they were being exploited for (Participant 9).

'…what's wanted and needed by society for [young women] to be recognised were the very things they were being exploited for' is an insightful observation. Indeed, feminist researchers and activists have sought to make apparent the continuities between abusive and oppressive acts of male power and those that are considered 'normal' (Kelly, 1988; Towns & Scott, 2013; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gavey, 2019).

Drawing on young people's interviews, Chung (2005) points to the dominance of romantic love in heterosexual western discourses. Romantic scripts which position masculinity as reliant on sexual experience and prowess may mean that young women interpret young men's behaviour not as signs of coercion, power, control possession or property but as representing intimacy, love and normative male behaviour.

Indeed, it is socially and culturally normative that men and male sexuality is positioned as always in pursuit of sex and access to female sexuality (see also, Brady *et al,* 2018). In the male-sex drive discourse men and masculinity are positioned as embodying an innate 'need' for sex and in heteronormative relationships, women are expected to accommodate the male-sex drive (Hollway, 1984). Whilst female sexuality may be perceived as submissive to masculinity, historically it has also been constructed as in need of control (Gavey, 2019). This is evident in one of the participant's misgivings about risk assessments, a tool she shared during the interview.

> Interviewer: In terms of practice, is there anything you would like to see change in terms of our responses to young people and sexual exploitation?
>
> For a start we need to get rid of these risk assessments. I hate them, they're dreadful. This is my real bug bear… [Participant leaves room and returned with a copy of the risk assessment] … To me this is just a whole victim blaming exercise. So across [the county] we all use that. So, you can see the sexualised dress, the sexualised risk taking. So that to me it's like, that's *your* fault. *You* wore your skirt too short, *your* top's too low, la, la, la. I don't like it at all. There's nothing on there to say that somebody has actually been exploited… It's like it's the young person's fault! (Participant 5).

Indeed, risk assessment tools may leave practitioners with a sense that they are colluding with the very same discourses which blame and responsibilise young women. There is an additional tension here since specialist practitioners are in a position in which they attempt to counter and reframe the blame and responsibility young people may feel about *themselves*, ironically whilst using tools which reinforce that same sense of responsibilisation. Coy and Kelly (2019) have critiqued the way 'risk' in lieu of 'safety' permeates discourses about domestic violence in England and Wales. Similarly, a risk discourse dominates the CSE arena. For a number of participants, particularly for participant 5 above, this is an uncomfortable fit.

Also notable in the reflections above are the explicitly gendered content of the risk assessment tool the participant described. One might infer from this that young women's choice of dress and 'sexualised risk taking' provokes their victimisation. As already noted in Chapter 2, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (2012) report found that phrases such as 'asking for it' and 'sexually available' are frequently used to describe 'young people', an observation noted by another participant.

> [P]eople just see it as rebellious behaviour, putting themselves at risk… promiscuous, seeking out this, as if there's no manipulation behind it. Even if there's no direct person, it's looking at the way the whole social media works in kind of encouraging young women maybe to put out sexualised images, make themselves look in revealing clothing online… Whereas then it's just put down to the individual, she's doing it, why's she doing it? Well, there's no wonder people are exploiting her. I was thinking, well, why is she doing it, who's manipulated her and even if it's not one person, you know, what type of websites or social media apps has she been using where this kind of thing is being encouraged? … There's this kind of whole culture around it as well where it's almost not seen as cool to just be dating, respectful, taking your time. Yeah, a real kind of messed up kudos around the power and the playing of it all (Participant 1).

Young women may be manipulated by others to send sexualised images. Indeed, research shows that it is common for young women to be harassed by male-peers/boyfriends to send sexual images and that young men are judged positively through such displays of sexual conquest (Coy *et al*, 2016). In heteronormative peer groups, whilst young women are expected to find reward in that they are judged as sexually desirable/available, they may simultaneously be called 'skets', 'sluts' and 'hoes' (Coy *et al,* 2016: 7 also see Chung, 2005).

> I think for me the difference is more of what we see is that peer-on-peer, it's kind of involved in a group of peers and it's that drip down effect of the culture I've been talking about where it's not about people seeking out close relationships. It's about people using other people for sex and using it as a tool to manipulate or as a thing of power… It's definitely more common than the media portrays it and I think that can have a knock-on effect on schools as well where schools almost vilify a girl who is being sexually exploited cause they don't want to be seen as a school that has a problem with sexual exploitation (Participant 1).

Other research has also shown that the sending and sharing of sexual images[8] was becoming part of the culture of peer groups and in schools (see, for example, Ringrose *et al*, 2012; Coy *et al,* 2016). Again, this does not fit neatly into the 'grooming' discourse.

> What I feel is that things around like sexting and the sharing of sexualised images has become normalised in school, so teachers themselves are now normalising it. Not always, I think people, you know, would bring it to our attention and be worried about that but there's lots of kind of occasions where they're not being shocked by that anymore. Or they're just going 'oh don't worry about it' or they're not necessarily taking that seriously or thinking that's inappropriate or an issue…. [I]t's just become a bit normal in schools (Participant 9).

This suggests that sexually exploitative behaviour in peer groups is not taken as seriously as sexual exploitation perpetrated by adults (also see, Barter, 2009). 'Sexting' and sharing sexualised imagery was discussed by many of the participants. The following section explores the ways in which this is rooted in the increased 'sexualisation' of culture.

'Sexualised sexism'

Over the past decade or so there has been increasing concern about the 'early' sexualisation of children and young people in policy arenas (Papadopoulos, 2010; Bailey, 2012). This was also reflected in one of the participant's accounts.

> Some of its to do with the over sexualisation of children as well now. You know, when you turn on the TV they've got all these pageants and they're made up with false eye

[8] Given that CSE is defined in terms of an exchange, sharing sexualised imagery or 'sexting' may not always be defined as 'CSE'. However, the sharing of sexualised images in peer groups was brought into discussions by a significant number of the participants, particularly in relation to sex and relationships education, consent and 'healthy relationships'.

> lashes on and they're 6 years old, walking around in bras and thongs, it's terrifying! (Participant 20).

However, an analysis of the sexualisation of mainstream culture through a lens of just age is like looking through a stained-glass window to observe the view outside – important elements of the picture are distorted, concealed and obscured.

> I feel like social media has stoked that so much… I mean I do think it's always on an increase, that kind of view of what women and girls are in the world for. And social media has heightened that so much. Also, maybe kind of reality shows, it's always a certain kind of women that's depicted on those shows… I can imagine the young women feel inundated with I should look like this; I should do this. It's just so much to think about and manage. And if we focus always on these things, actually all the things that makes those young women great are forgotten about because we're solely looking at what's she done with her hair? You know, all of that, what is she wearing? Is she wearing make up? What is she posting on the internet? (Participant 10).

This more nuanced account makes apparent the ways in which mainstream culture is a context in which women and young women's bodies are commodified to the extent that they become objects to be consumed (also see Gill, 2007). In a sexualised culture, women's value is perceived in terms of how their bodies (or body parts) *look* and what they do for others. In heteronormative discourses this means what female bodies, sexuality and sexualised femininity can do for men. As the participant above argues, this obscures all of the things that make young women 'great' – their personality, attributes and achievements – as women are assessed and evaluated based upon physicality and how 'accomplished' she is in terms achieving a specific kind of femininity.

> I think lots of women still really genuinely believe that they can do what they choose and they have just as much power as men and influence. But I don't see that. I don't see that in my work as a professional in any capacity… And it's particularly confusing for younger people because we keep telling them that things are better. You know, its ok. You can get paid; you can go to work and you can do well. You can achieve, you can have leadership positions and that's what we're telling our young people, that things are better. But actually, my direct experience is that actually, in some aspects of that, things are getting worse. So, where I think that social attitudes in terms of ok, so a woman may have been expected much more to raise children and stay at home and all those sorts of things, but I don't think that they were so explicitly sexualised [and] objectified quite in the way they we do now. And I think that's very difficult for young people to make sense of (Participant 9).

Coy (2014) has usefully conceptualised what the participants are referring to here as 'sexualised sexism'. Through this lens, Coy (2014) brings into focus the gendered and racial dynamics and their part in creating a conducive context for violence against women and girls. As the participant described above, the ways in which sexualised sexism shapes young women's (and to a lesser extent, boys and young men's) lives are critical to discussions and debates about sexual exploitation.

Gill (2007) argues that postfeminist media culture is comprised of a messy combination of feminist and anti-feminist themes. For instance, a postfeminist position might argue that women are no longer *expected* to give up employment to stay at home and raise children while at the same time arguing that if women *choose* to do this, it is an 'empowering', individual and even 'feminist' choice. According to Gill (2007), in postfeminist media culture femininity is defined as 'bodily property'. Where nurturing, caring and motherhood was once considered the cornerstone of femininity, a 'sexy body' is increasingly presented as women's primary source

of identity and 'empowerment'. Facets of this 'postfeminist sensibility' (Gill, 2007) are evident in this participant's account.

> Young people I work with would refuse school for days on end because they couldn't get their fake eyelashes on properly. So really, really impacting their education and actually you know their focus was very much is that I'm unacceptable unless I look beautiful and stunning as I am told what is beautiful and stunning and not having any focus around their education or what makes them happy or what's fun… I think that's really where it becomes very problematic. That because other people around them, family, friends, schools whatever are not telling them that as a young female this is really, you should be so proud of yourself that you are, you know, you're great at sport or you can do this or that (Participant 9).

This is reflective of a cultural context in which young women are expected to find 'empowerment' in a sexualised body such that the body becomes an object of surveillance, both by others and by young women themselves.

> Women are not straightforwardly objectified but are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so (Gill, 2007: 151).

The significance of sexualised sexism in the accounts above further problematise the notion that individualised vulnerability needs to be mitigated in order that young women are safeguarded against CSE. They suggest that sexualised sexism, patriarchy and heteronormativity creates a conducive context (Kelly, 2007) for the sexual exploitation and abuse against young women. This may be further compounded by intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) systems of power because 'empowerment' through a sexualised body/self may feel, and in young women's realities be, more within reach than alternative forms of power. An emphasis

on ‘healthy relationships’ in prevention work has limited scope if we are to decode the heteronormative messages that punctuate young people’s lived experiences.

Concluding summary

The concepts of ‘grooming’ and ‘vulnerability’ were drawn upon heavily by the participants to explain the causes of sexual exploitation. There are parallels here between the media’s construction of the problem and the broad application of these terms in CSE practice. To various extents, both of these arenas mobilize these concepts to explain the sexual exploitation of young women.

Vulnerability is used as a way of invoking sympathy for young women in these forums. In this chapter, however, I argue that the pervasive use of the term individualises the structural inequalities which underpin contexts conducive to sexual exploitation. Moreover, the media’s coupling of whiteness and ‘vulnerability’ has reinforced the long-standing notion that to be white is to be more in need of protection (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2019). A minority of the participants explicitly challenged the media’s notion that white girls are, by virtue of their whiteness, more vulnerable to grooming and sexual exploitation.

The whitening of victim-survivors in media narratives is evidence of systemic racism and this has compounded the silence surrounding Black and minoritised young women’s experiences of sexual exploitation (see also, Patel & Ward, 2005; Gohir, 2013; Davis, 2019). Albeit that this was not a common theme across the interview data, the notion that some groups are ‘hard to reach’ was directly critiqued by some practitioners. However, the lack of professional curiosity in respect of the intersecting needs of Black and a minoritised young women suggests that service provision continues to be implicitly focused on white young women (Patel & Ward, 2005; Davis, 2019).

Where gaps in service provision were acknowledged, the participants' recognised that the media representations of race and ethnicity in terms of perpetrators and victim-survivors was a barrier to reaching out to groups who were underrepresented in their services. Conversely, there were a few examples where participants endorsed the cultural relativism perpetuated in the media. This speaks to the power of the racialised media template to shape practitioner perspectives on sexual exploitation, even when they acknowledge that media representations are not reflective of what they see in practice.

Alongside vulnerability, I critique the concept of 'grooming' and the pervasive use and application of these terms to young women and their experiences of sexual exploitation. On a surface level, most of the participants used these terms uncritically: several, however, expressed explicit caution in respect of their use in CSE practice. 'Vulnerability' and 'grooming' obscure the wider context of young people's lives and the intersecting axes of power that form contexts conducive to sexual exploitation.

'Grooming' was nonetheless considered useful to the extent that it puts a language around the techniques used by (often older) perpetrators to entrap young women. In turn, this concept has enabled professionals and young women to make sense of their experiences. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, not all forms of CSE involve elements of grooming. Albeit that 'grooming' is at the forefront of practice, and indeed the media, it does not account for the young people abused outside of this 'model'. Moreover, using a wider analytical lens made clear that 'grooming' and 'vulnerability' focus too little on the social context of abuse and too much on the individual victim-survivors or perpetrators. Drawing on the participant accounts, I argue that these individualised concepts obscure the social, structural and heteronormative contexts which enable perpetrators.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that gender inequalities, amongst others, are significant to sexual exploitation. Empirical evidence continues to demonstrate this pattern (see Chapter 2). It is significant that the media representations analysed in Chapter 4 chose to emphasise the ethnicity of perpetrators and victims rather than the significance of gender to CSE in relation to perpetration and victimisation. The analysis in this chapter further complicates discussions, I argue that heteronormative practices are part of the context in which young women are entrapped and that 'grooming' is enabled by these discourses.

By bringing a focus on heteronormativity, the chapter reveals a tension between prevention framed in terms of 'healthy relationships' and the emphasis a number of practitioners gave to interventions which aimed to 'educate' young women about consent, 'keeping safe' and 'grooming'. This is not to argue against education and interventions which enable young people to reflect on sex and relationships. However, the wider context in which young women's choices and decisions about (hetero)sexual relations are shaped by structural conditions of unequal power and inequality also need to be taken into account.

Further, a prerequisite to a 'healthy' relationship is having a healthy relationship with the self and the body. As was suggested by several participants, this is far more difficult for young women to achieve in a social context which overtly sexualises and objectifies women and girls in a myriad of ways such that young women may come to *see themselves* as 'objects'. Thus, I argue that it is the wider context of gender inequality, the unequal distribution of power in heteronormative relationships and the normalisation of sexualised sexism, that creates the space for 'grooming', 'vulnerability' and sexual exploitation. Given the silences in the participant data on race and ethnicity in regards to victim-survivors, further exploration of the ways heteronormative discourses are experienced by Black and minoritised young women and the significance of these to sexual exploitation is needed.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Introduction

This thesis has provided a feminist account of news-media representations about sexual exploitation against young women and girls and an analysis of the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of specialist practitioners. The study has used intersectionality as an analytical strategy (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2015) to examine news-media representations and practitioner narratives about sexual exploitation. Specifically, I have considered sex and gender, socioeconomic class and (hetero)sexuality in regards to female victim-survivors and race and ethnicity in relation to male perpetrators.

This final chapter provides a brief summary of each chapter, outlines its original contributions to the CSE field and draws out the main arguments and points of comparison in relation to the research questions. It will then discuss some of the possible implications of the work for media representations of the problem, for policy and for practice.

Thesis summary

The introductory chapter outlined the context and rationale for the study. When I began this research in 2014, the media landscape was dominated by news stories about 'grooming gangs' and sexual exploitation against young women. From a feminist perspective, the study set out to explore the gap between media representations of sexual exploitation and the practice-based evidence of specialist practitioners working with sexually exploited young women.

Chapter 2, a narrative literature review, provided context for the study. This traced policy developments and practice responses to CSE. This related particularly to terminology and definition. Through processes of renaming, the chapter illustrated how sexual exploitation came to be known as 'CSE' in policy and practice discourse and, relatedly, how young people abused through prostitution were (eventually) acknowledged as victims of 'child sexual

exploitation'. These areas were drawn upon and developed in the thesis, particularly in terms of the way language, words and definitions are applied in practice settings. The chapter also gave a brief historical overview of media representations about child sexual abuse before outlining some of the significant moments in news-media reporting about sexual exploitation. This is not intended to be exhaustive but illustrates the ways the media's use of language had shifted from 'child prostitution' and had reframed sexual exploitation as 'grooming gangs'.

Chapter 3 provided a reflective and detailed account of the research design and the methodological approach. The comparative frame analysis of news-media articles over two time periods and the thematic approach to the analysis of the interview data was described. Kitzinger's (2000) concept of a media template was introduced. This chapter includes a reflexive account of how my positionality as a feminist practitioner and my social location influenced the research design, interpretation and analysis. I do not make any claims to objectivity in the interpretation of the materials analysed. This thesis is *my* interpretation of the media stories and *my* account of what the participants told me. It is therefore a representation of *a* reality and not *the* reality (Holliday, 2007).

Chapter 4 was a comparative frame analysis of news-media representations about CSE over two time periods (1997-99 and 2014-15) (see also, Elliott, 2019). This chapter illustrated how terminology informed the ways in which media narratives understood CSE and demonstrated some significant shifts in the way these perspectives defined the nature of sexual exploitation of young women by men. Young women in period one of the articles were framed in contradictory ways. Through a lens of professional failure, the 'innocence' and 'fragility' of young women was emphasised whilst the abuse and violence they were subjected to were simultaneously represented in overtly sexualised ways. Sex, gender, class and socioeconomic background were significant to how young women were represented in the media stories. Perceptions of young women as 'streetwise' suggested there was a lack of empathy and

understanding afforded to girls from working-class backgrounds, despite that elsewhere the coverage had demonstrated significant awareness that prostitution may be a survival strategy for young women who had run away from home or care and/or were facing poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage.

In the analysis of the coverage in period two, I extended Kitzinger's (2000) concept of a media template to capture the rigidity of the racialised media narratives drawn upon to conceptualise sexual exploitation against young women. Here, I argued that the racialised media template has become the dominant lens through which 'CSE' is constructed. Along with the emphasis on the 'grooming' of 'vulnerable' white girls, I argued that the racialised media template represents a reworking of the 'stranger danger' discourse popularised in the 1990s press about 'paedophiles'.

Overall, the coverage in period two was more sympathetic to victim-survivors compared to period one. However, I argued that the salience of 'vulnerability' in the media narratives obscured the social location of the young women who were the objects of these media stories. In a similar way to how the racialised media template obscures the significance of sex and gender in patterns of perpetration and victimisation, I argued that the emphasis on young women's vulnerability in news-media accounts individualises structural inequalities related to class and socioeconomic disadvantage and their significance to sexual exploitation.

In Chapter 5 I drew upon the interview narratives to analyse how the participants understood and defined 'child sexual exploitation' and how the term is applied in practice settings. These accounts were more nuanced than the news-media perspectives on the issue, albeit that there was a strong emphasis on 'grooming' in both the media framing of sexual exploitation and in many of the participant narratives (discussed later).

Overwhelmingly, the participants considered an 'exchange' (emotional, material, both) as a defining feature of CSE. Whilst CSE was understood to involve some of the same dynamics as child sexual abuse, the concept of an exchange was linked to young women's sense of agency and the failure of services to recognise young women as 'real' child abuse victims. Potentially, this reinforces a hierarchy of victimisation and/or leads to interventions which 'safeguard the body' but do not address the wider social context, particularly if young women were perceived as 'choosing'. Though young women's exchange activities were revealed as more complex than the grooming narrative adopted in news-media perspectives, the ambiguities surrounding the exchange concept were shown to be an inadequate way of delineating sexual exploitation from child sexual abuse (see also, Beckett & Walker, 2017). The pragmatic uses of the term 'CSE' were also discussed: 'CSE' generates resources for services and responses to young people defined as subject to violence and abuses outside of a familial context.

Chapter 6 went onto discuss the avoidant uses of 'CSE'. Drawing on the participants' accounts, I argued that the blanket use of the acronym 'CSE' dilutes and sanitises rape against young women. This imprecision means that it is harder to name the acts of sexual violence and abuse perpetrated disproportionately by men and boys against women and girls. As the examples drawn from the practitioner interviews illustrated, this can mean that the overt and more subtle use of violence are obscured from view. The implications of this on an individual level may mean that young women are referred into services which may not meet the needs of rape victim-survivors. Partly, this is because the language we use in the 'CSE' field shape our services and our interventions. As the participant accounts illustrated, interventions (particularly those whose practice was predominantly based in children's charities) often centre around educating young women about 'grooming', understanding 'risk' and keeping *themselves* 'safe', albeit that the analysis also demonstrated some resistance to such

individualised interventions. More broadly, I argue that young women's experiences of rape, and the reality that a significant number of women and girls experience rape both in and outside of their intimate relationships, are disappeared.

I also extended the avoidant use of 'CSE' to explore the disconnect between sexual exploitation and abuse through prostitution. The chapter explored the nuances in the practitioner data on this issue. One feminist practitioner expressed ardent resistance to the loss of the term and there were numerous accounts across the interview data which acknowledged implicitly and explicitly the continued relevance of the system of prostitution to sexual exploitation.

It was notable that where the issue of language was discussed in interviews, several other participants strongly asserted that the move away from prostitution was an absolute necessity since 'CSE' more clearly positioned young women as victims of abuse. These assertions, however, are arguably misplaced since the blame and responsibilisation of victim-survivors was discussed by all the participants who took part in this study. As outlined in the thesis, blame and culpability are created by perpetrators and can be what silence victim-survivors of rape and sexual violence (see also, Jordan, 2012). Significantly, blame and responsibilisation are dynamics of patriarchy. They are pervasive in our institutions, and in our interventions and responses to sexual exploitation and work effectively to uphold the structural systems of power and privilege conducive to it. Thus, I argue that these avoidant uses of 'CSE' serve to depoliticise a social, cultural, and political issue that are systemic to global patriarchal structures. This may lead to responses which pathologize the psychology of individuals in lieu of social and feminist perspectives. This was explored further in Chapter 7.

Drawing on the practitioners' accounts, the final empirical chapter provided a feminist critique of 'grooming' and 'vulnerability', the interconnectedness of these concepts and their

broad application to sexual exploitation in practice. In the analysis of the interviews, I argued that both terms have pragmatic uses. 'Grooming' was useful in that it puts a language around certain types of behaviour that in turn can support professionals and young people to make sense of the psychological 'pull' of a perpetrator. Significantly, this term has helped support the problematisation of age gaps in 'relationships' in mainstream practice which might have once been viewed consensual.

Grooming was frequently discussed in conjunction with 'vulnerability'. All young people were perceived as innately vulnerable to grooming by virtue of age and development and numerous accounts suggested that individual experience and psychology (for example, low self-esteem, trauma, abuse) could elevate vulnerability to CSE. Several accounts, however, diverged from this deterministic model.

Drawing on the practitioner narratives and building on a rich body of feminist research about rape and sexual violence, the analysis in this chapter complicates the discussion around 'grooming' and 'healthy relationships' in the field of sexual exploitation and abuse against young women. 'Healthy relationships' education may be victim-blaming and reinforce young women's sense of culpability. Moreover, interventions which seek to educate about 'grooming', in order that young women will be better able to prevent it, abstract the processes this concept is supposed to capture from wider social norms, gendered power relations and heteronormative practices. In summary, I argue that heteronormativity may constrain young women's space to resist sexual encounters which privilege men and normative male desire.

Drawing on Coy (2014), I argued that the pressures to conform to socially constructed femininity, masculinity and heteronormativity are amplified in a culture of 'sexualised sexism' whereby young women may come to view *themselves* as objects for the male gaze. The practice-based evidence suggested that this objectified sense-of-self was often reinforced by

peers, friends and family. Finally, I argued that 'grooming', 'vulnerability' and an overt emphasis on 'healthy relationships' in CSE practice have a tendency to individualise the gendered heteronormative structures which shape normative heterosexual practices and relationships.

Reflections on the research questions

This section responds in turn to each of the research questions and draws together the comparative learning from the media analysis and the practitioner interviews.

How have news-media perspectives understood and defined the nature of sexual exploitation of young women by men?

As summarized above, Chapter 4 provided a comparative analysis of new-media representations of sexual exploitation across two time periods. Reflective of the narrower conceptualization at the time, news stories in period one were framed through a lens of child prostitution. In the first category of articles analyzed in this period, those which documented charity campaigns and policy developments, abuse through prostitution was more clearly framed as a form of child sexual abuse. The Barnardos *Whose Daughter Next Campaign?* (1998), which first documented a gendered pattern of perpetration known as the 'boyfriend' model, and contexts in which young people exchanged sex for material resources were discussed in the media accounts. In the latter, prostitution was framed as a 'survival strategy' flowing from socioeconomic inequalities and material need. In most articles in this subset, however, prostitution as a predominately gendered survival strategy, was not explicit.

As noted above, in the coverage which focused on specific cases involving young women, there were numerous examples where the violence and abuse they experienced were ambiguous. This rested on a binary classification of 'victim' versus 'agent' and were shaped by perceptions related to the class and socioeconomic position of the young women concerned. Stereotypes related to childhood, 'innocence' and 'fragility' were drawn upon to construct

young women as victims but these were entangled with lurid detail and overt sexualization of the victimization described in some articles. This was particularly so in the stories published in the *Daily Mail*. Whilst in many cases journalists were highly critical of services, particularly of social workers (which is identified as an enduring discourse in media representations of child sexual abuse more broadly), often the same accounts positioned young women as responsible for the violence and abuse they were subjected to. Thus, the entanglement of the discursive frames of victimhood and agency constrain the space for more nuanced media accounts which construct young women as victimized yet capable of exercising some degree of agency.

The analysis of articles in period two introduced the concept of a racialised media template. This extended Kitzinger's (2000) concept of media templates, used to refer to the way in which the media emphasise one perspective of a story or event with such clarity that this becomes instrumental in shaping the narratives surrounding a social problem. The racialised media template captures the racism of the narratives around sexual exploitation of young women in which male perpetrators are constructed as racially other and their violence and abuse as driven by a deeply internalized and culturally derived hatred of women that are supposedly distinct from the patriarchal dynamics and masculinities in the majority culture.

What are the similarities and differences between news-media representations of sexual exploitation of young women by men and the perspectives of specialist practitioners?

All of the participants reflected upon the considerable progress they had seen in practice, particularly since the media's most recent uptake of sexual exploitation. As one participant stated, the Rochdale cases were a 'catalyst' for a range of developments within the CSE arena, including a Government response strategy and action plans to prevent and tackle sexual exploitation. 'CSE' is no longer on the peripheries of mainstream practice, as was the case for the decade following publication of the first 2000 guidance. Were it not for the media's influence, reach and impact, sexual exploitation may not have been considered as in need of

repeated Government response. Perhaps this is evidenced in that CSE did not feature in the Conservative Government 2010 manifesto, but became a top priority for Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition (see HM Government, 2010). Nonetheless, the perspectives of the specialist practitioners who took part in this study were far more nuanced than the news-media's representations of the issue.

Practitioner perspectives regarding the nature of sexual exploitation encompassed a wide range of forms and contexts. Sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking perpetrated by groups of men featured in numerous accounts. Also evident, was that these forms of 'organised' sexual exploitation were not characteristic of the majority of cases the participants worked with on an everyday basis, albeit that they clearly dominate the mediascape and are at the forefront of public attention (see, for example, the recent Home Office (2020) report about 'group-based' CSE).

There was an emphasis on 'grooming' in the majority of the accounts, particularly in cases where there was an older perpetrator, although there was disagreement amongst the participants as to whether all such cases should be categorized as sexual exploitation rather than child sexual abuse. It was also apparent that grooming, a predominant feature of the media representations and in many of the interviews, did not feature in all forms of sexual exploitation discussed by the participants. This included abuse through prostitution and an appearance of 'choosing' to sell/exchange sex to meet material needs, both a feature of news-media discussions in period one, and 'peer exploitation'. In the latter, this included sharing sexualized imagery where the perpetrator gain may be 'kudos' within groups which are structured around heteronormative ideals and sexual exploitation within what may resemble a loving heterosexual relationship between young people of a similar age, in many respects mirroring domestic violence.

As shown in Chapter 4, there was an explicit focus on Asian men in the media representations of 'grooming' and sexual exploitation of white young women. Whilst all the participants (at least initially) challenged the media's racialization of the issue in terms of perpetrators, overall little attention was given to the sexual exploitation and needs of Black and minoritised young women. This suggests that there continues to be an implicit focus on white young women in practice, albeit that research indicates that a significant number of Black and minoritised young women experience sexual exploitation (Beckett *et al,* 2013; Berelowitz *et al,* 2013; Gohir, 2013; Fox, 2016; Bernard, 2019; Davis, 2019).

However, a minority of the participants challenged the perception that Black and minoritized young women were 'hard to reach'. The reliance on statutory agencies to identify and refer in was acknowledged by some as a gap in service. A minority of participants also argued that the media's explicit focus on white young women had further silenced the voices and experiences of minoritised groups. Converged with systematic racism and sexism, the racialised media template serves a context in which the narratives of minoritised young women are perceived as worth less than their white peers. Essentially, Black young women are rendered invisible and *in*vulnerable (in media and in practice), 'even though they're right in front of us'. This silence in media and in practice was reflected in the interviews. Whilst this is a finding in itself, it also reflects a gap in the thesis relating to the impacts of race and racism in relation to victim-survivors.

There was an emphasis on 'vulnerability' in the media representations and in the interviews. These tended towards essentialist and individualist narratives about the nature of childhood, adolescence and the impacts of trauma on young women's psychology and risk of being pulled into sexual exploitation through a grooming process. However, there were also nuances and direct critiques in the participant data regarding the almost universal application

of these concepts in CSE practice. These were not seen in the media representations. The way these concepts obscure social and structural influences are discussed below.

To what extent do practitioners understand sexual exploitation of young women by men as rooted in structural inequalities of gender, race, class and sexuality?

Drawing on the participant narratives and an analysis of news media representations, this thesis has examined intersecting systems of oppression and their relationship to sexual exploitation of young women. Specifically, these have considered gender, socioeconomic class and (hetero)sexuality in relation to the sexual exploitation of young women by men and race and ethnicity in relation to perpetrators.

The participants implicitly and explicitly positioned sexual exploitation as a gendered issue. This was most explicit in the views and perspectives of the participants who were practicing or had prior experience working in violence against women and girls organisations. Here, sexual exploitation of young women by men was understood as rooted in structural inequality and the oppression of women because of their sex. Male entitlement, male ownership over women and the routine sexual objectification of women and girls in mainstream culture served to create a conducive context (Kelly, 2003) for sexual exploitation and abuse of young women. As noted above, the most direct critiques of individualist analyses which focus on vulnerability came mostly, but not exclusively, from these participants.

Whilst 'vulnerability' may be a way of invoking sympathy and concern for sexually exploited young women, a key issue raised in the thesis is the way this ubiquitous terminology locates social problems within the bodies and psychology of individual young women. Also obscured here is a focus on normative male behaviour (which may or may not be explicitly violent, exploitative or abusive) and instead on a quest in search of what made an individual young woman 'vulnerable'. As a participant powerfully argued: 'What I feel is happening continuously is we are not talking about the actual issue, *which is how boys and men behave*'.

None of this is to argue that past experiences do not feed into young women's lives. As a significant number of participants pointed out abuse, trauma and life experiences can impact the individual in a range of ways. This is not to minimize these. However, they also exist in a social and cultural context punctuated by structural inequalities and patriarchal power over women and girls. Individualist analyses deny and minimize the significance of these structural factors, deflect responsibility onto individual young women and in turn, shift attention from perpetrators (and the individual choices they make) and the ways in which patriarchy facilitates and enables sexual exploitation.

Though the grooming construct was critiqued as a linear and simplistic way of capturing how some young women become entrapped in sexual exploitation, as one participant pointed out, the term brings into focus the behaviour of perpetrators: 'It's not about what the young person does'. Here too, perpetrators might have individual motivations in terms of gain and these will vary across perpetrators. However, this thesis has highlighted that it is not only 'perpetrators' who behave in ways that might be characterized as 'grooming'. Indeed, many of the dynamics involved in 'grooming' are analogous to 'healthy' relationships, albeit that they are punctuated by heteronormative constructions of men, women, masculinity and femininity. While the behaviors 'grooming' – or indeed, the 'boyfriend' model - are said to encompass are problematised in this context, they may be unquestioned or perceived 'normal' in others. This casts doubt on the strength of individualist approaches which aim to 'educate' young women about 'risks' and 'keeping safe' without challenge to normative constructions of gender roles and heterosexuality.

Indeed, the thesis has argued that heteronormative relationships are a key site in which gendered power relations play out and this is of particular significance to sexual exploitation perpetrated by men and boys, against young women. In the field of CSE, however, heterosexuality and heteronormative sexual practices are rarely addressed explicitly. This is

one of the key contributions made in this study, adding another layer of complexity to discussions surrounding the importance of sex and gender to sexual exploitation by emphasizing the significance of heteronormativity and the way this regulates and constrains young women's resistance to (and enjoyment of) heterosexual sex, whether or not this is defined by professionals as 'CSE'.

As noted above, few of the participants discussed race and ethnicity in relation to victim-survivors. Whilst the media attention had prompted a shift in terms of the level of priority in both policy and practice, especially by statutory services, this suggests that an implicit focus remains predominately on the sexual exploitation of white young women. However, institutionalised racism was raised by one participant as a significant factor impacting upon Black young women's routes to services – white young women through children's social care and Black young women through the criminal justice system - thus illustrating the ways Black women and girls are perceived as less 'innocent' and less 'vulnerable' than their white peers (see Crenshaw, 1991; Bernard, 2019; Davis, 2019).

Race and ethnicity were most predominant in relation to media representations of CSE, most notably, in respect of the racialisation of perpetrators. Almost all participants were critical of the media's framing of perpetrators. A minority of the interviewees nonetheless endorsed much of the media messaging around this issue, even if they had initially rejected the media construction of the problem.

These endorsements are indicative of the power of the racialised media template to inform belief systems, even if these do not speak to what these participants see in practice. Partly, this is because the racialised media template is built upon preexisting social and cultural discourses about crime, particularly 'gang' related crime, and sexual violence and we live in a society in which racialised stereotypes are normalised. It is also indicative of how social

problems such as CSE are constructed in a way which maintains the status quo; systemic racism is unchallenged, even justified, and sexual exploitation positioned not as a product of patriarchy, institutionalised sexism, racism, the dismissal of (often working-class) young women and the silencing of Black and minoritised voices but as a problem stemming from the cultural and racialised otherness of individuals. An example of this is the way far-right extremists and right-wing media have co-opted women's rights and utilised the 'Muslim grooming gang' narrative to stoke support for racist and/or anti-immigration ideologies (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020). These powerful discourses mask the patriarchal dynamics which underscore these organisations and institutions.

The significance of class and socioeconomic status to sexual exploitation was also evident in a number of the interviews, albeit that many others focused most explicitly on the relationship between an abusive male, young woman and their emotional wants or needs. A number of the participants were nonetheless alert to the socioeconomic dynamics that underscore some young women's experiences of exchanging/selling sex. As argued in this thesis, both the racialised media template and the emphasis on 'grooming' in CSE practice obscure the class inequalities conducive to young women's experiences of exploitation through prostitution and the sex industry. This is an issue that requires further attention in research and practice.

What issues do practitioners perceive to be the most important in tackling sexual exploitation of young women by men?

As noted, all of the participants commented on the significant developments they had seen in practice, particularly following recent media coverage. Nonetheless, from the practitioners' perspectives, the media were not presenting to audiences the range of ways sexual exploitation can occur. They also perceived that there was a reluctance to consider alternatives to the dominant narrative, conceptualized here as a racialised media template, partly because this is

built upon racist discourses about the threat of (Islamic) terrorism, anti-immigration and the othering of perpetrators. Within this wider context, the racialised media template 'makes sense' and may more readily be construed as 'truth'. The participants urged that this tunnel vision within much of the press needed to be challenged if we are to tell stories about sexual exploitation with a true sense of care and concern for victim-survivors, public awareness and prevention.

Most of the participants robustly and consistently challenged the racialisation of 'grooming' and CSE during the interviews. As noted above, for some this involved highlighting the various 'models' of sexual exploitation and concern that CSE perpetrated by Asian and/or Muslim men were the only or main stories that were gaining traction. Other participants, particularly those who worked for women's organisations, argued most explicitly that this racialisation obscured gender and structural inequalities. There was an overt focus in these accounts that the gendered disproportionality in terms of perpetration and victimization needed to be understood. An analysis of the role society plays in perpetuating structural inequalities, sexual exploitation and sexual violence more broadly, was vital. It is important to note that it was not only VAWG practitioners who raised these issues, particularly around prostitution, male demand and male sexual entitlement (see Chapter 6).

Common to all of the participant accounts was the ongoing need to challenge the victim-blame and responsibilisation of young women when they have experienced sexual exploitation. Victim-blame and responsibilisation could be reinforced in a number of ways. First, the concept of an 'exchange' was argued to reinforce a sense of responsibility because young women had gained something and/or were perceived by others as *choosing*, as opposed to making *decisions* in circumstances which reduce space for action (Kelly, 2003; Melrose & Barrett, 2006). From the participant perspectives, these were common attitudes amongst other professionals and when this occurs it often strengthens young women's own sense of

culpability. Expressions of anger, self-assertion, resistance and survival may mean that when young women do not conform to normative constructs of child abuse victims as passive and innocent, they are responsibilised by services as unwilling to make the changes professionals expect of them.

These issues run deeper than the language we use to understand and make sense of sexual exploitation. At the same time, this thesis has argued that the words we use to describe this form of victimization are significant because language is the medium through which we communicate and make meaning of the social world and the problems in it. Reflecting on the emergence of 'CSE' in policy and the language of 'child prostitution', a number of participants were in agreement that the latter term was outdated and should never be applied to children or young people because it implies complicity and/or over-states the agency of a victim.

However, also evidenced across the participant accounts is that victim-blame and responsibilisation are pervasive in our interventions and social attitudes towards sexually exploited young women. They were clear that a large part of practice is spent educating others, countering the blame positioned with victim-survivors and that this needs to be challenged. Thus, the notion that the blame, responsibility and complicity that young women feel and encounter can be erased by language carries with it a degree of optimism since this has done little to change the underlying power dynamics which perpetuate them. Arguably, it serves to disguise these as being produced and reproduced through patriarchy. The blame and responsibilisation of young women are most obviously to the benefit of perpetrators and it is this, alongside racism, sexism and classism, which allowed CSE to continue unchecked in places like Rochdale, Oxford and Rotherham.

Contributions to ‘knowledge’ and the CSE field

The thesis has provided a detailed feminist analysis of news-media representations about sexual exploitation of young women by men and the practice-based evidence of specialist practitioners.

During the course of this research there have been a number of studies about media representations of CSE. The contribution made by the media analysis that formed one part of this study lies in its comparative approach, consideration of class (as well as gender) and in the concept of a racialised media template.

Though this concept was developed from an analysis of newspaper coverage published in England, the representations of CSE here mirror the ways sexual violence and abuse have been reported on elsewhere. For example, the sexual harassment and sexual assaults that occurred at a New Year’s Eve event in Cologne, and high-profile multiple perpetrator rapes in France and Australia (see Dagistanli & Grewal, 2012; Cockbain, 2013). Thus, it is also possible to shift this template and apply it to the media’s framing of events that have occurred internationally, offering a route to a transnational feminist analysis. The racialised media template gives a language to this globalizing discourse in which the strange(r)ness (Ahmed, 2000) of racialised ‘others’ are constructed as causal to sexual violence. In turn, this obscures the ways patriarchy, hegemonic masculinities, male entitlement and male ownership over women perpetuate all forms of sexual violence against women and girls.

The empirical chapters have also demonstrated the importance of words, names and definitions. These have demonstrated the ways ‘CSE’ is used in practice contexts, and the way the participants understand, apply and engage with concepts such as ‘exchange’ and ‘grooming’ in their practice. This builds on a body of academic research and critique about the

way ‘CSE’ is defined and indeed, what ‘exchange’ and ‘grooming’ obscure (see, for example, Melrose, 2010 & 2013; Beckett & Walker, 2017; Kelly & Karsna, 2017).

In respect of ‘exchange’, I argue that this concept, along with ‘CSE’, has created a space where we need not be explicit about what is happening in the lives of young women who are defined by services as requiring intervention. As a consequence, the structural and political dynamics of rape, sexual violence and prostitution which feminist activists and academics have long argued are rooted in patriarchy and oppression of women are hidden in plain sight. Individualist approaches which, for example, aim to seek out what creates ‘vulnerability’ to ‘grooming’ take precedence without consideration of the social context and normative relations between men and women in heterosexual relationships.

Thus, whilst the language surrounding sexual exploitation has become more complex, and both policy and practice have significantly evolved, in other respects it has become more difficult to speak clearly about the acts of violence young women are subjected to and the systems conducive to it. The loss of the term ‘prostitution’ in respect of young women is one such example. Albeit that all of the participants did not agree on the use of this term, a number also raised questions around male entitlement to buy sex that socially and culturally men feel they have a right to and the links between prostitution and sexual exploitation of young women. This signals to the significance of naming the context in which some young women exchange sex and foregrounds alternative ways of thinking and tackling this social problem. As raised by one of the participants, tackling male demand and male entitlement to buy sex to reduce the prevalence of sexual exploitation is one possibility though, as she stated, this is often met with resistance.

Individually, this may mean reassessing what needs and services young women require to support ‘exit’. For instance, secure housing and support to access benefits as a young person

as opposed to, for example, a 'healthy relationships' programme that might be mandated for a young woman who feels loved and in love with an abusive adult. Whilst the thesis has explored the problematic framing of 'healthy relationships' as the end point of CSE prevention, without challenge to societal expectations of men and women in intimate (heterosexual) relationships, it is arguably even more difficult to see the benefit here in respect of young women who engage in transient forms of 'exchange' (i.e., selling/swapping sex) to meet material wants and needs. Whilst this is not all of sexual exploitation, the accounts of several participants in this study show that it is part of it.

An overall contribution made in this study is the feminist analysis of media representations and sexual exploitation of young women by men. As much of the work around CSE is undertaken by children's charities, I suggest that there may be some resistance to applying a feminist analysis in this space. This is most certainly the case in terms of news-media representations about CSE where race and ethnicity have been placed of the highest importance in ending sexual exploitation. However, the practice-based evidence of the participants in this study suggest that the views and perspectives of practitioners are not as polarised as they might appear. One distinction may rest upon the language and concepts the more explicitly feminist practitioners have at their disposal to make sense of what they see in their practice and how they apply them in their work with young women.

Nonetheless, there were common themes across the interview data. These included discussions about naming the violence, naming the agent, countering gendered blame and a discomfort with concepts like 'vulnerability' and 'grooming' in some accounts. That said, practice which tends toward the pathologization of victim-survivors does little but mask the social and structural causes and impacts of sexual exploitation and sexual violence more broadly.

It is my contention that a feminist sociological analysis of the causes of sexual exploitation has much to bring to the table in order to tackle this problem. Many of the necessary tools to support victim-survivors to make sense of their experiences, to minimise harm and prevent sexual exploitation already exist within feminist approaches and service provision. If policy and practice responses were to engage seriously with this knowledge and expertise then perhaps pathways will be opened to address the intersecting structural inequalities that underpin sexual exploitation of young women and girls.

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Appendices 1a: Tables and figures for inclusion and exclusion of newspaper articles

Table 3:1: Number of articles excluded by reason (The Times 1997-99)

The Times 1997-99				
CSE not in England	Child abuse and no CSE	Film/TV/theatre	'Prostitution' or sexual exploitation mentioned or discussed other than in relation to involvement of young people	Total number of articles excluded
40	1	21	4	66

Table 3:2: Number of articles by wordcount (The Times 1997-99)

Word count						
1-99	100-199	200-299	300-399	400-499	500+	Total
4	1	6	5	3	19	38

Table 3:3: Number of articles excluded by reason (Daily Mail 1997-99)

Daily Mail 1997-99				
CSE not in England	Film/TV/Theatre	Sexual exploitation of adult women	Prostitution or sexual exploitation mentioned or discussed other than in relation to young people	Total number of articles excluded
15	4	4	13	36

Table 3:4: Number of articles by wordcount (Daily Mail 1997-99)

Daily Mail 1997-99						
1-99	100-199	200-299	300-399	400-499	500+	Total
0	0	1	2	1	22	26

Table 3:5: Number of articles excluded by reason (Mirror 1997-99)

The Mirror 1997-99			
CSE not in England	Film/TV/theatre	'Prostitution' or sexual exploitation mentioned or discussed other than in relation to involvement of young people	Total
34	5	2	41

Table 3:6: Number of articles by wordcount (Mirror 1997-99)

The Mirror 1997-99						
1-99	100-199	200-299	300-399	400-499	500+	Total
2	2	4	1	3	9	21

Table 3:7: Number of articles excluded by reason (The Times 2014-15)

The Times 2014-15											
Published in Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland	Published in Scotland	Magazine feature about CSE or CSA	Personal grooming	Animal grooming	CSE or CSA not in England	Grooming a person other than in the context of exploitation e.g. for sport	Grooming related to radicalisation or terrorism and domestic sexual exploitation not discussed	Child sexual abuse and no exploitation	Film/TV/theatre/book reviews	Other	Total number of articles excluded
37	88	8	259	80	21	53	34	57	22	6	665

Table 3:8: Number of articles by wordcount (The Times 2014-15)

The Times 2014-15						
1-99	100-199	200-299	300-399	400-499	500+	Total
16	10	24	22	25	141	238

Table 3:9: Number of articles excluded by reason (Daily Mail 2014-15)

Daily Mail 2014-15							
Personal grooming	Animal grooming	CSE or CSA not in England	Grooming a person other than in the context of CSE e.g. sport	Grooming related to radicalisation or terrorism and domestic sexual exploitation not discussed	Child sexual abuse and no exploitation	Film/TV/book reviews	Total number of articles excluded
83	42	6	18	17	84	6	256

3:10: Number of articles by wordcount (Daily Mail 2014-15)

Daily Mail 2014-15						
1-99	100-199	200-299	300-399	400-499	500+	Total
0	8	16	8	10	107	149

3:11: Number of articles excluded by reason (Mirror 1997-99)

Mirror 2014-15									
Published in Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland	Published in Scotland	Personal grooming	Animal grooming	CSE or CSA not in England	Grooming a person other than in the context of CSE e.g. sport	Grooming related to radicalisation or terrorism and domestic sexual exploitation not discussed	Child sexual abuse and no exploitation	Film/TV/book reviews	Total number of articles excluded
173	4	92	32	14	12	3	12	3	345

3:12: Number of articles by wordcount (Mirror 1997-99)

Word count The Mirror 2014-15						
1-99	100-199	200-299	300-399	400-499	500+	Total
1	17	2	2	3	7	32

Table 3:13: Final total of articles included in the final dataset by year and publication

Final dataset			
Outlet	1997-99	2014-15	Total
The Times	27	188	215
Daily Mail	25	125	150
The Mirror	13	12	25
Total	65	325	**390**

Figure 3:1: Breakdown of articles included/excluded for period one (1997-99)

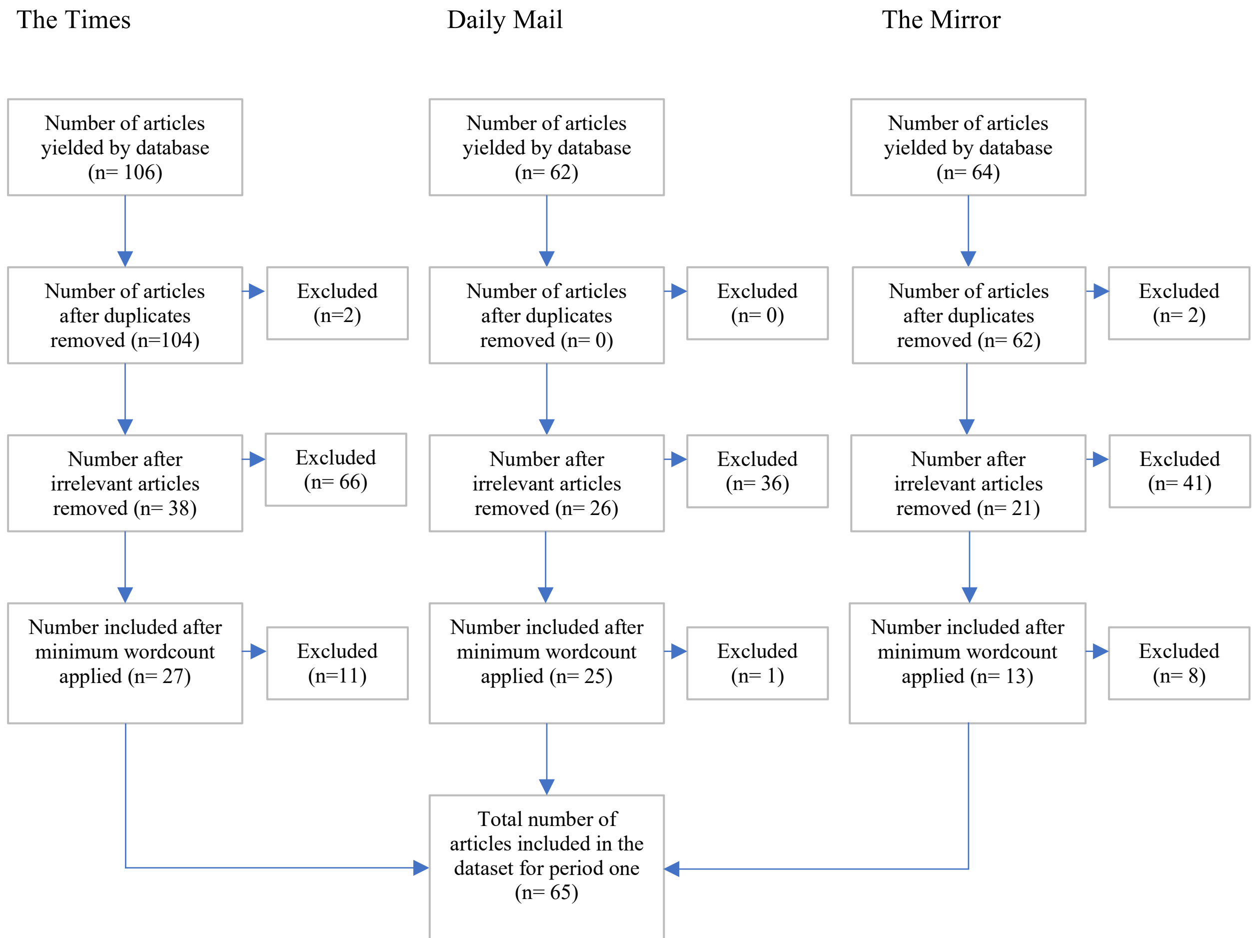
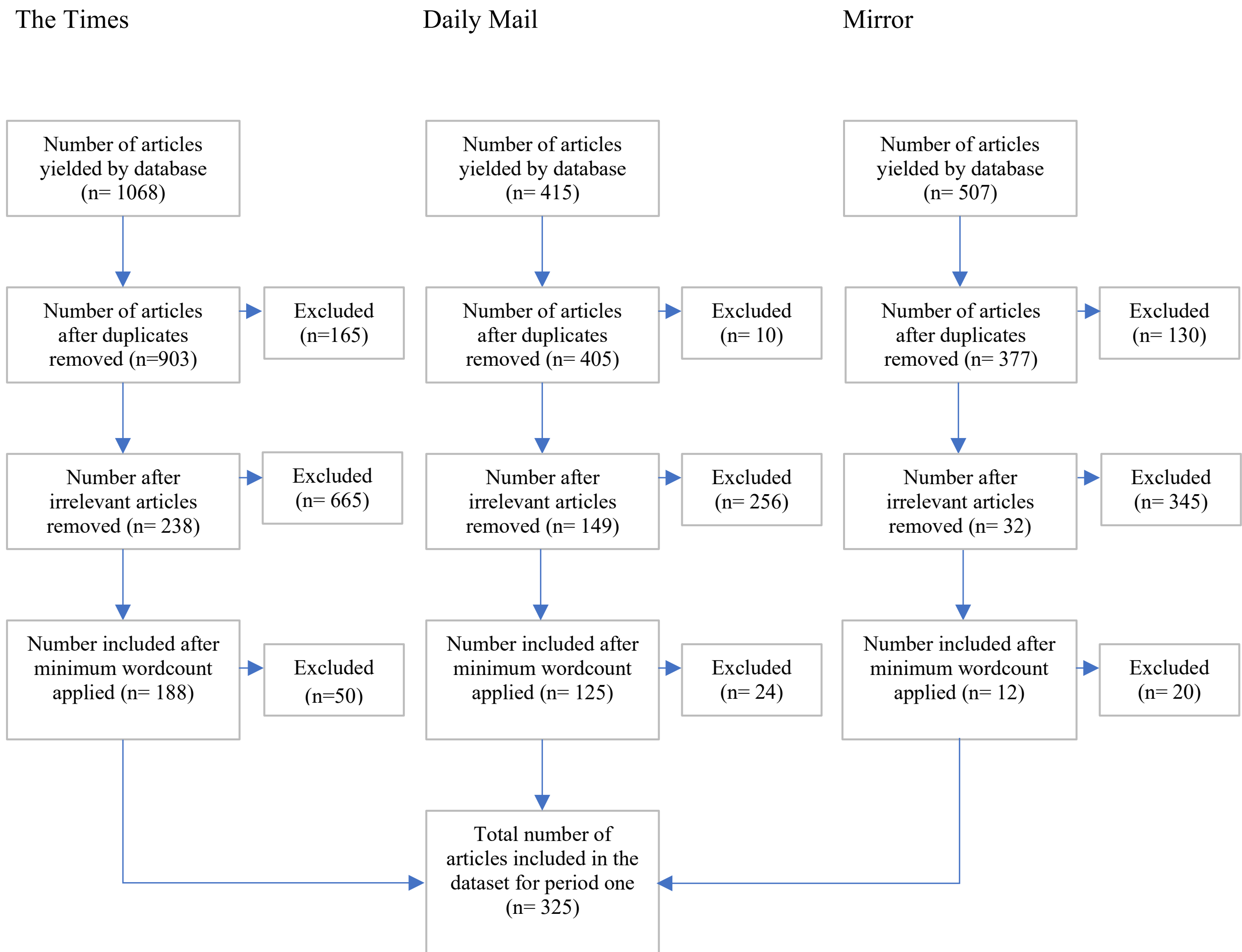


Figure 3:2: Breakdown of articles included/excluded for period two (2014-15)



Appendix 1b Proforma

Newspaper: The Times

Headline:

Journalist:

Word count:

Date:

What is main focus/purpose of the article?

- ☐ Isolated case/event
- ☐ Wider context of exploitation and abuse

Comments on style/tone of article:

Is the article descriptive or analytical?

- ☐ Descriptive
- ☐ Analytical

What terminology is used to describe CSE?

Victims

What terminology is used to describe victims/survivors?

What language is used to describe victim/survivors?

Perpetrators

Are the abusers/exploiters visible in the story?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What terminology is used to describe perpetrator(s)?

What language is used to describe perpetrators?

Gender & race

Is gender mentioned in the article?

- Yes
- No

Is gender analysed in the article?

- Yes
- No

Is culture mentioned in the article?

- Yes
- No

Is race mentioned in the article?

- Yes
- No

Is the race or culture of the perpetrator/victim mentioned in the article?

- Yes
- No

Is race or culture noted as a cause of CSE?

- Yes
- No

Appendix 2a Information sheet

Researcher: Katie Elliott (PhD student)

Contact details: kae0176@my.londonmet.ac.uk

Researcher supervisors: Dr Maddy Coy (M.Coy@londonmet.ac.uk) and Professor Liz Kelly (l.kelly@londonmet.ac.uk)

University: Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University

Introduction

This study is being conducted as part of a PhD titled: 'Sexual exploitation of child and young people: Exploring the gaps between media representations and practice'. The research is being funded by a fees scholarship awarded by the Vice Chancellor at London Metropolitan University. I am writing to invite you to participate in this research because you have expertise working with young people affected by sexual exploitation and because of the valuable insights your professional experience will bring to this project. This form is to provide you with information about the project so you can decide if you would like to take part.

Purpose of the study

The first phase of this research is an analysis of newspaper articles about CSE. You have been asked to participate in the second phase of the study. The second phase of this research involves taking part in an interview with the research student named above. This is expected to last approximately 45 – 60 minutes. The aim of the interview will be to explore what we can learn from your experiences as a professional in the field and to discuss your views about sexual exploitation. You will not be asked to discuss specific cases.

Should you choose to take part in this research an interview will be scheduled at a time suitable for you. Every effort will be made to travel to you for the interview but if more convenient for you then a telephone interview can also be arranged. You can withdraw from the research at any time.

Confidentiality

The findings from the interviews will be written up as part of the final thesis and potentially be published in academic journals. If you choose to take part in this study you are assured anonymity and no identifiable information about you (e.g. organisation worked for) will be included in any published material. If direct quotes are used in the final write up all quotes will be anonymised.

With your consent interviews will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept safe and secure. Once transcribed the audio recordings will be destroyed. Transcripts may be shared with the project supervisor(s). Should you have any questions which will assist you further do not hesitate to contact me, or if you prefer, the supervisor(s) of this research. If you would like to take part in the project please read and send back the consent form which accompanies this information sheet. I will then contact you to arrange a suitable time for the interview to take place.

Yours sincerely,

Katie Elliott

Research Student, CWASU, London Metropolitan University

Consent form

Please read through the statements below and mark all that apply to your participation in this study:

I have read through the information sheet and I understand the purpose of the study ☐

1. I consent to take part in the study ☐
2. My consent to participate in this research is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason ☐
3. I consent to the interview being audio recorded ☐
4. I understand that all my responses will be anonymised and give consent to use of anonymised quotes in the final thesis and publications ☐

Participant name:

Date:

Appendix 2b: Topic Guide

Section 1 – participant professional background

Can you tell me about your current job/role?

What is your background? (Probe: working around issues of sexual exploitation/abuse, how long, what roles etc.)

What do you understand as the defining features of sexual exploitation?

What changes have you seen in the ways sexual exploitation is understood since you began working with sexually exploited young people? (Adapt for role)

Section 2 – media and practice

What do you think of the ways sexual exploitation has been represented in the press recently?

What do you identify as the defining features about the way sexual exploitation has been discussed in the press?

Are there any specific examples you are thinking of?

a. Probe coverage of cases/convictions
b. Publications of CSEGG, Jay report, CEOP, Home Affairs report etc.

Are there any elements of the coverage that you think has been emphasised or played down in the media?

How far would you say that the media representations reflect your practice experience of working with young people involved in sexual exploitation?

a. What is different? (Explore perpetrators and victims)
b. Are there any similarities?

c. Are there issues that you think have been reported accurately? Are there any examples that you're thinking of?
d. Are there any elements you think are not reported accurately? Examples?
e. Have you spoken you or ever been interviewed by the media about sexual exploitation? If yes, explore the experience, accuracy of reporting etc.

What would you like to see change about how the media reports on sexual exploitation?

Why do you think sexual exploitation happens?

Section 3 – Policy and practice

What do you think needs to change in practice responses to sexual exploitation? Why do you think this?

Going back to the changes you mentioned in how sexual exploitation is understood, how do you think this is related to policy on sexual exploitation?

How do you think media has an impact on how sexual exploitation is understood?

What relationship, if any, do you think there is between media representations of sexual exploitation and practice?

a. Do you think there is any relationship between media representations and policy?
b. And what about any relationship between media representations and public understanding?

Appendix 3 – Examples of the Barnardos 'Stolen Childhood' (2002) campaign materials