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Making sense of narrative constructions of child sexual exploitation in England: a qualitative study of how they impact on lived experience, from the perspectives of adult female survivors, non-abusive parents and professionals.

A Thesis submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology and Social Anthropology in the University of Hull

by

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a shift in structural narratives of how ‘child sexual exploitation’ (CSE), a distinct and complex form of child sexual abuse, has been perceived and responded to in discourse and policy. What is currently identified as ‘child sexual exploitation’ used to be labelled ‘child prostitution’. The overarching purpose of this thesis is twofold: to examine the narratives, and narrative shifts, determining dominant understandings of CSE and their impact on policy and agency responses; and how these directly inform and shape the nature of lived experiences of CSE.

This thesis stems from a qualitative study which utilised narrative interviews to capture personal experiences of adult survivors’ of CSE and non-abusive parents whose child is sexually exploited outside the family. The two groups are unrelated. The aim is to develop an understanding of how both groups made sense of their respective experiences, how it impacted on them, and how they perceived and experienced responding agencies. A further group of professionals, conceptualised as conduits of the structural narratives and discourse of CSE, were also interviewed, providing rich contextualisation of the survivors’ and parents’ experiences.

Thematic analysis of the narratives shows that *how* CSE is constructed, particularly on a structural level, has a direct impact on the personal experiences of those involved, often through the enactment of professionals’ practices and attitudes. Both groups reported that their experience of CSE was often made worse by responding agencies and systems. Victim-blaming narratives of CSE and parent-minimising discourse were the most common, and shaped and exacerbated the participants’ experiences. However, victim-centred and parent-focussed narratives had a more positive impact.

CSE does not exist in a vacuum and ending the sexual exploitation of young people involves tackling other pervasive narratives that facilitate sexual violence. Some agencies and professionals need to develop their response to both victim/survivors and non-abusive parents in order to improve their experiences and meet their support needs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is an in-depth exploration into the ‘world of child sexual exploitation’ (CSE). It is interdisciplinary, drawing on sociological and psychological theory, and is located in a feminist social constructivist approach. Central to the thesis is the thematic analysis of three sets of narrative interview data. The two principle datasets comprise the personal narratives of adult survivors of CSE, and non-abusive parents whose child has been sexually exploited by perpetrators outside the family. The participants in these groups are not related to each other and I explore their experiences in terms of their journeys into, within and, in most cases, out of the world of CSE. Inherent within this analogy are the concepts of border crossings and turning points, which the participants highlight throughout their narrative accounts. Although the survivors and parents are the central focus of the study, a third dataset is drawn from interviews with professionals from the following standpoints: the police; Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); health; education; and CSE specialist services. This data is important and is used here to provide greater depth to the context of the experiences of the survivors and parents.

The overarching aims of this research are threefold. Firstly, to locate, elevate and re-locate the voices and experiences of victims/survivors and non-abusive parents who have direct experience of sexual exploitation, into the narratives and discourse surrounding CSE. Secondly, to contribute to the development and improvement of current understandings of, and responses to, CSE and provide useful insights to inform policy and practice. To this end, I have begun to unpick some of the issues and debates which create barriers to more consistent understandings of CSE, for example understandings of agency, exchange and consent. Thirdly, I explore the impact of structural narrative constructions of CSE which are transmitted into policy and practice, and how they shape, inform and even determine the nature of the lived experience for those affected.

Thus, there are three main research questions that are examined in this thesis:

1. How have dominant narratives of CSE been constructed over the last thirty-plus years, and in what ways have understandings changed and evolved?
2. How have those narratives impacted on personal experiences, and the way in which survivors and non-abusive parents make sense of those experiences?
3. What can be learnt from personal experiences of sexual exploitation, and how can they contribute an improved understanding of CSE which translates into policy and practice?

Whilst there is a growing body of literature about sexual exploitation that focuses on victims' and survivors' experiences, there is a gap in research pertaining to non-abusive parents' experiences, particularly in narrative form, and which centralises their experiences and views. The parents' narratives provide a rare and valuable insight into what it is to parent a child who is being sexually exploited and become involved in a statutory safeguarding system. Some of the parents' children were being sexually exploited at the time of the interview and so their narratives capture the essence of that experience and reveal how they are making sense of it as they live it. As a result, this study contributes to developing our knowledge and understanding of the personal impact of CSE, particularly regarding their experiences of responding agencies.

Each group of participants' experiences, all of which took place in England, span a period of around thirty years between the 1980s and 2016, and give insights into the impact that changes in narrative constructions of CSE have had on lived experience over time. The survivors, and some of the parents, were able to give retrospective accounts of their experiences, which provided an ethical way to capture and gain an insight into how individuals experienced, made sense of and responded to it at the time, as well as the long-term impacts it can have. Thus, the data gives a deep understanding of the subjective experiences of CSE-related processes, such as being groomed, as well as the emotions enmeshed in being involved in the world of CSE. The professionals' narratives serve to enrich the context of the survivors' and parents' experiences as well as provide useful insight into the frontline experience of working in the field of CSE.

I have utilised the lens of narrative theory and gender analysis to explore personal experiences of CSE, which is uncommon. This has allowed for an examination of the interconnected relationships between gendered dominant narrative constructs and lived experience, as well as illustrating the importance of narratives and the potential of narrative shifts in creating social change. The theoretical premise that underpins this thesis is that our understandings of the social world are cultural products. In place of bricks and mortar, the usual materials of construction, humans first and foremost use language. We tell stories and in doing so we create realities, 'facts' and 'truths' (Barthes, 1977; Bruner, 2004; Czarniawska, 2004; Foucault, 1977). This argument is developed in Chapter 4. Throughout this thesis I refer to these stories as narratives, which I envisage as existing and operating on structural and individual levels.

Furthermore, gender and power are omnipresent features of CSE, hence a gender analysis is incorporated throughout the thesis. Although it is recognised that boys and young men are also victims of CSE and women can also be perpetrators, CSE is *predominantly* about male exploitation and sits within a wider context of violence and abuse against girls and young women (CEOP, 2011; Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012). The construction of dominant narratives is gendered. They are steeped in patriarchy (Jay, 2014; Porter & Alison, 2006), and thus I view CSE as an archetypal patriarchal context, whereby girls and young women are sexually exploited and abused for male pleasure, power affirmation and economic gain.

The survivors' and parents' narratives, detailing their range of experiences of CSE, are central to this study, and it is hoped that meaningful insights can be offered to inform policy, professional and practical responses. It is also my intention to make a small but well-informed contribution to the growing body of research and literature surrounding CSE, specifically relating to how key issues such as definitions, grooming and consent are being conceptualised.

Contextual overview to child sexual exploitation

Whilst it is beyond doubt that CSE is currently a significant socio-political problem, it is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, CSE first hit the headlines 133 years ago in 1885, albeit under a different name, “the violation of virgins” (Stead[1], 1885:9) and it has existed in the liminal spaces of society for decades (Brown & Barrett, 2002). However, since the 2000s there has been an increasingly urgent recognition of what is currently termed ‘child sexual exploitation’ as a social problem in need of a statutory and public policy response (CEOP, 2011; DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2011, 2017; Harper & Scott, 2005; OCC, 2012; RBSCB, 2012). This was largely as a result of media reporting of high profile scandals and criminal trials all over the UK (Valley, 2012a, 2012b). This resulted in some damning reports (Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012; RBSCB, 2012) which have exposed large scale failings by authorities and responding agencies in protecting young people. Third sector agencies have also produced reports highlighting the pressing and extensive nature of this problem (Barnardo’s 2011, 2012; Harper & Scott, 2005; Munro, 2004; Stacey, 2009). As a result, CSE is now widely understood to be a complex “form of child abuse” (DfE, 2017:4), which can incorporate sexual, physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.

Recent years have seen a structural narrative shift in how CSE is perceived in discourse, notably from ‘child prostitution’ to ‘child sexual exploitation’ (DoH, 2000; DfE, 2017). I have identified three dominant narratives regarding child sexual abuse as emerging since the late 1970s to the present day: child sexual abuse (CSA); ‘child prostitution’; and ‘child sexual exploitation’. How CSE has been constructed, particularly on a structural level, through statutory narrative and discourse has had a direct, predominantly negative, impact on the children, young people and parents involved. For example, some literature demonstrated the victim-blaming language and attitudes used by some professionals and media, which resulted in young people being perceived not as victims of abuse, but as being responsible and criminalised for it (see DoH, 2000; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2013; Jay, 2014; PACE, 2016; Pearce, 2009; RBSCB, 2012).

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[1] See ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’ by William T. Stead (1885) for an account of articles published in the Pall Mall Gazette, which exposed the fact that young girls were being bought, sold and forced into prostitution.

Currently, there is an ongoing debate about what constitutes CSE, specifically regarding what characteristics extend it from child sexual abuse (CSA) into the category of CSE (Beckett et al., 2017; Kelly & Karsna, 2017). There are also many barriers to gaining a comprehensive and reliable understanding of its scale and prevalence (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). As a result, definitions and conceptualisations of CSE are contentious (Kelly et al., 2000), and these issues are addressed in Chapter 3.

A note about terminology

Terminology is more fully discussed within the context of the relevant chapters. Here, I just briefly elucidate the use of some key terms. Child sexual exploitation, or CSE, is the most recent name given to a very old type of child abuse. As already mentioned, it is a term with a contentious history. Nonetheless, it is the term and acronym that is predominantly adopted here. Its usage, however, is not without awareness of its loaded nature and that, at its very core, it is a term that is used to discuss abuses of children and young people. The term 'child prostitution' is written using inverted commas to highlight it as an outdated, value-laden term, so as not to perpetuate or endorse its usage in CSE discourse. The term 'survivor' is used as it reflects the preference of the participants and occasionally I utilise the term 'victim/survivor' to acknowledge the dual and transitory nature of experiencing sexual exploitation. The parent participants are considered to be non-abusive in that they have not perpetrated the sexual exploitation of their child, and hereon in will generally be referred to as 'parents'.

Structure of the thesis

I have structured this thesis to give as much context and voice to the survivor and parent participants as possible, and as such their sections are substantial. Before reaching these sections, in Chapter 2 I give a reflexive account of the ontological, epistemological and methodological rationale and approach that underpinned this research. In Chapter 3 I present a brief historical overview of CSE, review its key definitions, and unpick some of the issues, debates and barriers that hinder a more consistent understanding of CSE, such as the question: 'how can we differentiate CSE from other forms of child abuse?' In Chapter 4 I establish and justify the theoretical framework utilised to analyse CSE through a narrative lens, focusing on the three dominant narratives that I identify as emerging since the late 1970s and early 1980s. I examine the construction of these narratives in terms of the political, legal and social processes that cause and contribute to such narrative shifts.

Chapter 5 marks the entry into the analysis of the datasets. It sets the context for the thematic analysis of the survivors' narratives that follow in Chapter 6 by: discussing the terms survivor and victim, and the relationship between them; locating the position of survivors within the dominant discourses and narratives of CSE; and examining the emergent survivor narratives and discourses. The survivor participants are then introduced via summary case-studies. Chapter 6 is substantial and presents an in-depth thematic analysis of the survivors' narratives. My aim in this chapter is to elevate the voices and perspectives of the survivors, facilitating their contribution to the evolving formation of discourse and narratives of CSE. I establish the analogy of a journey into the world of CSE, and consider the survivors' journeys and pathways into sexual exploitation within the following framework: entering and starting; experiencing and suffering; and exiting and surviving. Intrinsic to this are the themes of border crossings and turning points. Key foci of the chapter are how survivors made sense of their experiences at the time, and how they make sense of them as an adult survivor.

In Chapter 7 I contextualise the narratives and experiences of the non-abusive parents of a child who has been sexually exploited by perpetrators outside the family. My principal aim is to explore the position of non-abusive parents within the dominant discourses and narratives of CSE, where I locate them within two types of literature: parent-minimising and parent-focused. The parent participants are then introduced using summary case-studies. In Chapter 8 I present an in-depth thematic analysis of the parents' narratives utilising the same journey-based framework as the survivors: starting out and entering; suffering and experiencing; and surviving and exiting the world of CSE. The themes of border crossings and turning points remain intrinsic to this framework. A permeating theme – parents' experiences and perceptions of responding agencies – is woven throughout the analysis.

The primary purpose of Chapter 9 is to utilise the professionals' data to provide context to, and enrich, the survivors' and parents' narratives. A further purpose is to provide balance to the thesis as much of the content of the survivors' and parents’ narratives is negative towards professionals. I present an analysis of how some professionals discussed sexually exploited young people and parents whose child has been sexually exploited, and some of the challenges they face as they undertake their professional role in the field. Although the professionals are not talking specifically about the survivors (as young people) or the parent participants in this study, their data provides insight into how some professionals may perceive and experience both groups. Chapter 10 summarises the salient arguments and brings together the key findings and recommendations from the study.

Chapter 2: Research methodology and methods

This research is a small scale, qualitative narrative interview study, situated within a feminist and social constructivist approach. It centres primarily on collecting personal experiences of CSE in narrative form. Personal perspectives were drawn from survivors, non-abusive parents and professionals who work in the field. There is intentionally no relationship between these groups of participants: specifically, the parent participants are *not* the parents of the CSE survivor participants. This is because an aim of the research is to explore, as fully as possible, the distinct standpoints of the social actors and an existing relationship between parents and survivors would change the focus and dynamics of the research.

The intention of this chapter is to give a reflexive account of the ontological and epistemological rationale and approach underpinning this research, and a description of the research design and process. I discuss narrative interviews and analysis as the central research tool, and conclude the chapter with a discussion regarding the ethical issues and dilemmas that were involved.

Reflexivity

I have intentionally written reflexively throughout in recognition of the fact that I am *not* an unbiased, objective observer of the participants' lives and experiences. I am motivated to do this *particular* piece of work. It is not accidental that I am interested in understanding and challenging the sexual exploitation of girls and women. I have what Haraway (1988:585) describes as a "passionate attachment" through a culmination of my own sense of identity, which is underpinned by my gendered experiences. I am a woman, a mother, a wife, daughter, sister, and teacher. Moreover, I am a woman who was groomed and sexually assaulted as a teenager, researching (predominantly) other women who have experience of grooming and sexual exploitation. My negative experiences have been absorbed into my sense of identity, shifting from self-blame to fuelling a commitment to challenge the normalisation of everyday sexism and the misogyny, negative messages, stereotypes and attitudes that girls and women are often faced with, and constrained by. My background in working with marginalised groups such as adults with learning disabilities, young people with mental health issues, and sexually exploited young women, all colour and influence my analysis and interpretation. As such, I recognise truth in Dorothy Smith's words: "our analysis of texts finds in them only what we know how to read from them" (Smith, 1990:156).

Ontological, epistemological and methodological framework

Guba (1990) states that paradigms are characterised through their ontology, epistemology and methodology which create a holistic framework for how we perceive knowledge, and the strategies used to explore, question and discover it. A fundamental belief influencing my constructivist ontological approach is that multiple realities, created through the perceptions of social actors, exist at any given point in time. This is based on the view that reality is constructed and reconstructed on individual, group and societal levels. Some realities are in direct conflict while others are interdependent. Reality is changeable and dynamic, and realities are paradoxically distinct yet co-producing and co-existing (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

I draw on narrative theory as a framework to facilitate the analysis of the formation and emergence of narratives surrounding CSE, which exist on structural and individual levels. Much has been written about the role and functions of narratives as a way to create, develop and express our understanding of the social world (Barthes, 1977; Bruner, 2004; Colyar & Holley, 2014; Czarniawska, 2004; Lucaites & Condit, 1985). A comprehensive definition of narratives is offered by Barthes (1977:99), who describes narratives as "numberless" and omnipresent through an "infinite diversity of forms (…) present in every age, in every place, in every society." He illustrates the omnipresent and unique importance of narratives. Bruner (2004) takes a constructivist perspective, making the point that narratives are the result of human reason and thought, and simply *one* representation of a perceived reality. Discourse contributes significantly to the formation and emergence of a narrative and they share a symbiotic relationship, each shaping, mirroring and perpetuating the other. Foucault (1977) argues that discourse is an active and visible part of life and human interactions. He posits that discourse is powerful because it is often accepted without question, which means that the reality with which society is presented can also go unquestioned. Thus, not only are discourses "integral to the construction of social reality"

(Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006:293), they are at the very heart of it, culminating in an expression of subjective experience and dominant narratives. Foucault (1972) has explained the relationship between language, subjective experience and power, and these ideas are useful in understanding how the language and discourse of CSE have contributed to the formation and perpetuation of its narratives, and how this impacts on direct experiences of CSE.

Feminist theory and values inform the epistemology and methodology of my approach to this research and my analysis of the data. In terms of CSE, knowledge has been produced, reproduced and maintained from, and within, a patriarchal social context. I believe that knowledge is both a commodity and a currency, and those who construct knowledge hold power (Foucault, 1977). Thus narratives are both a source and indicator of power and powerlessness. In this vein, what has been 'known' *about* CSE, and indeed what CSE has been known *as*, is highly gendered, and so too are subsequent CSE narratives. CSE has been constructed, over time, within a patriarchal context that facilitates a spectrum of violence against girls and women. Social actors interpret and make sense of social reality based on the meanings they and others ascribe. Hesse-Biber (2007:3) states that engagement with feminist theory and praxis requires one to "challenge knowledge that excludes, while seeming to include". I argue that the vast majority of the knowledge that has been produced about CSE has predominantly come from structural narratives and not from knowledge given by survivors and parents.

The potentially transformative nature of a feminist methodological approach is powered by its embrace and recognition of the importance of the lived experience and the situated knowledges of women (Haraway, 1988). My research approach is directly in line with the fundamental tenets of Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST), which argues that "women's historical situation of subordination within a system of gender hierarchy creates conditions for them to see the operations of the male-as-norm" (Kronsell, 2005:287). FST advocates for gaining knowledge of women's lived experiences, recognising that "knowledge grounded in women's lived experiences can provide situated knowledge with which to challenge dominant and repressive social practices" (Ibid.,287). FST also focusses on the position of women in a patriarchal social context and system (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) such as the world of CSE. I will utilise four themes identified by

Hammersley (1995) in his critique of feminist methodology to detail and explain how and why this research stems from feminist methodology.

The omni-relevance of gender

Gender is an ‘omni-relevant’ feature of CSE. Although I recognise that boys and young men are also victims of CSE and women can also be perpetrators, it is without doubt that CSE is fundamentally underpinned by a framework of abuse and violence against girls and young women (CEOP, 2011; Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012). These inequitable gender relations are a cornerstone of CSE. The sampling of the research was gender neutral. I wanted to interview *people* who perceived themselves as having experience of CSE, who would categorise themselves as either a survivor, parent, or professional. I had no gender specific criteria and cast out a net to CSE organisations and my own social and professional networks.

However, of the total number of 41 people who came forward, 38 were women (4 survivors, 6 parents, 28 professionals) and only 3 were male (1 father and 2 professionals). Of the victims of CSE (either survivor or the parents’ child), all were female except one. Of the perpetrators who were talked about by survivors and parents, all were male except one. These patterns are reflected in wider literature (CEOP, 2011; Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012) and it is accurate to state that the world of CSE is gendered in favour of men at the expense of women, and perhaps indicates the gendered nature of much of the work regarding CSE.

Personal experience over scientific methods

This research champions subjective knowledge over objective knowledge. A valid way of knowing and understanding realities is by listening to and investigating how people talk about, perform and produce their interpretations of their social reality, thus developing and utilising a “view from below*”* (Mies, 1983:123). This allows the interests of the dominated and exploited to be heard. If we wish to understand the social problem of CSE, we *have* to understand it from within, and not just what it may look like from the outside. Rather than setting out ‘entry criteria’ for the research, I have therefore prioritised participants’ self-identification as someone with experience of CSE, based on their subjective understandings. The problem with looking at CSE from outside, via sources such as government policy and a variety of media outputs, is that we are using sources that may not have equitable intentions. This could mean that we are not necessarily seeing what is *actually* there. However, capturing and utilising the narratives of people who have personally experienced CSE can show us what *is* there (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Rejection of hierarchy on the research relationship

The issue of hierarchy and power imbalance within research relationships is complex. Harding and Norberg (2005:2012) recognise fieldwork as an important site where feminist researchers can attempt to “eliminate power differences between the researcher and the researched”. Glucksmann’s (1994:150) observation that the “amount of angst suffered and enormous efforts expended in the attempt to create an egalitarian and reciprocal relation within the research process would seem to imply that there is some perfect model of the researcher/researched relation to be achieved”, has helped me frame my position as a feminist researcher. I reject the hierarchical research relationship associated with positivist approaches, or what Haraway (1988) refers to as the ‘god trick’, but equally I do not believe that the feminist research relationship is without some potentially troubling power dynamics. Lorde (1996:159, cited in Hesse-Biber, 2007), in discussing empowerment and difference, urges an “interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal”. This formed the basis of my approach to interviewing people with personal experiences of CSE: different, but equal and interdependent, with something both to offer and gain.

Emancipation as the goal of research

Although feminist values focus on illuminating women’s hidden lives and experiences (Fonow & Cook, 2005), these values are also extended to include the male participant. There are important lessons to be learnt from personal experiences, which means they are able to extend from the personal to the public to the political: essentially being transformative (Harding & Norberg, 2005). Some feminist thought on researching women’s hidden lives has focused on producing knowledge that would “liberate” women (Fonow & Cook, 2005:2211). However, the participants in the research do not need me or this research to ‘liberate’ them: they are more than capable of doing that for themselves. It is the role of the research only to assist in progressing the journey that some survivors and parents are undertaking in order to facilitate the recognition and acknowledgement of their voices, perspectives and experiences, and hopefully improve their lives and the lives of other women in similar situations. This is a primary reason why most of the participants chose to be involved in this research, which they perceived as just one of many possible ways to 'have their say'.

Thus, I centralise the significance of patriarchy, power, profound gender inequality and the subjugation of girls and young women as embedded within the context that facilitates, even nurtures, the sexual exploitation of children. I view the world of CSE as an archetypal patriarchal context, whereby predominantly girls and young women are sexually exploited and abused for male pleasure, power affirmation and economic gain, and I am deeply interested in *how* this happens. Clisby and Holdsworth (2014) offer a theoretical explanation of how a patriarchal social context and system is maintained by highlighting the links between "gender-based inequalities" and "normative processes of gendering" (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014:5). The authors argue that gender regimes and scripts, which shape social and gender 'appropriate' ways of thinking and acting, "are embedded into everyday imagery and imagination" (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014:56). We are all gendered beings and our gendering takes place within a "socio-cultural, heteronormative, patriarchal structural framework" (Ibid.,23). Thus girls and young women's gendered identity is fundamentally moulded by the context and gendered norms to which they are exposed. I assert that the socialisation of children and young people is highly sexualised (Gill, 2007; Papadopoulus, 2010), not with the aim of recognising or empowering their personal sexuality, but with the aim of justifying male sexual interest and positioning them as legitimate sexual 'partners'.

Research Design

The research was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of personal experiences of CSE from the perspectives of three groups: adult survivors; non-abusive parents whose children have been/are being sexually exploited; and a wide range of professionals. As a qualitative study utilising narrative interviews, the emphasis is on in-depth responses rather than a required number of participants. It is not my intention to generalise the findings to the wider population, only to report on the experiences of those included and make connections with cogent secondary research. The participants shared their construction of *a* reality (Sandelowski, 1991), in narrative form, which reveal insights that can be extended to CSE more generally.

The participants

Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Exploitation (see Table 1 below).

The four self-selecting participants each identified as a survivor of CSE. The women were 19, 22, 25 and 47 years old at the time of interview. Their names and all identifying information have been changed. The women were aged between 8 and 15 years when their abuse started, and lasted until they were between 12 and 26 years old. The names of the men who abused the women have also been changed. All the women had left the world of sexual exploitation between 3 and 21 years before being interviewed and comprise 23 years of exploitation between them, over a 30 year period from 1984 until 2014. This gives a useful insight into the changing legal, political and cultural context of societal responses over that period.

Two of the women self-identified as ‘White British’, one as ‘mixed British-Pakistani’ and one as ‘mixed Black British’. Two of the women were full-time students in Higher Education, one of whom works part-time at a survivor project in a training and awareness raising capacity. One is a youth worker and is setting up her own survivor-led CSE project, and one is a retail assistant who also works part-time at a survivor project in a training and awareness raising capacity. Two are mothers and all the women are without disabilities. At the time of their sexual exploitation, all were living with their family in cities in Northern England, which is where the exploitation occurred. Three were from single parent families - two headed by women, and one by a man - and one lived with both parents. Each woman was interviewed face-to-face at a location and time of her choosing. Two of the women (Alina and Ellie) requested to be interviewed together, as they knew each other.

Table 1: Overview of survivor participants

Survivor	**Year of entry**	**Age at entry**	**Year of exit**	**Age at final exit**	**Duration in years**	**Years since exit**	**Current age**	**Ethnicity**
Fran	**1984**	15	1995	26	11	21	47	White British
Leah	2006	15	2009	18	3	7	25	White British
Ellie	2008	8	2012	12	4	7	19	British Pakistani
Alina	2009	14	**2014**	19	5	3	22	Black British

The sample size of four is very small but it is not the intention of this research to attempt to generalise the findings to all survivors of CSE. The intention is to elevate these four women's powerful stories and understand *how* they made sense of their experiences of sexual exploitation. In line with feminist methodology and values, these stories are privileged and I conceptualise them as providing experiential expertise which allows us to understand sexual exploitation from 'within', and should inform both policy and practice. This sentiment is reiterated by Du Bois (1983:108), who states that feminist social science should "see what is there, not what has been taught is there". Thus, personal experience of CSE, as interpreted and made sense of by individuals is, for me, the most valuable way of knowing about that issue.

The application of the term survivor does not imply that the women are perceived as a homogenous group in any way. The term, of their own choosing, simply acts as an umbrella term and is not intended to undermine the individuality and diversity not only of the four women, but also of the varied experiences of being involved in the world of sexual exploitation.

Accessing Survivors

Accessing CSE survivors was difficult. I began by casting a wide net, contacting organisations that support survivors of CSE around the UK to introduce the research and myself and explain the aims, value and ethics of the research. These organisations either did not acknowledge my contact or told me they would not be able to help for safeguarding reasons. I re-contacted some of these organisations, sending flyers about the research and simply asked them to display them in their services. No one replied, so I do not know if organisations displayed the flyers, but no participants came forward as a result. I believe this to be due to a “gate-keeping culture” (Allnock & Barns, 2011:153) which acted as a barrier to their participation in research, and “remains a challenge for many researchers” (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016:42). This may be because of how some organisations interpret their duty of care to their service users (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016), and they *may* become over-protective. It could be a result of other factors affecting the organisation such as a lack of time and resources, or a general unwillingness to engage with research, particularly if the researcher is unknown to them. A potential issue with a lack of engagement in research such as this is that some organisations may impede an adult’s decision to take part and ‘have their say’ - something that all of my participants stated that they valued - and actually make that decision for their service users, when it is not their decision to make.

A consistent aspect of my successful access to participants was when I was known to someone who knew the gatekeepers and ‘vouched’ for me. My previous roles as an employee of a specialist CSE service and a qualified teacher have led me to develop a wide range of contacts and networks, and it was through these existing, informal contacts that I was put in touch with the four survivor participants. This indicates the need to present a ‘human face’ to gatekeepers in order to build trust, but unfortunately I was unable even to get to the point of meeting or having a conversation with those gatekeepers of the services I approached.

Parents whose children have been, or are being, sexually exploited outside the family (see Table 2 below)

Seven parents came forward to take part in the research via a national parent support organisation. All were considered as non-abusive parents of sexually exploited children. Names and all identifying information have been changed. Six were mothers and one was a father and all had one child who had been, or was currently being (at the time of interview), sexually exploited. Two were adoptive parents.

The ages of the parents at the time of interview ranged from 30 to 70 years, with the average being 56 years. Their age at the time of their entry into the world of

CSE ranged from 34 to 54 years. The parents give a total of 50 years' experience within the world of CSE, from the 1980s to 2016, but this is heavily contributed to by one parent's long term involvement. The vast majority of parental experience of CSE started between 2010 and 2015. The CSE is still on-going for half of the parents' children.

All of the parents reported their ethnicity as 'White British' and all lived in urban areas from a range of English counties within the South East, South West, Midlands and Yorkshire. All the parents hold, or had held, professional positions and I am using this term generically to maintain their confidentiality. Parents were interviewed either face-to-face or via the phone, at a location and time of their choosing. The term parent is used as an umbrella term and is not intended to undermine the individuality and diversity of the parents that chose to take part.

Table 2: Overview of parent participants at the time of interview

Parent	**Gender**	**Entry**	**Age at entry**	**Exit**	**Duration**	**Age**	**Gender of child**	**Child's age at entry exit**
Henry	M	1986	50	Ongoing	29	79	F	14, ongoing
Audrey	F	2010	47	2016	6	53	F	13 to 19
Annie	F	2011	34	2016	5	39	F	14 to 18
Lisa	F	2012	-	Ongoing	4	-	F	13, ongoing
Lucy	F	2013	51	Ongoing	3	54	F	13, ongoing
Donna	F	2014	54	Ongoing	1	55	F	14, ongoing
Michelle	F	2015	54	Ongoing	16 months	55	M	15, ongoing

Accessing Parents

Access to parents was achieved by approaching an organisation supporting parents whose children have been, or are being, sexually exploited. I made contact with a worker, who was in effect the gate-keeper, at a CSE conference. After explaining my research aims and purpose to her, she agreed to forward consent forms to their parent network. Seven parents returned their consent forms and I then contacted them.

The narratives produced from interviewing the parents and survivors are both retrospective and current in nature. The retrospective aspect stems from the participants remembering and talking about their past, often traumatic experiences and, in the survivors' case, they are almost observing their younger selves. Obtaining and utilising retrospective accounts could be considered problematic, but this research is interested in how people who have experienced CSE made, and make, sense of their experiences. It would contravene ethical principles to research young people as they currently experience sexual exploitation and abuse. Thus, interviewing adult survivors and parents is a way to ethically capture and gain an insight into individuals' lived experiences of CSE, how they perceived, experienced and responded to it at the time, and the impact it can have on families.

For three of the parents (Henry, Audrey and Annie), the actual exploitation of their child has stopped, but their narratives reveal that the impact of the exploitation is so strong that they were, at the time of interview, still living in the aftermath. This offers a useful insight into the long-term effects of CSE on families.

Professionals who work in the field of CSE in some capacity (See Table 3 below). Thirty professionals were interviewed in their professional capacity in their place of work, using the same approach and narrative interview, and were drawn from the following standpoints: the police; Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); health; education; and CSE specialist services. However, there is diversity within some of the standpoints. For instance, within the police category, there are non-police trained CSE workers working specifically within a police team, a Detective Superintendent and Detective Sergeants. Three of the health professionals could also belong to other standpoints: two are nurses working with a specialist CSE police investigation team in a police station; one is a school nurse in an inner-city secondary school. The professionals in the CSE specialist services include project workers, team managers and social workers. The narratives are not be viewed as representative of that standpoint, only as giving a flavour of individual experience within each perspective.

The professionals give a total of over 260 years' professional experience within CSE, child protection and safeguarding, spanning from 1984 to the time of interview. They were predominantly women, with only 2 being male, which gives an indication of the gendered nature of these services. The ages at the time of interview ranged from 27 to 61 years, with the average age being 42. All of the professionals reported their ethnicity as either 'White British' or 'White European' and worked for either statutory and/or civil services, or within the voluntary sector.

All worked in urban areas within the East Midlands, East Anglia and Yorkshire. Each professional was interviewed face-to-face at a location and time of their choosing. The application of the term professional is also used as an umbrella term and is not intended to undermine the individuality and diversity of the professionals that chose to take part. It is also a way of denoting the nature of their experiences as professional, not personal. Table 3 below, in contrast to Table 1 and 2, provides only a brief overview of the professionals interviewed.

Table 3: Overview of professional participants

Professional Standpoint	**Participants**	**Female**	**Male**
CSE worker	10	10	0
Social Worker (CSE)	2	2	0
Health	6	6	0
Police	6	5	1
Education	4	3	1
CPS	2	2	0

Accessing Professionals

In order to access the wide range of professionals I utilised my personal and professional networks and snowball sampling, as in some cases friends and colleagues spoke to friends and colleagues, essentially ‘vouching’ for me, and introduced me to more participants who then agreed to take part.

Method

Once each participant, for all groups, had agreed to be involved, I contacted them to introduce myself, explain my motivations for conducting the research, discuss the research and answer any questions. At this point each participant was reminded that they could withdraw at any point, and there was time between the initial contact and the interview to allow them to reflect on their decision to take part and change their mind. None did. The date, time and location for interview was agreed. I asked all participants to complete a data collection form with the aim of collecting contextual information such as age, gender, ethnicity and some basic information regarding their experiences of CSE (Appendix 1). This was solely for the purpose of allowing me to record the demographics of the participants.

Three of the survivors were interviewed at their home and two were interviewed together, in the home of one. The fourth was interviewed in a private room in her university. Both survivor and parent interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. Two parents were interviewed in their home and five were over the phone. This was due to a combination of factors, such as the parents' preference, travel distances and practical issues regarding their availability. Initially, I was hesitant about conducting a narrative interview over the phone in terms of losing some of the contextual and visual cues that come with a face-to-face interview (Holt, 2010). In reality, the interview was not inhibited by the use of the phone, evidenced by the pages of uninterrupted narratives, and Holt (2010) recognises the strengths of a telephone narrative interview as giving more control, flexibility and privacy to the participants.

Narrative Interviews

> "The narrative approach places people being studied at the heart of the study process and privileges the meanings that they assign to their own stories." (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:631).

Narrative Interviews (NI) put a spotlight on the participants' story and allow them to set the agenda, direction, pace and the content of the interview (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016:631). Polkinghorne (1988) sees narratives as a way for people to give their life meaning and McAdams and McLean (2013:233) recognise that people create a narrative identity in order to "convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going". This was very much the intention in this research: the participants are recognised and acknowledged as the experts in their own lives and it is their perception of their reality that is of interest. NIs are very apt as a research method within a feminist methodological approach in a framework of narrative theory. Not only are they very useful in aiding an exploration of participants' experiences, they also provide insights into how participants perceive both past and present events and importantly, how they make sense of them in their everyday lives (Bates, 2004; Dodsworth, 2012, 2014a).

I saw my interviewer role as facilitative and I was committed to doing all I could to ensure that the interviews were interviewee-centred, offering the participant the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and create their narrative in their own way (DeVault, 1990; Harding & Norberg, 2005). The interviews were informal and each participant was explicitly encouraged to talk only about things they wished to, and if they became upset, I offered to stop or pause the interview. No one chose this option.

The fact that the participants were sharing their personal, often very traumatic experiences made them vulnerable and it was important to safeguard their well-being. Establishing trust early on in the relationship was built into the research design and process, which aimed to centralise the participants within the research. In almost all the interviews the participants often expressed high levels of emotion, from anger and frustration to sadness and distress, which was an integral and significant part of their narrative. I endeavoured to engage with these emotions and respond with sympathy and empathy (Campbell et al., 2010), but at the same time not to confuse my role as a listening researcher with a more therapeutic role, such as counsellor. This was not always a straightforward process and at times, particularly in the earlier stages of my fieldwork, I did experience what Sampson et al. (2008) refer to as 'role conflict' as I wanted to help ease some of the women's pain, particularly guilt. Managing and reflecting on any sense of role conflict was an on-going process throughout.

Holstein and Gubrium (2004:141) see interviews as a social exchange and view NIs as a very interactive process whereby "knowledge is actively constructed (…) a site of, and occasion for, producing reportable knowledge". This means both interviewer and interviewee become active agents, each contributing to the process of social exchange. I would like to extend this to see the interview as an opportunity for the interviewee to gain self-knowledge, if they so choose. To this end, it was important that the participants did not feel interrogated, and I sought to keep the interviews relaxed and supportive (Oakley, 1981).

A 'warm-up' was included before the start of each interview and the completion of the basic data form contributed positively to this as it facilitated general chit-chat, allowing the participants to talk a little about themselves in general terms.

The narrative interviews were intentionally unstructured and informal and always began with an open question (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016):

> "Can you tell me about your experiences of child sexual exploitation?"

This was designed to allow the participants to tell their story in their own way and at their own pace. I also had a list of flexible 'prompt questions' specific to each group (Appendices 4a, b, c) as a means of keeping the interview focused on experiences of CSE, but I seldom needed to use them with the survivors and parents. I tried not to direct the participants except to generally keep the focus on sexual exploitation. This enabled them not only to talk freely, but often to make sense and reflect on their experiences as they were speaking about them. Occasionally, it became apparent through my analysis of the transcripts that there were some factual gaps missing such as ages or dates, which would have been useful to know and would have given a more comprehensive narrative. This highlights a tension in NIs: deciding whether or not to interrupt the narrative flow of the interviewee. Given the particularly emotive nature of the narratives, interrupting often felt inappropriate and insensitive, and I was reluctant to do this since the fundamental principle I was adhering to was allowing the participants to tell their story in their way, and being as non-directive as possible.

Towards the end of the interviews, each participant was asked if they would like to add or talk about anything else that they had not yet had a chance to do. Participants were debriefed at the end of their interview, reminded they could withdraw their data and thanked for their time and valuable contribution. The survivors and parents were offered an information sheet of support organisations (Appendices 6 and 7), and the parents were signposted back to the worker who put me in touch with them if they felt they needed further support.

Recording, transcription and note-taking

A digital audio recorder was used to record each interview. The telephone interviews were also recorded in this way by using the 'loudspeaker' option on the phone. All the participants were told and reminded that an audio device would be used. Overall, the sound quality was good, with only the occasional part which was difficult or not possible to hear. In these cases the word 'unclear' was inserted in square brackets in the transcript. The total number of recorded interview hours was over 45.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, guided by many of the Jeffersonian symbols (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013) to capture the pauses, intakes and exhalations of breath and emphasis given to particular words, by a professional freelance transcriber whom I paid for her services. The transcriber was given a ‘transcription key’ (Appendix 5) and was fully briefed on the level of detail to be included. I then re-checked all the transcriptions by simultaneously listening to the audio and reading them to ensure their accuracy and clarity.

Transcripts are essentially “research constructs” (Jenks, 2013:252) and an interpretation of the interview. Since they cannot fully capture the interview, I was keen to strike the right balance between being faithful to what the participants had said and expressed, and ensuring the transcripts were understandable and useable afterwards. For instance, ‘I wor 15 at time’ was transcribed verbatim and not as ‘I was 15 at the time’ because the former captured the essence and the dialect/accent of the speaker but did not reduce the readability of the transcript. These decisions were made as part of the process of transcription (Bailey, 2008). What was important to me was to try to capture the participants’ actual voices. I have had to edit many of the narratives in order to succinctly convey the point they were making, and this is represented as (…) within the text. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the transcript, I relied heavily on the audio recording and my field notes to check and re-check my interpretation of the participants’ words and expressions to ensure that I could re-capture the tone, emotions and general feeling of the interview more accurately.

Method of Analysis

I made the positive choice not to use any computer software in my analysis, not out of a disregard for the advantages of such software (see Flick, 2014) but more as a reflection of my small data sets, my personal preference to be fully immersed in the data (a feeling that was increased by my manual handling of it), and a commitment to a human interpretation of very human stories. Furthermore, although software can code and attach descriptive labels to sections of the narratives, it cannot analyse it with feeling or empathy or decide what the data means: “this remains the work of researchers” (Sandelowski, 1995:371).

In accordance with the methodological approach set out earlier, my interpretation and analysis of the participants’ narratives was driven by a commitment to being guided by the data and not by theory, therefore I loosely adopted a grounded theory or ‘bottom-up’ approach (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Charmaz, 2006). I utilised some aspects of thematic coding and analysis, essentially “labelling and categorising data” (Flick, 2014:373) into themes. Thematic analysis is associated with analysing narratives and “provides a way of understanding human experiences that is consistent with the way that people make sense of their own lives” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005:128). This is apt because the act of creating a narrative is a way that people construct understanding and meaning from their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988).

The data focus of this research is talk, which is encapsulated in a narrative text: what was said and how it was said. One notable aspect is the level of emotion expressed and contained within the narratives, and this became an inherent aspect of the thematic analyses that follow in subsequent chapters. Within both groups, the transcripts illustrate page after page of uninterrupted narrative and very often my contribution is a small prompt or brief question to clarify my understanding. This is noteworthy because it speaks to the desire of the participants to talk and tell their story.

Central to a thematic narrative analysis is a dissection of the narrative structure of the interview (Kleres, 2010), what is also referred to as “plot structure” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005:131). After several readings of each transcript an overarching, predominantly chronological structure became apparent which underpinned the participants’ narratives. This provided a framework for organising the data into a personal journey of entering, experiencing and exiting the world of CSE. The structure and style of each chapter was very much shaped by the thematic analysis of the data, and I endeavoured to mirror the position and location of a theme within the narratives themselves by tightly weaving my analysis of this theme throughout my entire analysis of the narratives.

Validity

It is the aim that this research is an accurate reflection and interpretation of the participants' narratives, and I undertook certain measures to ensure that this is the case. Firstly, the use of a NI is an appropriate tool to facilitate the participants' telling of whatever experiences they chose to share. Secondly, the recording and verbatim transcription of the narratives provide an accurate record of what was said and *how* it was said. Thirdly, throughout each interview I explicitly checked my understanding of the participants' experiences and their interpretation of it by reflecting back to them what I had understood they had said, a form of communicative validity (Flick, 2014). In this way, my interpretations of their narratives were co-constructed (Hunter, 2010).

Ethics

Given the sensitive nature of this research ethical considerations have underpinned the research from its design to its dissemination. This research gained ethical approval from the University of Hull Research Ethics Committee and I made myself aware of the ethical requirements stated in the British Sociological Association ethical practice guidance (BSA, 2017). To ensure informed consent for each participant, they were given an information sheet (Appendices 2a, 2b, 2c) and consent form tailored to their particular group before the interview began (Appendices 3a, 3b, 3c). For phone interviews, the information sheet and consent forms were emailed, signed and returned before the interview took place.

Confidentiality was maintained for each participant by using pseudonyms and changing any identifiable features to ensure their anonymity in the transcripts and analysis. The participants also named family members, friends and the perpetrators. These names have only been included when it helped maintain clarity of the narratives and have all been randomly changed. The name of the parent support organisation remained anonymous. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement and does not have any copies of the transcriptions. All memos and notes, transcriptions and audio recordings have been stored securely.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity was an issue for me because in the back of my mind throughout the process was an article by Huisman which details her feelings of “guilt, empathy, and frustration” (Huisman, 2008:388) when her interviewee asked her the question, “*Does this mean you’re not going to come and visit me anymore?”*, knowing that Huisman had got what she needed from her. In this moment, Huisman “feared” that her inability to visit anymore “ran counter to [her] commitment to feminist ideals of equality, reciprocity, and improving the lives of women” (Huisman, 2008:388). Because I had asked my participants to re-tell personal stories of abuse and exploitation, I felt these fears deeply.

Trying to ensure that the participants got *something* out of the research involved was an ethical dilemma that created uncertainty and discomfort (see Campbell et al., 2010; Head, 2009 for further debate). Deciding whether to pay survivors for their involvement was difficult and felt different to paying the parents. One argument for paying participants is to offer an incentive for their involvement, and some researchers argue that payment is a mark of ethically sound work (Head, 2009). However, given the sensitive and personal nature of the research, it was important that all participants were involved because they *genuinely* wanted to be, and *not* because they were being paid. The final strand of this dilemma related to the survivors of CSE specifically: not to pay them felt exploitative, which was unpalatable, but to pay them only a small amount was equally unacceptable. Ultimately, I did not pay the parents but sent them a hand written thank you card after the interview. Conversely, I decided to give the survivors a £10.00 gift voucher as a token of my appreciation for their time (Head, 2009). Within all my procrastinations over payment, I never got the impression that payment was expected by any of the participants, and the vouchers were met with surprise.

Campbell et al. (2010:61) suggest that most participants do not describe taking part in this kind of research as “unexpectedly upsetting” and most do not regret their participation. The authors suggest that many participants report their participation in qualitative research as beneficial because it was an opportunity to talk about their experiences with an “interested listener” (Ibid.). However, it was the participants themselves that inadvertently reassured me. For example, several parents thanked me for listening, one stated it had actually helped her and some participants acknowledged that taking part in the research was one way they could ‘do something’ positive to raise awareness of sexual exploitation:

Lucy (parent): “And thank you for your time because that’s kind of helped me actually (…) I’ve enjoyed speaking to you.”

Donna (parent): “If ever you want to come back to me, if there’s anything else that you need, or you know, if it would help to interview me again, I would be very happy to do that.”

Audrey (parent): “I want to get some help for these kids, you know, I just (...) I really feel like I just want to, yeah, do something positive.”

Wellbeing of the researcher

Sampson et al. (2008) highlight the ‘emotional risk’ associated with undertaking sensitive research on topics such as sexual abuse. However, during the interview process and particularly the analysis, it became apparent that the data, which I describe as traumatic, was having a negative emotional impact on me. There is a significant amount of emotional labour that underpins and fuels this type of research, which was perhaps exacerbated by my personal experiences and subsequent lack of neutrality in this area. Like many other women researchers before me (Sampson et al., 2008:929) I had not fully comprehended “the degree of emotionality” I would experience (Chatzifotiou, 2000 cited in Sampson et al., 2008:92). I felt drained by the participants’ narratives at times when reading the transcripts. Listening to the recordings was particularly difficult. I found the parent’s narratives especially challenging because of the tremendous amount of loss and grief within them. Burr (1996, cited in Sampson et al., 2008:923) recognises that “sharing the private world of people in despair, can be a psychologically and emotionally wrenching experience”, and this was certainly my experience. She describes her experience as “compassion stress” (Burr, 1996, cited in Sampson et al., 2008:923). For me it was more akin to compassion fatigue, associated not only with the participants but also my own emotional journey into, within and out of the narratives of experiences of the world of CSE.

I took care of myself by taking regular breaks from the analysis and speaking with my supervisors about the impact the data was having on me.

Concluding comments

In this chapter I have established myself as having a "passionate attachment" (Haraway, 1988:585) to both this research process and topic, which has influenced my decision to carry out a qualitative narrative interview study, informed by feminist epistemology and methodological values. Drawing on both narrative theory and feminist praxis has enabled me to examine the interconnected relationships between gendered dominant narrative constructs, processes of gendering and lived experience. The next chapter gives a detailed examination of CSE, highlighting key issues and debates relating to its narrative construction.

Chapter 3: Child sexual exploitation - the story so far

As previously mentioned, CSE is a serious and complex form of child abuse which can involve sexual, physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse of a child and/or young person. However, exactly what constitutes a clear, comprehensive and useable definition is contentious, and there is disparity between objective definitions and subjective understandings. This is largely as a result of the difficulties in identifying and agreeing the aspects of CSE that differentiate it from other forms of child abuse.

My aim in this chapter is to begin to unpick some of the issues, debates and barriers that hinder a more consistent understanding of CSE by considering what is currently understood by the term 'child sexual exploitation' in England. To accomplish this, the chapter is organised into two parts. Part 1 gives a brief historical overview, reviews key definitions of CSE, and discusses the surrounding issues and debates. A central concern is the question, 'how can we differentiate CSE from other forms of child abuse?'. Part 2 aims to establish what is currently known about CSE. This will include exploring the scale, prevalence and characteristics of CSE, as well as victim characteristics. This chapter sets the scene for Chapter 4, which will analyse the changes in dominant discourse and narratives surrounding CSE.

Part 1: Defining CSE – issues and debates

A key tenet of this thesis is that language and discourse, including definitions and labels, are crucial to the construction of the structural narrative of social issues. They lay the foundations for how a social issue such as CSE is perceived, understood and experienced because definitions are "socially constructed and therefore evolving" (Dodsworth, 2015:2). Although the focus of this section is on issues and debates surrounding definitions of CSE in England in 2018, it is necessary to briefly explore some historical roots[2] as they have remained strong forces, shaping how CSE has been defined, perceived and experienced more recently.

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[2] See Brown & Barrett (2002) for a comprehensive historical review.

Historical overview of CSE in England

The phrase child sexual exploitation is now commonly used to describe a form of child abuse, yet the concept is far from new. Jackson (2000:11) pinpoints the 1860s onwards as the "discovery" of sexual abuse, although it was couched in the term 'child prostitution'. Child prostitution and child sexual exploitation are the same abuse-based criminal offences perpetrated against children and young people, under a different name. The issue first received public attention in 1885 as a result of articles published in the Pall Mall Gazette by William Stead. The articles exposed the fact that there was "in full operation among us a system of which the violation of virgins is one of the ordinary incidents" (Stead, 1885:9), and demonstrate that young girls were being bought, sold and forced into prostitution. Using various contacts, Stead and his allies 'purchased' a young girl from her mother and placed her in a brothel. Masquerading as a sex-buyer, Stead went so far as to enter the room with the girl, proving it was possible to procure a thirteen year old virgin in London and creating a much needed public outrage.

Despite criticism of Stead's methods, manner of reporting them, and whether the means justified the ends, the impact of his articles cannot be ignored. They raised the ugly profile of the prostitution of children, and the male desire for it. As a consequence, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885 was introduced which established the age of consent as 16 and increased police powers to investigate "vice" (Brown & Barrett, 2002:14).

Stead also demonstrated understanding of what is now known as CSE in his writings about sexually exploited young women:

> "Some are simply snared, trapped and outraged when under the influence of drugs or after a prolonged struggle in a locked room, in which the weaker succumbs to sheer downright force. Others are regularly procured (…) or enticed under various promises." (Stead, 1885:9).

Stead documents the propulsion of CSE into public awareness in 1885 and in the quote above he is essentially describing, 133 years ago, what is now known as grooming and child sexual exploitation. It would be naïve to imagine that CSE does not have a much longer history than this, but Stead's work begs the depressing question of how, since the propulsion of CSE into the public consciousness in 1885, have these crimes and abuses been allowed to persist?

The exploitation of children and young people continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Child protection issues were occasionally acknowledged through social philanthropy and legislation, but child sexual abuse was largely positioned on the margins of social consciousness (Brown & Barrett, 2002). This began to change around the 1970s (Ibid.) when feminism began to doggedly prise open these dark spaces and shed light on the hidden abuses of women and children, but the predominant focus was initially on child abuse within the family and home (see Chapter 4). If CSE was referred to during this period onwards, it tended to be within the victim-blaming discourse and narrative of ‘child prostitution’, particularly in the media where girls (victims) were depicted as ‘virgins’ or ‘whores’ (see Brown & Barrett, 2002:147). The focus was on girls, so the abuse of boys remained hidden and invisible, illustrating very clearly the gendered nature of perceptions of prostitution. It was the 1980s onwards that saw an increasing awareness and concern about ‘child prostitution’, which gradually began to influence and shape legal, policy and practice responses in England.

The need for a definition of CSE

Names and labels are important because they reflect and reinforce societal norms and attitudes (Becker, 1963; Gasque, 2001). Child prostitution and CSE are exactly the same abuse-based criminal offences perpetrated against children and young people, just under different names. Thus, there is a need for a definition but it must be carefully constructed because how offences are named has significant impact on the direct experience of sexually exploited children and young people.

It is generally agreed there *is* a need to objectively define CSE and differentiate it from other forms of child abuse and there have been several attempts to do so (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2017; NWG, 2008). For example, Beckett et al. (2017) argue that “having a common definition of child sexual exploitation is critical to identification, monitoring and effective multi-agency responses” (Beckett et al., 2017:7). Furthermore, “definitions of issues connected with child sexual exploitation determine thresholds for intervention” (CEOP, 2011:10). It is important that CSE is consistently recognised by statutory and voluntary agencies and all professionals working with young people as a distinct and complex form of child abuse.

However, achieving definitional consensus has been a constant challenge which Kelly et al. (2000:71) describe as a “fruitless task”. An exploration of the literature reveals there are inherent problems in how CSE has been, and is being, conceptualised in policy and practice (Kelly et al., 2000). For example, Kelly and Karsna (2017:5) point out that “CSE related policy and practice frameworks in England and Wales operate with different definitions”. One barrier is the complex and dynamic nature of CSE, which can comprise several different forms of abuse and several types of criminal acts in a myriad of combinations. The multifaceted nature of CSE, and the fact that it has some distinctive aspects, makes it difficult to consistently differentiate CSE from other forms of child abuse. An additional complexity is that the research participants’ narratives also revealed wide discrepancies in *subjective* understandings of CSE. They do not consistently differentiate it from other types of child abuse, and so I have not found a definitional consensus from conducting this research. This highlights discrepancies between perceptions of objective definitions of CSE and subjective understandings of it. In order to understand the definitional challenges and a lack of consensus between perceived objective and subjective understandings of CSE, it is necessary to review influential, objective statutory and legal definitions of CSE and explore more subjective understandings through excerpts from participants’ narratives.

Statutory and legal definitions of CSE

Child sexual abuse and exploitation are emotive political issues. They also comprise a complex set of serious criminal offences. Only when a crime has a name, which signifies its recognition, can the government respond to it. Thus, having a clear legal and statutory definition is critical to the agencies charged with protecting children and young people, professionals charged with prosecuting perpetrators, and awareness raising with families, schools and the public.

‘Child sexual exploitation’ was first defined in 2009 in statutory guidance ‘Safeguarding Children from Child Sexual Exploitation’ (DCSF, 2009). This was the first official naming of this form of abuse, and was significant in the movement away from the ‘child prostitution’ discourse. The need for a specific definition implied recognition that CSE was distinct from previous understandings of child sexual abuse.

However, whilst this definition was widely accepted and utilised, it was not without strong criticism for being too longwinded, too broad, and not young person friendly (Children's Society, 2016). After a period of consultation in 2016 on the need to revise the 2009 definition, a new statutory definition was produced in February 2017:

> "Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of 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, 2017:4).

This definition begins by naming CSE as "a form of child sexual abuse" against persons under the age of 18 years (DfE, 2017:4), explicitly moving the discourse away from the victim-blaming discourse of 'child prostitution', and emphasising the role of an individual or group 'taking advantage' of a power imbalance. However, the idea that CSE is a form of child abuse is a contentious notion for some, for example "*No, it's not a* ***type*** *of abuse. It* ***is*** *abuse*" (Florence, professional participant, CSE worker). The use of the word 'power' is crucial and recognises the fundamental dynamic of CSE, but the phrase 'taking advantage' is weak and does not fully represent the often violent or cruel reality of the power imbalance between a perpetrator and victim. A notable omission from the definition is the word 'grooming', an extremely common feature of CSE. According to the statutory response to the consultation, this is because although "grooming can be a precursor to child sexual exploitation it does not define the act itself" (HM Government, 2016:6). However, I argue its inclusion, in conjunction with other tools used by abusers to gain and maintain control over their victims, such as 'coercion, manipulation or deception', would elevate the more nuanced aspects of CSE, such as why some young people *appear* to comply with the abuser's wishes, and could help improve some prevention work The definition also differentiates between two types of perpetration, direct and facilitative, which recognises the wide variance in how these crimes can be carried out.

The definition recognises the element of 'exchange' between the victim and perpetrator(s), whereby the victim often receives something in return for their involvement. In my view, the wording of this underplays the significance of a child or young person's vulnerability in the lead up to and at the moment of what presents as an 'exchange'. It is the exploitation of this vulnerability which is at the heart of CSE, and it is discussed later in this chapter. Exchange could be (and has been) characterised as 'payment', thereby implicitly suggesting that the relationship involves some form of reciprocity and consent (Pearce, 2006, 2013; Jay, 2014). It is this aspect of CSE discourse that has contributed to the misconceived view that children were somehow consenting to and, at least partially, responsible for their abuse and victimisation (see Chapter 4 for in-depth discussion). It also justified the term 'child prostitution' which has underpinned the narrative of CSE historically.

However, in order to gain a wider and deeper understanding of CSE, and the (constrained) decision making of sexually exploited young people, the complex issues of exchange, agency, victimhood and consent need to be examined. This is not with a view to taking a step backwards and re-positioning blame on young people, but to gaining a deeper, more nuanced understanding. These issues will be explored further in Chapter 6 because they have been, and still are, intrinsic facets of CSE that have confused, silenced and (mis)informed some agency responses (Coffey, 2017; Dodsworth, 2014a; Jay, 2014).

Consent is a contentious and confusing issue within CSE (Coy et al., 2013; Pearce, 2013) and is discussed further in Chapter 6. The original proposed definition by the government in 2016 tackled the issue head on: "Consent is irrelevant" (HM Government, 2016:7); but this message has been diluted in the new definition, which states that even if some "sexual activity appears consensual" it may be sexual exploitation (DfE, 2017:4). I firmly believe that if, as a society, we are saying that CSE *is* a form of child sexual abuse (as the statutory definition states), then the issue of consent must be irrelevant in line with the view that children “cannot consent to their own abuse” (Swann, 2000:277), and this should be included in the definition in terms such as: “sexual activity appears consensual *however, consent is irrelevant*”. This is hugely important because what literature and the participants’ narratives show is that an inclusion of the issue of consent simply creates confusion (among young people, parents and professionals), and can somehow almost legitimate the abuse (Barry, 1979; Coy et al., 2013; Pearce, 2013; Swann, 2000).

Whether a sexually exploited young person ‘consented’ to the abuse because they accepted a mobile phone, money or affection should not be a debate that professionals have if the starting point is that a sexually exploited child/young person cannot consent to their abuse. Being explicit and clear about this in the definition of CSE is a good start. Thus, there remain gaps and weaknesses in the statutory definition, illustrated by the way the College of Policing extends and clarifies the DfE definition for their own purposes. It includes some of the more nuanced aspects of CSE: “violence, coercion and intimidation are common”; “a young person’s limited availability of choice”; “young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship” (College of Policing, 2017).

In contrast to the statutory definition, the Crown Prosecution Service does not specifically define CSE. Instead, it locates CSE very clearly under the umbrella of child sexual abuse, offering prosecutorial guidance on “the range of child sexual abuse, including the abuse characterised as ‘child sexual exploitation’” (CPS, 2013:2). This is because CSE itself is not an offence, but a culmination of other offences against children such as grooming, online abuse and gang/group rape, or controlling and coercive behaviour (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). When a case reaches the CPS, a prosecutor’s role is to identify the range of offences, evaluate the strength of evidence and make a charging decision. Thus, a distinct definition of CSE is not necessary, only an understanding of what can constitute it, and guidance has been produced for this (CPS, 2013). A key debate is whether CSE should be created, in law, as a separate and specific offence (see Barnardo’s, 2014). One view is that this would increase understanding and awareness of CSE whilst emphasising how seriously it should be taken by all agencies involved. The opposing view is that making these changes would be highly problematic due to the dynamic nature of CSE, and the very fact that it is comprised of many other offences which carry serious sentences (Barnardo's, 2014).

A problem with the CPS approach is that CSE cases go unidentified, as only prosecutions for sexual offences against children under the category of child abuse are recorded (CPS, 2017a). A further concern is the potential impact it may have on prosecutors' understanding of the complexities of CSE if they are not consistently elevated and made explicit. Burrowes (2013) was commissioned by the CPS to research the challenge of rape myths in Court, and highlights the prevalence of myths that exist not only in wider society but also in legal settings. The fact that the report was commissioned by the CPS to "help those who prosecute rape cases to recognise and deal effectively with rape myths in court" (Burrowes, 2013:1) speaks to the persistent harm and power such myths and harmful stereotypes hold. Burrowes' work is relevant to CSE not only because rape is a central crime, but also because it highlights the CPS's recognition of the need to keep the profile of such issues elevated in order to attain good practice and prevent complacency.

Thus, the statutory definition (DfE, 2017) has ring-fenced CSE as a distinct and complex form of child abuse. There are weaknesses within this definition but it serves the purpose of elevating its status as a social and criminal problem. On the other hand, the CPS does not require a specific definition of CSE and so positions it as a form of child sexual abuse. The contradiction between the government's and the CPS's stance is notable, and only adds to this debate.

Participants' understandings and views on definitions of CSE

All the participants self-selected to take part in a piece of research investigating experiences of child sexual exploitation. Therefore, all of them believe they have specific experience of CSE: as a parent whose child has been sexually exploited, as a survivor, or as a professional. However, despite there being a statutory definition of CSE, professional participants in particular had different views, not only on how to define CSE, and whether a separate definition was actually required, but also about the term child sexual exploitation itself. There were also many discrepancies in subjective understandings of what CSE is and means, particularly from the survivor and parent participants. Although they all opted to take part in research about CSE, their narratives reveal very different understandings of the term.

Professionals’ views

In terms of definitions of CSE, the professionals tended to focus on the statutory definition. Some professionals found the definition “*very difficult*” (Florence, CSE worker) because they felt that CSE is simply child (predominantly sexual) abuse, and labelling it as a ‘type’ of child abuse diminishes it; for example, “*the concept that sexual exploitation isn’t sexual abuse is mythical, just farcical really.*” (Amelia, police officer). Some went on to question the need for a separate definition as, “*what’s the difference between sexual exploitation and sexual abuse?*” (Charlotte, police officer), a question Charlotte grapples with “*on a daily basis*”. This very question poses a challenge to defining when CSA becomes CSE because it is “critical for measurement” (Kelly & Karsna, 2017:5) of both crimes, and thus problematic for knowing the scale and prevalence of CSE.

The other side of this debate is that there *is* a need for the *distinction between* CSA and CSE because they require different responses and resources. This is because CSE, despite similarities with CSA, has some elements which are quite distinctive to more ‘traditional’ understandings of child sexual abuse. For example that the abuse often takes place outside the home, or that parents are very often unaware of, or uninvolved in, the abuse. Furthermore, failure to name and understand CSE as a particular form of child abuse meant many victims have been unseen (Jay, 2014).

Some participants expressed concern with the term itself, describing it as “*not understood very well by a lot of people*” (Libby, CSE worker); as being “*a bit of a label*” (Maya, CSE worker), leading one worker to state that she tends “*to avoid using* [it] *throughout my intervention*” with young people. A further issue, identified by a survivor participant, was that the ‘child’ part of the term was inappropriate as victims are mostly teenagers when the exploitation and abuse began (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). Leah explains:

> “I honestly don’t feel like I was a child (…) I was fifteen (…) when you think about child [sexual] exploitation, you think about small children, seven, eight, nine, ten.”

This highlights an important point consistently shown in research which is that teenagers, as opposed to young children, are at most risk of CSE (CEOP; 2011; Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012). The inclusion of the word child is a misnomer, illustrating the disparity between the legal, objective meaning of the word (anyone under 18 years) and perhaps more powerfully, subjective understandings of the word and a young person’s sense of identity. The labels of ‘child’ and ‘adolescent or young person’ represent two very different culturally recognised identities. The life stage of adolescence is “qualitatively different from being a child” (Smette et al., 2009:355) and a stage that is also recognised as associated with increased autonomy and agency (see Chapter 6). Rind (2004) posits that adolescents have more in common, biologically and cognitively, with adults than with children, which speaks to the agency and increased autonomy that adolescents have in comparison to children. For example, entering ‘adult’ sites such as nightclubs and adult parties, staying out in the evenings without parental supervision, or consuming alcohol and/or drugs are activities that are less likely to go unnoticed with younger children. The Association for Young People’s Health (AYPH) (2013:2) recognises adolescence as “a critical life stage. It is different from [but shaped by] the childhood that comes before it and has important repercussions for the adulthood that follows.” The AYPH recognises that adolescents have specific needs requiring “particular support and special services” (Ibid., 2). It may be that specifically calling this type of abuse ‘Adolescent Sexual Exploitation’ would be a more accurate term. It encapsulates the most common age range of the most likely victims; the agency and autonomy that adolescents have in comparison to younger children; and common understanding of the teenage years as beginning at 13 years, which corresponds to the law regarding children under 13 years and sexual activity (Sexual Offences Act, 2003).

Survivors’ and parents’ understandings

In contrast to the professionals, the survivor and parent participants did not really discuss the statutory definition unless asked directly. What was very interesting about these participants was the range of experiences they presented as their experience of CSE (see Chapters 6 & 8 for detail and analysis). Some were very clearly and easily labelled CSE, such as Fran, who experienced on-street grooming at the age of 15 and was violently forced into prostitution by a ‘pimp’. A few are more likely to be considered within the bounds of child sexual abuse, for instance Ann whose daughter was groomed and sexually abused by a teacher, while others fell somewhere between the two, like Leah, who was groomed, without sexual contact, for two years by a learning mentor at school, and unwillingly entered a sexual relationship with him aged 17 out of a sense of duty to repay him for his ‘support’. Thus the narratives, as a dataset, illustrate and capture significant differences in understandings of what CSE and CSA are, where they meet and where they separate. In terms of their inclusion in the research, whether or not the participants’ experiences fit the statutory definition of CSE was irrelevant. As a feminist informed piece of research, it was only relevant that the people themselves perceived their experiences as CSE.

Barriers to definitional consensus: differentiating between CSE and other forms of child abuse

From the review of the statutory and legal definitions, and an exploration of subjective understandings and views regarding CSE, it is clear that a significant barrier to gaining some definitional consensus stems from differentiating CSE from other forms of child abuse. It is my view that CSE is, first and foremost, child abuse, which incorporates sexual, physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. However, there are several features that distinguish it and extend it from child abuse into the category of CSE. Nonetheless, pinpointing and identifying these features in a consistent and standardised way is difficult because of the complexities of CSE, and the overlap and commonalities of other forms of child abuse, particularly sexual abuse. Diagram 1 below is based on a review of literature and the participants’ narratives. It aims to illustrate the overlap of common features, and begin a process of extricating CSE from CSA by identifying and separating some features of sexual abuse which are usually associated with either CSA *or* CSE. It is not suggesting that the features positioned in one sphere *only* belong there, but a recognition that they *generally* tend to, and neither does it aim to provide an exhaustive list.

Diagram 1: Identification and separation of some features which differentiate CSE from other forms of child sexual abuse.

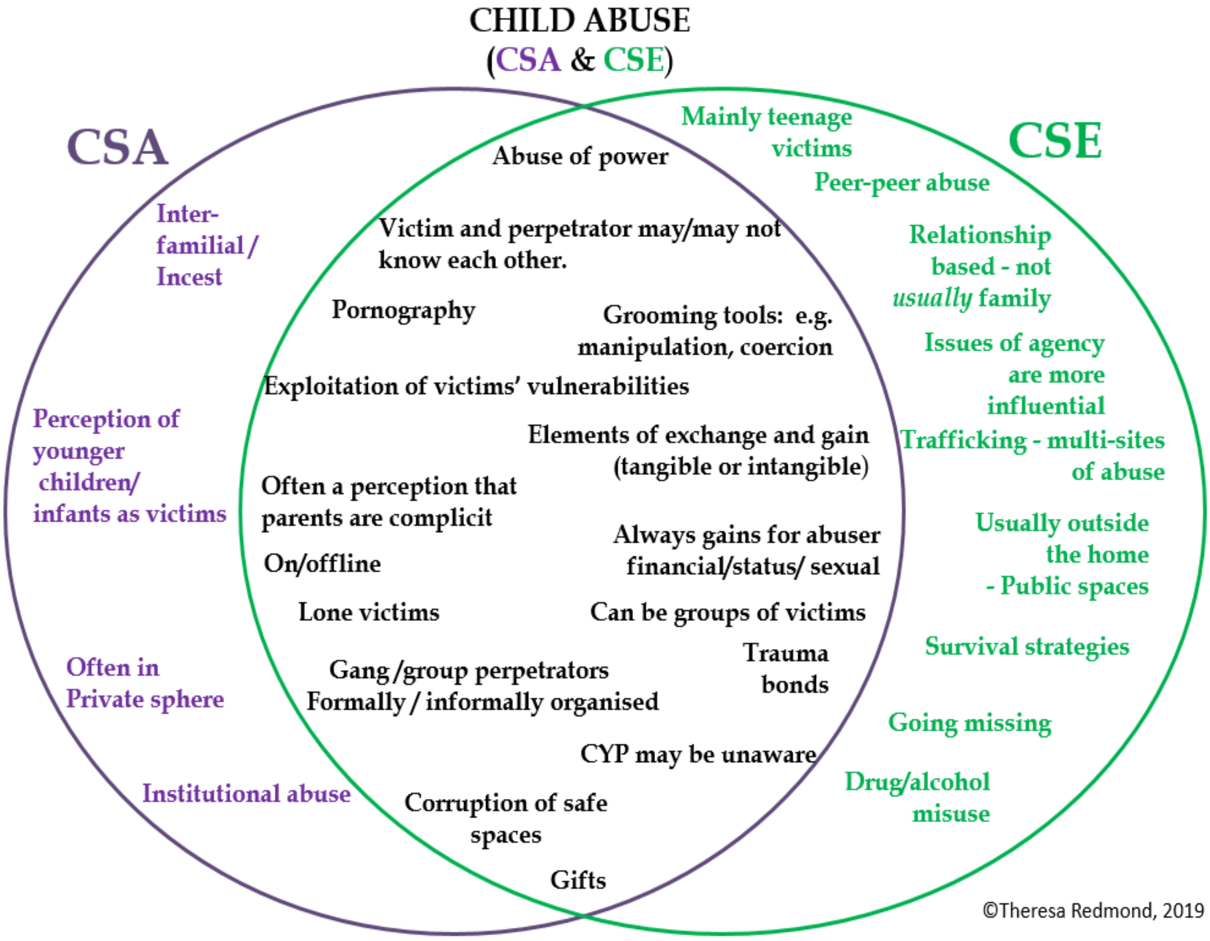
CHILD ABUSE
(CSA & CSE)
CSA
CSE
Inter-familial / Incest
Perception of younger children/ infants as victims
Often in Private sphere
Institutional abuse
Abuse of power
Victim and perpetrator may/may not know each other.
Pornography
Grooming tools: e.g. manipulation, coercion
Exploitation of victims' vulnerabilities
Elements of exchange and gain (tangible or intangible)
Often a perception that parents are complicit
Always gains for abuser financial/status/ sexual
On/offline
Lone victims
Can be groups of victims
Trauma bonds
Gang /group perpetrators Formally / informally organised
CYP may be unaware
Corruption of safe spaces
Gifts
Mainly teenage victims
Peer-peer abuse
Relationship based - not usually family
Issues of agency are more influential
Trafficking - multi-sites of abuse
Usually outside the home - Public spaces
Survival strategies
Going missing
Drug/alcohol misuse

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Diagram 1 illustrates several features that are very particular to CSE. I advocate for the age of the victims, who are predominantly teenagers and usually vulnerable in some way, to be given more emphasis, along with a combination of two or more features, for instance: going missing, trafficking and multiple sites of abuse being common; incapacitation using drugs and/or alcohol as a tool to increase compliance. These features could be utilised to assist in defining and differentiating CSE from other forms of child abuse.

The problem is that it is very difficult to identify just one feature that occurs in every case *and* that distinguishes it from other forms of child abuse. This is due to the slippery, multi-faceted nature of CSE, which makes achieving a standardised definition a significant challenge. Beckett et al. (2017), in guidance supporting and explaining the DfE (2017) statutory definition, attempt to address this issue. They state that:

“(1) The child/young person receives, or believes they will receive, something they need or want (tangible or intangible gain or the avoidance of harm) in exchange for the sexual activity AND/OR (2) The perpetrator/facilitator gains financial advantage or enhanced status from the abuse.” (Beckett et al., 2017:8).

The gains for a perpetrator/facilitator must be more than sexual gratification (if this was the only gain, the abuse would not be classed as CSE), they must also be financial and/or increased status.

Beckett et al. (2017:8) develop this by identifying and positioning ‘exchange’ as the “core dynamic” that differentiates CSE from other forms of abuse:

> “The key factor that distinguishes cases of child sexual exploitation from other forms of child sexual abuse is the **presence of some form of exchange** [their emphasis], for the victim and***/or*** [my emphasis] perpetrator or facilitator.” (Ibid.)

That the concept of exchange is important is not in any way under question here, neither is its significance in understanding CSE. However, I have concerns regarding its central position as the *key distinguishing* factor that extends CSE from CSA. This is mainly because the concept and term ‘exchange’ as the distinguishing feature does not hold up under scrutiny. Exchange means “to give up, part with or transfer one thing *for an equivalent* (my emphasis)” (Collins English Dictionary, 2000:537), thus denoting a *two-way* transaction. Beckett et al. (2017:8) highlight the notion of exchange (as understood as a two-way transaction) when both the young person and the perpetrator/facilitator gain something, and this is classed as CSE.

However, the positioning of exchange as the “core dynamic” (Beckett et al., 2017:8) becomes problematic because the authors also state that “where the gain **is only for** [their emphasis] the perpetrator/facilitator …” (Beckett et al., 2017:9) is also CSE. This implies, within the context of CSE, that it is possible for *only* perpetrators to gain something, which is *not* a two-way transaction. This contradicts the definition of the term ‘exchange’ and its use as the central concept, since the victim gains nothing. This situation is more akin to theft or extortion.

An analysis of the guidance reveals that the feature that actually appears to distinguish CSE from CSA is what the *perpetrator* gains in terms of financial gain, status or sexual gratification, more than the presence of exchange. A further reticence I have with exchange being positioned as the 'core dynamic' is that the transactions that commonly occur in CSE are often forced onto the victim, so at best it is an unwilling exchange. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that what the victim gains is of equivalent value to what they lost. Moreover, the term exchange does not account for situations where victims are given gifts (food, alcohol, phones etc.), often as part of the grooming process and *before* the abuse, but are then coerced and manipulated into 'paying' the abuser back for them. This is not an exchange. It is more akin to extortion as the result of the creation of an imposed 'debt'. Thus I argue that the term 'extortion' is a much more appropriate description of the dynamic interactions that commonly occur in CSE.

Returning to the question of whether, and how, we can differentiate between CSE and other forms of child abuse, the answer is simultaneously unsatisfying and frustrating. There is no way to achieve a standardised answer because CSE is not a standardised set of crimes. It can comprise several different forms of abuse and several types of criminal act in a myriad of combinations, all of which can constitute child sexual exploitation. These issues hinder achieving one clear, consistent and agreed understanding and definition of CSE.

Part 2: what is known about CSE?

Since 2000 there has been a significant increase in research into and literature about CSE, developing our knowledge base and understanding of its characteristics. In this section I review the key characteristics of CSE in order to provide a comprehensive overview of what is known, understood and still to find out about it in England. I give a discussion of the key issues around the scale and prevalence of CSE, highlight known characteristics of victims, and identify issues in particular around age, consent and gender.

The scale and prevalence of CSE in England

This is unknown (CEOP, 2013), and a central concern in much of the literature is the flawed data collection systems employed by many frontline agencies on national and local levels (CEOP, 2011; Jago et al., 2011; OCC, 2012). Issues of ‘underreporting’ and ‘inconsistent recording’ are considered “likely” (HMIC, 2015:9), and relate directly to how CSE is defined and categorised (Kelly & Karsna, 2017). A report from the OCC (2012) highlights the problems caused by the different definitions and recordings utilised by different agencies that relate to groups or gangs. For instance, CSE committed by a gang may well be recorded as a gang crime as opposed to a CSE related crime, thus skewing the figures regarding its scale and prevalence, as well as inhibiting an effective and appropriate response. Some reports have made estimates (Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012) and there are snapshots of information for some areas and projects (Barnardo’s, 2014; CEOP, 2011; Coffey, 2014; NCA, 2015). Flawed data collection appears to continue despite DCSF (2009) guidance that Local Children Safeguarding Boards (LCSBs) should establish recording systems to monitor and measure CSE and responses in their area, something which appears to be happening in only one third of LCSBs nationally (Pearce, 2014). The main impact of this sporadic data collection is that reports and research drawing on the data can only present an incomplete and often contradictory picture.

Key features of CSE as it is currently understood

CSE includes sexual, physical, psychological, emotional and financial abuse against male and female children and young people. Common types of sexual assault reported are oral, vaginal and anal rapes (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). Other forms of abuse involve the young people, predominantly girls, being prostituted, beaten, burnt with cigarettes; forced sexual role-play; insertion of objects into the vagina; and web-cam recorded sexual activity (Gohir, 2013). Perpetrators are often skilled at controlling their victims by threatening their families (Jay, 2014), or as part of the grooming stage, persuading them to share sexual images of themselves via social media or mobile phones, which are then used to blackmail and coerce the victim into further sexual activity (OCC, 2012). Peer-on-peer exploitation, which is reportedly on the increase (Barnardo’s, 2012; Pearce, 2014), presents complex questions regarding responses to children and young people who are both victims and perpetrators of abuse, and highlights the difficulties in distinguishing whether such involvement is direct or indirect, voluntary and/or as a result of coercion (Barnardo’s, 2012; Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012; Pearce, 2014; Stacey, 2009).

That there is no one model of how CSE is perpetrated is mainly due to the multidimensional nature of the crime, and the different contexts, such as on and offline, in which it can occur. However, the broadly titled ‘boyfriend model’ operates as a working model for many frontline services (Stacey, 2009). Research suggests that abuse often takes place within the context of a ‘relationship’, at least from the perspective of the victim, between the victim and the abuser (CEOP, 2011; Harper & Scott, 2005; Munro, 2004; Stacey, 2009). Another common manifestation of CSE is known as the ‘party model’ whereby young people are enticed into parties at adult clubs, hotels, squats and ‘chill houses’ (CEOP, 2011). Abusers use grooming techniques, alcohol and drugs, manipulation and/or coercion to ultimately sexually exploit the young people. Utilisation of this model taps into young people’s curiosity about entering the ‘adult world’ and experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Often the perpetrators are, at least initially, perceived as friends, enabling them to manipulate this curiosity.

More recently, the National Crime Agency (NCA, 2017) has identified County Lines groups as an aspect of criminality that can include CSE, essentially extending its parameters and complexity. This refers to groups (who may or may not be part of larger criminal gangs) who have “developed networks across geographical boundaries to access and exploit existing drugs markets” (NCA, 2017:6-7). Children and young people are exploited and trafficked to transport, store or supply Class A drugs across county boundaries. The NCA reports that boys between the ages of 15 and 17 are most commonly recruited and CSE is becoming recognised as “a significant risk factor associated to county lines” (see NCA, 2017:16).

Grooming

Grooming is a key feature of CSE and a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act (2003). Grooming may involve befriending, gaining trust, encouraging drug and alcohol misuse, giving gifts, attention and flattery, desensitisation using pornography, and eventually manipulating and/or coercing young people to perform sexual acts. Much of the literature already discussed tends to consider sex grooming as an interaction between perpetrators and victims and as a gradual, often intense interpersonal process.

From the survivors' data, I have identified two types of grooming which I call 'cultural sex grooming' and 'interpersonal sex grooming' (see Chapter 6 for in-depth discussion and analysis). Interpersonal (one-to-one) grooming, is direct and refers to the type of sex grooming perceived as synonymous with sexual abuse and exploitation. However, I assert that CSE does not exist within a vacuum; it is a direct product of its socio-cultural context, and cultural sex grooming is an insidious form of sex grooming that directly facilitates interpersonal sex grooming. It has become a "normative process of gendering" (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014:5) that subliminally primes young people, particularly those already vulnerable, by distorting their perceptions and understandings of what love is, and what they have to do and look like to get it. A significant component of cultural grooming is the increasing sexualisation of children and young people, and young girls in particular (Gill, 2007; Papadopoulus, 2010). In Chapter 6 I will focus specifically on the female survivors' experiences of being culturally and interpersonally groomed.

Going missing

Going missing is recognised as a significant risk factor for CSE (Barnardo's, 2011; OCC, 2012; Scott & Skidmore, 2006), and Sharp (2012:12) identifies sexual exploitation as both a "cause and a consequence" of going missing. Young people can be missing for days and research suggests that this is often as a result of being trafficked to another location (Barnardo's, 2011). There is also a correlation between children going missing from residential care and an increased risk of CSE (Sharp, 2012). Rees and Lee (2005) report that children in care are three times more likely to go missing than children living at home, despite the fact that most victims live with their parents/families when the exploitation begins (PACE, 2014b). This offers some explanation of why there is a disproportionate number of 'looked after' children reported as victims.

Location

Location, and the corruption of safe spaces, is an important feature of CSE. It is also a characteristic that can differentiate CSE from other types of CSA. Young people are often approached in public spaces, such as shopping centres and parks, in urban and rural areas (CEOP, 2011). To this end there has been a move towards targeting such locations in order to raise awareness and to disrupt CSE

(D'Arcy & Thomas, 2016; HMIC, 2015). Victims have reported that they have been approached and harassed by older men outside their school gates and on their way home (CEOP, 2011; Coffey, 2014; Jay, 2014), which means that staff and parents should also be made aware of CSE specifically.

Trafficking

Trafficking is a core component of sexual exploitation. Moving victims creates disorientation, increases dependency and becomes an effective way to control and coerce them into forced sexual activity. Trafficking of children for sexual exploitation is addressed under Sections 57-59a of the Sexual Offences Act (2003), and more recently in the Modern Slavery Act (2015, sch.1), whose purpose is to prevent crimes that involve trafficking and forced labour, including sexual exploitation and forced prostitution. Perpetrators are known to take victims to hotels and private houses for 'parties', whereby victims may be assaulted by several men (Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012). Victims have reported being picked up by a taxi and taken to different cities (OCC, 2012), and there are cases of CSE which have implicated taxi firms, with taxis as a site of the abuse to move victims across locations (Jay, 2014). This aspect of organised internal trafficking of children for sexual exploitation is becoming increasingly recognised. Barnardo's (2012) report that 1 in 4 victims had been trafficked for sex, and Brayley and Cockbain (2014) assert that internal trafficking has been neglected, with most attention being focused on international trafficking. They argue that there has been a lack of recognition that British children can be trafficked. Pearce (2011) offers some insight into the reasons and raises concerns regarding the variance in some professionals' understandings of the meanings of 'trafficking' and 'internal trafficking'. What is clear is that "the trafficking of children was invariably equated with the sexual exploitation of young women." (Pearce, 2011:1426).

Characteristics of sexually exploited young people

> "Child sexual exploitation knows no boundaries. Any child, regardless of where they live, their cultural, ethnic and religious background, their sexuality or gender identity, can become a victim of this horrific crime" (Fox, 2016:2).

Evidence from the Barnardo’s ‘It’s not on the radar’ report (Fox, 2016) clearly illustrates that sexually exploited young people are from diverse backgrounds. This challenges the common perceptions and stereotypes that present white, working-class, heterosexual girls as the most common type of victim. Fox (2016) argues that holding onto, and not challenging, these stereotypes “prevent[s] the identification of other children who do not fit into this stereotype” (Fox, 2016:5), thus impairing the safeguarding of all children and young people at risk.

Fox’s report discussed above highlights issues and concerns regarding some young people who may be overlooked when it comes to sexual exploitation. For example, children and young people with learning and/or physical disabilities are “three times more likely to be abused” (Fox, 2016:7) than those without. Stereotypes about ‘over-protected’ children, such as those from conservative faith backgrounds and children with a disability, are often presumed as low-risk, when in actual fact this stereotyping can increase their vulnerability. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people may also be overlooked by professionals or reluctant to disclose abuse as a result of prejudice regarding their sexual identity (Fox, 2016). Thus, it is important that responding agencies are trained in issues relating to the diversity of potential victims, and that professionals are also aware of their own prejudices and assumptions.

Gender, age and ethnicity

The OCC report (2012) finds that any child or young person can be sexually exploited: male, female and trans, from any ethnicity, sexual orientation, and with or without disabilities. While the exact numbers of sexually exploited boys and girls remains unknown, much more emphasis in the research, literature and media has been placed on female victims, and the hidden nature of sexual exploitation of boys and young men must be acknowledged (see Brown & Barrett, 2002; Lillywhite & Skidmore, 2006). A Barnardo’s infographic (Barnardo’s, 2018) states that 66% of its service users are female and 33% are male, a finding reflected in other literature (CEOP, 2011; Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012; Brayley et al., 2014b).

According to Lillywhite and Skidmore (2006), boys and young men are less likely to disclose abuse due to stigma and a fear that professionals may not believe them. Brayley et al. (2014a) highlight professionals’ gendered perceptions of male victims, and some professionals may perceive boys and young men as facing different barriers to disclosing CSE. Normative perceptions of hegemonic masculinity and gendered assumptions that boys should be able to protect themselves, and as having different, gendered support needs, can influence responses (Fox, 2016). Male victimisation may also be overlooked by practitioners, who may focus on the male victims' behaviour, which may be criminal and/or involve substance abuse, but fail to focus on the reasons behind that behaviour (Brayley et al., 2014a). One identified route into CSE for males is the exploration of sexual identity, which is often hampered by homophobia, issues of access to safe spaces and a lack of openness and role-models (McNaughton Nicholls et al., 2014). As a result, behaviour that may be more readily identified as risk factors for young girls is not so readily identified as such for male victims (Fox, 2016).

Nonetheless, CSE is largely a "disproportionately gendered" crime, (HM Government, 2016:5) predominantly perpetrated by men against girls and young women (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). CEOP (2011) finds that the majority of reporting victims are female. Grubin (1998) found that 60-70% of sex offenders target girls, approximately 20-33% target only boys and the remainder, around 10%, target children of either sex.

Children most commonly come to the attention of agencies aged 14-15, though children as young as 10 are known to have been victims (Barnardo's, 2011; CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). This information does not tell us, however, when the abuse started. Abuse can also last for long periods of time, and for many young people it can extend from early to late adolescence (Barnardo's, 2011). Barnardo's suggest that on average boys are 13.9 years old and girls are 14.6 years old when they come to the attention of some services (Barnardo's, 2018).

Data regarding ethnicity of victims is contradictory and problematic. CEOP (2011:44) reports that ethnicity data "was often recorded to a particularly poor standard at point of capture" and that data regarding ethnicity and nationality was often "conflated" (CEOP, 2011:44). The patchy recording of ethnicity is illustrated by the contradictory findings of the OCC (2012) and CEOP (2011) reports which show that victims come from a narrow range of ethnicities: White (61%), Asian (3%), and Black (1%). In both reports, White children were the largest groups of victims. In contrast to the CEOP report, the OCC reports a higher rate of victimisation among black and minority ethnic (BME) groups: 28%, combining two potentially very culturally different groups, compared to the CEOP report of a combined 4% BME victims.

One factor that may perpetuate the perception of CSE as being carried out predominantly against White girls is that BME victims may under-report due to stigma and taboo within their communities (Gohir, 2013; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2013). Jay (2014) reports that ethnicity of both offenders and victims was largely overlooked and ignored in Rotherham for fear of being perceived as racist or creating racial tension. Research by the UK Muslim Women's Network (Gohir, 2013) reports that Asian girls being sexually exploited were not identified by authorities and highlights that they were vulnerable within their own communities as a result of offenders' manipulation of cultural norms, preventing reporting of their abuse.

Concluding comments

The purpose of this chapter was threefold: to unpick some of the key issues, debates and barriers that inhibit a consistent understanding of the term CSE; explore how we can differentiate CSE from other forms of child abuse; and establish what is currently known about CSE. What I have shown is that these three issues are interlinked; for instance, definitional issues impact on what we know about CSE, and how we understand and define CSE influences how we differentiate it from other forms of child abuse.

There is a need for an accurate definition of CSE because definitions of social problems enable identification, act as thresholds and allow for its recording (Beckett et al., 2017; CEOP, 2011). Furthermore, how an issue is named has a direct impact on individual experience (see Chapter 4). The current definition has been provided by the government (DfE, 2017), but it is not consistent with legal definitions of CSE. Additionally, my review of the literature and of the participants' narratives shows that there are discrepancies between objective definitions, such as the Government's or the CPS's, and subjective understandings of CSE as evidenced by the participants' views.

This illustrates the challenges in achieving a definitional consensus (Kelly et al., 2017) because CSE is complex. For example, CSE is not classed as an offence in itself but is comprised of many different offences, and what specifically constitutes CSE is fluid. Some of the language and concepts used in discourse are ambiguous, such as exchange and consent. I argue that continuing to include the term consent in CSE discourse creates confusion and can contribute to victim-blaming. The inclusion of the word ‘child’ only really refers to the legal definition of a child as someone under the age of 18 years and does not speak to subjective understandings and interpretations of the concept, particularly by teenagers, who are the most likely group to be sexually exploited. I have suggested the term Adolescent Sexual Exploitation as being more accurate because it acknowledges the relevance of age in CSE, and accounts for the differences in the agency and freedoms of teenagers in comparison to younger children.

The other related key issue pertains to differentiating CSE from child abuse and Beckett et al. (2017:8) argue that exchange is the “core dynamic” that distinguishes CSE from CSA. I have questioned the centrality of exchange as the one key, distinguishing feature in CSE, suggesting that CSE is too multi-faceted to be identified by a single feature. Instead, I propose that the age of the victims as teenagers should be given more emphasis, along with a combination of two or more features such as going missing, trafficking, multiple sites of abuse and incapacitation using drugs/alcohol. I have also questioned the term ‘exchange’, suggesting instead that ‘extortion’ is a more accurate term to describe the processes and interactions that often take place between a sexually exploited young person and perpetrator.

Our knowledge and understanding of CSE has improved over the last twenty years. We are able to identify key features such as grooming, going missing and trafficking, and have a better understanding of the vulnerability of victims and their potential characteristics regarding gender, age and ethnicity (CEOP, 2011; Fox, 2016). However, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge, particularly in terms of the scale and prevalence of CSE. Definitional inconsistencies within and between different agencies and flawed data collection systems remain problematic. These gaps in our knowledge not only inhibit our comprehensive understanding of the issues, but also preventative and protection work. Thus, our current knowledge and understanding of CSE is still under construction and this links to structural narrative constructions of child abuse and sexual exploitation, which are examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Narrative constructions of child sexual abuse - a shift from 'child prostitution' to child sexual exploitation

This chapter develops the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 2 and examines the dominant narratives surrounding child sexual abuse (CSA). It also highlights the power narratives can have on influencing perceptions of CSE and how that can impact directly on personal experiences (Czarniawska, 2004). Narratives exist on both macro and micro levels and are the windows to the soul of any society: they reveal who we are, our beliefs and our values. Colyar and Holley (2014) describe narratives as both a product *and* a process which are "inextricably linked" (Colyar & Holley, 2014:72), highlighting an evolutionary process of emergence and development.

Here I explore both the products (the narratives themselves) and the process (how they 'came to be') of the changing narratives of CSA in two main sections: Part 1 – 'Narratives as products,' which identifies and examines three dominant narratives that have emerged since the late 1970s/early 1980s: Child Sexual Abuse; 'Child Prostitution'; and Child Sexual Exploitation, and Part 2 – 'Narratives as process', which offers a discussion of what processes cause and contribute to a narrative shift, whereby one narrative surpasses another and becomes dominant.

It is important to note that when it comes to examining dominant narratives, parents tend to be either positioned as potential or suspected abusers, in need of an assessment of their parenting capacity, or overlooked (HM Government, 2015; 2018; Scott & Skidmore, 2006). Thus, a lack of direct discussion regarding parents in the narratives is not an omission on my part, but a reflection of the space they occupy in discourse, narrative and practice. There will be a thorough discussion of parents' narratives in Chapters 7 and 8.

Narrative theory as the theoretical framework

Discourse and narrative share a synergetic relationship, each creating and shaping the other. Language and labels feed into discourse and narratives but these are not neutral. Language is a doorway into the mind of the speaker, writer or society, reflecting values, beliefs, morals, intentions and sites of power which create and perpetuate knowledge, or a widely perceived ‘truth’ (Foucault, 1972).

Czarniawska (2004:3) highlights the link between how narratives shape experience, arguing that “enacted narrative [is] a basic form of social life”. Similarly, Thompson (1984, cited in Steinmetz, 1992:495) develops the idea of the connection between narrative and experience by including the relationship between narrative and ideology, arguing that ideologies take a narrative form and thus impact on experience. Furthermore, Gavin (2005) suggests that a dominant narrative can also be reinforced by other dominant ideologies, highlighting the relationship between narrative, ideology and experience. For example, Jenks (1996) discusses ideologies regarding societal views of children which co-exist in a paradoxical manner: the child as in need of social control, whereby children enter the world with a predisposition towards evil; and the child in need of protection, whereby children are seen as innocent. These two opposing views of children are present in narratives and discourse surrounding young people who have been sexually exploited (CEOP, 2011; Goddard et al., 2005; Jay, 2014). Thus, dominant ideologies and narratives intersect and, in the case of CSE, have directly impacted on the experiences of the people involved (Bates, 2014; CEOP, 2011; Cockbain, 2013; Jay, 2014; OCC; 2012). For example, sexually exploited young people have been criminalised (as in need of social control) and more recently, responded to as victims (in need of protection). Therefore, observing and challenging not only the content of narratives, but the ideologies, assumptions, prejudices and values behind them is important because it reveals something about the society which created them. This can be a positive affirmation or, in the case of CSE, a negative indictment.

Narratives are fluid, thriving on “what is ‘normal’, usual, and expected, and the ‘abnormal’, unusual, and unexpected” (Czarniawska, 2004:9), in any given time and place. Optimistically, this means narratives can shift and are changeable, thus our social constructs can be re-constructed. Over the last ten years or so, CSE has seeped into the collective consciousness of the public and of powerful agencies such as media and the government, leading to a new CSE narrative forming and emerging. Narratives are essentially a meaning-making tool and CSE, once thrust into the known, has to be made sense of.

Part 1: Narratives as products: child abuse - a changing story

I have identified three dominant child abuse narratives which have evolved since the late 1970s/early 1980s. Each one represents a narrative shift and tells a story of how child abuse has been perceived, responded to and consequently experienced in England:

1. ‘Child sexual abuse’ (CSA), characterised by a focus on ‘stranger danger’, then a shift to familial danger, in the 1970s and 1980s.
2. ‘Child prostitution’, characterised by victim-blaming and minimising, dominant in the 1980s until around 2009.
3. ‘Child sexual exploitation’ (CSE), a complex form of CSA characterised by a victim-centred narrative, which has been emerging from around 2009 until the present day.

These narrative shifts do not have clear and neat beginnings and endings. They are ragged, incrementally changing with different speeds and force, in different sites at different times. It is also important to note that the processes, characteristics and activities involved in ‘child prostitution’ and ‘child sexual exploitation’ are the same. It is simply the naming that has changed.

Stranger danger versus familial danger: ‘Child sexual abuse’ 1970s and 1980s

The 1970s saw an increased acknowledgement of child abuse as a serious crime (Brown & Barrett, 2002; Grubin, 1998) and two competing dominant narratives began to emerge: ‘stranger danger’ and then ‘familial danger’. The dominant narrative throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s focused on the discourse of ‘stranger danger’ as the main threat towards children. This narrative was further perpetuated by a series of national safety campaigns, for example the ‘Charley says…’ campaign (Horney, 2008) in the 1970s & early 1980s which specifically targeted children and parents about ‘stranger danger’[3]. The abduction and murder of four young girls by Robert Black in the 1980s further exacerbated this narrative (Canter, 2003). Child abuse was presented as something that stereotypically occurred outside the home, by a single male stranger lurking in public spaces waiting to approach and molest a lone child. These contributed to the formation and emergence of this dominant narrative regarding CSA.

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[3] The ‘Charley says…’ safety campaign was a series of animated adverts produced by the government in the 1970s and 1980s to address safety issues for children.

Although research findings suggested that abusers known to the victim were the most likely perpetrators (Russell, 1983; Radford et al., 2011), it took extreme and high profile cases of familial child abuse to begin to establish a counter-narrative highlighting the existence and danger of familial abuse. There was an increasing number of child deaths as a result of serious abuse at the hands of family members[4] (Jones, 2014; Laming, 2003; Timmins, 1994). The Cleveland sexual abuse scandal (1987 to 1988), which resulted in 121 children being removed from their families under safety orders, also had “a huge impact on public thinking about sexual abuse” (Kitzinger, 2004:56). This was because the “reality of child sexual abuse within the family” was catapulted into the public consciousness (Lovett et al., 2018:36) and the once dominant narrative of ‘stranger danger’ declined, gradually replaced by the perception that ‘familial danger’ was, in reality, a greater threat. There was therefore a subsequent shift in the narrative and discourse surrounding CSA, which began to focus on abuse within the family (HM Government, 2015, 2018; Lovett et al., 2018).

The government was motivated into introducing more legislation to protect children[5], with the Children Act 1989 being the most extensive, representing “a major reconfiguration of relationships between children, their families and the state” (Kirton, 2009:10). The Act introduced the concept of parental responsibility, gave safeguarding powers to statutory services to meet the needs of children, and positioned the welfare of the child as paramount (Kirton, 2009). This meant that parental responsibility for the child became “shared between parents and the state” (Kirton, 2009:10) and the state can intervene if it is believed that the parents are struggling or failing to fulfil their responsibility. Under the Children Act 1989, children may be categorised as ‘child in need’, which means they are recognised as needing some type of additional support (Children Act, 1989, s.17), or they can be recognised as at risk of suffering significant harm and be subject to a ‘child protection plan’ (Children Act, 1989, s.47). In both cases the state has a duty to intervene in order to support the child and promote “family preservation” (Kirton, 2009:10). All intervention, whatever form it takes, “begins with some form of assessment” (Ibid.,10) of the child’s needs and the parents’ capacity to meet them. However, assessing parental capacity, an intrinsic aspect of child protection and safeguarding (HM Government, 2015), can be a marginalising experience for non-abusive parents whose child is being sexually exploited. This is certainly the case for the parent participants.

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[4] Maria Colwell (died 1974), Tyra Henry (died 1984), Victoria Climbie (died 2000) and Baby P (died 2007), all died as a result of severe abuse at the hands of a parent or step-parent.

[5] For example, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Children Act 2004.

Finally, it must be noted that the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people through prostitution, by ‘friends’ and/or by boyfriends was unrecognised on a statutory level at this time. When it was recognised, it was mis-named as ‘child prostitution’.

‘Child Prostitution’: child abuse hidden under a different name

> “The young women concerned were often seen by the Police as being deviant or promiscuous. The adult men with whom they had been found were not questioned.” (Jay, 2014:85, reporting on the response to CSE by agencies in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013).

The narrative of ‘child prostitution’ started to be recognised as a form of abuse around the late 1980s. This is not to suggest that this form of child abuse was new but rather one that had gone largely ignored by the public and policy makers. The term ‘child prostitute’ is an oxymoron; “a euphemism for child sexual abuse” (Brown & Barrett, 2002:.6), and its discourse prioritises the status of ‘prostitute’ above the status of child. Goddard et al., (2005:275) criticise the term as being “the rapist’s camouflage” and for implying that this mis-naming of child sexual abuse “is a form of [child] labour” (Goddard et al., 2005:280). This label made the abused child invisible.

Around this time, research also contributed to this emerging narrative using, and perpetuating, the term ‘child prostitution’. Wild’s (1989) research described prostitution rings and the description of what, how and where the abuse occurred is exactly what would be called child sexual exploitation today. Wild and Wynne’s (1986) research into 11 child sex rings in Leeds also refers to the ‘prostitution of children’ as opposed to ‘sexual exploitation of children’. This is not a criticism of the use of this term in the research, but the research provides evidence that CSE has existed and been recognised under a different name for many years.

The media at the time were also enacting the narrative of 'child prostitution' in their discourse, for example headlines such as, "Pregnant girl, 12, names five lovers" (Loudon, 1999). The simple use of the word 'lovers', places the onus on the child and implies her consent and promiscuity. It denies her status as a 12 year old child, unable to legally consent to sexual intercourse, and the fact that she was raped by five men before her 13th birthday. Cooper's (1995) newspaper article, "Underage prostitution 'doubled in five years'" reports that over 5000 underage girls were working as prostitutes in the UK in the late 1990s. The emphasis on the girls as the problem, and not the perpetrators, essentially amounts to a blaming of the girls. The article goes onto describe the violent, abusive and exploitative experiences of some of the girls at the hands of their 'pimps'. Today, this exact occurrence is being named as child sexual exploitation. The use of the term 'child prostitute' acted as a smokescreen, disguising the truth of the situation and allowing it to continue.

From child prostitution to child sexual exploitation:

> "Child sexual exploitation is horrific and has no place in this, or any other society. It's a serious crime and must be treated as such, with the perpetrators pursued more rigorously" (DfE, 2011:3).

The current victim-centred discourse and narrative of 'child sexual exploitation' began to emerge in written and verbal discourse, and a statutory definition was introduced, first in 2009 and then revised in 2017 (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2017). One way of identifying a narrative shift is by pinpointing a *re-naming* of the issue. This tends to occur in the most powerful sites and social institutions (Foucault, 1972), which are able to transmit the renamed issue into society, perpetuating its normalisation and embedding its use, thereby forming and shaping a new narrative. The DCSF (2009) definition was developed with the aid of "expert service providers, academics and other stakeholders working at a practice level, based on a shared understanding of the nature of CSE" (CEOP, 2011:13), thus this definition is legitimised by its basis of expertise. A consequence of the involvement of frontline professionals was to open the door to a more victim-centred approach, which had previously been largely ignored and marginalised. However, it is noteworthy that victims and/or their parents are not identified as stakeholders and experts in the 2009 definition. This reiterates their lack of power and inclusion within the dominant CSE narrative and discourse. Recently, however, there has been an upsurge in the victim/survivor narrative (see Chapter 5) as they take back some of that power and become more included within the formation of the narrative (Burns, 2017; Saner, 2017). As yet, the same cannot be said for parents. They currently occupy the liminal space that victims and survivors once did, and a shift in the CSE narrative is required to elevate the role and position of non-abusive parents.

The evolution and development of this narrative is illustrated in political, legal and social discourse and responses that are setting the tone of the narrative, and therefore the direct experience of it.

Political responses

Since 2000 there have been a succession of government reports, guidance, action plans, strategies and legislation designed to tackle CSE (DCSF, 2009; DoH, 2000; DfE, 2011, 2014, 2018; HM Government, 2015, 2018; PHE, 2017). Some examples are given below which demonstrate the Government's more comprehensive and proactive response to tackling CSE. This is not an exhaustive list, but an overview to give a flavour of the range of responses which contribute towards deconstructing historic narratives of child abuse and influencing and shaping a new narrative of sexual exploitation.

- A 'National Group on Sexual Violence against Children and Vulnerable People' established in 2013 "to co-ordinate and implement the learning from recent inquiries into historical child sexual abuse and current sexual violence prevention issues" (HM Government, 2013:5) and promote a "multi-agency response" (Ibid., 4).
- A 'Child Protection Taskforce' created in 2015 to protect the most vulnerable children and the appointment of a Minister for Preventing Abuse, Exploitation and Crime.
- The Government's re-launch of its "refreshed" strategy for 'Ending Violence against Women and Girls, 2016-2020' (HM Government, 2016:6).
- The 2015 statutory Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse (see www.iicsa.org.uk). That the inquiry was established highlights the range and extent of institutional child abuse that has occurred, an impetus to

understanding and learning from what went wrong, and a recognition of the importance of the voices of victims/survivors, which begins to tackle the hidden nature of child abuse.

- The ‘Disrespect Nobody’ campaign launched in 2016, targeting 12 to 18 year olds to continue awareness raising of what a healthy relationship looks like and challenge negative and harmful understandings of issues like coercive and controlling behaviour, gender based abuse and consent.
- The 2017 Government-funded Centre of Expertise in Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. The purpose of the Centre is to “bring about significant and system-wide change in how child sexual abuse is responded to locally and nationally” (Centre of Expertise, 2018).

Legal responses

Clearly, the legal response to CSE is not separate to the political one. The laws of a society reflect its values. CSE is a culmination and co-occurrence of a range of other offences, as opposed to an offence in its own right. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA, 2003) legislates for offences against children (see ss. 9-15a and 47-50), such as: sexual activity with a child; rape; causing a child to watch sexual activity; arranging or facilitating commission of a sex act; and meeting with a child following sexual grooming. Section 15a (“sexual communication with a child”) of the SOA, 2003, was added in 2015 and reduced the number of meetings or communications between a groomer and a child from ‘at least two occasions’ to ‘one or more meetings/communications’. This allows the police to intervene earlier in the grooming process.

Sections 74 - 76 of the SOA, 2003 deal with issues of consent in law, identifying choice, freedom and capacity as the key elements. The Act specifies that a sexual act on or including a child aged 12 years and below is a serious offence, as a child of this age cannot legally give their consent to *any* sexual activity (SOA, 2003, ss. 5 –8). The Act sets the legal age of consent at 16 years for males and females and criminalises all consenting sexual activity among children under 16 years old. However this distinction between under-13s and 13-16 year olds implies a recognition that teens have some capacity to consent to sex in certain circumstances, for example, two 15 year olds in a long-term relationship deciding to have sex together. This would be considered as factual consent and it is highly unlikely that they would be prosecuted, even though the law criminalises that behaviour. It highlights the differences between the evidential test and the public interest test: that it would not be in the public interest to prosecute the above scenario (CPS, 2017b). Thus, there is some ambiguity concerning legal and factual consent which has impacted on professional and legal responses to sexually exploited young people, whereby they have been perceived as giving factual consent (due to their age), which perpetuated the pervasive victim-blaming, misnamed narrative on ‘child prostitution’.

There is evidence of a legislative shift in discourse and narratives surrounding CSE. 2015 saw an overt challenge to the use of the term ‘child prostitution’, particularly in legislation (Coffey, 2014), whereby sixteen pieces of legislation used the term ‘child prostitution’ (Coffey, 2014; Midwifery training and the care of women sexually abused as children, 2015). The term was encapsulated in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (SOA, 2003), which has now been amended*.* The “anachronistic” terms ‘child prostitution’ and ‘child pornography’ have also been removed from legislation recognising “children as victims (…) rather than consenting participants” (Home Office, 2015:3). This has made a significant contribution to the emerging victim-centred narrative regarding CSE and its survivors, and illustrates how it is gaining power and merging with the legal narrative.

Thus, although social change is usually slow, the victim-centred narrative of CSE *is* making itself felt on a structural level. The CPS and Criminal Justice System (CJS) are responding, albeit reactively, to the surge in CSE cases, and are aiming to move towards a more child/victim centred approach. Improvements in safeguarding child witnesses, recruiting specialist coordinators and improving training for prosecutors and frontline police need to be made; for example guidance has been produced to dispel myths such as victims inviting sex by the way they dress and children consenting to their own exploitation (CPS, 2013). That such myths have been acknowledged as creating bias in the CJS suggests that narratives surrounding CSE still need to be consistently challenged and revised to ensure that victims are not further abused in the court system.

Both the CPS and the police have been criticised for failing to protect and support child victims and witnesses in CSE cases, and for taking an “inappropriately cautious” approach to the credibility of children (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2013:29). A lack of positive, proactive attitudes towards sexually exploited young people has become a barrier in many cases. Many victims are often unwilling to engage with the police and go to trial, and one young victim described her experience in court as “one attack after another” (Coffey, 2014:47), which is arguably a hangover from the victim-blaming narrative. Sometimes the victims or their families choose not to proceed due to fear of reprisals or the stress of a trial. When cases do proceed, a lack of understanding by the jury of the complexities of CSE and issues surrounding consent can mean a negative outcome for the victims (Barnardo’s, 2011; Burrowes, 2013).

The police have a crucial frontline role in tackling CSE and although it is recognised that a great deal of good police practice exists (HMIC, 2015), the Jay Report (2014) highlights poor police practice and attitudes towards victims in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013. HMIC (2015:12) found “limited evidence that the police listened to children”, and in many cases the police are still not responding consistently or appropriately, and some sexually exploited children “may be exposed to criminal proceedings when safeguarding actions are more appropriate” (HMIC, 2015:12).

Thus, there has been a narrative shift, evidenced by the rise in the political and legal profile of CSE. The numerous policies, guidance documents and increasing research offer a widespread acknowledgement of the need to provide a victim-centred response to sexually exploited young people. Despite this, there is still a significant gap between the discourse of policy and the reality of practice. The real measure of success comes at the frontline practice level and how well professionals respond to and engage sexually exploited young people and their families. Despite the introduction of improvement measures (CPS, 2013; HMIC; 2015), the participants’ narratives of their experiences with responding agencies were largely negative, demonstrating the need to put guidance into practice.

Social responses

Bates (2014) argues that victims of sexism, and its many forms of associated harassment, abuse and violence, have been silenced through disbelief and/or being dismissed; by the “invisibility and the acceptability of the problem” (Bates, 2014:30); by victim-blaming; and through shaming. However, recent years have seen a swell in the emergence of people talking publicly about their experiences of sexual violence and abuse (see Chapter 5 for more in-depth discussion on victim/survivor narratives). There has also been a growth in organisations, movements and projects with a distinct feminist tone and purpose that work to challenge not only gender inequalities and violence against women and girls in particular, but also the silencing of victims. One excellent example is the 'Everyday Sexism Project' (see www. everydaysexism.com), set up in 2012, which gives women the space to share their experiences of everyday sexism (which is often sexual assault) online. The project collects these stories as mass evidence which bears witness to the enormous scale, persistence and insidious acts of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual conditioning that girls and young women face on a daily basis (Bates, 2014). This is noteworthy because it represents a change in victims' perceptions of themselves, and perhaps a belief in the likelihood of being believed. Many individual victims are courageously finding their voice and many are refusing to be, or to remain, silenced. They want to be heard (Jackson, 2012; Moran, 2013). It is also indicative of the narrative shift away from victim-blaming towards a victim-centred narrative, illustrating that narratives can inform "social life" and experience (Czarniawska, 2004:3).

This refusal to be silenced and speak out against sexism and violence against women and girls is also taking a more collective form. For example, the inauguration of President Trump in 2017 provoked collective action as women marched on a global level to protest against his direct sexism and lewd comments about women and to challenge misogyny (Jacobs, 2017). Women spoke out not only about their anger towards Trump (Reflect, 2017), but also their personal experiences of sexual harassment (Halsey, 2018). The Weinstein sexual abuse scandal in 2017 resulted in numerous women coming forward to talk about their experience of sexual assault and harassment (Walters, 2018). This contributed to the #MeToo and 'Time's up' movements which campaign against sexual assault, harassment and inequality of women, especially in the workplace[6]. This public discourse helps challenge the enforced silence and shame many victims of abuse have endured by creating more positive conditions for victims/survivors of any type of sexual violence, empowering them to speak out.

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[6] See: www.metoomvmt.org and www.timesupnow.com

Part 2: Narratives as process: narrative shifts - which narrative and why?

Foucault (1977) was concerned with *which* 'truth' (narrative) gains dominance and which does not. Discourse and truth are viewed as intrinsically linked to power, sharing a reflexive relationship as discourse is created and perpetuated by those who hold the power, thereby forming social practices and highlighting power relations (Foucault, 1977). The three significant narratives of child abuse which emerged from the 1970s onwards each dominated for a while until they were surpassed by the next. Given that several narratives regarding the same issue exist at any one point (Barthes, 1977; Foucault, 1977), this section aims to address the broad questions of what causes a narrative shift and how narratives assert and maintain their dominance over others. Issues of power are central to the processes involved, such as naming and renaming, the source and purpose of a narrative, and the plurality of 'truths' (Foucault, 1977).

The Power of a Name

> "What we call people and what we call places reveal the ways that we feel about ourselves and how we relate to other people and our environment." (Gasque, 2001:18).

The importance of definitions was discussed in Chapter 3, so this section focusses more on the *process* of naming. I argue that labels and language are crucial, and naming is one of the first actions we do as humans. As babies, we are usually named immediately, often with parents spending months beforehand thinking about what name to give their child. As infants and children, we learn to understand our social world through learning names of people, objects and places. Names are important and have meaning. How an issue is defined tends to encapsulate and perpetuate values which lend form, content and power to a narrative. Work on the power of naming highlights the enormous impact it can have on an issue, an individual and on perceptions. For example, Gasque (2001:20) states "there is great power in naming" and Merry (1990:35) argues that, "the power of naming is a particular kind of power in modern society, different from coercion or violence, and very subtle." The naming, or rather mis-naming, of sexual exploitation as 'child prostitution' was indeed a subtle type of power as it acted as a diversion, preventing professional, policy and funding responses from being effectively employed and targeted.

Language has shaped the discourse surrounding CSE and perpetuated the view that young girls ‘chose’ this way of life (Goddard et al., 2005; Stacey, 2009). The construction, definition and discourse of CSE as ‘child prostitution’ has occurred within the statutory, legislative, voluntary and academic spheres, resulting in some responses overlooking the abusive and exploitative nature of the crimes (Jay, 2014; Sharp, 2012). Peteet (2005:153) posits that “Words and names reference a moral grammar that underwrites and reproduces power” and changing the terminology used within CSE denotes a moral and perceptual shift in understanding the issue. This emphasises the importance of the meanings of words as the cornerstone of narrative formation (Goddard et al., 2005). Peteet’s (2005) term ‘moral grammar’ begins to explain how one narrative can gain dominance over another by introducing morality, another powerful social and individual narrative, as a tool of social control. The words chosen underpin that sense of morality and highlight their regulatory nature and their role in perpetuating and re-creating power relations and discourse in terms of what can and cannot be said.

Foucault (1976:170) referred to this as “the authorised vocabulary”, which is created by implicit and explicit rules and norms that regulate when and how sex can be spoken about. This concept of the authorised vocabulary is evident in the sexist, victim blaming discourse which Jay (2014) reports as being dominant and accepted in Rotherham Council. For example, some professionals, in their submissions of evidence regarding young people’s behaviour, used terms such as “prostituting herself””, “sexually available” and “asking for it” (OCC, 2012:47). Statements like these demonstrate that discourse is active and visible in daily interactions (Foucault, 1977). Their language reflects some professionals’ attitudes towards young people, as well as asserting and normalising the victim-blaming discourse which will inevitably have influenced their responses. However, this discourse is no longer ‘’authorised’ as a result of official rejection of it (OCC, 2012; DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2011; Jay, 2014). A more victim-centred vocabulary has been authorised and endorsed within CSE which conveys a different social attitude and policy. It elevates the value of the victim and is correcting previous damaging discourse.

Source and purpose of the narrative

The purpose of narratives and the interests they serve is also key to which narrative becomes dominant. The contest for dominance between the ‘stranger danger’ and ‘familial danger’ narratives discussed earlier is a good example of the central role of the source and site of power in narrative formation (Foucault, 1977). The ‘stranger danger’ narrative maintained dominance as a result of the statutory power base from which it stemmed. Family policy was laissez-faire and patriarchal (Fox Harding, 2008; Kirton, 2009) at the time. The state tended to view child protection and the family as a ‘private’ space, not to be interfered with. Witten (1993) develops this, arguing that the dominant narrative is often the one that serves a pragmatic purpose. The ‘stranger danger’ narrative is perhaps more palatable than the alternative narrative regarding ‘familial danger’. The former narrative preserved the dominant ideology of the family as a safe and private place, instead of presenting it as a possible site of harm. If the ‘familial danger’ narrative was fully acknowledged, it would have meant being unable to overlook the fact that abuse may be highly prevalent and could happen to *any* child who lives with a family. The perpetuation of this narrative would undermine the strength and social value of the family as a fundamental institution whose primary purpose is to maintain social order (Parsons, 1951). Since narratives are ways to make sense of the world, these narratives transmitted and reinforced constructions of child abuse which diverted attention away from a different type of child sexual abuse that was occurring on the streets and in brothels.

The plurality of ‘truths’

A plurality of ‘truths’ exist, whereby some truths (i.e. narratives) hold more power and influence than others (Foucault, 1977). Who holds power is fundamental in determining which ‘truth’ is presented. Merry (1990:3) supports the view that discourse and narratives are tools of the powerful and represent the interests of dominant groups in society, arguing that “power lies in the ability to establish a dominant way of constructing events and to silence others.”

This was evident in the case of Rotherham Council Children’s Social Care services’ failure to protect young people between 1997 and 2013 (see Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012). For example, a specialist team who worked directly with young people experiencing sexual exploitation at the ‘Risky Business Project’ in the

1990s tried to highlight the sexual exploitation occurring in the town. They proactively promoted the more victim-centred discourse of CSE, resisting the narrative of ‘child prostitution’ and its expected influence on practice (Jay, 2014). However, the power lay with the senior council officers and the police, who established a construction of CSE as a lifestyle choice. For example, a 13 year old girl was groomed by a violent offender but Jay (2014:38) reports that, “Police and social care were ineffective and seemed to blame the child (…) for placing herself at risk of sexual exploitation and danger”. Other sexually exploited children were categorised as ‘out of control’ or ‘wasting police time’ (Jay, 2014). Thus, the voices of project workers were minimised and rejected, and the project found itself marginalised (Jay, 2014).

Cohen (2002) suggests that the focus should not be on why one issue dominates another (i.e. the ‘child prostitution’ narrative) but on why an issue does *not* gain dominance (i.e. the CSE narrative). In respect of Rotherham, the ‘child prostitution’ narrative was too strong and the conditions were not conducive to a narrative shift, possibly because recognising it as child abuse would have required a response and there was no appetite for change within the site of power at that time. Thus, while some truths dominate (the ‘child prostitution’ narrative endorsed by Rotherham Council), others are marginalised (the Risky Business Project and the sexually exploited young people and their families).

The discourse of those in power in Rotherham as revealed by the Jay report (2014) was one of denial, disbelief, arrogance and an undercurrent of patriarchal sexism and machismo:

> “The prevailing culture at the most senior level of the Council, until 2009, (…) was bullying and ‘macho’, and not an appropriate climate in which to discuss the rape and sexual exploitation of young people” (Jay, 2014:100).

Sexism and the Council’s patriarchal structure are evident in the language cited in the Jay report (2014), so it is important to acknowledge the role of patriarchy and power in the construction of the victim-blaming CSE narrative. Millet’s (2000) in-depth analysis of patriarchy recognises the deeply entrenched and pervasive role that it has on shaping every aspect of human social life. This is predicated on historical and biological arguments, and the crucial role of socialisation which normalises this system, gaining “pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority” (Millet, 2000:26). It is also clear that in the 1990s, unchecked sexism and a ‘macho culture’ in the work space facilitated and enabled the perpetrators of CSE to commit their crimes against young people by the failure to recognise the seriousness of CSE and act accordingly. Walby’s definition of patriarchy as, “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990:20) and Millet’s (2000) view that the act of rape is at the centre of patriarchal force is clearly embodied within CSE and some of the narratives that have emerged. The predominantly male abuse of females, the grooming process and formal or informal structures in place are designed for the sole purpose of procuring, sexually abusing and exploiting young women.

Furthermore, the interconnectedness and co-existence of narratives is evident in the approach to CSE and its victims in Rotherham after many of the perpetrators were identified as Asian males (Jay, 2014). The anti-racist narrative has been exceedingly powerful, contributing to a deep societal, legal and moral shift in the last century regarding racism and the treatment of minority ethnic and racial groups. However, in Rotherham it appears that this narrative became subverted in the case of CSE by a misguided anti-racist narrative which prompted council leaders to “downplay” (Ibid., 91) the role of ethnicity of victims and perpetrators for fear of appearing to be racist. This in turn led to a confused situation, with a lack of open communication which disempowered some frontline workers and left minority ethnic communities feeling frustrated and marginalised, because young victims from those communities were unacknowledged. The anti-racist narrative of this time was not sufficiently challenged by the victim-blaming narrative as it did not hail from a position of higher authority, such as the Government.

Interestingly, as the ‘child prostitution’ narrative eventually began to shift to a more victim-centred one, the narrative regarding race and ethnicity began to take a more overtly racist tone. Cockbain (2013) identifies the media construction of the folk devil ‘Asian sex gangs’ as a result of a succession of newspaper headlines such as “Asian grooming: why we need to talk about sex” (Valley, 2012b). This is a misleading and unhelpful discourse as it shifts the focus onto ethnicity, prioritising a racist element to CSE over the fundamentally sexist element. It essentially creates a moral panic that facilitates the racist scapegoating of a community (Cockbain & Brayley, 2012), which has been hijacked by groups such as the BNP (bnptv, 2012). Whether race and ethnicity are significant facets of CSE is certainly an important area for further discussion and research, but one that is beyond the remit of this chapter. The concern here is that the media's sole focus on 'Asian sex gangs' overshadows the much greater concern that the vast majority of offenders are male and the vast majority of victims are young females. This is the crux of the matter, but sexual violence towards women by men has become so normalised that it barely receives a mention in this narrative – it is simply accepted as 'the way things are'.

Social psychological explanations

A change in the dominant narrative is an indicator of some measure of social change. Psychological theory (Hogg & Vaughan, 1998; Moscovici, 1976) regarding minority influence and social change can be utilised to further explain changes in CSE narratives, *if* the narratives under this discussion are framed as the majority narrative (victim-blaming) and the minority narrative (victim-centred). Moscovici (1976) found that the minority (supporters of the victim-centred narrative) can achieve power and change through a consistent message being calmly and reasonably repeated. Over time the majority (victim-blaming narrative) moves towards the viewpoint of the minority which in turn gathers momentum, like a snowball, (van Avermaet, 1996) until it can no longer be ignored and becomes the majority view. Foucault's (1978) 'principle of discontinuity' is useful at this point as it states that discourse can also undermine existing power bases as well as reinforce them. This is optimistic as it highlights the power of discourse to instigate change through resistance and the subsequent emergence of a counter-discourse. Thus, a discursive (or narrative) shift can occur when a counter-discourse emerges and receives political, social and media attention. In the case of CSE, this discourse and narrative shift was a response to extensive media coverage of shocking cases of CSE, the growth in a victim/survivor narrative, and social movements against sexual harassment and violence towards women and girls. Thus, a process began whereby other voices started to emerge, challenging and questioning the old narrative in order to create a new, more appropriate one that more accurately reflects our societal views.

Festinger's (1957) work on cognitive dissonance can also be utilised to aid understanding of what has caused narrative shifts regarding child sexual abuse. Knowledge of sexual exploitation of children creates cognitive dissonance, whereby disequilibrium is experienced between what is a 'normal and expected' reality and an 'abnormal and unexpected' reality. Thus "the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance" (Ibid., 3). Similarly, self-perception theory (Bem, 1967) suggests that an individual's perception of self is based on their observations of their response to external stimuli. Bem posits that dissonance is experienced when the internal stimulus (what we believe to be true about ourselves, in this case that 'we protect our children') is contradicted by an external stimulus (evidence of CSE, therefore we have not protected our children). I extend both theories, which are usually applied to the individual, to apply them on a societal basis. CSE scandals have forced the recognition that thousands of children and young people have gone unprotected, which creates collective dissonance. Public and media attention on CSE has become a mirror to society, confronting us with a truth that reflects negatively on us as citizens and as a society. Thus, the collective awareness of the extent and nature of CSE presents an intangible moment of opportunity for society to redefine, or re-narrate, its response to CSE. We are motivated by the dissonance to form a newer, more acceptable narrative in order to regain collective cognitive consonance, or equilibrium. In the case of CSE, it meant re-defining the abuse from 'prostitution' to 'sexual exploitation'.

Concluding comments

In this chapter I have utilised narrative theory to establish a theoretical context which underpins this thesis. Within this framework, I view narratives as a structural product *and* process that gives insight into societal norms, ideologies, regulations, and temporal and cultural factors that offer crucial insights into social life (Colyar & Holley, 2014; Czarniawska, 2004), specifically narratives and discourse surrounding CSE. I have identified dominant child sexual abuse narratives, which have essentially shifted from a victim-blaming and minimising discourse in the 1980s to the current victim-centred narrative, as impacting on policy, practice and lived experience. For example, evidence shows that defining and labelling CSE as 'child prostitution' has facilitated sexist, short-sighted and incorrect perceptions of CSE by stakeholders (Jay, 2014; Barnardo's, 2014; Pearce, 2014; RBSCB, 2012), which has allowed the abuse to be overlooked and minimised and caused significant harm to vulnerable young people (Jay, 2014). The victim-blaming narrative has been perpetuated by the legal system, and the framing of CSE as 'child prostitution' has impacted on the way young people have been treated within the court system, specifically in terms of their credibility as witnesses (Coffey, 2014).

CSE narratives do not exist within a vacuum but co-exist and compete with other narratives and ideologies, and this was demonstrated in the Jay report (2014), which identified competing dominant sexist and anti-racist narratives that significantly impacted on frontline practice and sexually exploited young people. Narrative constructions of CSE are a representation of power, which is the determining factor dictating which narrative is heard and which version of the truth becomes widely accepted as a social reality (Foucault, 1977). Some narratives have more power than others and this is largely due to the power base which underpins them. The victim-blaming narrative has maintained dominance for many years because it was underpinned by a patriarchal system which enabled macho cultures to thrive, coupled with a laissez-faire political approach (Jay, 2014).

I have also highlighted the significance of the power to name, or mis-name, as crucial to the formation and emergence of narratives, for example the labelling of CSE as 'child prostitution'. This resulted in diverting attention and support from where it was most needed, and allowed the victim-blaming narrative to be maintained, whereas a renaming of the abuse as child sexual exploitation contributed to a more victim-centred response.

Application of social psychological theories offers some explanation of a narrative shift when it is framed as an indicator of social change. I argue that the snowball effect can be seen in the way the victim-centred narrative gathered momentum through an enormous amount of media and public interest, which highlighted the horror and extent of the abuse. This is turn raises questions about what kind of society we are and how this could happen, which creates dissonance. The formation and emergence of a newer, more palatable and affirming narrative becomes crucial in order to restore cognitive consonance on a collective level.

However, the current discourse and narratives surrounding CSE indicate almost a full swing away from the view that young girls ‘choose’ the life of prostitution towards a greater focus on the ‘victims’ and their vulnerability. This demonstrates a change in the ‘moral grammar’ (Peteet, 2005) and a new ‘authorised vocabulary’ (Foucault, 1976). Words like ‘grooming’, ‘coercion’ and ‘exploitation’ are much more commonplace within the discourse. This shift is at a structural level of government, law and policy, and is still in the process of trickling from paper to practice.

Nonetheless, this shift demonstrates the fluidity of narratives as it facilitates the emergence of a new one from the voice of the disempowered: the victim/survivors of CSE. The emergence of the concept of victimisation within CSE discourse may lead to a greater empowerment of victims and survivors (Harding & Hamilton, 2009). I argue that the social construction of a new narrative requires social action because discourse is active and visible in the everyday practice of human interaction (Foucault, 1977). That is to say that the daily practice and discourse of those involved in CSE, in whatever capacity, can shape and influence the experience of its victims. They can, in effect, breathe life into a helpful narrative and facilitate its pervasiveness throughout society.

Chapter 5: Contextualising survivors within dominant narratives of child sexual exploitation

In this chapter I set the context for the thematic analysis of the survivors' narratives that follow in Chapter 6. Firstly, I discuss the use of the terms 'survivor' and 'victim', their implications, which can be contentious, and the relationship between them. I locate the position of survivors within the dominant discourses and narratives of CSE (discussed in Chapter 4), identifying a narrative shift that is slowly moving away from excluding victim/survivors, towards being more inclusive of them. I examine these emergent survivor discourses and narratives with a view to understanding the processes of narrative change. Finally, I introduce the survivor participants.

Firstly, a note about terminology: why 'survivor'?

> **Leah**: "I don't like being a victim (…) I don't like the word 'victims' (…) I prefer survivor."

The term survivor is adopted and used throughout this thesis because it reflects the preference of the women interviewed. All the women self-identified as survivors, rather than victims, of sexual exploitation. In three of the cases the women work in a CSE training capacity to share their experiences with others to improve understanding, awareness and agency responses, and they appear empowered by their self-selected status as a survivor. One participant was slightly reticent about the label 'survivor', but still felt it was more positive than 'victim'. Her reticence stemmed from her sense of guilt and self-blame for what she still perceived as her part in the abuse.

None of the women were happy or comfortable with the label 'victim of CSE'. They were responding to the negative connotations, disempowering overtones and passivity that *can* surround the idea of victimhood (Dodsworth, 2012, 2014a; Thompson, 2000). The participants prefer the term survivor, as it indicates a change in their status underpinned by strength and recovery, whereas their status as a victim reflects a sense of powerlessness. The participants' feelings are echoed in some of the wider literature regarding the term victim. Thompson (2000) found that women who had been raped associated the term 'victim' with weakness, vulnerability and powerlessness. However, the term ‘survivor’ engendered feelings of strength and recovery. Similarly, other research found that the terms ‘rape victim’ or ‘rape survivor’ can have a real impact on the individual’s outcomes. ‘Rape victim’ suggests that their physical and psychological outcomes are primarily negative, whereas literature about ‘rape survivors’ acknowledges the negative outcomes but also recognises positive ones, such as perceived emotional growth (Hockett & Saucier, 2015).

The reticence of the survivor participants to label themselves as victims is indicative of the tension surrounding the victim-survivor relationship. Barry (1979:46) described being a survivor as the “other side of being a victim”. This suggests that the relationship is interdependent: that one cannot exist without the other. I disagree with this premise to an extent. This relationship should not be considered as binary: either victim *or* survivor. It should be considered as transitory, existing along a dynamic continuum. The terms signify aspects of identity which are fluid and potentially paradoxical. For instance, one may at the same time be a victim of a robbery and a survivor of abuse. The terms can be simultaneously empowering and disempowering; political and value-laden; intended as simple descriptions, objectively ascribed but also subjectively internalised. Anyone can become a victim as the result of an event that renders them initially powerless. To continue to be viewed, either by oneself or others, as a victim suggests an inability to recover, potentially freezing the person in that identity, which can have stigmatising and damaging effects on those labelled as victims (Hockett & Saucier, 2015). This is disempowering and locates power with the perpetrator.

The label of victim is often “assigned to her by those who are judging her experience” (Barry, 1979:46), whereas survivor tends to be a self-proclaimed label denoting strength and agency. Use of the term survivor shifts the power balance and unfreezes the victim, allowing them to re-establish their identity, giving them a basis from which to move forward. Thus, inherent to the transition from victim to survivor is the concept of agency (see Chapter 6 for an in depth discussion). Dodsworth (2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015) explores the relationship between victimhood and agency and highlights that “recurrent, often polarised themes of victimhood and agency are evident in the perception and treatment of children and adults involved in sexual exploitation” (Dodsworth, 2012:520). Like the victim-survivor relationship, the relationship between victimhood and agency should not be considered as binary or mutually exclusive. Dodsworth, (2012:520) shows that this relationship is "complex" and dynamic with "a differing balance of agency and victimhood" throughout the life of victims of sexual exploitation. This balance is determined by "the impact of risk and protective factors" (Dodsworth, 2012:525), which shapes how women make sense of their involvement in sexual exploitation. This is also a finding of my study and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

The most significant aspect of the terms victim and survivor is that they can denote an identity shift - a transition from one state to another, and this is the primary reason why some women who have experienced sexual violence and abuse, and all of the participants here, choose to call themselves a survivor. Being a survivor "involves will, action, [and] initiative" (Barry, 1979:46-47) and one can only become a survivor if there is something to survive. This represents a journey of transition, a crossing of borders from victim to survivor, irrevocably changed by the experience. The survivors in this research have made, or are making, that journey and some felt empowered into activism:

> **Ellie:** "Let's tell our stories. Let us get it out there. Let's, let's change."

> **Alina:** "I want people to know how this can affect other people and how it starts."

Locating survivors in the discourse and narratives: where they have been and where they are now

Within this study, the 'world of CSE' is perceived as a microcosm - a reflection of wider society. CSE as a concept has been constructed largely through the dominant discourse and narratives which I have pinpointed as evolving from a victim-blaming narrative towards the current victim-centred narrative (see Chapter 4). It is from the latter that the survivor narrative is emerging. The victim-centred narrative originated from the voluntary sector advocating and speaking on behalf of victims and reporting the sexual exploitation they were seeing on the frontline, and was initially met with some resistance and denial (Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012). This is an example of the power dynamics involved in the construction of ‘truths’, whereby the statutory agencies and professionals held the power to expose or hide the sexual victimisation of young people (Foucault, 1977). When that exposure occurred and CSE was catapulted onto the national stage, the discourse and narratives emphasised the victimhood of the young people (Barnardo’s, 2012; DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2017; Harper & Scott, 2005; Munro, 2004). However, over time those young people are no longer being exploited and many have come forward as survivors (Jackson, 2012; McDonnell, 2015; Moran, 2013).

As previously discussed (see Chapter 3), there is a range of research from the statutory, academic and voluntary sectors regarding CSE (CEOP, 2011; Chase & Statham, 2005; DFCS, 2009; DfE, 2017; Lowe & Pearce, 2006; Melrose, 2013; OCC, 2012). Moreover, a recognition of the need for the active involvement of young people’s personal experience in shaping policy and strategic and practical responses is now acknowledged (Barnardo’s, 2011; Coffey, 2014; DfE, 2017; Sidebotham et al., 2016; Pearce et al., 2002). One example of this is the ‘Real Voices’ reports (Coffey, 2014, 2017), which lead with the voices of young people. The reports detail the failings of many responding agencies and the powerlessness that many young people feel, and recommend that young people should be contributing to the discourse and formulation of CSE policy (Coffey, 2014). Some CSE organisations now facilitate the participation of young people in their services[7].

Victimhood, and victims of CSE, have been the dominant focus of much of the influential literature (Barnardo’s, 2011; CEOP, 2011; Dodsworth, 2014a; OCC, 2012) and this has had many positive effects, particularly in raising awareness and developing knowledge and understanding of victims of sexual violence and abuse. For example, the acknowledgment of young people as victims of sexual exploitation is the very thing that propelled CSE into the public spotlight, triggering a shift from inertia to action (DFCS, 2009; RBSCB, 2012). Barry (1979:44) refers to this practice of creating a status and role of ‘victim’ as “victimism” and was originally a “call to awareness” of violence against women and girls. Thus it is important to recognise the utility in the political and social power of the term

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[7] See www.safeandsoundgroup.org.uk as an example of a CSE service prioritising young people’s experiences and stories to inform understanding of CSE.

‘victim’, as it can engender support, sympathy and resources and in the case of CSE, effect a positive change in law, policy and practice (DFCS, 2009; Jeffrey & Candea, 2006). The status of victim is essentially a double-edged sword: it helps the victim’s experience to be understood and strips her of blame; but also “creates a mind-set eliciting pity and sorrow” (Barry, 1979:44).

Much of the published literature tends to focus more on the dynamics and processes inherent in victimhood which has made a valuable contribution to understanding victims’ perceptions of these experiences (Dodsworth, 2012). Other research provides an important spotlight on recovery (Gilligan, 2016; Palmer & Foley, 2016). However, it is relatively unusual to find a paper that addresses the topic of *surviving* child sexual exploitation. Dodsworth (2012) contributes to this by focusing on how sexually exploited women make sense of, manage and essentially survive their involvement in sexual exploitation. Palmer and Foley’s (2016) paper utilises the next best thing to speaking directly to survivors of CSE. They produced a thematic analysis of three published memoirs by women who had experienced CSE. This type of research serves to elevate victim and survivor voices as experts in their own lives, telling their stories in their own way, which elevates their voices in academic and policy making spheres, subsequently shaping the narratives which surround CSE.

It is important to clarify the distinction between victims’ voices and survivors’ voices. Both are equally important, and both represent the experiences of young people who have been sexually exploited. So, why does it matter what we call them in the literature, since the voice of someone who has been sexually exploited is still present? The answer is not straightforward and goes back to the nature of the victim-survivor relationship, the connotations of both terms, and the increase in survivors of sexual abuse publicly speaking out, which is a reclamation of power. For the purpose of this thesis, it is an important distinction to acknowledge because both voices, whilst representing the experiences of people who have been sexually exploited, offer different perspectives. The victim perspective is gained whilst the individual is *being* victimised whereas the survivor perspective comes afterwards, when they are no longer victimised. This is valuable because it means that potentially the same story can be told and understood from different perspectives at different points in time, and allows greater understanding of the longer term impacts of sexual exploitation on a person. I contend that in terms of developing a robust response to CSE, both voices are extremely valuable and should be recognised as partners and experts. Furthermore, such recognition and acknowledgement of their experiences and voices can aid in the recovery process.

The most significant foundation for a growing survivor voice stems from feminist work, particularly looking at women's experience of exploitation through prostitution as the ultimate subjugation of women in a patriarchal society (Banyard, 2016; De Beauvoir, 1997; Millet, 2000). Prostitution is a huge topic, largely beyond the remit of this thesis, though it has to be explored to some degree as it is a common form of abuse within CSE. In 1949, De Beauvoir made the still pertinent point that prostitution encapsulates "feminine slavery", exposing a parallel between the function of sewers as necessary to "guarantee the wholesomeness of palaces" and the similar function of prostitutes (De Beauvoir, 1997:568). Millet (2000), utilising the work of Engels, recognises that "the demand for prostitution continues within a male-supremacist culture" (Millet, 2000:123) and Engels himself acknowledged that prostitution is "a social institution" which denounces only women (Engels, 1884, cited in Millet, 2000:123) and not the exploiters and purchasers of sex. Thus the prostitute is a "scapegoat", "a pariah" necessary to facilitate the smoother running of society (De Beauvoir, 1997:569).

Another basis from which the CSE survivor voice is growing is anti-prostitution work. One example is SPACE (Survivors of Prostitution Calling for Enlightenment) International. It was set up by survivors of exploitation and prostitution, all of whom have waived their anonymity and are willing to speak out about their personal experience of abuse. SPACE campaigns through political activism for the abolition of prostitution and adoption of the Nordic Model, which "decriminalises prostituted persons, criminalises those who exploit them and provides viable exit strategies (SPACE International, n.d). This model has, at the time of writing, been adopted in six European countries, with Ireland being the latest addition in February 2017 (O'Halloran, 2017).

The Nordic Model, adopted in Sweden in 1998, was part of a wave of measures designed to tackle violence against women and change attitudes of the general public and of men who purchased sexual services. Waltman (2011) cites research suggesting that street prostitution almost disappeared after its introduction, such that “Swedish men are now ashamed of buying sex - it’s just not socially accepted” (Swedish politician, Jenny Sonesson, cited in CATWA, 2017:10). This illustrates that government and law can have the power to inform and influence discourse and narratives that shape social attitudes. However, there is clearly much work to do as Sonesson’s comment above provides a stark contrast to Coffey’s (2014:35) concerns that “in some neighbourhoods child sexual exploitation had become the new social norm” in England.

Survivor Voices: the creation of a new narrative?

> “Survivor narratives play a pivotal role in reshaping discourses that focus on victimisation” (Jean-Charles, 2014:40).

We are now seeing a shift in the construction of CSE as survivor narratives are becoming recognised and the discourse is beginning to include them. Indeed, the discourse is now emanating *from* them and voices of survivors are gradually gaining volume. Naples (2003) provides an analysis of how survivors of child abuse “come to voice” (Barringer, 1992, cited in Naples, 2003:1152) and identifies multiple sites and social processes which may generate survivor discourse. These range from talk shows and autobiographies to survivor self-help groups and research. As already discussed in Chapter 4, there has been a groundswell of opposition and campaigns challenging gender inequalities, the normalisation of sexual harassment and violence against women and girls. These have all added to the momentum and strength of the survivor voice and serve to create more favourable conditions for survivors of sexual exploitation, in its many forms, to speak out. The very fact that some survivors speak more openly and publicly about their experiences is a powerful force in shifting the narrative regarding child sexual abuse (Johnson, 2013; ‘Midwifery training and the care of women sexually abused as children’, 2015; Moran, 2013). Linda Hartley, a survivor of CSE, is working with service providers to guide them on how to deal with victim/survivors (Johnson, 2013). Survivors of CSE have written autobiographies about their experiences of CSE (Jackson, 2012; McDonnell, 2015; Wilson, 2015), and Sammy Woodhouse, a survivor of the Rotherham abuse scandal, has also recently waived her anonymity, speaking publicly about the abuse she suffered and its long-term effects on her life (Saner, 2017). In 2017, Professor Jay, chair of the national Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, publicly urged survivors of child abuse to come forward and share their experiences with the Truth Project (Burns, 2017). This denotes a narrative shift: an important transition, whereby the discourse and narratives of CSE are being translated into action impacting directly on the lives of victims and survivors.

Some survivors are empowered to share their personal and traumatic experiences of CSE to inform and train others in its complexities. Projects such as the survivor-led Build a Girl Project in West Yorkshire and REIGN in Manchester are just two of these that work to establish survivors as experts and partners in tackling CSE[8]. The voices of survivors are forming a new narrative and a tension in this is that for survivors' voices to be heard and to gain momentum, survivors have to speak for themselves, which can be very difficult and potentially re-traumatising. That survivors may be taking back their power is reminiscent of the view expressed by Greer (1975) on BBC 2 Newsday, "You can't liberate people from above" – implying that the most effective way for people to be free is through self-liberation of the mind and spirit.

The four survivors

I hope that this research will contribute to the emerging survivor narrative by presenting a thematic analysis of the experiences of four women who identify as survivors of CSE. The next chapter explores these narratives in detail, so I will simply re-introduce the survivors at this point, Fran, Leah, Ellie and Alina, with a brief summary of each of their stories.

Table 1 provides a brief overview of the participants.

Survivor	Year of entry	Age at entry	Year of exit	Age at final exit	Duration in years	Years since exit	Current age	Ethnicity
Fran	**1984**	15	1995	26	11	21	47	White British
Leah	2006	15	2009	18	3	7	25	White British
Ellie	2008	8	2012	12	4	7	19	British Pakistani
Alina	2009	14	**2014**	19	5	3	22	Black British

* All names of the survivors, their family members and abusers have been anonymised.

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[8] See www.buildagirlproject.com and www.reclaim.org.uk/reign as examples of survivor led projects.

Fran

Fran was 15 years old when, after an argument with her parents, she ran away one evening in the early 1980s. Fran happened to meet an older man, Mick, who groomed her and established his control over her through physical and sexual violence. Fran believed she was in love with him, and he became her 'boyfriend/pimp' for over a year. She was then 'pimped' by her new 'boyfriend' Danny for several years, and even when she had the chance to escape, it did not occur to her that she could. Only after a severe beating by Danny, which hospitalised Fran, did she leave him and try to exit her life of sexual exploitation. This was too difficult for her and she became a 'self-employed' sex-worker until her exit when she was 26 years old.

Leah

Leah was groomed by a learning mentor, Jazveer, at her school from the age of fifteen. She was having a difficult time at home. Her mother had left and her father had a new partner. Leah was self-harming, truanting school, smoking and drinking a lot of alcohol. She confided in Jazveer, whose role was to support and safeguard Leah. Instead he manipulated her and nurtured her dependency on him by 'lending' her money, providing alcohol, cigarettes and alibis for when she truanted. To Leah's knowledge he never passed on safeguarding concerns about her. There was no sexual contact between Leah and Jazveer until she had been excluded from school when she was seventeen. It seems that Jazveer patiently positioned himself so she would 'come to him' when she was at her most vulnerable, which she did. Leah felt obliged to have sexual relations with him, as a form of repayment, though she did not want to. The sexual exploitation ended when Leah's ex-boyfriend threatened Jazveer.

Ellie

On Ellie's 8th birthday she found her mother unconscious after a suicide attempt. Ellie, who was already known to services, was put into the care of her cousin, Sarah, and was not allowed any contact with her mother for some time. Ellie was happy and felt secure with Sarah until Sarah's son, who was nine at the time, began to sexually abuse her. Although she disclosed the abuse to Sarah, she was not believed. Out of fear of losing her place in this family, Ellie remained silent about the abuse, and recognises that she 'accepted' it as the price of living in an otherwise “normal, happy family”. Ellie returned to her mother’s care and disclosed the abuse when she was 14 years old. She was “disowned” by Sarah.

Alina

Alina was raped on her way to her local youth club by an older man, in his house, when she was 14 years old. She disclosed the rape to a youth worker and was supported to report it to the police. There was an investigation, during which Alina was harassed and threatened by friends of the man who raped her. After several months Alina found out that no further action would be taken by the police and Crown Prosecution Service. As a result, her self-esteem plummeted and, at aged fifteen onwards, she began to go to parties and clubs where she would have sex with men in return for alcohol, presents and money. At the time she thought *she* was “using” *them*. Her case was re-opened several years later and a conviction against the rapist was won. Alina stopped going to the parties and clubs.

The next chapter is focused solely on what the four survivors had to say about their experiences of the world of sexual exploitation. This data is traumatic, emotional and emotive. It speaks of terrible sexual violence and abuse, isolation, confusion, self-destructive and self-harming behaviour, and traumatic emotional and physical journeys. It also includes hope, strength and an inspirational reclamation of power. The survivors have spoken articulately and with courage about these very personal experiences and the impact they have had. I have endeavoured to provide a faithful and accurate account of their lives that they have shared with me in good faith.

Chapter 6: The survivors’ narratives: journeys into, within and out of the world of child sexual exploitation

> “The only way to understand a woman’s survival is to put oneself in her place. In order to do that we must know the situation she faces, understand what the objective conditions are that she must handle when confronted by a rapist, pimp, or violent husband.” (Barry, 1979:49).

This chapter utilises the analogy of a journey into the world of CSE from survivors’ perspectives, and is split into three main parts. The survivors’ journeys will be considered within the following framework: entering and starting out in the world of CSE; experiencing and suffering within the world of CSE; and exiting and surviving the world of CSE. The journey analogy is fundamental to this framework, intrinsic to which are the themes of border crossings and turning points. Of particular interest is how survivors made sense of their experiences at the time and how they have re-framed their experiences to make sense of them as an adult survivor.

Emergent themes relevant to each section will be discussed: the nature of CSE; vulnerability; the insights adult survivors can give about their younger selves; the role of survival strategies; resilience; exits from sexual exploitation; and creating a new sense of identity. This chapter aims to elevate the voices and perspectives of survivors of CSE, facilitating their contribution to the evolving formation of discourse and narratives.

Part 1: Entering and starting out in the world of sexual exploitation

Maintaining the journey analogy of survivors’ experiences within the world of CSE, this section will consider how they came to enter that world. Underpinning this are the concepts of border crossings and turning points, which the survivors highlight throughout their narratives. These concepts refer to movements, decisions and events that culminate in some kind of change, which can be positive or harmful. ‘Border crossing’ encapsulates an individual’s movement into another space or state. This movement can be either dramatic and sudden, and/or slow, quiet and almost imperceptible. In the world of CSE, there exist both geographical, physical borders and intangible borders. Some border crossings involve physically entering others' spaces, for example CSE perpetrators waiting outside school gates. Other border crossings do not take material or physical form; they can be psychological or emotional shifts, for instance from 'healthy, average teenager' to 'victim of CSE'. Adolescence can also be viewed as a border crossing, a journey from one state (child) to another (adult), and is a significant part of the context for CSE. Three of the four survivors were teenagers when their exploitation began and this developmental state can add to young people's vulnerability as they try to find, and express, their own sense of identity and independence (CEOP, 2011; Sidebotham et al., 2016). Furthermore, if an adolescent has had trauma in their childhood, it can lead to mental health problems, engagement in criminality, and/or drug and alcohol misuse, exacerbating their vulnerability in adolescence (Dodsworth, 2012; Scott & McNeish, 2017; Sidebotham et al., 2016). It also appears that the nature of border crossings within the world of CSE is often determined by who is making the crossing, and how much power they possess to negotiate and control it. Turning points refer to markers and moments, sometimes a series of decisions or events in the survivors' narratives which shaped the direction and nature of the border crossing.

There were broadly four dominant and consistent themes which arose from the data: the ubiquitous nature of CSE; the form and extent of grooming; vulnerability compounded by a range of exacerbating factors; and the insights adult survivors can offer about their younger self. These themes are not easily organised under neat subheadings. They are interlinked, often with one causing or exacerbating another, and they also recur through the journeys into, within and out of the world of CSE.

The ubiquitous nature of CSE

What does it look like when a young person enters into, and is swallowed up by, the world of sexual exploitation? How and where does it happen? I shall turn to the survivors' narratives to answer these questions:

> **Fran:** "And then, one night, after a particularly bad argument, I ran away (…) I just were wandering around (…) I don't even know what I were doing. I had no money. I had nowt. I bumped into a guy who I recognised from town (…) and he introduced me to this guy, Micky, and I fell, "Phwar". I were nearly blown off my feet and Micky took me to a flat."
> (Aged 15 at this time).

Fran was wandering about her local area after an argument with her parents and by chance bumped into a man who took her to her main abuser, which suggests at least some level of organisation on the abuser's part. Fran was angry with her family and felt alienated from them. She had been rejecting and disengaging from them and her risk taking behaviour had escalated in the previous months. Fran was seeking a sense of freedom, belonging and excitement and was open to adventure, so meeting a relative stranger and going off with him was appealing. She never returned home.

> **Alina:** "I was on the way to the youth club and he called me over to his house, to his doorstep (…) and then, honestly, he raped me and whatever (…) the Police came to me for an interview in January (…) I had a video interview (…) and I never heard anything back (…) And then, to me, it kind of felt like it was acceptable." (Aged 14 at this time).

Alina was on her way to her youth club and was raped by an older man, whom she knew, in his house. Being raped, the poor police response and the sense fourteen year old Alina made of it, propelled her into the world of CSE. Alina was looking for a sense of control and power as she moved into a world of parties where she "*used men*" to get what she wanted.

Ellie was ejected out of her life by her mother's suicide attempt, and put into the home and care of a family member, Sarah, where she was sexually abused by Sarah's nine year old son for the next four years. Ellie was also looking for love, belonging, and stability, which she got from Sarah, albeit at a very high price:

> **Ellie:** "One day, well, not one day, my birthday, when I was eight years old, came downstairs and my mum had overdosed (…) I was, erm, living at my auntie's house. For them four years, erm, my cousin sexually abused me (...) I told her and she was just like, "Stop telling tales and go back to sleep". She never believed me." (Aged 8 at this time).

Leah was looking for love, safety and a sense of power and control. She was systematically groomed for almost two years by her learning mentor, Jazveer, whilst at school, during which time she had no sexual contact with him (this started after she had escaped from a violent relationship with another man):

> **Leah:** "I was kind of groomed by my, erm, mentor at school. It started from the age of about 15 (…) I weren't in school. And then, from then, I got involved with him in this sexual relationship with him (...) And for me I think if that what did happen in school didn't happen then it wouldn't have gone on to, yeh." [Crying].
> (Aged 15 at this time).

The corruption of safe spaces

The four powerful excerpts above capture a moment when each of the women stood at a border, and were subsequently swept into the world of sexual exploitation and abuse. What is shocking is the randomness and mundane nature of the contexts. Essentially, the young women were just going about their daily lives. All four of these women's abuse began in very ordinary, everyday spaces which are often presumed as safe: the streets of a local area, a family home and school. Each survivor's moment represents a turning point where the direction of her life changed. Unbeknown to them, they were simultaneously pushed and pulled across an invisible line or through an intangible portal to a different space, with different rules that contravened 'normal', expected and accepted ways of being. The moment of entry into the world of CSE was a silent, life-changing and catastrophic explosion that no one else saw or heard until it was too late and the ramifications and ripples became impossible to ignore or hide.

The mundane contexts where CSE can occur, which contribute to its ubiquitous nature, have been touched upon in some of the literature and were initially referred to as ‘on-street grooming’ (CEOP, 2011). Coffey (2014) highlights the school gates as a site of potential exploitation of young people and many of the parents interviewed for this research (see Chapter 8) echo this, foregrounding everyday places such as outside a supermarket (whilst waiting for their parents) and fast food restaurants as the starting place of the sexual exploitation of their child. This presents a very challenging message for practitioners because these areas are a part of normal, everyday life for the vast majority of young people. It is important to note these mundane contexts, not to promote fear and danger, but to recognise that sexual exploitation and abuse can begin and occur anywhere and the potential locations are not necessarily in liminal spaces such as dark, seedy alleyways that we could avoid.

The cultural and interpersonal nature of sex grooming

Grooming is a powerful tool in an abuser’s toolbox, a manipulative strategy designed to increase the pliability and compliance of a vulnerable young person. Most of the survivors talk about being groomed, but although the outcome was similar, they experienced the process differently. Two types of grooming emerged from the narratives, which I have identified as ‘cultural grooming’ and ‘interpersonal grooming’. Grooming for sexual purposes is intrinsic to both. Cultural grooming is pervasive and indirect while interpersonal (one-to-one) grooming is direct and refers to the type of sex grooming perceived as synonymous with sexual abuse and exploitation.

Cultural grooming

I argue that cultural grooming is a more insidious form of grooming and has become a normalised and dominant process, comprising powerful explicit and subliminal messages that teach individuals of all ages how to perform their gender. The process *and* consequence of cultural grooming is the sexualisation of children and young people. Gill (2007) defines sexualisation as “the extraordinary proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms (…) as well as the increasingly frequent erotic presentation of girls’, women’s and (to a lesser extent) men’s bodies in public spaces” (Gill, 2007:151).

Papadopoulus (2010) provides a comprehensive review of the literature which makes a very clear and strong evidence-based case that sexualisation of children and young people is increasing at a rapid rate through four dominant and pervasive formats: sexualised content and mainstreaming of pornography; magazines, marketing and advertising; television, film and music; and new technologies. Shephard and Lewis (2017:12) support this, reporting that young people often feel "victimised by a culture of commercial sexualisation", and highlighting the impact pornography can have on their perceptions of relationships and sex. Sexualised messages, which tend to hyper-masculinise males and objectify and sexualise women, are coded in the plethora of images directed at children and young people via these channels. Internet availability, via mobile phones and other devices, has increased the immediacy and accessibility of such messages, as well as normalising them. These messages are often embedded in media images perceived as 'cool' by young people, as something to aspire to, and have become powerful tools of gender and sexual socialisation (Bates, 2014).

These images 'teach' children and young people, particularly females, how to dress, act, and pose: essentially how to present themselves as a particular version of a sexualised being. This has led to an increase in sexting and young people sharing explicit images of themselves, increasing their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (Rawlinson, 2017). Papadopoulus (2010) has shown that young children are not able to cognitively process these types of persuasive messages, which they are consistently exposed to, and as they enter adolescence the pressure to conform to particular appearances to meet the imposed criteria of being 'sexy' or 'hot' have been found to have detrimental effects their levels of self-esteem and body image. This wider context is tantamount to a cultural grooming of children and young people for sexual purposes.

Evidence of cultural grooming is also found in research conducted in secondary schools. Sexualised behaviour is described as "the new norm" for young people aged over sixteen (Fixers Investigates, 2016:2), and "sexually charged behaviour drives young people's physical interactions" in school corridors and playgrounds "and permeates through to their 24-hour-a-day life online" (Fixers Investigates, 2016:2). Similar findings were reported from research into sexism in schools in

‘It’s just everywhere’ (National Education Union & UK Feminista, 2017), which found that over a third of female students experienced some form of sexual harassment, and almost a quarter experienced unwanted sexual touching at mixed schools. Other research (Russell et al., 2016:10) described sexism as “embedded” within schools from dress codes, which were perceived as stricter for girls, to stereotyped subject choices. Misogynistic language was also found to be prevalent and sexist stereotypes and behaviour were described as “a typical feature (…) reinforced though mundane, everyday actions” (National Education Union & UK Feminista, 2017:2). This is significant because school is a location where young people spend the majority of their time and a primary site of secondary socialisation. School is a microcosm of wider society and also a “key site where sexist attitudes and behaviours are fostered and experienced” (Ibid., 3) and practised. Gendered messages that exist in wider society are often intensified within the school environment (Russell et al., 2016:10). This only magnifies the importance of the unique position schools have to challenge cultural sex grooming.

Interpersonal grooming

Interpersonal grooming is recognised as a type of grooming offence (Sexual Offences Act, 2003) specific to CSE, referring to a child who is “groomed for sexual activity with the offender and their associates” (CEOP, 2011:14), and is considered as a (usually) gradual and interpersonal process between perpetrator(s) and victim(s) (see Chapter 3). I posit that the necessary conditions which enable interpersonal sex grooming are facilitated by the pervasive cultural sex grooming that exists in wider society. It is clear from research *(*Coy et al., 2010, 2013) that the messages discussed above (Gill, 2007; Papadopoulus, 2010) are internalised by young people, which impairs an empowered response to the issues of sex, sexuality and gender. This grooming process is reminiscent of the psychological concept of graduated commitment, whereby individuals get locked into obedient behaviour in stages so small and incremental that it is harder to disentangle oneself (Milgram, 1963). So in CSE cases, young people may take the gifts offered (alcohol, phones, money etc.) and may comply with small requests regarding sexual favours or petty crime, making it harder to be disobedient and non-compliant at later stages.

Cultural sex grooming as experienced by survivors

Evidence of cultural sex grooming is threaded throughout the survivors' narratives. By this I mean their (sexual) experiences of boys and men in a more general sense and how they talk about them. Underpinning their narratives is an insight into how normal they perceived their gendered role, which was essentially to be submissive, to please and consequently accept or tolerate abuse as something to be expected. Alina opens her narrative by talking about the youth club she attended as a fourteen year old:

> **Alina:** "There were a lot of guys. It was like 85% of guys and 15% of girls but the guys were always older than the girls there and I kinda got mixed up in the wrong crowd (…) and they did like, use me and stuff like that."

The youth club sounds unsafe: a predatory site where young girls were outnumbered by older males, who attended to find younger girls. The man who raped Alina knew her from the youth club and she described him as in his "*twenties*". Furthermore, Alina gives the impression that this was very normal to her at the time:

> **Alina:** "But then, I didn't really see it."

She is also quite vague and matter-of-fact about being used "*and stuff*" by the older males. The impression Alina gave was that it was all very normal to her as a fourteen year old and it is only as an adult that she is able to recognise what was really happening. This speaks to cultural grooming, which served to prepare Alina for future exploitation.

Similar experiences are reported by Fran, who describes herself as being promiscuous as a young teenager as part of her self-destructive behaviour:

> **Fran:** "I was promiscuous but there were older lads, like my friends' brothers but, like older."

I would like to substitute the word 'promiscuous' for 'exploited'. It feels very much like Fran was taken advantage of by older boys who exploited her vulnerability well before she was sexually exploited by Mick, yet in her narrative, she does not seem to recognise this and also blames herself: "*I was promiscuous*" not "I was exploited".

The oppressive and controlling impact of cultural grooming on everyday experience is illustrated in Ellie's narrative, which she tries to resist by hiding her femininity, recognising it as a beacon to attract unwanted attention. Here we see Ellie rejecting the 'markers' of normalised symbols of femininity (i.e. revealing clothes, make-up):

> **Ellie:** "You walk down the street and you can guarantee you're gonna get a compliment, but it isn't a compliment. That you're gonna get whistled at or you're gonna get some sort of attention that you **don't** [Ellie's emphasis] want so I would make it, I would do everything possible to make sure that didn't happen, so I would go out in like baggy clothes and I would make sure I had no make-up on."

These narratives highlight the impact that cultural grooming can have on young people: the hyper-masculinisation of males and the sexualisation and objectification of women, coupled with a powerful ability to normalise these stereotypes, creating acceptance of lower expectations of how to treat and be treated in terms of sexual relationships. Clisby and Holdsworth's (2014) concept of the 'triad of violence' is evident in the survivors' experience of cultural sex grooming, which is arguably a tool of the triad of violence. The authors develop the concept of violence to include three forms of violence – symbolic, structural and visceral – that work together in a multifaceted way to influence and control various areas of women's lives. Symbolic violence refers to a softened, pervasive form of violence that can be so subtle it appears normal, for example Alina's unquestioned acceptance of her purpose as being "*used*" by the boys at her youth club as a 'normal' experience. Structural violence refers to unequal gender structures that are embedded in the material lives of women, for example:

> **Fran:** "They [the police] literally said "good evening" to him [the pimp] and took me in the car."

Finally, visceral violence refers to physically harmful gender-based violence which represents the most tangible form of violence against women, for example:

> **Fran:** "He just kicked and kicked and punched and punched me."
> "I were anally raped by him all the time"

Interpersonal sex grooming as experienced by survivors

Three of the women experienced interpersonal grooming, though it looks different in each case. Interpersonal grooming is omitted from Ellie's narrative. She makes no mention of her older cousin grooming her before he sexually abused her and it is unclear why this is the case. It could perhaps be that Ellie was not groomed, or does not remember or recognise it in these terms, possibly because the abuser was only a year older than her at the time. Or she chose not to recount this part of her experience because her narrative is weighed more heavily towards her relationship with her abuser's mother. The narratives of the other three survivors highlight the diverse nature of grooming and its varying role within CSE.

Fran's experience of being groomed is quite 'typical' and in line with what is often discussed in the literature (Cockbain, 2013: OCC, 2012; Pearce & Pitts, 2011). She was extremely vulnerable, compliant and probably an 'easy target' for an experienced child abuser. Fran describes herself as being "*very flattered*" to receive attention and affection from "*a good looking guy, in his 20s, loads of jewellery, very cool*". Fran's compliance was also the result of her perception of meeting and falling in love with her abuser, Mick, as exciting.

> **Fran:** "[Mick] just said 'I'm your man now' and I was like 'okay.'"

Mick seems to represent something exotic and adventurous for Fran, and perhaps a way out of the life she had come to "*hate*". The night Fran met Mick, she went with him to a flat and never returned home. She describes the flat:

> **Fran:** "There were no furniture. There were bare light bulbs. There were a mattress on the floor in the upstairs room wi' one dirty sheet which is where I slept and I thought it were brilliant."

The fact that Fran embraced this level of material deprivation so openly and without question speaks to her enormous need at the time for what she perceived as freedom, adventure and an opportunity to belong. Mick offered her the possibility of meeting this need, which was so strong it seems she was happy to live in these conditions, perhaps seeing them as a small price to pay:

> **Fran:** "I just loved this completely different world to my boring life and I were being treated as a grown up. I had a man who was like this gorgeous drop dead good-looking guy. I were in my element."

What this highlights about the grooming process is the significance of a young person's needs and the strength of their desire to have those needs met. This desire seems to cloud or impair their judgement, increasing compliance. Looking back, Fran cannot rationalise why she thought her new life and living conditions were "*brilliant*", except to explain:

> **Fran:** "My self-esteem were pretty low (…) made it very easy for him to break me."

It took Mick only two weeks and very little effort to gain control over Fran. In this time he did not need to use force or coercion as Fran was completely infatuated with him. This exposes not only the extent of her vulnerability, but also how she became dehumanised and detached:

> **Fran:** "When he broke me, he broke me gently in them two weeks (…) I were like a robot. The power is **just indescribable**." [Fran's emphasis].

Leah's experience of being groomed provides a contrast to Fran's experience and this may be a result of the wider context of the grooming. The man who groomed her, Jazveer, worked as a learning mentor in her secondary school and spent two years forming a highly inappropriate non-sexual relationship with her:

> **Leah:** He didn’t do anything in that time whilst I were at school. Erm, he [was] just, overly nice with me so he (…) used to get me out of lessons that I didn’t like and we used to go out of school (...) he used to give me cigarettes and we’d smoke in his car (...) if I were truanting he would like give me back up that I was with him so I didn’t get into trouble.”

The man positioned himself as a confidant to Leah, who was vulnerable and seeking love “*in the wrong places*”, and he consistently abused the position of trust and power which he had. He failed to safeguard Leah from some of her destructive behaviours, such as substance misuse and self-harming, all of which he knew about. Leah left school at seventeen and became involved in a violent and abusive relationship with another man. When she felt able to leave this relationship, it was Jazveer who she contacted as a way out. When Leah talked about these experiences she was tearful, embarrassed and guilt ridden. Even now, she feels it was partly her fault because *she* re-contacted him when she was seventeen:

> **Leah:** “I also feel like he left me in a situation where I always knew the doors were open (...) I think if that what did happen in school didn’t happen then it wouldn’t have gone on to, yeh.” (Crying).

He responded the same day and although he did not force Leah, she felt pressured to engage in sexual activity with him, describing sex as “*a duty*”. She tried to avoid him but he was persistent and often went along with him to hotel rooms because she felt duty-bound:

> **Leah:** “I really din’t want to see him, din’t want to spend any time with him and I saw he was on the street so I (…) climbed over my fence to get into my back garden.”

Fran and Leah’s experiences illustrate the fluidity of grooming and sexual exploitation and the fact that experiences of them can vary enormously. Both survivors see themselves as having been groomed and sexually exploited, yet their narratives regarding this are very different, further highlighting the previously discussed problems in accurately defining CSE. In Fran’s case the grooming and exploitation was extreme and rapid, whereas Leah’s is better described as hidden in plain sight. What is clear from my data is that grooming is a tool of manipulation and control which abusers utilise in a variety of different ways, and to different extents. This appears to be dependent on their intentions and the vulnerability levels of the young person. As Fran as an adult, able to recognise her extreme vulnerability as a teenager, states:

> **Fran:** “He didn’t have much of a job to do really.”

This research cannot accurately speak to the motivations of the abusers except to surmise from the data provided by the survivors. Leah’s abuser *appears* as patient and was prepared to wait for her to come to him. It is Leah’s understanding that he was “*like this*” with other young women at the school, which gives the impression that he cast a net and waited patiently for a ‘catch’, motivated perhaps by sexual gratification and a sense of power and status:

> **Leah**: “He seemed to like to go to public places with me. I don’t know if he must get a kick out of being with a younger woman.”

He has since been fired from his role and is no longer able to work with children and young adults. Fran’s abuser appears to have been more organised and established as a ‘pimp’. She was clearly a commodity to him and two weeks after she met Mick, *he* trafficked her to London and *he* put her onto the streets to have sex for money for *him*. Mick was the perpetrator of many sex crimes, yet Fran was ultimately held responsible for the abuse he rained down on her:

> **Fran:** “He gave me a packet of three durex and he just said, ‘You charge thirty quid’. And it was so matter of fact and robotically I got out of the car and stood on the corner, with a packet of condoms (…) that were my introduction to the world of exploitation.”

This represents the moment when Fran crossed a border and was fully swallowed up into the world of CSE.

Pathways to this point and exacerbating factors

From the survivors' narratives it is clear that these moments of entry did not simply just happen. They are the culmination of other events and experiences that jostled and nudged, and perhaps in some cases, locked the survivors onto a pathway into the world of sexual exploitation, referred to in some literature as the 'push and pull factors' (Dodsworth, 2012; Home Affairs, 2012; NSPCC, 2013; Sharp, 2012; Smeaton, 2013). Dodsworth's (2012) research examining pathways into sex work, of which sexual exploitation is a cornerstone, is useful here. Dodsworth interviewed twenty-four women involved in sexual exploitation and sex work and found that damaging childhood experiences and trauma can affect an individual's ability to manage and cope with adversity in adolescence and later life, specifically in relation to sexual exploitation. Dodsworth (2012:521) argues that the "complex interaction" between "personal and environmental" factors which are 'accumulated' in childhood "appear to be predisposing and contributory" to the particular pathway someone takes. Dodsworth (2012, 2014a) argues that *how* an individual makes sense of, and manages, these factors and experiences will affect their level of victimhood or agency, and vulnerability or resilience, which in turn determines their pathways through the world of sexual exploitation. This was certainly evident for four of the survivor participants in this study and I discuss this later in this chapter.

Several reports (CEOP, 2011; Scott & Skidmore, 2006; Sharp, 2012) have compiled possible exacerbating factors that *may* increase a young person's vulnerability to being sexually exploited. Scott and Skidmore (2006) collected data over a two-year period from detailed case histories of 42 young people in receipt of CSE services and identify commonalities such as: disrupted family life; a history of abuse and disadvantage; 'problematic parenting'; disengagement from education; going missing; exploitative relationships; drug and alcohol misuse; and poor health and well-being. Most of these factors are spread throughout my data, woven through the fabric of the survivors' narratives, and were exacerbating factors that positioned the young women on a pathway into sexual exploitation.

Vulnerability

The most common characteristic of the victims is their powerlessness (OCC, 2012:14), whereby sexually exploited young people are “often singled out for their vulnerability” (CEOP, 2011:5). Indeed, it seems that vulnerability transcends other factors such as age, ethnicity or class. The Children’s Commissioner (2018) Vulnerability Report analysed levels of vulnerability and identified children who have been exploited as a specific type of vulnerable group. The survivors were made vulnerable by a variety of exacerbating factors such as feelings of abandonment or rejection, being bullied, or disengagement from family and school, which led to a poor sense of self-worth and esteem, all of which increased their vulnerability to be sexually exploited. Leah’s comment below demonstrates this:

> **Leah:** “I always looked for love in the wrong places [voice wobbles]
> and I think that made me very vul-vulnerable.”

Relationships with parents and feeling abandoned and/or rejected

As part of their sense-making process, each survivor talked about their relationship with one or both parents, and the impact this had on them. They all talked about their lives as children and young women, implicitly and explicitly referring to feeling unloved and insecure in some way, particularly in terms of their family experiences. At some point, all of the women either felt abandoned, or were physically left or bereaved by a parent when they were girls. The pain and impact of the perceived rejection and abandonment that the survivors felt is embedded throughout their narratives, and it is likely that it increased their levels of vulnerability. These perceptions of not always feeling loved, and not having a firm and secure sense of belonging come out of the narratives strongly.

Our cultural expectation of parenting is to rely on parents to create that sense of being loved and belonging for children but, for a myriad of possible reasons, not all parents may be able to do that successfully, or in the way that the child needs. The survivors as adult women, and some as mothers themselves, discuss this in terms of their own parents quite sensitively, with understanding and loyalty. This contrasts with some of the value-laden language that exists in some literature that pertains to parents (DCSF, 2010; Scott & Skidmore, 2006), which is explored further in Chapter 8. For example, Scott and Skidmore (2006:3) identify what they refer to as “problematic parenting”, using the term to generally encapsulate the impact of “a clear deficit in the parenting capacities”. This is a rather loaded term. Although it refers to parents who struggle to parent effectively and safeguard their children (for a variety of reasons such as poor mental health, substance misuse, and/or poor parenting skills), the term also contains a value-judgement and implied blame and I prefer the more neutral term, ‘parents with problems’. The term ‘problematic parenting’ contributes to the perception that CSE mainly happens to young people who come from certain ‘types’ of ‘problem’ families, and is a hangover from a dominant family-blaming narrative of the post-war period (Delap, 2015). It is certainly not the intention here to perpetuate this stereotype, and indeed all of the parent participants (see Chapter 8) challenge this particular image of parents and families. Furthermore, such terms are representative of the current child protection system and its approach to safeguarding, in which assessment of parental capacity is central (DCSF, 2010; HM Government, 2015, 2018).

Whilst it is well documented that in many cases some parents do abuse and mistreat their children (McNicoll, 2017; Laming, 2003; Radford et al., 2011), and therefore assessment of parenting capacity is necessary in order to safeguard children, this is not *usually* the case in terms of CSE (PACE, 2016). Therefore, it is important to note at this point that literature stemming from parents’ rights organisations indicates a tendency, within both literature and practice, to highlight “intrafamilial abuse as the key precursor or pre-existing vulnerability to CSE in a child” (PACE, 2014b:5). It is argued that this often serves to shift the focus, which should remain fixed on the perpetrators, away from the actual causes of CSE (PACE, 2014b).

To be clear, it is not the purpose here to judge the parents’ ability to parent, but to reflect and re-frame the survivors’ experiences of their relationships with their parents. It is the survivors who identify problems their parents may have had, as opposed to ‘deficits in parenting capacity’. These are characterised in the narratives as: parental mental illness; ‘absent presence’ whereby the parents are physically there but unable to meet their child’s emotional needs; emotional and physical abandonment of the child; and bereavement. This applies to both male and female parents.

It is interesting to note that most survivors focused predominantly on their relationship with their mothers and consequently this analysis follows suit. That mothers feature so highly in the narratives encapsulates the ideal of motherhood as a ‘natural’ and desired state for women and is a pervasive notion. It symbolises the social osmosis that transmits gendered messages regarding what is ‘normal’, expected and performed. It is likely that these messages have been absorbed by the survivors and have coloured the sense-making in their narratives. However, it is not my intention to reproduce a ‘mother-blaming’ narrative, reminiscent of Bowlby’s concept of maternal deprivation (Bowlby, 1952), and indeed most of the survivors do not lay the blame with their mothers either. Instead, they have sought to understand their mother’s position and experience, demonstrating empathy. In three of the cases it was the mother who stayed and parented the survivor, and one was raised by her father.

Rutter (1981) has unpicked the concept of maternal deprivation and, as a result of an in-depth review of the research, concluded that it was “misleading” and “inaccurate” because in most cases the harm to attachments and relationships relates to the care of the child and/or “relationships with people rather than any specific defect of the mother” (Rutter, 1981:121). In this work, Rutter also questions the deprivation aspect of the concept on the basis that deprivation refers to a loss of something. However, Rutter’s review (1981) of attachment research found strong evidence that damage to attachments is most often the result of a lack or distortion of care, as opposed to the loss of it. Yet despite this, Rutter (Ibid.) highlights that the idea of maternal deprivation has elevated the mother, and the love only she is able to provide, to “an almost mystical importance” (Rutter, 1981:121). The consequences of this discourse and the impact it has had on welfare agency responses in relation to parents and families are explored later.

Although their mothers dominate in their narratives, the survivors do also talk about their fathers. In half the cases, the survivors’ relationship with their fathers appears poor. In Ellie’s case, her father was also physically absent in her life and this is reflected in her narrative:

> **Ellie:** “We don’t really have a relationship.”

Present but absent fathers also contributed to the survivors' vulnerability:

> **Leah:** "He was very cold (...) I didn't have that where I could speak to my dad (…) he didn't fully understand."

Leah recognised the strain in her relationship with her father and that she never really connected with him, which was compounded when he re-married, diminishing her feelings of security and being loved at home.

This research cannot speak to how Leah's father experienced being a single parent to a young girl, but it is fair to note that notions and expectations of fatherhood are culturally and socially constructed, embedded in dominant and pervasive ideas regarding family, parenting and hegemonic masculinities (Schmitz, 2016). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the idealized, normative version of what it is to be a male and how to perform 'being a man' (Connell, 2014). This may include characteristics such as being economically active, heterosexual, tough, dominant and rational and these characteristics do extend to normative ideas surrounding fatherhood (Schmitz, 2016). As a result, fathers are often positioned as secondary, or "auxiliary", parents (Schmitz, 2016:4), which may inhibit how some men engage with parenting, not perceiving themselves as legitimate parents (Donaldson, 1993). Schmitz (2016) suggests this can create uncertainty and ambiguity for some fathers, who internalise these pervasive cultural messages, accepting that they exist in the shadow of the "motherhood mystique" (Schmitz, 2016:7), which positions women as the best caregivers. As a result, this can mean "children may suffer the indirect consequences of a detached father" (Schmitz, 2016:18), as Leah and Ellie seem to have done. The other two survivors presented a more favourable picture of their fathers:

> **Fran:** "My dad were really protective and a loving, loving guy."

Fran spoke very affectionately and emotionally about her father throughout her narrative, despite being negative about him once as part of her explanation of her emotional state as a teenager:

> **Fran:** "I hated my parents." [Fran's emphasis].

Alina's father died when she was young and as an adult she firmly believes that she would not have been exploited if he were still alive, because he would have taken care of her:

> **Alina:** "I always say if my dad was here my life would be so much different. So much different (…) I wouldn't have been around the people that I've been around. For a fact."

Alina is drawing on normative and gendered understandings of the role of 'father' as instrumental, dominant and protective (Schmitz, 2016) and her words have a yearning quality. There is a contrast between her expectations of her father, who she imagines would have protected her and who she would have been more willing to listen to, and of her mother, who:

> **Alina:** "Tries her best but she knows she can't really tell me what to do (…) so she doesn't really know what to do."

Feelings of abandonment and/or rejection were present in each narrative, yet none of the women implied or inferred that they blamed their absent parent for the abuse; indeed in most cases they were protective of and loyal to them, which echoes other findings in the literature (Scott & Skidmore, 2006).

Leah's mother left her in the care of her father when she was 10 years old. This is an important turning point for her due to the huge emotional impact it had on her and her sense of self. This comes quite soon in her narrative and she clearly still found it painful to talk about:

> **Leah:** **"**My mum, she kinda left when I was ten (…) [voice is shaking] so that hit me quite hard. Inside I'd felt like I hated her but really I didn't. I just wanted her to love me."

Leah's statement also identifies another theme, to which she returns several times in her narrative, regarding the importance of, and need for, love and how her absence of feeling loved only increased her vulnerability:

> **Leah:** **"**So it were a lack of love when I needed it."
> **"**You go back 'cos you love the person and you get something from them."

Ellie’s experience of, and relationship to, her biological mother was fraught and often traumatic, as opposed to loving. Her narrative explicitly captures her perception of the uncertainty and horror that she experienced. Her mother, a single parent, had a diagnosis of schizophrenia and Ellie remembers living with her:

> **Ellie:** “It was so horrific like living with my mum was, it was like a nightmare you would never wake up from.”

Ellie’s vulnerability at this point was already high but at the age of eight, she was ejected from her mother’s life. This was a significant emotional and geographic turning point for her. Ellie was put into the care of an older cousin, Sarah, who became her surrogate mother, but her feelings of abandonment continued and permeate her narrative:

> **Ellie:** “I wasn’t allowed any contact with my mum at this point, like I wasn’t allowed to see her, I wasn’t allowed to speak to her.”

Ellie recognised that living with Sarah prevented her from entering care but this also increased her vulnerability because she was so dependent on, and indebted to, Sarah. However, when Ellie, aged 8, first disclosed the sexual abuse she was suffering at the hand of Sarah’s son, she was disbelieved, and when she disclosed again, aged 14, Ellie was “*disowned*” by Sarah:

> **Ellie:** “She [Sarah] was my mum and she left me.”

Ellie was returned to her biological mother when she was 12 years old, as a young carer, which appears to have extended to the current day. She exhibits strong, almost maternal feelings towards her, probably due to the role of carer that she had to undertake from a young age. Their role reversal is evident:

> **Ellie:** I’m gonna give her the life that I always wanted to have that I **know** [Ellie’s emphasis] she did want to give me, she just couldn’t.”

Fran’s relationship with her mother was strained and talking about it is one of the first things she explains about her life history.

Fran: “I had attachment issues to my mum (…) and my mum was **really** ill, **really** ill, [Fran’s emphasis] when she had me.”

The importance of positive attachments formed in early childhood is well established, as is the recognition that childhood relationships significantly influence how well an adult copes and functions psychologically and emotionally (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1973). Attachment theory posits that experiences of attachment to significant care-givers create cognitive templates, effectively providing children with an internal working model (IWM) (Bowlby, 1973). The emphasis, reflecting cultural norms, was on the mother as responsible for this, but this assumption is *not* echoed here. These internal representations serve as templates for future relationships and it is the quality of attachment experiences that determine the nature of the IWM and the subsequent “behavioural strategies employed beyond infancy” (Scott Brown & Wright, 2001:18). A positive IWM provides a cognitive framework for achieving a good sense of the self, sense of others, and relationships with oneself and others, all increasing one’s self-worth (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

Conversely, poor attachments lead to poor IWMs which can lead to low self-worth and difficulties in establishing positive relationships with others (Bowlby, 1973). If a child has perceived themselves as unacceptable to their care-giver, their IWM will negatively influence their future sense of self and relationships to others. Thus, if a child feels unwanted by their caregiver, they may be more likely to believe they are unwanted by anyone (Shibue & Kasai, 2014).

My analysis of the survivors’ narratives indicates that they all experienced some form of *parental* ‘deprivation’ or deficit and I suggest that this increased their need for love, affection, a sense of belonging, and subsequently increased their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Poor attachments in infancy have been found to create “later deficits in social and emotional competence during childhood, adolescence and adulthood” (Saunders et al., 2011:403). Increased vulnerability coupled with poor ‘social and emotional competence’ contributed to the survivors’ perception of their relationship with the abusers and/or their responses to being sexually exploited.

Most of the survivors were adolescents when they were sexually exploited, and this pattern is reflected in wider literature (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). Attachment and adolescent development has received relatively little attention (Scott Brown & Wright, 2001). This is an important omission due to the transitional nature of adolescence, the increase in external influences, the need to assert their autonomy, and where the "self-in-relation-to-other" (Scott Brown & Wright, 2001:16) development is particularly strong. Scott Brown and Wright (2001: 20) observe that patterns of attachment often "become sexualized" (Ibid., 20) and the type or style of attachment a young person has will shape the nature of those experiences, such as "experiencing sex without love to please the other" (Ibid., 20). Crittenden (1997, cited in Scott Brown & Wright, 2001) states that this may manifest as promiscuity. These aspects of attachment theory are evident in some of the survivors' narratives and offer a possible explanation of their experiences.

As a child and teenager, Fran perceived that perhaps her mother did not love her as much as her siblings and this was confirmed in later years:

> **Fran:** "She told me that she didn't love me like she loved her other children and that she never bonded." [Voice wobbles].

As an adult, following counselling and conversations with her mother about this, Fran is able to make sense of her relationship as being the result of poor attachment for quite understandable reasons (poor health, low income, several children and poor recognition in the 1970s of what was likely to have been post-natal depression). As a child, however, Fran did not have this capacity and instead internalised what she perceived as a rejection as being her own fault:

> **Fran:** "I always thought there was something bad about me and wrong wi' me."

Fran's comment offers insight into how she understood and made sense of her relationship with her mother as well as her sense of self, which was essentially that she was "*bad*", and illustrates a poor IWM (Bowlby, 1973). This internalised message significantly increased Fran's level of vulnerability, directly impacting on her sense of self-worth and value, in turn leading to increasingly high-risk behaviour and detachment from family and subsequently school.

Being bullied

Another experience that some of the women had as girls was being bullied, and in some cases they were physically harmed as a result. This is a common push factor in terms of pathways into CSE, particularly because of its harmful psychological effects (NSPCC, 2016

> **Fran:** “She bullied me, verbally at first and then physically. Erm and even at youth club, we all went to same youth club, she’d have a go at me (…) [Sharp intake of breath] in class, she’d have a go at me. In drama she’d have a go at me.”

The way Fran tells this gives a sense that the bully was everywhere, which made school a very unsafe space to be. She conveys her sense that there was no real escape, except to avoid the places where the bully was, which was school. As an adult, Fran recognises the power this person had over her and the impact the bullying had on her life. She began to truant for “*months and months*” at a time, spending her time in other unsafe environments. The experience of being bullied is clearly an event in her life that acted as a turning point, increasing her vulnerability and nudging her closer to the world of CSE:

> **Fran:** “It had a really big impact on me (…) It affected me, me work, me mood, my other relationships and at home. I started to truant (…) to smoke, cider (…) stay out late, mess up my school work. So really just self-destruct in a way and erm, I was promiscuous as well.”

Here Fran literally charts her self-destruction in a very detailed way. She lists the extensive and ripple-like effects of being bullied and there is a strong sense of one self-destructive act leading to another. Fran’s description of herself and her “*normal*” childhood before she went to secondary school provides a stark contrast to herself as a young teenager:

> **Fran**: "Lots of hobbies: I was a majorette; I was a dancer; I was a sunbeam at the theatre; I were talented."

Fran's self-destruction was almost targeted at destroying the young 'good' girl she once was. Being bullied exacerbated her evolving sense that there was "*something bad*" about her, and this experience served to confirm her existing negative sense of self. In this way, vulnerabilities can be visualised as layers, and every layer, which is the result of a challenging or harmful experience and the interpretation of it, rests upon the previous one, serving only to increase the person's vulnerability. This layered nature of vulnerability is also evident in Leah's narrative. The first layer was set down when her mother left her, the second due to a strained relationship with her "*cold*" father, and another after being bullied at school.

What is apparent in the accounts is how fragile and fraught the transition from girl to young woman can be. The messages and lack of guidance the survivors experienced about being a young woman or, perhaps, how to be and how to perform their gendered identity, appear as largely negative. They highlight the confusion embedded in the transition from girl to woman, which is clearly compounded by the mixed messages the survivors received. For instance, Fran was a "*normal*", 'good girl' with lots of healthy hobbies but, for her, it seems she lost herself in making that transition to young woman. It is as if she believed she had failed at being the good girl, perhaps as a result of how she perceived her place in her family as an outsider, as exacerbated by the extreme form of bullying she experienced, and so she sought to destroy that ideal and focus on being a 'bad girl' successfully. Leah's experience is a similar, though less extreme version of this.

How the young women understood their experience at the time

The vulnerability of the survivors as children and teenagers was not only due to external factors, such as difficulties within their relationships with their parents or being bullied, it was also shaped and compounded by the way they made sense of events at the time. As adult survivors, the women are able to give valuable insights into how they perceived, internalised and made sense of events they experienced at the time. They all directly and indirectly recreate, to some extent, the context of their childhood and youth. Each survivor focuses on aspects of the context, or “strips of personal experience” (Goffman, 1981:174) that best suit her re-telling of her experiences and the creation of her narrative. These strips are replayed, re-experienced and shared with the listener and become internalised as the life story develops. The replaying and sharing of the experiences creates and reinforces the survivor’s “narrative identity”, defined as “a person’s internalised and evolving life story” (McAdams & McLean, 2013:233) and is “used to develop and maintain the self” (McLean et al., 2007:262).

The survivors’ narratives act as a window to, and a verbal representation of, their IWM, giving an insight into how they made sense of events at the time and how this led to their decisions, choices, coping strategies and behaviours. All the women interviewed made sense of their experiences in their own way but there are two noticeable responses evident in the narratives. One is characterised as ‘active and angry’ and the other is ‘silent and compliant’.

Active and angry

Leah’s narrative illustrates her active and angry state as a teenager. Fundamentally, this was a response to feeling that love was withheld from her, predominantly by her mother and, to some extent, her father too. Leah’s need for love runs throughout her narrative. She made sense of this at the time, probably in a way that she could not have articulated then, by feeling unloved and possibly unlovable. This became internalised and then influenced her choices and actions. As an adult, she recognises the loss of her mother’s love, and her hunger for love, as fundamental contributors to her vulnerability to being sexually exploited

> **Leah**: “I just wanted to be loved and I’m one of those people who fall in love very quickly as well because I just want to be loved.”

Similar processes can be seen in Alina’s narrative. After being raped when she was 14, Alina was subsequently interviewed by the police but nothing happened as a result. Alina describes one day when the police collected an alarm they had put in her house, as she was being harassed by some of the men in the community for disclosing:

Alina: "So I thought, alright forget about it then, I suppose 'cos it's not that serious 'cos they haven't done anything about it."

After they took the alarm, Alina never heard back from them. This event is a turning point for her. The lack of police action sent Alina the message that it was 'acceptable' for her to be raped. She internalised this. The subtext of this message, also internalised by Alina, was that she was not important, valued or worthy of the effort of protection and it is apparent that Alina believed that too:

Alina: "I felt so bad I wanted to kill myself and all sorts."
"I feel like I'm a failure."

The result was 'damage' to her IWM and self-esteem, which impaired her successive decisions, actions and behaviours.

Alina: "It was alright for someone to treat me like that so I ended up getting caught up in like, going out clubbing, meeting guys, like friends introducing me to other guys and stuff like that, where I'd just get used and abused."

Alina's response was similarly active. By her own admission she embraced and actively sought out the party lifestyle, simultaneously recognising that whilst it led to her exploitation, it also rewarded her financially and on a superficial level met some of her needs:

Alina: "I'd love it because, obviously, I'm not getting that at home so (…) and I just couldn't stop." "I'd get given money, like I could get my hair done, my nails done."

Fran's response echoes Alina's in that she also actively looked for ways of getting her needs met by looking for 'something' that would fulfil her in some way. Fundamentally, Fran's response was fuelled by her anger and her sense of abandonment and insecurity, and the way she framed these feelings caused her to lash out at her family and reject their protection:

Fran: "My self-esteem went, my self-worth"

Fran gradually disengaged from family and school, essentially detaching from the areas in her life that she felt unable to manage by quickly, almost spontaneously, making some decisions which changed the course of her life:

> **Fran:** "I just thought, 'I'm never going back to school.' I thought 'No way am I living in this house anymore, I've had enough. I'm running away'."

Fran never did go back to school or return to her family home. The night she ran away was the night she entered and became ensnared by the world of CSE.

Silent and compliant

Ellie's narrative provides a contrast to the other survivors in terms of how she responded to her abuse. Unlike them, Ellie's response can be characterised as much more passive. Before the age of eight she lived with her mum, who had a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. She lived in an unsafe environment with her mother's partner, who Ellie describes as an "*evil person*" and a paedophile:

> **Ellie:** "He would try to like, touch me, but I would always get away."

Ellie also suffered physical harm from his sons, including a broken nose. By the time of her mother's attempted suicide Ellie was already known to Children's Services. On her eighth birthday, she found her mother unconscious and called 999 and her older cousin, Sarah. Ellie's account depicts a terrified, confused and traumatised little girl, stood alone with her unconscious mother, not knowing if she was dead or alive:

> **Ellie:** "I opened it [the door] and like, they rushed in and it, it felt like I was just like flung back in a way."

The phrase "*flung back*" draws to mind being discarded, pushed out of the way, unnoticed, and having no sense of control. It suggests something that happens, or is done *to* a person and it captures Ellie's feeling and interpretation of the situation. The notion of being flung back ripples like an undercurrent permeating her entire narrative, increasing its sentient quality. For example, when Ellie disclosed being sexually abused to Sarah, whom she lived with after her mother's suicide attempt, she was 'flung back':

> **Ellie:** "I told her and she was just like "stop telling tales and go back to sleep". She never believed me."

When Ellie disclosed again several years later, she was disowned by her family, and Sarah, who Ellie saw as a surrogate mother, refused to see her, another instance where Ellie was 'flung back' out of the way. This was also a turning point in Ellie's mental health and well-being:

> **Ellie:** "It felt like it broke me in a way (…) I took an overdose (…) I just felt like I was abandoned."

Ellie's narrative reveals many times when she felt "*flung back*", starting perhaps as a result of her mother's mental illness, which left very little room for her. She details the dire emotional impact this had on her, each time sending a message reaffirming her low value, which she internalised. In these moments of being "*flung back*", she was pushed out of the way, unseen, overlooked and unprotected. Ellie's response to this, in contrast to the other three women, was to become silent and compliant, crystallised in the moment when her cousin, after the disclosure of abuse, told her to go back to bed:

> **Ellie:** "So, I did exactly that. I went back to bed and I carried on for another three years and I didn't tell anybody."

This statement is loaded with defeat, yet Ellie paints a picture coloured with relief and gratitude at being taken in and cared for by her cousin after the ordeal of living with her biological mother and her partner:

> **Ellie:** "She looked after me in ways that, even now, I could never be more grateful for because if she never took me in, God knows what could have happened to me."

It seems as though Ellie understood that if she wanted to remain in Sarah's care, she could not mention or talk about the sexual abuse her son was perpetrating against her again, and she did not. It is unlikely Ellie would have consciously made this decision, weighing up her possible options, but it does appear that this is what she did. She complied, and this is the crux of her exploitation: she was so vulnerable and desperate to belong that she ‘accepted’ being sexually abused in return for the façade of a stable home.

Detachment

It is evident from these narratives that the journey into the world of CSE is facilitated by a process of detachment. Smeaton (2005) identifies detachment as a potential state of being for young people involved in CSE. She recognises it as a process, defining it as:

> “A situation where a child or young person has left, or been forced to leave, parents or carers and has been detached [from them] for a period of four weeks or more” (Smeaton, 2005:6).

Smeaton’s (2005) definition is quite narrow and can only be applied to Fran, who after running away from home became entangled in CSE for the next eleven years. Fran had a liminal existence outside of key social institutions such as her family and education for the vast majority of this time. Detachment from education is widely perceived as a common characteristic of sexually exploited young people (Scott & Skidmore, 2006) and truanting from school was a persistent behaviour of some of the women.

However, the *process* of detachment applies to most of the women and is an important tool which aids our understanding of their journey into the world of CSE. From the narratives it appears that the process occurs on an emotional and psychological level. Detachment is a result of how the young women made sense of themselves, others, the events in their lives *and* how they felt about this. For instance, Fran detached from all the areas of her life which she struggled to cope with, such as school and family, thus demonstrating that detachment can actually be a coping mechanism. Ellie did not seem to detach from family and education; in fact she tried to hold on, to remain *attached* to her family despite the extreme personal cost.

Part 2: Experiencing and suffering within the world of CSE

> **Fran:** "I lost my identity very quickly and I shut down. I just tried not to feel."

It is clear from the survivors' narratives that the sexual exploitation of a young person is traumatic, requiring a sensitive and informed understanding of the inherent complexities not only of CSE itself, but also of the range of responses a young person can have to it, and the impact it can have. This section will explore how the survivors experienced and suffered within the world of CSE as young women. It is noteworthy that the narratives of Fran and Alina provide contrasting perspectives and give a clear insight into different 'models' of CSE (see Chapter 3): Fran's experience is indicative of the 'boyfriend/pimp' model, while Alina's is more aligned with the 'party' model (Shephard & Lewis, 2017). The data explored in this section allows an analysis of the dominating themes of agency, exchange and young peoples' search to meet their needs, and suffering.

Understanding the agency of sexually exploited young people

> **Alina:** "Obviously nothing in life is for free."

Agency

Bandura (2006) defines having agency as being able "to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (Bandura, 2006:164). I add 'thoughts' to this definition in reference to the cognitive processes of sense-making, like the IWM, which influence subsequent decisions and actions, which are apparent in the survivors' narratives. Whilst care is needed when discussing the agency of a young person experiencing CSE, because there is potential to sound victim-blaming (Smette et al., 2009), it is important to recognise that agency is very often an intrinsic aspect of it. It is important to develop a better understanding of agency, and as Woodiwiss (2018:163) suggests to "separate agency and choice from blame." Part of the problem is the current distinction between 'child' and 'adolescent'. O'Connell Davidson (2005) suggests that labelling young victims of sexual abuse as 'children' (i.e. sexually innocent), as opposed to 'young people' (i.e. sexually aware), ensures they are perceived as innocent and blameless. This is because they have "restricted capacity for exercising agency; thus they cannot be considered responsible for crimes committed against them" (Smette et al., 2009:354). Conversely, recognising the agency of adolescents can be misconstrued as blaming victims, or implying some blame on their part, and this has certainly been the case in some responses to sexual exploitation in England (Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012; RBSCB, 2012).

Melrose (2013:14) argues that "CSE discourse cannot and does not account for the sexual agency of young people", and argues that the current discourse wrongly positions sexually exploited young people as "passive objects". This can project a disempowering message regarding victimhood. Dodsworth (2012) highlights that it is important to acknowledge that the relationship between victimhood and agency is not an oppositional, binary one. It is an active, fluid and dynamic relationship whereby the two intersect and interact, and can be experienced simultaneously. She highlights the dangers of taking a "too polarised" (Dodsworth, 2012:520) position regarding victimhood and agency, which can actually lead to silencing the women involved and excluding those voices from forging an effective way forward. Instead, Dodsworth advocates for the need to recognise the "differing balance of agency and victimhood through life pathways" (Dodsworth, 2012:520) as a way to understand the complexities involved in surviving and adapting to exploitation. Harper and Scott (2005) highlight the nuances of the concept of agency within constrained circumstances, identifying that exploitation often occurs "as a result of young people making constrained choices against a background of social, economic and emotional vulnerability" (Ibid., 41). Thus, young people may be coerced to make a 'constrained choice', for instance to partake is certain activities in order to receive something they feel they need (such as drugs, affection and sense of security, or a bed for the night).

There is also a connection between performativity of gender and agency (Butler, 1990). They can be considered as interdependent since performativity can be viewed as an expression of agency, and so without performativity, individuals would have "no way of exercising agency" (Alsop et al., 2002:100). I argue that a young person's involvement in CSE is often a maladaptive way to meet their unmet (particularly emotional) needs, which in the survivors' cases is dependent on their performance of their gender as sexually compliant young women, and as such their agency is constrained and their decision making becomes impaired.

This is evidenced in the survivors’ narratives and is supported by other research (Dodsworth, 2014b; Melrose, 2013). Butler (1990) argues that gender is performed and performances of gender are context specific, influenced by the dominant ideals, norms and practices of any given context at any given time. She also recognises that performativity of gender is guided by scripts (which can also vary) that guide towards appropriate and acceptable gendered behaviours and ways of performing masculinity and femininity. I argue that these gendered scripts, transmitted through cultural sex grooming, are learnt through behaviours that are positively and negatively reinforced by external sources. For instance, Alina and Fran learnt that their value was in being ‘desired’ by men and their gender script was to please them, whereas Ellie learnt that her script was to stay silent and compliant and when she deviated from this she was punished. Underpinning all the survivors’ scripts was the message ultimately to be submissive.

Research by Pearce et al. (2002) suggests that CSE is not static but instead the victims are able to move within broad categories that operate on a continuum: children at risk of CSE; children and young people trading sexual favours for gain; and children and young people who identify as working as prostitutes. This idea of (constrained) movement between the categories highlights an important element of decision making, or agency, on the part of the children/young people. It infers they are “social actors in their own right” (Melrose, 2013:14), making rational or strategic decisions within the abuse, possibly to maintain their survival. Dodsworth (2014:190) identifies further wider structures relating to socio-economic deprivation that can also “have a significant impact on the pathways” that sexually exploited young people “feel able or forced to take.” To be clear, I do not, in *any* way, blame young people or hold them responsible for being sexually exploited, but I do recognise that young people are active decision-makers within any given context and sometimes these decisions *appear* to contribute towards their exploitation. Leah, reflecting on her fifteen year old self, illustrates this point:

> **Leah:** "I was like a rebel and I thought I was streetwise and I thought I was headstrong and I thought I was mature (…) I don't think anybody would've been able to convince me otherwise."

Exchange

As I discussed in Chapter 3, a significant aspect of CSE, which is closely linked to agency, is the acknowledgement of the role and existence of 'exchange'. This word denotes a two way transaction. In Chapter 3, I questioned the centrality of exchange as *the distinguishing factor* in defining CSE and argued that extortion is often a more appropriate term to describe some interactions that occur in CSE. Yet, although it is uncomfortable to write, it is clear from some of the literature (Beckett et al., 2017; CEOP, 2011; DfE, 2017; OCC, 2012) and from the data explored here, that often young people receive *something* in exchange for their involvement in CSE, and sometimes they actively seek out the 'reward', or 'compensation'. It is the exchange element of CSE that facilitated the use of the once commonly used term 'child prostitution/prostitute', and the consequent criminalisation of many exploited young people. The term prostitute and the idea of prostitution are entirely unhelpful because both are so profoundly and inextricably stigmatising and negative towards the 'prostitute', i.e. the person, usually a woman, who is usually being sexually exploited and often controlled. The term simplifies and dilutes the enormous complexities regarding issues of power, gender and control of sexuality, particularly for females involved in prostitution (Banyard, 2016; De Beauvoir, 1997).

Some literature encapsulates this concept of exchange as 'survivor sex' (this includes any sexual activity), whereby selling sex is a means to survive (Dodsworth, 2015). This is generally associated with extreme need, such as homelessness, or exchanging sexual activity for basic material needs such as food, accommodation, drugs and alcohol (Kattari & Begun, 2017; Roe-Sepowitz, 2012). Another term is 'transactional sex', which typically occurs between younger women and older, wealthier men (Zembe et al., 2013) and is a means of accessing not only basic material needs but also markers of a lifestyle the young women would not otherwise have been able to access, such as fashion and beauty items. Pearce (2013) refers to this as 'survival consent'. These terms are more helpful as they begin to unpick and recognise the reasons behind sexual exchanges. A limitation of these terms, as used in the literature, is the focus on survival/transactional sex being motivated by material needs and a lack of recognition that meeting emotional needs is also a strong motivator. This is certainly the case in the survivors' narratives. Whichever term is used, the important issue is that underlying both is a lack of choice, due to powerful contextual factors underpinned by pervasive gendering processes.

Agency and exchange: the search to meet their needs

It appears that a main driver of the survivors' decisions, choices and actions/inaction (i.e. their agency, albeit constrained) as young women was their search to try to meet some of their emotional needs: an active process in itself, but one based upon extremely flawed scripts. Inherent to that search is the concept of exchange - in order to receive the thing they need, they would *have to* give something. The phrase 'have to' is important as it denotes a lack of real and free choice, highlighting the constrained agency that surrounds exploited young people:

> **Leah**: "I'd make myself get into like horrible situations because I **just** [Leah's emphasis] wanted to be loved (…) I just want to be loved."

Leah's comment "*I'd make myself*" illustrates her agency, and "*I just wanted to be loved*" reveals her vulnerability and the relationship between the two. The statement demonstrates how her decisions and actions were directed by her profound vulnerability and unmet emotional needs. Either consciously or unconsciously, Leah was an active agent who made 'choices' that were not necessarily healthy, after weighing up her (limited) options at the time. The strength of Leah's need to feel loved drove her into situations that she describes as "*horrible*" yet it seems that the 'cost' of the exchange was worth the fulfilment (no matter how superficial or temporary) of that need to feel loved and wanted.

This search to meet emotional needs is echoed in other survivors' narratives and wider research (Dodsworth, 2014a, 2014b). The need to 'belong' somewhere was important to some and they made enormous compromises in order to secure this feeling. For instance Fran, after her release from three months in a juvenile detention centre, had an opportunity to escape her sexual exploitation. Instead, she rejected this, stealing from her parents and willingly returning to a new abuser, Danny, who was pimping and beating her. Fran was living as his 'girlfriend' with his family and Danny's father was also sexually abusing her. She was sixteen years old.

> **Fran:** "I stole £20 out my mum's purse and I went to the gambling house 'cos I wanted to surprise him"

Fran's agency is evident: she wanted to "*surprise him*". This speaks to her perception of her and Danny's relationship as a couple, and perhaps her need to normalise their relationship as a way of making the reality easier to cope with. Fran's comment also implies her need to prove herself and her loyalty to Danny, perhaps in exchange for his approval and to secure her position with him. That Fran chose to take this path can be perceived as implying that she consented, on some level, to the subsequent abuse. Of interest at this point is Milgram's research into obedience, which highlights an 'agentic state' (Milgram, 1974), whereby an individual obeys the orders and wishes of someone they perceive as an authority figure, essentially acting as an agent of that person's will. Following this idea, it is plausible that Fran's own agency was replaced by Danny's.

An obvious question is, why did Fran go back? Perhaps because Danny had 'rescued' Fran from Mick, which made her feel indebted to him, and she perceived herself to be his girlfriend. Other research acknowledges that abusers create a feeling of indebtedness in their victims as a way of coercion and control (Barnardo's, 2011). Fran's narrative suggests that despite the horror of her situation, she did have a sense of belonging and it appears that this was a tolerable exchange for her. Social identity theory states that an individual's sense of self and identity is based on which group they belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). After all the abuse, Fran saw herself as belonging to Danny's group. She 'was his', giving her a place and even a small amount of status. Danny "*had girls all over the place*" but Fran describes herself thus:

> **Fran:** "I was his number one (…) and I sat in the front of the car."

Fran's comment about being the one allowed to sit in the front seat is quite heart-breaking. It gives a clear insight into the mind of a sexually exploited sixteen year old and one can imagine how important this was to her at the time, how she was slightly elevated above his other girls and how this must have given her a (false) sense of self-worth and esteem. It seems that Fran's need to belong and to be loved were so strong that she was somehow able to 'tolerate' extreme abuse and sexual violence to satisfy those needs. Furthermore, isolating the young person from their support system is common in CSE cases (Barnardo's, 2011). Danny had successfully done this to Fran by constantly telling her that no one else cared about or wanted her. It was perhaps easier, or simpler, to go back into the life into which she had been indoctrinated for a year, rather than face the shame, guilt and uncertainty of returning home to her parents, where she did not believe she was wanted. This is a version of 'better the devil you know' and a similar but contrasting process is visible in Ellie's narrative. She remained silent and compliant about being sexually abused for four years, in exchange for having a sense of belonging within a family. The strength and impact of the unmet emotional needs of vulnerable young people clearly cannot be underestimated or overlooked when trying to understand their perspectives, experience and sense-making.

An interesting dimension to a discussion about young people's agency is to recognise that a person is not simply either active or passive, and these states do not exist as a binary. They are dynamic, fluid and can be simultaneous, affected by the strength of unmet emotional needs. Alina's narrative illustrates this:

> **Alina:** "So I ended up getting caught up in like, going out clubbing, meeting guys, like friends introducing me to other guys and stuff like that, where I'd just get used and abused and like I'd get given money."
> "I got a bit money hungry."

Alina's first statement positions her as very passive, "*caught up*", as though she was being swept along, being introduced to men, and being given money: all of these things were happening *to* her. Dodsworth (2014b:3) describes this as "a strong sense of victimhood and inevitability, or fatalism." Alina was fifteen when she entered this 'party lifestyle', a misnomer if ever there was one. The wider context of her narrative explains this as the result of how she was treated, firstly by the man who raped her when she was fourteen, and secondly by the poor police handling of the rape, and of her as a vulnerable young person. It also indicates the ability of cultural grooming to desensitise young women to sexual violence and what Pearce (2013) would identify as ‘normalised consent’.

Alina’s second statement, however, implies agency, exchange, and perhaps even pragmatism as she took part in transactional sex, underpinned by ‘survival consent’ (Pearce, 2013). One could argue that given the circumstances in which Alina found herself, she simply ‘made the best’ of it and enjoyed what she could; for instance. being able to afford getting her hair and nails done and getting a lot of attention. For Alina, being “*used and abused*” was a tolerable exchange in return for getting some of her emotional and material needs met. Her continued engagement with the abusive ‘party lifestyle’ had the dichotomous effect of simultaneously reinforcing her very low sense of self-worth, but also offering her a temporary and superficial boost which sustained her involvement in the exploitation for several years.

As adults looking back, the survivors recognise their agency as teenagers: that they made choices or took certain actions, or even inaction, that they believe compounded or exacerbated their sexual exploitation. Most of the survivors report enjoying some aspects of being involved in CSE and some needs were being met by their involvement, despite the high price they had to pay. They were enticed by the novelty of new experiences, many of which were very simple, and of being given things for ‘free’. For Fran, who had grown up in a white, working-class family with a “*racist*” father, experiencing foods from a different culture to hers would not only have seemed exotic, but would also have probably satisfied her rebellious nature at that time:

> **Fran**: “He took me curry houses. I’d never tasted food so delicious in all my life.”
>
> **Leah:** “He gave us cigarettes and stuff (…) to a fifteen year old girl, free cigarettes alibi for when you’re truanting, **yeah**. Win, win, win for you.”

Leah, as a fifteen year old, enjoyed receiving these things and recognises that at the time she was not at all suspicious of Jazveer's motives. There is also an implied sense of power in her words, that she was the 'winner' and was getting the most out of the situation, that she was in fact "using" *him*. This illustrates the cunning and manipulative nature of a sex groomer, as in Leah's case Jazveer positioned himself as less powerful than Leah, and lulled her into a false sense of security whereby she had the power and when they got together it would be Leah's 'choice'.

This sense of personal power and of being wanted or desired is present in Alina's comment as she describes the 'buzz' of being the centre of attention:

> **Alina:** "It makes you feel nice 'cos you're in a club and everyone's staring over, looking over."

These three statements clearly demonstrate how vulnerable some young people are and how easy it is for potential abusers to groom them. The statements illustrate that it does not require an elaborate plan to ensnare a vulnerable young person – it seems that substances that are usually 'off limits' to young people such as alcohol, cigarettes and 'exotic' foods can be enough. The survivors' recognition of how they were swayed and their engagement in the exchange process complicates their ability to reconcile what they perceive as their role in the abuse, a finding reported elsewhere (Dodsworth, 2014a). Thus agency is mixed up with responsibility and, more negatively, self-blame:

> **Leah:** "I just feel like because it happened after I left school he didn't do anything wrong but he still groomed me but still inside I felt really guilty when I went to the police. Like he might lose everything because of me."

Leah not only blames herself for what happened with Jazveer, she also feels responsible for him. This confusion, caused by the recognition of one's own agency and the subsequent power of self-blame, is crystallised in Alina's narrative as she talks about being raped:

> **Alina:** “Since that first rape, I have been raped again but I don’t call it rape. (...) There’s plenty of times when I’ve said “No” and the guy doesn’t listen so in a way, to other people that’s rape, but to me, I kind of put myself into that situation (...) I just feel like it’s my own fault.”

Not only does Alina’s comment highlight the normalisation of rape as a possible or usual occurrence in her life as a young woman (a consequence of cultural grooming) it also illustrates a sub-standard she holds for herself: what would be considered as rape for others should not be considered as rape for her because she deserved it for ‘putting herself in that situation’. This is a direct result of her experience of sexual exploitation, and being raped is something that happened to her several times between the ages of 14 and 18 years, so it seems to have become something she expected as a real possibility, which had to be tolerated. Furthermore, after the first rape, Alina did not report any further ones.

The excerpts above illustrate that, as vulnerable young women, the survivors’ involvement in CSE was driven by a search to meet their unmet, predominantly emotional needs such as feeling loved and belonging. Similar themes were found by Dodsworth (2012) in her research into sex workers, whom she qualitatively interviewed to understand how they made sense of their experiences relating to their journeys into sexual exploitation. Dodsworth (2014a) reports that some of the women who had an unresolved search for approval and affection, who felt defeated by a sense of feeling different (and therefore had a very strong need to belong) developed maladaptive coping strategies which led to a downward spiral into sexual exploitation.

This is the case for all four survivors, especially Fran, although their ‘downward spirals’ all look very different as a result of other situational and individual factors. For my participants, what appears to be a key determinant is the concept of a ‘tolerable exchange’ that each of the survivors were able to cope with. All four survivors were looking for affection, a sense of belonging, and ultimately to feel loved, even if it was fleeting and superficial, and this appears to have been a powerful driver of their sense-making and subsequent behaviour in terms of how they responded to the sexual exploitation. *How* the survivors made sense of their childhood experiences, their sense of self and their worth impacted on the nature of their journey, what Dodsworth (2014:190) refers to as “pathway outcomes”. The strength of these needs, and their dependence on perpetrators to meet them, along with other factors such as family circumstances and very low self-esteem, increased their vulnerability. This negatively impacted on their ability to make healthy choices and decisions. It also appears that at the time the women did not really recognise the issue of consent, or their right to say no.

Consent

Implicit within the concepts of agency, and particularly exchange, is an understanding of an agreement being made. It is this aspect that becomes particularly slippery to grasp since agreement implies consent and this has been especially problematic in terms of misunderstandings of consent contributing to victim-blaming responses to CSE. As discussed in Chapter 3, consent is a complex, multi-faceted concept that is sensitive to situational dynamics. It is not simply about saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a request, it is about having the ‘freedom and capacity’ to do so (Sexual Offences Act, 2003, S.74). One’s ability to consent depends upon so many other potential factors, particularly the contextual factors. These include capacity, age, what has gone before, who else is present, coercive aspects which may be explicit, threatening and violent, or softly coercive underpinned by a seemingly gentle, consistent manipulation, and the perceived consequences of the consent or of withholding it.

Consent is not a clear cut issue for young people or victims of CSE (OCC, 2012) and this was certainly true for the survivors who were interviewed in this research. In many cases the victims were confused about the meaning of consent, and 13-14 year olds are “less likely to recognise non-consensual sex than older age groups” (Coy et al., 2013:11). This is particularly relevant in CSE, as it is this age group who are more likely to be sexually exploited (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). Research by Coy et al. (2013) has found that generally young people understand what it is to give consent but are less clear about what getting consent is, and young people feel more confident describing and recognising consent in theory than in real life situations.

Coy et al. (2013) also found that the most influential factor in young people’s understanding of consent relates to constructions of gender, particularly regarding the double standards applied to male and female sexual activities.

Young men in the study reported feeling pressurised into acting in specific ways regarding sex and women, in order to gain status and respect amongst their peers. Young women reported feeling pressurised to have sex and stigmatised or even blamed for having sex against their will, and these socially gendered norms were found to be reinforced by both young women and men (Coy et al., 2013). Victims' views and/or confusion regarding consent are further complicated by their not always seeing themselves as victims, or recognising the 'soft coercion' they have experienced, because they often believe their abuser to be their boyfriend and feel a sense of loyalty towards them. This can complicate the investigation of CSE and the prosecution of perpetrators. Research has also found that some young people often took part in sexual activity to avoid the threat of harm to themselves or someone else (Coy et al., 2013).

Current understandings of consent are inadequate in relation to CSE and to understanding young people's experience and behaviour. This results in professionals and agencies failing to respond appropriately, and young people often feeling blamed for the abuse they experienced. Pearce (2013) proposes a *Social Model of Consent (SMC) as* a useful tool for turning our gaze away from the young person, and towards the social issues and context they are in, aiming to extend understandings of consent within an abusive context like CSE.

The SMC offers ways in which professionals can assess a young person's capacity to consent by considering how that consent can be abused*. The model recognises four modes of consent: Condoned (often by professionals who ignore or blame the victim); Coerced (through force and violence, or more subtly through grooming and manipulation); Normalised (relating to peer pressure and social norms within a group); and Survival (links to poverty or as a way to meet physical needs) (Pearce, 2013). A*ll of these modes are evident in the survivors' narratives. The SMC begins to address the social and situational aspects of consent, which can make it a rather nebulous grey area, and offers some clarity into the complexity of consent. However, I question the predominant use and inclusion of issues of consent, and advocate a shift in the discourse, particularly in terms of developing and re-framing responding agencies' understandings about consent (see Chapter 3).

Compliance, not consent

I believe that only to focus on developing an understanding of consent, as much of the literature and practice currently does (Coy et al., 2013; Pearce, 2013; Shephard & Lewis, 2017), is too narrow. It does not facilitate a more developed understanding of sexually exploited young people's 'choices' and behaviours, whereas employing the term compliance within CSE will. I argue that academics and responding agencies should consider the role and influence of compliance within the complex context of CSE, as it is often a more fitting term than consent, and thus will enable a more nuanced understanding.

Research from social psychology can assist with this. Compliance means "to conform, submit, or adapt (as to a regulation or to another's wishes) as required or requested" (Definition of comply, 2018). It is a type of social influence which operates on principles of consistency and responses to normative social pressures (Hogg & Vaughan, 1988). These pressures are usually invisible and intangible, and referring back to research (Coy et al., 2013) are what makes consent, or not consenting, very difficult and confusing for many young people *in the moment* of real life situations. Compliance is performed by most people every day whenever they 'go along' with something, even when they do not agree or want to. For example, wearing a school uniform whilst disagreeing with the policy, or following a bureaucratic procedure at work that seems unnecessary. Individuals tend to comply as a result of limited options or freedom, which signifies a power differential within the interaction. 'Submit' and 'adapt' (and even 'survive') are more appropriate and accurate terms to use when discussing, and improving understanding of, sexually exploited young people's behaviours, and being clear that these actions are not part of the consent discourse.

Sometimes sexually exploited young people unwillingly 'go along', or comply with, sexual interactions, not because they *want* to, but because they perhaps perceive it as the 'best' or only option at that time. Framing this as a version of consent is unhelpful and confusing as the survivors clearly demonstrate compliance in their narratives. For example, Alina went to clubs repeatedly knowing that she'd "*get used and abused*" in return for money, which I suggest should be framed as 'normalised compliance'. In contrast, Fran returned to her abuser 'voluntarily', which was interpreted by professionals and her parents as a choice and therefore as consent, but it is actually more accurate to call this 'coerced compliance'; and when, after disclosing being abused, Ellie was disbelieved and told to go to back bed, she complied.

The survivors experienced and made sense of these within a specific socio-cultural context*. I suggest that merging the concept of processes of gendering* as a triad of violence (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014) with better understandings of compliance would provide a useful framework and possible explanation for the survivors' actions. The triad of violence encapsulates the highly gendered, patriarchal context of the world of CSE, which essentially causes and maintains the existence of CSE. The impact of the triad of violence, which includes the pervasive processes of cultural grooming and prolific sexualisation, has resulted in a mass disempowerment of young people in terms of their understanding and interpretations of gender roles and expectations, particularly in relation to sex and sexuality. This has had a tremendously negative effect on their ability to make coherent sense of consent, their rights and their value (Coy et al., 2013, Papadopoulus, 2010; Pearce, 2013) and serves to increase their levels of compliance.

Thus the difference between compliance and consent is that acts of compliance stem from yielding, or submitting, to another's request, usually due to limited options and/or not having the strength and/or power to refuse, whereas consent means having capacity to willingly and freely agree to something. Compliance indicates that constraints of some nature are present, whereas consent does not. In moments when a young person feels threatened, it is no longer an issue of consent but of compliance, adaptation and survival. Therefore, in many cases of CSE there is a lot of compliance but very little consent. Ultimately I argue that there is simply no place for discussions of consent because compliance ***does not*** mean consent.

Survival strategies

Survival strategies utilised by sexually exploited young people are examples of adaption. Another way to understand the survivors' agency is to think about their actions in reference to trauma bonding (Lodrick, 2010). This refers to a deep connection between the young person and the abuser, despite the negative aspects of that relationship. It draws on the idea that attachment is a survival strategy and a way of explaining how some sexually exploited young people can develop a strong attachment, sense of loyalty and protectiveness towards their abuser, whereby abusive relationships become normalised. This can result in a young person developing a bond to their ‘in-group’ (abuser), for example Fran returning to Danny, which meant a further detachment from her ‘out-group’, (her family) (see Bloom, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ellie had a trauma bond, not to her abuser, but to his mother, Sarah, who was Ellie’s primary care-giver, and Leah may have had a trauma bond to Jazveer, which prompted her return to him.

Saunders et al. (2011) highlight how a positive relationship with an alternative support figure can be a way for children to overcome negative parenting and “transcend their negative working model” (Saunders et al., 2011:405). Scott Brown and Wright (2001) highlight the importance of secondary attachment figures, particularly during adolescence. My analysis shows that in CSE a young person who may have experienced ‘problems’ in their relationship with their parent(s) forms a strong secondary attachment with an alternative support figure, the abuser, who does, at least initially, meet their needs. However, because that relationship is ultimately abusive and exploitative the negative working model held by the young people is reinforced; self-worth is decreased which increases the dependency on, and trauma bond to, the abuser.

A further explanation is neurobiological in nature and only a brief overview is relevant here. Fight, flight or freeze are well-documented responses to threat and danger (see Levine & Frederick, 1997) and the role of the amygdala in survival is widely acknowledged as paramount (for example, see Cozolino, 2002). Lodrick (2010) adds ‘friend’ and ‘flop’: defence mechanisms that may be engaged in response to threat and danger. The ‘friend’ response is essentially a process of social engagement as a way to relate to and engage with the person making the threat. This response is evident in most of the survivors’ accounts. For example, Fran sought to actively please her abuser and earn his approval. Leah and Alina did the same by complying with sex that they did not really want out of a sense of obligation or duty. Lodrick (2010) describes people who ‘flop’ as being submissive and not protesting about what is happening to them. Ellie’s response is an example of the ‘flop’ response. After her initial, disbelieved disclosure, she adopted this survival mode.

Learned helplessness is also a useful way to explain and understand some of the survivors' responses to their sexual exploitation. It is evident in some of their narratives and supplements theories of attachment, trauma bonding and survival responses. Learned helplessness, defined as "emotional numbing and maladaptive passivity" (Peterson & Seligman, 1983:103), may follow victimisation and highlights the possible psychological impact of the trauma and subsequent psychological deficits. Peterson & Seligman (1983) state that learned helplessness is the consequence of learning that "responding is futile" (Peterson & Seligman, 1983:103), which is reminiscent of the 'flop' response. Lodrick (2010) takes a more positive view, as do I, and suggests one does not simply have a 'response style' to threat. She argues that the survival strategy utilised by the amygdala depends on several factors, such as what is most likely to be successful and ensure survival, and what has been successful or unsuccessful in the past. Fran tried different responses; initially she fought back when Danny physically assaulted her, but learned very quickly that the response was unsuccessful and made things worse. Ellie fought back when she was eight years old by disclosing the abuse. When she was disbelieved, she learned to become silent. At the core of learned helplessness is the recognition of a lack of control and power and victims learn, and repeat, a response which works. In the case of some of the survivors, this was being non-responsive and passive, which sometimes may be the best survival strategy.

Barry (1979:48) argues that "surviving is a muddy business" complicated by the fact that it is "not written into the code of socialised female behaviour" in the same ways as it is for men. Barry (1979:48) argues that men are socialised through various means to "battle it out" whereas women are more likely to be socialised to be compliant, gentle and protected. I disagree to some extent and suggest that women are actually hard-wired to survive, and all of the women interviewed have survived by varying means. The survivors could not necessarily physically battle it out with and overpower their abusers so they had to employ a more nuanced approach to survival. This involved being extremely sensitive to the abuser's mood and ego, as well as adhering to their learnt gendered scripts of being compliant and pleasing. The survivors' narratives demonstrate that their survival skills had to be sharper and much more responsive to the subtleties of the danger and threat they faced. It is the very fact that women can and do survive sexual violence that has caused them ‘trouble’. One of the many things that rape victims often feel regret or shame about is that they did not ‘fight back’, and sadly in a patriarchal society which abounds with rape myths, this is perceived as compliance and therefore some form of implicit consent, particularly within the justice system (Burrowes, 2013). Victims of rape, and other crimes, often freeze instinctively and this is very much because of the neurobiological response determined by the amygdala as the optimal way to survive an attack (Lodrick, 2010). Not fighting back is often the best survival strategy. However, this is problematic for survivors as they try to make sense of their abuse.

Research also shows that “traumatised people lead traumatic and traumatising lives” (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996:11). Central to this is the idea of repetition and that trauma is re-enacted by the individual. This can certainly be applied to Fran and Alina, who both sought out and ‘contributed’ to the maintenance of abusive experiences and relationships. This was because, despite the abuse and exploitation, some needs were being met. Fran returned to Danny because at that point in her life, where she had already been violently sexually abused and exploited for the previous year by Mick, she almost had no other choice that would have made sense to her.

Suffering, self-harming and suicide attempts

Suffering is synonymous with pain and both are woven through all the survivors’ narratives. Emotional pain is predominant and highlights the impact of emotional abuse as a very significant aspect of being sexually exploited. O’Hagan’s (1995:456) definition that “emotional abuse repeatedly inflicts emotional pain upon the child, e.g. fear, humiliation, distress, despair” echoes many of the survivors’ experiences as young people. This section will explore some other ways in which their suffering manifested itself.

One manifestation of three of the survivors’ suffering, as young women, was self-harming. This is generally understood as “the act of deliberately inflicting injury on oneself” (Preece, 2007:19) and can range across behaviours such as cutting, hair pulling, burning, eating disorders and head banging. Some self-harm theories emphasise its psychological and emotional functions as coping strategies and emotional release (Townsend, 2014). Very few of the women spent much time talking in detail about how or why they self-harmed, and Fran gave the most detail, referring to her eating disorder and how she scrubbed her skin until it was “*bright red*” with “*scourers every day*” using Dettol to “*try and clean*” herself. It is likely that her self-harm was very specific to how she felt about herself, dirty, as a result of the sexual violence she had suffered. Lack of control and trying to achieve it has been linked to self-harming (Derouin & Bravendar, 2004, cited in Preece, 2007) and Fran’s attempt to feel clean is a manifestation of her attempt to gain some sense of control over what had happened to her and her body.

The other women only mentioned their self-harming in passing, which is interesting. They are all a generation younger than Fran and I wonder whether they are perhaps more acculturated or desensitised to the shock of self-harming behaviour, as a result of its increased prevalence in Western culture. For example, there has been a rise in hospital admissions for young people who have self-harmed (Marsh & Boateng, 2018) and the Children’s Society (2018) found that one quarter of fourteen year old girls (n. 11,000) had self-harmed in the last year. Young people have reported that they have self-harmed as a means of escaping, or to get some relief from unbearable feelings and emotional states, and low self-esteem and depression have also been linked to self-harm (Bell, 2014; Preece, 2007; Townsend, 2014). Leah made the connection with her self-harm, cutting herself, as a manifestation of the pain she felt as a result of feeling abandoned by her mother.

Self-harm and suicide attempts are often perceived as being on the same continuum but Bell (2014) points out that they are not the same thing and require different responses. Bell (2014:243) highlights the importance of the “intention and motivational basis” of self-harming and suicidal behaviour as the key difference between them, drawing attention to how the method used by the person can indicate their intention and motivation. For example, taking an overdose is usually associated with suicide attempts (Bell, 2014). This seems to be the case for Ellie, who very briefly mentioned self-harm in relation to her suicide attempts, which were not because she wanted to die; she just wanted her pain to stop, a finding echoed in research by Williams (2001, cited in Bell, 2014). Ellie’s narrative gives a very strong sense that she carried on and on, silently tolerating the sexual abuse because, in exchange, she was receiving the semblance of a safe and secure family. However, it was when her family "*disowned*" her after she eventually disclosed the abuse to the police that Ellie made her first suicide attempt:

> **Ellie**: "As soon as they disowned me, I took an overdose."

This was a turning point for her. By breaking her silence about the abuse and disclosing to the police, Ellie was disowned and rejected by Sarah and her extended family. She perceived this as punishment for breaking the 'rule' not to 'tell tales'. The family's response emphasises the complete lack of unconditional regard and acceptance of Ellie, and highlights the cruel conditions of her place in the family: inclusion is only possible if she remains silent about the abuse.

Survivors' perceptions and experiences of responding agencies

A recurring and permeating theme woven through all of the survivors' narratives is their experiences and perceptions of responding agencies, particularly statutory services such as social workers and the police, on their journey into, within and out of the world of CSE. All of the survivors talked about their suffering being exacerbated by failures in some of the professionals' one-to-one and agency responses. Although they all identified positive responses, in most cases these related to professionals working outside of statutory agencies. As a result of its recurrent nature, this has been woven throughout the analysis, to reflect how it is woven within the narratives. However, a powerful theme emerging from the survivors' perceptions of responding agencies concerned how they often felt overlooked and ignored. Very often the survivors became a 'person unseen'.

Person unseen

Most of the survivors spoke with anger and mistrust towards the police, and one expressed feelings of distress regarding the CPS and their decision not to take her complaint forward. It becomes apparent how important agency responses were for the survivors as young victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the power that both positive and negative experiences held in terms of responding agencies' ability to influence the young person.

Fran's experiences are the most negative, and at times the most extreme. They reflect the socio-cultural context of her exploitation, offering an insight into the world of CSE thirty years ago when the victim-blaming narrative was thriving and structural and procedural gender-based inequalities were much more explicit. Fran gives a brutal account of how, after being reported missing for eighteen months by her parents, she was arrested, at the age of sixteen, in the presence of the pimp, Mick. She describes how the police knew Mick, and knew "*he was a criminal* (*…) he were dangerous*", but how, after greeting him, they arrested Fran. Her outrage and disgust was palpable at the seeming insanity of the situation that the police:

> **Fran:** "Never thought to arrest a man who might be buying a girl on the street to have sex with a child."

Although Fran's parents were called, they did not come to collect her from the police station and Fran implies that one reason was that her dad "*were told by a Police Inspector that I were probably 'one of them girls' and he should wash his hands o' me*." As a result, Fran was charged "*with being a common prostitute*" then bailed to the pimp's parents' house until her court appearance, where she was living with Mick, with dire consequences:

> **Fran:** "I got the absolute shit kicked out of me that night by all of 'em, for bringing the police to the door."

Three weeks later Fran attended "*the Juvenile court*" but describes how she was "*sold every day in between*". At sixteen, after being violently sexually abused and exploited for eighteen months, Fran was criminalised and sentenced to three months in a remand centre. She describes this experience as like being in "*a mini prison*":

> **Fran:** "The first three things they did were wash me hair with nit lotion, my body with scabies cream and give me an internal examination which, when you've been through ***eighteen months of extreme sexual violence*****,** [Fran's angry emphasis] and it's done in a clinical, cold and criminal way…"

Fran describes the remand centre as being "*full to bursting with girls who had been picked up on the streets*", who all shared stories about "*us* [our] *boyfriends*". Fran was very angry when she recalled this experience; it was palpable and filled the room we were in during the interview. Much of her anger was directed at the system that "*put the responsibility on me*" (Fran). She also points out that although "*they were supposed to be doing a report*" on her, "*nobody sat me down and asked me anything*". During that time Fran did not receive any form of education and/or therapeutic support, another source of her anger. It is at this point that she mentions her involvement with a social worker, another negative experience:

> **Fran:** "So a social worker came, oh my God, again [it] just sent a clear message to me I were a piece of **shit** [Fran's emphasis]. She didn't even look at me (…) she didn't even speak to me."

Within this account, Fran as an abused young girl is completely unseen. Phoenix (2002) highlights the distinction between young people perceived as voluntarily and persistently returning to prostitution and young people coerced into prostitution. The latter are deemed as more deserving than the former, who have tended to be criminalised. In reality, it is likely that both groups experience abuse through prostitution and sexual exploitation as "a survival strategy within restricted social and material circumstances" (Phoenix, 2002:368). This highlights the narrative of child victims as 'deserving' (innocent victims 'at risk') or 'undeserving', often marginalised (voluntarily returning to prostitution) which suggests two co-existing and contradictory views of children (Jay, 2014; Pearce et al., 2002). It appears that Fran was perceived as more 'undeserving'. Instead, superimposed upon her was a stereotyped, scapegoated character created by an intrinsically sexist, even misogynistic, system which consequently dehumanised and punished her. As a result, and unsurprisingly, Fran never reported her abuse to the police, and interpreted their response as a reflection of her worth.

Alina's involvement with the police occurred over twenty years after's Fran's, but her interpretation of their response to her rape was also negative and damaging, leaving her feeling unseen and unimportant. Alina believes it steered her onto a pathway to sexual exploitation and left her with strong feelings towards the police whereby she holds their inaction and mistakes at least partly responsible for the sexual exploitation she suffered:

Alina: “I blame the police because if the police would have done what they were supposed to have done the first time and sorted this out then I probably wouldn’t have been used by all these guys.”

Despite the passage of time, Alina still feels some residual anger towards the police and about how they (mis)managed her case, which feels like unfinished business:

> **Alina:** “I haven’t had no apology off the police (…) because they lost the files or something (…) and I personally think they should get in trouble for it.”

Ellie, who was involved with the police (actually the same police station) at a similar time to Alina, also reports similar experiences and feelings of being profoundly let down. When Ellie was fourteen she was sexually abused again by the same cousin, at a family event. This time she disclosed straight away and was interviewed by the police. Sometime afterwards, Ellie was told that “*nothing was going to happen*” because he was almost the same age as Ellie and “*was probably just a kid acting up*”. The crime of the sexual assault and abuse of a child, and Ellie herself, went unseen. This response was condoned by the adults in Ellie’s life and the impact this had on her was profound, leading to “*counselling for five years*”, self-harming and suicide attempts. Ellie asked a terrible rhetorical question at this point during her narrative, one to which she was clearly looking for an answer, indicating that she is still (at the time of interview) trying to make sense of her experiences:

> **Ellie:** “Which is worse? Being abused or being told that the authorities that are meant to protect me (…) that I’m not worth it? Which one’s hurt me the most? Because they’ve both been very close.”

Leah also shares her experiences of being unseen whilst at school and struggling with life. She had a family therapist and a social worker for a short time because she “*went off the rails*” and her dad “*couldn’t cope*”, yet Leah describes feeling unseen - like no one really saw *her* and her struggles:

> **Leah:** “It felt like nobody really noticed, like when I were self-harming (…) I dint get much support really.”

However, Leah's experience of her involvement with the police was slightly more positive in that she describes one officer as being "*very supportive*". Even so, she expresses how "*it really hurt to go through everything*" that had happened with the learning mentor, Jazveer, and how it "*were awful*" to have "*to go into detail*", only to be told that the CPS "*dropped it*". Leah felt that she was not believed and what she has experienced was not 'bad enough' to be taken seriously:

> **Leah:** "Because it didn't go to Court I just feel like they didn't believe me (…) it's made me look like a liar."

Alina also had a negative experience within the CJS, despite getting a conviction for the man who raped her. She had to testify at the trial and recounted her treatment by the defence barrister, who questioned her motives by calling her an "*attention seeker*" because her "*dad had passed away*". He tried to use her family history, such as her brother having "*been to prison*", and her clothing ("*I had a denim skirt on*"), to discredit her. Unfortunately, this treatment of victims of sex crimes within the CJS is widely recognised as common (Burrowes, 2013; Girl 'A' & Bunyan, 2013; PACE, 2014a). It is also further evidence of the triad of violence and a manipulation of symbolic violence used to maintain the position of a (usually) female victim of (usually) male sexual violence as responsible, thereby perpetuating a perception of patriarchal sexual entitlement. However, Alina succinctly challenges this manipulation by making a very straightforward observation:

> **Alina:** "It shouldn't have to be an issue. I can wear whatever I want to wear. It doesn't concern anybody else. It doesn't mean that I want you to touch me 'cos I'm showing skin or anything like that."

Dodsworth (2014a:193) found that the availability of a "secure base relationship, whatever form it took" was an important factor in how the women in her study made-sense of and adapted to their experiences of sexual exploitation. All of the survivors identified at least one positive source of support from responding agencies, which seems to have acted as a 'secure base relationship' for them. This seems to have helped the survivors re-frame their understandings of their experiences, build self-esteem and confidence, and begin to shift the direction of their pathway towards exiting (discussed in the Part 3 of this chapter). An analysis of what made those experiences positive for the survivors reveals that they all felt seen, heard, believed and cared for. This gives a simple, entirely achievable approach and crucial message for practitioners when working with sexually exploited young people: See, Hear, Believe and Care.

Alina had a support worker who would "*listen*", no matter how many times she wanted "*to go over something*". She describes this woman as trying "*her best to try and sort things out*" and by going "*that extra mile*" to make sure Alina got what she needed to "*succeed*". What comes across from Alina's narrative about this worker was that she felt the worker was committed to her, and that made Alina feel like she mattered. She felt seen:

> **Alina:** "She took it on. She didn't forget about it. She done her job! She communicated everything well."

Ellie expresses something similar as she talked about a counsellor, Nicky, the only one of the nine she had over a five year period who not only "*played a massive role*" in helping her to deal with the abuse, but also inspired her to go into counselling as a career. Ellie highlights the importance and quality of a professional's approach when working with sexually exploited young people, which includes demonstrating a commitment to the young person:

> **Ellie:** "She didn't do something amazing, but she just had the passion and the fire in her to help me (…) she wanted to help me like nobody else wanted to."

Ellie clearly trusted Nicky, and describes her as patient and approachable:

> **Ellie:** "She sat there and just waited for me. She didn't rush me. She didn't try and come at me with all these big words that I weren't gonna understand. She was so down to earth."

Fran spoke of a woman, Ann, outside of professional responding agencies, who used to see Fran as she was being sexually exploited on the streets. Ann was important to Fran because:

> **Fran:** "She used to stop me on the street and I used to cry, because she named the violence to me. She told me what was happening to me and she just gave me something, like human contact."

Ann told Fran she was "*beautiful*" and "*intelligent*", perhaps planting a seed of possibility for her: that she was so much more than what was happening to her. She gave Fran her phone number, and later on it was Ann, a relative stranger, that Fran contacted to help her escape Danny. What is powerful about this account is that Ann ***saw*** Fran, when no one else seemed to, as a vulnerable young girl who had so much potential.

Leah identifies one teacher who was extremely supportive and "*tried so hard to keep me on track*", but acknowledges that this teacher "*couldn't really do much*" because "*I'd gone*" (Leah). What this suggests is that for Leah, she crossed a line somewhere along the way and once that has happened it feels for a young person that there is no going back, as if it is too late for them. This sense is certainly present in Fran and Alina's narratives, whereby they felt they had gone too far down a certain path to turn back, and perhaps this perception is something to challenge when working with sexually exploited young people.

These narratives regarding the survivors' experiences of responding agencies highlight the positive power, influence and impact they *can* have on young victims of CSE. What the survivors highlight as good practice in supporting, believing and protecting them is not a surprise. It is fairly straightforward and obvious: good, transparent communication; good listening skills; being approachable, committed, kind and caring. Yet there are clearly deficits in the provision of such support which require further investigation, as these survivors are left with feelings of being abandoned (again), unworthy, unprotected, disbelieved and ultimately powerless. Professionals' perceptions and experiences of young people who have been sexually exploited will be explored in Chapter 9.

Part 3: Exiting, surviving and making sense of the world of CSE

This section will explore the variances in the exit processes that the survivors' narratives reveal, considering the differences and similarities in experience, the influencing factors which shaped the experience, and the role and agency of the survivor as a young person within the process. It is also clear that for some, exiting CSE required the crossing of physical and emotional borders along with changes in their thinking and behaviours. The differences in how the women talked about exiting are also noteworthy; for instance, it is discussed in depth in Fran's narrative whereas Alina only mentions it in passing. This perhaps speaks to the level of processing the women have engaged in, the proximity they feel to it, and the impact it has had on them at the time of interview.

The term 'exit' refers to the women no longer being sexually exploited and abused, and all the survivors have exited because they have not been sexually exploited for several years. However, exiting CSE does not equate to recovery or mean that there is no aftermath, as the longer term impacts of CSE are apparent within the survivors' narratives. The exit process for all four women is varied and this is linked to the nature and length of their sexual exploitation.

Variances in exiting the world of CSE - the role and impact of influencing factors

Mansson and Hedin (1999) identify the importance of structural, relational and individual factors, which are interrelated and interdependent and greatly influence both an individual's ability to successfully exit sexual exploitation and how that exit occurs. Their Exit Model draws together these "influencing factors" (Mansson & Hedin, 1999:73) that affect how and why women exit prostitution, and provides a useful theoretical framework to develop my analysis of the four survivors' exits from CSE. The applicability here is *not* because the survivors are considered to be 'prostitutes', but rather, I emphasise its utility in giving some insight into women who have experienced and escaped sexual exploitation. This section will explore the interplay of the influencing structural, relational and individual factors. Fran's narrative will be explored more fully as it gives the deepest insight into exiting and illustrates that it can be a long and complex process.

Long and complex exit

Fran got her first clear opportunity to exit the world of CSE when she was 16, after her release from a remand centre, but she did not recognise or take this opportunity for several reasons. Another two years passed before Fran was able to escape. She had been trafficked to London by Danny and was being pimped into prostitution. Danny had become addicted to crack-cocaine and left Fran largely to her own devices whereby she saw him infrequently, when he came to collect her earnings. During this time, it did not occur to Fran that she could leave Danny, London or the world of sexual exploitation:

> **Fran**: "I were that controlled by him that he would go to a crack house for up to three months but when he came back I would have put £200 every day in his shoe-box."

Her statement illustrates the extent to which Fran was controlled, almost indoctrinated, by Danny, even in his absence. One criticism that has often been levelled at victims of CSE is focused on the victims' agency and perceived 'choice' to stay with or return to the abuser (Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012). Fran's statement demonstrates the impact of other factors on her response: the lack of control she perceived herself as having over her life, possibly because she no longer considered it as *her* life, but that it belonged to Danny; and the profundity of her trauma bond to him and subsequent deep sense of learned helplessness (Lodrick, 2010; Peterson & Seligman, 1983). Fran's exit was not pre-meditated, as her comment above suggests that she was unable to conceive of leaving Danny before she actually did. This is contrary to some exit models. Fuchs Ebaugh (1988), for instance, suggests a period of doubt about one's current role or position which leads to a period of seeking alternatives. Sanders (2007), however, identifies four main types of exit, one of which is reactionary and is the 'best fit' for Fran's exit. Reactionary exit is the direct result of the woman's response to a significant event. This event, for Fran, was sudden and traumatic. Danny seriously and violently beat her, which gave her the opportunity to escape:

> **Fran**: "I finally got away from him because he left me for dead."

This was clearly a turning point for Fran and this type of traumatic event can be a catalyst for exiting (Mansson & Hedin, 1999). The ferocity of the beating, the resultant admission into hospital and Danny's absence presented Fran with some breathing space that allowed her to see a viable way out. However, Fran had been in this position two years before, after she left the remand centre aged sixteen, so what was different this time?

Fran could only offer by way of explanation that all she knew was that she just could not stay. Her narrative demonstrates she had a huge capacity to bear suffering, but Mansson and Hedin (1999:71) found that some women simply reach the “limit of what is essentially bearable”, whereby the ‘exchange’ becomes intolerable, and perhaps the assault was a breaking point. Fran was driven by her almost Maslowian need for safety from the *immediate* danger of serious physical violence (Maslow, 1943), which was more acutely life threatening than the chronic danger complicit with the sexual exploitation to which she had become accustomed. Thus, leaving at this point was directly related to her physical survival and is an example of Fran’s ‘flight instinct’.

There had also been a shift in some of the influencing factors surrounding Fran. Most immediate were relational factors, which refers to social networks and support systems in the women’s lives (Mansson & Hedin, 1999). Fran’s relationship to Danny was changing. He had been the centre of her world but, due to his drug addiction, his omnipresence in her life had been decreasing over the previous year. This, in turn, could have helped her recognise that she did not need him to the extent she thought she did. Fran also had some informal support external to the world of CSE, from Ann, the woman who had named the violence to her. Ann was not enmeshed in the shame, guilt and anger Fran associated with her family, nor was she a part of the statutory services for which Fran had nothing but mistrust. Ann was neutral, kind and supportive, and perhaps represented a secure base relationship to Fran (Dodsworth, 2014a).

This recognition of Fran, who had been chronically dehumanised and was essentially invisible as a person for over two years, was extremely powerful and presented enough of a lifeline for her to hold on to. Ann made Fran memorise her phone number, Fran rang her from the hospital and Ann came and gave her a safe place, at least for a while. However, her narrative illustrates the difficulty of extricating herself from the world of CSE. Danny found her and violently assaulted her again in Ann’s home, simultaneously testing and confirming her decision to escape. Although Fran did leave Danny, she felt unable to press charges against him, identifying the following important reasons for this:

> **Fran:** “I din’t trust the police, I din’t, I was scared stiff of my pimp and, actually, I thought I deserved it all. I din’t think I was worth (…) I was mentally exhausted.”

The reasons she gives speak very clearly to how Fran internalised her experiences of the police, the pimp and herself. Her lack of trust in the police to protect her and deal with Danny effectively is based on her previous experiences of them, and is further evidence of how she was grievously let down. The lack of police support and protection also served to compound her faulty self-view that she was not worth it and was in some way to blame, and increased her fear. This represents the *absence* of supportive structural factors that could have eased Fran's exit from sexual exploitation. Structural factors refer to "the societal circumstances" (Mansson & Hedin, 1999:74) in which women who have escaped sexual exploitation find themselves, such as employment, housing, benefits and education.

There were some supportive structural factors for Fran at this time in terms of housing and education. Fran entered a women's refuge but was unable to be honest about her past because she knew she would have been perceived as, and stigmatised for, being a 'prostitute' as opposed to a sexually exploited and abused young woman. So, Fran told them she was a victim of domestic violence and she had the injuries to prove it. This highlights the power and value of names on direct experience: as a victim of domestic abuse, Fran was welcomed and supported, but as a victim of prostitution, she believed she would not have been accepted to the refuge:

> **Fran:** "I didn't tell 'em I'd been in prostitution. I just told 'em about the domestic violence because in them days they would not take women who are in prostitution because it brings risk to "ordinary" women! I have **actually** been told that." [Fran's incredulous emphasis].

This statement encapsulates the process of 'othering' women who have been sexually exploited and prostituted to a marginalised, ostracised space, what Fran refers to as "*Planet Prostitute*". This can only have confirmed Fran's negative sense of self as 'less than' and compounded her sense of shame and unworthiness, instead of enabling her to receive targeted support to help her come to terms with the years of abuse she had endured.

Although Fran was suffering with several mental health issues, she was also enjoying her child-care college course and starting to feel “better” and “normal”. Fran was demonstrating hope, optimism and resilience. An in-depth exploration of the concept of resilience has been developed elsewhere (see Hickle, 2017; Rutter, 1985, 2007; Southwick et al., 2014) and is beyond the scope of this thesis, except to consider its role in the survivors’ experience of CSE. Resilience is often referred to as a protective factor (Spaccarelli & Kim, 1995) in regard to children’s ability to overcome adverse experiences and circumstances. Resilience has been defined as: “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress” (APA, 2014). All of these forms of adversity are present in the narratives, but the phrase ‘adapting well’ is open to interpretation. In terms of CSE, I define it as being able to navigate a way through that world, cope with the suffering, find a way out and achieve a position where recovery is possible: basically to survive it.

Fran had been criminalised, from the age of fifteen, as a result of her sexual exploitation. In order to undertake a placement in a primary school she had to have a background check with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)[9]. Her resilience was challenged when the results came to the school. Fran was, “*physically, **physically*** [her emphasis] *removed off the premises*”. The structural factors supporting Fran disintegrated in a matter of humiliating seconds, representing another turning point. One can imagine how exposed, vulnerable and unwelcome Fran would have felt in those moments and how these feelings would have flooded over her with such force that she was swept backwards into the world of sexual exploitation:

> **Fran**: “I never went back to college. I never went back to school. I never went back to the hostel. I phoned a mate of mine who I knew was a working woman. Went to stay with her and I went back to a brothel the next day.”

Fran was completely cowed by this reaction to her past and she literally walked out of her new life straight back into her previous life without ever talking to anyone or even collecting her things from the hostel. This illustrates that the enormity of her belief that she did not belong at college far outweighed the fragility of her newly forming identity, which was perhaps too new to be resilient enough to withstand what Fran perceived as a colossal and tangible rejection. The interplay between the influencing factors is significant. Until this moment, all three were present, but it was the collapse of the structural support, which doubled as an external source of validation, that proved most devastating. The need for external validation, which I define as the sense of one's worth as ascribed by others, is a recurrent theme for all the survivors. Throughout their journeys, they experienced the need for external validation from others (such as family and professionals) as well as structural factors (such as eligibility for a place in a women's refuge). Whether external validation is given or withheld from these sources is extremely significant to the outcomes for young people. For the survivors, it was literally life-changing, both negatively and positively.

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[9] In 2012 the CRB merged with Independent Safeguarding Authority, becoming the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Fran's rejection from "normal" life signified the end of her dream to *be* "normal" and work with children. Fran uses the word "normal" often and in doing this she simultaneously positions her life, and possibly herself too, as "abnormal", and in doing so recognises herself as 'othered'. The structural support available to Fran was inadequate and actually harmful to her because she continued to remain invisible as a victim of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse within the hostel, so she received no therapeutic support and her educational opportunities were sabotaged.

In contrast, Fran did have a sense of place in the world of sexual exploitation, the infrastructure needed to enable her return was available and it was a world she understood. There were structural, relational and individual factors that facilitated her re-entry. She had a place to stay with a friend, 'employment' and a support network. Fran remained in that world for another six years, although she was never pimped again, which illustrates her agency and increased self-worth and confidence at the time:

> **Fran**: "I worked for myself and I thought I were alright (…) I made my own money."

After Fran's subsequent return to the world of sexual exploitation as an adult (she was eighteen), she effectively worked for herself for the next six years. This is reminiscent of Dodsworth's (2012) work on how sex workers manage their identity, and it appears that Fran felt defined by that identity; it was who she was. The fact that she had eliminated her dependence on a pimp indicates that, perhaps strangely, Fran experienced an increase in self-confidence, demonstrating her resilience. She told herself she was "*fine*" and "*empowered*" but Fran also recognises these as lies she told herself in order to cope because she had "*multiple issues*" regarding her mental health and "*drank to oblivion*". Nonetheless, Fran continued this way until 1995 when she finally exited the world of sexual exploitation for good. This was the result of another traumatic turning point: Fran's nineteen year old cousin, who had been groomed and sexually exploited since the age of fourteen, was found murdered by a recently released convicted murderer and rapist:

> **Fran**: "That shook me into the harsh reality and I've never sold myself since that day."

Her cousin's murder impacted tremendously on Fran. It is noteworthy that her exit was reactionary and *only* came as the result of sudden, traumatic events which ended *someone else's* life. This speaks to Fran's low self-esteem and self-worth as she had, by this point, been severely beaten and left for dead by Danny but had returned to the world of sexual exploitation. Perhaps what happened to her cousin acted as a mirror, or a warning, and it left Fran angry and motivated, giving her meaning and direction:

> **Fran**: "I don't want [cousin's] life to be in vain so a lot of my drive is for other women I knew who never made it."

This suggests that exiting sexual exploitation may be motivated by an immediate survival instinct, which in Fran's case was triggered by these shocking events, as opposed to the chronic threat to life that most sexually exploited people may experience. This latter experience is more tolerable as it becomes normalised over time, reducing the sense of threat and danger.

Exit through shift and drift

In contrast to Fran, Alina's narrative only mentions exiting the world of CSE once, and is almost mentioned in passing:

> **Alina**: “Yeah, that’s kind of how I got out of it ‘cos I stopped speaking to a lot of people.”

The words “*yeah, that’s kind of how I got out*” suggest that Alina almost drifted out of CSE. The topic of exit emerged in the narrative almost as an afterthought, and I got the sense that at this stage in her journey Alina has not really considered how she managed to leave. I felt as though I had witnessed her first consideration of this and Alina does not offer much explanation or insight into what triggered her departure from the world of sexual exploitation, apart from ‘stopping speaking’ to some people. The impression given in Alina’s narrative is that she lost interest in the sexually exploitative scene she had previously been very involved in. Through detailed exploration of her narrative, which does not generally follow a chronological order, I have surmised the following analysis.

Structural support had been lacking, resulting in Alina’s deep mistrust of, and resentment towards, the police and social workers. Alina had been raped several times. Like Fran, she did not consider reporting them to the police, but as a result of her involvement with sexual health practitioners she was known to some services. This led to some structural and relational factors, such as supported living and a key worker, gradually being put into place. Alina’s main friend who “*brought*” her into that “environment” had subsequently left, becoming a parent, so the relationship that had once colluded with and supported Alina’s involvement in CSE decreased in influence. This impacted on Alina in that she began to disengage from CSE, simply by not “*going out*” as much. Around the same time, she was introduced to a multi-agency project (via the sexual health practitioners) that specialised in CSE. At the apparent insistence of one project worker, Alina’s first rape, when she was fourteen years old, was re-investigated and eventually successfully prosecuted, five years later. Alina demonstrated resilience in her ability to re-engage with police and subsequently the CJS. Despite this process being painful, it did have a positive impact on her because during the re-investigation and subsequent court case, she was no longer being sexually exploited. Alina was developing relationships with people she could trust and who were ‘on her side’. The project worker was at the heart of it:

> **Alina**: “She was supportive. She was a star (...) she would listen.”

The project worker's approach was new to Alina and highlights the power of positive relational factors, and perhaps this worker offered Alina a secure base relationship from which she could begin to challenge her previous understanding of what had happened to her. She gave Alina time, allowed her to go at her own pace and, importantly, believed her. This is the only relationship Alina talks about in her narrative in terms of trust. She felt the project worker "*kind of changed [her] life a little bit*". Alina received external validation from the worker and also from the fact that her case was finally being taken seriously, because she was finally believed. The impact this had on her self-image is significant and empowering. It has helped her recognise that she is capable of change, has the potential to make a difference to others and is motivated to do so:

> **Alina:** "When I feel 100% like I'm changed (…) I want people to know how this can affect other people and how it starts."

Alina's case is very different to Fran's, as Alina had more freedom and agency to enter and leave. There does not appear to be a specific event that triggered Alina's exit, rather it seems there was a gradual shift and drift for her as these various factors converged. Unlike Fran, she was not being overtly controlled or coerced by a specific person and as such she was not as deeply entrenched. All the influential factors were present, interacting and aligned, providing a safety net for Alina which enabled her exit.

Exit triggered by external circumstances

It was clear from the data that the role the young person may have in exiting the world of sexual exploitation can vary. Fran was quite active in her departure in that she seized an opportunity to escape. Ellie, on the other hand, had a more passive role, primarily because she was an eight year old child in receipt of statutory child protection services, which ironically had placed her in a home where she was sexually abused for four years by a young male cousin. Structural factors and forces triggered Ellie's exit as a response to her mother's improved mental health and ability to take care of her, not because of the abuse. This decision was taken for Ellie by the professionals involved and Ellie's phrase "*ended up*" gives a sense of a resignation to matters beyond her control.

Although Ellie clearly loves her mother and is very protective of her, there is a distinct impression that she would have preferred to stay where she was because, apart from the abuse she endured, she seemed happy and secure in what she describes as a stable family environment. The impression I got from listening to Ellie's story was that at least in that household she felt, and was treated, like the child she was and this is indicative of her need to belong somewhere. Conversely, Ellie describes living with her mum as "*horrific*", and due to the chaotic circumstances she felt unsafe and uncared for:

> **Ellie**: "I was in an environment where the man that my mum was with was raping young girls as well and luckily, that never happened to me."

Eventually, as a teen, Ellie became her mother's carer and it seems there was a role swap, with Ellie becoming the 'parent':

> **Ellie**: "I want to give my mum the life she never had."

Trying to unpick the complexity of Ellie's exit is difficult and her narrative is laced with a sense of lacking control or power, of being silenced and invisible. The abuse she suffered went unacknowledged. The relational factors underpinning Ellie's exit are complicated. What is most striking are the conflicted feelings and dissonance she felt, and still feels, towards Sarah, the cousin who became a surrogate mother to her. She talks frequently of the pain of being "*disowned*", abandoned and betrayed by her extended family (when she finally disclosed the abuse to the police), and how she rejects and "*hates*" them for it. Yet despite these strong feelings Ellie still maintains regular contact with the family, partly for her mother and also for herself:

> **Ellie**: "I hate them for it but it's the hate that I can live with and to sit in a room full of people that I don't class as my family (...) it's better than sitting in a room with nobody."

Much of Ellie's narrative is powerful because it is so earnest and raw. Her comment above is emotive, loaded with a desperation to belong which is so strong that she would rather have people she hates than have no one. It smacks of the constrained choices Ellie has been faced with all her life: the price of having even the semblance of a family, and of belonging, is extortionate and has always come at great personal cost. Ellie "*does everything in [her] power*" to avoid seeing the cousin who sexually abused her and can tolerate the other family members as long as his name is not mentioned. Her response mode is still primarily silent and compliant, colluding with the charade, settling for so much less than she deserves.

> **Ellie**: "Now we go along like 'happy families.'"

However, it also speaks to her increased maturity and recognition of her power to establish boundaries to keep the abuser away from her, and her capacity to protect herself after everyone else failed to do so. Ellie pinpoints her vulnerability, a highly significant individual factor, as a profound fear of loneliness and abandonment. This fear is a primary driver of her attitudes and behaviour around her family and she regularly refers to it throughout her narrative. The effect of her openness about it makes her fear seem palpable and ever-present. Recognising its strength makes it easier to understand why Ellie keeps going back and offers evidence of the trauma bonds she has made:

> **Ellie**: "I'm scared she'll [Sarah] leave me again."
> "I can't come to terms with losing them again."
> "If I'm alone it's just horrible."
> "I can't let go of that loneliness."

In terms of Ellie's exit, there is a clear interplay between the influencing factors. Structural factors have consistently remained in place with varying degrees of effectiveness, one clear success being her access to Higher Education. This opened up possibilities which strengthened her exit. Ellie's relational factors are complicated and cause internal conflict for her. The dynamic process that seems to exist between Ellie and family members is that her place in the family comes with certain conditions and at a cost. She has acquiesced to paying this price, although she acknowledges that she wants to change the relationship when she has her own family and support network:

> **Ellie**: "When I do have my own family and I **do** have my own children, **my** children are not seeing them." [Ellie's emphasis].

Leah, like Alina, does not spend much time discussing her exit and when she does it is often shrouded in guilt. Leah's exit from the world of sexual exploitation was abrupt and, like Ellie's, as a result of circumstances external to herself. The exit was not a result of her decision making or agency. Leah had been reluctantly sexually involved with Jazveer, who had systematically groomed her for the previous two years while she was at school. As previously explained, Leah contacted Jazveer after she left school as a means of escaping a violent partner. Ironically, it may have been that Leah identified Jazveer as her secure base relationship at that time. Her relationship with him ended when her ex-partner found out about him and threatened his physical safety, job and family. Jazveer stopped all contact with Leah immediately, ending her involvement in CSE:

> **Leah**: "He just stopped. Like that."

Leah does not offer further reaction to her exit from sexual exploitation in her narrative except to recognise that she feels partly responsible.

> **Leah**: "I felt really guilty when I went to the police. Like he might lose (…) everything he's worked for, because of me."

Leah's comment illustrates her sense of self-blame and that she is still in the process of making sense of what happened, describing it as "*a tug of war*". Relational factors are influential in her exit: the inappropriate relationship that Jazveer had invested two years building up with Leah, based on his exploitation of her vulnerabilities, created her perception of him as the person she could trust and go to in times of need. When Leah needed to escape a violent relationship, Jazveer was immediately available. This is evidence of the power and influence he was able to subtly exert over her. However, his continued lack of regard for Leah and her welfare, previously evidenced through his failure to safeguard her when she was a student in his care, was exemplified by his abrupt departure from her life, essentially leaving her in potential danger.

Elastic resilience and pragmatism

Resilience is not generally characterised as a personality trait (Rutter, 2007), but as a mixture of "personal, social and physical resources" (Hickle, 2017:305) that are called upon when an individual interacts with, and responds to, adversity. Some writers argue that resilience exists on a continuum and can change over time (Dodsworth, 2014; Southwick et al., 2014). Furthermore, a person can be resilient to some forms of adversity in some circumstances, but not in others (Rutter, 2007). Thus resilience should be perceived as dynamic, subject to changes in temporal, structural, relational and individual factors. Individual factors are described by Mansson and Hedin (1999) as comprising internal driving forces and resources such as capacities, interests, dreams, fantasies, adaptation and coping strategies. I would add resilience, conceptualised as a skill that can be learnt and applied in challenging circumstances.

“Elastic resilience” refers to “the *recovery* (my emphasis) of competence following exposure to ‘bad experiences’ or stressful events” (Magee & Carr, 1998, cited in Mansson & Hedin, 1999:76), whereby the accumulation of adverse experiences in childhood and adolescence can serve to toughen or protect the person, facilitating better coping competence for later adversity. This implies that resilience can be ‘built up’ or practised, so for some people the more adversity they face, the more resilient they become. It is similar to courage: as courage can only exist in the face of fear, so resilience can only really exist in the face of adversity.

The survivors demonstrate enormous resilience throughout their narratives. Despite the trauma they were exposed to and the suffering they experienced, they actually navigated their way through the complex world of CSE and have survived it. Time, specifically in terms of where each woman is in her ‘journey’, is an important factor in terms of the distance the women have travelled from their victimhood and towards survivor-hood and recovery. Fran is the oldest survivor and has been out of the world of sexual exploitation for over twenty years. It has been ten years since Leah’s involvement but only around three since her disclosure. Alina and Ellie have also been out of CSE for around three years. Fran’s level of disclosure is much deeper and more insightful than the other narratives. This is not to derogate the other narratives in any way, it is in fact a strength of the data, as each narrative signifies, and offers insight into, different ‘stages’ of this transition.

It is interesting to consider then, whether the longevity of the exploitation and abuse has a role in facilitating the development of elastic resilience. For example, by the time of Fran’s first exit she had endured a further two years of sexual exploitation, abuse and violence. She had demonstrated resilience by enduring those years of abuse as well as finding the strength to break her bond with Danny. Although she had been further damaged and was "*mentally exhausted*", she was also more mature and perhaps more 'practised' at coping and surviving. Although this is not articulated in her narrative, it is possible that the assault on Fran actually triggered a sense of resilience within her whereby the pain of staying outweighed the pain of leaving. The elasticity of Fran's resilience is evident when she was 'exposed' after the result of her CRB check: her resilience deserted her and she returned to the world of sexual exploitation, but was re-triggered by the murder of her cousin, prompting her second and final exit.

Pragmatism, defined as "behaviour that is dictated more by practical consequences than by theory or dogma" (Collins English Dictionary, 2000:1216) is another thread running through the narratives. It speaks to the survivors' decision-making and problem-solving skills, the emphasis being on the fact that many of the decisions the women took were consequence-led. Alina's pragmatism is evident in her recognition that she needed attention, to feel wanted and loved, as well as wanting certain material items, all of which served to boost her self-esteem. Given the economic and emotional constraints on her life at the time, Alina recognised that tolerating sexual exploitation was a practical way to achieve these things. Similarly, Ellie's pragmatic decision to tolerate continued involvement in the family where she had been sexually abused, and which she "*hates*", is essentially a pragmatic response. She has decided she will remain involved until she has built up her own family and support network, at which point she will reject her extended family. This pragmatic and temporary decision is fuelled by her overarching fear - "*I'm so scared to be alone*" - but it also allows her to get some of her needs met until she feels in a position to meet them herself.

How they maintain their exit

Barry (1979:49) distinguishes between "survival and *effective* survival" and I view 'effective survival' as being able to maintain the exit from the world of sexual violence and exploitation and create a new identity and life. Fuchs Ebaugh's (1988) work on Role Exit offers a theoretical context and general theory regarding status transition. She argues that in modern society, many people experience major shifts in various areas of life which result in a transition from one role to another. This requires a role exit which results in becoming an ‘ex’ *something*, what Fuchs Ebaugh calls an ‘ex-role’. This is a way to explain how people exit roles that have been central to their lives and their identity, and create a new role such as becoming an ex-teacher, ex-criminal, or ex-alcoholic. I will add becoming an ex-victim of CSE to this list. This is helpful to my analysis of how these women exited the world of sexual exploitation and how they make retrospective sense of their involvement, allowing them to achieve some sense of recovery.

Only a brief overview of the Role Exit theory is necessary here (see Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988 and Baker et al., 2010 for a comprehensive summary). Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) posits that just as we are socialised into roles, we are also socialised out of them. The theory suggests that escaping a particular role is a social process that usually happens over time, and four consecutive stages have been identified: i) first doubts, derived from a sense of unease with the current role; ii) seeking alternatives – the costs and benefits of staying in the particular role are weighed up; iii) turning points – a gradual or sudden event or set of events offers a justification for exiting; and iv) creating an ex-role whereby exiters distance themselves emotionally from their old role and attempt to create a new one. Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) emphasises that the stages are not prescriptive, as people may not go through them all, and some may regress to a previous stage due to individual variation. It is the last two stages, turning points and creating an ex-role, that are most useful to my analysis.

Role exit is defined as a “process of disengagement from a role that is central to one’s self-identity and the re-establishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one’s ex-role” (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988:1). Role Exit theory provides a useful framework for exploring the survivors’ experiences of exiting their role as a victim of CSE, which was central to their lives for a period of time, and the re-establishing of their identity and new role which incorporates, to varying degrees, being a survivor of CSE. According to Fuchs Ebaugh (1988), creating an ex-role can be fraught with the tension between establishing a new role and accommodating the old one. This tension is palpable within Fran’s narrative. Her entry into the women’s refuge came with the recognition that she would have to hide the reality of her experience and present herself as a victim of domestic violence.

So, what has maintained the women's motivation not to return to the world of sexual exploitation? A significant commonality in all the narratives is that all the survivors have found a purpose, or a mission, which has motivated them and helped maintain their exit. This is a further interplay of the influencing factors, but Mansson and Hedin (1999) identify the "ability to dream and fantasise" as being "at the very heart of the process of change" (Mansson & Hedin, 1999:75). This is an individual factor and relates to individual resilience. This 'ability to dream' is indicative that the survivors are able to look forward, at least sometimes, and visualise positive possibilities for themselves which provide a direction to follow.

The ability to dream of a new role

The data suggests that the ability to dream is central to the creation of the ex-role, essentially a new self-identity. Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) sees the creation of the ex-role as a process of resocialisation and a shift in self-identity that the individual has to incorporate into their new sense of self. She further argues that the new role will inevitably contain "vestiges and residuals of the previous" (Fuchs Ebaugh, 1988:4) as a result of self-identity being formed by one's myriad of life experiences. However, analysis of the narratives indicates that these 'vestiges and residuals' can be both positive and negative. Alina's narrative demonstrates the negative impact of vestiges and residuals of the old role, as she was very hesitant in her ability to dream of entering Higher Education. Alina experienced a strong sense of self-doubt that is steeped in her perception of her past experiences and low expectations of herself in some areas of life: "*I went to college and I quit, I went back to college and I quit*" and this, currently, outweighs her ability to see it as a possibility. However, for Ellie and Leah, being in Higher Education represents the ability to dream and create new possibilities and self-identity. Both women were at university at the time of interview, and both identified themselves as a 'student'. They held career and personal aspirations for when they completed their courses and believed they could improve their life. Both women were proud of being on their courses, which they perceived as an achievement in itself.

Conversely, the vestiges and residuals of an old role can also be utilised in a constructive way. Alina, Fran and Ellie have demonstrated their ability to dream in terms of making a difference to other victims of CSE. Barry (1979:49) argues that “effective survival necessitates women’s coming together over the serious threat of sexual violence and organising against it”. Alina, Fran and Ellie are currently demonstrating their effective survival as they are all pro-active in improving understanding of, and responses to, CSE and are committed to establishing the voice of survivors as experts in this field. To varying degrees they have distanced themselves from their previous identity, which they flipped from being shameful and negative to being a strength and source of internal power, thus utilising only the helpful vestiges and residuals. These decisions will have taken an enormous amount of resilience.

Another, more personal indication of the survivors’ ability to dream was motherhood. Two of the women were mothers and the other two demonstrated a desire to become mothers. Each of them expressed hope and aspirations, not only for their children and future children but also for the type of mothers they are and would be. They all identified what they were lacking from their relationship with their own mother, and were clear that they would ensure their children did not experience the same negative feelings:

> **Ellie:** “**I’m** gonna protect **my** children.” [Ellie’s emphasis].
>
> **Alina:** “If I have a child I’m going to be so over-protective, so over-protective.”
>
> **Leah:** “My daughter, I’m **so scared** for her and I’m scared of what people are capable of doing.” [Leah’s emphasis].
>
> **Fran:** “Having my son, was the best thing that ever happened to me [emotional] (…) he was my gift.”

The feelings of the women, in these statements and in their narratives more generally, are characterised by the need to protect their children and this is because their experiences of sexual exploitation had left them with a residual fear. They have seen and felt the cruelty of people, particularly men, and this is a likely influence over their view of parenting. More implicitly, it is clear that for the women who are mothers, their children are a source of motivation for them to be ‘well’ and to be able to move forward from their experiences. When I asked

Leah what made her disclose her exploitation so many years after it had happened, she answered quite simply:

> **Leah:** “My daughter were born.”

This shows the continued relevance of attachment and attachment theory, as the women have formed positive and secure attachments since their exit from exploitation. Bowlby (1977, cited in Shibue & Kasai, 2014:280) perceived attachment as “relevant and active” throughout the life course, and although he perceived attachment styles as relatively stable, he did not view them as unchangeable. Early attachment theory posited that as the individual gets older, the IWM is less likely to change (Bowlby, 1973) but subsequent research (Moller et al., 2002; Pearson et al., 1994) suggests that it is possible to change attachment styles.

The concept of earned-secure attachments represents a transition, “an internal shift from insecure to secure attachment status” (Moller et al., 2002:213). Earned-secure attachment refers to individuals who had an insecure attachment in their younger years but have become more secure, possibly as a result of breaking a cycle of abuse (Aoki, 2012 cited in Shibue & Kasai, 2014). Saunders et al. (2011:404) state that an adult can be viewed as having earned-secure attachments “if they describe negative relationship experiences with their primary caregivers during childhood, yet are able to talk about these experiences openly and coherently.” Although the survivors involved in my research were not tested for their attachment styles, the idea of earned-secure attachments is certainly applicable as a possible explanation, particularly for Fran and Leah. Both are mothers and both have broken the cycle of abuse (centred very much on abandonment for both women). Both were open and coherent in their recognition of what had happened in their childhood, how they interpreted and responded to it at the time, and how they have since made sense of their parents’ actions. Fran actually demonstrated a lot of empathy with her mother, recognising the struggle she had when Fran was a baby.

The data suggests that the ability to dream can grow and develop over time and experience. Ellie, Alina and Leah are, figuratively speaking, at the beginning of their journey out of CSE. Fran, however, was once in the same position as Ellie and Alina but has since travelled much further and has developed the confidence to ‘dream bigger’. Fran is in the process of setting up a survivor-led project. She has waived her anonymity, working openly as a survivor to challenge violence and sexual exploitation against young girls and women.

Fundamentally, the women’s journeys into, within and out of the world of sexual exploitation are journeys of transition and profound change. Each woman is on her own path. The remarkable aspect is that they are each moving away from the abused girl and young woman they once were, evolving towards becoming more self-directing, empowered and recovered.

Concluding comments

This chapter has been substantial and its purpose has been to let the four survivors take the reader on a journey into, within and out of the world of child sexual exploitation. I have wanted to show not only what it can be like for highly vulnerable young people who are sexually exploited, but also how they can arrive at, navigate and escape that world.

Each of the survivors became entrenched in, and experienced, her own version of CSE and this links back to the discussion (Chapter 3) regarding the nature of CSE: what it is and subjective understandings of it. The survivors’ points of entry occurred in mundane, everyday spaces, illustrating the ubiquitous nature of CSE and the corruption of these spaces, which presents a challenging message for practitioners and parents because these areas are a part of normal, everyday life for the vast majority of young people. Despite some similarities, how each journey began and ended was unique, as a result of a complex interplay of individual, structural and relational factors, as well as push and pull factors (Dodsworth, 2012, 2014b; Mansson & Hedin, 1999). This resulted in each survivor having a different experience of, and response to, being sexually exploited; for example, active and angry or silent and compliant.

This can present difficulties for professionals because often exploited young people have not ‘looked’ or presented like ‘victims’, but as challenging or difficult adolescents making ‘lifestyle choices’ (Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012). All the survivors experienced this perception and as a result the survivors became a ‘person unseen’. Their narratives were disproportionately negative in their accounts of responding agencies, which often exacerbated the survivors' suffering. All gave several examples of being and feeling overlooked, let down and/or ignored, particularly by statutory agencies, which served to isolate them and contribute to a downward spiral into CSE (Dodsworth, 2014a). The narratives also revealed the power of good practice and the positive impact it can have when the survivors felt seen and heard. The narratives show that this was significant for the survivors, providing them with a secure base relationship from which to build their resilience and ability to cope, begin recovery and eventually exit CSE (Dodsworth, 2012; Mansson & Hedin, 1999).

The continued involvement of young people in sexual exploitation is complex, and suffering is an intrinsic consequence of being sexually exploited. The predominant type of suffering stemmed from emotional pain which manifested as self-harming behaviours and suicidal thoughts or attempts. Thus, navigating the world of CSE requires resilience to adapt and survive, which involved the survivors coping with a 'tolerable exchange', maladaptive decision making, and making terrible compromises as a way to meet what needs they could. Young people are active decision makers and sometimes these decisions *appear* to contribute towards their exploitation, so gaining a clearer understanding of the concepts of agency and exchange within a CSE context is important. The narratives show that a main driver of the survivors' responses, which manifested itself through their decisions, choices and actions/inaction (i.e. agency) was their search to meet some of their emotional needs, such as feeling loved and belonging. However, this was often based on a poor IWM and impaired sense-making, flawed gender scripts, and poor support systems and attachments. All the survivors demonstrated feelings of loyalty, gratitude and love towards their abuser and this is problematic for them to come to terms with. Thus, better understanding of agency, the pathways to and within CSE, and the impact of trauma bonds will help survivors overcome their sense of guilt and self-blame.

I have made the point that CSE does not exist in a vacuum and how the survivors made sense of and performed their gender illustrates this, such as how Alina promoted her 'feminine' appearance and Ellie minimised, even hid, hers. Clisby and Holdsworth (2014) offer a socio-cultural, heteronormative, patriarchal theoretical framework within which I have located the world of CSE. It is an archetypal patriarchal context, integral to which is a spectrum of symbolic, structural and visceral violence (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014) against women and girls. I located cultural grooming on that spectrum, as a form of symbolic violence that operates through sexualised and sexualising messages. These are both explicit and subliminal, hyper-masculinising males and objectifying and sexualising women and flooding spaces that belong to, and are accessed by, young people (National Education Union & UK Feminista, 2017; Papadopoulus, 2010). Cultural grooming is a pervasive, normative process of overtly sexualised gendering which primes young people for sexual exploitation. It increases their vulnerability to, and compliance within, interpersonal grooming that is so common in CSE, and this is certainly evidenced in the survivors' narratives. Their narratives also demonstrate cultural and interpersonal grooming as a powerful and highly versatile tool utilised by abusers to maximise their chances of achieving their goals at the expense of the victim.

An important message that emerged from the survivors' narratives was the significance of compliance, defined as synonymous with 'submission' and 'adaptation', within CSE. All the survivors were compliant while they were being sexually exploited and their ability to consent was taken away. They 'went along' with, and even accepted, certain abuses, but they did not consent. Their narratives support my view that developing a better understanding of compliance allows for a more nuanced understanding of sexually exploited young people's behaviours, and is much more relevant and appropriate than focusing solely on young people's understanding of consent.

These are the stories of four women who survived a journey into the world of CSE. They are survivors. All have achieved and maintained a successful exit and are currently working to develop a new life, role and identity for themselves. They have all demonstrated great resilience in the face of great adversity. Their journeys have been transitory: from victim of CSE to survivor of CSE; from adolescent girl to adult woman; from experiencing negative attachments to earning secure and positive ones. They all demonstrated their ability to dream as they exited, being able to perceive themselves in a new light with a new and improved role identity, such as student, mother and activist.

Chapter 7: Contextualising the narratives and experiences of the non-abusive parents whose child has been sexually exploited

The principal aim of this chapter is to set the context for the thematic analysis of the narratives of non-abusive parents (hereon referred to as parents) whose child has been sexually exploited that follows in Chapter 8. I begin by exploring the position of parents within the dominant discourses and narratives of CSE (discussed in Chapter 2). The parent participants are not related to the survivors (discussed in Chapter 5) in any way. Here, I identify parents as being located within two types of literature: parent-minimising literature and parent-focused literature, and the position of parents will be examined within this framework. Inherent within the parent-minimising literature, and wider society, is the stereotype that CSE only happens to certain types of families (YouGov, 2013) and one aim of this work is to challenge that image and promote a more accurate view that CSE can happen to any young person and therefore any parents. I discuss relevant terminology and emerging parent discourses and narratives surrounding CSE will be explored. The parent participants will then be re-introduced.

It is important to acknowledge that the vast amount of literature pertaining to the experiences of parents has been produced by PACE (Parents against Child Sexual Exploitation), a parent-led charity run by parents for parents that has advocated for parents since 1996 (PACE, 2014a, 2016). The organisation[10] was started by a mother, Irene Ivison, after her 17 year old daughter, Fiona, was sexually exploited and murdered in 1993 (Ivison, 1997). The discourse regarding parents in this literature represents a challenge to the dominant discourse found in literature from more powerful sources like the Government and statutory agencies, and signifies a growing shift and change in the discourse surrounding parents of exploited children.

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[10] PACE was originally known as Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (CROP) until 2013.

Terminology

Parent is a widely understood term that denotes a person's status as having a biological or adopted child or children. The term parent is generally uncontested; however, what is often contested is the *quality* of parenting. Value judgements regarding whether one is a 'good' parent, assessments of parental 'capacity' and value-based descriptors such as 'problematic parenting', and 'disengaged/engaged parent' are frequently utilised (DCSF, 2010; DfE, 2017; Scott & Skidmore, 2006).

The use of the term 'non-abusive' is a reference to the parents *not* being the perpetrators of the abuse their child experienced. All the parents in this research had parental responsibility for their child when the sexual exploitation began. Parental responsibility is a legal concept defined as "all rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child" (Jarret, 2017). However, parental responsibility is not considered as "a constant right" (Jarret, 2017:1), but one which decreases as the child gets older and becomes capable of making decisions and understanding their consequences. Parental responsibility can be lost, gained and restricted in England and Wales via certain court orders (see Jarret, 2017). Although parental responsibility is a legal, thus objective concept, the subjective meanings of parent's perceptions of it will be explored in the following section as a theme closely linked to power and disempowerment.

In this study, all the children lived in the family home at the start of the sexual exploitation. Research suggests that this is the case for most children who are sexually exploited (OCC, 2012) and some evidence highlights that "a substantial number of victims in the dataset are from stable families and have no prior involvement with social services" (CEOP, 2011:53) (as is the case for all the parent participants in this research). These findings challenge the misconception that the families most likely to be involved in CSE are somehow 'dysfunctional', poor, less well educated families, experiencing substance misuse (see YouGov, 2013). This stereotype only succeeds in detracting focus from the perpetrators.

In contrast to the debate surrounding victim-survivor terminology explored in Chapter 5, there is no such debate with regard to parents. Furthermore, the reluctance of some survivors to perceive themselves as victims of CSE differs from some parents who describe themselves as ‘secondary victims’ and want external acknowledgement of this:

> **Annie**: “Although we’re not the direct victim, my husband and I, we’re sort of secondary victims.”

Annie’s statement is indicative of the recognition that being perceived as a victim generally brings an acknowledgement of harm, validation and possible sources of support, which are encapsulated in the notion of ‘innocent victim’. This is significant for many non-abusive parents because it is clear that often, when it is discovered that a child has been sexually exploited, not only do parents feel unsupported, they frequently feel blamed and judged by professionals as well as their family and community (PACE, 2014b; Regehr, 1990; YouGov, 2013). A survey commissioned by PACE and the Virtual College Safeguarding Children e-Academy, in which 750 parents and 945 professionals participated, found that 44% of the professionals who took part believed that in most cases the parents are in some way responsible for their child’s sexual exploitation (YouGov, 2013). This often leaves parents feeling disempowered and marginalised within the statutory child protection system (PACE, 2014b, 2016) which, by placing the needs of the child as central and paramount, can inadvertently marginalise non-abusive parents.

While research (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012) suggests that a substantial number of CSE victims come from stable families, it is important to acknowledge that even within stable families, the relationship between a child and parent is complex and often far from perfect. In some cases, whether intentionally or unintentionally, any parent may act as a ‘push’ factor for their child, for a variety of reasons. This may be due to parents’ responses to their child’s wish to establish independence as they transition from child to adult, a process which often includes issues around a young person finding and asserting their own sense of identity, and can create conflict within the parent-child relationship (AYPH, 2013; CEOP, 2011). Parents may experience stress, financial difficulties or bereavement, which could contribute to the creation of an uncomfortable home environment for their child. However, recognition of difficulties, challenges and dynamics within the parent-child relationship is not intended to perpetuate a parent-blaming narrative; on the contrary it is hoped to highlight the very human nature of parenting.

Furthermore, a common facet of sexual exploitation is for the perpetrator to drive a wedge between child and parents, isolating the child as a way of increasing their control over them (PACE, 2014a, 2014b). Sometimes, young people do not disclose their exploitation because they wish to protect their families (CEOP, 2011; PACE, 2015a). Additionally, a child's behaviour can often dramatically change as a result of being exploited, such as truanting, substance misuse or going missing, and it is highly likely that this would cause conflict between the parents and child, which only strengthens the perpetrators' position (CEOP, 2011; PACE, 2014a). The impact of these aspects of CSE is hugely significant in terms of developing a comprehensive and consistent response to parents, which will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

The role of parents whose children are being sexually exploited, in this study and elsewhere (YouGov, 2013), appears largely underrated, underutilised and under-resourced by responding agencies. For convenience, 'responding agencies' is used as a generic term to include statutory agencies such as social workers, police, the Criminal Justice System (CJS), health and education services, as well as voluntary and specialist CSE services. However, it will be made clear in the analysis if and when parents discuss a specific agency. It does not appear to be the case that parents are routinely and consistently met with sympathy and support, or embraced as safeguarding partners (PACE, 2014b, 2016), and this is certainly a repeated finding from the narratives of the parent participants. It is also apparent that many parents feel victimised by the child protection system, and its inherent policies and practices actually exacerbate the profound trauma that parents are already experiencing (PACE, 2014a; Regehr, 1990).

Locating parents in the dominant child protection discourses

Locating the parents of sexually exploited children in the literature has revealed an interesting contrast in their position and how they are perceived: either 'parent-minimising' *or* 'parent-focused', and I have found very little that does not fit into either category. It must be noted that much of the literature that pertains to minimising the role of parents is statutory and/or government papers and reports (for example, CEOP, 2011; DfE, 2017; DoH, 2000; HM Government, 2015, 2018; OCC, 2012). Child protection discourse and practice is premised upon the assumption that child abuse tends to take place within the home/family environment and parenting capacity is an intrinsic aspect of child protection assessment (HM Government, 2015). However, CSE is fundamentally different to intra-familial abuse because, in *most* cases, the risks and threats to children's safety lie outside the family and home, and this difference is "still not acknowledged in the current child protection framework" (PACE, 2016:3). The view that "parents are not the sexual abusers of their exploited children but they go through a statutory system where they are treated as such" (Ibid., 3) is widely felt by parents engaged in support services and in this research.

Thus, there is a glaring discrepancy regarding the role of parents in CSE literature which the following statements succinctly illustrate:

> "When professionals refer a child, they should include any information they have on the child's development needs and the capacity of the child's parents or carers to meet these needs" (HM Government, 2015:16).
>
> "The crucial role parents play in safeguarding a child at risk of sexual abuse and violence outside the home is still largely ignored in our national approach to CSE." (PACE, 2016:3).

The first statement comes from the statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (HM Government, 2015), and inherent in this are the assumptions that underpin the child protection system in the UK regarding assessment of parental capability as fundamental to safeguarding. The second statement, essentially parent-focused, represents the voices and beliefs of many parents who contact PACE for support and guidance once they have discovered that their child is being sexually exploited, and emphasises the centrality of the parents in safeguarding children.

Parent-minimising discourses

The term 'parent-minimising' aims to encapsulate how parents are referred to or included in the literature. For instance, parents generally tend to be referred to in terms of their 'parental capacity' (HM Government, 2015). Government guidance advocates a threefold systematic approach as the "best way to deliver comprehensive assessment for all children" (HM Government, 2015:22) which involves assessment of the child's developmental needs, family and environmental factors and parenting capacity. Parents' capacity to respond to the revelation that their child has been sexually exploited is often, at least initially, limited for many reasons such as shock, guilt and a complete lack of knowledge and understanding of what CSE is (Deblinger et al., 2001; PACE, 2014b). Research suggests that the distress parents may feel when learning their child has been sexually exploited may "interfere with their ability to be optimally responsive to their children's needs" (Deblinger et al., 2001:333). After being told by the school that her 13 year old daughter was being sexually exploited, Lisa recalled that she felt "*completely floored*" because she did not know what CSE was and had "***never*** *even heard of it*."

In this situation the parents are also extremely vulnerable and in need of specialist support that at worst is simply not recognised, and at best is given inconsistently by agencies. A significant cause of this is the way non-abusive parents of abused children have been positioned and perceived within the child protection framework, and several of the parent participants agreed with Lisa's view:

> **Lisa**: "Social Services never really did a lot for us."

Another way parents are positioned within the discourse are as 'lumped in' with other agencies, for example in the phrase "relationships with parents, carers, staff, outreach workers, social workers and other trusted adults." (OCC, 2012:10). In Barnardo's (2014) 'Working in Partnership' paper based on a Parliamentary Review, only around 100 words of text are given to the role of parents as partners. This is an undeveloped opportunity to promote the distinctive and important role parents can take in protecting their children. Although parents are recognised as having a role, the discourse remains minimising as it fails to recognise the distinct parent-child relationship. Both approaches neither implicitly nor explicitly recognise that "the unique gift of love and commitment by the parent to the child is crucial and distinctive" (PACE, 2016:4). It is this 'unique gift' that distinguishes parents from professionals in the world of CSE. For parents it is not a job, it is their and their child's life and this positions most parents as strong safeguarders:

> **Lisa:** “We are fighting tooth, yeah, tooth and nail to keep her safe. Her safety, you know, above anything else and they’ve got a blasé attitude but they [Social Services] don’t seem to care.”

I believe that part of the minimising of the role and importance of parents stems from the Children Act, 1989 which clearly places the needs of the child as paramount and translates to policy as, “where there is a conflict between the needs of the child and their parents/carers, decisions should be made in the child’s best interests” (HM Government, 2015:22). This makes sense when the parents are assessed as lacking capacity or are deemed to be abusive in some way. However, what it appears to do to non-abusive parents whose children are being sexually exploited is reduce their parental capacity and responsibility, and inadvertently disempower and marginalise them. Parents have reported that agencies, constrained to act within a particular system, often swoop in, essentially brushing the parents to one side. In some cases parents feel like they “are traumatised twice over” (PACE, 2014b:2), having lost their children to the perpetrators of sexual exploitation and again by their treatment within the child protection system.

Thus the need to assess parents and “reach a judgement about the nature and level of needs and/or risks that the child may be facing *within* their family” (HM Government, 2015:23, my emphasis) stems from the current child protection system and legal framework, which has evolved to protect children from abuse (primarily) within the home (HM Government, 2015, 2018; PACE, 2016). This approach fundamentally positions parents as part of the problem instead of part of the solution, which is an inappropriate stance to take for non-abusive parents. Policy and practice, which advocates for inter-agency working (DoH, 2000; HM Government, 2015), has not yet caught up with and been adjusted to better respond to CSE by pro-actively interacting with parents as interagency partners, “well placed to spot the signs of exploitation” (Barnardo’s 2014:35). For instance, statutory guidance (HM Government, 2015, 2018) clearly states that the systematic collection and recording of information is important, but fails to acknowledge in policy and practice the parents’ role in this as frontline safeguarders of their own children.

The origins of a family-blaming narrative and parent-minimising discourse regarding parents of sexually exploited children has its roots in a gendered, socio-historical context of child protection and the notion of the heteronormative nuclear family being the ideal. Children have long been perceived as “integral to western notions of family” (Brown & Barrett, 2002:2), and the family’s primary role is to socialise and protect children. Delap (2015) charted the history of child protection from 1918 to 1990, noting that a system has emerged throughout the last century whereby welfare workers intervened, resulting in child welfare being divided between various professionals, but not parents. She also draws attention to its gendered nature, whereby welfare professionals would step in when it was deemed that the parent(s), specifically the mother, had failed in her duty of care.

During the post-war period it was widely believed that the causes contributing to ‘problem families’ were a result of “maternal incompetence and ‘mental deficiency’ (of mother, abuser and victim)” (Delap, 2015). This dates back at least to the 1860s when sexual abuse was ‘discovered’ along with a focus on ‘fallen women’ and ‘immoral, flighty girls’ (Brown & Barrett, 2002; Delap, 2015). Boys were generally not perceived as sexually vulnerable, which resulted in the relative invisibility of male victims of sexual abuse (Brown & Barrett, 2002; Delap, 2015). The post-war period saw some powerful and pervasive structural narratives emerge and become normalised. For example, the emerging sociological thought relating to the ideological heteronormative nuclear family was fundamentally comprised of the female expressive role and male instrumental role as forming “the internal structure of the family” (Parsons, 1951:133). This family type has been culturally absorbed as a social norm, placing the responsibility for children (and therefore blame if things ‘went wrong’) squarely on the mother’s shoulders.

A further example is the powerful narrative of ‘maternal deprivation’ (discussed in Chapter 6) of the post-war period, which emerged from attachment research during that period that “gained very wide currency” (Rutter, 1981:15) and undoubtedly contributed to the responses of welfare agencies. Much of the attachment research of the time reflected this socio-cultural context and focused on the relationship (or lack of) between the child and mother, with key findings such as ‘maternal responsiveness’ (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964) and a mother’s ‘sensitivity to her child’s signals’ (Ainsworth & Bell, 1969) being reported. This reflects the expectation that mothers were, and still are, very often the primary care-givers and are the ones with primary responsibility for the success or failure of the family. Furthermore, a pamphlet published in 1963 regarding child sexual abuse explicitly contributed to the mother/parent blaming discourse of the era by emphasising the behaviour of the family as a significant cause of creating pliant victims (Gibbens & Prince, 1963).

It is beyond doubt that there exists today a hangover from these discourses and structural narratives regarding parents and notions of ‘good’, ‘bad’ and ‘troubled’ families (Coffey, 2017; Jay, 2014; Kosaraju, 2009; PACE, 2014b, 2016). Although maximising family support is a principle of intervention (Finkelhor, 1997), it does not seem to be one that the parent participants have experienced positively, which is leading to the growth of a counter-discourse. I argue that the minimising discourse of the role and importance of non-abusive, capable parents does indeed translate into practice and very often shapes the experiences of parents whose children are being sexually exploited in a negative way. This assertion is well supported in wider literature (Kosaraju, 2009; PACE, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; YouGov, 2013) as well as by my thematic analysis of the parents’ narratives, wherein their predominantly negative experiences and perceptions of responding agencies are intricately woven throughout, often colouring and shaping the overall nature and tone of their stories.

Parent-focused discourses

> “Sexual exploitation can damage relationships between children and parents, so support for both parties during re-engagement is absolutely vital” (CEOP, 2011:82).

As already stated, the vast majority of parent-focused literature has been produced by PACE. Over the last twenty years or so the parent voice has gathered strength and recognition and is cited as a voice of expertise in some other works (CEOP, 2011 for example). This is as a result of the work of PACE, the projection of CSE and associated scandals into the public eye and a slowly developing governmental response to the role and experiences of parents. Other research has explored the impact of child abuse on non-abusive parents (Deblinger et al., 2001), and has recognised the importance of the parent-child relationship and the parents’ role in giving consistent and continued support to their sexually exploited child (CEOP, 2011; Finkelhor, 1997; Regehr, 1990). Finkelhor (1997) describes the principle of maintaining positive relationships between victims of abuse and their non-abusive family members as “perhaps the most important of all principles” and advocates treating them with “respect and concern”, involving them in “the process and decision making”, “providing counselling” and essentially considering them as “victims of the situation” (Finkelhor, 1997:110). However, despite pockets of best practice around the country, there is substantial evidence that the child protection system does not respond well to these parents and there are few sources of support or treatment for families (PACE, 2014b).

The bulk of parent-focused literature highlights the various impacts CSE has on parents and families. The literature does not pit the harm to parents against the harm to their children, but strongly advocates that to really support and safeguard children during and after sexual exploitation, parents must also be fully supported, informed and utilised (Kosaraju, 2009). PACE has published guidance and support for parents on strategies to cope with CSE (PACE, 2015a) and how to work with the police in CSE investigations, emphasising the centrality of the parents’ role (PACE, 2015b), and is a proponent of the Relational Safeguarding Model (RSM) as best practice when working with families experiencing CSE (PACE, 2014b). The RSM positions parents as central to safeguarding and meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people by maximising the capacity of parents to “contribute to the prevention of abuse and the disruption and conviction of perpetrators by enabling family involvement […] ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the family [and] balancing the child’s identity as both an individual and as part of a family unit” (PACE, 2014b:7). This last point is of particular importance, as a common response by some agencies is to treat the child as if she is in a vacuum, “abstracted from their family life” (PACE, 2014b:2). As a result, there is a growing picture of the full range of impacts CSE can have on parents and the families of victims. For example, Kosaraju (2009) highlights the ultimate cost of CSE to families who have experienced it by listing the names of nineteen young women who had died as a result of sexual exploitation by 2009.

Other research highlights the impact CSE can have on the health of parents and other family members. 80% of respondents to a small-scale piece of research reported various health issues ranging from frequent headache to stomach and chest pain; 56% reported a range of psychological impacts such as difficulty sleeping, feeling disconnected and self-harm; 76% reported various impacts on their emotions, such as heightened anger and replaying the CSE events over in their head; 72% reported that they had been prescribed medication to help them cope (Unwin & Stephens-Lewis, 2016). There is also a financial cost to parents from prescriptions, repairs to homes which have sustained damage by the perpetrators, loss of income due to sick leave or job loss, travel costs incurred in attending meetings and/or court proceedings and in more extreme cases, moving costs if the child/family have to leave the area. All of these impacts were included in the parent participants' narratives in this study.

Concluding comments

In conclusion, there is a discrepancy between two opposing locations of parents within the literature and discourse. Firstly, in much of the statutory literature, the parents' position is minimised, and as such, so too is their power and influence and a recognition of their unique role as partner and safeguarder. An analysis of the origins of this parent-minimising position reveals a parent-blaming discourse rooted in a gendered, socio-historical context which champions the heteronormative nuclear family. Post-second world war sociological thought and theory regarding the nuclear family, and the emergence of powerful, gendered attachment theories, reinforced this social framework. It is from this context that the current child protection model and system emerged and developed. This system initially explicitly blamed parents, particularly mothers, if things 'went wrong' with their children. Over time, this blaming culture became more implicit, couched in notions of assessing parental capacity, but has remained one-dimensional in its approach. These notions continue to shape and inform the experiences and treatment of parents whose children have been sexually exploited. Assessing parental capacity is only necessary when the parents are potentially harming their children, yet it appears to be the starting point of the child protection model applied to, at least in the initial interactions, all parents. This has a marginalising, harmful impact on non-abusive parents, and diminishes the possibility of working collaboratively to safeguard the child.

In contrast to parent-minimising discourse, there has been a gradual emergence of parent-focused literature and discourse which positions parents as experts, partners and frontline safeguarders. This literature illuminates parents' negative experiences of CSE, often as a result of responding agencies' treatment of them, and highlights various impacts on parents relating to their health and wellbeing, employment and relationships. The bulk of this literature emanates from PACE and emphasises the importance of the parents' role in a holistic and effective CSE response. It also values the parent-child relationship as a source of consistent care and support for the child during and after the abuse. Thus, much of the literature advocates for a family-centred approach to CSE being taken by responding agencies.

Re-introducing the parent participants

I will re-introduce the seven parents, Audrey, Annie, Michelle, Lucy, Donna, Lisa and Henry here. As with the survivors' narratives, I have endeavoured to provide a faithful and accurate account of their lives. They volunteered to take part in this research, via a parent support organisation, and have openly and bravely shared their stories and feelings. Like the survivors' narratives, this data is also traumatic and emotive. The parents powerfully articulate their pain, guilt, sense of loss and powerlessness, frustration and anger. This data is overall less hopeful than the survivors' because in several cases, the CSE was ongoing, so the narratives catalogue the descent into the world of CSE but not always the journey out of it. However, what springs out of their narratives above all else is the love and enduring commitment these parents have for their child.

Table 2: Summary of parent participants

Parent	Gender	Year of entry	Age at entry	Exit/Aftermath	Duration in years*
Henry	M	1986/7	50	Mid 1990s /Aftermath	30
Audrey	F	2010	47	2016/Aftermath	6
Annie	F	2011	34	2016/Aftermath	5
Lisa	F	2012	Un-disclosed	Ongoing	4
Lucy	F	2013	51	Ongoing	3
Donna	F	2014	54	2016/Aftermath	1
Michelle	F	2015	54	Ongoing	16months

*at time of interview

Henry

Henry entered the world of CSE after he found out that his daughter Saskia, who was around fifteen years old at the time, was being sexually exploited. He and his wife had no idea what was happening to their daughter and were given very little support, as their experience began when this abuse was called ‘child prostitution’. The sexual exploitation of Saskia escalated and she was being sold by her ‘boyfriend’/pimp. The abuse went on for many years and stopped when the abuser seemed to ‘lose interest’. Henry and his wife have done all they could to support Saskia, and her subsequent children. Even when the abuse and exploitation of Saskia ended, their involvement in the aftermath of CSE has lasted for many years, totalling approximately thirty years at the time of interview.

Audrey

Audrey entered the world of CSE as a result of her daughter, Nadia’s, disclosure when she was sixteen years old that she had been groomed and sexually abused by a teacher in her secondary school. This ended the abuse and the teacher was prosecuted and convicted. However, Audrey’s experience of CSE been very much in the aftermath, focused on supporting Nadia through the Criminal Justice System and coping with the devastating impact the CSE has had on Nadia’s psychological and emotional health and well-being.

Annie

Annie’s daughter Becky quickly became entrenched in CSE after being approached by some older men outside the local supermarket, while Annie was inside. Becky was thirteen years old and was sexually exploited. During this time Annie describes how Becky constantly went missing and how she (Annie) had to fight for support services and the profound sense of loss she experienced. After several years Becky was moved out of the area in order to protect her and try to break her traumatic attachment to her abusers. Becky was free from sexual exploitation at the time of Annie’s interview and they were living in the aftermath of CSE, trying to re-build themselves and their relationship.

Lisa

One day before school, Lisa’s twelve year old daughter Clare disclosed that she had been gang-raped on the way home from school some weeks before, by some older male pupils in the same school. Lisa went to the police but describes how the young men were not prosecuted. Clare was struggling emotionally and psychologically and was referred for psychological support. Lisa was then informed by the psychologist that Clare was being sexually exploited. The exploitation continued and escalated for several years. During this time Lisa witnessed the impacts of Clare being raped regularly, developing trauma bonds to her abusers, becoming addicted to drugs, and eventually having to be removed from the area for her own safety. Lisa was still ensnared in the world of CSE at the time of interview.

Lucy

Lucy fostered her daughter Lizzie from the age of six and eventually adopted her when she was eleven years old. Lizzie had come from a very abusive and disrupted background and as she approached her teens she began to go missing for days at a time and was being sexually exploited. Lucy has witnessed the impacts of CSE, such as drug and alcohol overdoses, on her daughter. Lucy describes how she is engaged in 'battles' with responding agencies and was still heavily involved in the world of CSE at the time of the interview.

Donna

Donna entered the world of CSE after being called into her daughter Alice's school by the Deputy Headteacher. Donna was told that the school believed some of the girls, including her daughter Alice, were being sexually exploited by some male ex-students, and the police were involved. Donna had noticed a change in Alice's behaviour but believed it to be 'normal' teenage rebellious behaviour. The school was proactive and Alice received some intervention which Donna believes prevented the CSE and Alice's further involvement from escalating.

Michelle

Michelle's son Carl was groomed from the age of 11 years by a teacher at his secondary school. Michelle was also befriended and groomed by the teacher and she became increasingly reliant on him for support. Michelle describes how this man became more and more involved in their family life and how guilty she feels because she 'let him in'. Michelle watched as their son became infatuated with the teacher and she details changes in Carl's behaviour and personality. At the time of the interview Carl, aged seventeen, was living with the teacher who had been dismissed from the school on grounds of gross misconduct. Although Carl denies that there is a sexual relationship between him and the teacher, Michelle believes there is one but that Carl has been ‘brainwashed’ by him. At the time of her interview, Michelle was entrenched in a battle on all fronts: with the school, her son and responding agencies.

Chapter 8: The parents' narratives: journeys into, within and out of the world of child sexual exploitation

This chapter continues the analogy of a journey from the perspective of non-abusive parents whose children have been, or are being, groomed and sexually exploited by perpetrators outside the family. The chapter is split into three main parts, allowing the parents' journeys to be considered within the same framework as the survivors: starting out and entering the world of CSE; suffering and experiencing within the world of CSE; and surviving and exiting the world of CSE. This is important because many aspects of the parents' journeys mirror aspects of the survivors' journeys and it provides a useful insight into the similarities and connections between them. The journey analogy remains fundamental to this framework, intrinsic to which are the themes of border crossings and turning points: of moving or transitioning from one place to another, either physically or emotionally. Border crossing encapsulates an individual's movement into another space, place or state, which can be dramatic, sudden and shocking, and/or slow, quiet and almost imperceptible. Turning points refer to markers and moments, sometimes a series of decisions in the narratives which shaped the direction and nature of the border crossing.

As one data set, the narratives offer an insight into CSE that spans from the 1980s to 2016 and capture a range of parental experiences of CSE totalling fifty years, from those who were experiencing CSE at the time of interview to those who were at various stages of the aftermath of their and their child's involvement in CSE. Aftermath denotes that the actual CSE has ended but the families are still dealing with its various, often long-term impacts.

Some of the same themes discussed in the survivors' section, such as the ubiquitous nature of CSE, the corruption of safe spaces and vulnerability are revisited as they also run through the parents' narratives. Other emergent themes include: the nature of parents' journey into the world of CSE; exacerbating factors that may have contributed to the sexual exploitation of their child; parental lack of CSE knowledge and understanding; powerlessness; loss and grief; the impact of witnessing the effects of exploitation on their child; and resilience and recovery in the aftermath of CSE. These themes are not easily organised under neat subheadings as they are interlinked, often with one causing or exacerbating another, and they also recur throughout the journeys into, within and out of the world of CSE. The exploration of these themes aims to elevate the voices and perspectives of parents' experiences of CSE, facilitating their contribution to the evolving discourse and narratives.

A permeating theme: parents' experiences and perceptions of responding agencies

Underpinning all these themes, indeed all of the parents' narratives, are the parents' experiences and perceptions of responding agencies, characterised by a strong "*sense of powerlessness*" (Michelle). All the narratives reveal the disempowerment of parents by responding agencies (such as police, social workers, CSE workers and school). In most cases, the parents turned to agencies for guidance and help, based on the assumption that they, as experts, would know what to do to protect their child. When this happens, parents seem to begin to lose their autonomy and child protection systems, policies and procedures take over, leading some parents to feel that they "*were just kind of following systems*." (Annie).

Six of the seven parents' narratives highlight that their suffering and experiences within the world of CSE were often worsened by responding agencies, particularly statutory services such as social workers and the police. They clearly felt a great deal of anger, resentment and frustration towards some professionals' one-to-one and agency responses. Parents felt that their role as non-abusive parents was not recognised; they were often not being kept informed and felt "*disregarded*" (Lisa); they found responses inconsistent within and between agencies, and in some cases this led to a break down in trust and communication. Several of the parents have made, and are in the process of making, complaints against various agencies.

Attention is being drawn to this theme here because it intersects with almost all the other themes that emerge from the narratives. It offers an important source of learning for responding agencies, and forms an intrinsic, often dominant part of the parents' suffering and experience. As a result, it is difficult to extract parents' perceptions of responding agencies in a neat section, as this would only serve to dilute their narratives, and they are threaded throughout my analysis to reflect how they are woven within the parents' narratives

Part 1: Entering and starting out in the world of sexual exploitation

This section considers how parents came to *enter* the world of CSE, and the nature of that entry. The concepts of border crossings and turning points take a slightly different form within the parents' narratives because their journeys are a direct result of their child's journey into CSE. The parents are tightly bound to their child, who often seems like a stranger, present but beyond reach; yet still the parents hurtle after them, often feeling like they can never quite touch or reach them. Thus the narratives emit a pain borne out of the desperation being unable to save their child, and in many cases their attempts to do so are reminiscent of trying to grasp smoke, which simply dissipates when touched. For the parents, these border crossings are anguished and impossible to control. A child's entry into CSE can have elements of excitement and an exploration of a sense of freedom, but there is no element of this in a parent's entry. In all cases, their entry into the world of CSE came hand in hand with a profound, life-changing tsunami of horror, pain and shock. It is not a journey any of the parents *chose* to take, or exercised any agency to facilitate, and indeed several did not even know the world of CSE existed before they were catapulted into it.

Points of entry and the corruption of safe spaces by the ubiquitous nature of CSE

The theme of the corruption of spaces and the ubiquitous nature of CSE is revisited in the parents' narratives. All the parents found out about the exploitation of their child in spaces of daily life perceived as safe, such as their home or the child's school. They all also reported that the exploitation was initiated in other 'safe' places, for instance inside a school, outside school gates, or in a supermarket, a finding consistent with the literature (CEOP, 2011; Coffey, 2014). As with the survivors, the parents and their children were simply going about their everyday lives, which highlights the fact that harm can be perpetrated anywhere, often in unexpected places.

The nature of parents' entry into the world of CSE

Many of the border crossings are intangible: psychological or emotional shifts such as transitioning from a self-perception of "*a fairly, normal, happy family*" (Henry) to helplessly watching your child become "*possessed*" (Annie). The very nature of parenthood renders their needs as secondary to their child's, and in all the narratives the parent was forced to witness, and powerless to stop, the pain and abuse of their child. All the narratives are steeped in a sense of disempowerment, desperation and loss, whereby the parents are thrust into, and have to negotiate, an alien world of sexual predators and child protection services. I have categorised the nature of the parent's entry as either 'gradual then brutal' or 'brutally gradual'.

Gradual then brutal

The narratives reveal that a parent's entry into the world of CSE is often gradual, generally unrecognised for what it *actually* is, their child's entry into CSE, and always brutal. In most of the narratives, the entry can be described as a two-stage process whereby most parents initially noticed a change in their child's behaviour, which many thought of as "*just a teenage thing*" (Donna), and then were brutally thrust into the world of CSE where the exploitation was revealed to the parents, in almost all cases too late. The following excerpts illustrate these stages:

> **Lisa**: "It was really difficult (…) I remember going to work one morning and she [her daughter] was sobbing on her bed and I just sat down next to her and said, "Why is it you won't go to school?". And she just shouted, "I've been raped!"

Lisa's daughter Clare, aged 12, had been gang-raped on her way home from her new school by "*some older lads in the same school*". She went to the police to press charges but "*it didn't go anywhere*". The full extent of what was happening to Clare was explained to Lisa, but she did not feel she could comprehend what was being said:

> **Lisa**: "I just sat there thinking 'I don't even know what you're talking about' (…) she didn't really explain, she just kept on, she gave me a list of all the things that had been happening to Clare and that she was being taken, erm, to have sex with."

Henry, the parent who has been involved in CSE for the longest time (30+ years), describes a similar process. He and his wife adopted three children in the 1970s and noticed a change in his youngest daughter Saskia's behaviour when she was around 13 years old. She had started middle school, when she got "*really taken over*" by some older girls who Henry describes Saskia as being "*enamoured by*":

> **Henry**: "We thought it was just the kind of wildness that we had with our son."

Henry knew that Saskia had been "*latched on to by a boy five or six years older*" (which made him an adult at 18 or 19 years old), with whom she became "*infatuated*". Although the parents did not like this relationship they had "*no inkling*" of what it really was. Gradually, by the time Saskia was 15 or 16:

> **Henry**: "It came out that, erm, he, erm, she was erm, her sex was being sold basically by this man, and she was completely under his control."

Donna's entry was similar to Lisa and Henry. Her daughter, Alice, was beginning to stay out later than agreed and was occasionally truanting from her new school with a friend she had made. Donna and her husband responded with sanctions such as grounding her and confiscating her phone. However, Alice's behaviour escalated with more and more periods of going missing until one day Donna and her husband were called into school, which she assumed was about Alice's increasing truanting. Instead, they were told that there was a small group of male ex-students who were hanging around the school gates approaching girls, something which Coffey (2014, 2017) suggests is quite common. The police were aware and involved and the deputy head told Donna that some girls, including Alice, were being sexually exploited by these ex-students, another reminder of how perpetrators of CSE invade spaces perceived as safe. One can imagine the parents' reaction to the news that their child was being sexually exploited.

Donna: “We were horrified (…) completely horrified, completely shocked.”

The narratives show that in this moment parents can be exceptionally vulnerable and perhaps need the most support due to shock and the struggle to understand and process not only the words, but what they actually mean. Lisa and Donna’s descriptions conjure up the image of everything slowing down, becoming silent and confused, thoughts becoming sluggish as a mixture of fear and denial flood the brain:

Donna: “I thought, my God! We’re a middle-class family and it doesn’t happen to people like us.”

Annie: “Where we live, people don’t think it really happens (…) we live in quite an affluent area.”

Audrey: “But you sort of think, you hear about these things, you know, kids whose parents don’t bother or, yeah, the tearaways or whatever.”

Donna’s comment that CSE does not happen “*to people like us*” exemplifies not only her denial, but also her absorption of the stereotypes and myths that exist about who CSE *does* happen to. Annie and Audrey’s comments reaffirm this sentiment, which is also echoed in wider literature. The YouGov report (2013) found that 80% of professionals reported that they think there are “some types of families” whose children are more likely to be sexually exploited and worryingly, 90% of the police surveyed shared this view (YouGov, 2013). The comments also suggest that the people perceived as more likely victims of CSE, largely on grounds of class, have been ‘othered’.

Donna: “Because people always think that it must be people who are, you know, not particularly well off.”

This view echoes assumptions that CSE “exclusively affects chaotic or dysfunctional families” and families who may experience “social disadvantage” (CEOP, 2011:16). Donna’s statement is important as it suggests the profundity of the impact on some of the parents’ world view: their belief that they and their families were safe from threats like CSE. However, evidence suggests that any child can be a potential victim of CSE (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012), including children who have ‘stable family lives’ (CEOP, 2011).

Running through several of the narratives are notions and understandings of ‘normal family’, which illustrate commonalities of what family means and represents:

> **Audrey**: “We’re just a nice normal family.”
>
> **Henry**: “A fairly normal and happy family.”
>
> **Donna**: “[We’re] middle class, very normal people.”

Family is profoundly attached to parents’ identity, sense of security and perhaps achievement. Henry describes family as “*a very powerful thing really*”. Creating a happy, healthy, safe family can be perceived as a measure of success and it becomes clear throughout many of the narratives that the very idea of family has been, at best, threatened by the invasion of CSE across its borders, and at worst destroyed by it. All the narratives hammer home the point that CSE does not only devastate the young person, it also devastates families.

Audrey’s experience is slightly different in that she entered the world of CSE essentially at the end rather than the beginning stages of her daughter Nadia’s abuse. After attending a workshop on grooming when she was seventeen, Nadia disclosed to Audrey that she been groomed and sexually abused by a teacher at her school from the age of thirteen. Audrey describes her shock and disbelief at what had happened and recognises she was also shocked to learn that Nadia had not recognised what had happened as grooming and abuse until she had attended the workshop. During those years Nadia’s behaviour changed and she developed serious health issues, which Audrey believes to be a direct consequence of the abuse. Her narrative conveys her sense of guilt that she did not know, recognise or stop the abuse that has left her questioning and blaming herself:

> **Audrey**: “Why didn’t we know? (…) Why didn’t I question this?”

The abuse stopped immediately and eventually the teacher was convicted. A further difference between Audrey's experience and some of the other parents is that because Audrey only found out about the abuse as it ended, she never had the opportunity to attempt to prevent or reduce the harm done to her child. Instead she has to live with that fact that she continued to send her daughter to school, a site of some of the abuse, for four years. Audrey's narrative is heavily focused on what happened afterwards to Nadia, her and their family, and so will be explored later.

All of the parents' children were entering puberty/adolescence when the sexual exploitation began, a pattern reflected in wider literature (Barnardo's, 2011; CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). In most cases, the first stage of the parents' entry was signified by a behavioural change in their child which went either unseen or unrecognised for what it was, sexual exploitation. This may be due to understandings and expectations of adolescence as a time of transition, when young people can 'act out', get in with the 'wrong crowd' and/or experiment in some way with substances in an attempt to explore their identity (Scott Brown & Wright, 2001; Spera, 2005). So, when their child's behaviour began to change, these parents framed it as part of 'growing up'.

Each parent offers some description of their child's behavioural change, which gives an insight not only into the personality and disposition of their child, but also how they have since tried to make sense of what happened. For example, Henry describes his daughter, Saskia, before the sexual exploitation as "*a very quiet girl, very well behaved*" but she "*got taken over by some bigger girls"* and "*was being misled*". Lisa pinpoints a significant behaviour change when her daughter, Clare, began refusing to go to school shortly after starting secondary school. Another significant change in behaviour was that all but one parent's child truanted and/or went missing, which has been established as a key indicator of CSE and thus should be considered a possible warning sign (CEOP, 2011; Scott & Skidmore, 2006). This highlights the necessity of educating parents (PACE, 2014a), as frontline safeguarders, about CSE so they are aware of the possible warning signs, because "*trying to find your way through what is kind of normal teenage behaviour*" (Donna) is challenging enough as it is. By the time the parents reached the second stage of entry, it was too late and their child had been groomed and was being sexually exploited.

It is worth noting that in three of the most extreme cases of CSE, the parents do not include any details about the exact moment they found out what had been happening to their child. I wonder whether this is because the trauma they have experienced since that moment has overshadowed the shock and horror they initially felt. Perhaps how and when they found out has paled into insignificance in the light of what followed.

Brutally gradual

In contrast to the experiences above, Lucy's narrative is permeated with a sense of inevitability that her daughter, Lizzie, would suffer in some way, so in a strange way, and not to diminish her experiences, Lucy did not experience the initial level of shock and horror that the previous parents did. Lizzie's behaviour did not really change, but it did escalate as she reached puberty. Lucy adopted Lizzie when she was 11 but she had lived with Lucy in the interim. She tried to adopt her as a six year old but Lizzie refused as "*all she wanted was to return to mum, who was a prolific heroin user*". Lucy's narrative communicates not only an understanding and resigned acceptance that parenting Lizzie was going to be extremely challenging, but also a resilient commitment to doing just that. An initial reading of the transcript may give the impression that Lucy is critical of her daughter. However, this is not the case. Lucy's comments below are not intended to blame Lizzie, but instead reveal her understanding not only of CSE, but also her love and commitment to Lizzie, who is extremely vulnerable and "*very damaged*":

> **Lucy**: "She came from a very chaotic background."
> "There was a lot of loss."
> "She has a disorganised attachment disorder."
> "She had probably been sexually abused."
> "She'd been moved ten times within four years."
> "Lizzie has a gap, a hole in her life which goes way back."

As the parents became aware of their child's involvement with CSE, most of them began to have involvement with the responding agencies for the first time. Almost all the parents report quite negatively on this and Annie felt that "*no-one really listened or took it seriously from the outset*". However, Lucy's narrative focusses on responding agencies almost immediately as she is a safeguarding professional. Her narrative has a defensive nature because it is immediately clear that she has felt, despite Lizzie's background, unfairly blamed, judged and unsupported by many of the professionals she has encountered:

> **Lucy**: "But that has not prevented the professionals thinking I am 100% responsible [for the CSE]."

Lisa and Annie share a similar feeling. They had never had any involvement with Social Services before their daughters were sexually exploited and describe feeling judged and a sense of being under suspicion:

> **Lisa**: "You feel that you're having to watch everything when you've got Social Services involved as well. It's almost like you're being judged."

> **Annie**: "We were told we were over-protective parents."

These parents are not alone in feeling blamed and judged: most of the others interviewed also felt this and it is reflected in other research. PACE point out that "once a perpetrator commits a crime against a child, their parents are no longer 'forgotten safeguarders' but 'failed parents'" (YouGov, 2013:4). The CPS has identified a societal myth that not only should parents know what is happening to their child as a victim, but they should also be able to stop it (YouGov, 2013). This myth has clearly been absorbed by some professionals, but also by parents too, as 41% of parents surveyed also agreed that in most cases parents are in some way to blame (Ibid.). This is reflected in the level of guilt and self-blame found in the parents' narratives, which show that most parents do not know how to stop CSE and once statutory services are involved, parents lose their autonomy in how to respond. Initially, parents seem to view child protection agencies as experts and look to them for guidance, but for most parents interviewed it was poor and inconsistent. One parent was faced with the unthinkable decision of locking her daughter in her bedroom to keep her safe, or accepting that she would leave the house (often by breaking windows) to go to the abusers, where she would almost definitely be raped. This parent was accused of being abusive as, in that impossible moment, she opted to lock the child in her bedroom.

Lucy's narrative is peppered with anger and frustration, particularly towards the responding agencies. She establishes her professional background, role and expertise in safeguarding very early on, and it is clear that this is an important aspect of her identity and self-perception:

> **Lucy**: "I had done everything under the sun to do with child protection (…) **really** did know my stuff."

Yet it seems that Lucy feels her professional experience and expertise was not recognised by her peers and counterparts: "*whatever you do, it's suspicious (…) whatever she does* [her daughter] *is my fault*". At one point, she describes herself as "*a **fucking** professional*". This emphatic description was within the context of her narrative whereby she was talking with a lot of feeling and emotion at how her skills and experience as a safeguarding professional were completely overlooked. Instead of being recognised as 'one of them', it seems Lucy was actually 'othered' by some professionals. The impact of this treatment, which often manifested in safeguarding meetings where Lucy felt "*beaten up",* has had a significant impact on her. She describes feeling "*so traumatised*" by the "*punitive*" manner that some professionals have dealt with her. Often, her anger and frustration towards responding agencies is palpable. Lucy swears frequently when she talks about some of the professionals, for instance describing one mental health worker as a "*bastard*" and a "*bully"*. However, she also points out that she does not *"normally swear like that*", which perhaps gives an indication of the level of her frustration and resentment.

Lucy does provide her own analysis of why she thinks some professionals have treated her the way they have, and essentially it relates to issues of power in the parent-professional relationship:

> **Lucy**: "Because I had a professional background, I think people kind of got even more [Lucy's emphasis] hostile with me because it was very threatening for them."

In terms of responding to a child's involvement in CSE, police and social workers have a statutory duty and legally supported authority in child protection issues, and this locates the power with them. Lucy and Lisa both recognise this when they speak of feeling 'judged', 'observed' and 'under suspicion', which must be somewhat intimidating for parents. Lucy talks about being described as "*confrontational*" or being thought of as "*arsy*" by some professionals when she has challenged their decisions or actions. She gives an illuminating example of being told by a police officer that her daughter's bedroom was "*a bit young*" for her and she (the police officer) would speak to Lizzie about this, as perhaps it would help deter her from going missing. Lucy disagreed and told the police officer "*You can't do that. It's my home*". Also, she had already redecorated the bedroom with Lizzie "*four times since she's lived with me*". However, the police officer and social worker did speak to Lizzie, who said she would like to change the colour to red. As a result, Lucy explains how "*the social worker e-mailed me and said "Lizzie would like red. Perhaps you could just decorate one room together. That will help your bonding"*, clearly implicating the quality of their bond, and the colour of her bedroom, as contributing factors to the CSE.

Lucy gives another example of being told by the same police officer to put a television in Lizzie's room because "*if she only had a television she wouldn't run away*" as often. When asked, Lizzie was very clear that she did not want a television. Lucy describes how she took issue with and challenged these suggestions, describing them as being "*self-generated*" and "*ridiculous*" because she did not believe they were the reasons Lizzie kept going missing. They also highlight the invasive nature of some responding agencies' interventions when they are not working in partnership with parents, and crystallise some agency responses as still looking *inside* the family and home for the problem and solution, despite overwhelming evidence that the abuse is occurring externally.

There is also an enormous amount of resilience evident throughout Lucy's narrative. She is committed to parenting a child who has suffered an extreme amount of loss, rejection and abuse. Lucy is clear that what she needs is support from the professionals involved. Her narrative highlights a troubling possibility: that even when a parent is CSE-aware, knowledgeable of child protection procedures and familiar with statutory agencies, the brutality of the experience is not necessarily diminished.

Sense-making and exacerbating factors

In nearly all the narratives the parents try, but fail, to adequately explain to themselves how their child came to be sexually exploited. For most of them, there is an overwhelming sense of incomprehension at how and why it happened. However, the narratives offer some retrospective explanation of how they and their child entered the world of CSE, and identify some potential contributory and exacerbating factors.

In Chapter 6, the survivors identified aspects of their relationships with their parent(s), such as an ‘absent presence’ and emotional and/or physical abandonment as creating insecurities that increased their vulnerability to potential sexual exploitation. However, this research cannot speak to how the children of these parent participants’ perceived and experienced their parents at the time, and most of the parents’ narratives, although often drenched in self-blame and guilt, do not explicitly refer to their own parenting as being ‘problematic’. Most give the impression that they perceive themselves as ‘nice normal families’ until CSE invaded their lives. The parents recognise that family conflict, borne out of CSE, often put them into battle mode with their children and presented an array of parenting challenges. What is apparent is that trying to effectively parent a child who is being sexually exploited distorts the parameters of ‘normal’ expectations and experiences associated with parenting. For example, Henry recalls an impossible decision he and his wife had to make when his daughter came home, desperately saying to him “‘*Give me some money ‘cos otherwise I’ll get beaten up*’”. How would one ever really know what is the right thing to do in this instance?

Vulnerabilities

Vulnerability can be increased by a number of structural and individual factors and has been identified (and previously discussed in Chapter 6) as a fundamental contributor to the likelihood of being sexually exploited (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). It is difficult to clearly extract parents’ vulnerability in some of the narratives, since very few explicitly identify themselves as vulnerable. Their experience of CSE is so tightly bound to their child’s, and therefore their child’s vulnerabilities, that there is often an overlap between the parents’ and child’s vulnerabilities in the narratives. I will explore parents’ perceptions of their child’s vulnerabilities, which is an intrinsic aspect of their sense-making process, as well as their own vulnerabilities which emerged in their narratives.

Michelle is one of the few parents who explicitly reflected on her parenting as part of trying to make sense of the sexual exploitation of their child. She returns to this theme often, which is evidence that she is still in the process of making sense of what has happened, and is happening, to her and her family:

> **Michelle**: “We’re older parents as well (…) I’d had miscarriages (…) we were sort of further apart from his age group (…) we were over the top, we wanted the best for him, so maybe we over-parented him or something.”

Self-reflection and blame is incorporated in Michelle’s statement. She has clearly thought deeply about why her son was groomed, particularly by wondering whether it had something to do with how she and her husband parented Carl. What is sad about her reflections is that the self-blame and guilt have diminished her confidence in herself as a parent, allowing her to take some responsibility for what happened to her son onto herself, and not leave it fully with the perpetrator where it belongs:

> **Michelle**: “So, have *I* made him vulnerable? “

Low self-esteem

Another exacerbating factor identified by some of the parents for their child’s exploitation was low self-esteem and confidence, which was also identified in the survivors’ narratives. This is also perceived to be the most significant factor by professionals and other parents (YouGov, 2013). Annie recognises her daughter, Becky’s, vulnerability that existed before she was exploited:

> **Annie**: “She was pretty quiet and sort of withdrawn. And she had self-harmed prior to that, erm, for long periods of time, erm, by pulling out her hair and things. She had very low confidence.”

Becky was approached outside a supermarket while waiting for Annie at 5.30pm one evening by some men who asked for her phone number. Although Annie does not explain what has contributed to Becky’s low self-esteem, she believes that her level of vulnerability contributed to the speed at which Becky became fully groomed and exploited, which “*was days really*”. Annie draws a contrast between Becky and her friend, who was also outside the supermarket that evening, stating that Becky was flattered and gave her phone number out, whereas her friend "*had the confidence to say 'no'*" and "*told the guys where to go*". Henry's daughter, Saskia, was also described as "*not very good at standing against*" the older girls and "*was being misled*" by them. This could be because, as explored in some of the survivor narratives, some girls felt flattered, excited and keen to belong, illustrating the interrelationship between cultural grooming and self-esteem.

One parent, Lisa, also talked about how the impact of CSE and interactions with some responding agencies had a "*real serious knock*" on her self-esteem. She describes her husband and herself as hard working and having "*decent jobs*", yet feeling "*disregarded*" by a range of professionals, as if they did not have "*any intelligence to be part of the process*":

> **Lisa**: "It's like you're deemed as being much lower down the pecking order (…) my self-esteem is really through the floor."

This is interesting and important because it speaks very much to how some parents feel they are treated by some agencies. The impact is extremely negative, leaving parents feeling even worse and perhaps less capable and confident than they did before. Negative perceptions at the beginning of a parent's journey into the world of CSE are particularly harmful, as they can set the tone for future interactions and relationships, leading to a breakdown in communication and trust which only serves to make safeguarding the child even more challenging.

School

Over half the parents identify starting a new school as a turning point in their child's (and therefore their own) journey into the world of CSE. This may be because this level of change increases the vulnerability of some children, as they lose old friends and have to make new ones. This can lead to what several of the parents perceived as 'getting in with the wrong crowd'. The impact of going to secondary school was seen in Fran's narrative (survivor of CSE in Chapter 6) when she articulated the negative effect that going to high school had on her sense of self and security.

Henry describes receiving “*no help*” from his daughter’s school. This is possibly a reflection of the period when his daughter was sexually exploited: in the 1980s when CSE was still very much unseen (Jay, 2014). Much more recently, one parent was threatened with a fine for her daughter’s absence, when the child was actually officially missing as a result of being sexually exploited, whereas in contrast another parent found out about her daughter’s exploitation as a result of a pro-active Deputy Head and CSE policy. This school raised their concerns with the parents and provided them with useful and practical information that helped them safeguard their child.

Michelle’s son Carl was groomed by a teacher, Simon, in his fee paying school from the age of 11. Carl was estranged from Michelle and her husband at the time of interview, and is now (aged 17) living with Simon, who has since been disciplined and sacked from his job on various counts of gross misconduct. A police investigation was just beginning when Michelle was interviewed. The school is very important to Michelle as “*it was my dream to send him to this school, to have the best education that he could get* (crying)”, despite always being at “*loggerheads*” with her husband “*because I couldn’t really afford to send him*”. It also intensifies her guilt at what happened, because she feels she put Carl in harm’s way by sending him there. It seems that Michelle was slightly in awe of the school, and this became a source of vulnerability because she trusted Simon as a representative of the school and perhaps, like she identifies in Carl, Michelle was also keen to ‘fit in’. Consequently, she now recognises that she did not question many of the things Simon did at first, which retrospectively were clearly grooming acts, such as befriending Michelle, gaining her trust and creating a sense of her being indebted to him:

> **Michelle**: “We are at fault in this (…) look at what we let happen. “I did feel incredibly like it was my fault.”

Michelle identified Carl as being lonely and not always able to do the same things as his peers could, which perhaps speaks to his increased vulnerability and eagerness to ‘fit in’ and belong, which echoes some of the survivors’ narratives. It could also speak to the perpetrator’s reasoning in targeting Carl:

> **Michelle**: “He is an only child (…) lonely because we live (…) a few miles outside of [their town] so he didn’t have any friends locally.”

Michelle recognised that her aspiration for her son to go to a prestigious private school created a financial vulnerability. She draws a contrast between her family and many of the other families whose children attend the school:

> **Michelle**: “I suppose in that school we were probably one of the poorer families (...) they’re all company directors and lawyers and doctors.”

These parents’ narratives illustrate that safeguarding responses from schools are not necessarily consistent, possibly for a variety of reasons such as lack of resources and training. However, given the frontline and usually daily nature of schools’ involvement in young people’s lives, schools are often “the first agency to notice that a pupil is at risk” (NSPCC, 2013:3). They are also considered as ‘safe spaces’. They are well-placed to contribute to young people’s learning about healthy and safe relationships, particularly as the Children’s and Social Work Act (2017) will make Sex and Relationship Education compulsory in state maintained secondary schools in England from 2019 (Long, 2018). These factors enable schools to play a pivotal role in awareness and prevention work with staff, pupils and parents, as well as share their concerns proactively and consistently with parents and signpost them to appropriate agencies for support.

Parents’ lack of knowledge and understanding of CSE

Another factor that increased the majority of the parents’ vulnerability was their lack of knowledge and understanding about CSE and its possible warning signs:

> **Henry**: “In those days there was absolutely no public talk about CSE, so we didn’t know what was going on.”
>
> **Lisa**: “I didn’t even know what it was.”

Pullins & Jones (2006, cited in Marriage et al., 2017) suggests that many parents lack awareness and understanding of peer abuse, abuser characteristics and warning signs of harmful sexualised behaviours. Marriage et al. (2017) assessed parents' understanding of sexualised behaviour in children and adolescents and found that parents could accurately identify normal, age-appropriate behaviours and harmful behaviours, but they struggled to accurately identify concerning behaviours. Thus, if parents are unable to recognise concerning behaviours as warning signs, they are unlikely to be able to respond appropriately (Marriage et al., 2017). YouGov (2013) found 1 in 10 parents (of the 750 interviewed) admitted to not knowing 'very much' about CSE and that most parents still perceived stranger-danger as the biggest threat. Research also found that 7 out of 10 professionals believed that a lack of parents' knowledge "is the most significant barrier in the fight against child sexual exploitation" (PACE, 2014a:10), with over half of professionals believing that parents do not understand what CSE is. It is apparent in the narratives and literature that a climate of blame towards parents does exist, which can be both explicit and implicit, and perhaps based on a sense of 'how could you *not* know about the abuse?' This is a question that many parents have since asked themselves, and something for which they blame themselves. This lack of awareness has contributed to "parents falling into a safe-guarding black hole" (YouGov, 2013:4) and is a pressing issue. There is an urgent need to inform and educate all parents of the dangers of CSE, and to dispel some of the myths around who CSE actually affects that feed the understandable denial a parent may feel.

The narratives suggest that often the parents find out about the sexual exploitation of their child too late, and that the grooming process is a powerful foe due to its insidious, divisive and controlling nature, often pitting the child against their parents. By the time parents find out and understand what is happening to their child, they are often already ensnared, 'in love', addicted to drugs, or too terrified, all of which increase the difficulty and challenges involved in extracting them from that world. Again, this highlights the need for an increased onus of awareness and prevention work with parents.

Grooming of parents

Michelle experienced interpersonal grooming since she was also groomed by Simon, (the teacher who groomed her son), who she describes as "*charming and charismatic*". Befriending Michelle appears to have been part of his overall strategy to gain access to and groom Carl. Michelle's narrative begins by explaining that Carl had become very "*friendly with his teacher*" and was "*always talking*" about him. Around that time, Michelle's mother died and she describes herself as "*totally lost*" without her, recognising herself as very vulnerable during this time. Bereavement has also been identified as a factor that can contribute to young people becoming sexually exploited (Scott & Skidmore, 2006). As a result, she contacted the school and asked them to keep an extra eye on Carl. Simon was responsible for this type of pastoral support and it seems that it was at this point that he began to ingratiate himself into Michelle's life. Michelle poignantly describes what Simon did, the grooming process, in terms of how "*he broke into the family*".

The grooming process started with Simon being 'helpful', for instance by bringing Carl home from school when Michelle was unable to collect him, unbeknown to her that this was "*not allowed*". Simon was "*really friendly*", "*just charming*" to Michelle and one day he asked her to meet him for coffee outside of school and told her that Carl had a "*severe pornography addiction*". Michelle describes her shock at this and how Simon was kind and reassuring. He promised her he would "*sort it all out*" and Michelle now recognises this as the moment where she began to feel both indebted to, and trusting of him. She perceived this as the beginning of a new friendship, at a time in her life when she had suffered a significant loss.

Once friendship and trust had been established, Simon became very involved in their lives, for instance by taking the family on holiday and frequently coming around for dinner. He took Carl, and sometimes a few other boys, on trips (that Michelle found out later had not been sanctioned by the school and Simon had paid for with his own money). He inserted himself into important events, in "*a drip, drip*" (Michelle) way, positioning himself between Carl and his parents. In reality, he was guaranteeing that he was spending an enormous amount of time with Carl. Michelle admits that occasionally she felt something was wrong but that she "*suppressed it all*". She gives an example of just one of the many things she thought was odd but ignored: Simon would always insist on riding in the back of the car with Carl and never in the front with her. Gradually it became clear that Simon's behaviour was, at the *very* least, highly inappropriate, and very slowly other agencies began to get involved. However, for Carl the damage was done and Michelle describes him as "*brainwashed*" by, and living with, Simon at the time of the interview.

Michelle's narrative is very emotive as it captures her at a time in her life when she is trying make sense of, come to terms and live with what has happened to her son and her family. She is guilt-ridden:

> **Michelle**: "I've been really stupid, I feel like I've given my son away and that's a killer (tearful). I've given him away to this man (…) **I** opened the door and let that man in this house." [Michelle's emphasis].

Traumatisation of parents

Finding out that your child is being sexually exploited is only the beginning of the trauma that parents face, and some responses have already been discussed earlier in this section. It is beyond doubt that CSE will have "a traumatic and negative impact on the family unit as a whole and the individuals within, including siblings" (YouGov, 2013:8). Annie describes the impact of CSE as "*traumatic for all of us*" and Audrey describes it as "*just a nightmare*". Parents report feelings of despair, guilt, shame, loss and disempowerment. They experience breakdowns in relationships, physical and mental health issues, and financial difficulties (Kosaraju, 2009; YouGov, 2013). It is therefore difficult to imagine how any parent in this situation and emotional state is able to respond effectively, especially if they also feel criticised and unsupported. This trauma does not exist just at the entry into the world of CSE, but continues throughout the entire journey, which will be explored in a later section. As Annie explains:

> **Annie**: "You don't realise that things are going to get very much worse."

Part 2: Suffering and experiencing the world of CSE

> **Michelle**: "It is an absolute living nightmare. It's almost become like our normal life now (…) it is horrendous, absolutely horrendous."

The narratives offer different perspectives and insights into how parents can suffer. For instance, at the time of interview some were in an acute stage of suffering (Michelle, Lucy, Lisa), whereas others, whilst still suffering, had been able to move out of that acute stage and achieve some distance as a result of their child no longer experiencing exploitation (Henry, Annie, Donna, Audrey). These latter parents' struggles were the result of dealing with the aftermath of the abuse and exploitation.

It is clear from the parents' narratives that witnessing the sexual exploitation of their child is traumatic and requires a sensitive and informed understanding of parents' unique role and position within the world of CSE. **Some** parents felt bereft and were grieving. Often the tone of the narratives is oppressive, as if a heavy cloud of sadness rests on the pages of the transcripts. As a result, loss and grief are powerful emotional threads woven through many of the narratives and it was not always in what the parents said, but how they said it, which is difficult to convey in printed text. Often, their voices were low and their speech slow, as if talking about it required more energy than they had available, and much of this data stems from trauma and pain.

I analyse dominating themes of loss and grief, witnessing the effects of exploitation on their child, active parenting, and the various impacts and coping strategies that have emerged from the parents' narratives. Similar to previous themes, these too are not neat with clear boundaries; they overlap, interact and interconnect with each other. I also continue my analysis of parents' perceptions of responding agencies throughout, which is most heavily present in the parents' narratives at this part of their journey within the world of CSE.

Loss

> "The *loss* [my emphasis] of a child is a devastating event that severely disrupts the lives of those affected for years thereafter." (Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008:31).

The most pervasive and powerful theme, intrinsic to all the narratives but especially so in this section, was a profound sense of loss and grief felt by all the parents. It is explored here in some depth but is also present and recurring throughout the entire chapter. Although the primary source of loss for the parents centred on their child, their sense of loss was multifaceted. Some losses were tangible and are reported elsewhere, such as of the parents' health, employment and relationships (Kosaraju, 2009; Unwin & Stephens-Lewis, 2016). However, it seems that the more intangible losses were often harder to cope with and make sense of: losses relating to the parents' sense of security and understanding of the world; their role and identity as parents and, most poignantly, the loss of their hopes, dreams and expectations for their child's and family's future.

The above statement by Wijngaards-de Meij et al. (2008) succinctly encapsulates the parents' experiences of the loss of a child as a result of CSE. The term 'loss' is often used synonymously with, or as a softer replacement for, the word 'death'. For example, Wijngaards-de Meij et al. (2008) are writing specifically in relation to the *death* of a child, yet the authors utilise the word 'loss' instead. This is important to note in the context of my analysis of the parents' experience of loss, as none of their children died. Similarly, the terms bereavement and grief are also commonly associated with responses to death (Mercer & Evans, 2006; Stroebe & Schut, 1999; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008), yet some parents talk about their sadness and loss in these terms. For example, Michelle describes her husband Ray as "*bereaved and heartbroken*". This is problematic for some of the parents, as they were trying to make sense of their feelings of loss, bereavement and grief yet their child was still alive. Annie captures this sense of loss and also illustrates the use of the term as synonymous with 'death':

> **Annie**: "It's almost like you've lost a child, you know, I haven't physically lost a child and, you know, I don't want it to sound insulting to somebody who has lost a child and going through bereavement, but it does kind of feel like that, because there is a loss and things have changed forever."

Annie's recognition that she has not 'physically lost' her daughter (i.e. that her daughter has not died) speaks to the intangibility of her loss: the notion that her daughter is there, but not *really* there, because she has become unrecognisable and perhaps, at least for a time, unknowable. Annie's statement also illustrates her reluctance to 'insult' anyone whose child has died, suggesting that she sees her sense of loss as 'less than', or secondary to, parents who have experienced the death of a child. This speaks to a cultural hierarchy of loss, whereby physical death is considered the worst kind of loss, and this may undermine the significance and pain of other types of loss. Loss occurs within a social context which affects the understanding and interpretation of that loss, not just by the individual directly experiencing it, but from the wider circle of affected people, and the “responses to the griever by others” (Murray, 2001:229). Grief is subjective and has been defined as “the emotional response to loss” (Raphael, 1984, cited in Murray, 2001:219) of something perceived as valuable (Murray, 2001). Annie points out that a parent’s sense of loss is “*still just not properly recognised*”. This lack of explicit acknowledgement and validation from external sources (friends, family and professionals) of the terrible sense of loss and grief parents were experiencing is a significant difficulty that they faced. It also resulted in a lack of appropriate support being given regarding those feelings, and as illustrated by Annie’s statement, can make it harder for the individual to acknowledge and recognise their own feelings of grief. Annie’s words provide a good example of Doka’s (2002) concept of disenfranchised grief, which offers a useful explanation of the grief that the parents felt.

Many bereavement theories tend to focus on death and grief (Kouriatis & Brown, 2011), thereby reinforcing their interconnectedness, which tends to overlook other types of loss-inducing grief. However, Doka’s (2002) concept of disenfranchised grief refers to grief that stems from a loss that is not socially “recognised, legitimised, openly expressed” (Kouriatis & Brown, 2011:210) and therefore often goes unacknowledged, such as losses resulting from divorce, ill-health or ageing. I add losing a child to sexual exploitation to this list. This lack of external (and often internal) validation can result in the grieving individual feeling unable to express their grief (Doka, 2002). It is clear from the narratives that many parents’ feelings of loss and grief went unrecognised, not only by most professionals, but also by some friends and family. Indeed, Annie’s statement above illustrates how hard it was for her to openly and explicitly name her feelings and experience in these terms.

A significant aspect of the parents’ experience of loss as a result of CSE is its intangibility. This makes it easier for their losses to go unrecognised and unacknowledged, and for their grief to become disenfranchised (Doka, 2002). For example, some parents’ sense of loss and sadness stemmed from their feelings of grief at what they and their child had jointly lost. Some parents articulated this as their child’s loss of their childhood and the future they *should* have had, and heightens the sense of ‘what could have been’. Lisa shares a similar feeling about her daughter Clare, who was an “’*A star student”* before the sexual exploitation. Lisa expresses her grief at the potential and possibilities that Clare *should* have had:

> **Lisa**: “It’s like grief isn’t it. It’s the grief of what’s happened to your child. It’s the grief that, erm, the loss of what your child’s life’s gonna be like; what you hope that your child’s gonna achieve, you know, in some way and that’s all been robbed from them hasn’t it?”

Lisa asks an unanswerable question that signifies not only her sense of loss for her daughter’s future, but also represents the long-term damage and cost of CSE, which hits victims and their families with such force that the trajectory of their lives is changed forever. CSE can significantly disrupt the victim’s education, which can have a significant impact on their life chances:

> **Lisa**: “What could she have achieved if she had she been able to go to school?”

Some of the parents’ loss in the narratives stemmed from not being able to recognise their child anymore, which highlights the way CSE can change a victim’s personality and behaviour, or ability to comprehend what was happening to them:

> **Lisa**: “She was just like a wild child really. It was like a shell of her. She was very abusive and very, erm, didn’t care about anything. It was like she was possessed really.”

> **Michelle**: “Our son’s just gone wild, he’s just gone to parties, found drunk in the street, wanting to fight with people.”

These statements provide powerful images of how their child’s behaviour influenced how they saw their child. The terms used, such as ‘wild’, ‘abusive’, ‘possessed’, and ‘lost’, emphasise the lack of recognition the parents felt towards their child and the extent to which sexual exploitation, abuse and violence can change an individual’s behaviour and personality. Physical changes in their child also triggered a sense of loss. Annie’s daughter, Becky, was living in foster placement, a loss for Annie in itself. Whilst living there Becky made some changes to her appearance that Annie would not have supported had Becky been living at home:

> **Annie**: “The foster carer lent her [Becky] money to go and have her nose and tongue pierced and then bleached her hair, which was a lovely brown and wavy hair (…) so we just felt that we had kind of completely lost her really at that point.”

This excerpt illustrates not only Annie’s sense of loss of her daughter, but her role and influence in her child’s life. Making changes to one’s appearance can be considered commonplace in teenagers, but the loss Annie experienced was simply not having any voice in that decision, and having to accept that the foster carer, a relative stranger, did have a voice. The sadness of this statement is that those physical changes that Becky made were, for Annie, a marker of the precise moment she and her husband felt they had “*completely lost*” their daughter.

Witnessing the effects of exploitation on their child

> **Lisa**: “You’re thrown into an uncomprehendable [sic] situation.”

Several of the parents recounted horrifying stories of their experiences of the effect and impact of the abuse they witnessed their child suffer, and without doubt the parents also experience its emotional impact and trauma. Between them, the parents have witnessed the impact of their children: being groomed; going missing; becoming addicted to drugs (as a result of the abusers giving them drugs to control and coerce the young people); being subjected to sexual and physical violence and rape; becoming pregnant (by the abusers) and having an abortion; self-harming and attempting suicide. These events are traumatic and reflect and reiterate a ‘new reality’ that parents are faced with in the world of CSE.

Witnessing the grooming of their child

The parents’ narratives provide insights into the cultural and interpersonal grooming processes (see Chapters 3 & 6) and *how* they operate, highlighting the variance in grooming as a tool used by sexual predators.

Interpersonal grooming is evident in many of the accounts. Michelle’s son Carl, and Audrey’s daughter Nadia, were each groomed by teachers in their school.

The grooming process appears to have been slow and steady over several years, and is perhaps a reflection of the caution needed given the school context in which much of the grooming occurred. Nadia was then sexually abused by the teacher, whereas Michelle is unclear whether the grooming of Carl has resulted in sexual abuse. This is because Carl does not acknowledge or recognise that he has been groomed. This grooming can be categorised as 'slow and steady', similar to the survivor Leah's experience.

Henry, Annie and Donna's children also experienced interpersonal grooming and had been groomed by 'boyfriends'**.** Donna describes the text messages from the perpetrator to Alice and witnessed the insidious power of the grooming process:

> **Donna:** [The texts said] "'What very nice legs you've got' and 'you've, you've got gorgeous coloured eyes and your hair' (…) that was very, very flattering and then it got into more kind of sexual, erm, more sexual texts (…) 'You don't really want to be spending time with all your friends, come and spend time with me and my group of friends.'"

Donna reports Alice's response to these text messages as, "*"I love you" and "I want to be with you*"" and pinpoints two insidiously successful facets of the grooming process: couching the manipulation in terms of a relationship and isolating the young person. Donna's account of the messages sent from the perpetrator to Alice, which focus on her legs, eyes and hair, provides an example of interpersonal (or one-to-one) grooming and how its content is borne out of the gendered messages of cultural grooming. Cultural grooming refers to the sexualisation of children and young people, which tends to hyper-masculinise males and objectify and sexualise women (Papadopoulus, 2010). Sexualising messages are very often internalised by young people, impairing an empowered response to the use of appearance-based flattery as a form of manipulation. A troubling facet of this is that it appears that, for some vulnerable young people, having aspects of their *appearance* praised, as opposed to aspects of their character and personality, is sufficient for perpetrators to gain entry to, and control of, that young person's life. Donna's observations further illustrate my argument that cultural grooming is a symbolic tool of Clisby and Holdsworth's (2014) concept of the 'triad of violence', which ultimately seems to create lower expectations in some young people regarding how to be treated in terms of sexual relationships. Donna's quote of a text message below further reiterates the idea of the invasion of safe spaces (i.e. schools) by CSE perpetrators, as well as a more sinister feature which highlights that often these men are waiting outside school gates and specifically targeting under-age girls:

> **Donna**: "You looked really beautiful *when you came out of school today* [my emphasis]."

Annie's analysis of why her daughter, Becky, was vulnerable to sexual exploitation also reiterates the concept of cultural grooming. She identifies Becky as having low self-esteem and confidence, describing her as "*quiet and sort of withdrawn*" before the abuse began. Annie believes that Becky enjoyed the flattery and attention the men gave her because she was "*never the prettiest, never the trendiest, never the thinnest*." Annie's comment sums up the implicit and subversive markers of the successful performance of gender for a girl and woman: being beautiful, fashionable, slim. A concise lesson in 'how to be a girl successfully', at which, until these men paid her some attention, I have the sense that Becky felt she was failing. This illustrates the devastating impact of cultural grooming, particularly in increasing the vulnerability of some young people.

In contrast, Lisa's daughter does not appear to have been groomed and then sexually exploited. Her entry into sexual exploitation was the result of being gang-raped and subsequently developing a drug addiction, both of which significantly increased her vulnerability to the exploitation that followed by the same gang that raped her. It is difficult to apply the grooming process to Lucy's daughter Lizzie, as Lucy does not mention grooming at all in her narrative, nor allude to it. Her outlook on the sexual exploitation of Lizzie is different to the other parents, as she acknowledges Lizzie's agency in her involvement in sexual exploitation. Lucy does not blame Lizzie. She blames her having been abused "*at every level possible*" (Lucy) and the consequent emotional and psychological damage Lizzie experienced as a young child. She recognises the damage as a destructive force driving Lizzie to seek out rejection and harmful experiences, such as CSE:

> **Lucy**: "She seeks the love that she never had as a child."

Witnessing their child going missing

Most of the parents reported that their child went missing. The parents' narratives give a useful insight into going missing, its impact on parents, and how it can vary in its severity. Furthermore, if the missing periods are short, it is possible that that may be viewed within the realm of 'normal' teenage behaviour and therefore not recognised as a potential warning sign of CSE:

> **Donna**: "Teenagers tend to go missing as they want to go out with their friends (…) that's very teenage stuff."

Some parents' children went missing much more frequently, often for prolonged periods of time, and it is in these cases that the sexual exploitation the children faced was more extreme and the child was more entrenched:

> **Annie**: "It just went on for years. She went missing nearly forty times."

> **Lucy**: "She was persistently going missing."
> "She continues to go missing (…) for two days (…) missing for five days."

The impact of these missing periods on the parents was enormous and contributed to feelings of stress, anxiety and exhaustion. This is also reflected in wider research (Kosaraju, 2009; PACE, 2015a; Unwin & Stephens-Lewis, 2016). All the parents were extremely worried when their child disappeared; several would often go looking for them at night and be unable to sleep while their child was missing. Lucy describes feeling *"totally washed out and exhausted"* after her daughter went missing for three days.

A missing child was often the start of statutory agencies' involvement in the family and some parents reported this as both challenging and worrying:

> **Annie: "**I said 'Are we being looked at as bad parents?' because you just don't know, do you. All of a sudden your life is full of social workers, police".

Annie was advised by a police officer to report her daughter missing as soon as she realised, so she would not "*'be deemed as bad parents*.'" All reported doing this, but the narratives do not speak positively of some agencies' responses. The narratives also show that when their child goes missing, parents' are actually relatively powerless and highly dependent on the police for help:

> **Lucy**: "I tell them every time she goes missing. Immediately within an hour."

> **Michelle**: "He went missing (…) and the police came here to search my home because I had reported him missing."

> **Annie**: "[The police] would come in and open every kitchen door and wardrobe door and slam it shut and, erm, yeah, kind of not interested and blamed the parents and the family."

A police search of parents' homes may be deemed necessary from a police perspective after an assessment of the level of risk to the child has been carried out (PACE, 2015b). However, to the mothers it only highlighted a lack of support and understanding of their position and put unnecessary stress on them because in that moment, the *only* thing the parents were sure of was that their child was *not* at home. The sense of being blamed experienced by some parents also extended to feeling blamed for being unable to stop their child going missing. When many of the parents talked about their child going missing, it was often with a tone of exasperation (primarily towards responding agencies), defeat and a sense of powerlessness that indicates they feel that, apart from reporting the child missing, there was very little they could do to stop it happening. The excerpt below from Lucy's narrative illustrates this. Lucy and Lizzie were on a train on their way home from a trip. When their train pulled into their home station the following happened:

> **Lucy**: "[Lizzie said to Lucy] 'don't think I'm getting off' and 'I'm getting off in [a different city]. Sorry, I'm jumping' (…) she said, 'I'm going out with my mates aren't I and I won't be coming home" and I said 'You can't really do that love. We're going home now (…) and she went 'Not doing it" (…) and so I said, 'You have to get off the train now' and she said, like, 'Fuck off, I'm not going to. I'm meeting up with my friends (…) so she jumped off the train and then she jumped back on. So I shouted at the guard 'Stop the train, I need to get my daughter' and he said 'I can't stop it' and I said, 'You have to please. I've got to get my daughter off'. He said 'oh, hurry up, hurry up'. I ran down the train, I said 'Get off the train, we are getting off'. She jumped off the train, she jumped over the barrier at the station, ran through another station, and on to a train in that station and was missing for two days."

This illustrates a very stressful interaction between a mother and daughter in a highly pressured context, as a result of its public nature and a moving train. The account provides some useful insights, such as highlighting that, at least in that moment, the power in the relationship very much lay with the daughter. The excerpt illustrates Lizzie's decision making and agency in this moment - she appeared very determined to get off the train and also knew how and where to go to get on the train that she wanted. From Lucy's description it is difficult to see how else she could have responded, short of trying to physically restrain Lizzie, and so she simply could not stop her from going missing. The account is also very moving and captures the sense of trying to catch smoke which only dissipates when touched. One can imagine Lucy standing alone on the platform feeling an acute sense of loss, watching as her child disappears to somewhere unknown, and the following anguish of the next two days.

Witnessing their child's substance abuse

Five of the seven parents reported that their child was given drugs and/or alcohol by perpetrators and also began to misuse them as a result of the exploitation and abuse:

> **Lisa**: “It’s the CSE that’s made Clare take the drugs.”

It is very apparent from all the interviews, and a wide range of literature (CEOP, 2013; CPS, 2013; Ivison, 1997; Jackson, 2012; Wilson, 2015), that alcohol and drugs are a significant tool in a groomer’s toolkit, and increased drug/alcohol misuse and addiction can be viewed as a potential ‘side effect’ of sexual exploitation. Substances are often given to victims by the perpetrators as a means of increasing their control and the victims’ compliance, and can become a means of coping with the abuse, often leading to addiction. Misuse of alcohol and drugs fundamentally serves to increase the vulnerability of victims and diminishes their capacity to protect themselves or to consent. The examples below detail the horrific and extreme abuse of their daughters, illustrating the role of drugs in facilitating sexual violence against her child, highlighting how extreme and unthinkable it can become:

> **Lucy**: “She was found unconscious in a wheelie bin when some local teenagers gave her drugs (…) she was given ketamine and had a fit in the bloody graveyard, erm when she was thirteen. Erm, and she’s been drunk in the street.”

> **Lisa**: “She was going downhill with the drugs, taking more and more stuff (…) she nearly died of the concoction she had taken. She’d had morphine poured into her mouth, she’d had methadone, she’d had weed, she’d had ketamine, anything, you name it, erm, and she didn’t, and she actually has got no recollection of what happened to her that night. She was very sore in her groin area.”

Lisa’s last statement about Clare being ‘*very sore in her groin area’* is loaded with unspoken meaning and horror. Lisa does not need to explain any further and the fact that she does not only adds to the powerful impact those words have: her child was fed a potentially lethal cocktail of drugs, was then raped/sexually assaulted and then just discarded. As far as Lisa knows, no one was ever held accountable for it.

Although the narratives were highly emotional throughout, it was interesting to note that most of the parents who talked about their child’s drug misuse did so without much specific reference to their own feelings about it. For example, Lucy and Lisa's statements above were delivered very factually, yet I found them very shocking to hear, and I was aware of a sense of incongruence between *what* I was hearing and *how* it was being told. I think this is a direct result of some form of desensitisation, as a way of coping by the parents. This is not because they do not feel any emotion about it, but because it is just one more horrifying strand of a larger horrifying experience that they are currently battling with. My impression (of Lucy and Lisa in particular), is that they were on 'high alert' and, by the time of interview, had been involved in the world of CSE for several years, so there is the sense of both mothers 'just knowing' that something horrendous was always just around the corner.

Clare's drug use was also an issue which Lisa felt that the responding authorities failed to understand to be a direct consequence of experiencing extreme and persistent sexual violence and abuse, as a result of which Lisa and her husband "*fought very hard to get her into a placement out of area*" (Lisa) for her own safety. This is a tool used by Local Authorities when young people perceived as being "at high risk of CSE are placed in secure or high-cost residential accommodation for their own protection" (Gasper et al., 2016:4). Clare was moved out of the area into a foster placement which she refused to accept, and so was given another placement back in her home town, where she had been sexually exploited. Lisa explained that given Clare's age at this point ("*sixteen going on seventeen at the time*", Lisa), the social worker "*wouldn't communicate with us anymore. Just left us out of the loop*". However, Lisa perceives the location of the second placement, into which she had no input, as a failure to safeguard Clare:

> **Lisa**: "She has been placed in foster care in an area with high drugs use, had experience of being exploited, erm, and that she's got a traumatic attachment to her abusers which is impacting on her ability to make decisions."

Clare chose the second foster placement rather than returning home to her parents due to some conflict in her and Lisa's relationship as a result of the CSE. This example illustrates how easily parents can be marginalised, disempowered and frustrated by the child protection system's response to safeguarding young people from CSE. It also reiterates Jarret's (2017) point made earlier regarding parental responsibility diminishing as the child matures.

Witnessing extreme changes in their child's behaviour

Drug or alcohol use was only one aspect of behavioural change which parents witnessed in their child. Many of the behaviours they witnessed were extreme and felt to some parents as markers of losing the child they once knew very well. The parents demonstrate their understanding of the impact of CSE has on their child and some parents endured watching their child suffer in severe ways:

> **Lisa**: "Clare's behaviour got very, very extreme over this time. I mean she would try climbing out of the window of the second floor (…) she would cut herself up, she's got cuts all down her wrists, she overdosed, she nearly killed herself on an overdose once."

Self-harm and suicide attempts were also responses shared by some of the survivors who were interviewed (see Chapter 6). Lisa did not elaborate on her child's perception of self-harming but it is widely accepted that it can function as a coping strategy, emotional release, and as a means of regaining a sense of control (Bell, 2014; Preece, 2007; Townsend, 2014). Lisa's narrative provides insight into how much pain Clare must have been in as a direct result of the abuse she was experiencing. A further consequence of the CSE was that Clare became pregnant as a result of being raped, and this was clearly very difficult for Lisa to talk about:

> **Lisa**: "I really, really struggled with that one because I've had a couple of miscarriages and she was adamant that, erm, she didn't want to keep it, erm, because she didn't even know whose it was. Erm, and she was about six weeks pregnant when she went to the, erm, for the appointment."

Lisa, unable or reluctant to use the terms abortion or termination, perhaps as a result of her struggle with the whole experience, explained that Clare was offered an anaesthetic but Clare "*decided to not have the anaesthetic and went through the pain*" (Lisa). This stood out to me as perhaps a guilt-induced decision and that Clare felt she deserved to feel the pain.

Active parenting: love

> **“**Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination, full of hope.” (Angelou, 2013, n.p.).

The single determining factor that distinguishes parents from professionals in response to child sexual exploitation is their love for their child, who Donna describes as **“***so precious*”. The active and determined love that Angelou (2013) refers to describes the type of love that emanates from the parents’ narratives. Their love for their child is what fuels them and enables them to maintain their strength to battle on trying to protect and save them. Ironically, heightened suffering is also the result of the love the parents feel for their child because the love and hopes the parents hold for them compounds and exacerbates their pain. Some parents do talk specifically about their love for their child:

> **Audrey**: “This is your child who you’ve loved and nurtured for thirteen or fourteen years.”

> **Michelle**: [Told her son] “We are the only people that really, truly love you.”

However, in most cases, their love radiates within their narratives by *how* they talk about their child and explain what they have done and the lengths they have gone to in order to try to protect them, all of which positions these parents as active and loving. For example, this has involved searching for their missing child, often putting themselves at risk:

> **Lucy**: “For the first two years I went out every night (…) I would go in parks at night, I would be in car parks at night (…) I report her, erm, I Facebook people (…) I get my family looking for her.”

It has also involved supporting and encouraging their child to engage with positive activities like “*drama, dance, and horse-riding*” (Lucy) and develop healthy relationships and maintain existing ones:

> **Lucy**: “We’ve had her sister to stay. We’ve been out for tea with her gran and her granddad and we’ve got in touch with her father.”

Lucy often prioritised her child above herself, such as over her privacy, *“She slept in my bedroom until she was eleven*”, and her job, “*I’m always late for work and if she’s missing from school I have to drop everything*”.

Impact of CSE on parents

The impact of finding out that someone has abused, raped and drugged your child was addressed earlier, with the parents describing it as a ‘horrifying’ and ‘shocking’ experience. The impact of living with a child who is being sexually exploited and all the trauma and challenges that involves is huge and far reaching (Kosaraju, 2009; Unwin & Stephens-Lewis, 2016). Parents identified several different aspects of the impact, ranging from their mental and physical health and the impact on family relationships, to more practical issues regarding their daily life such as their employment.

In several of the narratives, the parents’ focus was more on articulating their concern about the impact of CSE on their child than on themselves, a focus found in other research (Kilroy et al., 2014). This reiterates notions of the parents being secondary victims, vicariously experiencing their child’s trauma, and their primary role as parents and protectors of their children, thereby prioritising the pain their child suffered over their own. The narratives also suggest that the impact on parents can change over time and is shaped by the extent, severity and longevity of the sexual exploitation, how supportive and effective the responding agencies are, and how resilient the parents are at adapting to and coping with the untenable situations they can find themselves in. For example, Donna describes her daughter Alice as being “*on the fringes of being exploited*” and believes that they “*managed to stop it in time”*. Donna, who is the only parent with a predominantly positive experience of responding agencies, believes that this was due to some effective intervention and support from agencies. This is reflected in the tone and nature of emotions that colour her narrative, which is emotionally light in contrast to some other parents’ narratives, such as Annie’s, Lucy’s and Lisa’s, where the exploitation is on-going and/or extreme, and the narratives are often pain-infused.

Emotions spill into every aspect of the parents' lives, so an exploration of the impact of CSE is not a neat process. Parents' emotions intersect, underpin and connect different areas such as health, work, family and responding agencies, and are pervasive in the majority of the narratives. For instance, Annie reported that the sexual exploitation of her child resulted in regular disruption to her ability to go to, and stay in, work but she reports that her employer was unsupportive, and she was eventually made redundant, which only exacerbated the stress and anxiety she was already feeling. Thus, the pervasiveness of emotions in the narratives is reflected in the structure and content of this section because the emotional content surfaces throughout, across different themes.

Emotional impact on parents

> **Audrey**: "You're knackered. You're bereft. You're grieving. You're fighting. You're working. You're juggling. You're supporting."

The emotional impact which CSE can have on parents is enormous (Jobe-Shields et al., 2016; Kilroy et al., 2014; Kosaraju, 2009). The parents' emotions are intricately and consistently woven throughout their narratives, forming a myriad of threads that overlap and intersect, giving the narratives an emotive texture that is simultaneously rough and smooth, light and dark, saturated with both love and pain. The parents' emotional states and feelings impact directly on their ability to cope and manage stressful and traumatic CSE-related situations. Furthermore, parents also have to manage their other children's (if they have them) needs, work, and life in general whilst coping with their own feelings. Underlying much of the negative feeling is a sense of complete powerlessness. Donna sums up what many of the parents directly say or allude to:

> **Donna**: "You feel completely helpless (…) as a parent (…) you're just waiting for something to happen and, and, and during that period (…) you just, you just cannot do anything at all."

Many of the narratives give the sense of the parents being stuck in a "*big vat of treacle"* (Audrey), floundering in a frozen tableau, unable to move freely in any direction:

Audrey: “You’re just not moving at all. You just feel like it’s almost like life’s been put on hold.”

Audrey’s comment that life was put on hold speaks to the all-consuming nature of the parents’ experiences of CSE and Annie draws an interesting contrast, making the point that victims of CSE have a similar experience:

Annie: “I would say it was almost like her [daughter’s] life had been paused from before the abuse started.”

Research suggests that most parents perceive that their primary role as a parent is to protect their child (Bowlby, 1980) and Holt et al. (2014:1057) suggest that feeling to have failed to do this this would lead to “general distress, guilt, or self-blame”. This is certainly the case for the parent participants, especially if they see the abuse as a result of decisions or actions *they* took. In the previous section, Michelle’s sense of guilt and self-blame was discussed because she believed that she colluded with the man who groomed her son. Donna has a similar response because she and her husband moved to the city where the sexual exploitation occurred:

Donna: “We went through (…) the whole thing about blaming ourselves. It’s all our fault. It’s our fault because we moved to [city] (…) you haven’t kept them safe.”

It seems that the parents’ feelings of guilt and blame were perpetuated by feeling criticised by some professionals who “*blamed the parents and the family*” (Annie); indeed Annie shared the story of a “*Child Protection police officer*” who said to her:

Annie: “It was happening because, erm, ‘She’s an only child and you live in a city, so what do you expect?’”.

This ill-informed and fatalistic response by a police officer is completely at odds with the College of Policing’s guidance on ‘Responding to Child Sexual Exploitation’, which explicitly states: “If the victim’s family contacts the police, they should be actively supported and referred to relevant support agencies.” (College of Policing, 2017). It also shows the “significant impact” CSE agency responses can have on parents who are often “distraught” and “traumatised” (College of

Policing, 2017), providing a clear example of the incongruence often found between macro-narratives in legal and policy discourse, and micro-narratives which expose the individual, everyday experience. This type of response only served to heighten the mistrust Annie felt towards the police's ability to safeguard her daughter, thus eroding the quality of their communication. She goes on to explain that the police then looked into some of the male perpetrators and then "*started to be taken a bit more seriously*" but that "*it was too late then*" for her daughter. Parents can also feel blamed by their child. Lisa encouraged her daughter, Clare, to report a perpetrator to the police. However this did not lead to any action being taken against the perpetrator, and all that happened was that he then beat Clare up. It is well documented (CEOP, 2011; Kosaraju, 2009; PACE, 2014b, 2016) that perpetrators seek to create conflict and division between the victims and their families in order to isolate the child. However, Lisa's example shines a light on another source of conflict: division and breakdown of trust within a family, which can potentially stem from agency responses.

Impact on parents' physical and mental health and well-being

> **Lisa**: "This has made me so, so ill."
>
> **Audrey**: "I've suffered with (…) dizziness, feeling really, really rough at times and it's an inner ear infection. I've had chest pains and all this sort of stuff and you just think, you feel like you're a bit of a hypochondriac."

Most parents reported that their physical and mental health had suffered since their involvement in the world of CSE. Most identified characteristics of stress and anxiety, such as headaches, problems with sleep, exhaustion, and stomach pains as taking a toll on them. A few parents also reported persistent minor problems such as thrush, mouth ulcers, chronic itching and, in one case, nosebleeds. Similar findings were reported by Unwin and Stephens-Lewis (2016), whereby the majority (88%) of their respondents believed that their health had been worsened as a result of their experiences of CSE, with over half (58%) reporting symptoms associated with stress. High levels of anxiety and worry were reported, which at times have been debilitating and felt like "*a lack of power in the body*", and "a *feeling of panic"* (Michelle):

> **Michelle**: "I'm afraid and constantly worried. I'm worried where our son is. Where he's been sleeping? Is he safe? Is he okay? What's he doing about his education? (…) where is all this going to lead?"

Underpinning Michelle's statement is a profound sense of fear, uncertainty and powerlessness about her son and their future. The issues Michelle are concerned about also speak to her diminished role as Carl's mum. Many of the issues regarding his education and safety, for instance, would be things Michelle would ordinarily have been involved in. Michelle points out that some of her anxiety also stems from her fear of the perpetrator because "*that man knows our home and (…) I think he's gonna burn my house down with me in it*."

There is also a sense that her fears are spiralling around her and that one fear triggers another, reducing her chance to feel some reprieve from them. Lisa described herself as being in a state of "*high alert*" and this term is certainly applicable to how Michelle and her husband feel. Michelle's husband Ray also suffers with severe panic attacks, which (at first) Michelle thought was a heart attack:

> **Michelle**: "I was so scared sometimes (...) they were just awful. The doctor told me to call the ambulance 'cos it was like he was having a heart attack."

To varying degrees, the parents reported poor sleep patterns as the result of their child's and their own nightmares, vivid dreams, not being able to get to sleep or not being able to sleep through the night, or as a result of searching for their child in the middle of the night. This is also reflected in Unwin and Stephen-Lewis's (2016) research, which found that the majority of their respondents reported sleep problems. Lisa gives a chilling glimpse into the reality of this:

> **Lisa**: "When they'd gang raped her [Clare] they'd put their hands round her throat and, erm, she has nightmares about hands round her throat [long pause] and I'd found her diary and she had wrote about that and it was just horrible to read. She'd, where she'd put that she thought that she was gonna die."

This obviously has a huge impact on their ability to cope with and live their daily lives and leads to a profound sense of exhaustion for some of the parents, which had a detrimental effect on their health or exacerbated existing heath issues:

> **Lucy**: "I've had some heart problems (…) it affects my heart and I can't, I can't carry on with that."

> **Michelle**: "I feel exhausted (…) I *couldn't* [her emphasis] actually get out of bed. I didn't hear the clock. I just couldn't wake up."

Isolation

Being thrust into the alien world of CSE was perhaps the worst experience many of the parents had ever had and therefore a time when they most needed the support and understanding of their family and friends. Yet research suggests that parents are "frequently cut off from social and familial support networks" (van Toledo & Seymour, 2016:403) and this was certainly the case for several of the parent participants, who identified feeling isolated by a combination of factors such as a sense of shame and guilt. A lack of understanding from friends and family, and perhaps fear of their judgement, also increased parents' isolation. Lisa explains that she alienated herself to some degree "*from friends because it's not something that's very easy to talk about, because how does anyone react to hearing that your child's, erm, a victim of CSE?*" Henry had a similar experience, explaining that "*until you've got some experience of this, you see, normal people just can't understand it*." The sense of isolation fundamentally comes from feeling unsupported and not knowing where to get, or not being signposted to, appropriate support. It was also clear from the narratives that parents' feelings of being unsupported and isolated were further compounded if or when responding agencies were unhelpful, unsupportive or ineffective.

Parents are not only a primary source of safeguarding for their child; they also play a fundamental role in helping their child recover from the traumas of sexual abuse and exploitation. It is therefore obvious that ensuring parents are well supported and informed is fundamental to the prevention of, reduction of harm due to, and recovery from CSE. It calls to mind the principle of air stewards telling their passengers always to put their oxygen masks on before their child's in the case of an emergency, emphasising that for children to have a chance of recovery from CSE, they need their parents to be well and functioning effectively.

However, the narratives and other research (Kilroy et al., 2014; Kosaraju, 2009; PACE, 2016; van Toledo & Seymour, 2016) suggest that this is not the case. The parents had to find and develop new support networks by finding sources of support from people and organisations who understand the complex nature of CSE, because as Henry says '*normal people'* just cannot understand it. Henry's use of this term is interesting, perhaps a reference to how it makes people who experience CSE feel 'abnormal'.

Sources of support

The importance of the role of parents in helping children recover after traumatic experiences is "critical" (Holt et al., 2014:1057) and "crucial" (Jobe-Shields et al., 2016:110). However, the impact of CSE on the parents' emotional state and subsequent parenting can be debilitating, as their narratives and wider research show (Jobe-Shields et al., 2016; Kilroy et al., 2014; Kosaraju, 2009; PACE, 2014b). All of the parents interviewed identified PACE, the only national organisation specifically for parents in this situation and "*a coalition that included parents*" (Henry), as the most helpful source of support, describing the organisation as "*amazing*" (Lisa) and "*my saving grace*" (Lucy).

PACE fulfils several important roles for parents, from arming them with knowledge and understanding about CSE, preparing them for what they may expect to experience, and putting parents in touch with other parents. PACE organises Network Days (see www.paceuk.info) and being put in touch with parents in similar situations was also identified as extremely helpful because it reduced the sense of isolation and confusion about what was happening to their family and child, allowing parents to be "*with other people who are wrestling with the same things and understand*" (Henry). Fundamentally, the involvement of PACE in the parents' lives was empowering and helped them by providing a context for what they are experiencing, and to be active stakeholders in safeguarding their child and in challenging professionals when necessary.

However, most of the parents reported that they were not automatically put in touch with PACE by responding professionals. It is not clear whether this is because the parents' support needs went unrecognised or because agencies were unaware of PACE. Lisa's experience suggests that it could be a combination of both:

> **Lisa**: "Social Services weren't interested that we were in touch with PACE, they didn't want to know. It was irrelevant (…) not any of 'em, apart from one, acknowledged PACE at all."

Lisa's comment speaks to the position of PACE in relation to statutory agencies and other organisations that support victims of CSE (discussed in the previous section), a position that PACE consistently campaigns to improve (PACE, 2014a). It also reflects the position of the parents within the overall narratives surrounding CSE. I argue that it should be a matter of policy and procedure to immediately put parents in touch with appropriate support services, such as PACE, for themselves and their child, as soon as the sexual exploitation is known about. The parents found out about PACE by looking on the internet for themselves, and for two parents their work colleagues put them in touch. One parent was active in setting up PACE, thereby creating a source of support for parents in this situation.

Most parents identified at least one other source which was helpful, most often professionals outside those agencies responding directly to the CSE. For example, Lucy identifies her adoption worker as "*superb*" and Michelle talked about seeing a spiritual healer who was "*very good*". Lisa describes her GP as being "*excellent*", and is able to pick out some supportive and effective services such as Victim Support and CAMHS, both of which are specialist services, which could be why the parents found them so effective. Lisa gained support from a local organisation that supported parents whose children, like her daughter Clare, were addicted to drugs. Michelle also received support from a local charity that specialises in helping families whose children have been groomed and sexually abused by perpetrators outside of, but known to, the family. This is a version of the parents upskilling themselves so they are better able to understand and cope with the different aspects of parenting a sexually exploited child. Although the impact of CSE on family relationships will be explored later in this section, it is worth noting here that all but one of the parents who were in a partnership or marriage described their relationship as a supportive one.

Two parents sought help from their local MP and had very different experiences of this. Lisa was desperate for her daughter Clare to be moved out of the area as a means of protecting her from the perpetrators who were sexually exploiting her:

> **Lisa**: "We went to our MP and asked him if he would help us to try and get a placement and gave him an outline of sort of the last four years and he did help with that (…) I'm sure that [getting the placement] was the result of getting the MP involved."

Annie had the completely opposite experience with her MP:

> **Annie**: "I went to my local MP (…) and I showed him the evidence that she [daughter] had been groomed, it had names and things on and he said 'it's very ungentlemanly behaviour'.*"*

What is apparent from the narratives is that there is very little consistency among responses. Annie's negative experience did not end at the MP's inappropriate, dismissive and sexist understatement. As a result of the blatant ignorance and insensitivity of her own MP's response, Annie went to the MP in the next ward, "*because she is very well known nationally and I just thought that she might help*". She just re-directed her back to her local MP. Annie "*approached her about four times … and she won't help*" because "*they said it was too politically sensitive to discuss*". The frustration and disbelief that Annie felt about these responses from public servants is palpable in her narrative, as is her sense of being at an utter loss about what to do and where to go for help. In this section of her narrative, Annie is essentially describing trying to save her daughter's life, who was suffering sexual violence and abuse by gangs of perpetrators and was 14 at the time. Annie offers a further example of inappropriate language used by some professionals:

> **Annie**: "Even the police officer I spoke to (…) was calling the perpetrators "boys" and erm that is just really offensive because they're not boys, they're men, and that's something that we repeatedly keep raising with workers as and when they do it."

As previously discussed, language is important and can denote how people perceive an issue, as well as shaping experience and relationships. Annie was angered by the way the police officer infantilised adult male perpetrators, and states that challenging some professionals' inappropriate language is an on-going issue for her. The use of the term 'boys' in this context serves to minimise the predatory nature and sexual violence of the perpetrators. This links to Ellie's (survivor in Chapter 6) story about when she disclosed her abuse to the police. Ellie was told that the police did not pursue the case because the perpetrator of the abuse was only one year older than her and was "*just a kid acting up*" (Ellie). This is indicative of gendered notions of boyhood, the assumption that 'boys will boys', and the implicit message that girls should comply with this.

In contrast, only Donna identified and described the support from responding agencies, particularly social services and the police, in positive terms:

> **Donna**: "To be fair, everybody has been brilliant (…) the police here have been brilliant."

Donna explains that she and her husband were "*really, really, really, impressed*" with the police team that interviewed her daughter, and identify certain characteristics that provide a stark contrast to the other parents' experiences of responding agencies. Firstly, the leading CSE police officer *"would always keep us up to date of what was happening*". Donna's daughter, Alice, was interviewed by a woman "*on a number of occasions*" and Donna felt confident they were taking care of her daughter within that process by reassuring her they would not put Alice "'*under any pressure and if she doesn't want to tell me anything, that's fine'*" (Donna citing a female police officer*).* Donna is also very positive about the one-to-one CSE social worker, Tina, describing her as "*absolutely brilliant*" with "*a good approach*", which Donna recognises allowed Tina to build up "*a really good relationship with Alice*". The social worker also gave Donna "*loads of leaflets and information*". Donna's experience illustrates that parents whose children are being sexually exploited actually have quite simple needs: to be respected and included; to be kept informed and abreast of a changing situation and often complex processes; and to be able to trust professionals to care about their child.

Coping strategies

All the parents demonstrate extraordinary resilience, which was defined as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress” (APA, 2014) in Chapter 6. As with the survivors’ narratives, all these forms of adversity are also present in the parents’ narratives. In terms of CSE, I defined ‘adapting well’, and therefore resilience, as the ability to navigate a way through that world, cope with the suffering, find a way out and achieve a position where recovery is possible; basically, to survive it. The parents, depending on the stage of their journey, have navigated or are navigating that world without a map.

Having some positive and effective support systems in place, as discussed above, helped all the parents to cope with the sexual exploitation of their child and strengthened their resilience. Some also talked about their personal coping strategies in their narratives. These were specific to individual parents, such as maintaining a hobby like music or floristry. Lisa joined a gym and took a particular form of high intensity exercise class, which helped because it was fast and meant she did not “*have time to think about anything else (…) which is good because it gives your brain a break*”. Some parents who were employed reported mixed levels of support from their employers, from ‘good’ to being made redundant. Audrey’s experience fell between the two:

> **Audrey**: “I took a month off, unpaid leave, and I’ve come back to work and, and I knew I wasn’t coping at work and they know the situation and now performance rating’s been down-graded (…) and they’re moving me onto another role.”

This illustrates the impact of CSE on Audrey’s finances as a result of unpaid leave, but also on her career. However, one parent identified going to work as a positive because it offered stability and routine and “*it’s the only thing in my life I’ve been able to control*” (Lisa). Lisa also highlights the power of working hard to adopt a positive attitude by taking “o*ne day at a time*” and focussing “*on any small positive*” she sees.

Agency and activism: fighting back

The majority of the parents' narratives contain many examples of their agency, which often took the form of activism, and in most cases is focused on doing *something*, akin to fighting back (usually against the responding agencies) and fighting for their child. The parents' agency is further evidence of their resilience. They have engaged in what feels like a battle and even though it is exhausting, it signifies the parents' need to feel and know that they are doing, or did, everything they possibly could to try to protect and save their child. For Henry and his wife, activism became a lifeline, not just for them, but also for other parents of sexually exploited children. Initially their involvement helped soothe their sense of isolation:

> **Henry**: "Suddenly, we found we weren't alone (…) and that was, erm, a terrific difference from the earlier loneliness."

Activism, whatever form it takes, is a coping strategy, as it gives the parents a sense of being re-empowered and having at least some sense of control over their lives. During her interview, one parent said "*in future, I would like to get more involved … [*and*] do something for these kids*" (Audrey). As a result I later contacted her to ask if she would consider sharing some of her story at a conference, which she did. Afterwards she told me that although she was incredibly nervous beforehand she was "*so pleased and proud*" of herself that she took part, and had "*really enjoyed it".* I also know that this parent has gone on to support a survivor-led project for victims of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation.

Doing is the very essence of agency, and particularly in the early stages of CSE, a parent's agency is compromised because they are at a loss as to how to respond, which increases their vulnerability. It is at this point that parents turn to responding agencies for support and I believe that at least some of the resentment that parents may feel towards agencies is a result their struggles and losses having gone unacknowledged, of not being supported, 'seen' and helped in those very vulnerable moments.

Another prevalent form of activism for many of the parents is in their battle "*fighting tooth and nail*" (Lisa) against responding agencies, and the sense of them being engaged in a struggle to protect and save their child is striking in several of the narratives.

> **Lucy**: "You're fighting to save your daughter from the clutches of men and then you have to fight these people who think you're a shit [parent]."

As a result there is also a sense of battle fatigue, sadness and hopelessness at their perceived lack of power to 'make it better':

> **Annie**: "We just fought and fought and fought. Letters to Parliament and all sorts of things (…) you're just kind of battling (…) it takes so much energy out of you and you're just kind of battling and re-living, it's a very negative process and it doesn't really achieve anything."

The battle is unfortunately fought on different fronts, often directly with their child, indirectly with the perpetrators, and both directly and indirectly with different responding agencies. All of these have left the parents feeling a plethora of predominantly negative emotions, which are felt most acutely towards responding agencies. Five of the seven parents detail their experiences of substantial conflict with responding agencies as having taken the form of official complaints, and one parent reported being involved in a law suit against the Local Authority. Parts of some of the narratives are consumed with details of these battles, with parents reporting that they have "*boxes of evidence*" (Annie) *against* responding agencies, because they learnt to document everything as a way of safeguarding their own position as parents. In this sense, the parents' activism serves the same purpose as mentioned earlier: it can be a way to re-empower oneself, but being engaged in this battle is a significant emotional drain.

Family relationships

For most parents, protecting and maintaining their ordinary family routine was important and was perceived by parents as their responsibility, which may be felt as an additional pressure. It is without doubt that the impact which CSE can have on families, as a result of many factors, can be shattering (Kosaraju, 2009; Palmer & Jenkins, 2014). For instance, one function of the grooming process is to alienate and isolate the child from their family. The child's behaviour can become very extreme, as a result of trauma, drug misuse and fear of the perpetrators, and the home can become a highly stressful and emotionally chaotic site as family members feel emotions such as guilt, anger, confusion and shame. Often, pre-existing stresses and issues are exacerbated and new problems can develop as family members struggle to cope (Palmer & Jenkins, 2014). Three main aspects of family relationships emerged from the narratives: the parents' relationship with each other; the parent-child relationship; and the impact on siblings. Relationships with extended family were addressed earlier in the discussion regarding parents feeling isolated.

Parents' relationship

The parents' narratives provide a small insight into their relationship with their partner and the effect the sexual exploitation of their child has had on them as a couple. Some parents talk about their partner to varying extents, and whenever appropriate that data has been included, but only two parents (Lisa and Michelle) explicitly mention the impact of CSE on their relationship. Michelle reflects that the experience has brought her and her husband closer, whereas Lisa acknowledges the strain CSE had put her relationship with her husband:

> **Michelle**: "And it's absolutely awful to hear your husband howling and crying. In some ways this has made us closer because we are absolutely at one on this."

> **Lisa**: "You fight more, you argue more because, I think, everything else is out of control. You, you take it out on each other, don't you 'cos it's, I suppose, the only thing you can do."

Overall however, where the parents have talked about this relationship, it was predominantly positive and none disclosed that their relationship had ended as a result of the CSE, which can happen (Kilroy et al., 2014; Palmer & Jenkins, 2014). It is noticeable that in the narratives where the parents are in a relationship, they use the terms 'we' and 'us' frequently throughout, including when the partner was not the child's biological father. The parents speak as part of a couple, signifying a sense of unity with each other. For example: "*what hit us"; "we watched it"; "we've been door knocking"; "why didn't we know?"; "she would tell us*". This suggests that despite the challenges the parents have faced, they have generally faced them together. Some parents shared aspects of their partner's pain and how hard it was to watch them suffer, further illustrating the profound emotional impact CSE can have on them, but it does appear that shared suffering can strengthen their bond.

Parent-child relationship

All the parents reported various degrees of conflict and relationship breakdown with their sexually exploited child. As already discussed, a significant emotional impact on parents was the sense of losing and/or not recognising their child, and this was usually because of significant, often extreme changes in their child's behaviour and a sense of distance between themselves and the child. In two cases the parents physically lost their child, who had to be moved out of the area for their own protection. In one case this worked and the young person became safe and was eventually able to move back to the same town as her family, but in the other case, the move had a detrimental effect on the parent-child relationship:

> **Lisa**: "She fought against going because she really didn't want to leave the area (…) she's angry and annoyed with us."

In a third case the parents lost their child because he moved in with the man who groomed their son.

Impact on siblings

Four of the parents have more than one child, but only one parent, Lisa, talked a little about the impact CSE had on her older child, Clare's sister Julie. Lisa described the experience as being "*really hard for her*" and believes that Julie's exam results suffered as she was studying for them at the time of the CSE and had to cope with her sister's "*off the wall*" behaviour. Lisa describes Julie trying to revise for exams while Clare "*would break stuff … she would scream, she would swear*". Julie got an opportunity to leave home and travel, which she took, and Lisa recognises that it was good that Julie was "*out of the way for a bit*" so she could have a break from the situation. However, Lisa also recognised that Julie has "*got a lot of anger inside her*" towards Clare and the whole situation, but does not expand on how this manifests within their relationships. Other research highlights that siblings may also be pulled into CSE, and they may feel neglected and/or jealous at the attention their exploited sibling receives (Palmer & Jenkins, 2014). Kosaraju (2009) found that siblings of sexually exploited young people may also experience bullying because their peers have heard negative things about their sibling; they may feel the loss of their sibling and isolated within the family.

Part 3: exiting and the aftermath of CSE

There is a relative paucity of literature regarding how parents whose child has been sexually exploited experience the exit and aftermath of CSE, as understandably most of the focus is on experiences and impacts *during* the exploitation. This statement is supported by a recent and comprehensive review of research relevant to supporting parents of sexually exploited children (Scott & McNeish, 2017). Although the review offered a valuable insight, most of the research reviewed pertained to parenting a child who was *currently* being sexually exploited, as opposed to supporting a parent/ child in the aftermath of CSE. This section begins to redress this through a narrative analysis of parents whose children are no longer being sexually exploited.

For clarity, the term exit refers to the parents whose children are no longer being sexually exploited and abused. Four of the parents' narratives reflect this position (Audrey, Henry, Annie and Donna), and as such form the empirical basis of this section of analysis. Analysis of the parents' exits suggests some similar findings to the analysis of the survivors' experiences of exiting (see Chapter 6): that exiting is complex, varied, unpredictable, and appears to be based on a unique combination of several different factors, human actions and circumstances. The term exit acts more as a marker or turning point in the outbound journey, rather than as a description of a destination. It also seems that parents have limited control and influence, despite their actions, over how and when they reach this turning point.

Exiting the world of CSE is a *process* and this is much more apparent in the parents' narratives than in the survivors'. As a result, analysing and discussing the exit of parents is more complex than that of survivors. This is because all the survivor participants had exited CSE, in that they were free from exploitation when they were interviewed. These women had, by their own admission, achieved some recovery and were living their lives positively, acknowledging that they had ‘moved on’, and as a result hope shines through their narratives.

The four parents who have exited CSE, however, reveal a different, less hopeful experience. Exiting CSE does not equate to recovery or mean that there are no after effects. The longer term impacts are apparent within the parents’ narratives because although their child is no longer sexually exploited, the parents are far from free of the world and consequences of CSE. The parents’ narratives illustrate that the impact of CSE on parents can be far reaching and long lasting, and reveal that the turning point of exiting CSE actually represents the start of another journey for parents, whereby they live in and have to negotiate the aftermath. The term aftermath refers to the various impacts of CSE on themselves, their child and their family, such as ongoing emotional, practical and financial support for their child, and in two cases, a grandchild. The term also illustrates the blurring of borders between being involved in CSE and exiting CSE, highlighting exiting as a process that can last for varying lengths of time. One parent sums this up:

> **Annie**: “I would say that there’s an awful lot of damage still (…) as a family it will be kind of life long.”

Three parents cannot be classed as having exited from CSE. At the time of interview they were fully entrenched in their own versions of the world of CSE because their child was still being exploited. None of these three parents talk in any depth about ‘exiting’ CSE, or what life might be like afterwards, except to briefly contemplate how the experience will change them:

> **Michelle:** “I think it will probably change me (…) because I’m locked in this battle.”

One parent refers to it wistfully, in passing, and in relation to how she will then respond to some of the professionals she has felt aggrieved by, but overall it is as if that is not even on their radar:

> **Lucy:** “One day when this is over…”

This suggests that these three parents are so consumed with their daily battles just to try and stop the abuse of their child that perhaps they are unable to think any further ahead, or that thinking ahead to what will be left of their child, or themselves afterwards, is almost as terrifying as their current situation.

The process of exiting the world of CSE

The child's exit

A significant influencing factor that shapes how the parents exited CSE is how their child exited and became free from sexual exploitation. This emphasises the position and experience of parents as secondary to, and determined by, their child's experiences, and illustrates that there is not one simple route out of CSE (for parents or their children). In order to contextualise the parents' point of exit from CSE, it is necessary to provide an overview of how each of their children exited.

The four narratives illustrate various ways in which a young person, and subsequently their parents, can exit CSE, which builds on the different types of exit discussed in Chapter 6 (long and complex; shift and drift; triggered by external factors). As with the survivor participants' exits, the interplay of different structural, relational and individual factors can shape the nature of the exit. Structural factors refer to the social circumstances and context and I add responding agencies, particularly statutory services including social workers, the police and the CJS to this. Relational factors refer to social networks and support systems and, following the flow of the narratives, I focus particularly on the parent-child relationship. Individual factors are described as comprising internal driving forces and resources such as capacities, interests, dreams, fantasies, adaptation and coping strategies (Mansson & Hedin, 1999).

Audrey's daughter, Nadia, illustrates an active exit when she recognised she had been groomed and disclosed the abuse, first to Audrey and then to the police. Nadia's recognition of her experience of sexual abuse was triggered by external circumstances when she attended a workshop on grooming. She told Audrey straight away, illustrating the role of positive relational factors in terms of her support system. Structural factors came into play when the family informed the police, who responded effectively to the complaint and the abuser was charged, found guilty and imprisoned.

Henry's daughter Saskia's exit appears to be more passive, as she seems to have drifted out of the world of CSE mainly as a result of the abuser seemingly losing interest and moving away. This sense of drift is reiterated by Henry as he does not specifically talk about how Saskia exited CSE; his narrative suggests that it just gradually happened, after "*the acute phase*", which Henry uses to refer to the most extreme elements of the exploitation. Saskia's and the abuser's circumstances changed over time with the birth of their child, which, due to the abuser's violence, triggered structural factors such as children's social services' involvement.

Annie's daughter Becky's exit was triggered by external structural factors when she was eventually moved out of area, placed in a secure children's home and "*became safe*" (Annie). This helped her to break the "*traumatic bond*" (Annie) she had with her abuser, allowing her time to begin a healthy relationship and become a mother. This only happened after Annie's intervention, whereby she had "*fought long and hard*" with social services.

In contrast, Donna's daughter Alice exited as a result of external structural factors in the shape of good intervention being provided by responding agencies. Donna's narrative suggests a combination of effective social work intervention and actions taken by her and her husband which meant they "*managed to stop it in time*". Donna reported that the social worker's one-to-one intervention with Alice, which focused on educating her about keeping herself safe, sexual exploitation and safe sex, had a positive effect on her daughter who had "*really taken on board everything* (…) *that the social workers have said to her*" (Donna).

The parents' exits from CSE

Each narrative illustrates the parents' lack of influence, control and power over helping their child to exit, which is limited and constrained by the circumstances, responding agencies and systems. Consequently, how the parents exercised their agency was in response to their particular context and circumstances. This means their journeys to their child becoming free from sexual exploitation are varied and complex.

Audrey's experience is quite unique in comparison to the other parents. She was unaware of the abuse her daughter was experiencing until Nadia disclosed it, which ended the abuse. The other parents found out about the abuse of their child and then spent various lengths of time trying to stop it. Audrey's role in Nadia's exit was primarily to support her daughter through the next stages of the CJS. Audrey does not spend a lot of time on their experiences from disclosure to conviction in her narrative. I believe this is because the structural elements, in terms of agency responses, were largely positive and a conviction was achieved, thus the majority of her narrative is focused on her current situation (at the time of interview), which places her squarely in the aftermath of CSE, trying to find the appropriate support for her daughter.

Henry's narrative illustrates the longevity of the exiting process in how he details the support he and his wife gave to Saskia and her children "*over the years*" (Henry), though it is also clear that Saskia was not always receptive to their help as a result of the conflict within their relationship. For Henry, structural factors such as effective responding agencies were scarce during the 'acute phase' of his daughter's exploitation. This is because it began in the 1980s, a time when the dominant narrative was largely victim-blaming (see Chapter 4), positioning sexually exploited young people as *"small versions of adult prostitutes and also criminals.*" (Henry). Henry does not offer details of exactly how Saskia exited CSE, nor of his specific role in that, except to talk about supporting her however they could at the time. This could be because Saskia exited over twenty years ago and it is no longer a pressing issue for him in the same way it is for some parents. It also reflects his focus on the current situation, which involves him and his wife living in the aftermath of CSE, continuing to support Saskia and her children.

Annie's agency and resilience is ever-present throughout her narrative, which conjures an image of her as a soldier battling against an ineffective and sluggish system to save her daughter. Her narrative is peppered with examples of her agency, such as fighting to get Becky into a secure children's home and managing to get her into a national pilot project working with sexually exploited young people. This illustrates the potential uphill battle some parents have with the very agencies that exist to protect children, and the resilience and perseverance needed to withstand such a battle. Like Audrey and Henry, Annie's predominant focus in her narrative is on her current situation, the aftermath of CSE.

Donna's narrative represents a 'success story'. Donna and her husband in effect extended the intervention provided by social workers by sending Alice to a private school in a different town, essentially removing her from the area and the people with whom she had begun to get involved. They intervened to keep Alice safe, acting on their instinct to remove their daughter from harm's way by moving her – "*to move her as far away"* as possible "*so that she has a* ***long*** [Donna's emphasis] *school day*" – despite it going against their personal beliefs about private education. Donna's experience indicates that they felt that further strategies were needed to ensure Alice was safe and protected from CSE. This is a privileged position to be in and illustrates not that affluence can prevent CSE, but that it may help to reduce the harm. Donna now considers Alice to be safe. Conversely, and tragically, it is worth noting that Michelle made a positive choice of a private education for her son, which is where he was subsequently groomed by a teacher, reminding us of the corruption of 'safe' spaces.

Thus, all four parents' children eventually became free of sexual exploitation and abuse, but there are many differences between their experiences of this. Henry and Saskia received very little statutory support, so Henry began to create his own support network out of necessity, illustrating the influence of the temporal context of CSE. Audrey was thrust into the aftermath of CSE as a result of her daughter's exit from it. Donna received some consistently effective input and support early on from responding agencies, whereas Annie catalogues a series of mistakes and poor practice. What this variety of experiences really highlights is the lack of a consistent statutory response to parents and CSE. All the parents live in different locations and it does appear that some local authorities and police forces offer better responses and support than others. Finally, the narratives illuminate that for these parents, the impact and aftermath of CSE is long-lasting and deeply impactful.

The Aftermath of CSE

> "Sexual exploitation does not come with an expiry date." (PACE, 2014a:16).

The four parents' narratives demonstrate that their child's exit from CSE is actually a turning point into another journey: the aftermath of CSE. A parent writing in the PACE Annual Review succinctly explains why this aftermath exists and is particular to parents:

> “The professional agencies depart, but life does not stop for the young person, who often carries horrible memories and deep personal disturbance. Rebuilding life is not easy and who is there to help? Who is there who understands? The parent is still there. A parent who has lived through the same story, who has been loyal to the child throughout all the tensions (…) Parents do not close the case and move on to another.” (PACE, 2014a:17).

This section will examine the four parents’ experiences of the aftermath of CSE. It is the very nature and product of active and loving parenting that creates the aftermath, because ‘parents do not close the case’ and are unable to begin to ‘move on’ at least until their child has done so. These narratives show that in fact it is the parents who fundamentally support the child to achieve some recovery, not responding agencies.

Impact on their child - picking up the pieces

The narratives show that it is the child’s needs, as a result of the impact of CSE on them, which can significantly shape the nature of the aftermath that parents’ experience. The parents detail the myriad ways their child has responded, emotionally and physically, to being sexually exploited and abused and the ways that it impacts on their life, and by extension the parents’ lives, often for years afterwards.

Henry describes the long-term impact of CSE on his daughter and consequently on him and his wife. He makes sense of the CSE as a “*disturbance*” which has created an “*incapacity for life*” in his daughter, describing her as “*completely messed up*” and unable to “*negotiate … out of any problems*” as well as having “*a very erratic, fragile temper*”. Henry explains that these impacts of sexual exploitation on his daughter have been “*transmitted down*” to her care of her own children, highlighting the inter-generational impact of CSE, a finding reflected in other research (Kosaraju, 2009). One significant outcome of these issues was that Saskia was deemed by Social Services as unable to protect her first child from the abuser, and so she lost custody of him to Henry and his wife, where the child stayed until the age of nineteen, something which Saskia blames her parents for.

Throughout his narrative, Henry remained factual, generally positive and stoic in the telling of his story. There is just one point where he conveys a profound sense of weariness regarding the on-going impact of living in the aftermath of CSE and supporting Saskia "*through thick and thin for thirty years now.*"

> **Henry**: "And still in old age (…) we are still dealing with it and wondering, 'when we go, how will they survive?' Because, again and again, they have crises (…) so in some ways it's almost harder to live with it now (…) when we were younger, erm, we could cope with a lot more things but we battle on (…) you just have to keep going and do your best."

Annie's experience of the aftermath is the closest in nature to Henry's, as are their daughters' experiences, which were both extreme and prolonged. Annie describes her daughter Becky as suffering "*so much damage*" whereby "*she has good days and bad days*", exacerbated by her "*night terrors*". Annie's narrative reveals that she has put herself in the role of supporting Becky, who is beginning to make sense of what has happened to her, and when Annie talked about this she became upset. The pain of knowing what happened to her daughter is palpable and it was clear that some of the words were hard for her to say:

> **Annie**: "She's sort of got much more understanding now of, erm, [long pause] that she was groomed and [sharp intake of breath, audible gulp] raped and attacked [voice shakes, exhales] physically."

Another impact of CSE which some parents have to manage in the aftermath is their child's impaired memory. Research suggests there is a link between childhood abuse, dissociative symptoms and memory loss. Chu et al. (1999) found that abuse in childhood is related to the development of dissociative symptoms, and Bremner et al. (1996) found that extreme stress can have long-term effects on memory. Both Annie and Audrey talk about their daughter's (Becky and Nadia) memory loss and what they may have "*blocked out*" (Annie). Both mothers pinpoint memory problems, "*she can't remember key events in her* *life*” (Audrey), as a direct result of the sexual exploitation and point out that there is no specialist support available for this. Nadia, who has been diagnosed with “*a really severe form of PTSD*” (Audrey) also suffers from flashbacks and dissociative attacks which have a huge impact on her life and can endanger her and possibly her family.

Other impacts of CSE that the parents have to deal with in aftermath are seeing their child self-harm and hearing their child’s suicidal thoughts. Audrey describes Nadia as unable to “*see any future for herself”*, which highlights that not only does CSE steal a young person’s childhood, it can also obliterate their sense of hope for the future:

> **Audrey**: “She just said, ‘I just want to walk over that bridge and jump off it in front of a car.” [Crying].

The parents also report further long-term impacts of CSE on their child that they face in the aftermath, such as hypervigilance, vulnerability, problems with their weight, anxiety and fear, sleep disturbances, and problems with intimacy, all of which impinge on their daily life, all of which are echoed in wider research (PACE, 2014b; Unwin & Stephens-Lewis, 2016).

Parent-child relationships in the aftermath of CSE

The parent-child relationship is crucial to safeguarding young people (PACE, 2014a, 2014b; Scott & McNeish, 2017) and the parents’ narratives illustrate how important that relationship is to parents too. All the parents’ children were adolescents when the sexual exploitation began, and it is widely accepted that parenting a teenager can be challenging, both for parent and teen, as the young person needs to develop their sense of identity and autonomy (Spera, 2005). Under ordinary circumstances this period of transition can be difficult both for parties and the family as a whole and these challenges are only exacerbated by CSE. The impact of CSE on children continues to reverberate in the aftermath and it is the parents who shoulder and manage this.

There is, however, hope in the aftermath of CSE, although it is bittersweet in nature. Annie’s daughter’s abuse started when she was thirteen and she describes it as though Becky’s “*life and personality had kind of paused*”, but it also seems that Annie's role as Becky's mother was also paused, yet she poignantly explains:

> **Annie**: "Even though we are a lot closer again now, it's still kind of getting to know each other (…) but I think of her in a very kind of protective way as if she was a thirteen year old, I suppose, rather than the nineteen year old that she is now (…) you know, you never stop protecting them but I don't know, it still feels different (…) I worry every time she gets on a train or goes out with a friend, or even when she comes over to see us we always have to make sure that we're at the train station."

There is a shift in parents' understandings of the boundaries and nature of their relationship with their child. In Annie's case, this involves the recognition and acceptance of the person their child has become and the path their life has taken. Donna echoes some of Annie's feelings and describes herself as "*still paranoid, and I'm not exaggerating by any means*" in regard to her daughter's safety. She details the process of rebuilding her relationship with her daughter in the aftermath as a continual negotiation of the boundaries. At the core for Donna is the ability to trust her daughter again.

Prolonged dependency

A significant and life-changing result of CSE for parents is the prolonged period of parenting and extended period of dependency on them by their sexually exploited child. This is a cornerstone of the aftermath, taking different forms depending on the needs of their child and appearing to require some adjustment for some parents:

> **Henry**: "We helped and supported her all we can over the years and she's relied on us."

There is an undercurrent of broken expectations in the narratives regarding what the parents imagined their child's life would be like, and much of this was based on normative hopes and ideas that your child grows up healthy and happy, becomes independent and able to live their own life, thus reducing the role of the parents:

> **Audrey**: “You’re hoping that, yeah, normal circumstances, they’ll go through school, university, they go travelling, get a job or whatever.”

However, for these parents and their child the reality is very different and results in a recurrent sense of loss for the parents that feels “*like a bereavement (…) the future that was gonna be, isn’t gonna be*” (Annie), and so an adjustment of expectations is necessary in order to accept the unchosen reality and find the positives. Annie’s words convey her sadness at both her and her daughter’s loss of ‘what should have been’, emphasised by the “*stark reminder*” that “*all her [Becky’s] friends went to Uni and all that kind of thing*” while Becky’s life was derailed onto “*such a different path.*”

All the parents’ narratives illustrate their child’s reliance on them, even into adulthood, in ways that the parents do not believe would have existed had they not been sexually exploited. For example, Henry explains how his wife still “*goes with* [Saskia] *to a lot of sensitive meetings that she has with Social Services*”, which is useful because his wife “*can talk to these professionals like they need to be talked to, in their own language.*”

The predominant focus of Audrey’s narrative is fixed on the battle she has trying to support Nadia herself, and to get her the support she needs for the complex health and well-being needs she has as a result of the abuse she suffered and the PTSD she has been diagnosed with. The deep toll this has on Audrey is clear in her narrative. She is anxious and frustrated about the black-outs, dissociative states, night terrors and panic attacks that Nadia experiences. Audrey details having to drive for several hours to Nadia when she went to university, sometimes in the middle of the night. The depth of the impact this has had on Audrey is reflected in her experience of sometimes waking up “*hearing her scream*”, even when they are not in the same place. The impact of Nadia’s health issues prolongs her dependency on her mother, extending Audrey’s caring responsibility as she appears instrumental in arranging the various medical appointments that Nadia needs but is unable to cope with by herself:

> **Audrey**: "She's twenty-one, you know, and technically, she should be going to doctors on her own talking about that but she's quite immature. I think that's partly as a result of this."

Although approximately 40% of grandparents over fifty years old provide regular childcare for their grandchildren (Age UK, 2017), prolonged dependency is a salient feature for some parents as a direct result of CSE. Both Annie and Henry support their grandchild as well as their now adult child and this support is financial, emotional and practical in terms of childcare. Other financial support is provided by some parents in the form of paying for therapeutic treatment or contributing to living costs and education, and some of the children still live with their parents when ordinarily it is likely they would have been living independently. Henry and his wife also support Saskia by attending meetings she still has to have with Social Services regarding the care of her own children.

Engagement and battles with agencies and systems

Parents' engagement with responding agencies and systems does not disappear once the CSE has ended. It may change in terms of which agencies they are engaged with as a result of their child's needs and situation, but some parents continue to talk of these experiences in negative terms. The narratives speak to the unmet support needs of these parents, which is reflected in wider literature (Asmussen et al., 2007; PACE, 2014a, 2016). Annie describes her frustration and the emotional impact of her and her daughter's experiences with the CJS. At the time of the sexual exploitation of Becky, the police said she "*was the strongest victim at that point and they wanted my daughter to press charges*", but they were unable to make a case and Annie and Becky felt severely let down by them, resulting in them feeling unconfident "*that the police knew what they were doing, or even knew who the perpetrators are*". Annie explains that now that Becky is safe "*she does want justice and has a much greater understanding of what was going on*" but that they as a family had not been kept fully informed. They then found out that one of the perpetrators had been tried but found not guilty, and this had a negative impact on Becky:

> **Annie**: "I think that really affected my daughter but she wasn't called as a witness and, again, that kind of, that in itself, the fact that the police didn't contact her. It was really, erm, sort of devalued her."

Annie's lack of confidence in the CJS and her lack of control or influence prevents recovery for Becky and her parents. Annie talks about contacting and re-contacting key police officers to be told "'*we haven't forgotten'*", and at the time of interview Annie had waited over three months for an informative response. It is like a wound that cannot heal, which is "*quite traumatic for all of us and particularly my daughter*". Annie and Becky feel devalued, lacking "*any closure because there hasn't been a conviction*" and in need of external validation, much like some of the survivors in Chapter 6:

> **Annie**: "It's just something that never, ever goes away and until there is some level of justice or acknowledgement or something, from someone, or some service then, as a family, we just feel like we're still kind of battling."

Audrey had a more positive experience, acknowledging that the police were "*actually quite good*" because they kept in touch and provided a supportive female officer for Nadia. However, despite a conviction being achieved for Nadia, Audrey describes her experience of the CJS as difficult because she felt she was left *"floundering around in the dark (…) just this constant waiting and not knowing what was gonna happen."* This 'not knowing' placed Audrey at a disadvantage within the CJS, over which she felt she had no control or influence. This lack of control is echoed in her engagement and battles with responding agencies, which is much more focused on struggling to get Nadia the appropriate help and support for her health issues:

> **Audrey:** "It's just a nightmare of trying to get her the help that she needs to get better and trying to get people to accept that, actually, she really does need some *proper* psychological help. It's been a constant fight (…) it's just a battle."

Underpinning Audrey's experience is her dependency on services which operate within a system and lack a human face and point of contact. A contrast can be drawn here regarding the emphasis on multi-agency working in terms of dealing with and responding to CSE, which although not always as effective as it could be, is written in policy and government guidance (DCSF, 2009; HM Government, 2015, 2018). Audrey's experience of health professionals illustrates a distinct lack of a multi-agency co-ordination or holistic approach in supporting her daughter, or even signposting her in the aftermath of CSE:

> **Audrey**: "This is my biggest argument with all of this, Why doesn't anybody link up and talk to each other? You know, why, why is it always a battle to get professionals to do that holistic approach? They need some sort of joined up approach."

A sense of injustice

> **Audrey**: "It's just so unfair, it's just so **unfair** (...) all because of **him**." [Audrey's emphasis].

A sense of injustice is present in all four parents' narratives to varying degrees, and all the parents feel aggrieved by the unfairness of what has happened to their child and themselves. The sense of injustice is layered, in that the parents feel traumatised that their child was sexually exploited in the first place, but that their struggles were largely exacerbated by how many of the responding agencies dealt with the situation and with them. A sense of injustice is present in Henry's narrative, more so when he initially laid out the story of the sexual exploitation of his daughter, but as his narrative continued it became more of a sense of resigned acceptance. This is probably related to the longevity of his experience of CSE.

Annie's experience and sense of injustice is much rawer, reflecting her situation as battling with the CJS at the time she was interviewed. Her words illustrate her frustration and powerlessness to influence the outcome, as well as clearly highlighting the difficulty in living in the shadow of uncertainty:

> **Annie**: "We just want some closure, that's all we want (…) as a family, we all need to just kind of almost draw a line under it and either accept it or learn to live with that and move on, whereas every day of our lives it comes up one way or another, just, it just never, it never goes away and you never kind of stop thinking about it."

A further sense of injustice stems from the parents' knowledge of the perpetrators. There was not a conviction for Henry and Annie and the knowledge that the men who raped, exploited and abused their child are still walking about freely is very difficult for the parents. There was a conviction in Audrey's case, but this does not alleviate her sense of injustice because he was released after serving two and a half years of a four and half year sentence, the shortness of which was also a source of injustice and insult to Audrey:

> **Audrey**: "We're still dealing with it (…) she's still ill and it feels like we're living the sentence."

At the time of Audrey's interview, Nadia had recently received a phone call to let her know that the perpetrator of her abuse was "'*doing really well. He's going to all his courses, he's doing this and that*'". Both Audrey and Nadia were very upset by the call because for Audrey it reiterated the injustice and her sense of loss that "*He's got a life. She's not got one*."

An impaired sense of freedom and safety

In three of the parents' cases the perpetrators were still able to exert some control, influence and fear over the parents and their child, impairing their sense of freedom and safety in the aftermath of CSE. Annie and her family had "*been threatened in our own home by a male, erm, who was trying to kick the door down and we didn't feel safe.*" Annie had to make a third party report to the police because her daughter Becky saw one of the perpetrators with some children. She describes Becky as being "*very frightened of the perpetrators*" and "*very anxious if she ever sees any of them …* [so] *she doesn't want to be on her own.*" The power of some perpetrators to instil fear even after the actual exploitation has ended can be immense and it does not necessarily have to be the actual perpetrators – just the idea of them can be enough to cause severe distress:

> **Audrey**: "[Nadia] saw a car go past. She was convinced it was him. Massive panic attack. She can't breathe."

It is not just the perpetrators that can cause difficulties for the victims of sexual exploitation. All the parents still live in the area where their child was sexually exploited and Annie talks about physical reminders that impact on them, highlighting the constant and mundane aspects of the aftermath of CSE, the corruption of everyday spaces and their potential to re-traumatise:

> **Annie**: "We're forced to go past where an awful lot of the things that happened, happened. We have kind of no choice on that."

An impaired sense of freedom and safety can also extend to the parents' perceptions of their future. Audrey expresses deep concern for Nadia:

> **Audrey**: "How's she gonna get a job? She can't drive 'cos she can't stay conscious. She can't go travelling [because] there's the insurance thing."

There is no 'expiry date' for the effects of CSE on these parents because their role with, love for and commitment to their child is tremendous and appears unshakeable as they stand and face continued battles, navigating a sense of injustice and an impaired sense of freedom and safety, often for many years. Annie expressed her anger "*because these people* [perpetrators] *are still out there*" and most of the parents' experience of the aftermath of CSE is very much crystallised in Audrey's comment, "*we're* *still* *[*her emphasis*] dealing with the consequences.*"

Resilience and recovery

There is some hope in these often bleak narratives in that the parents (and their children) are managing to survive terrible circumstances. This is largely a result of their resilience, a protective factor. Factors that have been associated with resilience are good self-esteem and confidence, self-belief and problem solving skills (Rutter, 1985). In the context of the resilience of the parent participants, I would add parental love to that list because it is the most fundamental factor that all the parents have in common and it comes through their narratives time after time.

The parents' narratives also reveal a scarcity of provision for therapeutic services for their child or themselves, and their resilience and perseverance is evident in how they have pursued a path of recovery, often in the face of further adversity when trying to achieve support. Those parents who have received such support for their child (Annie and Audrey) only received it after a battle. The only way the parents have guaranteed some therapeutic support for their child, or themselves, is to pay for it privately. These particular parents were able to afford it, but it is extremely unlikely that there are many parents who would be able to do so.

All the parents have managed to navigate their way through the world of CSE as secondary victims. They are on a journey to achieve a position where recovery is possible, and the impression the narratives gives is that, despite the painful difficulties they face, the parents are able to maintain this position of resilience over time. This perhaps indicates 'elastic resilience', which refers to "the *recovery* [my emphasis] of competence following exposure to 'bad experiences' or stressful events" (Magee & Carr, 1998, cited in Mansson & Hedin, 1999:76), suggesting that the parents become more practised at coping, but I believe that the fundamental driving force which maintains the parents is their love for their child.

Concluding comments

Like the survivors' chapter, this one has also been substantive, taking the reader into a relatively undocumented world of non-abusive parents' experiences and feelings as they try to deal with the abuse and exploitation of their child outside their home. As 'secondary victims' of CSE, a fundamental aspect of the nature of the parents' journey into, within and out of the world of CSE is a consequence and by-product of the nature and extent of their child's journey. The parents' narratives illustrate that their involvement within the world of CSE was characterised by trauma, feeling disempowered and conflict. All the parents were still suffering at the time of interview, either because they and their child were entrenched in CSE, or they were struggling with the aftermath as a result of the abuse and exploitation.

All of the parents' entries into the world of CSE were traumatic and disempowering because they were transported into CSE by other forces, such as their child going missing or abrupt disclosures of sexual abuse. It was as if they suddenly ‘woke up’ in an alien world. They all expressed shock that CSE could invade their ‘normal, happy family’ and reveal an implied expectation that their ‘normality’ would somehow offer a layer of protection from something like CSE. The parents’ narratives also highlighted thematic connections to the survivors in terms of the corruption of safe spaces and the ubiquitous nature of CSE. Perhaps the worst corruption of a safe space, for parents, was the invasion of CSE into their family home where they face the consequences on a daily basis.

Most of the parents reported simply not knowing what to do at first, which increased their vulnerability and reliance on responding agencies. The narratives illustrate that this is a crucial moment and opportunity for professionals to set a positive and supportive tone for their involvement with the family; however, every parent (even the one parent with predominantly positive experiences) reported that this was not the case in their experience. Thus, in the initial stages, parental agency was reduced as they had to come to terms with understanding what was happening to their child as well as manage their own emotions.

Once they understood, however, parents focused their agency on trying to get their child out of that world, but their power and influence was often limited by responding agencies and systems. This highlights the need for a more collaborative approach, instigated by responding agencies, that supports and empowers parents. The parents demonstrate an impressive resilience, which is necessary even after exiting CSE, as some parents reported that their involvement with agencies and systems was often a continuing source of stress. In several cases, this presented as engaging in conflict with their child and with many responding agencies, and creating and finding their own support system.

Most of the parents mistook warning signs of CSE as ‘normal teenage behaviour’, when in fact their child was being groomed. The brutality of this for the parents was that their realisation of what was actually happening in their child’s life often came too late. One parent was also targeted and groomed by the same man as her son and her narrative highlights the damaging impact on her in terms of self-blame and guilt. Thus, the narratives revealed a lack of therapeutic support for parents to help them build their own resilience.

A powerful and pervasive theme that is almost omnipresent within the parents' narratives are their loss and grief, which is woven throughout the narratives and sets the emotional landscape underpinning much of the pain they experience throughout their journey. Many of the parents experienced disenfranchised grief, as their sense of loss was not always recognised and acknowledged. Many of the losses experienced are intangible and relate to the parents' loss of their role and identity as parents, and their hopes, dreams and expectations for their child's and family's future. The parents convey their grief as they speak about this, and sadness seeps from the narratives and hovers like a dense mist that leaves one feeling dampened and weary. The parents became indelibly changed by their enforced role as involuntary witnesses to their child's experiences of extreme sexual violence and its many consequences, such as addiction, unwanted pregnancy, self-harm and extreme behavioural and personality changes. Further impacts of CSE range from affecting mental and physical health to more practical issues such as employment and finances. The emotional impact of CSE on parents can be enormous, characterised by negative feelings such as anger and frustration. Many parents reported increased stress and anxiety levels which compounded their sense of uncertainty about how to respond effectively, and reduced their ability to cope.

Parents' suffering, at all stages of their journey, was very often exacerbated by how they perceived agency responses to themselves and their child, and this also dominates most of the narratives as it was clearly an integral part of their experience. Six of the seven parents often felt judged, blamed and under suspicion by some agencies, whose response was to look 'inside' the home and family for causes and solutions to CSE, instead of outside and with a focus on the perpetrators of the abuse. Some parents felt they were excluded from the safeguarding process and meetings, which exacerbated their sense of the loss of their child and their sense of powerlessness. Some parents experienced a power imbalance in their interactions with some agencies, which became particularly apparent if a parent challenged the professionals' decision making, resulting in one parent being labelled as 'confrontational'.

What stood out in the analysis was that in most cases the parents were battling against their child and/or the protective services, and not against the actual perpetrators of the abuse. They had to rely on statutory services to do this, but often parents felt let down by them. As a result, trust between responding agencies and parents was often diminished and parents report their experience of CSE as being worsened by their interactions with them. Only one parent described the support from responding agencies, particularly social services and the police, positively.

The narratives show that even when their child is free from sexual exploitation, the parents reside, often for many years, in its aftermath. Suffering does not stop when the sexual exploitation does. The aftermath is shaped, predominantly, by the child's needs and is therefore unique to each parent and family, often involving a prolonged sense of dependency of the young person on their parents. Thus, living in the aftermath of CSE can be long-lasting and have significant emotional, practical and financial impacts on the parents.

The narratives provide a difficult read as they catalogue parents' pain as a result of the sexual exploitation of their child. However, they also illustrate the parents' enormous resilience in relation to their experience within and out of the world of CSE as they continue to fight to make their child safe. Most parents found sources of support, often outside of the responding agencies, which had a role in re-empowering and upskilling them with knowledge and understanding. Parents developed coping strategies, such as activism, to help them manage the sexual exploitation of their child, re-build their confidence and regain some sense of control within their lives. There is no expiry date for the effects of CSE for parents, or for their sexually exploited child, and the narratives are often bleak. However, there are glimmers of hope that shine through. This hope stems from the parents' love for their child, which forms a steely spine, shaping the narrative and holding the families together.

Chapter 9: Professionals' perceptions and experiences of parents, and of young people who have been sexually exploited

Although professionals, particularly those from statutory agencies, have not generally fared well in most of the survivors' and parents' narratives, it is not the aim here to offer an unmitigated critique of those who work in the field of CSE. It is important to acknowledge that there are many committed and highly trained professionals dealing with, and diligently working in, very difficult situations. This section will explore *how* some of the thirty professionals, from a range of CSE-related backgrounds (Police, Health, Education, and CSE specialist services), generally discussed young people and parents who have experience of CSE. This is with a view to gaining insight into how some professionals may perceive and experience both groups. It must be noted that the professionals are not talking specifically about the survivor (as young people) or parent participants in this study. The inclusion of the professionals' voice is not intended to negate the survivor or parent participants' experiences of responding agencies, but to explore some potential reasons and context for their predominantly negative experiences, from professionals' perspectives.

Professionals are the agents, or representatives, of the structural narratives and discourse regarding CSE. They are conduits of the dominant messages, attitudes and policy which become enacted in their practice and interactions and shape and inform victim/survivors' and parents' lived experiences. A purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of young people's experiences of surviving CSE *and* what it is like to parent a child who has been sexually exploited. We have heard a great deal about professionals from the survivors' and parents' perspectives because their experiences and perceptions of responding agencies are so tightly woven into their narratives. However, hearing what professionals say about their own experiences of working with young people who are being sexually exploited, and their parents, is illuminating. It enables a much deeper and broader understanding of the interplay of factors and dynamics which operate within their interactions. The professionals' narratives serve to provide a richer contextual layer for the survivors' and parents' narratives, and allow for examining these relationships from more than one viewpoint.

Professionals’ perceptions and experiences of sexually exploited young people

All the professionals talked about young people throughout their narratives because sexually exploited young people, or victims of crime, are a principal aspect of their work. *How* the professionals spoke about young people did vary, often depending on the purpose and demands of their role and approach. This was not necessarily about the actual words they used, but often about the *tone* of their discourse. For instance, a CSE worker’s main focus is to “*support*” (Nicky, CSE Therapeutic worker), “*empower*” and “*advocate*” (Sandy, CSE worker) for a young person, whereas the focus of the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is to “*build a case*” (Leila, police officer) that can be successfully prosecuted. The amount of time a professional has to build a relationship is also determined by the purpose and demands of their role. Nonetheless, all of the professionals conveyed sympathy with young people and a clear understanding of the complexities of CSE.

Emotional proximity

A notable difference between the professionals’ narratives was the level of emotional proximity they demonstrated to the young people they worked with. By emotional proximity, I mean the expression of their level of emotional engagement and connection with the young people. This ranged from being emotionally expressive (for example, sounding frustrated, outraged or passionate) to speaking in a matter of fact, distanced manner in their narratives. This is not to suggest that the professionals in the latter group care less; it is simply an observation that prompted me to think about the significance of proximity to the young people, and the impact this can have on professionals.

CSE frontline workers, for example, who work in close proximity to young people were generally more passionate about their work and the young people than the police participants. Florence and Maya (CSE workers in separate specialist CSE services) presented as fierce and loyal advocates of the young people they worked with. They expressed frustration and anger at some of the battles young people have to face once the sexual exploitation is known about. For example, Florence discussed the challenges presented by the CPS within the CJS: “*What really pisses me off is, ‘she’s* [a young person] *not a ‘credible’ witness*”. Maya demonstrates a similar passion and outrage when she talks about the upheaval and distress that can be caused for young people who are moved out of their area, often in a "*chaotic*" way, in order to protect them from the abusers (as opposed to prosecuting the abusers themselves): "*What message does that give her? She's not really that important"* (sounds angry)". The outrage and frustration when they discussed particular young people they had been involved with was palpable in their body language, hand gestures and facial expressions. They gave specific examples that demonstrated their commitment ("*I had to really fight* [for a young person]") (Maya), and the impact which emotional proximity to a young person in very difficult circumstances can have on professionals ("*I had a period of sickness which was due to stress and anxiety*" (Florence). Some workers, particularly specialist CSE workers, engaged on an emotional level and subsequently located young people very centrally in their narratives, reflecting that for these professionals the young person is their primary focus.

In contrast, other professionals' narratives had a more distanced tone. The young people were not as centrally located in these narratives, which tended to be less emotionally expressive. This is reflection of the goal of their role, which is ultimately to secure prosecutions of perpetrators of CSE related crimes, whereas the purpose of a CSE worker is more fundamentally supportive. The police participants gave many examples of working with sexually exploited young people but often talked about them as if they were a resource, one piece of a bigger picture. Lana's (police officer) comment "*when you did finally get an account from a girl that, erm, you'd been trying to tap into*" is an example of this. The phrase 'trying to tap into' the young person, as a resource, is a detached way to describe working with a sexually exploited young woman, positioning her as secondary to the process of collecting evidence to build the case against the perpetrators. It also objectifies the young person to some extent, implying she is a commodity to be utilised.

Leila (police officer), when discussing the attempted sexual assault of a young person described a perpetrator as trying "*to have some of her*". This cold description was very uncomfortable to hear and was said very casually. The phrase 'to have some' of a young person is distanced, objectifying and minimising, considering she was actually discussing the rape and exploitation of a child. The Crown prosecutors also spoke very factually about the cases of sexual exploitation they had been involved in prosecuting. It seemed that the purpose of their job, which is to make "*threshold charging decisions*" (Bridget, CPS) to ensure that the case meets "*the code for Crown prosecutions*" intentionally disallows any emotional proximity. Firstly, prosecutors seldom meet the people involved in their cases, so although they may be sympathetic, they do not experience the human connection to the people involved. This may make their job easier in some ways because prosecutors' primary purpose is to follow the law. They also have to objectively apply "*the evidential test, that is, there's got to be a realistic prospect of conviction based on the evidence, and it's got to be in the public interest to proceed to prosecute*" (Bridget, CPS), and emotional involvement could reduce their clarity and objectivity.

Person unseen

I cannot speak to whether or not these attitudes' were conveyed to any sexually exploited young people they worked with, but some narratives show that the CPS objective decision-making regarding people's subjective experiences can be harmful. For example, Florence (CSE worker) expressed her frustration regarding some young people being described as 'not credible witnesses', and Leah (CSE survivor) felt confused and hurt that her case was not proceeded by the CPS. This lack of emotional proximity relates back to the theme 'person unseen' which emerged from the survivors' narratives (see Chapter 6). This theme encapsulated their experiences and feelings of being overlooked, ignored and unseen by many of the professionals they came into contact with. The survivors also gave specific examples of experiencing poor attitudes and treatment by some professionals, though none of the professional participants disclose this occurring in their own practice.

A few professionals recognised that sometimes a young person, especially one with complex needs, can "*get lost*" (Maya, CSE worker). Maya gives an example of working to support a highly vulnerable sexually exploited young person who was in receipt of various statutory and voluntary services. She felt that the professionals involved sometimes lost "*sight of the young person*" due to "*a crisis response, which is not about her, it's about their agendas (…) about them ticking a box*". One impact of this on the young person is that they can be essentially objectified by their support package, and as Maya points out, not necessarily asked "*'What workers do you think you need?'*". Maya also said that with all this support the young person is often asked and re-asked about the abuse and exploitation they have suffered by several professionals, which had, in her experience, led to young people disengaging from the support. There is an emphasis on the necessity of multi-agency working (Berelowitz et al., 2013; Home Office, 2014), but Maya's example highlights the importance of co-ordination to make it effective and young person-centred.

Language awareness and sensitivity

A criticism of some professionals and agencies has centred on victim-blaming attitudes and language (Jay, 2014; OCC, 2012; RBSCB, 2012) but this was rare in the professionals' narratives. Any explicit examples of victim-blaming language and/or attitudes were of professionals' experiences of other people. For example, some noted that they had met parents who blamed their child for the exploitation (see next section); one professional discussed challenging such attitudes when delivering CSE training, citing an example of a delegate referring to young people who had been sexually exploited as "*feral*" and "*making a choice*" (Florence); and one CSE worker talked about "*the language of prostitution*" (Dee) being common when she started working in this field almost twenty years ago, but it is uncommon now. I got the impression that all the professionals were extremely language-aware. For example, Craig, a police officer who works on historical cases of CSE, talked about the nuances of victim/survivor terminology and described how he "*sat down with a group of survivor victims and families and asked*" which terms they prefer. This demonstrates an awareness and sensitivity that reflects an acceptance of the importance of language, which perhaps challenges unconscious biases some professionals may have, or have held, regarding young people.

This awareness was also evident when some professionals were talking about the challenges of working with sexually exploited young people. For example, Katy (manager of a CSE service) hesitantly described some young people as "*not the easiest of kids to work with*", often due to "*a real lack of trust*". Several hesitated when they were about to say something negative about the challenges, especially if it could be perceived as victim-blaming. For example, Katy was discussing the subsequent importance of therapeutic work, to help young people be "*able to start investing in themselves and making, you know, erm, decisions* *that will help them, you know, improve, erm, their lives*", quickly adding, "*not that I'm into victim blaming"*. Katy's increased use of 'you know' and 'erm' reflects her hesitancy and her self-consciousness about appearing to blame the victim. Similarly, Amelia (police officer) stated that some young people are "*really difficult to manage because their behaviour is off the wall*", quickly adding "*but it's not their fault*". This awareness of, and sensitivity to, victim-blaming language is an impact of improved training and understanding of CSE as a result of the many scandals and a narrative shift.

Many of the professionals recognised young peoples' agency and issues of exchange and consent as some of the "*fundamental things that professionals find so difficult."*(Charlotte, police officer). These issues contribute to misunderstandings of some of the behaviours that young people can appear to take part in 'willingly', which have prompted victim-blaming phrases such as 'lifestyle choice'. Florence gives an example of a fifteen year old female who:

> "Will seek out males for that attention. Erm, for example (…) she wrote her number on a napkin and gave it to a group of approximately ten adult males who were in McDonald's."

Maya (CSE worker) gives a similar example of a young woman she works with:

> "She'll go to men and say 'Aw, have you got a car? Can you take me cruising and aw, can you buy me some cigs?', and they'll be like random people so they're not necessarily targeting her and grooming her, she's targeting them and she feels like she's in control and taking advantage of them and they're just being stupid men who give her money."

Florence and Maya also explain that both these young women have a history of childhood abuse, and their decisions and actions represent their attempts to meet unmet emotional needs (see Chapter 6). Their agency is constrained by a lack of understanding about healthy relationships and love, as well as a lack of belief that they deserve them. As a result, actions like these can be one of the hardest challenges professionals face when working with some sexually exploited young people, and Maya states that "*to try and undo that is massive.*"

Professionals' perceptions and experiences of parents whose child has been sexually exploited

I intentionally did not ask the professionals about their experiences or perceptions of parents, unless they referred to them of their own accord first. This was a deliberate strategy designed to explore the professionals' levels of engagement with, and acknowledgement of, parents, and where they located them in their narratives. Of the thirty professionals, twelve either did not refer to parents at all, or only to briefly state that they did not have much contact with parents as they "*purely engage with young people*" (Jenny, CSE worker). The remaining eighteen professionals introduced parents within their narrative unprompted, discussing their experiences and perceptions to varying degrees.

The level of inclusion and amount of experience that the eighteen professional participants had of parents was determined by their job role. For example, some CSE workers' role is to work solely with the young person, although they still shared their views of parents, or the police goal is to collect evidence and build a case. CSE professionals have to work within a remit that is imposed on them by a system, set of policies, procedures and statutory and/or funding guidance. For most professionals, their involvement with parents was secondary to their involvement with young people/victims of CSE. For example Maya, a CSE worker, describes her level of involvement with parents as "*variable*", usually working with them in a secondary capacity. Florence, another CSE worker, does direct support work with both parents and young people, particularly around CSE awareness raising. Professionals in schools work primarily with the young people involved in CSE, and with their parents where possible.

Police professionals also work primarily with the young people as victims of CSE, and again, tend to work with parents in a secondary capacity if the parents "*were around*" (Lana, CSE police officer), as opposed to proactively seeking to work collaboratively with them. The sexual health workers also worked predominantly with the young people. In contrast, only one of the professionals interviewed, Abby, a family support worker in a CSE service, worked predominantly with parents, and occasionally with their sexually exploited children too. However, there was a general recognition and consensus amongst these professionals that parents "*need lots of support themselves*" which should be "*separate*" (Maya, CSE worker) to the support given to the young person to ensure everyone's needs are met, and minimise conflicts of interest for the professionals. Many also acknowledged that there is actually very little provision provided for parents, and very few professionals discussed how they signpost parents to appropriate sources of support.

The professionals who talked about their experiences of working with parents all pointed out that they have worked with "*so many different parents*" (Florence, CSE worker) identifying that parents "*vary from case to case*" (Suzie, safeguarding lead at a secondary school). This highlights the diversity of parents in terms of factors such as class or family structure, as well as the variances of parenting styles. Overall, the professionals had experience of a range of parents: some who "*think their child is just completely off the rails*" (Florence) or "*do nothing about it at all*" (Dean, safeguarding lead in a secondary school) and others who "*will do anything and everything to safeguard their child*" (Florence). Amy, a retired social worker, states that these types of parents "*were the vast, vast majority*". It is this latter description that best fits the parent participants in this study. However, it is clear from these professionals' narratives that parents are not a homogenous group and professionals have experienced, and been challenged by, parents who demonstrated, for many reasons, a lack of "*compliance*" or "*engagement*" (Suzie).

Whilst all the professionals acknowledged that they have worked with responsive and engaged parents, it is interesting to note that when positive accounts were given, they were usually sweeping. For example, Dean's earlier comment stating that parents can generally be "*fantastic*" and often "*responding well*", or capable of being "*hugely supportive*" (Suzie). Only one professional (Abby) volunteered a detailed example of how any parent they had dealt with had responded positively to agencies.

Negative perceptions of parents

Conversely, the professionals were much more likely to give detailed *negative* examples of parents' responses, which has led me to question why this is the case: is it because these experiences impact more on professionals, perhaps because they shock or frustrate them? Or is it because these negative experiences are more common? For example, Maya (CSE Worker) shared a story about working with a young person whose parents were actively "*facilitating* *the exploitation*" (Maya) because they "*rented out her* [their daughter's] *bedroom to an older guy, with her in it!*"

Dean, the safeguarding lead in a secondary school, acknowledged that whilst some parents "*are very, very good (…) we have some with a very blasé attitude*". The biggest frustration facing Dean in dealing with CSE in his school is "*the attitude of the parents, particularly of high risk girls*". He shares one example of his frustration regarding a mother of a twelve year old girl with "*high risk*" behaviour (such as posting images of herself and interacting with older men via video calling). Dean spoke with the mother "*three times, with a police officer, trying to make these risks very, very clear*" about the "*potentially life changing*" consequences of the sexual exploitation of her daughter, yet the girl's parents "*still let her take her phone to her bedroom at night*". Dean states that this "*amazes*" him and it is clear in his narrative that he struggles to understand how some parents seem to choose not to engage in safeguarding their child. This adds to the sense of frustration that permeates this section of his narrative. It is clear he feels that he and his team are doing all *they* can to safeguard children within the boundaries of their professional roles but he recognised that "*the risks happen when they're out and about. Particularly on evenings because some of these kids are out late at night …because at home, there's no boundaries*." Although Dean's narrative is more heavily weighted towards his negative experiences of parents, he does share that at times he has felt "*quite taken aback and surprised (…) when they become involved*" by passing on information or concerns to the school to help safeguard their child and how "*some parents will allow us to intervene and help and support where necessary*." Dean's 'surprise' suggests he has quite low expectations of parents.

Professionals identify some parents' lack of engagement as "*a huge barrier*" (Suzie). Dean talks about some of the minimising or denial based responses he has had from some parents when he has raised concerns with them, such as "'*well, they all do it these days, don't they?*'". This is a response he feels he has to continually challenge. Dean talked about some parents just "*not engaging at all*" and identified issues in the families such as "*alcohol problems, domestic violence problems, so they are families that are not functioning in what you might say, in the normal way*", and cited "*poor parenting, lack of control over the kids*" as serious challenges to safeguarding these children. These are all issues that have been identified in wider literature too (DCSF, 2010; DfE, 2014, 2017; Scott & Skidmore, 2006). Some professionals also highlight some parents' "*mistrust of agencies*" (Suzie), exemplified in decisions such as never calling "*the police because they aren't 'grassers'*" (Florence), as being a factor in some parents' levels of engagement with services. On the other hand, Lana gives an example of one father, "*a professional burglar*" who "*hates the police*", being "*totally supportive of the work that we were doing with his daughter in terms of keeping her safe*".

Negative experiences of parents were echoed by the police professionals involved in a large CSE investigation who explained that only a few of the victims "*had families that gave a damn*" (Leila, police officer). Another described a "*range of responses*" from parents: "*some that couldn't give a rat's whatsit*" as a result of having "*their own issues to deal with around alcohol, drug abuse, too many children, no work*", to some who were "*actually quite grateful that we were taking a problem away from them*" (Lana, police officer). Both comments suggest that Lana perceives parents as generally passive, begging the question of how professionals can be supported to engage with more disengaged parents and build more trusting relationships.

Although many professionals expressed sympathy to varying degrees with parents, almost all indicated a generally negative perception or low expectations of parents, either explicitly through accounts of their experiences, or more implicitly in how they chose to speak about them. The majority transmitted frustration, judgement and implied blame of parents within their narratives, echoing Scott and Skidmore's (2006) concept of 'problematic parenting' discussed in Chapter 6. The professionals communicate this using a range of terms and phrases such as "*poor parenting*" (Suzie), "*lack of parental control*" (Dean), "*chaotic background*" (Carol, sexual health worker), "*dysfunctional family*" (Maeve, nurse in a police CSE unit), care-givers having their own "*massive needs around health, mental health, substance dependency*" (Charlotte, police officer); "*the parents not caring about 'em*" (Rosie, sexual health nurse), "*mistrust*" (Suzie), and a "*fear*" that services might take their child away (Jackie, school nurse).

As a result, it is very difficult to discern how much of the professionals' perceptions of parents is based on their direct experiences of them, and the extent to which that creates negative stereotypes and low expectations of parents, which may colour their interactions. It is also important to note the constraints that professionals work within, which are largely resource-based, particularly in terms of funding and time. Negative perceptions and value judgements of parents exist but none of the professionals reflected on how they may or may not transmit some of these attitudes to parents.

Abby, a family support worker in a CSE service who works directly and primarily with parents, and externally to statutory agencies, does reflect on how some professionals may transmit negative attitudes to parents. She states that she had witnessed, "*on a daily basis*", some professionals at meetings "*automatically*" and "*inadvertently*" put the blame on parents, and "*knock parents down*" by asking them questions like, "'*Why are you allowing your child to go out at midnight?*'". This is echoed by Katy, a CSE service manager who thinks "*parents are automatically treated with suspicion".* Both women use the word 'automatically' which suggests some unconscious bias against parents that may stem from policy and negative experiences which inform their perceptions. Abby echoes this when she discusses the "*mind-set*" of many social workers she has worked with who are "*used to dealing with parents that don't look after their kids properly"* and are "*used to the parent needing to change the way they look after their kids*":

> **Abby**: "You know, so straight away that puts the blame on the parents which then alienates parents because they don't wanna work with someone who's blaming them 'cos their child's been exploited".

Abby strongly suggests that it is this kind of treatment that causes parents to "*disengage completely from services*" which, as already discussed (see Chapter 8), is counter-productive to the safeguarding of children. Abby's observations not only provide a contrast to some of the other professionals' accounts and views of parents, they also offer support to how the parent participants experienced some responding agencies.

Many of the professionals also make reference to many parents who "*don't understand*" (Florence) CSE, a finding echoed in wider research (YouGov, 2013), identifying it as a barrier to safeguarding their child. However, only a few of the professionals identify this lack of knowledge as a support need for parents rather than a barrier, or endeavour to help meet it, either themselves or by signposting parents to an appropriate source of support. Steph (a learning mentor) runs a "*parenting course*" which targets "*the vulnerable families*", which some families may find helpful and others insulting. However, the fact that the school has recognised a need for some family-based provision suggests motivation to work in collaboration with parents and families, that they do not perceive the vulnerable young person as existing in a vacuum. Some professionals recognise that "*once the parents have actually 'got it' and fully understand it, erm, nine out of ten are really, really supportive and really work well*" (Abby). This illustrates the impact that improving parents' knowledge and understanding of CSE can have on safeguarding young people more effectively and highlights the role that professionals can play in facilitating this.

Positive perceptions of parents

A few professionals demonstrated a contrasting view of parents and their approach offers some answers to the question of how professionals can be supported to learn how to engage with and support parents. Abby demonstrates emotional proximity to the parents she primarily works with, which is influenced by the fact that her own daughter was sexually exploited (which is the reason she gives for working in this area). Angie, the manager at a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) which provides a specialised, one-to-one support service to meet the needs of victims of rape and sexual assault, also demonstrates emotional proximity. Abby states that "*in the three and a half years I've been doing this, I haven't come across one parent that doesn't care, not one*" but concedes:

> "There's a few families I've worked with where there's been a lot of kind of chaos, so there's been a lot of other stuff going on and (…) [some] parents don't do what they should be doing (…) they put their own needs before kids but that's a fact of life (…) that is a minority".

Abby's approach to parents is empathetic and demonstrates a deep understanding of the parents' perspective and often echoes some of the insights of the parent participants, such as parents feeling blamed and judged by some professionals. She does not seem to share the sense of frustration towards parents who ‘get it wrong’ in some way that other professionals report feeling. Angie works directly with young victims of sexual violence and occasionally works with their parents. Drawing on her counselling background, she identifies “*empathy*” and “*genuineness*” as important characteristics to building trust with victims *and* their families, whenever appropriate. Like Abby, Angie recognises the importance of building a relationship based on trust, and her role within that as being “*key*” to supporting victims and their parents. She describes her one-to-one support work as “*a relationship of two, for the benefit of one*”.

Although Abby openly admits to experiencing challenges with some parents’ responses to the sexual exploitation of their child, for example parents blaming their child for the exploitation, (“*I’ve had parents calling their child slags and all sorts*”), her response is forgiving and understanding that the relationship between the parent and child has “*just completely and utterly broken down* [and] *both are that angry and are that upset and, you know, and immersed in their own grief that the, you know, they can’t even talk to one another properly.*” This supports both findings of wider research (CEOP, 2011; PACE, 2014a) and the parents’ narratives that discuss conflict and relationship problems with their sexually exploited child. The difference between Abby’s and Angie’s approach and response to parents and other professionals’ approach is the value they place on the need to build trusting and supportive relationships. It is clear from both narratives that they believe that when this is done, and parents are supported and “*actually understand why the kid’s behaving in the way (…) it’s easier for ‘em then to start being able to see what they need to do then as parents to pull ‘em back and to try and be able, you know, to reduce the risks*”.

Amy, a retired social worker, also supports the inclusion of parents in sexual exploitation cases. She began working in CSE services in the 1980s when this particular form of child abuse was commonly called ‘child prostitution’, and “*always included parents*” in child protection strategy meetings, “*although it wasn’t usual to do that*”. Amy led her team and recognised early on that whenever possible “*it was really important to actually involve the parents ‘cos parents are just a mine of information*”. These professionals’ distinctive approach to parents are more inclusive and empathetic, and in alignment with that of PACE.

Concluding comments

This inclusion of professionals' narratives has illuminated and helped contextualise the survivor and parent narratives by offering insights into how professionals perceive and experience young people and parents with experience of CSE. It also evidences the good practice and commitment of many professionals, who often work in challenging and frustrating situations. The narratives indicate that how professionals perceive and experience working with sexually exploited young people and parents of exploited children differs. It is very much determined by the purpose of their job role and the agency they work in, and this has a bearing on the nature of the relationship they may or may not develop. This was transmitted in their narrative, explicitly by the words and phrases they used, but also more implicitly by the tone of the discourse. Overall, most professionals, regardless of their job role, spoke more positively about sexually exploited young people than they did about parents of a sexually exploited child.

Professionals' narratives regarding working with young people were generally positive and supportive, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the complexities of CSE. However, there were also differences, shaped by the job role. Professionals whose role is to support, empower and advocate for young people (for example CSE workers) tended to demonstrate more emotional proximity to the young people they worked with as a result of their "*young person centred approach*" (Maya) building trust-based relationships, and young people were more centrally located within these narratives. Conversely, in Chapter 6, survivors spoke more positively of professionals who took this approach to them, describing workers who listened to them and who did what they said they were going to do as having a very positive impact on them.

Other professionals, particularly those from a legal background, tended to be more distanced in their language and tone, with some occasionally portraying the young person as a means to an end in their work. Young people were not centrally located in these narratives: the story of an investigation, procedure or investigative strategy was the focus. This is because the young people were only one piece, albeit an important one, of a bigger picture. It is possible that this translates to some young people feeling unseen, as described by the survivor participants in Chapter 6. However, all the professionals demonstrated an awareness and sensitivity to the language they used when discussing young people, and many were careful not to be perceived as victim-blaming. I believe this is a direct result of the change in discourse and narrative surrounding CSE, from victim-blaming to victim-centred, which has led to improved training and increased knowledge and understanding.

Parents did not generally fare as well as young people in the professionals' narratives, and parent-blaming language was present in some of them. All except one professional tended only to work with parents in a secondary capacity, if at all. For some professionals, working with parents of a sexually exploited child was beyond the remit of their role. Although most professionals expressed some sympathy for parents, and acknowledged that parents do need support, only a few discussed what they do to support parents or signpost them to other sources. Consequently, overall, parents were more likely to be discussed in negative terms than young people. Feelings of frustration and blame towards parents often permeated some professionals' narratives, and parents were sometimes positioned as passive or active barriers that made the professionals' jobs harder. Only one professional demonstrated emotional proximity to the parents she worked with, expressing feelings of empathy, support and advocacy.

All the professionals encountered a diverse range of parents: those actively abusing, or complicit in the abuse of, their child; those who are resistant to agency support and/or the idea that their child is being sexually exploited; and those who are proactive and supportive. Yet almost all of the professionals spent more time in their narratives describing their negative experiences of parents. Most of the professionals cited 'problematic parenting' as a factor in the sexual exploitation of a child and mistrust of parents to engage, comply and understand CSE was an undercurrent of many of their narratives. This mirrors the parents' mistrust of professionals discussed in Chapter 8, highlighting a gap between the two groups that actually should be working collaboratively to safeguard young people.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

I have captured the transformative nature of understandings and meanings ascribed to CSE as they have been unfolding since the 1990s, and are currently unfolding, by addressing, and answering the three research questions set out in Chapter 1:

4. How have dominant narratives of CSE been constructed over the last thirty-plus years, and in what ways have understandings changed and evolved?
5. How have those narratives impacted on personal experiences, and the way in which survivors and non-abusive parents make sense of those experiences?
6. What can be learnt from personal experiences of sexual exploitation, and how can they contribute an improved understanding of CSE which translates into policy and practice?

I have offered a temporal map of the emergence and widespread recognition of CSE as a particular form of child sexual abuse over the last thirty years in England, and this matters now because our understandings of CSE are still under construction. I have charted the perceptions and understandings of CSE through narrative constructions that have largely been communicated through statutory, legal, policy and practice discourses and responses. This is important because there is significant evidence in the wider literature, and the survivor and parents participants' data, which clearly shows that *how* narratives of child sexual abuse have been constructed has had direct and often dire consequences on sexually exploited young people and parents involved (Coffey, 2014; Jay, 2014; Kosaraju, 2009; OCC, 2012; PACE, 2016; Pearce, 2009).

Utilising gender analysis and feminist methodology within a narrative theory framework, I framed the world of CSE as an archetypal patriarchal context, whereby *predominantly* girls and young women are sexually exploited and abused for male pleasure, power affirmation and economic gain within a wider context of violence and abuse against girls and young women (CPS, 2017a; Jay, 2014; RBSCB, 2012), and this is reflected in the narratives of the survivors and parents. A journey analogy emerged from all the narratives that charted the survivors’ and parents’ movement into, within and (for some) out of CSE. These journeys are at the very core of this study and I hope that their voices will become part of the discourse which informs, shapes and develops understandings of the impact of CSE. The current position of parents within CSE narrative, discourse and policy is largely marginalised, thus their data begins to fill a significant gap.

The use of a narrative interview method has enabled an open story-telling of the survivors’ and parents’ experiences and this has produced extremely rich, in-depth data, which details the lived experience of sexual exploitation from different, but related perspectives. Of particular value is the depth of insight that all the narratives give in relation to what it *feels* like to experience sexual exploitation as a victim/survivor, and as a parent witnessing the exploitation of their child. The data from both groups also offers some interesting temporal insights into the construction and experiences of CSE over the last thirty years or so, all in one place, and captures the participants in the action of making-sense of their experiences as they talked about them. I also hope that aspects of the thesis will contribute to a consistent understanding of CSE, and will be of interest to practitioners and policy makers, as well as contributing to the existing body of academic work.

Definitional issues of CSE

The current narrative construction of CSE has roots in many other powerful narratives and ideologies that exist within a patriarchal, heteronormative socio-cultural context (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014), which all operate to shape and influence its construction (Barthes, 1977; Bruner, 2004; Foucault, 1977). A theoretical premise has been recognising the power of narratives and discourse, on both structural and individual levels, as a sense-making tool which reveals how something is understood. Thus, once the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people seeped into the collective consciousness around the 1970s and 1980s, sense had to be made of it, which informed the response to it (DCSF, 2009; DfE, 2011, 2017). The problem was that this form of child sexual abuse was (mis)named ‘child prostitution’, a victim-blaming misnomer, which shaped the attitudes of professionals whose role it was to protect children. At best this misnomer marginalised abused children and young people and at worst it stigmatised and criminalised them (DoH, 2000; Jay, 2014). This narrative and discourse were transmitted into law, policy and practice. It prioritised ‘prostitute’ above the status of child, implying a type of labour for economic gain on the child’s part (Goddard et al., 2005), and has allowed some professional, policy and legal responses to overlook its abusive and exploitative nature. Furthermore, this response has only served to protect the abusers and subjugate the victim/survivors and parents.

An examination of how CSE is being understood and responded to revealed that inconsistent definitions and classifications of CSE inhibit accurate recording of data. It is widely agreed that CSE is a form of CSA, yet it remains a highly complex problem. For example, CSE is not an offence in itself, but a culmination of a myriad of other offences. This means it is extremely difficult to consistently classify and to gain a clear and accurate view of its scale and prevalence in the UK, which creates a “fractured response” (OCC, 2012:24). Thus, a central barrier to reaching a consensus about what constitutes CSE is the issue of how it can be consistently differentiated from other forms of child sexual abuse. Beckett et al. (2017) proposed a single factor - exchange - as the key distinguishing factor and core dynamic that lifts CSE into its own category.

However, I believe that this approach is too limited, and the term exchange does not fully capture the nature of many interactions that occur within CSE. The term ‘extortion’ is often much more apt. After unpicking their suggestion it appeared that what actually distinguishes ‘child sexual exploitation’ from ‘child sexual abuse’ is what the perpetrator gains from it (Beckett et al., 2017). I made the case that multiple factors (e.g. going missing; trafficking; multiple sites of abuse; and incapacitation using drugs and/or alcohol), when present at the same time, should differentiate CSE from other forms of CSA. I strongly advocate that the age of the victims, who are predominantly teenagers (CEOP, 2011; OCC; 2012; Jay, 2014), should be given more emphasis, suggesting the term Adolescent Sexual Exploitation is a more appropriate name because the age of the victim does matter in our constructions of CSE. Age is a marker that evokes certain expectations and assumptions. It matters in law, and it matters in terms of how victims of CSE perceive themselves and have been responded to. For example, if a six year old child was given alcohol so they were heavily intoxicated, taken to a party and gang-raped, would any professional have any doubt as to what this was, and how to respond? I strongly doubt it, yet, when the same thing has happened to a 14 year old there has been doubt (Jay, 2014; PACE, 2016), and the motivations, actions and credibility of the teenage victim have all been called onto question. Age matters.

Key contributions regarding definitional issues of CSE

- Narratives of CSE are currently under reconstruction and although achieving definitional consensus of CSE is challenging and problematic, this is an opportunity for us to ‘get it right’.
- Age (adolescence) matters within CSE and should be given more emphasis and consideration as a way to differentiate CSE from CSA. The use of the term Adolescent Sexual Exploitation may be a more accurate one and needs to be tested.
- Narrative constructions of CSE have emerged within a specific patriarchal, heteronormative, socio-cultural context which has determined how CSE has been understood and responded to.
- Victim/survivors and parents have not been able to contribute to constructions of CSE and a narrative shift is now required which includes their experiential expertise.

What we can learn from survivors of CSE

Central both to narrative constructions of CSE and issues around the age of sexually exploited young people are the concepts of agency, exchange and consent. Agency relates to age because the older we get, the more agency we tend to have, and this has been recognised by responding agencies who have misinterpreted a young person’s agency as making ‘lifestyle choices’, thus negating the abuse they are suffering (Jay, 2014). Exchange is often perceived as the result of a young person’s agency because they often receive *something* in exchange for their involvement in CSE, indicating a transactional aspect. Harper & Scott (2005:41) discuss this in terms of young people making “constrained choices”, which is helpful and a shift away from victim-blaming discourse towards a more victim-centred discourse.

Agency and exchange share a symbiotic relationship and gaining a clearer understanding of them, and of their role within a CSE context, can only improve responses from safeguarding organisations. After analysing the survivors’ narratives, I argued that a main driver of young people's decisions, choices and actions/inaction (i.e. their agency) within CSE is a maladaptive way to try to meet some of their unmet, predominantly emotional needs. This is an active process in itself, but one based upon extremely flawed scripts, compounded by a lack of choice due to powerful contextual factors underpinned by pervasive gendering processes. Inherent to that search is the concept of exchange - in order to receive the thing they need, they would *have to* give something. The phrase 'have to' is important as it denotes a lack of real and free choice, highlighting the constrained agency that surrounds exploited young people. The strength and impact of the unmet emotional needs of vulnerable young people should not be underestimated or overlooked when trying to understand their perspectives, experience and sense-making, and the concepts of agency and exchange within CSE should be understood in relation to a young person's search to meet their unmet needs. Furthermore, the process that underpins the dynamic of exchange is very often akin to extortion, and using this term to describe these interactions, often inherent in sexual exploitation, further calls into question the use of the terms exchange and consent.

Gaining a clearer understanding of these concepts is important because misunderstandings of them have caused significant confusion and ultimately the misnaming of CSE as 'child prostitution'. Furthermore, some of the survivors' personal struggles in terms of recovery from their abuse relate to their own recognition of their agency, which tends to manifest as self-blame. Finally, not recognising, or overlooking the agency, particularly of adolescents, has created flawed responses by some safeguarding professionals, who need to be fully cognisant of what drives agency in young people. We need to recognise and understand that their agency is very often constrained by structural factors, unmet emotional needs and, in many cases, a lack of maturity to cope with and navigate such experiences.

There has been a substantial focus on understanding the role of consent within abusive contexts such as CSE (Coy et al., 2013; Pearce, 2013; Swann, 2000). This is because it has become an accepted part of CSE discourse, stemming back to the 'child prostitute' narrative. However, I advocate that the narrative construction of child sexual abuse as 'child sexual exploitation' should not focus on debates about consent. CSE has been established and agreed as a form of sexual abuse of a child (anyone under the age of 18 years) (DfE, 2017; CPS, 2013), and so consent must be irrelevant. This is particularly pressing in terms of CSE because inclusion of consent as an issue or question to be debated can, and has, somehow legitimised the abuse (Barry, 1979; Jay, 2014). There should not be discussion as to whether a sexually exploited young person 'consented' to the abuse because they accepted something from the abuser; the bottom line should be that a sexually exploited child/young person *cannot* consent to their abuse.

Through my readings of the survivors' narratives, what came to mind was that as young women who were being sexually exploited, they were compliant and they complied. They 'went along with', conformed and submitted to something because they perceived it as the 'best' or only option at that time. Compliance, within the complex context of CSE, is a much more fitting term than consent, and enables a more nuanced understanding of the moment-by-moment decisions a young person makes when they feel threatened or coerced. At this point, it is no longer an issue of consent, which is willingly and freely agreeing to something, but of compliance, which stems from submitting to another's request in order to survive (Barry, 1979). Thus, compliance is not consent.

CSE does not exist in a vacuum, it is a product of a socio-cultural, heteronormative, patriarchal context, integral to which is a spectrum of violence against women and girls (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014; CPS, 2017a). The key findings from this data highlighted the ubiquitous nature of CSE and how it invades spaces perceived as safe. Related to this is cultural grooming, which I argued is pervasive and is closely linked to the extensive sexualisation of children and young people that floods society. Gendered messages which hyper-masculinise males and objectify and sexualise women exist throughout society but are often intensified in spaces utilised predominantly by young people, such as schools and social media (Gill, 2007; Papadopoulus, 2010). These messages of gender and sexual socialisation teach young people how to 'perform' their gender. As such, cultural grooming has become a normative process of gendering. It primes young people for exploitation, helps create the necessary conditions which enable interpersonal grooming, and desensitises young people to sexual violence, which teaches them to be compliant, all of which was evidenced in the survivors' narratives. It is incredibly difficult to stop these processes, which are the products of a variety of vested interests. However, one way is to continue to tackle this wider context and to empower young people to question and challenge these messages in order to, albeit slowly and gradually, change the narrative

Key contributions of the survivors' narratives

- Each of the survivors experienced her own version of CSE as a result of a complex interplay of individual, structural and relational factors.
- All the survivors' narratives provide evidence that they experienced cultural grooming which essentially taught them how to 'perform' their gender: essentially to be submissive, to please and to be compliant.
- All of the survivors had predominantly negative experiences of responding agencies, reporting that they often felt unseen and unsupported.
- Concepts of agency and exchange, which often lead to 'tolerable exchanges' within CSE, should be understood in relation to a young person's search to meet their unmet needs.
- There is a need to distinguish between consent and compliance, clarifying understandings of each and a promotion of the message that compliance is not consent.

What we can learn from non-abusive parents whose child has been sexually exploited outside the family

The parents highlighted their unique and distinct role in response to CSE and all the parents demonstrate an enormous commitment to, and love for, their child. The point was made that parents are still there for the child in the aftermath of CSE, long after responding agencies 'close the case'. In fact, prolonged dependency was a common experience whereby parents believed they were much more heavily involved in their child's life (as a young adult) as a result of the CSE. A further aspect of the aftermath was a sense of injustice, impaired freedom and safety for both the parents and their child, illustrating there is not an expiry date for the effects of CSE.

However, parents' perception of their position is not mirrored in policy, discourse and practice (Barnardo's, 2014; HM Government, 2015; PACE, 2014b), which marginalises their experiences and voices. Parents do not have an established place in the dominant discourse, which is fundamentally parent-minimising. When parents are present they are either ‘lumped in’ with other agencies or referred to in terms of assessment of their ‘parental capacity’ (DfE, 2014; HM Government, 2015). The parents’ narratives illustrate that parent minimising has trickled down to frontline practice, with six out of the seven parents reporting predominantly negative experiences of responding agencies, which made the whole experience of CSE even worse. This was also reflected in the professionals’ data, which showed they were more likely to be negative about the parents they came into contact with, and despite expressions of sympathy for them, implied blame was present in the examples they gave.

Furthermore, there is substantial evidence in wider literature (see Delap, 2015; DCSF, 2010; PACE, 2014b, 2016) and the parents’ narratives that the current child protection system does not respond positively to parents whose child is being sexually exploited, and furthermore there are few sources of support or treatment for families during or after the abuse (PACE, 2014b; Sesan et al., 1986). Like the survivors, the parents’ narratives speak of often feeling unseen, overlooked, judged and blamed. The worst examples were parents presenting their experiences with professionals as a battle they were engaged in, with those parents experiencing a form of battle fatigue and deep mistrust of the agencies. These two groups ought to be on the ‘same side’, and it is in all of their and, most importantly, the exploited young person’s best interests that this should be the case. However, the participants’ narratives strongly indicate that very often this is not the case. CSE essentially triumphs on the breakdown of positive relationships which serve to isolate a young person and boost the perpetrators’ power and influence.

CSE can have a traumatic impact on parents, and some identified themselves as secondary victims, experiencing a loss of power and control over their own lives. Almost all of the parents reported a lack of knowledge and understanding of CSE, and thought it was something that happened to other, ‘dysfunctional’ families. This indicates a need to challenge stereotypes about potential victims of CSE and their families, and that parents need to be upskilled. Many of the parents experienced disenfranchised grief (Doka, 2002)**,** as their sense of loss was not always recognised. Many of the losses experienced are intangible and relate to the parents’ loss of their role and identity as parents, and their hopes, dreams and expectations for their child’s and family’s future. The parents convey their grief as they speak about this, and sadness seeps from the narratives. The parents became indelibly changed by their enforced role as involuntary witnesses to their child’s experiences of extreme sexual violence and its many consequences, such as addiction, unwanted pregnancy, self-harm and extreme behavioural and personality changes. Further impacts which CSE can have on parents, families and relationships range from affecting mental and physical health to more practical issues such as employment and finances.

The result is that parents are left feeling disempowered, even victimised within the statutory child protection system (PACE, 2016), which can inadvertently marginalise non-abusive parents. The narratives highlight that this can exacerbate the profound trauma that parents are already experiencing (PACE, 2014a; Regehr, 1990). The problem is that child protection discourse and practice is premised upon the assumption that child abuse tends to take place within the home/family environment and parental capacity is an intrinsic aspect of safeguarding assessment (HM Government, 2015). However, in *most* cases the risks and threats to children’s safety lie outside the family and home, but this difference is not yet explicitly acknowledged, which results in parents feeling under suspicion and judged. These negative impacts are perhaps underestimated or minimised by some professionals, as the parents consistently felt unsupported and unrecognised by agency responses.

Thus the narratives suggest that very often professionals do not tend to engage with parents in ways the parent participants’ suggest they need to be engaged with, and often parents do not engage in the manner which professionals may expect them to. This amounts to a borderland of sorts, an impasse which can be characterised by a lack of, or breakdown in, mutual trust between parents and professionals that if bridged, could improve the safeguarding of sexually exploited young people and improve support and outcomes for them and their parents. Mutual mistrust is a powerful undercurrent that can occur between parents and professionals, particularly from and towards statutory agencies, and is likely to be the culmination of a range of factors that shape and influence the very human and individual nature of their interactions, often in dire and emotive circumstances. These factors are likely to include the pervasive influence of child protection discourse and practice, which is predicated on the assumption that child abuse *tends* to take place within the family.

Key contributions of the non-abusive parents' narratives

- CSE can affect middle-class, stable families in affluent areas, which challenges common stereotypes.
- Parenting a sexually exploited child is traumatic. It pushes the parameters of 'normal' parenting of a teenager and parents become involuntary witnesses to the impact of abuse on their child.
- Statutory literature tends to minimise the unique role of parents and positions them on the margins of safeguarding.
- Parents are more likely to be talked about by some professionals in negative terms than sexually exploited young people are.
- Parents' lack of knowledge about CSE should be considered as a support need and they need to be supported in a non-judgemental and inclusive way.
- Parents were especially vulnerable when they first found out about the sexual exploitation.
- Parents can experience disenfranchised grief**,** as their sense of loss is not always recognised.
- There is 'no expiry date' for parents of a sexually exploited child, and often parents experience prolonged dependency of their child in the aftermath of CSE.
- Six out of seven parents said that responding agencies exacerbated their experience of parenting a sexually exploited child.

What we can learn from professionals

The purpose and role of professionals, and the agencies they work in, tends to determine how they perceive and experience sexually exploited young people and parents. How professionals spoke about them differed both explicitly and implicitly, but overall most professionals, regardless of their job role, spoke more positively about young people than they did about parents of a sexually exploited child. For example, professionals whose role is to support and empower young people demonstrated more emotional proximity than professionals whose role is more distanced from them. Occasionally, some objectified the young person, portraying them as a means to an end in their work, and it is possible that this translates to some young people feeling unseen, as described by the survivor participants. It was noticeable that when discussing young people, all the professionals demonstrated an awareness and sensitivity to the language they used. They appeared conscious not to be perceived as being victim-blaming and I believe this to be a direct result of the change in discourse and narrative surrounding CSE, from victim-blaming to victim-centred, which has led to improved training and increased knowledge and understanding.

In contrast, parents were more likely to be discussed in more negative terms than young people, and parent-blaming language was present in most of the professionals' narratives, with 'problematic parenting' often being referred to. Evidence of parent-minimising discourse was present as parents were sometimes positioned as passive or active barriers that made the professionals' jobs harder. I believe this to be a reflection of the marginalisation and position of parents in the current narrative construction of CSE. Professionals discussed their experience of working with a diverse range of parents but tended to focus on their negative experiences, with only one, who worked primarily with parents, demonstrating emotional proximity to the parents she worked with.

There has been a groundswell of recognition of CSE, and the wider context of violence against women and girls, in public, policy, legal and importantly, victim/survivor discourse. Consequently, there is better training which is increasingly survivor led, more resources, and a palpable desire to improve understandings. However, although there are pockets of good practice regarding parents around the country, there is substantial evidence that the child protection system generally does not respond well to these parents and there are few sources of support or treatment for families (PACE, 2014b; Sesan et al., 1986). There now needs to be a narrative shift towards the inclusion of parents. This could be achieved by: raising the profile of non-abusive parents as safeguarding partners; supporting these parents to develop the skills and knowledge to become effective safeguarding partners; explicitly and proactively including them in multi-agency working via a shift in CSE discourse from parent-minimising to parent-focused; and training professionals to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to work more effectively with parents. In the words of Lisa (parent):

> “They [the victims] should have everything thrown at them support wise but I think there should be some support in place for parents at the same time.”

Key contributions regarding the professionals’ data

- The level of emotional proximity felt by professionals influences how they speak about the young people they work with.
- All the professionals demonstrated language sensitivity when discussing young people, taking care not to be perceived as victim-blaming, arguably as a direct result of the change in discourse and narrative surrounding CSE, from victim-blaming to victim-centred, and a new ‘authorised vocabulary.
- Overall, parents were more likely to be discussed in more negative terms than young people, and parents were sometimes positioned as passive or active barriers that made the professionals’ jobs harder. Most of the professionals cited ‘problematic parenting’ as a factor in the sexual exploitation of a child.
- Professionals’ mistrust of parents to engage and comply with them and to understand CSE was an undercurrent of many of their narratives and mirrors the parents’ mistrust of professionals.

Moving forward: key messages for practitioners

- Safeguarding organisations need to be fully cognisant of the concepts of agency and exchange within CSE, which should be understood in relation to a young person’s search to meet their unmet needs. The influence of this search should not be underestimated or overlooked by professionals.
- Young people, victims/survivors of CSE and parents need support to understand the differences between compliance and consent, and that compliance is *not* consent.
- Parents are at their most vulnerable when they first learn that their child is being sexually exploited and their lack of knowledge of CSE should be responded to as a support need, not as a criticism or failing. These are

opportunities for professionals to build trust and set the tone of the working relationship.

- Ten out of eleven of the survivor and parent participants had predominantly negative experiences of responding agencies. A significant reason that perpetrators of CSE are successful is because they thrive in the conflict and miscommunication between victims, parents and professionals. To combat this, and to safeguard more effectively, it is necessary to create a more united front based on mutual trust. The clear message to professionals from the survivors' and parents' narratives is always to: See, Hear, Believe and Care.

Finally, the narratives surrounding CSE are important. The impact they have had, and continue to have, on lived experiences for victim/survivors and challenge a whole myriad of other narratives which feed into and serve to facilitate sexual violence, such as the cultural grooming of young people. Thus there is a lot of work to be done, and also undone. Fran articulately makes this point and so I finish with her words:

> "It might seem like a pipe dream to some people but I believe if we change attitudes, if we change the culture that girls and young women are sexual objects, when we start tackling porn and the impact on children and young people, when we talk to young boys and make 'em sensitive, loving and allow them to be like that, things will change." (Fran, a survivor).

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Websites

www.buildagirlproject.com

www.everydaysexism.com

www.iicsa.org.uk

www.metoomvmt.org

www.reclaim.org.uk/reign

www.timesupnow.com

Appendix 1

Basic data Collection

Interviewee code:

Interview date:

Please complete the form below. This is just to gather basic data from you for the research in order to provide a general overview of the people involved. Some of it will be used by the researcher for a brief, anonymous, description of the participants involved. Many thanks.

****

Participant Role in the Research:

Profession: ____

Gender: ____

Age: ____

Ethnicity: ____

Disability: ____

Time spent involved in CSE: ________________________________

Age at involvement: ____

(Year) From: ____________________ To ________________________

Appendix 2a

Study information sheet for adult survivors of CSE

Research study: Hearing different voices, collecting different stories**.**

Who I am:

Thank you for considering being involved in this research. My name is Theresa Redmond and I am conducting research for a PhD at the University of Hull into people's knowledge, understandings, perceptions and experiences of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Throughout the research I will be talking to a range of

The study:

An important aspect of the research is focused on gaining a real sense and understanding of the actual experiences, views and feelings of survivors of CSE as there has been very little research or attention given to this group of people, particularly in terms on direct, primary research. I feel very strongly that the real 'experts' in CSE are the survivors of it and it is their voice that needs to be heard the most in order to inform change and policy.

Key things you need to know:

If you are interested in taking part in this research,

- I would like to interview you at a time and place of your choosing.
- The interview will be informal, will last about 60 - 90 minutes, and I will ask you to talk freely about your understanding of CSE.
- I will have to audio record the interview to help me with my notes.
- What you choose to share with me is completely up to you.
- It will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous throughout.
- You will be able to stop the interview at any point if you feel the need to and you can withdraw yourself from the research without any explanation if you wish to.

What I'm going to do with your information:

- The information will be integrated into a PhD thesis, other related academic publications, conferences and training materials.

If you have any questions about being involved in this research please feel free to contact me:

T.Redmond@2014.hull.ac.uk

Mobile: 07513 869 369

Yours sincerely,

Theresa Redmond

Appendix 2b

Study information sheet for parents taking part, whose children have been involved in child sexual exploitation.

Research study: Hearing different voices, collecting different narratives

Who I am:

Thank you for considering being involved in this research. My name is Theresa Redmond and I am conducting research for a PhD at the University of Hull exploring people's knowledge, understandings, perceptions and experiences of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Throughout the research I will be talking to a range of people, with either professional or personal experience, of CSE, from parents and young people to specialist project workers, social workers and police. The aim of this research is to show how different groups of people experience, understand and respond to CSE and to perhaps develop and improve practice and communication between these different groups.

The study:

One aspect of the research is focused on gaining a real sense and understanding of the actual experiences, views and feelings of parents who have experienced CSE through their child's involvement. There has been relatively little research on the experiences of the parents of children who have been exploited and it is hoped that your contributions will assist in strengthening the parent voice and agenda.

Key things you need to know:

If you are interested in taking part in this research,

- I would like to interview you at a time and place of your choosing.
- The interview will be informal and I will ask you to talk freely about your understanding of CSE.
- The interview may last up to 90 minutes (the timings are flexible to suit you).
- I will have to audio record the interview to help me with my notes.
- What you choose to share with me is completely up to you.
- It will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous throughout.
- You will be able to stop the interview at any point if you feel the need to and you can withdraw yourself from the research without any explanation if you wish to.

What I'm going to do with your information:

- The information will be integrated into a PhD thesis, other related academic publications conferences and training materials. It is hoped that the research will increase a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the experiences of the people involved, in different capacities, within CSE.

If you have any questions about being involved in this research please feel free to contact me:

T.Redmond@2014.hull.ac.uk

Mobile: 07513 869369

Yours sincerely,

Theresa Redmond

Appendix 2c
Information sheet for profess

Hearing different voices, collecting different narratives: the world of child sexual exploitation explored from the viewpoints of the people involved.

Who I am:

Thank you for considering being involved in this research. My name is Theresa Redmond and I am conducting research for a PhD at the University of Hull exploring people's knowledge, understandings, perceptions and experiences of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Throughout the research I will be talking to a range of people, with either professional or personal experience of CSE, such as parents and young people to specialist project workers, social workers and police. The aim of this research is to understand how different groups of people experience, understand and respond to CSE and to perhaps develop and improve practice and communication between these groups.

The study:

One aspect of the research is focused on gaining a real sense and understanding of the actual experiences, views and feelings of wide range of professionals who work in the field of CSE, as there has been relatively little research on this. It is also important to understand these experiences within the context they occur so wherever possible and appropriate I am asking to spend some time in professional settings.

Key things you need to know:

If you are interested in taking part in this research,

- If possible, I would like to spend some time shadowing you at work and be able to discuss issues and challenges you face
- I'd like to interview you in more depth to follow up on issues that may arise during the shadowing (this may take @60-90 minutes but can be flexible).
- The interview will be informal and I will ask you to talk freely about your understanding and professional experiences of CSE.
- I will have to audio record the interview to help me with my notes.
- What you choose to share with me is completely up to you.
- It will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous throughout.
- You will be able to stop the interview at any point if you feel the need to and you can withdraw yourself from the research without any explanation if you wish to.

What I'm going to do with your information:

The information you give me will remain anonymous and be integrated into a PhD thesis, other related academic publications conferences and training materials. It is hoped that the research will provide a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the experiences of the people involved, in different capacities, within CSE.

If you have any questions about being involved in this research please feel free to contact me:

T.Redmond@2014.hull.ac.uk

Mobile: 07513 869 369

Yours sincerely,

Theresa Redmond.

Appendix 3a
Consent form for adult survivors

Hearing different voices, collecting different narratives

Name of researcher: THERESA REDMOND

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research. Please read the form below carefully and feel free to ask me any questions.

Please circle

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet **Yes No**

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I do not have to take part in the research. **Yes No**

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason. **Yes No**

I understand that I do not have to answer any or all questions that I cannot or do not want to answer. **Yes No**

I also understand that I can take a break from my participation or stop the interview at any time. **Yes No**

I understand that you will take out any information which identifies me, any other individuals or organisations. **Yes No**

I agree that the researcher can make an audio recording of the interview. **Yes No**

I agree that a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement may transcribe my interview notes **Yes No**

I agree that you can use something I have said in future publications, using my own words. **Yes No**

I agree to take part in the research and to be interviewed.

Name of participant (please print): ....

Signed: .... Date: ....

Name of person taking consent: THERESA REDMOND

Signed: .... Date: ....

Appendix 3b

Consent form for parents taking part, whose children have been involved in child sexual exploitation

Name of researcher: THERESA REDMOND

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research. Please read the form below carefully and feel free to ask me any questions.

Please circle

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet **Yes No**

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I do not have to take part in the research.

Yes No

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving

Yes No

I understand that I do not have to answer any or all questions that I cannot answer.

Yes No

I also understand that I can take a break from my participation or stop the interview at any time.

Yes No

I agree to take part in the research and to be interviewed.

I agree that the researcher can make an audio recording of the interview.

Yes No

I agree that you can use something I have said in future publications, using my own words.

Yes No

I understand that you will take out any information which identifies me, any oth organisations.

Yes No

Name of participant (please print): ....

Signed: .... Date: ....

Name of person taking consent: THERESA REDMOND

Signed: .... Date: ....

Appendix 3c

Consent form for professionals taking part in the study

Research Project:
Hearing different voices, collecting different narratives: the world of child sexual exploitation explored from the viewpoints of the people involved.

Your profession: …………………………………………………………….

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research. Please read the form below carefully and feel free to ask me any questions.

Please circle

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet

Yes No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I do not have to take part in the research.

Yes No

I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time, without gi

Yes No

I understand that I do not have to answer any or all questions that I cann to answer.

Yes No

I also understand that I can take a break from my participation or stop the interview at any time.

Yes No

I agree that the researcher can make an audio recording of the interview.

Yes No

I agree that a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement may transcribe my interview notes

Yes No

I agree that you can use something I have said in future publications, using my own words.

Yes No

I understand that you will take out any information which identifies me, any or organisations.

Yes No

I agree to take part in the research and to be interviewed.

Yes No

Name of participant (please print): ....

Signed: .... Date: ....

Name of person taking consent: THERESA REDMOND

Signed: .... Date: ....

Appendix 4a

SURVIVOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE / PROMPTS

Themes / topics to be covered:
Warm-up: the study & ethical considerations
Basic Data collection

Narrative: Your story told your way.
Can you tell me something about what you know about CSE?

The 'world of CSE'
For this research, I've conceptualised "the world of CSE" but I recognise that you may not see it in this way. Do you feel that you were/ have been / are in this 'world'?
What words come to your mind when you hear the term child sexual exploitation?
What feelings come up?

Can you tell me something about how you felt when you were experiencing CSE?
How did you see it / experience it at the time?
Did you see yourself as being sexual exploited?
What influenced this **perception**?

How do you see it now?
What influences this perception?

Grooming
Grooming is considered to be a very significant aspect of CSE, can you tell me something about your experiences of grooming? Do you believe that you were groomed?
Can you talk a bit about your experiences of/feelings about this?
When you look back, how do you view it?

Location/Trafficking
Where did the abuse occur? Were you moved?

Borders and barriers - Experiences of professionals
YPs negative experiences are often compounded by their experiences at the **hands of professionals** - Can you tell me about your experiences of professionals (school, police, social workers, prosecutors etc.) re CSE?
What barriers (language, attitudes, locations etc.) did you come up against, with whom?
What support have you received? Has it been consistently given? What determines whether support if good & effective or not?

Transmission of narratives
What, if any, information did you receive from professionals or adults about CSE?
What have you heard / seen about CSE?
Have you noticed any changes in how CSE is talked about nowadays?

Consent

This has also blurred understandings of **consent,** by both YP and professionals: the idea that YP have consented to their own abuse - what do you think/feel about this? Were you aware of this attitude at the time?

Agency - Blame / responsibility

What / who do you think is to **blame** for CSE? What / who is responsible?
There has been a victim-blaming culture within CSE from many professionals, have you felt this? Has it affected you, your decisions etc.?
Did you feel, at the time, that you were making good/your own decisions?

Vulnerability

Vulnerability has been identified as the most common characteristic in YP experiencing CSE - would you identify / recognise yourself as vulnerable at the time? What factors contributed to your vulnerability?
Detachment? Missing?

The Power of a name / Language used

The power of a name - what do you think about the term **survivor** being used instead of victim?

Were you ever called negative names as a result of the CSE?
Have you ever heard professionals using negative language / terms about YP involved in CSE?

Experiences of prosecution?

Why did you come forward / disclose? What changed for you?
Can you tell me about your experiences of prosecution?
Challenges / difficulties?
Positives?

Impact on you

How has this experiences impacted on you, your life and relationships, your family?
Do you feel you were supported enough? Who by & in what ways?
Has your family been supportive?

Do you see CSE as different to CSA?

Appendix 4b

PARENT'S INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

EXPERIENCES OF CSE

1. Can you tell me something about your experiences of CSE?

2. How has CSE impacted on and affected you and your family?

3. What are the challenges you face? Daily & long-term?

4. What do/have you find the most frustrating and why?

UNDERSTANDINGS OF CSE

5. How would you define CSE?

6. What do you think about the DCSF definition of CSE?

7. What is CSE? What do you think it is?

8. Who are the perpetrators of CSE?

9. Who are the victims of CSE?

10. Where do you think it happens?

11. Who, or what, is to blame for CSE?

OTHER PROFESSIONALS

12. The Jay report identified some professionals' attitudes as blaming the young people for their part in CSE – is this something you have experienced?

13. Can you tell me about your experiences of professionals (school, police, social workers, prosecutors etc.) re your experience of CSE? Did you feel heard / seen?

14. Can you tell me if you've heard or experienced professionals use negative language regarding those involved in CSE?

15. There has been a victim-blaming culture within CSE from many professionals, have you felt/experienced this? Has it affected you, your decisions etc.?

SYSTEMS

16. Do you think that our current CP system is appropriate to deal with CSE?

17. Do you think the law re CSE is as effective as it could be? Do you think CSE should be classed as a criminal offence?

18. Can you tell me about your experience CSE and the criminal justice system?

LANGUAGE

19. The power of a name - what do you think about the terms CSE and survivor being used instead of victim?

20. Vulnerability has been identified as the most common characteristic in YP experiencing CSE - would you identify or recognise your child as vulnerable at the time? If so, what factors contributed to their vulnerability?

21. Issues around consent and young people's agency have been something that has caused some confusion in the past re CSE, what are your thoughts on this?

22. When you hear the phrase CSE what are the 1st words that pop into your head?

Appendix 4c

Generic interview prompts and areas for professionals

1 Basic data collection questionnaire

AIMS:

- Your experiences of CSE –the interviewee will tell their story, their way and in their own time but some of the following prompts may be used.
- The impact of these experiences on the interviewee
- Your views and feeling around these experiences

PROFESSIONALS:

Can you tell me about your experiences of child sexual exploitation?

2 What is your job/role?

3 Can you outline your main responsibilities?

4 How long have you been doing it?

5 What is CSE? What do you think it is?

6 When you hear the phrase CSE what are the 1st words that pop into your head?

7 What do you think about the DCSF definition of CSE?

8 How important is language when talking about CSE?

9 Who are the perpetrators of CSE? How do you describe them?

10 Who are the victims of CSE? How do you describe them?

11 What role have parents played in CSE in your experience?

12 Which other group(s) do you work most with?

13 What do you think needs to be done by / for YP to avoid involvement in CSE?

14 Where do you think it happens?

15 Who, or what, is to blame for CSE?

16 What do you think is the most significant factor for YP who get involved in CSE?

17 What are the barriers / challenges you face working, daily / long-term, in this field with: other groups (other professionals, survivors, parents); and within your own organisation?

18 How easy is multi-agency working?

19 The Jay report identified some professionals' attitudes as blaming the young women for their part in CSE – has this changed? Do you still hear / see / experience this kind of attitude in any way?

20 What, if anything needs to change/improve in statutory responses?

21 Do you think that our current CP system is appropriate to deal with CSE?

22 How well trained / confident do you feel working in this field?

23 How do you spend the majority of your time at work?

24 What do you find the most frustrating and why?

25 What do you find the most satisfying, and why?

26 Do you think the law re CSE is as effective as it could be? Do you think CSE should be classed as a criminal offence? Is it possible to establish a threshold which, when met by a combination of other offences, could be classed as CSE?

27 A problem with knowing the scale & prevalence of CSE is a result from flawed, inconsistent, data collection and recorded – is this something you have experienced or faced?

28 ‘Crossing borders’ - how do you do it? What is it like?

Appendix 5

Transcription Key

(vsp) - very short pause

(sp) - short pause

(p2) - pause for 2 seconds

word - slight emphasis

word - emphasis

word - a lot of emphasis

.hh - intake of breath (probably not going to use this)

I'd I'd - Repeated word

aaannnndd - prolonged pronunciation

***** - name of a person, location, name of a case

'words words' - participant is paraphrasing; quoting someone else; using slang

(unfin) - an unfinished word OR

'prosec…' - an unfinished word

(laughs) - If laughter, irony, sarcasm include in brackets

…. - sentences peters out

Appendix 6

Contacts for further support:

- ✓ The Survivors Trust: www.thesurvivorstrust.org
- ✓ National Association for people Abused in Childhood: www.napac.org.uk
- ✓ Help for Adults Victims of Child Abuse: www.havoca.org
- ✓ Victim Support: www.victimsupport.org.uk
- ✓ MIND: www.mind.org.uk
- ✓ I Survive: www.isurvive.org
- ✓ SARSVL: www.supportafterrapeleeds.org.uk/links/national-links/

Appendix 7

Contacts for further support:

- ✓ Pace: https://paceuk.info/about-pace/contact-us/
  Phone: 0113 240 5226
- ✓ Victim Support: www.victimsupport.org.uk
- ✓ MIND: www.mind.org.uk